

The rooftop garden of the Deutsch Bank was saved from self-parody by the dedicated application of the best horticulturalists and plants that money could buy. Unlike some other relics of 1970s architectural planning, *this* roof garden – greenhouse, really – was a lush, semi-tropical patch, quite out of place with the grimy concrete and streetlight-tinted clouds which could be perceived beyond its glass walls.

Yvette Collier wasn't in any position to enjoy her surroundings, angry as she was. The object of her ire – Paul Viersan - leaned against a cast iron pillar in ease, but Yvette knew him well enough by now to know that he wasn't quite so comfortable as he appeared. A slight narrowing of his eyes and an occasionally clipped word gave him away.

"I don't believe you!" she snapped, pacing back and forth in between two rows of potted trees. "How could you ask him that? How on earth could you think of doing that to me?" she demanded.

Paul looked at her, surprised at the question. "Because it's for the best. It would have made you safe."

"That's an odd idea of safety, Paul. We both know most neonates die young. And never mind the fact that it's not something that I want!"

Paul was baffled. "You don't want it? Why not?"

"The why of it doesn't really matter-" Paul tried to interrupt her, but Yvette spoke over him. "What matters is that you didn't talk to me about this, at all. You made the decision for me."

Yvette looked at Paul, hoping for some reaction – a sign of remorse, perhaps, and saw none. She sighed and moved away.

"What I asked for was a favor, a compliment," he replied mildly.

"So you made *amply* clear to your Sire." Yvette scowled. "But why couldn't you have talked to me *first*? It would have saved you some embarrassment, don't you think?"

Paul winced at that. "I see that now." *Why couldn't you understand that I asked for your own good?*

"Is that why we came to Berlin? *Really* why we came here? So that you could Embrace me?" She glared at Paul, defying him to say otherwise.

Paul reached out to a nearby plant, broke a leaf off the stem and examined it carefully. "It was one of the reasons, yes." He replied, still looking at the leaf in his hand.

"For God's sake, why?"

"Why the Embrace? Or why Berlin?"

"Both."

"Berlin because my sire is here, because his approval is the only approval I care about-" Paul ignored the flicker of resentment on Yvette's face. "And as my Sire is the Prince of this city, his blessing would serve a dual purpose."

"And my approval – or lack of it - was just incidental?"

Paul didn't reply for several moments. "I... thought you would agree to it." He admitted.

"And what did you base *that* assumption on?"

*Because I would have asked you to!* But he held his tongue. "Incorrect data, apparently." That was all his wounded pride would allow.

"Apparently." She muttered.

“You can’t consider this matter clearly,” *like I can, either*. “What happened in Denver, in Los Angeles proved your vulnerability.”

Yvette scowled at the reminder. She didn’t like having her fate taken out of her hands – just as Paul was trying to take it from her now.

“I survived. I’ve learned. It won’t happen again.”

“Yes, it will.” Paul insisted. “And sooner or later, luck won’t go your way and you’ll be dead and I don’t think I could bear that.”

Yvette gaped at Paul, whilst his gaze slid to the floor in a rare moment of embarrassment.

“Paul-”

He threw caution to the wind. “This isn’t just about your weakness,” *Ignore the frown, Paul, just keep going*. “It’s about mine. For you.” He picked at the stem in his hand, still unwilling to meet her eyes. “The Embrace would protect you, more so than just my blood alone, and I want to know that you’re safe.”

“Why?” a whisper-quiet question.

*Why does she have to ask? To make me admit this?* “Because I love you.” He muttered.

“What?”

“Because I love you.” Paul repeated, louder. *In for a penny, in for a pound*. He looked at Yvette, finally, saw suspicion and wondered at it. “I didn’t expect it but...” he shrugged, helpless. “It happened, anyway. Certainly something in which I didn’t have a choice.” *Or was even fully aware of until quite recently*.

Yvette scowled, skepticism struggled with hope and both were writ large on her face. “You love me? Prove it.”

“I thought I just tried to.”

“That was about you, about what you want for me.”

“Alright,” he had to concede that point. “Then what do you suggest.” *She must have something in mind*.

“Marry me.”

Paul couldn’t quite believe what he had just heard. “Excuse me?”

“Marry me. It’s something that people do when they’re in love. *If I ever decide that I want the Embrace, then I’ll gladly waive the until death do us part, clause*.”

Paul laughed quietly, unheeding of the distress it caused Yvette. “Marry you? My God. If it got out that a kindred – a Primogen of the city, no less – was engaged in some May-December romance with his ghoul. Do you have any idea the sport my detractors would make of that? The harm it would do to my clan *and* my Sire – and by extension the entire city he rules?”

Yvette bit her lip disappointment plain upon her face. “So your dignity is more important than whatever you feel for me?”

Paul’s only reply to that was a half-shrug of his shoulders.

“If you really love me, you’d marry me – or at least think about it.”

“And if you love me, you’d accept the Embrace,” Paul countered quickly. “I could have just forced it upon you. In fact, I could have had you believing that you wanted it.” He threatened.

“That’s not behavior I’d expect from a beloved,” she replied, just as quick.

“Which is why I didn’t do it that way.”

“No, you just put us both on the spot in front of the man whose high opinion you crave so badly. What if he *had* said yes? Was I supposed to smile gratefully and bare my throat then and there?”

“That’s the usual response.” Paul replied dryly.

“Then I’m not the usual sort of ghoul.”

“Indeed.” *Like I would consider the ‘usual sort’.*

“So, what now?”

“Given your disenchantment with my decision making...” Paul spread his hands. “What would you suggest?”

Yvette thought for a moment. “A ceasefire. You let the matter of the Embrace go until I’m ready to discuss it. In the meantime, I won’t mention marriage,” she offered with a hint of a smile that left Paul wondering if she truly wanted him as a husband. Or was the demand a ploy to gain leverage? Perhaps she had learned from him than he realized. Indeed, Yvette had left Rachel behind some time ago.

“All right,” Paul nodded. “A ceasefire. Consider the matter dropped until you bring it up again.”

Yvette’s bright smile of relief charmed Paul and made him realize that he didn’t need to rush things, not really. *Let her have this choice; it can’t run contra to my own desires, not in the long run. She knows now that I want to make her a vampire. She’ll reconcile herself to it, sooner or later...*