

Mark's lament

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Chapter Eight

*Give us a place to stand
And a place to grow
And call this land Ontario
A place to live.
For you and me
With hopes as high
As the tallest tree
Give us a land of lakes
and a land of snow
And we will build Ontario
A place to stand, a place to grow
Ontari-ari-ari-o !*

*From western hills,
To northern shores.
To niagara falls,
Where the waters roar.
Give us a land of peace,
Where the free winds blow.
And we will build Ontario
A place to stand, a place to grow
Ontari-ari-ari-o !*

- A Place to Stand, by Dolores Claman and Richard Morris

It was a balmy January evening. A young woman of about 28, and a young man of approximately the same age stepped into the dark alley. Without knocking, they opened the unmarked door to the back of the nightclub.

"Mistress, we never thought we would have the honour of hosting you here in Ottawa" one of the taller, and more bulkier men said.

"I'm not here to pleasure you with any honour that you may or may not have. I'm a *seer*, and I have a job to do. I've been doing it since Christ was born, as you will recall, idiot."

"Of... of course, Mistress Nyarai. How can I be of service?"

"Where are we in this city of yours?" She needed to know the geography before she could complete her task.

"The Byward Market, Mistress" was the simple reply. "It's downtown, near Parliament" he expanded for the benefit of the elder. It's not every day that the world's oldest vampire visits Ottawa.

She pauses for a few moments, looking at the map presented to her by one of the leader's lackeys. "What's your name?"

"Winter, ma'am. Lucien Winter." The large leader looked nervous.

"Is the rideau canal skateway far from where we are? Especially... this... Dow's Lake?"

"We can get there, it's on the other end near Prince of Wales Drive, Mistress. I can have one of my people take you there in a car." Mr. Winter replied, nervously.

She stood up. "I need somewhere to sleep when the sun comes out. Tomorrow night myself and my grandson Romeo will walk there ourselves. Thank you Mr. Winter for your fine explanation."

"Where are we going?" Mark asked impatiently. He was in Christian's BMW, and wanted to take off the blind fold, but Christian wouldn't tell him where they were going!

Christian just gave a big, goofy grin. "You'll see. It's somewhere you reference often enough!"

Finally Christian parked the car, and took Mark's hand. He grabbed something out of the back seat, and lead Mark over to a bench. "Okay, take your blindfold off."

Mark did as instructed, and looked around. "Christian, it's just Dow's Lake. What's so special about being here?"

Christian just sighed. "You've wanted to go skating all fall." He held up two pairs of skates.

"Now, you and I are going to go out on the canal, and we're going to enjoy some skating... together... as a couple..."

"As a couple of what?" Mark asked a little daftly. The blindfold must have cut off circulation.

"A romantic couple? As your boyfriend?" Christian tried to clarify. "Look, it's either this or ballroom dancing, and I have 500 years more experience in that."

Mark grinned. "Well then, skating it is." The two started putting on their skates. Mark had a hard time containing his excitement.

Holding hands, the two made their way onto the hard ice, and started to skate down towards Parliament. On in that general direction, anyway. Much further down the ice, though they couldn't see that far, Mark's friends Lisa, Stan, Drew and Scott were enjoying ice skating as well.

Christian enjoyed holding Mark's hand, and they even took off their gloves so that they would have skin contact. Christian even bought Mark a beavertail. A local pastry served during the winter months to skaters. The two of them sat at the table, as Mark took another bite.

"Christian Weller, as he lives and breathes... or rather in this case, I guess just as he... exists. It's been a long time, my son." A young woman of about 28 years old with green eyes said. She was wearing a fluffy winter coat, with a pair of normal black jeans.

Christian turned around to see who was speaking. He was in shock. "It's been... a long... 450 years... what are you doing here, Nyarai?"

"You don't see your mother for 450 years, and that's the best hello I get?" Nyarai asked, raising an eyebrow. Mark of course just plain confused, though the man with Nyarai he had to admit looked quite hot.

Christian sighed a little. "Will you two please join us?"

Romeo looked to Nyarai, who sat down accepting the invitation. "Of course, Christian." Her voice was soft, almost pillow. And the attraction that vampires have to draw in their prey, with her, could even affect fellow vampires. But Christian wasn't under its effects, and surprisingly, neither was Mark.

Nyarai turned her attention to Mark now, since Christian couldn't find his voice. "You are Mark, are you not?"

"Yes?" Mark replied, questioningly. He wondered who the strange woman was.

Nyarai gestured to Romeo. "This is my grandson, Romeo."

"I didn't know that vampires could reproduce." Mark said, a little surprised.

"We can't. His vampire parent was killed, just after he was turned. So I took him in and trained him." Nyarai explained. "His vampire parent was someone I had turned, hence the grandson honorific."

Mark just gulped. He was scared of this woman all of a sudden. Christian could see his fear, so could Romeo. Christian took Mark's hand in his again.

"Why are you here, Nyarai? You've never been to Canada before, not even Ottawa. Now you show up unannounced?" Christian was more than surprised.

"You're the one who wrote the vampire bible, aren't you?" Mark blurted out.

Nyarai studied Mark for a moment. "Have you read it?"

"No... I didn't know where I could get a copy. My normal bookstore, Chapters, was sold out." Mark tried some humour.

Nyarai of course got the humour and gave a small laugh. "That's funny and clever, Mark. Yes, I am that same woman." She looked to Christian, "Despite your objections, I'm not here for you."

"Then why are you here?" Christian asked, pointedly.

Nyarai took out a small box from her coat pocket, putting it in front of Mark. "I came to give that to you."

"Where are you from?" Mark asked out of curiosity, not yet opening the box.

"Currently I reside in Israel. Though I may move to the United Kingdom soon. More cloudy days there." She said candidly.

"That's a long trip..." Mark wondered how she could get here with the sun.

"Yes, especially on Royal Caribbean Cruiselines. Expensive, too. No bother, I had to bring that to you. It's too important to trust to anyone else." Nyarai replied.

"What is it?" Mark asked, finally opening the box. In it was a small white gold signet ring, with a simple design laid into it.

"A gift, from Christ" was the simple reply.

"No, really. What is it? It's beautiful, needs a bit of polishing, but it's a beautiful ring. I can't take this." Mark pushed the box back to the older vampire.

"It is meant for you, Mark. It's 2000 years old. It was paid for by Christ, while he was alive." Nyarai explained.

“But why?” Mark asked. “Why me?”

“You have a bad habit of asking the why me question, Mark.” Christian quickly pointed out.

“It is meant for you. For now that is all I can say. Christian, let the boy read a copy of your bible. Romeo has on his laptop, something called... instant messenger... from a company the humans call Microsoft?” Nyarai looked at Romeo with a questioned look.

“Yes grandmother. It's called *Windows Live Messenger*.” Romeo replied. “My ID is romeomustdie.”

“Add him to yours. You can get in touch with me that way. But keep the ID quiet. I'm a very popular woman, and I only give that to people whom I trust. Romeo will keep us both updated.” Nyarai explained.

Mark just put the ring on his right finger, and then squeezed Christian's hand tight.

Nyarai leaned over and whispered in Mark's ear. “Don't be afraid of change. Your life will be very different soon, but embrace it. If you fail to, it could not only endanger you, but everyone you love as well.” Nyarai stood from the table.

“It was good to see you, but we must be going.” Nyarai started walking down the canal, with Romeo in tow. In fact, they were moving quite fast, so both Mark and Christian neither had the opportunity to react, nor say goodbye.

Mark just scratched his head. “So if Romeo is her grandson, was she the one who bit you?”

Christian looked down a little. “Yes. I spent 50 years with her, before going off on my own. Rarely do we meet our... parents, again. But she had something to give you, and she tends to do the really important things herself. How Romeo ended up staying around to serve her, I'll never know. He's probably around 300 years old now.”

“Did she really mention Christ?”

“Yes, she knew him. She is the oldest vampire in the world, you know.”

“I didn't know that. But why the ring?”

Christian just shrugged. “I guess you and I will have to read the bible together.”

Mark just rolled his eyes, and finished his beavertail. “Not exactly an activity I wanted to be doing with my boyfriend. It feels like I'm committing some great sin.”

“We're not going to read the holy bible, silly!”

“I know, but couldn't they have named it something else? Like the Vampire's Letter, or perhaps *Mr. Holland's Opus*? ”

“Why would they name it after a movie?”

“I felt like a vampire watching it” Mark replied. “It was that boring.”

“Are you saying I'm boring?” Christian challenged.

Mark sighed a happy sigh. “With you, every day seems to be more and more entertaining. Besides, how many humans ever get to meet that lady?”

Christian thought about the answer for a few moments. “You're probably one of a small few.”

“I expected you to say the first.” Mark said, matter-of-factly.

“No, she always meets with each President of the United States. Something about diplomatic relations between the person and the Vampire Council.”

“Not the Prime Minister?”

“Why does she need to meet with him? This is the first time she has ever been to Canada.” Christian watched Mark.

“Because there are vampires here?” Mark clarified.

“Nah. She has other people who can do that if...” Christian's comment was cut off as something grabbed him by the throat.

“Let me...” the deep voice of the demon said menacingly.

By this time, Mark's friends Lisa, Drew and Scott had gotten closer after seeing the two strangers talking to Mark and Christian; and had been keeping a close eye on their friend. Lisa happened to be glancing their way when the demon appeared and grabbed Christian. She screamed...

Lisa's scream prompted the demon to drop Christian. He grabbed Mark, and shook him around, beating him severely. Ripping all of Mark's clothing off, the demon started to break bones, and cause deep bruises, which revealed internal injuries. Finally, from a great distance, the demon dropped Mark on the ice, all naked, and broken like a rag doll.