

HIGH STAKES^{AND} *Soulmates*

VAMPIRES KNOW HOW TO PARTY

Bonus Short

ALICE WINTERS

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*Contains spoilers for High Stakes and Soulmates. Read AFTER you are finished.

From Cyrus's POV

"Cyrus, I'm so excited you're here!" Ezio says.

I stare at him as I question if I really shouldn't be here.

Ezio looks a bit concerned as he reaches out to me. "Cyrus... Cyrus, why are you backing up?"

"I'm not," I say while I try to back up slower, like he might not notice if I reduce my speed.

"Arturo, my sweets," he says, and of course that makes me stop, and even makes me blush a little because there's obviously something wrong with the way my brain works. Clearly, everything about this is bad. I should just turn around, get in my car, and rush home.

"I just... don't understand..." I admit.

"We had a slumber party without you, and I feel so bad you got left out, so I want you to enjoy every second of it, you know?"

"Not really?"

"Let me explain. None of us ever got to experience slumber parties as children, so we're doing one now!" Ezio says, far too excited as he picks me up and carries me inside. He must have decided this was the only way to get my body through the door, and hell, it might be.

"This is going to be so much fun," Julian says as he sees what's happening. "Cyrus... you look like you're not interested in fun."

"Fun is different for everyone," I explain, as if I need to remind him that his level of "fun" might be vastly different than mine. "Your definition

of fun is squatting naked, balls out on top of The Game of Life while I question my life.”

“Was it Life? I thought it was something else,” Ezio says.

“It doesn’t matter what it was. What matters is that Julian was naked.”

Julian waves it off. “Oh shush. I did that once. You act like I do that every week.”

I try not to think about the dog show and Julian must also be trying not to think of the dog show because he hesitates before giving me a wave, like that fixes everything.

Yorick clears his throat, apparently wanting attention on him. “I was so thrilled you invited me, but why... *why* the fuck did you invite *him*?” Yorick asks, waving toward Atticus. “Like what ancient fucking vampire wants to have a slumber party?”

Atticus beams as he leans back in a chair, making it look much more like a throne than it should. “Just because I’m old, you think I would miss an opportunity to make your life miserable? Johnny, I need more blood!”

Johnny, Atticus’s butler, rushes onto the scene. “Yes, sir. And for you two?”

Ezio, seeing nothing weird about this, shrugs. “That would be lovely. Cyrus, do you want blood or something else?”

I hesitate because the idea of drinking blood in front of people still feels odd to me. “Just like... a Pepsi or something would work. Coke? Really anything.”

“Coming right up,” Johnny says, and off he goes.

“What should we play first?” Julian asks. “Board game? Watch a movie? What do you guys want to do? Ooh, we could just brush Gustov. That’s Casimir’s idea of a good Friday night.”

“Ha. Ha,” Casimir says as Julian grins.

"I've always wanted to play spin the bottle!" Yorick declares.

"Aren't you supposed to do that when you're single?" Julian asks.

Yorick glowers at him. "I *am* single. I'm well aware you're all happy as can be with your irritating men, but some of us are still young."

"You're like the third oldest in the room," Casimir says.

"Shhh. I'm young at heart," he says, and then he flips his hair back like it makes him look younger. "Here we go. Here we go."

He zips off for a bottle and then pats the ground like he really thinks we're all just dying to spin a bottle and kiss our friends.

"Cyrus, since you missed last time and you're our VIP, you can go first," Yorick says, which is definitely not what I was hoping for.

Casimir is off staring at a painting of his dog that Julian must have done and, for some reason, seems to think this makes him invisible.

"Casimir, get your ass down here. If I have to exchange some spit with my friends, you have to too," Julian says.

"Can we not just like do a peck on the cheek? Do we have to jump right to tonguing each other?" I ask.

"Fine, fine," he teases as he drags Casimir down.

I sigh when Yorick looks at me expectantly, far too excited about the idea, so there I go, spinning the bottle. I'm really hoping it lands on Ezio or even Julian, but if it ends up on Atticus or Casimir, I'm positive I'm packing my bags and going home.

The bottle spins around and around before coming to a stop. I look at who it's pointing to with delight and hold my arms open. "Come here!"

He leaps and bounds over the bottle and into my arms as I kiss his face all over. "I could just take you home with me," I say while I squeeze the poodle to me, my arms sinking into his perfectly groomed fluff.

"You can't kiss Gustov!" Yorick protests.

“Of course I can. The bottle landed on him! Yorick, please, go ahead.”

Yorick sighs and spins the bottle. I really have no idea who he’s hoping it lands on but I’ve decided I’ll hold on to Gustov so if it hands on me, they have to kiss him instead.

Is Yorick hoping for Atticus, who he obviously has some weird love/hate thing going on with so he can kiss him while pretending he doesn’t want to? Like... who else here would he even really want to kiss?

It comes to a stop and we all look up at the person it landed on.

“Here are your drinks, sir,” Johnny says as he hands out drinks.

Yorick’s eyes widen. “Ha... haha, I’ll spin again.”

“Johnny, Yorick’s bottle landed on you. Pucker up,” Atticus says, absolutely *beaming*.

Yorick waves them off. “He’s not playing, now is he?”

“Wait, we can decide we don’t want to play? I don’t want to play, then,” Casimir says as he starts backing away and trying to drag Julian with him. Julian is too invested and smacks him off.

“As you wish, sir,” Johnny says, dropping to one knee before Yorick.

Yorick’s looking a little concerned now, even though this was his game. “Ha... haha! So funny! I wasn’t... I mean. You know, let’s play a different game.”

“Don’t be silly, Yorick. You wanted to play this one. Now kiss him or you’re going to make Johnny feel bad,” Atticus says, loving every second of this.

“I would rather kiss him than you,” Yorick declares.

“Oh, I was going to let you kiss me in exchange, but after that declaration, it’s quite clear Johnny’s the one for you.”

Johnny grabs Yorick’s face while Yorick clamps his eyes shut and puckers his lips. Julian is literally cackling as Johnny kisses him loudly

right on the lips.

“Anything else, sir?” Johnny asks.

“He looks like he wants another,” Atticus says.

“I’m going to kick your ass,” Yorick decides.

Atticus waves a ring-laden hand at them. “Johnny, kick his ass for me.”

“As you wish,” Johnny says as he takes the loving embrace he had on Yorick’s face and uses it to throw Yorick to the ground. Yorick is up and has Johnny in a headlock just like that. Because of his personality, I always forget that he’s actually quite old and a good fighter.

“Sir, I have failed,” Johnny announces.

“I see that,” Atticus says.

Yorick lets him free. “Let’s play a different game, yeah? Ha. So fun. What else can we play?”

“No... I was just having fun. I really thought the idea sounded ridiculous at first, but it’s been delightful,” Julian says.

“I was too. My favorite part was seeing Yorick’s head hit the ground. Delightful,” Casimir comments.

“It was the kiss for me,” Julian says.

“So this is what you guys did last time?” I ask as I lean into Ezio. “Just kissed each other?”

Ezio grins. “I saved my lips just for you...” He kisses my cheek. “Oh, and Gustov.” And then he kisses the dog who tries to give him a lick in exchange.

“How delightfully sweet of you,” I say.

He smiles at me and scoops me up, like I need to be carried to the next activity.

“What if we play Dungeons and Dragons?” Yorick suggests. “Please? Please. I’ll be the dungeon master. I have everything. I have it all in my car.”

“Isn’t that like... a commitment?” Julian asks.

“I’ll let you be naked through all of it if that’s what you want,” Yorick says.

“*Is* that what I want?” Julian asks, weirdly skeptical.

“It’s what I want,” Casimir says.

“Alright, we’ll try it.”

“Okay. I know I’ve given you no time to prepare your characters or learn the rules, so I promise I won’t be super strict. We’ll just do it for fun, so think of what kind of character you want to play.”

“I want to play as Yorick,” Atticus says with a grin. “Quick question, Mr. DM. How many times can my character die?”

“You’re going to kill me off?” Yorick asks with a raised eyebrow.

“Ooh! I’ll be a necromancer so I can just keep bringing you back to life!” Julian states.

“How splendid,” Atticus says.

“Why are you encouraging him?” Yorick asks.

Atticus waves Johnny over. “Johnny must play as well. I need a butler in game too.”

“I’ve changed my mind. Monopoly. Who wants to play Monopoly?” Yorick asks.

“So let me get this straight,” I ask Ezio. “Slumber party just equals picking on Yorick?”

“Seems like it,” Ezio says. “I want to be something that Cyrus can ride.”

“Why?” I ask.

He grins. “Because I want you to ride me.”

“I’m going to be something so huge that I can’t ride on you,” I decide.

And even though Yorick declares he couldn’t possibly play with us, he rushes off to the car for his computer and loads each of us down with pages on how to play our characters. Evidently... we’re in it for the long haul.

And even though Atticus plays a character named Yorick who throws himself into danger at every opportunity, he somehow is the only one who ends up doing well. The rest of us just limp our way behind him while trying to stay alive after Casimir cast a fireball which nearly killed all of us and missed most of the enemy, except for “Yorick” who somehow rolled a natural twenty (which he really didn’t even need with that fire-resistant cloak he happened upon). But I can tell Yorick is having the time of his life and I can’t help but agree that it’s significantly more fun than I thought it’d be.

“Now when we sleep, we all sleep in Julian and Casimir’s bed,” Ezio says.

“I sleep in the nude,” Casimir says.

“We’re used to seeing Julian nude, so seeing you shouldn’t be too shocking,” Ezio retorts.

“We have two guest bedrooms that everyone could share instead,” Julian says.

“Yes, I get the second one,” Yorick declares. “All alone. To myself. Mine.”

“You’re going to sleep with me and Johnny? How interesting,” Atticus says. “Are you going to wait until I’m asleep to try to stab me again?”

Yorick glowers at him. "I might think about it! You just spent the last like... three hours trying to kill me off through a game!"

"I made you the most powerful character in the group," Atticus says.

"I know because you kept taking the most ridiculous risks that no one would ever choose and getting all of the good loot because of it! Who tells a strange man in a dark alley that he can stab you in exchange for a rock?"

"It was a mighty rock."

"You didn't know that at the time!" Yorick says.

"Have you lined the beds in plastic in case Yorick stabs me again like he did in the past?" Atticus asks. "I don't want to get his blood all over my wonderful hosts' home."

"I'm sleeping with Ezio and Cyrus, thank you," Yorick announces as he just waltzes right into our room.

"How romantic," Ezio says.

"He can be our practice for when we get a dog," I tell him as I shut the door with the three of us inside. "Sleep at our feet now. Curled up."

"It's like... whenever I'm around that man I get this... feeling in my chest. And even when he's gone, he's all I can think about," Yorick says. "I've never met an enemy who I want to stab so badly, but I can't."

My eyebrows knit at this declaration. "Are... are you sure that's what that feeling is?"

"What else would it be?"

"Man, I don't know," Ezio says with much sarcasm.

Yorick, obviously not getting that we're not agreeing with him, just strips his shirt and pants off and leaps into the bed in his underwear. I glance at Ezio, who stares at me.

"Woe is me," Yorick declares.

"He's so smart yet so dense," I say.

“Who?” Yorick asks.

“You!” I say.

“Dense? What the hell am I dense about? Come cuddle with me.”

“Put some clothes on,” Ezio orders as he throws Yorick’s bag at him.

“Fine! Fine. I will grudgingly clothe myself. I don’t want to cause a rift in your relationship by forcing you to look at my nude body,” Yorick says.

“That’s definitely why we wanted you to clothe yourself,” I say with even more sarcasm.

I finish in the bathroom and when I come out, I find Yorick and Ezio in bed like any part of this is normal.

“I get that it’s too light out for you to leave, Ezio. But our house is like... ten minutes from here. I’ll just come back when I wake up. You two bros snuggle it out,” I decide.

“Nonsense, Cyrus. We played rock paper scissors and decided that you’ll fit right in the middle,” Yorick says.

“What was the rock paper scissors for?” I ask.

“To decide who got spooned in the middle. Ezio wanted the middle but he lost,” Yorick explains.

“Oh... so... winning means I get the middle. How fun... I think... because I am such a gracious person, Ezio can have the middle,” I say as I shove him over and reluctantly crawl into bed.

“You guys are the best. I promise I’ll never stab any of you,” Yorick declares.

“That... that’s concerning.”

Yorick laughs. “Really... Going hundreds of years alone seems so endless sometimes. I’m really glad I found all of you.”

“Aw! I’m glad we found you too! Even if you started out as a bad guy,” Ezio says as he smacks Yorick’s face lightly.

Yorick presses a finger against Ezio’s lips. “Shhhh, let’s not remember that part.”

I roll into Ezio and tuck my head against his shoulder. “I’m really thankful I found all of you too. Being alone... it fucking sucks.”

Ezio hugs me to him, and then Yorick must feel left out because he hugs both of us as well, which is how Julian finds us when he comes in to see if Gustov is in here.

And I decide that I’m never going to another sleepover for as long as I live.