Letters to Elise

A Peter Townsend Novella

Amanda Hocking
I’m writing this in the corner of the room with trembling hands. The candle long since burned out, and I sit in darkness, yet I can see perfectly. I wanted to believe this was some parlor trick, that the man who found me was merely a magician or a doctor, but I’m unable to refute it any longer.

My name is Peter James Monroe, and I am a vampyre.

I’ve taken a few sheets of paper from the one who made me. I have to write this all down, as if to convince myself that I’m not mad.

It was only a few days ago that I was still human, but it feels like an entire lifetime has passed. I had been riding my father’s horse into the city. My younger sister Caroline had been bitten by a dog, and despite my mother’s best remedies, she was gravely ill. That morning, when I awoke, she could no longer move.

Father had me take Lysander, his fastest horse, and sent me to fetch the doctor. Lysander might be faster than our elderly mares, but he was a horse built for work, not speed. He must’ve sensed my urgency, though, because he pushed himself.

We didn’t make it far when a pack of wild dogs came upon us. They may have been the same dogs that attacked poor Caroline, because they acted nothing like dogs should. They appeared mad, and continued to give chase, even after Lysander kicked at them.

I turned Lysander off the road, hoping to lose the dogs in the thick trees of the forest, but I didn’t think it through. The smaller dogs were much better suited for dodging through the thick tree trunks than the big work horse.

The dogs bit at Lysander’s legs, and one of them managed to latch onto Lysander’s haunch. The horse couldn’t take it any longer, and he reared up, bucking me off him. I fell to the ground, cracking my head against a tree.

For a moment, I could see nothing but blackness, and the sound of the growling dogs muffled in my ears. By the time I came around, the dogs were already on me. One of them had me by the arm, dragging me away.

Lysander was gone, and from the echoed barks through the trees, some of the dogs gave chase after him. The rest of them stayed behind, stalking around me.

I tried to pick up a stick or a rock, anything to fight off the animals, but my right arm wouldn’t move at all. The dog had begun to gnaw on my left arm, and I couldn’t even pull it away from him. My body was paralyzed.

I called for help, relieved to find that I could still make a sound. I was breathing and I could yell, but that seemed to be the only things I could do.

A dog howled in the distance, maybe in victory at conquering Lysander, I’m not sure. The dogs that had stayed behind realized that I wasn’t going anywhere and ran ahead to see what their comrade was howling about.

They left, but I knew they were coming back, and they would certainly finish me off when they returned. I tried desperately to move my arms or legs, but they refused to budge.

My arm had been chewed up viciously, with my blood spilling onto the dirt. The one good thing was that I couldn’t feel it. I was incapable of feeling anything except for the ache in the back of my skull from where it hit the tree.

I lay in the cold ground, feeling weaker as my life drained from me. I yelled as long as I could, until long after my voice had gone hoarse. My throat was raw, and it ached to even swallow.

It wasn’t that I believed anyone could save me – if I couldn’t move, it would only be a matter of time before I died. But my sister needed a doctor. Caroline wouldn’t survive much longer without one, and my family thought I was getting help. They needed to know that I hadn’t made it so they could go fetch him themselves.

I wasn’t sure who they would send in my place. My father shouldn’t leave my mother and sister alone at the house, not with the mad dogs on the loose, and both of my brothers had moved and lived too far away to get help soon enough.

My younger brother Joseph lived in New York City caring for an elderly aunt, and that was almost a full day’s ride from our house.

My older brother Daniel lived half a day away from us, but he had a wife and two small children to worry about.

The thought of Daniel made me grimace. Every time I spoke to him, he lectured me about how I needed to grow up and be a man. He never failed to remind me that when he’d been seventeen – two full years younger than I – he’d gotten married and built his own home.

When it grew dark, I began to feel better. Father would’ve realized something was wrong and set out to fetch the doctor himself. Since I hadn’t come back, he’d be more careful and smart enough to bring his gun, something I would’ve done if I hadn’t been in such a rush.

Father would get help for Caroline. Mother would lock up the doors to the house, and she wasn’t a bad shot
herself, if the dogs came around. Father would have to take Helena, who was a slower mare than Lysander, but she was younger, so she had more stamina.

Caroline would be alright, even if I wasn’t.

I imagined I could hear the hoof beats of my father’s horse on the road past the forest. They pounded heavily in the dirt as he raced to the doctor. I could’ve called for him, but I didn’t want to slow him.

Then the hoof beats got louder. They grew closer, crunching on the twigs and leaves. This was all wrong. Father needed to help Caroline. He didn’t have time to worry about me.

I tried to yell out, to tell him to go back and leave me be, but my voice only came out in a croaked whisper. I sounded like a dying toad.

The horse stopped next to me, snorting loudly. The moonlight cast splotches of light through the tree branches, so I could only see bits of the brilliant white horse and the rider. Helena was a dark brown, and Lysander was black. This wasn’t my father’s horse.

The rider dismounted. I saw his legs swing down, but his feet didn’t make a sound when they landed. He walked over to me, still silent when the ground should’ve crunched beneath him, and he crouched down next to me.

His face was hidden in the darkness, but I heard him sniffing the air, inhaling deeply. He touched my arm, covered in drying in blood, and then put his hand to his mouth.

“Can you move?” he asked finally, his voice deep with a heavy accent. Something about it made me feel strangely comforted.

“No,” I whispered, barely making a sound at all.

“You’re dying.” It wasn’t a question or filled with pity. He was merely stating a fact. “Do you want to live?”

I was surprised by his question and didn’t know how to answer it. Of course I wanted to live. I had so much that I still wanted to do, so much I hadn’t done yet.

But it didn’t matter whether I wanted to live or not. My body wouldn’t move, and it was getting hard to breathe. I didn’t have a choice whether I lived or died.

“Do you want to live?” he repeated, this time with more force.

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Very good.”

He pulled something out of his pocket, and the moonlight glinted on the blade. He ran it down his arm, slicing it open, and I smelled the blood mixing with the pine and dirt around me. But his blood smelled unlike anything I’d ever encountered. It was sweet and tangy and… delectable.

He put his arm to my mouth, and the hot liquid poured down my throat. It tasted even better than it smelled – rich and sweet. I swallowed it so quickly I nearly choked. Some part of me knew I should be disgusted about drinking this stranger’s blood, but I couldn’t help myself.

I could feel his heartbeat in his blood, pouring through me. I could feel him – his intelligence and strength filling me, radiating through me. It was like warmth and love, only so much more powerful.

He pulled his arm away much too soon, and I suddenly felt cold and small. The pleasure and contentment of his blood had been ripped away, although a haze of it still lingered around me, making me drowsy.

“Please…” I whispered, begging for more of his blood. My voice had already grown stronger, and my throat had healed.

“You’ve had enough,” he said.

He reached out, taking me in his arms, and I hung limply. I couldn’t even lift my head. He climbed onto his horse, letting me hang over his lap so I didn’t slide off. I was fighting to stay awake, but once the horse started moving, almost rocking me to sleep, I passed out.

The next time I awoke I was in horrible pain. Worse than anything I had ever felt in my life, worse than I had even imagined pain could be. I lay on a cold dirt floor, writhing in pain and screaming at the top of my lungs.

My insides were moving around. I could feel them squirming inside my belly. I wrapped my arms around my stomach, and I didn’t even care that I could move my arms again. I would gladly take the paralysis and numbness for the agony that overwhelmed me.

When I opened my eyes, the dim light from a nearby candle shone too brightly. It scorched my vision, and I squeezed my lids shut again. I curled up onto my side, trying to hold myself together, but nothing I did eased the pain.

I couldn’t hold it back any longer, and I struggled to get to my knees. I leaned over, vomiting up everything inside me. A long black string of my own intestines came up, covered in something dark that almost resembled blood. It spilled out all over the dirt floor as pain ripped through me.

“Shh,” a man said, the same stranger that had given me his blood before. He knelt down next to me, setting a pail of water on the ground. “Screaming will only making it worse.”
“What have you done to me?” I wept. I wanted to stay on my knees, but I collapsed back on the ground. “I saved your life.” He reached into the pail, pulling out a rag soaked in cold water, and he began to wipe my face of sweat, tears, and my own blood. “You didn’t save me,” I groaned, gripping my chest. My heart felt like it was about to pound out through my ribcage. “I am dying.”

“It only feels that way,” he said, his voice deep and comforting as he wiped my brow. “You’re turning. You’ll feel much better soon.”

I knew I should be terrified of this man. He’d fed me his blood and made me feel this horrendous pain. But I couldn’t fear him. I trusted him implicitly, and I even felt a longing for him. Not the way a man longs for a woman, but something more basic and primal. The way I longed for spring after a terrible winter or water after a lengthy drought. I needed him.

“Who are you?” I asked, peering up at him through half closed eyes. “My name is Ezra.” His dark brown eyes rested on mine, warm and meaningful. “Go back to sleep. This will all be over soon.”

I tried to sleep, but I never seemed to truly be asleep or fully awake. I existed in an awful nightmare place between the two. The pain only intensified, and I begged for death. My dreams were filled with insects and snakes eating my flesh, and even that was a reprieve from how I actually felt. I’m not sure how long it lasted. It might have been days or even weeks. It felt like eternity when it was happening.

Then I opened my eyes, and I realized I wasn’t in pain anymore. I didn’t feel like anything. I’d been asleep, my cheek rested against the cold floor, and when I awoke, I’d never felt better. Even the dirt against my skin felt amazing.

I sat up, looking around the darkness. I appeared to be in a cellar, a small room dug in the ground. The walls were packed dirt lined with shelves, and an old staircase led out of it. The doors at the top were shut, leaving me trapped in total blackness, but I could see clearly.

A thirst grew inside me, and it was unlike any thirst I’d ever felt before. It was like a hunger, only deeper. Like it came from the very heart of me, and every part of my body needed to feed.

“Hello? Ezra?” I called out for him. I moved towards the stairs, and I tripped over my own feet. I’d meant to take only one step, but it happened with a strange ease.

“Ezra?” I repeated and got to my feet again. Somehow, I knew he was nearby. I sensed it, but even that small distance felt too great. “Ezra!”

The doors at the top of the stairs opened. Before I saw him, I could smell him – the same tangy smell I remembered from drinking his blood, only stronger and mixed with something heady, like sandalwood.

I heard a gently thudding, and I realized with some dismay that was his heartbeat. I could hear it, and stranger still, the sound of it made my mouth water.

I stepped back as he came down the stairs, but not because I was frightened of him. I was frightened of myself, of what I might do to him, and I could never live with myself if I hurt him.

“What’s happening to me?” I asked with a tremor in my voice. I reached out, touching the wall to steady myself. “What am I becoming?” “It’s already happened,” Ezra said. “You’ve already became what you are.” “And what is that?” “A vampyre.” “What?” I gasped. It seemed unreal, but I believed him as soon as he said it. I trusted him far more than I trusted myself. “I’m a demon?” “No, nothing like that,” he said with a small smile. “We’ll discuss it more later. But now, I see the thirst is getting to you. You must feed before it grows too strong.” “Feed?” I echoed. “Yes.” He turned and began walking up the stairs. “Come with me. It’s time you learn the proper way to be a vampire.”
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There aren’t words fit to describe her. I still can’t believe in my own eyes. I’m writing as fast as the ink will allow me, but it’s not fast enough. Ever since I first saw her, I feel as though I’m going to burst.

Something has taken hold of me, something too large for my body to carry, and I must release it or perish. I’ve never been one for hyperbole, so please believe this isn’t grandeur. As soon as I saw her, I was in love, horribly, deeply, irrevocably in love. It was as if my purpose in life suddenly became clear, as if every moment before this one only happened so I could see her, be near her, love her.

Nothing in life has ever made as much sense as this. I want to run to the hillsides, climb to the rooftops, singing her name over and over. Elise, Elise, my love, my true, Elise.

All this time I’ve been here, travelling with Ezra, and we hadn’t seen her. We must’ve gone over every bit of countryside in all of Ireland, but somehow, we missed her. As if she’d been hiding, a treasure tucked away like a pot of gold.

The guilt I’ve felt these past two years has finally disappeared, like a weight from shoulders. For nothing about me can be as horrible as I’ve imagined, as I’ve feared. No creature such as Elise would ever speak to me if I was a monster.

I want to write down exactly how I found her, precisely as it happened, so I can remember this day forever, in perfect clarity. Even if tomorrow she leaves, I could survive forever on this one meeting, on this one beautiful, perfect day. So I cannot forget. I will not.

Ezra and I have been staying in the countryside, preferring the small villages to the cities. The rural areas have been hit the worst by the famine, and that is why we came here in the first place. Ezra had gotten word of the devastation in Ireland, of all the people dying of starvation.

After some debate, Ezra decided we should come here. We would be doing the people a favor, helping to ease the suffering.

Things were even worse than we’d expected. Children so small and frail with bellies round and distended. Fields filled with rotting, stinking potatoes. Bodies piled along the side of the road. Flies in swarms, the only things thriving in this kind of climate.

Well… perhaps not the only thing.

Initially, I was against the idea. It was the opposite of everything Ezra had ever taught me. Taking a human’s life is beyond my capacity. But when I saw how these people were dying, the slow agonizing death that starvation is, I understood that there were far worse things in life than death by vampyre.

Ezra chose carefully, looking for people he was certain wouldn’t survive and whose absence would benefit those around them. Like a family of five that only had enough to feed two.

Many humans called him the Angel of Death, and they were grateful when he’d finally come for them. To humans, Ezra did look much like an angel. He was beautiful in a way that I’d only imagined the seraphim could be. Calm and comfort seemed to flow from him, and he held his victims in his arms, giving them peace for the first time in so long.

Still, the guilt ate at me. I truly believed we were helping these people, ending their anguish in the only way we knew how, but death is not an easy burden to bear. Even a welcomed death.

We both ate much less frequently than we needed to. Once or twice a month at most. The humans were far too weak and frail to handle even the smallest blood loss, so every feeding meant death.

I’d begun to hate Ireland. When we’d first arrived, I’d been enchanted by the beautiful rolling moors. The grass here seemed so much greener than I’d seen before. Even with famine lurking around every hill, there was a certain lushness to the scenery I’d never seen in America.

But now I saw the grass that was so green because it grew from such tainted fertilizer. How many bodies were buried here? How many lives had been lost? Not just at mine and Ezra’s hand, but by the hands of our kind, or by disease and famine?

“Why does this happen?” I asked him, kneeling beside a fresh grave I’d dug myself. We always buried every body we came across, whether we made them or not.

“I don’t understand the question,” Ezra said, wiping the dirt from his hands onto his trousers.

“Why do people always die?”

“It’s as it is. As it should be,” he said, but the moonlight shone brightly on his expression, and I knew he’d asked himself that a thousand times before. “Everything dies.”

“But we don’t.” I stared up at him, hoping he would have some response, but I’d already began the realization...
that my maker didn’t know everything. He was no more a god than I was, with no more solutions than I had.

“We will,” he assured me, staring off in the distance. “Someday.”

“But why is it like this?” I got to my feet, unable to contain the anger and confusion inside me. “Why do all these innocent people suffer? How can children, who’ve barely even taken a breath, die in so much pain? How is there so much death in this world, and yet we live on?”

“I don’t know, Peter,” Ezra said. “But I’m afraid that the answer might be that you’re asking too much of this life. I don’t think there is a reason.”

“Asking for a reason isn’t too much.” I shook my head fiercely and clenched my fists. “Suffering requires a reason.”

“We’ve spent too much time out here.” Ezra lowered his eyes and turned away from me, walking towards the road. “The isolation is getting to you.”

“What isolation?” I asked, following him. “I’m with you always.”

“I’m not enough.” He quickened his steps, inciting me to hurry along with him. “I’m death as much as anything around here. You need to be around life. We’re going to the city.”

“How will that help? Life is only a prelude to death,” I insisted. “Being around living vital people will only serve as a reminder that soon they will be still and motionless in the ground.”

“Sometimes the best course in the search for the meaning of life is to busy yourself until you forget that you don’t know the meaning of life,” Ezra said finally.

I wanted to argue further, but Ezra was impossible to argue with when he’d made up his mind. He’d become tired of my ever growing malaise and was determined to snap me out of it. Once we reached the city, he planned to find a boat to take us away from Ireland, maybe to England or France.

We reached the city two nights ago. Ezra took me to a pub, which is the only way I’d know how truly hard this was him. Ezra kept his emotions to himself as often as he could, but when they became too much for him, he had to find a release.

His best solution for dealing with a depression was to lay with a woman, preferably a human woman full of life with a warm body and pounding heart. I never asked him, but I suspect that he never bit a woman he took to his bed. To be with them was to pretend, for a moment, that he was alive, that he was capable of giving and receiving love with another being.

In the pub, he ordered whiskey, which we both pretended to drink, but most of it ended up on the floor. Women were always enamored with Ezra, and two lovely girls joined us.

The fairer of the two had her eyes set on the Ezra. She hung on his every word, gripping his arm with urgency, and she melted at the sound of his laugh. It didn’t take long before he was renting a room above the pub and whisking her up the stairs.

Her friend would gladly go with me, but I didn’t have it in me. Being with a woman had never been quite the release for me as it was for Ezra. I stayed down in the pub, listening to the girl talk for quite a long while, but eventually, I left to walk the streets alone.

When the sun began to rise, I headed back. We didn’t have much money, so I didn’t want to rent a room of my own. I waited on the stairs until the girl had gone before going into the room. Ezra was sprawled across the bed, contented and sleeping. I stole a thin blanket and made myself a bed on the floor.

Ezra awoke early for the day with an extra bounce in his step. He was still convinced that being around people was the cure for what ailed me. He insisted that we go out to the market while the evening sun was still up, when the market was busy with shoppers and sellers. Seeing people laughing, bartering, living, would be good for me.

I’d wanted to argue with him, but I thank the heavens that I did not. Letting him drag me out to that market was the best thing that’s ever happened to me.

The streets were crowded, much fuller than I’d seen them in the small villages we’d traversed. The sound of voices echoed off the shops that lined market. Chickens and goats were aplenty, making their protests at being sold off for food.

The smell of it was all overwhelming. The thin blood I’d been subsiding on was nothing like this, heady and pounding through the masses. It was intoxicating.

People pushed against me to get where they wanted, their bodies burning like small flames. Children ran into me, shouting an unapologetic “sorry” over their shoulders as they dashed on to play some game.

“See?” Ezra clapped me on the shoulder to draw my attention to him. “This is what life is about.”

“A dirty market?” I asked with a wry smile, but I’d already begun to feel lightheaded.

The combination of the sun, which tires vampyres, and the effects of the market were too much for me. I couldn’t hang onto my sense of hopelessness even if I’d wanted to.

“We will stay in the city for a few more days,” Ezra said, seeing through my attempts at disapproval.
Then I felt something, a sensation I’d never had before. Like a heat in the pit of my stomach pulling me. As if I’d had an invisible thread tied to me all this time that I’d never noticed before, and someone just picked up the slack and began to pull me.

In the din of the thousand voices that filled up the street, I heard one clear as a bell. I turned towards it, not that I had a choice. The thread yanked at me so hard, it was turning me.

“You expect me to let you have that for –” the voice was saying, that clear, perfect girl’s voice lilting with an Irish accent. But she stopped speaking when I turned around, when she saw me.

I couldn’t move or breathe or do anything. The whole world fell away, and she was the only thing I could see.

Her eyes were gray, like a heavy fog that blanketed me, and her skin was white as porcelain. Red flames of hair framed her face, and the pink petals of her lips parted as she stared at me.

I could hear her heart above everyone else’s around her, even though her heart beat much softer and slower. She had the heart of a vampyre, and it sounded strangely exotic against the frantic beats of the humans. It sung to me, calling me to her.

I don’t remember walking over to her. I’m not sure that my feet even moved. It was as if I’d evaporated into a mist so I could float through all the people crowding the street until I stopped in front of her.

A cart filled with tomatoes separated us, and no gap had ever felt farther. We were only a foot or two apart, but I needed to be closer to her. The distance was terrifying.

An old woman stood next to me, trying to push me out of the way to continue haggling over the cost of tomatoes, but I ignored her. I was immovable, like granite. I couldn’t go anywhere unless this beautiful girl asked me to go.

I had never seen anything more lovely than her, and I doubt I ever will again. She was most painful to look at, like staring at the sun, because she was so perfect. She appeared young, maybe sixteen when she’d turned, and she was flawless in a way I’d never seen anyone, not even other vampyres.

“Hello,” she said, her words barely more than a breath. A strand of red hair had fallen across her forehead, and she tucked it back with delicate fingers.

“Hello,” I said, my voice as soft and weak as hers. She’d stolen all the air from my lungs.

“My name is Elise,” she said at length.

“Elise?” I smiled, knowing there had never been a name that sounded more beautiful. “I’m Peter.”

“Peter,” she repeated, and my knees became weak at the sound of it. She turned back, breaking eye contact with more for an excoriating moment as she yelled back over her shoulder. “Catherine! Can you watch the cart? I have to…” She trailed off and looked back at me.

“What do you mean?” I asked, filling in the gap.

She nodded once, and another vampyre came over. Her dark hair was tied back in a braid, and she gave Elise and me an odd look.

“Elise?” she asked. “What’s all this?”

“Catherine, I have to go walk with this gentleman,” Elise said.

Catherine tried to press her for more answers, but Elise didn’t have any. She stepped out from behind the cart and walked next to me. We turned down a street, moving away from the hustle of the market. She kept staring up at me, and I down at her, as if we were both afraid that the other would disappear.

She turned into a stable, empty aside from a few horses. She put her hand on one of the wooden pillars, as if to steady herself, and looked at me. Her eyes were hypnotic, forcing me to look at them. With her, I had no willpower of my own.

“Who are you?” she asked, almost in an awed tone.

“I already told you. I’m Peter,” I said, hoping that would be explanation enough, and moved towards her.

“Are you a sorcerer?” Elise asked and stepped away from me. She climbed up on a bale of straw, so she could look down at me.

“No.” I ducked below the beam so I could walk over to her. “Are you?”

“No.” She shook her head, and I noticed a small braid she had in her hair, keeping it back so it didn’t fall in her eyes.

She reached up, hanging onto the beam, and her dress pulled taut against her bodice. It awakened a fever inside of me, and my whole body began to heat up.

“How have you put this spell on me then?” Elise asked.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

I reached up, putting my hands on the same beam as her. My fingers brushed against hers, causing a jolt to surge through me. Her eyes widened, so I knew she felt it too. I leaned on the beam, so our bodies were so close they were nearly touching, and I breathed in the sweet perfume of her flesh.
“This,” she said softly. “This is a spell, isn’t it?”
“I don’t know,” I admitted. “If it is, I don’t care. I don’t ever want it to stop.”
I leaned in, meaning to kiss her, but she jumped down off the bale of straw. She ran out of the stable, her dress flowing behind her, and she glanced back at me over her shoulder. I’m not sure if she wanted me to give chase, but I didn’t have a choice.
I ran after her, and she sped up. I was faster than her. I easily caught her. I grabbed her wrist, gently as not to hurt her, and she stopped, whirling around to face me. Her body pressed into me, so I could feel how hard her own heart hammered in her chest. She stared up at me, searching my face.
“What game are you playing?” Elise asked.
“This isn’t a game.”
She pulled her wrist from my hand and stepped back from me. “Just because I want to kiss you doesn’t mean we can.”
“Why not?” I asked, and I made myself stay in place. I wanted to follow her, to be close enough to touch her again, but I knew that wasn’t what she wanted, so I stayed firm.
“Because.” She stood up straighter. “I am a lady, and I have morals.”
“Yes, of course,” I nodded, feeling the blush on my cheeks. “I didn’t mean to… tarnish you.”
“Good, because you can’t.” She turned away. “If you’d like to walk with me, you can. But nothing more.”
I hurried to catch up with her, and we walked slowly down the road. A little boy ran out in front of us, nearly into her, and she paused to let him pass.
“You don’t know what this is?” Elise asked softly after he’d gone. She kept her eyes focused on the path in front of her, only occasionally glancing up at me.
“You mean this… pull between us?” I asked.
“No, I haven’t the faintest idea,” I shook my head. “My maker might know, though.”
“You know your maker?” Elise looked up sharply at me.
“Yes, don’t you?” I gestured back to the market. “Wasn’t Catherine yours?”
“No, she’s a friend, more like a sister.” Her steps slowed a bit as we talked. “My maker was a stranger that my father paid to turn me, and then he promptly abandoned me.”
“Your father paid him?” I asked, not hiding my shock.
“We were dying,” Elise explained. “Both my younger sisters and my mother had already died. It was only my father and I left. The famine hit our family hard.”
“So to save you, he hired someone to turn you?” I asked, and she nodded.
“But he left me, alone with my father.” Her face darkened. “I had to learn how to be a vampyre on my own.”
I remembered how I’d been when I’d first turned, and I could only imagine what a starving girl like Elise had done, alone with a human.
“I’m sure my maker will have answers,” I said, hurrying to erase the thoughts on her mind. “Would you like to go talk with him?”
“Not now.” She shook her head, and her hair looked even more like fire as it shimmered across her back. “I should be heading back to help Catherine.”
“How did you meet Catherine?” I asked, desperate to keep the conversation going. I didn’t want to lose her.
“Luck, really,” Elise smiled at the thought. “I wandered around for a bit and came across her. She lived outside of the city with a garden. She lived like a human, not that animal I’d believed I was, and she taught me how to do the same.”
“That doesn’t sound bad,” I said.
“It’s not, really.” She stopped, looking back towards the market. “I really do need to get back and help her.”
“But we’ve only just met,” I said, and I’d already begun to panic at the thought of her departing. I didn’t know how I would possibly survive when she went out of my vision.
“I’m sorry.” She shook her head again, and I knew she meant it.
“When will I see you again?” I asked, and when she didn’t answer right away, I said, “I have to see you again.”
“Tonight,” Elise said. “Where are you staying?”
“We’ve rented a room above the pub,” I said.
“Tonight then,” she nodded once to convince me. She smiled and turned away, running back the way we had come.
This time, I didn’t follow her, despite how badly I wanted to. The thread around my heart tightened, squeezing it painfully, when she disappeared. My very being wanted to go with her, and I could barely breathe at the thought of being without her, even for a few hours.
When I found Ezra, I immediately told him about Elise and the way I felt around her. It was more than emotion. It was something physical. My body craved hers, my blood yearned for her. I had to fight to keep my feet from chasing after her.

Over a pint of whiskey we both pretended to drink, Ezra told me everything he knew about it, which wasn’t that much. He’d heard of stories of vampyres being bonded to each other. Something in their blood made them meant for each other. It was a physical reaction, something that pulled them together.

He’d never experienced it before, so he believed it to be a myth. He didn’t understand the purpose for it, but he understood very little of why vampyres acted the way they did.

Listening to me talk of Elise, he was convinced that this was the case with the two of us. We were bonded together, meant for each other, and nothing had ever sounded sweeter. I’d like nothing more for the rest of my life to start with Elise as soon as possible.

Ezra tired of listening to me speak endlessly of Elise, her smooth skin, her fiery hair, her hypnotic eyes… so he sent me out with a pad of paper to write down my story of Elise.

So here I sit on the stone by the pub entrance, scribbling all the things I can’t keep inside as I wait for Elise to arrive. Elise, my love, my true…
Dearest Elise,

I hope this letter finds you well. My heart aches without you, but otherwise, this journey is setting alright with me. I’ll never learn to enjoy being at sea, but the boat ride from Dublin wasn’t that long, and I am grateful for that.

As I write this, we’re not yet to London, but I expect we will be soon. The carriage is jostling us about a lot, so forgive the mistakes and the ink on the paper. Ezra is sound asleep next to me, and I wish that I could travel like him.

Maybe I would, but I can’t keep my thoughts from my last conversation with you. It’s that you said this time apart would be good for us both that has me so terrified.

I know this only because you feel as though I’m rushing things, but I’m not. We have only been courting for three months, that is true, but I am certain that I want to be with you for the rest of my existence. My proposal isn’t that strange.

Eternity is a very long time, but I know what I am agreeing to with you. I lie awake thinking of you when I should be sleeping. Ezra complains because I say your name in my sleep, and it keeps him awake.

We are bonded together, just as he says we are, and we both feel it. Why can’t you trust that I love you? I’ve done nothing to dissuade you of that, have I?

Ezra and I bought the house down the road from you, so we can be near without being too near. I’ve enjoyed the few kisses you let me steal, and I never ask you for more. I respect your decision to wait until marriage, but that’s not what I am encouraging marriage.

I love you, Elise. I love you, I love you, I love you.

Nothing can part me from you, my love, not even this distance between us. My heart still belongs to you, the way it always has, and always will.

I still feel your lips pressed to mine, taste the salt on them from the tears in your eyes as you kissed me goodbye. I assured you it was only a month to do business, to make our lives better, and you told me the time apart would do us both good.

The night before I left, when we stood in the moonlight in the garden behind your house, my proposal felt hasty. I know. But it wasn’t. I’ve thought of it since I met you, but when I’m with you, the words come out all wrong. My tongue fumbles that which my heart is certain of.

Elise, you are my love, my world, my true. You are the compass that keeps me due north. You are the moon that tells me when to wake and the sun that tells me when to sleep. You are everything, and so much more than that.

What I wanted to say to you, when your soft hand was cold in mine, and I saw you looking up at me with worry in your eye. You think I’ll go to London and won’t return – as if I could exist without you, as if I even have a choice not to come back.

I want to pour my heart out to this paper, but I fear the paper cannot contain it all. My love is spilling down the edges, seeping to the ground, and out the carriage door. The wind will carry it back to you, carry my heart to you, to where it belongs with you.

Do you not see that, Elise? You possess me, the way the Devil possessed Judas. Not that you are evil – but that you have taken over my soul, that you occupy my body, that my very being belongs to you.

I am going to London for you, for us. I know you love the farm, that you love managing the land your father once churned. But the earth can dry up, it can turn on you, and you know this better than anyone.

I want a life for us that is built on something far more stable. Ezra believes something is happening in America, something we should return to. He’s speaking of the gold rush in California, and sees that as an opportunity for us to grow. To have something, instead of scraping by. He wants to be a captain of industry, and on this, I agree with him.

I can’t ask for your hand if I have no means for us to live. I’m not recanting my proposal, but I am working up to it. I must earn the right to be your husband, and I assure you that I will. When we return, I will have everything I need.

Until then, I will have the memory of you to spur me on.

Do you remember our first kiss? You’d been dodging it for weeks, just as determined to keep your virtue as I was to steal it. I was meant to be helping you garden, but I spent more time distracting you than working.

I took your hand, and you fell down laughing onto the grass. I lay above me, looking in your eyes, certain I’d never seen anything I’d ever want more. I bent down to kiss you, overjoyed when you let my lips touch yours.

Something surged between us, something deeper than passion or desire. My blood warmed, flowing like liquid fire through my veins. I could feel your heart in my lips, hear it pounding in my ears. It was if love had a physical manifestation.
This month will be agony without your kisses, I know it, but it is a necessity. It must be done, for the good of us both, and hopefully, you will understand how much I love you, how much I need you.

Until I return to you, remember you are my love, my life, my very self.

Eternally yours,

Peter
May 12, 1853

My only love, my Elise –

Your trust in Catherine is rightfully placed. I’ve tried on three separate occasions to sneak into your chambers, and she has thwarted me every time. I’d like to say I hated her for this, but I know she is only following your wishes. But why must you wish it so? I know that tomorrow, as soon as the sun sets, we will be wed on the moors behind your farm, but nothing has ever felt longer than this night. The morning sun hasn’t begun to rise, and already I feel as though I’ve been waiting for days.

Perhaps that’s because it’s taken almost a year for this day to come. I know part of that is my fault. The month in London turned into three. That time apart anguished me as much as it did you, but that’s all behind us now.

Ezra and I have a great share in the business, and I can now afford to treat you the way you deserve to be treated and give you the wedding of your dreams. I’d like to say give you the house of your dreams, but I know how loyal you are to this farm.

I don’t understand it, but that might be because of how quickly I left mine. I left my home one morning in the spring to fetch a doctor for my sister, and I haven’t been back in almost twenty years.

I don’t have a home, not in the sense of house or land. You are my home. Wherever you are, that is what home will be.

My hands are trembling as I write. I feel strange and giddy, reminding of a time when I was a small boy. My father’s mare Helena was giving birth, and I stayed out in the stables all night with my father and older brother Daniel. They told me to go back in, but I refused.

I remember so clearly the moment when the foal’s legs emerged from the mare. The smell of the straw, the way the lantern lit up the barn, the sound of our stallion Lysander neighing.

It was in that moment, I realized something amazing was going to happen. A creature would be alive that wasn’t before, and nothing could be more magical than the creation of life. I trembled with excitement and expectation.

That is how I feel right now. In an existence so full of death – dependent on it really – this is the only thing I’ve ever done that has felt like creation. We will begin a life together. We will cease to be two people and become one.

I will not be able to sleep until I see you again, until I can take you in my arms and press you to me. Until I know that you are mine, now and forever, before God and the earth, you belong to me as I belong to you.

Your everlasting groom-

Peter
July 8, 1853

My dear brother, Ezra,

I meant to write you sooner. I truly did, but you know how honeymoons go. I’m so very grateful that I waited to wed Elise until I had enough money to travel this way. Although I’m certain that the two of us would have been as happy any place, as long as it had a bed.

Oh, brother, forgive me for being crass, but I’ve had no one to speak of this with. Our wedding night – there aren’t words. This wasn’t the first I lain with a woman, although this was my first time with another vampyre, but it was nothing like I remembered it being.

In the mornings, after a woman had shared your bed, and I would see your face, I would think that I must be doing something wrong because I never looked like that. And maybe I was, but I finally understand the sublime, exhausted expression you always wear.

After the wedding, we barely made it to her room before our clothes were off – and I’m certain that you heard us, you and Catherine were so near, and for that I apologize. But that was a moment I couldn’t contain myself. I’d never felt so out of control, unable to stop myself, and I was so grateful for it. When Elise and I are together, it feels as if we are one. I can feel her emotions inside of me, as if they are my own. I’ve spent my whole life fragmented, living as half a being, but I never realized until I was with her and she made me whole.

These past two months have been a blur, a haze of happiness and pleasure. I’m not sure how long it took for us to get to Paris, and I don’t really remember much of the journey. We stopped every chance we could, renting rooms far more often than we needed to, but it was hard enough for me to keep my hands off her.

I am her humble servant, and I worship at her feet nightly.

When I first turned, I felt as if I belonged to you. Did I ever tell you that? There was this sense that you had created me, that you owned me, and I felt like a slave to you. Not that you ever treated me as such, but it was something in my essence that told me that. Something inside me saying, “You belong to him. You do his bidding. That is why you exist.”

And I did, without complaint. I was happy to do it, and I still would be. If you asked anything of me, I would gladly do it. Your unending friendship is the thing most valuable to me this life, other than my wife, of course.

I feel that way with Elise, only stronger. I’m so grateful she allows me to be with her, that she lets me touch her and share her bed. I know that I don’t deserve her, no matter what our blood says. She is far too good to me, so pure and virtuous. So I spend every waking moment trying to make it up to her that I’m not nearly as perfect as she.

My Elise, my beloved…

We went to the opera house the last night we were in Paris. Most of our trip had been spent inside our hotel room, but we’d done some sightseeing. Elise had never been to the opera before. She’d never even been out of Ireland, and she’d grown up very poor.

Until I met her, she could barely read. I don’t understand that part exactly. As you know, I grew up with hardly any money, but we could all read. My father was a great admirer of Shakespeare, and he read to us as often as he could. My siblings and I spent hours acting out his plays.

Father always adored A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and we performed a loose version of that once a year. My younger sister Caroline was always Puck, but being a trouble maker suited her fine.

When I told Elise of these stories, she could hardly believe me. I went to a small bookshop in Paris (I’m indebted to you for forcing me to learn French all those years ago), and I bought up all the Shakespeare they had.

Elise and I lay in bed. The room would still glow, the way it always seemed to afterwards. The sheets were satin, so soft and light they feel like nothing on my bare skin.

It was in those moments, when we were too drunk on love and too tired to move, I’d pull out a book. Elise lay next to me, her arm resting on my stomach, as I begin to read to her, telling her the tales that Sir William wrote long ago.

She stared at me with eyes so wide and bright, I always had to hide my laugh. She gazed at me with such wonder and adoration, it’s as if she thought I wrote the stories myself.

It’s because of this I insisted we go to the opera house. I’ve seen how much simply hearing the stories captivates her. Seeing something performed on stage would amaze her.

Elise can only speak a few words of French, despite my efforts to teach her. She loves hearing it spoken, but she claims her accent butchers it too much, so she refuses to learn. I think her Irish burr warms the language, but she won’t be convinced.

Even with that, I took her to the opera at Salle Le Peletier. It was a performance of Le prophète, and we had balcony seats. In the beginning, I tried to translate for her, but eventually she held up her hand to silence me.
“You don’t need to tell me,” Elise whispered, as not to disturb the other patrons. “I can see it on their faces.”

By the time the opening number had ended, Elise had begun to weep. I put my hand her arm, concerned that something was the matter, and she shook her head, dabbing at the tears on her cheeks.

“It’s so beautiful,” she said. “I’ve never seen anything so moving.”

After it had finished, Elise was still in high spirits. She sang the songs from the opera, and her pronunciation was a bit off but her tone was perfect. Her voice was like an angel. I took her hand, pulling her to me, and we danced along the streets of Paris. A large, slow waltz as she sang.

We met a couple, slightly drunk on wine and even more drunk on love, and they invited us up to their flat. Elise and I were having too much fun to decline, and we followed them up to a small artist’s loft. Paint and wine stained what little furniture they had, and the floor was littered with canvases.

The man, Luc, asked to paint Elise, and when I translated for her, she gladly accepted. She sprawled on a purple blanket, her ringlets coming loose from her hair. I understood why Luc had to paint. If ever there had been a muse, Elise must surely be one.

While Luc carefully tried to make his brush strokes match the perfection of my wife, I talked to Marie. She spoke some English, and she used as much as she could to keep Elise in the conversation.

Marie and Luc had just come back from a holiday in Prague. It wasn’t meant to be a holiday – Luc was supposed to be working. Marie explained that last month they’d barely eaten, and Luc had hardly painted from lack of inspiration.

So they’d travelled to Prague, where Luc had been hired to paint portraits for a wealthy family that lived there. Only as soon as they’d gotten there, Luc had enraged the mistress of the house, and they’d been sent packing without any pay.

That hadn’t stopped them from having a marvelous time, though. Marie told us of the architecture, the streets, the river, the people. She said we must go to Prague if we had the chance, and I realized that we certainly did.

We left before Luc could finish the painting, but I paid him for the half-finished canvas anyway. It only seemed fitting, since Elise and I had drank of them before we left. They tasted of purity and grapes, and Elise seemed a bit tipsy when she was done.

The next day, Elise and I packed our things and hopped on the train out of Paris. I know that’s not at all what I told you when I left. I said two weeks in Paris, then we’d come home.

But this is the only time Elise and I will be newlyweds. I implore you to forgive me, dear brother. I want so much to enjoy this time with my wife. I have this strange sense of urgency when I’m with her. Our time together feels so very precious, as if there is only a finite amount left.

I know that’s not true. That we have all eternity to see the world together. But right now, I feel this is something that I must do. I must give Elise the world while I have the chance.

As I write this, we are still on the train, on our way to Prague. The sun has only just begun to rise, the pink light spilling through the windows. Soon, I’ll have to pull down the shades, shrouding us in darkness, but for now, the light seems perfect.

Elise has her head on my shoulder, and she’s been sleeping for a while. She stirred a bit ago, watching me as I wrote this letter to you.

“Is that to Ezra?” Elise asked, stifling a yawn.

“Yes, it is,” I told her.

“Please tell him not to hate me,” she said.

“Why would he hate you?” I asked.

“For stealing you away from him. I would hate somebody that took you away from me.”

“Nothing can take me away from you, my love. You know that.” I brushed back a hair from her forehead and kissed her gently. “I am yours forever.”

“I know.” She smiled, lopsided because she was sleepy. “But I still stole you from him.”

“I went willingly,” I assured her. “And Ezra isn’t the type to hold grudges.”

“Perhaps.” She snuggled closer to me, resting her head in the nook between my shoulder and neck.

“Does Catherine hate me for taking you away from her?” I asked.

“A little,” Elise admitted, and then giggled. Somehow, the sound was even more charming when she was sleepy. It had an innocent quality to it that made my heart swell.

With that, she drifted off to sleep. So I beg of you, Ezra, if you cannot forgive me for leaving you now, please at least do not hold it against my young bride. She cares for you, not as much as I do, but as much as she can.

We only wish to make each other happy, but we don’t want to do it at your expense. Let us have a few more weeks to be free and unfettered, in love and foolish the way only the young can be.

Then I’ll return home. I will work with you to open the business. Elise will work in the gardens and fields of
her farm. We’ll build a house together, but the life we build will include you. You are as much a part of my life as my beloved Elise.

I want you to know that. Just because I am married now it doesn’t change a thing between us. I still love you as much as I ever have, brother. And when I return, I will set about proving it to you. I don’t want there to ever be a doubt about my loyalty to you.

I hope things are well with you, and you are checking in on Catherine to make sure she’s alright. Elise has been afraid that the farm will fall apart in her absence, but I assured her that you will keep Catherine in line.

Take care, dear brother, and I will see you soon.

Yours,

Peter
To Elise, with all my love —

On this Christmas, I wanted to give you something to show you how much you mean to me, how grateful I am that you’ve let me spend these past eight years with you.

I would buy you a new house, if you’d let me, but I know how much you love this old farm. I’d take you on another trip, if I hadn’t already taken you everywhere you asked to go.

I’ve given you everything I have to give, and so much more. I’d give you the moon and the stars, if you asked for it, but I know that’s not what you need.

Love, my love, is the thing you crave the most. I’ve heard you talk of your family, the stories growing with increasing frequency. Our small home has become too large for you. I hear your footsteps echoing as you walk about during the day, and I reach over to your spot in bed, finding the sheets cold.

When did you stop sleeping? When did this ache begin to fill you?

I offer myself to you, completely, eternally, humbly yours, but I feel it in your touch. In your smile that never seems quite true. A sadness. You miss something. Is it something you lost? Or is it something you never had?

My love, my true, my only. What is that you lack that I cannot give?

I think I know the truth, but I’ve been afraid to speak it. I fear if I form the words, it will become a real. A solid entity that will take over our lives. That will ruin everything I have worked for to create with you.

It’s the stories of your younger sister Charlotte that haunt me the most. You talk of her running down the hall, her feet pattering on the floor, her laughter filling the house, her hair flowing with pink ribbons.

Is that the sound you miss? Is that the color you crave? The one thing that we can never be? A family?

I lived for fifteen years as a vampire before I met you. It doesn’t seem that long compared to forever, but when I think of the days, the long nights I spent lost without you, it feels so endless.

The truth is — the truth you mustn’t ever tell Ezra — is that I think I missed you before I knew you. The absence where you should be had been in my heart the second I was born. Even as a human, I’d denied all potential suitors.

I’d always been waiting for you.

But it wasn’t quite the same for you, was it? Not that I’m doubting your love. I know you love me. I know how deeply that flows within your blood. We are bound together forever, and I know you are as happy for that as I am.

I refer to the life before me. Before you knew me. I don’t think you felt the absence quite as sharply as I did. You had wanted more. You had wanted a life, before it was taken from you. And this is a life that I can never give you.

Love, my love, is something I can give. You have my whole heart, my whole being, and if that is not enough, then I will find you more love. More to have, more to give, more to take.

Our house will be empty no more, and there are only so many visits from Ezra and Catherine we can take. I’ve found you the closest thing to life I can give you — a puppy.

I saw him in the market three days ago, and Ezra’s been holding him in secret until now. He’s a small mongrel, something between a collie and a wolfhound I’ve been told. When I first spotted him, I thought, What an ugly little creature.

But then I looked at him the way you would, tilting my head and seeing past his wiry tufts of fur. I saw the love and the hope and the joy inside him, and I knew that he would belong to you. He was meant for you as much as I was.

I can only pray he helps to fill the hole in your heart, the one that even I cannot touch.

You are my love, my true, my only, my Elise.

Merry Christmas

Peter
My beloved Elise –

The waves will not stop crashing. I’ve written you three letters that have gotten swept away to the sea. I meant to write you a cheerful letter, to keep all my nausea to myself, but you see through all my words anyway.

I hate this damnable ship. Its ceaseless rocking. Its constant dampness. Every bit of it is wet, no matter how low or high I go. Everything smells of mold and filth. These humans are far more disgusting than I remembered them being, but I haven’t had to live in such close quarters with them in a very long time.

Ezra finds this whole thing amusing, but he always does. He’s maddening. I’ve had to find new and inventive ways to vomit, since I can’t let the other passengers see my blood red emesis. The food here is horrible, as well. We’ve been at sea for over a week, and I’ve yet to eat.

Ezra found himself a nice girl, but it’s harder to hunt here. I’ve spent so much time below deck, holed up in our room looking ill and frail. I’ve heard the crew whispering that they think I’ve got the plague. It makes it harder for me to lure someone down for a snack.

Moreover, the nausea is destroying my appetite. Ezra had no idea that vampyres could even suffer from seasickness, but it is a condition of the inner ear, and I still have ears. The sea is sitting marvelously with him. Too well, perhaps.

He came down from the deck an hour ago, only to disturb me, I’m sure. He spends a great deal of time above ground, and far too much time with his young human companion.

He’s lonely, I think, and has been for some time, but traveling has always made him feel more contented, more human.

“Are you writing her again?” Ezra asked, splayed out on his small twin bed next to the writing desk. He smelled of sea salt and his hair is damp. He always stands right at the bow of the ship, trying to get sprayed by waves.

“You know very well what I’m doing,” I told him, catching the inkwell before it slid off the desk. I’ve lost more ink in this trip than I have in my entire life.

“Isn’t that a waste of time?” Ezra asked. “You’ve already lost three or four letters.”

“That doesn’t mean that I’ll lose this one,” I said, and held the paper tighter, as if he meant to take it and toss out the window.

“Come now, Peter.” He propped his head up on his elbow, staring at me severely with his dark eyes. Sometimes I think he has the same power that you hold over me, the power to hypnotize me into doing anything.

“Come where, Ezra?” I asked. “We’re trapped on this godforsaken vessel for at least twenty-two more days. I can’t go anywhere.”

“You can’t stay holed up in this room any longer. You’re gaunt and pale.” Ezra sat up and swung his legs over the edge of the bed. “The crew is beginning to talk about your condition.”

“Let them talk,” I muttered. “I can’t get them sick.”

“We don’t need any more scrutiny,” he said.

“You’re only concerned that I’ll scare your friend away,” I said, referring to his young companion. She spends every waking moment with him, and I’m presuming the only reason she hadn’t followed him down here is because it’s well after midnight.

“I would prefer if you didn’t chase off dear Aggie, it’s true, but I’m only concerned about your welfare.” Ezra stood up and put his hand on my shoulder. “You’re not looking well, brother. You must eat.”

I would’ve continued to argue with him, but he dragged me to my feet and pulled me out of the room. Ezra took me down the hall to where his dear young Aggie shared a room with her twin brother. While Ezra occupied the girl, taking her up to the deck for a midnight stroll, he left me alone with the boy to do some convincing.

I only feel mildly better after feeding. The nausea hasn’t faded, but at least I’m not so weak. Ezra thinks that if we have to wait a week or two between feedings, we won’t have to branch out farther than Aggie and her brother.

Of course, none of the seasickness even compares to being away from you. I know this is what is best for us, even if it’s hard. For me, being apart is agony, but I know for you to leave the farm that you have loved is the greater agony.

The neighbors have grown too suspicious that you haven’t aged past sixteen in the past ten years, and they’ve become older and wrinkled.

We will have a new farm in America, one with plenty of land for Hamlet to run. The trouble he’s been causing with the neighbors’ sheep is no good. But in America, they have acres and acres of land for a big dog like him to
It’s been so long since I’ve been home, too. I’ve heard how New York has changed. I would love for you to see where I grew up. We didn’t live right in the city, but I’ve been told that the city has grown so much, it’s swallowed up many of the farms around it.

This will be a brand new start for us, Elise. We will be as newlyweds all over again. We will build a new home, start a new life. We can leave behind all the worries you’ve made in Ireland.

I haven’t wanted to say anything, out of fear of upsetting you. But even Ezra has noticed the change within you this last year. He’s called it “darkness.”

Sometimes, when you and I are sitting there, talking, I see it come over you. Like a shadow across your face, and I know that you’re not there anymore. You’ve gone, and left behind something that looks like you, talks like you, but it’s simply not you.

When I was still home, packing up my trunk in the bedroom, I heard you in the kitchen talking to Ezra. I couldn’t even see you, but I heard it in your voice. I heard when you left, and the darkness came in.

“That darkness is getting stronger with her,” Ezra said on the carriage ride to the port. “She’s hardly even there anymore.”

“I know,” I sighed, unsure of what more to say on the subject. I’d already thought of everything I could think of, said everything I knew to say. Nothing seemed to help.

“She has the worst melancholy I’ve seen,” Ezra said. He stared out at the window, at the green countryside that rolled past us. The lush scenery that I had come to love, as I had come to love you.

“What’s the treatment?” I asked, watching him. “How do you alleviate melancholy?”

“Purpose,” he said simply. “Every living thing needs to feel a purpose, even if that purpose is only finding something to eat and somewhere to sleep. Elise has everything. Her only purpose is to make you happy, and you’ve been happy.”

“Do you think this will give her purpose?” I asked. “Starting a new life in a new country?”

“Only time will tell.”

I am doing this for you, Elise. For us. Together, we can create a life with new purpose.

Saying goodbye to Ireland was harder than I’d thought it would be, and I know it will be hard for you. It is the land where your family is buried, where we fell in love, where all your memories are.

But that’s the true joy of this voyage. It will be like being born anew. All your old memories and fears and concerns will be left behind on that farm. And you and I and our love can spring forth in America.

Remember before we got married, and I told you of the time I’d seen a foal born on my father’s farm? I feel that way again, the way I did before we wed. That I’m on the precipice of a grand beginning. Together, we will create a new life again.

Leaving Catherine behind will be difficult, I know, but her heart is Ireland. Ezra talked endlessly with her about coming with us to America, but she refused. I am lucky to have the heart of a woman that is so open to change.

But I’ve always been lucky to have you, for a million reasons. I know you will not think less of me for hating the sea so much. And I know that despite your melancholy, you love me as much as you ever did.

I don’t deserve your love, and I know that. I don’t make you as happy as I should, try as I might. I’m an imperfect man filled with imperfect thoughts and capable of imperfect deeds. I hope to be a better man when I see you again.

Please write me soon. I already miss you so, and it will be months until we are able to see each other. I will send for you as soon as Ezra and I get ourselves established, and you set the house in Ireland in order.

I am counting down the days until you and Hamlet will join me. Until then, I will be half a man, living half a life. My heart is with you, where it always will be, and I won’t be whole until I am with you.

You are my love, my true, my only, my Elise.

Eternally yours-

Peter
Elise, my love –

Have I done something to offend? It’s been over a month since your last letter, and I used to be able to set the calendar by the arrival of them. I’d expected to hear that you were on your way to America, or at least close to leaving.

Perhaps I’m only being paranoid. I’ve had this bizarre illness that I cannot seem to shake. It started about a month ago. I was walking down the street one night, and a spasm came over me. I collapsed to the ground, unable to stand, and waited for the pain to abate, but it never truly did.

Since then, I’ve felt this odd loneliness that I don’t quite know how to explain. I’ve been without you for so long already, missing you terribly this entire time. But something about it feels different. The distance between us feels more vast than ever before. I am so lost without you.

So perhaps that is what is talking, driving me to write this. My own paranoia and malaise. Your absence always leaves me half a man, and I fear that I’ve left both my brain and my heart in your possession. I will be unable to think or feel until you return to me.

In your last letter, you sounded better than you have in such a long time, more like the girl I’d fallen in love with. The darkness had faded, ebbed back from your words. Was that not true? Are you not as excited to join me as you claimed to be?

I do believe you’ll find New York as lovely as I do. The flat we have has an amazing view of the park. I know it’s not a house, but you’ll love this place, and we can search for a house together.

How are things with Catherine? The last you told me she’s been agitated about you leaving. I hope the two of you have managed to make some peace before you go. You have been together for a long time, and I’d hate to see your history destroyed over this.

I’ve been thinking a lot about the past. I looked up my younger brother Joseph last week. Ezra had always encouraged me to avoid my family, but I couldn’t help myself. Being back in this City, even though it’s changed so much, still reminds me of home.

Joseph only lives a few blocks away from my flat, in the same brownstone my elderly aunt once owned. She’s long since passed, and her home went to my brother, who had cared for in the years before her death.

Obviously, I couldn’t go to his home and inform him that I’m his long lost brother, unchanged from the last time he saw me a quarter of a century ago. But I had to see him. I wandered the street around his address, waiting for a chance to bump into him.

As I waited near the flower shop by his home, watching his front stoop, it occurred to me that I might not know what he looks like. He’d been a scrawny boy of fourteen when I saw him last, and now he would be a man of forty.

Then I spotted someone. A tall, slender man in a dark suit. He walked with a cane, though he didn’t appear to limp. He stopped at the flower shop, admiring some daisies, and I couldn’t help but gape at him.

His thick hair was peppered with salt, and his face was lined with age. A dark moustache grew below his nose, hiding features that might belong to my brother. When he looked up from the flowers, his eyes meeting mine, I nearly gasped. He had the same green eyes I see every time I look in the mirror.

The emerald of our eyes is something our mother passed down to us – both Joseph and I, and our sister Caroline have that same shade of brilliant green. Only our older brother Daniel had gotten our father’s murky brown eyes, like the color of dull mud.

“Can I help you?” Joseph asked, the baritone of his voice sounding much deeper than I remembered. He narrowed his eyes at me, but I’m not sure if this was because I stared at him so intently or if he recognized me.

“No, I…” I had no idea what to say to him. In all my plans to see him, I hadn’t thought of a single thing I’d say once I found him.

“Are you alright?” Joseph asked, and by the concern in his eyes, I’m certain I had paled.

“Yes, I’m quite fine,” I nodded, and I hurriedly grabbed a bouquet of wild flowers from the stand. “I was getting flowers for my wife.”

“As was I.” Joseph turned back towards the flowers, but he seemed reluctant to look away from me. “Or I was considering it, anyway. We had a bit of a row last night, and a bright bunch of flowers always seems to help.”

“Oh?” I asked. “How long have you been married?”

“Twenty years last September,” Joseph said with a smile, and his eyes twinkled with pride. His eyes had always sparkled like that when he did something well. “They’ve been mostly happy years, but if I’m an honest man, I’d say that has more to do with my choice of bride. Mary is a saint.”
“Most women are,” I said, matching his smile.
“What about you?” Joseph asked, and I didn’t understand his question. “How long have you been married?”
“Only just,” I said, answering the same way I always do when people ask. I look far too young to have been married for almost a decade. But this time, when I said it, I meant it. We’re going to be newlyweds, you and I, as soon as you join me.
“Marriage is a spectacular thing,” Joseph assured me. “A family is about the best thing that can happen to a man.”
“Do you have children?” I asked.
“Four,” he grinned. “Two girls and two boys. Alexandra, Michael, Peter, and Pippa.”
I wanted to congratulate him, to say something to that, but the lump in my throat became too large for me to speak around. He’d named one of his children after me. I could barely even work my mouth into a smile. I had nieces and nephews I would never meet, could never meet. I hadn’t missed my family this much since right after I turned.
“They’re a handful,” Joseph went on, since I said nothing. “Of course, mine are almost grown now, and I was fortunate to have my sister help with their care.”
“You sister?” I asked, and my heart skipped a beat.
All these years, I’ve never known what became of Caroline. Ezra thought it would be best if I didn’t see them again, so I left without knowing if she’d survived.
“Yeah, my younger sister Caroline,” Joseph said. He raised an eyebrow at my reaction, but continued with his explanation. “She was injured as a child and never quite recovered. After our parents passed away, she moved into the city to live with me and my wife.”
“Your parents…” I reached out to steady myself on the cart next to me. The wind had been knocked out from my lungs, and my stomach twisted in knots.
Of course I’d known I would outlive my parents. Even as a mortal, I’d known that. It hit me so much harder than I’d expected it to.
“Are you alright?” Joseph asked and put his hand out, as if to catch me in case I fainted.
“No.” I shook my head. “I mean, yes. I’m fine. I felt… a bit ill for a moment, but it’s passed.”
“Do I know you?” He leaned in closer to me, narrowing his eyes again. “You look so familiar to me.”
“I… no, I don’t believe I know you,” I said.
“Strange.” He looked thoughtful for a moment, then stuck out his hand to me. “Joseph Monroe.”
“Ezra Townsend,” I said, taking Ezra’s name since I couldn’t very well give him my own. I hadn’t gone by the name “Monroe” since I’d been human, and it felt strange hearing him say it aloud. My own name had become the name of a stranger.
I took his hand, shaking it firmly. His skin felt rough and calloused, the hands of a man in midlife who’d worked hard. My skin was soft and smooth as ever, the firm hands of a young man. He was my younger brother, and he was so much older than I will ever be.
I left after that, wandering back to my flat in a daze. The streets felt winding, and I got lost several times. I couldn’t seem focus on anything.
I hadn’t thought to ask of Daniel, and I regretted that. But Caroline and Joseph were fine. They were thriving actually. They’d done well without me, as they should.
But seeing Joseph, knowing he’d grown old, that he would die in time, and I would not. I would not even change or age. These are things I’d known for so many years, but it was almost unfathomable to see.
Time moves so strangely. I think it moves just as quickly for mortals as it does for us, but we have the luxury of being timeless, of being untouched by it. Or at least that’s what I’ve always believed.
But now I’m beginning to think that it touches us even more than it touches them. It erodes, causing decay as harmful as the humans, but ours isn’t visible. It’s hidden away, tucked inside our hearts, where all our memories eaten away.
I can never be sure if this life, this thing that Ezra bestowed to me, is a curse or a blessing. At times, I think it would be completely unbearable without you. I don’t think I could handle this on my own.
Even as I write this, I’m still shaken. Not just from the visit with my brother, but from the illness I had last month. It won’t go away – this strange feeling of doom. I wake up in a cold sweat most days.
Please, Elise, I need to hear from you soon. Ezra has tried to assure me that everything is fine, and I wish I could believe him, but I can’t. I won’t, not until I hear it from you. Tell me that you still love me, that we’ll be together soon, always and forever.
Do you remember when we were on our honeymoon, and we arrived in Prague? We stood on the bridge, looking out over the Vltava flowing below us. The sky glowed blue as twilight came upon us, and the first star
glowed brightly above us.

“Should we go back to the room?” I asked you, my arms wrapped around your waist. I nuzzled your neck, my words muffled in the soft of your hair. “We could sleep…” I said sleep, but we’d slept on the train, and we hardly ever slept when we were in bed, at least on that trip.

“Sleep?” You laughed a little at that and turned to face me. Your hands went to my cheeks, stroking them lovingly, and you stared up in my eyes. “To sleep, perchance to dream. For in that sleep of death what dreams may come.”

In that moment, I loved you, and you loved me. I heard you say those words, and I thought you meant death as in our lives, since we are truly the undead. You smiled as you said it, and I thought surely you must mean that we had been sleeping in this death until we met each other. Every moment we spent together had been a dream come true.

I thought you had misquoted Shakespeare as a declaration of love. But now I wonder… were you ever truly happy, my love? Did you mean the soliloquy by its true intention? Even on our honeymoon, had the melancholy taken hold, so that you were thinking of suicide even as I held you in my arms?

Or am I thinking on this too much? Elise, my true, return to me quickly, and tell me what dreams may come for us.

Yours, forever and always, in this life and the next –

Peter
June 15, 1863

Peter-

By now you must know that something has happened, and that’s why I’m writing to you instead of Elise. I’ve gotten all your letters, and I’ve read them all, even though most of them were addressed to Elise and not Catherine. I pray you haven’t gotten on a ship to return back here, the way you said you would in the last letter. Not hearing from Elise on your anniversary had to be a shock, and I am certain she would’ve written to you had she been able.

I should’ve written to you months ago, and I know that. I just didn’t have the words to say to you, and I was in mourning myself. You had Elise for eleven years, but I’ve had her for fifteen. Peter, I love you as much as I loved my own brothers. There isn’t a person on this earth I cared for more than you, other than Elise. That is why it is with such despair that I have to tell you this, and in such an impersonal way. This is not how I meant for you to find out, but I have no other means to tell you.

Peter… Elise is dead.

I’m not sure if you’ll keep reading this after that, if you’ll even be able to. But I feel I should tell you how it happened, in case you have the strength to read on.

As you know, she was trying to close up the farm and sell it so she could meet you in America. We talked some of me keeping the land, but the townsfolk had become far too suspiscious of us both, so I began visiting villages farther north.

Elise went with me. She felt bad about leaving me behind, and no matter how I tried to ease her guilt, she insisted on helping me getting settled into somewhere new.

I know now I shouldn’t have let her come with me. I beg your forgiveness, knowing I will never receive it, nor do I deserve it. I didn’t think anything would come of it.

We stopped at a pub in a village far up the road. We didn’t know that it was already overrun with vampyres, not until it was much too late. They’d claimed the town as their own, and thought we were trying to take over their territories.

Elise and I tried to leave. She kept telling them she didn’t want their land. She even offered them hers. A vampyre grabbed her arm, meaning to throw her out of town himself, and dear Hamlet saw the brute put his hands on Elise, so the dog rushed in to save her.

The vampyre reacted, lashing out the dog, and Elise wouldn’t stand for that. She would never let anything happen to Hamlet. I swear she loved that dog more than me.

I tried to help. I tried to save her. Truly, I did, Peter, and they nearly killed me too. Somehow, Hamlet and I escaped with our lives, but just barely.

Elise…

I’m not sure how much I should tell you. How much you’d want to know.

She fought valiantly, Peter. You would be so proud of her bravery. She fought with a purpose I didn’t even know she had.

But it was one move. A farmer’s pitchfork propped up against a stable that did her in. I pulled it from her chest, and I threw her onto her horse. I raced us out of town as fast as I could, thinking if I got her home, I could do something. I could save her.

Now I know that she was gone as soon as that fork pierced her heart. I tried to do everything I could for her. Anything I could think of, no matter how insane sounding, I had to try. But nothing would bring her back.

I buried her out in the garden behind the house. I know that’s where she’d want to stay. Hamlet has hardly left her grave. He whimpers every night for her, but she never wakes up.

Oh, Peter, I am so sorry. I can’t even begin to express how terribly feel. You left me in charge of your wife. The last thing you said to me was to take care of her, and I have failed you in the worst possible manner.

It’s this shame that has prevented me from writing for so long. Elise died on the twenty-seventh of March, and I’ve been unable to bring myself to tell you. I started writing a thousand letters, but they all came out wrong.

She loved you, Peter. Elise truly loved you. A darkness had settled over her these last few years, but that wasn’t because of you. She hated herself for feeling any sadness when she had you, and she was grateful for every moment with you.

Elise wasn’t meant for immortality. Eternity had never set well with her, and the longer she lived, the more it seemed to eat away at her.

That is the one blessing in all of this. Elise never wanted to do anything to hurt you. She never wanted to leave
you. But I think she might find some solace in death that she was unable to find in life.

I hope the opposite is true for you. I hope that you can find some happiness in life, even without Elise. May her love comfort you in the years you have ahead of you. Her heart is always with you, of that I am certain.

With my deepest sympathies-

Catherine
November 12, 1863

My Elise, my love, my true, my only.

I’m not even sure why I’m writing this. It’s not that I believe that you can get letters in heaven. I’ve been unable to stop talking to you, even though I know that you’re no longer there. I spent so long telling you all my thoughts and hopes and fears, and a little thing like death won’t stand in my way.

Catherine sent me a letter, telling me what happened, and I didn’t even read it through. As soon as I opened it, I knew something was the matter. My hands trembled so badly, I could scarcely read it. When I saw the words Elise is dead, the world fell away from me. Everything went black.

Then I heard screaming. This horrible, tortured yelling so loud it hurt my ears. It took me a moment to realize that it was coming from me.

My vision blurred so badly from the tears, I couldn’t see anything at all. I knelt on the floor, my hands clutching my sides, and I’m not sure how long I stayed that way. I might still be that way if not for Ezra.

“Peter, it’s alright,” Ezra said, and he wrapped his arms around me.

I fought him, though I’m not sure why. I hit and kicked at him, but he wouldn’t let me go. He held me tightly to him, without saying a word, until my wailing and fighting had stopped.

Eventually, after a great while, my body simply gave up. I lay limply against him, unable to move or think or cry. A numbness had settled over my body and my brain, and for that I was grateful, but I wished it had reached my heart.

My heart had been torn to shreds. Nothing even compared to the pain I felt, to the pain I still feel. It’s a gaping wound inside my soul, a horrible burning torture that never ceases.

It’s strange because I’ve grown fond of the constant pain. It’s the only thing I have left of you, like I am carrying you inside me.

There are moments even still where I think that I’m alright. Not alright in the way I was before, but if another person saw me, they would think that I was alive. I can pretend at least to exist, even though there’s nothing inside me.

I’ll be doing something menial, like washing my clothes or helping Ezra with paperwork, and then it will hit me. This sudden realization that you aren’t alive, that I won’t ever see your smiling face, or touch your soft skin again.

The hole inside me is ripped open anew, and my knees give out. I collapse to the ground, sobbing uncontrollably. And there is nothing I can do to stop it. It comes in waves, whenever it pleases, and it only fades when I became too weak.

Many nights I awake with fresh tears on my face, my throat raw from screaming. I don’t remember it, and I suppose it is better that way.

Ezra watches me constantly and almost never leaves my side. He fears I will do something rash, something to end my own life, and he is right to worry that way. I want nothing more than to be with you in the next life, or at the very least, end the loneliness of this one. How can I be if you aren’t?

But it’s the look on Ezra’s face, the broken terror simply thinking about a life without me that keeps me here. I am still bound to him. The small part of me that didn’t belong to you still belongs to him. He is my maker, my friend, my brother, and I cannot leave him, no matter how much it pains me to stay.

The first month without you was a horrible blur of blackness. I did nothing. I couldn’t. I lay in bed, refusing to eat, to move, to breathe. Ezra sat by my bedside. When I’d gone too long without eating, he poured his own blood into a goblet, and forced me to drink it.

I could taste his love, and his terror over what had become of me. It was that that pulled me out of bed.

I died when you died, Elise. I feel that absolutely in my heart. I even know the moment you left this earth. When I was walking on the street, my heart ripped in two, and I threw up on the cobblestones. That was the moment you died. I know that now.

Every moment since then, I’ve existed. I do the things other living creatures do – I talk, I breathe, I go about my day. People see me, and they think that I am live. But it’s all an illusion, a parlor trick. I am not here.

Once I began to function again, at least on a physical level, I knew I had to come back to Ireland. I had to see you. As horrible as I felt, as much as I knew you were gone, I had to see it for myself, or it would always just be a nightmare.

I would want to believe it was a nightmare, that you were wandering the world somewhere, and it would only be a matter of time until we were reunited. At times, I thought it would be easier that way, to simply pretend you were waiting in Ireland to join me.
But I needed to know that you were gone. The possibility of you being alive would haunt me much longer than
the certainty of your death.

Ezra got the business set up to run without us, and as soon as we could, we boarded a ship. The weeks at sea
were horrible. I remembered the last time, only a few short months before, I had written you countless letters to ease
my sickness. This time, I had no such reprieve.

I was born in America, and I’ve lived most of my life there. But landing in Ireland felt like coming home. This
is my home, Elise, and it always will be. The fresh green smell of the earth suffocated me with how much I missed it
here, how much I missed you.

When I arrived at our house, just after sunset, I still expected you to come walking out of the door to greet me,
with Hamlet bounding at your heels. Instead, it was only Catherine, and Hamlet trailed slowly behind her, wagging
his tail.

Catherine showed me where she buried you, all the while apologizing for what had happened to you. I hardly
heard anything she said, though. Her voice became background noise, like a babbling stream.

I fell to the ground, to the patch of earth in your garden where Catherine buried you underneath blue
wildflowers. She may even have tried to stop me, but once my fingers dug into the dirt, I couldn’t stop. I tore up the
ground.

As soon as I got to you, I pulled you from the earth, and holding you in my arms was so much worse. I’d seen
human bodies before, seen what death does to them, and I was unprepared for what it had done to you – nothing.

Your skin was still smooth porcelain, smudged with dirt from the ground. Your body was still soft, feeling as
much like flesh as it ever did, except that it was ice cold now. The wound in your chest left the dress covered in
dried blood, but otherwise, it looked as if you were sleeping. The insects and creatures of the ground hadn’t even
touched you.

I brushed the dirt from you hair, watching you as the moon hit your face. You looked as beautiful as you ever
did. I sat that way for a long time, cradling you to me, and I would sit that way still if Ezra hadn’t pulled me away.

Even then, he had to drag me from you. I fought him, wanting to crawl down in the earth and lay with you until
death took me too. By then, I’d begun to sob, but I scarcely noticed. All I saw was Catherine lowering you back into
the hole, and I couldn’t bare it.

“No, Ezra!” I shouted, trying to rip his hands off me. “I need to be with her! Let me stay with Elise!”

“Peter.” Ezra’s voice was calm but firm, and his arms around me were marble. I couldn’t break free from his

“Peter, she is gone. Now let her rest in peace.”

“You don’t understand,” I said, still fighting him. “I can’t live without her. I am nothing. Just let me lie with
her. Let me die!”

Ezra put his hands on the sides of my head, forcing me to look at him. He gripped so tightly, it felt as if my
skull might fracture. His eyes were dark, penetrating through my despair. I put my hands over his, not pulling them
away, but merely hanging into him, hanging onto the small bit of sanity he gave me.

“I am sorry, Peter, but I cannot,” Ezra said. “I can’t let you die. Elise would not want you to simply give up and
die. That does nothing to honor her or the time you spent together. For her, you must go on.

“And if that’s not enough, then please, I beg you, go on for me,” he said. “It’s selfish, and I know it, but you are
the only thing I have tethering me to this world. I don’t know that I could survive without you.”

It wasn’t sense he was able to knock into me but devotion. Ezra and I shared a bond – still share a bond – that is
made in blood. Without you, we are left for each other.

So, for him, I lived. I let Catherine bury you, and I crawled into the bed we once shared. The blankets still
smelled of you, of us. I clutched onto them, holding them to my mouth to keep from screaming.

When I slept, I dreamt of making love to you as the sun rose through the windows. It warmed our bare skin,
but we didn’t mind. We didn’t even notice. We were too wrapped up in each other, your arms around me, my lips on
you.

I still remember everything about you with such perfect clarity. The way you tasted and smelled and felt. The
way you laughed, and the crooked way you smiled. The way you still blushed when I told you how beautiful you
are. The way your hair tickled my face when I wrapped my arms around you and held you to me as we slept.

Catherine took me to the town where you died, and we found a few vampyres, but not the ones that killed you.
We stayed around for a few days, hoping to find them, and Ezra prevented me from starting pointless fights. When
we left, I felt impotent and lost. I couldn’t save you. I couldn’t even avenge you.

I couldn’t stay in the house we’d shared any longer, so we left almost as soon as we returned. I took Hamlet
with me, although he isn’t the same dog he once was. Living in town without much land won’t bother him. He
doesn’t need the room to run anymore.

Catherine is staying on at our house.
“What about the townsfolk?” I asked before we left.

“Let them talk.” Catherine waved me off. “Let them all think I’m an ageless witch or a demon temptress. It doesn’t matter. I won’t leave. It’s not right for me to give up this land, not with Elise still here.”

“You will take care of her, won’t you?” I asked.

“I always have.”

I left Catherine in charge of you, once again. Maybe I should’ve stayed on with her, kept the land for you. But I don’t think I stood a chance of surviving in that house, surrounded by all those memories. I had to leave it all behind, if I wanted to stay with Ezra.

I still don’t know what I’ll do without you. But I will go on.

All my love, always and forever,

Peter
Elise,

It was Ezra’s idea to join this war, but I don’t disagree with the decision. He thought it would do me well to fight for something instead of sitting sullenly in the apartment. He was an avid supporter of the cause before convincing me to fight with him, and he would’ve taken to arms even if you were still with us.

Most of the soldiers here are fighting over land, even the ones on the Union side, but Ezra’s always been an abolitionist at heart. He spent almost a century as a slave, and though he speaks very little of it, I know it haunts him still.

He does an amazing job of rallying the troops. In the mornings, when we rise for battle, he gives elegant speeches about the evils of other men and what we must do to defend good. They fight valiantly for him, and we’ve done well because of it.

So much of our work takes place during the day, and that has been a struggle for Ezra and me. Eating is also difficult, at least when we’re not among the enemy. The time spent in the sunlight requires us to eat more to stay in control of ourselves. Ezra has been alternating between several of the nurses that are caring for the injured soldiers, but he doesn’t want to weaken them too much.

I prefer waiting until we find Confederate soldiers. Sometimes, that means I will travel at night alone, away from our base, until I come upon someone that I don’t mind greatly weakening. I don’t kill them – not unless we are doing battle, and then I only use my gun. Drinking blood until death has never sat well with me, and it reminds me too much of the time spent in Ireland.

The one good thing about the war is that we are all alone here. Every man here – boy, really, since most are hardly more than children – has left his family, his wife at home. For most, this is the first time they’ve spent away from their home.

When I am with them, I can pretend that you too are left at home, waiting by the window for my return. We can commiserate about our homesickness, and I feel something close to human. Something closer than I have since you were alive.

Last night, as I tried to settle in my blankets to sleep, Ezra came in. He was fresh from eating, full of life, and he lay down in his bed near me. The camp had gone silent, but sleep never comes easy for me at night.

“I heard you talking to the soldiers,” Ezra said, his voice low so anyone nearby wouldn’t be able to hear. I had my back to him, and I didn’t respond. “You were speaking of Elise.”

“Am I not allowed to?” I asked, tensing already.

“You talk of her as if she is alive,” Ezra said, avoiding answering my question.

“I speak of her however I would like.” I pulled the blanket up more around me, even though it was warm inside the tent. “She is my wife. It is my right.”

“I’m not arguing that.” He paused, exhaling deeply. “I am only worried for you.”

“How is that anything to worry about?” I asked. “We are in the middle of the war, but words I choose to use to describe my wife are your concern?”

“This war is temporary,” Ezra said. “We are not.”

“Just because we are still here doesn’t mean we always will be,” I reminded him.

“Peter.” The blankets rustled next to me, so I knew that Ezra had sat up. “I don’t want you to get caught up in the stories you tell the other soldiers.”

“I know the difference between fact and fiction,” I snapped.

“You?” Ezra asked, his words gentle. “You still write to her at least once a week.”

I’d been trying to keep these letters secret from him, but Ezra sees everything. He has a way of knowing things I haven’t even uttered. Sometimes, when I’m thinking of you, he looks at me, and there’s something in his eyes, and he knows I’m thinking of you.

“What would you have me do?” I asked as I sat up. I tried to keep my voice low so others wouldn’t hear, but my irritation made it hard for me to keep quiet. “Would have me pretend she never existed?”

“Of course not.” Ezra looked appalled in the darkness of our tent. “I’m not asking you to forget her. But she’s been gone for over a year, Peter, and you still talk to her. I hear you whispering her name all the time.”

“So what?” I asked, but my cheeks reddened with shame. “What if I talk to Elise? What if I pretend that she’s still here? What does it matter?”

“You have to heal. You have to get past this,” Ezra said. “I lost my wife and children a long time ago, and I know how terrible this pain is. You should mourn the ones you love, remember them, but move on with your life.”

June 20, 1864
“What life?” I hissed. “I’m the undead.” I sighed and shook my head. “I am only here for you, Ezra. I am alive because you want me to be. If I must live in my delusions to stay here, then so be it. Do not ask anymore of me. I cannot give it.”

“I was hoping this war would give you a purpose,” Ezra said at length. He lay down, watching the shadows on the tent from the fire in the center of camp. “Something to fight against, if not something to fight for.”

“I fear I’ll never have purpose again,” I said, laying back down.

“As do I,” he admitted.

Part of me knows that he is right. That this isn’t the best thing for me to do, but I don’t know what the best thing to do is. I don’t know how to survive without you.

Since I began writing you last fall, it’s gotten easier for me. The attacks, where I fall to my knees and sob or throw up, have almost completely stopped. I sleep better, although I still dream often of lying in our bed.

I am sitting in the shade of a tree, trying to escape the hot Georgia sun. We’ve stopped to rest for a spell, and many of the soldiers are sleeping, eating, or writing home. Ezra is smartly sleeping, but I am writing you. The way I do on every break. At every chance I get. As if I believe you will receive these letters.

The other soldiers tease me about you, about my devotion to you. When we have a chance to stop at taverns, most of them will bed local women if they can. But I never do. The idea of being with someone that isn’t you repulses me. I can’t imagine the prospect.

Elise, I swear to you, I will never love anyone but you. I cannot even fathom the idea.

But this war has given me some kind of direction. When I am fighting, I hardly think of you. My head is in the battle, even if my heart remains with you. Being a soldier might be the only that makes sense to me.

It’s not that my life has meaning, but what I am doing matters. Because of what we are, Ezra and I have great advantages to help the other soldiers. We can hear and see things before they do and let them know when enemies are approaching. We are stronger and much harder to hurt, so we can take bigger risks.

A lot of our time is spent protecting our battalion, as opposed to simply fighting the Confederacy. But I prefer that. I prefer to know I am saving someone than killing them. In my lifetime, I will see far more death than I can possibly imagine, but I would like to put it off for as long as I can.

We are moving on again, so I must cut this short. But I will write to you again, and again, and again. No matter what Ezra says.

All my love –

Peter
Oh, Elise forgive me. The mistake I have made feels too horrible for me to even write. I am drunk, and I know I am drunk. We came to Russia to get away, to hide in the cold and drink too much blood, and oh, how I have drunk too much blood. I simply couldn’t take it anymore. The life we’re leading felt so artificial, and I didn’t want to take Ezra along with me. I wanted him to stay behind, to keep running the business, but he refuses to leave me. I feel so much like Cain must have felt with Abel. Not that I want to harm Ezra, but this feeling that I am his keeper. Or he is mine. That we are meant to watch over each other, but Ezra is good and pure, and I am of evil and will drag him down with me.

Elise, Elise, Elise, what I have done?

We never should’ve left America. Ezra was doing so well in Chicago. He ran a factory and owned a share in the railroads, and we were doing well, it felt all too well. He’d even started to date a young woman named Abigail, and I’d never known him to actually court a woman. He’d only see them for a night and then move on, but something about Abigail struck him. And something about it struck me too. Seeing him happy and in love, building a life. It was raw in a way I hadn’t expected. I told him to stay. I begged him not to leave, to stay with Abigail, turn her into a vampire, and they could live happily ever after. Without me.

But he refused to be apart from me. He chose me over her, and I think I’ve begun to hate him for that. He’s so dependent on me for his happiness, and it’s too much pressure. It’s too much on me. I can barely survive and make myself happy. How am I supposed to do the something for him I can’t do for myself? Why does he need me so much? Why can’t he let me go?

I don’t know what I’m saying or what I mean. I don’t want to leave Ezra. I love him, more than any man has ever loved his brother. But sometimes it’s unbearable. Loving anyone, being loved. It would so much better if I could simply be alone, if he would let me die.

But he won’t and I refuse to be the one to destroy him. I will not do to him what was done to me. Or at least that’s what I tell myself, what I’ve promised him. But I don’t know how much my promises are worth. My word means nothing.

I gave you my word that you were my one, my true, my only. You were to be my last. But here, in Petersburg, everything has gone insane. The cold has been lovely. The blood is divine. And we lost ourselves. Ezra heartbroken over Abigail, me drowning in guilt.

Was it right to make him leave? No, of course not. But I didn’t make him leave. I could not stay any longer. Should I have stayed? Should I have suffered in silence, watching him fall in love? If that is what happiness required, is that what I should have given him?

I do not know. Sometimes I feel he asks too much of me, but other times I feel it is his right. To this day, my life belongs to him. Not in the way that my heart belongs to you. But something about me is still bound to him, and I cannot shake it. I cannot change it. We are for each other.

So we left, we came here. The vampire population in St. Petersburg is five times what it was in Chicago, or any other American city I’ve seen. The cold suits us all so much better. I don’t know why we don’t all move here. It’s marvelous. The nights are endless. The days are frigid. Everyone is so poor, but there is a majesty to the city that reminds me of Prague. You would love it here.

We drank. I’m not even sure how long we’ve been here. Maybe a month, maybe six. It’s all a blur. I’ve never been drunk on blood before, but I’ve been in a constant stupor. The blood is prevalent. They have bars here, and they sell blood in wine bottles. They have bloodwhores on hand so we can feed as often as we want.

We bought a place above the bar. I think it was meant to be a hotel. Ezra sold his factory when we left, and he bought the place, with its gold vaulted ceilings and chandeliers and lush velvet furniture.

We used to frequent the bar. As soon as we’d wake, we’d head downstairs, and stay all night. Then we began to have the bloodwhores and bottles sent up to us. We rarely stepped outside. Other vampires came to our place, and the maids couldn’t keep up with the mess. At least five different phonographs were broken from roughhousing.

The parties were out of control. The way we lived was beyond decadent. Even Ezra took up with bloodwhores in a way I’d never seen him before. It broke his heart to leave Abigail, and he must have resented me. I’m sure he did. But Ezra can never say that. He can never really say anything about how feels. So he took girls to his bed, two at a time, and barely spoke to me.

This was our life. It may have been the closest to being happy I was since you died, because I didn’t feel a thing. I even laughed. I laughed a lot. I laughed with tears streaming down my cheeks, and everyone thought they were tears of joy. But I couldn’t believe my life had become this.

When I sobered up, it was too late. I woke up in my bed with another a woman, a bloodwhore whose name I
couldn’t remember. I’m not sure that I’d ever known it. The night came back to me in a rush, and I realized I’d gone
to bed with her. In some drunken haze, I’d slept with someone that wasn’t you.

I promised you that you would be my last. I even promised you that when you were alive.

When I realized what I’d done, I lost it. My binge turned into something darker. I didn’t want to live anymore. I
couldn’t do it. I was only ruining Ezra’s life, and my own, and everyone else’s. I’d done nothing good for the world
in so long, and it would be better if I weren’t in it.

I went to the bar and started fights with anyone I could. With everyone. I finally found a taker in a vampire
named Gunnar, only he’s unlike any vampire I’ve ever met before. I didn’t know that, not when I met him, not when
I challenged him. If I was in a right mind, I would’ve sensed the evil in him.

He’s a monster, Elise. A true demon. When he came into the bar, the bloodwhores all scattered. When I had a
moment alone with a girl, she explained that Gunnar always raped the girls when he fed, and sometimes he killed
them. He’d kill one by ripping out her heart with his hands.

I didn’t know this, not when he eyed me up as he stalked across the room, and I made a snide remark to him. I
was looking for trouble, but not even I wanted to be a part of the kind of trouble he brought. His eyes were dark and
black. They reminded me of a shark I’d seen at the World’s Fair. Calculating and cold. He was only biding his time
to kill me.

Or that’s what I thought. That he’d go after me. But he only watched me, studying me. I’d offended him, so he
wanted to hit me where it hurt the most.

Ezra came down to get me just before dawn, as was his custom. If I would become too inebriated, Ezra would
fetch me. I was drunk, but not too drunk.

I’d gotten in a small bar fight with a vampire called Petra, but I’d won easily. It left me restless and on edge. I
sat on a velvet couch, drinking blood from a goblet, and watched the bloodwhores pick up vampires.

That’s how Ezra found me, and that’s when Gunnar pounced. He leapt at him with a glass bottle, breaking it
over Ezra’s skull. Then he sliced open his throat. It wasn’t enough to kill him, but it spilled his blood all over,
staining everything around us.

“What are you doing?” I bellowed and tried to defend us against him, but I was weak and slow. Gunnar hit me,
throwing me back against the wall.

“All his blood will drain from him, spilling all over the floor,” Gunnar said, and he sliced Ezra’s throat again,
since the wound had begun to heal. “And then I will make you lap it up like the starving dog you are.”

Ezra kicked at Gunnar’s legs, and he slipped in the blood and fell to the ground. Even as weak as he was,
Ezra’s always been strong and a remarkable fighter. But what saved him was the fact that he owned the hotel that we
lived in, that the bar was located in. So the bouncers were there to protect him, and as soon as Ezra got Gunnar to the
ground, they hauled him away.

Ezra wasn’t even mad about any of it, at least not at me. Still holding a hand to his throat to keep his blood
from leaking out, he walked over to make sure I was alright. He’s now lying in the next room, resting with a
bloodwhore.

I don’t know who I am anymore, Elise. I don’t like who I’ve become. My mourning has turned into something
horrible, something that’s selfish and whining. I love you, Elise. And I have sinned against you. Not just by sleeping
with someone else, but by dishonoring your memory as I have. I have become someone you would never love.

Ezra almost died because of me. Because of choices I made out of self-pity and jealousy. I won’t let my love
for you turn into something grotesque, something that’s holding me back and making me cruel.

I have to let you go, Elise, my love, my one, my true. It is the only way I can truly love you and keep your
memory alive, the way it was meant to be. I have to move on and stop writing you these letters.

I love you. I will always love you. No matter what dreams may come, you will always be the only dream I’ve
ever truly had.

Goodbye, my love,

Peter
June 24, 1958

Elise-

I haven’t written you in over fifty years. I’ve thought of you, often, but I refused to put my pen to paper. Ezra deserved a brother again, and I promised him that I would be one, that I would finally allow you to stay in the past.

I think that’s a promise I’ve kept. Since the turn of the century, I’ve begun to prosper, as has Ezra. He went back to being a business man, something he always thrived at, and I helped him when I was around. I went off to fight in both Great Wars, but this time, Ezra stayed behind. He let me go alone, which I think is progress for our relationship.

Being a soldier is still the only thing that truly makes sense to me. The battlefield is the only place where I feel at home in my skin. That sounds horrible, with all the death and terror around them, but it’s because of that that I can focus on being alive and keeping those around me alive. It allows no time for introspection.

I’m between wars now, and Ezra has set up home in Minnesota. I wanted to move back to New York, but Ezra prefers the Midwest. Something about it appeals to him, and I don’t understand what, but I am starting to believe he was drawn here.

The winters are nice, and the lakes are lovely. We built a house on a lake this summer. It was wonderful. Ezra made the plans himself, and we actually built it with our own two hands. It ended up being more work than we anticipated, but it was worth it. It’s a shame we’ll have to move in a few years.

I even got a dog, the first since Hamlet died all those years ago. He’s a Giant Schnauzer, and despite his name, I hadn’t expected him to be as large as he is. He’s even bigger than Hamlet, and I’m certain Hamlet had Irish Wolfhound in him. He’s black, and nearly the size of a horse, so I named him after my father’s horse, Lysander.

Ezra hasn’t dated in years, not since Abigail. I don’t think he’s bedded a woman, not since St. Petersburg, but that whole mess spoiled the experience for us both, I think. He’s been chaste and quiet. Not exactly depressed, but something sated.

Until two weeks ago. He came home with a mess of a vampire. She was newly turned and had no idea what a vampire was or how to be one. It was amazing she hadn’t gone on a rampage killing everyone. Her clothes were torn and filthy. Twigs and blood were tangled in her hair. She was a complete and utter fright.

But I liked her instantly. It’s hard to describe the way I feel about her, actually. It’s not the same as it was with you, or as it is with Ezra, but some odd combination. I cared for her the moment I saw her and knew she would be part of my life, a part of our lives.

Ezra was practically falling over himself bringing her in the house. He was in love with her, and I could feel it coming off him in waves. He looked at as if he’d never seen anything more beautiful, but then, he probably hadn’t.

It didn’t take long for us to realize that she is his. They are meant for each other the way you and I were meant for each other. Their blood is bonded together, and because my blood is bonded with Ezra’s, I am bonded with her too.

Her name is Mae, and she’s already a fixture in our house. Ezra didn’t go to work the first three days she lived here because he didn’t want to leave her. Not even for a moment.

I’m certain that she loves him back, but she’s been through some kind of hell. Her transformation had to be terrifying, and by the wedding band on her hand, I know she’s left something behind. She’s still dazed most of the time, but she’s warm.

I hadn’t even realized that our home was lacking warmth until she arrived and brought it with her. It’s as if someone lit a fire in the hearth for the first time. She’s cleaned herself up, and she’s even cleaning the house. Not that Ezra and I were ever that messy, but we’ve lived as bachelors for far too long.

I know I should feel like a third wheel, but I don’t. It’s as if she’s a piece that’s been missing from our lives all this time, and it all feels a bit more complete. Even Lysander seems happier with her around.

I don’t know why I’m writing to tell you this. It’s not as if I’ve stopped loving you or missing you – I never will. But I feel… almost content. If that makes sense. And I thought you would want to know.

Wherever you are, you won’t get this letter. But I wanted you to know that I’m okay. I truly think I’ll be alright.

Yours forever-

Peter
Elise-

I suspect this is how a father feels, and as a first time parent, I wanted you to know. I don’t even know how to describe to you what I’ve been through. The ridiculous nature of it all still seems so unbelievable.

Mae has had the luxury of being born in the twentieth century, and most of the blood she’s drank has been from human blood donations. She gets cold bags of blood from a blood bank and stores them in the fridge until she drinks them.

She has drunk human blood before, but for some reason I don’t understand, she prefers the bag to the fresh humans. It has something to do with guilt. I don’t know that I ever felt guilty from feeding on humans – only killing them.

A few weeks ago, Mae decided she wanted to go out to eat, so to speak. She felt uncomfortable having Ezra watch her pick up somebody and bite them, so I offered to go with her. She was actually quite excited, claiming that we don’t do enough things just the two of us.

I took her to a vampire club in downtown Minneapolis. I used to go there a lot in the eighties, when it was disgustingly loud and vibrant. I liked the noise of it. Ezra would never go to it, though – he’s sworn off clubs, and I’m not sure where he finds food exactly.

Mae was thrilled to pieces. She went over a week without eating in anticipation of our big night. Too much anticipation, as it would turn out.

Shortly after we arrived, Mae found her prey. I think she picked him because he looked so easy. He wore flannel and ripped jeans – a fashion trend I’ll never understand and can’t wait until it goes out of style. But there was something clumsily charming about him. Even I had to admit it. It was his laugh, and he laughed at everything she said.

She took him to a back room for privacy, while I lingered out front looking for my own dinner. Fortunately, I hadn’t gotten that far away when she began screaming hysterically for me. I raced back to the room to find him dead. Mae had drained all the blood from him.

Let me be clear – I was certain he was dead. His heart wasn’t beating, and when I listened for his breath, there was none. But Mae was sobbing, begging me to save him. She hadn’t meant to hurt him, of course, but had merely gotten carried away.

She looked so stricken and heartbroken, and I knew that I had to do something. Ezra wasn’t here, but I’m not sure that any real life saving measures could be taken. I would’ve driven him to the hospital if I thought it would help, but as I said, I was certain he was dead.

The only thing I could think of was turning him, but even that seemed like a terrific long shot. I’d never turned anyone, never even seen it done, and Ezra had told me it only worked on the living. Once the dead were dead, there was nothing that could be done for them.

With Mae pleading with me to save him, I went ahead it with it. I tore open my wrist and pressed it to his mouth. He didn’t react or wake, but I held the wound open, letting as much blood flow into his mouth as it possibly could.

Eventually, I had to pull my wrist away. Mae sat next to him, clinging onto him as if that would help, and I began pacing the room, trying to think of what we should do with the body. Perhaps a river or a lake would be a good place to discard him...

Then he started to cough, like he was choking on my blood. Mae turned to me, hoping I would know what to do, but I was stunned. I hadn’t thought it would really work, so I hadn’t thought about any of the ramifications of turning another human being into a vampire.

It wasn’t a decision I would take lightly. I hadn’t done it in over one hundred and fifty years of life, and Ezra himself had only done it the once when he turned me. Cursing another human to this existence is a cruel thing to do, especially without asking for the human’s consent.

But this human was alive, swallowing down my blood, and I had to do something. I carried him out the back door of the club, with Mae still crying as she followed me. She kept apologizing for what she’d done, but I didn’t blame her. She’s still too young to completely understand how frail humans truly are.

At home, I took the human up to my room to get him comfortable. We don’t even have a spare room at our house, so we’re going to have to move soon. I can’t share a room with him long term, that is for certain.

Ezra helped prepare us for the transformation, while Mae did most of the hands on care. Her maternal instinct is unparalleled in any human I’ve ever encountered. She sat by the human’s side, unwilling to move, even though nothing much happened the first twenty-four hours. I feared he might be in a coma, because he didn’t even move.
Then the transformation took hold, and it’s almost as horrific to watch as it to experience. His body actually contorted. It moved about, as if there were creatures under his flesh, as he changed and grew. His screams were agonizing, and his vomiting seemed endless. Though Mae did her best to catch it and clean him, my bed was destroyed by black vomit.

The thing I was most unprepared for was the transformation in me. Somewhere in the middle of his change, I began to feel one myself. Something inside me wanted to be near him, pulled towards him. When he was in great pain, I felt it too, although on a much smaller scale.

I was paranoid and nervous when I was away from him, as if I thought he would perish if not under my watchful care. I took over his care completely before his transformation was finished because I couldn’t stand to be away from him.

I imagine it was much like a mother might feel leaving her newborn child with a strange babysitter. Panicked and apprehensive and somewhat obsessive.

When he finally awoke once it was all over, I was sitting at the side of the bed. I hadn’t moved in nearly a day, terrified something would happen as soon as I did.

“Where am I?” he asked, sitting up a bit. He was still pale, his hair was a fright, and his eyes were bloodshot, but he was on the mend. Physically, his body had completely made the change, and he appeared stronger and healthier than he had the club.

“You’re… you’re at my house,” I said, unsure of how exactly to the answer him. “Do you remember what happened to you?”

“Not really.” He shook his head and furrowed his brow in concentration. “I remember going to a club with a couple of hot girls… but that’s all. What happened?”

“I don’t know how to tell this to you, but you’re a vampire,” I said, and he stared blankly at me. “You were bitten at the club and lost a lot of blood. To save you, I had to turn you.”

“You protected me,” he nodded, as if it that made total sense. He mulled it over a minute, then nodded again. “I believe you.”

At first, I didn’t understand how he could be so trusting, but I remembered the way I felt about Ezra after my own transformation. Or even the way I felt about the newly turned vampire now. He knew I would protect him, just as I knew that I would do anything to protect him. He was a part of me now, my brother, bonded to me for life.

“Who are you?” he asked, turning to face me.

“My name is Peter,” I said.

“I’m Jack,” he smiled and stuck out his hand. “Jack Hobbs.”

“It’s nice meeting you,” I said and shook his hand.

“So…” Jack said, looking around the room. “I am really, really hungry, like starving.”

I got him bag blood, since it’s much safer to learn that way than on humans. Mae came in with me when I brought it back, and they took to each other right away. She loved the childlike innocence about him, and how needy newly turned vampires are. He liked the affection, I think. There was something strangely lonely about him.

Jack didn’t speak much of his family, but when I suggested that he moved in and cut ties with them, he didn’t seem to mind. He said that they wouldn’t even miss him.

So far, he’s been sleeping in my bed, and I’ve been sleeping on the floor nearby. I could sleep on the couch in the living room, but if I’m being completely honest, I don’t really want to be away from him.

I haven’t bonded this intensely or quickly with anyone since I’ve met you. It’s not romantic, not like with you, and I assume it’s something close to parental. But it is bizarrely consuming. I worry about him constantly. I don’t even like leaving the house for work.

But on the positive, there’s a new joy to my life. I don’t know how to explain that either. But with Jack, I’m feeling emotions I’ve tried to stifle for the longest time. His laughter is so contagious, though, it’s impossible not to have fun with him.

He’s excited about everything. The whole world is new to him, and looking at it through his eyes, it feels new to me too. The past month has been the best month I’ve had in a very, very long time. Turning him might actually be the best thing that’s happened to me.

Although, the past few days have been a bit insufferable. Some rock star that Jack was quite fond of has apparently died, and Jack’s been quite upset about it. This wouldn’t be so bad if I wasn’t acutely aware of everything that he feels. Every moment of fear or intense sadness, I get a wave of panic all my own. I come rushing into the room to find him watching a music video and crying.

Still, I can’t complain much. I feel like I have a real and true purpose, and not like when I went to war. This gives meaning to my everyday life. I am helping shepherd him into something, and life feels more complete.

Even Ezra and Mae seem happier. I thought that Ezra might be disappointed, but he’s not. Jack has filled out
the family in a way that we needed. Ezra and I are too grave and serious. We’ve been alive for too long and seen too much, and we’ve become world weary.

Jack reminds me of the lightness in the world. That there is still enjoyment in it. That there is still more to hope for. That life is worth living.

Peter
March 27, 2009

There’s something the matter with Jack. He came home the other night saying he’d met a girl, and at first, he wouldn’t stop talking about her.

Both Mae and I were pleased, mostly because it would get him out of the house. Since he broke up with Aisha last year, he hasn’t been himself. He hasn’t exactly been mopey, since Jack doesn’t really mope, but he was sedated and didn’t leave the house much.

I don’t know why Jack always insists on dating humans. It’s not that I have any problems with humans per se, but they’re too frail. I don’t want to make connections with something that he’ll outlast by several millennia.

But Jack and Ezra are so drawn to them. With Ezra, I know it’s because of how much he still longs to be human. With Jack, I don’t completely understand it. But he’s never been quite right in that he’s never really been a normal vampire.

Maybe it’s because of how he turned. He doesn’t remember turning, and he doesn’t even have many real memories of his human life, which didn’t end all that long ago. I’m starting to think maybe he really was dead when I turned him, but that doesn’t make sense. Once you’re dead, you’re dead…

He has always been strange, but he’s acting even weirder than normal. He met this human girl, raved about her for days, then just completely stopped talking about her. At least to me. He and Mae would have quiet little conversations in their room, and when I tried to talk to Jack about it, he changed the subject.

This is bizarre because Jack tells me everything, far more than I’d ever really want to know. Whenever I went on a trip with Ezra, he’d be waiting by the door for me to get back, looking as lost as that dog of his without me.

If I’m being honest with myself, I was always grateful for that. Ezra and I have a strong bond, stronger than most vampires I’ve met, but there’s always been something special about mine with Jack. Even after all these years, the urge to protect him hasn’t faded, and his hero worship hasn’t waned.

“That boy thinks you walk on water, you know,” Mae told me the other day.

I’d been helping Jack fix the dining room table that he’d accidentally broken when roughhousing with his dog. He went back out to the garage to return the tools, but Mae had stayed sitting in the living room with me. She was reading a book, but she always managed to keep half an eye on us.

“What are you talking about?” I asked, running my hands over the table to make sure the crack had been smoothed out seamlessly.

“The way he watches you when you’re not looking,” Mae said. “He adores you.”

“We’ve always been close,” I said, feeling uncomfortable with her claims. “Why hasn’t he been talking me lately? He usually tells me everything.”

“It’s complicated.” Mae shook her head and looked back down at her book.

“Mae.” I turned to her and folded my arms over my chest. “If there’s something going on with him, I should know. I can help him.”

“Not this time, Peter,” she sighed.

“What does that mean?” I asked, growing irritated. I couldn’t stand of the idea of something hurting Jack and being unable to help him. “Is it about that human girl he’s after?”

“I suppose you’ll find out anyway.” Mae closed her book and set it on her lap. “But you can’t tell him I said anything to you. He wanted to wait to sort this out on his own, but it won’t hurt if you know.”

“Know what?” I asked.

“The girl, there’s something about her that draws him to her,” Mae said.

“Like he’s bonded to her?” I shook my head. “But she’s human. She can’t have a blood bond with a vampire.”

“No, she’s not supposed to, but we don’t completely understand how these things work,” Mae said. “And I don’t think she’s bonded with him.”

“But you said…” I trailed off, confused. “You think it’s a transference bond, like the one Jack and I have with you because you’re bonded to Ezra?”

“Maybe,” she admitted.

“But Ezra has you,” I said. “And I had Elise.” I swallowed after I said her name. I’d gotten better about it since Jack came around. He asked so many questions, and I’d been forced to really talk about my past for the first time. In the long run, it had made life better.

“I know, but I don’t know what else it can be.” She shrugged. “Jack’s beside himself over it.”

“Why?” I asked. “And why didn’t he tell me about it?”

“Because he likes her, Peter.” Mae gave me that look, the one she used when I didn’t realize I’d hurt Jack’s feelings or been rude. “He’s afraid she’s bonded with you.”
“She can’t be bonded with me,” I said firmly. “I had Elise, and I lost her. That part of my life is over.”

“Mae,” Jack groaned as he came back into the living room with Matilda at his heels. The dog followed him everywhere. “You told him?”

“He knew something was wrong, Jack,” Mae said apologetically. “He only wants to help.”

“She’s right.” I turned to face Jack. “And there’s nothing to worry about.”

“What do you mean?” Jack narrowed his eyes at me.

“I can’t be bonded with this girl,” I said. “It’s not possible.”

“But there is something weird going on,” Jack insisted. “I am drawn to her.”

“You like her,” I shrugged.

“No, I don’t,” he shook his head. “I mean, I do. But… I don’t know. We’re just friends.”

“If you’re really worried about her, bring her around,” I said. “When she meets me, I won’t feel anything, and then you’ll know.”

“That doesn’t explain how I feel about her,” Jack said.

“That’s something you’ll have to figure it out on your own,” I said. “You’re probably just a bit closed off because of what happened with Aisha.”

“Don’t even bring that up,” he shook his head. His cell phone buzzed in his pocket, and he pulled out. “That’s her. Alice. I’m going to go meet up with her.”

“Alice?” I asked.

“Yeah, the girl.” He smirked at me. “The one we were just talking about?”

“Oh, right,” I said. “I don’t think I’ve heard you say her name before.”

“Well, now, I have. I’ll think about what you said, though, and maybe I’ll bring her around sometime,” Jack said as he turned to leave the room. “But not tonight.”

He left in a hurry, so eager to see her, but I thought it was good for him. He needed something to care about, other than me, Mae, and Ezra. There was a life outside of this, and he needed to live it.

“What if it is you?” Mae asked quietly once Jack had gone.

“What?” I asked, looking back at her.

“What if she is bonded to you?” Mae asked.

“She won’t be.”

“But Peter…” Mae chewed her lip thoughtfully. “I think she might be. It’s a feeling I have. And you need to have a plan in case she is bonded with you.”

“Nothing,” I said. “I will do nothing. My heart is buried with Elise.”

I closed the subject and went up to my room. I didn’t want to think about the matter any longer. But I couldn’t shake it off. I thought it would help to write it all down, but it hasn’t. Because what if Mae is right?
April 2, 2009

Elise-

I have no one else to talk to about this. It feels like sacrilege to speak of this to you, but I’d rather write to you than say it aloud to anyone else. Even though they know. Mae knew the instant she saw me, and Jack must know. He can probably feel it, the way I can feel it when his heart speeds up when she walks in the room.

Jack brought his human girl, Alice, over tonight. I’d told him to. I’d assured him that everything would be alright, and everything should have been alright. I was bonded with you. Elise, I’m certain I was. The way I felt about you, it was unmistakable.

But now this girl has come into our lives and everything is… a mess.

As soon as Jack brought her in the house, I felt it. I didn’t even need to see her. I was upstairs in my room, reading and waiting for him to return. But I could hear her heart as soon as she walked in, beating like a frightened rabbit. And it was like music. It sang to me, Elise, in a way only your heart had ever sung to me.

I didn’t want to see her or meet her or feel this way. Mae brought Alice up to my room, and I nearly suffocated. I couldn’t even breathe around her. It was so overwhelming, the pull inside me. I thought it would rip my heart from my chest. I wanted to rush to her and…

I don’t know what I would’ve done. Simply feeling this way is a betrayal to both you and Jack. You should see the way he fawns over Alice. It would be so sweet if I didn’t want to tear out his throat to get to her.

I actually want to do that, Elise. At the thought of him being with her. When he touches her. I want to hurt him. It’s something animal and dark and unlike anything I’ve ever felt for Jack. Half of me wants to protect him and step aside so he can be with her, and the other half wants to kill him and claim her for mine.

That’s crazy. None of this makes any sense. She isn’t mine. You were mine. I loved you. I still love you, Elise. I can’t love anyone else. My heart died with you.

And yet… my heart is still beating, still being pulled to this silly, awkward girl. She is beautiful, not the way you were, but in a disarming way. She seems like she’d be plain, but then she smiles, and it lights up the whole room.

But it doesn’t matter. I can’t love her. I’m not even capable. And even if I was, she’s in love with my brother — a brother who I care about more than I care for myself. Alice glows when she’s around him, like he’s a light that shines from inside her.

What am I saying? This is all madness.

I can’t be around her. For your sake, my sake, her sake, Jack’s sake. I need to leave. Jack would make her so much happier than I ever could. I could never even make you happy, Elise, and I loved you more than I had ever loved anything.

I still love you. Why am I talking of our love in the past tense? When did I begin to do that? When did I put you behind me?

I will not love this girl. I promise you that, Elise. I’ve already promised you that. You are my love, my true, my only.

I will leave her. I will leave them all if I have to. Ezra has a family now. He needs me less than he used to, and if Jack had to choose between Alice and me, he would choose Alice.

No, I don’t believe that. Jack would still choose me. He would stop seeing her if I asked him to. But I won’t do that. He deserves to be happy. I already had my chance at happiness, and I lost it. I can’t punish him for that.

I will make Alice hate me, and I will learn to hate her. And she and Jack will be happy in a way that you and I never got to be.

Eternally yours,

Peter
Elise –

After all these years, I finally have peace for you. Alice is onto something, and it might be my chance to rectify what happened to you. I will never forget you, never stop loving you, no matter what happens. But I will make it right.

I know I’ve failed so many of my promises. I fell in love with Alice, the way I said I never would. But we’ve come to something different, something like an agreement, and I feel close to happiness. I’ve made peace with her choices, and I’ve found peace in my life.

But this I cannot forgive. Losing you will always remain the greatest tragedy of my life. And someone will answer for what they did.

Peter
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