

"Strange," the man says. "I didn't think you would come."

"And why not?" the woman asks.

"Because..." the old man ponders, "I thought you were afraid of us, and our kind."

"Who's to say that I'm still not afraid?"

"Who?" He asks incredulously. "Why you, of course. Your presence here tells us that."

"Yet, what if I am still afraid, but merely able to face my fears?"

"Impossible."

"By whose standards and ideas?"

"Ours."

"Ours' meaning yours and mine?"

Shaking his head, "No, mine and my group's."

Defiantly, "Then perhaps you and your group should rethink your ideas."

Staring straight into her eyes, "Never. Our ideas and beliefs have been passed down from generation to generation for thousands of years. And never have these ideas failed us."

Staring back, "Then how do you explain my presence?"

"Obviously, you realize our greatness, and therefore wish to become one of us," he says, sure of himself and of his wisdom. The crack-line of a thin smile joins the countless wrinkles on his face.

"And what if I don't see your and your people's ways as great?"

A cynical laughter convulses through the old man. It comes from nowhere and is gone just as fast, only it echoes for awhile in the woman's head. "If you had not realized our greatness, you would not have come back. You see, your own curiosity has revealed your true feelings."

"You say that as if it's a fact, when it might not be true."

"Oh, but it is, my child. Half of our current fellowship began just as you are. Soon, you shall speak with them, and see the similarities yourself."

"Now, come. It is time for you to not only join us, but to become one of us." The old man turns, his dark robes fluttering. He whispers a word and a door slides out from the wall. Entering the darkness, he mutters, "Come along, do not be afraid."

She hears the robes rustling in his footsteps, and notices he doesn't wait for her. She follows into the blackness, gasping as she hears the door close behind her.

He knew she would follow. He hears her gasp, and knows that he can calm her fears; however, he opts not to. Instead, he leaves her in the darkness to think and doubt herself, waiting until she calls out to him for support. He doesn't have to wait long.

"Please..." She tries to hide her fear, but he knows it's there. He can hear it, he can feel it. "...speak to me, so I can find you."

He pauses for a moment longer. Slowly, and discreetly, he begins building within her a need to trust him, a need to find him, a need to be with him.

"I am here, my child." Already, he considers her one of his own. He extends his arm in her direction, so that the first thing she touches is his hand. The hand that will soon guide her in all that she does.

Searching, she reaches out. After a few seconds, she grasps a hand. She notices that it's cold, stiff. Memories of her grandfather's funeral flood her head, especially his hand that she held for one last time. The similarities between the two seem unreal, considering one was dead and one is alive.

"Where are we going?" The woman asks. In the darkness, she sees nothing and wonders how and if somehow he can see.

"To join the others," he whispers.

She wonders to herself if this was the right thing to do, but it doesn't matter now. For soon the decision will be made, and all doubt will fade.