

DeGray story- This takes place after book 3
Alice Winters

Bentley

“Are you good, DeGray?” Finn asks.

“Yeah, why?” I question as I look over at the young man. He was the first human ever to join the VRC, and somehow he’s made the biggest impact. Of course, Church has closed more cases than him and Karsyn has taken down bigger enemies than him, but he’s got this way about him that’s helped all of us expand our views on the equality between vampires and humans.

I can’t help but wonder if everything would’ve gone differently if I *hadn’t* met Finn. I think the detectives of the VRC had fallen into this rhythm of only relying on other vampires more than humans. But there’s a whole world out there that we miss in our little corner.

“Well... you have this far-off look on your face and that little wrinkled forehead thing going on that Marcus only gets when he’s been doing a lot of scowling.”

I smile at him. “Trust me, I’m not doing a lot of scowling. I’m not sure I know how to scowl.”

Finn grins at me. “Really?” He waves to the scene where Church, Karsyn, and Claude are all in a heated discussion. It all has to do with whether or not a vampire could pick up an elephant. Claude, using his “scientific abilities,” says no, the muscles would tear and then have to heal and on and on. Church claims that *he* could pick up anything, including but not limited to a cement truck, and Karsyn is telling Church that he can’t even pick up his own feet so how is he going to pick up an elephant. (That part was because Church tripped earlier in the day over a raised sidewalk as everyone watched in stupefied silence. Karsyn, Claude, *and* Finn refuse to let him forget that). “I stand by my idea that vampires regress as they get older. They argue over the strangest things sometimes.”

“Looks like they’re having fun, though,” I say as my smile widens.

“I suppose.”

“You don’t want in on this bet?” I ask, although how they’re planning to prove this ludicrous idea, I’ll never know.

“Nah, man. The issue is that I know Claude is right because Claude is rarely wrong. He’s too damn smart, but I’d have to side with Marcus with him being my sexy man and all. Usually at that point, I’d then side with Alexei, but since he and Claude started dating—or whatever they’re calling it—it’s hard to side with him because then he gets those schmoopy eyes at Claude.”

I raise an eyebrow while wondering if we’re talking about the same man. “You’ve seen Karsyn give... schmoopy eyes?”

We both stare at Karsyn who has his arms folded over his chest glaring at the two brothers. “Okay... maybe not... but it’s like a feeling.”

“Ah, yeah, I get that. I’m glad, though. I think Karsyn’s too hard on himself and Claude shows him he doesn’t have to be.”

“True. I’m glad he found someone to care about. I guess all it took was a vase of flowers in the trash,” Finn teases. “Speaking of someone to care about...”

Finn eyes me as I pretend I don’t notice and stare straight ahead at the others like they’re unbelievably interesting.

“DeGray...”

I turn to look at him. “What’s that?”

Finn’s not a fool and continues to scrutinize me. “Can we meet this mystery man?”

“Who?” I ask, playing so dumb. So, *so* dumb. Like how could I possibly not know who he’s talking about?

“Your... partner? Boyfriend? Lover? Buddy? I don’t really know the correct term. I just call Marcus my lovebug. Can we meet your lovebug?”

“Hold on... Marcus lets you call him lovebug?”

Finn grins. “He loves it. Watch. Lovebug!”

Marcus immediately turns to look. “Yes?”

Finn gives him the sweetest little smile. “I love you.”

And a smile instantly forms on Marcus’s usually cold face. “Hmm... I love you too. This is extremely suspicious,” Marcus decides.

Finn turns back to me. “So?”

“You really want to meet him that much?”

“I do! I was born curious and I have this issue where I’m extremely nosy,” he says. “Let us meet him sometime. Is he scary or something? Like

this big monster man, maybe? Five fangs instead of two, at least six eyes, four arms?”

I shrug. “Depends whether you make him angry.”

When they finally stop their debate, we all head outside to our vehicles. I get into my car after telling them bye and start driving. As I drive through town, I see the flower shop, reminding me of what Finn had said about how all it had taken Claude was a vase of flowers to woo Karsyn. I pull up in front of it and head inside. I used to stop in here every week and buy flowers, but I haven’t for a while now.

The florist smiles when I step inside. “I haven’t seen you in a long time, Bentley!” she says. “The usual?”

I look around and suddenly feel nostalgic, but I’m not sure it’s a good feeling. It makes me think of her and that’s always such a hard thing to think about. There are beautiful flowers everywhere and a vase on the counter that the florist had been working on when I entered.

“Umm... no.” I look around, unsure of what to do, before seeing a small selection of live plants in the corner. Unlike the cut flowers that, while beautiful, will wither and die, the live plants at least have a chance of living. “Maybe a live plant instead?”

“Of course!” she says as she comes over. “What about this one? This one blooms almost the whole year.”

She picks up a potted plant with dark leaves and red flowers. “Or if you’d like—”

“No, I like this one.”

She smiles as she carries it to the register. “Anything else?”

“No, that’s it. Thank you.”

“A gift?”

I nod. “Yes, but it doesn’t need a note. I’ll hand it to him in person.”

“Let me wrap it up, then,” she says as she grabs a paper that is, thankfully, a different color than she used to use on the flowers I bought weekly. Once I pay, I head on my way.

When I reach home, I grab the plant and head inside to where River is sitting on the couch. He works from home, but seems to be wrapped up for the day by the way he’s playing a video game, though he pauses it as I come in.

His green eyes light up the moment he sees me. “I did the wildest thing today.”

“What’s that?” I ask as he holds his hands out to me, like he’s too tired to get off the couch and wants me to... pick him up? I really don’t know.

“Booked us a white-water rafting trip down the mountain!”

I stare at him with a raised eyebrow as I walk up to him. “White... what?”

“White-water rafting! It’s like... canoeing but in a raft and the waves threaten to pummel you into the river. It has so many five stars. Let me read one: ‘My wife ‘fell’ off and was never found again—five stars, would definitely recommend.’ And ‘I pretended to drown so the hot tour guide would save me in his tiny Speedo—All the stars.’”

“Wow, nothing about the actual river or the rafting?” I ask with a grin.

He gives me that smirky grin he does that tells me he’s not being fully honest. “Not a whole lot. Why are you not picking me up and carrying me around the house after missing me so dearly?”

“My hands are full,” I say, even though that should be obvious. “I got you something.” I hand him the pot, and he looks delighted as he sets it on the couch and carefully opens it.

“Ooh,” he says, eyes wide as he pulls it free. “I love it! Thank you! I didn’t like... forget something, right? Like it’s not my birthday?”

I grin because I hope he’d know his birthday. “No, I just felt like getting you flowers.”

“I love it,” he says as he gets up and wanders around the room before heading into the dining room where he pushes the ugly centerpiece his mom gave him out of the way and sets it there. “It’s so much prettier than the vagina centerpiece.”

“It’s supposed to be... art. Not... female genitals.”

“Well, it looks like the artist had one thing in mind while making it,” he says.

I snort as I shake my head. He walks up and grabs me in his arms, squeezing me tightly to him.

“I really love it. Thank you! I not promising anything, but I will try my absolute hardest *not* to kill it. But if I do... please know I still love it.”

“I’m not concerned. What I am concerned about is the rafting. Are we really going camping and rafting?”

“Yes! If you want!”

“Alright... sure. I’m up for it,” I say as I reach up and run my fingers over the small patch of white hair among the mess of brown. It’s my favorite part to play with. “I can’t wait.”

“Me too. Do you want to sleep in a tent or... something nicer?”

“I’m old, unlike you, so let’s sleep in a cabin. Preferably one with electricity and a hot tub.”

River’s eyes get wide. “Ooh, keep talking dirty to me,” he teases as he pulls back from the hug to rush into the living room and grab his computer before returning. “Sit, sit.” He waves at the chair, so I sit down and he plops down on my lap, bony butt digging into my thighs. I can barely see around him, but that doesn’t matter. I wrap him up in my arms and kiss his neck where his skin is riddled with scars. So many scars. I wish I could wash them all away. Because of the attention to his neck, there’s slight tensing in his body, but he turns and smiles at me, like he has to assure me he didn’t mean to.

“Sorry,” I say.

“No, no, I like it when you kiss me. You know that,” he says as he pulls up a website. “So, I took a guess that you would prefer comfort, so I found a few small cabins. Is there one you like better?”

I lean around him as he presses his back into me so I can get a better look. I love how perfectly he fits against me. “Ooh, this looks nice,” I say as I click on the first one up.

“That one’s a bit pricey, what about this other one?”

“It’s fine,” I assure him. “We haven’t gotten to do much like this. Let me spoil you.”

He raises an eyebrow. “Like you don’t already?”

“Hmm... but maybe I enjoy it. Let’s get this one. Hot tub, pool, within walking distance of the trails. Let’s book it.”

River grins at me. “I’m excited.”

“So am I. Do you know the last time I did something like this?”

“Probably never because you’re always going on like ‘I’m too old’ and stuff.”

“One time. One time that I got my ass *handed* to me at work and you’ll never let me live it down.”

The smirk on his face tells me he really isn’t going to. “I’m gonna need a walker before long,” he says in his “grandpa” voice.

I grab him and toss him over my shoulder as he laughs.

“No! Stop using your super strength to make it hard for me to fight back! Evil! Evil!” he calls as I carry him into the living room and toss him onto the couch.

“What was that?”

He grins at me. “Evil.”

I grab for him and he jumps off the couch, but I snatch him up before he gets far and toss him back on the couch. “I swear I didn’t hear you right. Please, feel free to repeat what you were going to say?”

His grin is huge as he whispers, “Evil.”

“That’s it! I’m tossing ya out on your ass,” I say as I grab his ankle and head toward the door while dragging him.

“No! You love me too much! I promise I’ll be good,” he says as he hooks his arms around the coffee table and drags it across the living room with him.

When I let go of his leg, he swings his, kicking mine out from under me. Then he grabs my arm and pulls me down to the ground with him before climbing onto me and looking down. “I love you, Mr. Evil Vampire.”

I wrap my arms around him. “I love you too.”

“Want to read more white-water rafting reviews?”

“I would literally lie here and let you read the phone book to me and I know I’d love every minute of it.”

He shakes his head. “There’s something wrong with you, but that’s okay. I’ll remember to read the phone book to you later... do they even make phone books anymore?”

“I don’t know.”

He laughs as he squeezes me while he unlocks his phone. “Okay, there was another good review. ‘The tour guide in his teeny-weenie Speedo turned me gay—five stars.’”

“I don’t even know what to believe anymore.”

River laughs again. “Good.”

“And how freaking sexy is this tour guide?”

“Five star sexy, obviously,” he teases.

I squeeze him to me as he reads me actual reviews of the place and I listen as I hold him closely. I love seeing him smile and I love having him in my arms. And I vow... I vow more than anything, that I won't let him be hurt again. I won't let him feel the pain he was forced to live with. And I won't let him have to kill to survive again.

I kiss his forehead.

Because I promise to protect him, no matter what happens. It doesn't matter who I have to kill or if I lose my position at the VRC, I'll do anything to keep him from feeling that pain again.

Author's note:

I know this short story seems rather... short. But I just wanted to give you a touch of DeGray and River. These two have quite the story to tell, especially River. I never planned for the VRC series to go the way it has. It was primarily supposed to be Finn and Marcus (maybe three books total), then I fell in love with Karsyn and Claude and knew they needed a story. Then I had an idea for DeGray and this mystery man who I knew I needed to give a chance to tell his story. While I have literally just named him, I've known he's had a story to tell and I'm really hoping to tell it soon. This doesn't mean I won't get back to Finn/Marcus or give Karsyn/Claude their second story!

DeGray and River's story takes place after book one and before book two, but it'll be the fourth book in the series (because that's the way I figured it out! Ha ha!) But there will be more details on it before long!

Thank you guys so much for sticking with me this far. I hope you hang around for a while because I have so many more plans left for this series. I never imagined the people this series would reach and I'm excited to keep giving you more about these guys! Thank you for taking a chance on it!

