

Exclusive Bonus Scene:

Jesu's Revelation By J.D. Brown

I sat on the cool damp ground with my legs out in front of me and rested against the cavern wall, settling in for the day. Ema sat in the shadows across from me, hugging her knees to her chest. She tilted her head toward the cave opening, her whole face scrunched into one big angry squint. I half expected her to hiss at the sunlight. I bit back the urge to laugh and fished around my pants pocket for a smoke. Lighting up, I took a long drag and then sighed.

“How do you do that?” she asked, her brow still pinched in annoyance.

“Do what?”

“Keep your eyes open in the light. Doesn't it bother you?”

I held the cigarette between my fingers and then shook my head. “I am not using my eyes. I can see everything I need to see right now with my ears and my nose.” *Like the cute snark in her tone and the rose oil scent of her hair.* She was a fireball of a woman, prone to fits of emotion.

She pouted. “But your eyes are open.”

“That does not mean I am using them. You could do it too, you just need practice.”

That earned me a frown as she lowered her chin to her knees. “Tell me something about yourself, Jesu.”

I took another drag then flicked the tip to remove the lingering ash. “What would you like to know?”

“Anything. We spend so much time together yet I don’t know anything about you, except you’re Draugrian and you can manipulate the elements. What does that include anyway?”

“Exactly what it sounds like. The earth, the air, water, fire.”

“Can you make fire out of thin air?”

I chuckled at her innocent question, remembering how little she knew of our nature. “I cannot make anything out of thin air. I can only manipulate the elements already around me.”

She bit her lip and my senses soared. I loved when a woman did that and with Ema it was a habit. I’d give anything to put my fangs where hers were now. “To what degree can you manipulate them?”

“I can swim through the earth as though it were liquid. I can hold fire in my hands and create tornados with the flick of a finger. Of course, I am not as powerful as a vampyre.”

She tilted her chin. “Show me.”

I thought about it a moment. This was my chance to impress her. “All right.” I took my lighter and flicked it open, igniting the flame. She turned away from the light, opting to watch from the corner of her vision. I balanced the cigarette between my lips then used my free hand to grab the flame, closing my fist around the fire and plucking it from the lighter.

Her breath hitched as she faced me. I couldn’t help the close-lipped smile that curled the left side of my mouth as I pocketed the lighter and then turned my fist palm-up. I opened one finger at a time, revealing the tiny flame as it floated just above my palm.

“If I touch it,” she marveled, “will it burn me?”

“Of course it will.”

She chuckled to herself. “Yeah I guess that was a dumb question, but it doesn’t burn you. Are you nonflammable?”

“Fire can burn right through me if I do not keep it under control. Look close, under the flame. It never really touches my skin.”

She scooted closer and my body reacted, hardening under my jeans. *Get a hold of yourself.* Easier said than done. The curiosity in her eyes sparkled as wisps of dark silk hair feathered lightly across the milk-white arch of her cheek bones. My hands ached to push the strands back and then burry my fingers into her hair. But this wasn’t like other times. Ema wasn’t a moment of fun. She was so much more. More than I could begin to understand. I couldn’t mess up. I had do right by her. I *wanted* to do right by her. I had not felt this way about a woman in over a century.

“How does it work?” she whispered.

“Same way your powers work, I suppose, through concentration. It’s like telekinesis, only limited to the elements. It took me a long time to learn to master fire. In the beginning I burned off at least half my body hair.” I was babbling. I never babbled.

“Do something with it,” she challenged. “Manipulate it.”

Her eagerness made me chuckle. “What would you like to see me do?”

“Can you make a fireball and throw it?”

“That is easy.”

She cocked an eyebrow. “Let’s see it then.”

Grinning, I cupped the flame and then moved both hands in a circular motion, adding just the right amount of oxygen to make it grow to the size of a baseball. I threw the fireball into the back of the shallow cave. The stone walls and stalagmites illuminated briefly as the ball passed them by and then hit the back of the cave with a thunderous *crack!* Orange embers and black pebbles exploded around us.

Emma turned away, her shoulders curling forward. I may have overdone it. I lifted a hand to shade my gaze against the orange glow, trying to see her expression. She pulled her knees to her chest and hid her face between them. Did the light bother her that much? I guess I was more used to it than I realized. *Way to go, Casa Nova.*

“What other powers did the Draugrian have?” she asked, as though to fill the silence.

I took a puff while contemplating her question. I wasn’t going to spill the beans about Raven the cat, but...could I trust her not to panic if I told her about my premonition? She needed to know eventually. It was just too much too soon. I already told her a little bit, about Mother and my oath. It had upset her. I shook my head, deciding against it. “That is all.”

“That’s all?” Her head popped up in disbelief. “You can’t fly, you can’t phase, you can’t do anything else?”

I chuckled and shrugged. “I would say manipulating the elements is pretty good. Besides, not all clans have extra powers. Some have nothing more than sensitive senses.”

“Must suck for them.”

“They can be a bit envious, yes.” I wet my lips, mulling over an idea. Maybe, if I was careful how I articulated it, I could tell her a little more? “Actually, there is one other thing the Draugrian could do, maybe two.”

“I knew it,” she perked. “So let’s hear it.”

No going back now. “The Draugrian vampyres were psychic.”

“You mean they could predict the future?”

I nodded.

“Were they any good at it?”

I couldn’t help grinning as I recalled Mother’s talents. “Of course. Humans used to pay the Draugrian to tell them their future.”

She gave me a sidelong glance. “Weren’t they scared?”

I shook my head. “The Draugrian were a peaceful clan, the first and only clan to ever openly co-exist with humans. Some say they were too nice, unable to defend themselves and now they are extinct because of it.”

“Except for you, right?”

“Yes.” Could she see where this was going? I chose my next words carefully. “But even so, I am just a vampire, not a vampyre.”

She bit her lip and frowned. “I’m so sorry, Jesu. I can’t even fathom what it must be like to be the only vampire of your kind. But, can’t you just create more Draugrian vampires through bite?”

Okay, I wasn’t sure where that came from. She was so new and I wasn’t used to this—this being the role of teacher to a vampyre ignorant of her own kind. “Technically, I could. Unfortunately, we have laws against creating clans of vampires. It would not be the same, anyway. Vampire powers are weak compared to vampyres, and each generation is weaker.” I paused to consider something and then chuckled. “We could probably bite our way back to human in less than ten generations.”

She frowned, not getting the joke. “Does that mean you’re not psychic?”

Ah, there was the connection I hoped for. Now, how to keep her on the correct line of thought without revealing too much? I did not want to frighten her. “My psychic abilities are...different from what they should be.”

“Different how?”

“Well,” I shifted my weight and glanced to the side, fishing for the right words. “The Draugrian vampyres could see the future any time they wished. Anyone’s future. However, what they predicted was not set in stone. Free will changes the future constantly. What they really saw was the definite outcome of any decision. Change your mind about something, and the future changed as well. My psychic

abilities, on the other hand, work the complete opposite way. I get premonitions. I have no control over it. They come unannounced, like bad dreams.”

She shrugged. “At least they can be changed.”

“No.” I scrapped the cigarette butt against the ground and automatically lit a second one, trying in vain to organize my thoughts. “My premonitions *are* set in stone. Every single one has come true, no matter how hard anyone tries to avoid it.”

She waved at the plumes of smoke and scowled. “I wish you wouldn’t smoke. The smell is unbearable.”

Of course the smell would bother her, she’s on sensory overload. I should have been more considerate. I turned away to blow my last puff out of her line of wind and then put the cigarette out.

“Why do you smoke anyway? It’s not like a vampire needs anything to make him look like a badass.”

I chuckled at her implication. “Yes, I suppose I am enough of a badass without them. I started smoking because it is a sneaky way to keep fire handy. I guess over the years it became a habit.”

She laughed, letting down a fraction of her carefully guarded walls just long enough to light up the room. My own grin stretched wider.

“Well,” she said, “knowing what I know now, I guess that is a justifiable reason. But I rather you didn’t smoke around me. It’s not like we need to burn any more walls in this cave anyway.”

“All right,” I agreed. “No more smoking.”

“Thank you.” Smiling, she rested her head against her knees and closed her eyes. The lingering orange glow of the whole in the back wall had disbursed most of the shadows and shimmered across the top of her hair, haloing the outline of her fair skin. If ever there was a time in history when angels were real, they must have

looked like this; powerful and breathtaking. Alight with heavenly fire. After all, the fact that Ema existed, and was here with me now, was nothing short of a miracle. Vampires didn't believe in theology. Religion was a ludicrous idea when one lived as long as we did, but for Ema I was ready to believe in anything.

“What are we supposed to do for food out here?” she murmured, eyes still closed.

“Nothing.” I said, content to simply watch her. “I did not bring any blood with and the animals have an advantage right now.”

“Then you better keep talking to me.”

I furrowed my brow. Her bloodlust was baffling. “Is it really that hard for you?”

“Yes. Is it really that surprising?”

“It is. You seem rather susceptible to it. Even more than most new vampires.”

“Aren't all vampires susceptible to blood?”

“No more than humans are to food. Forgive me if this offends you, but you seem to take to it like a drug.”

“It does feel like a drug. It gives me a high. I feel so alive and full of energy.”

I was afraid of that. I sucked in a deep breath and then sighed. “I think you might be part Upioran. Blood has strange effects on them as well.”

“Is that bad?”

“No. It just means you will have to work harder to control your urges. Much harder.”

She groaned. “Let's not talk about me right now.”

I loved when she pouted. Most people look like babies when they pout, but on her it was adorable. “Okay, what would you like to talk about then?”

“You. Tell me something personal about yourself.”

“Like?”

“Anything, Jesu. You’ve been alive for over a thousand years, it can’t all be boring.”

She was back to moody. I understood. The shift from human to vampyre wasn’t an easy one. I kept my voice light, hoping to make her smile again. “Yes, but you asked for something personal.”

She was quiet for a moment then said, “Why is your skin blue?”

I glanced at my hands. “It isn’t.”

“Well, not literally, but you have pale-blue undertones, like you’re cold. Jalmari and everyone else are just pale.”

Huh, I never noticed. “I suppose it is also a Draugrian trait. My mother’s skin was the same color.”

“Tell me about your parents. What were they like? What’s it like being a kid born into a royal vampire clan?”

Boy, that was a loaded question. I didn’t want to give her the wrong impression, but, to condense my upbringing in a nutshell? I ran my fingers through my hair and decided to answer honestly. “It’s...pain.”

Her eyes popped open and she sat straight, looking right at me. “Did your mother bite you?”

“What?” Her question caught me off guard and I may have snapped.

She coiled away from my harsh tone and shrugged “You were born human and now you’re a vampire. You said your mother’s Draugrian, so I figured maybe she did it. I would understand, you know, to make things easier.”

I nodded, gazing to the side so she wouldn’t notice me chastening myself. “You are right, she did turn me.”

“When you were born?”

“No. She did it when I was fifteen years old. You cannot tell what the baby of a vampyre is until puberty. The human children are not allowed to live after that, a law my own father made up.”

“Why not?”

“He feared them. He worried they would one day turn on us and tell the other humans how to defeat us. So he ordered all human-vampyre children to be decapitated.” Jalmari and I never spoke about Dad. Never. The fact that he would come up in conversation again with the arrival of Ema made me worry. She was only curious. She had no idea how deep this went—and that wasn’t a good thing. She needed to know, all of it, for her own safety. I swallowed the nervous lump in my throat and then continued. “My mother, being psychic, knew what I was before I was born. She spent her pregnancy plotting ways to save me, checking the outcome of each idea until she found one that worked.

“Luckily, my father was usually away and was not there the day I was born. My mother told him I had died in birth, but in truth my uncle took me to an old Sami woman who agreed to raise me for a small fortune. She kept me for the first three years. I do not even remember her face. She died in her sleep one night.

“My mother and uncle kept a mental eye on me. When the woman died, my uncle took me back to the castle and raised me. They told my father he was raising me to be a slave. He did not like this. He wanted me either dead or turned so I would not be a threat. But my mother was not ready to see me become a vampire. She wanted to wait until I was old enough to make the decision for myself.

“My uncle managed to buy some time by bargaining with my father. He promised he would turn me when I got a little older. A small boy would not be a very good slave, after all.

“The older I got, the less my father could stand it. The fact that a human lived in his household sickened him. He planned to kill me himself. My mother saw this

and spoke to my uncle. They decided to give me a choice. On the night of my birthday, my mother and uncle came to my bedside. She confessed to me for the first time that I was her son.

“They told me they loved me very much, but I could not stay with them as a human. It was too dangerous for me. My choices were to run away and live as a human, or be turned and live with my family as one of them.” I looked at my hands, seeing the blue undertones for the first time. “Guess which one I chose?”

“Oh, Jesu, I’m so sorry.” She placed her hand over mine, warming the tops of my knuckles.

I smiled at her touch. “Don’t be. I was overjoyed to finally have a family. I had thought I was an orphan. My mother was always so kind to me, I had grown to love her long before I found out we were related. I asked her to do the honor of transforming me. It tied us together, you know. A vampire is always bound to his sire.”

She inched closer and my heart did a backflip. “Did your father ever come to accept you?”

I shook my head. “He was very angry with my mother when she told him, but it does not matter anymore. He passed away long ago.”

“What about Jalmari, did you two get along?”

“We had good times and bad.” I grinned, recalling old memories. “When I was human, Jalmari and I were best friends so long as our father wasn’t around. When he was, Jalmari treated me like scum, but only because our father would beat him if he was ever caught being nice to a human. As soon as our father left again, Mom would punish him for being mean to me. Poor kid was so confused. Of course, when we found out we were brothers, Jalmari apologized profusely. He and I were quite the inseparable pair throughout our teenage years.”

“Thank you for telling me these things, Jesu. I normally don’t converse much with people.”

I cocked an eyebrow. “Really? You are always so full of questions. I would have thought you had a lot of friends back home.”

She laughed, blessing me with the angelic sound. “God, no. I’ve been a loner all my life.”

I dared to scoot closer to her, craving more of her touch, her heat. I wanted to know everything about her life before coming to Finland. What were her hobbies? What music did she enjoy? What made that beautiful mind of hers tick? Instead of prying, simply I said, “How come?”

She bit her lip and glanced at our entwined hands. I held my breath, worried she would pull away. She didn’t. “I don’t know. Well, I guess in part because of my parents. No dad and a bipolar, manic-depressed mother. I guess I just got used to fending for myself.”

“Do you have any siblings?”

“Nope. I’m an only child.”

She continued to talk, telling me about her mother, how her father left when she was young, and how she’d attended school in the city to get away from her broken past. I tried my best to listen, but the details eluded me as my eyes became transfixed by her mouth and I thought about kissing her. *You’ll scare her away. She needs time to adjust.* I needed time to figure out what this all meant. The premonition, Ema being here, everything.

The conversation came to an end. “I’m sorry about your mother.”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said. “I’d just like to see her again, you know? I feel more like a ghost than a vampire, like I’m floating around in limbo. I’d like to see her and tell her I’m not dead and not to worry. She may be dysfunctional, but she worries about me constantly.”

The urge to hold her suddenly overwhelmed me, but Ema wasn't used to such an intrusion of personal space. I settled for gently squeezing her hand. "Ema, do you feel homesick here?"

She nodded. "It's hard not to. Northern Finland is a dramatic change from the city, and so is being a vampyre."

"You know you cannot go back to Chicago for several decades, right? It is too obvious that you are not one of them anymore."

She pulled away. "What do you mean?"

I rushed to explain, already angry at myself for breaking her heart. "Ema, they will take one look at you and know you are not human. We cannot risk—"

"Bullshit, no one knows vampires are real. Sure, they'll see that I'm a little different, but they'd never guess I'm not human. I'm still me."

"How would you explain your new diet to them? How would you go back to work, practically blind in the day? How could you guarantee that you would not hurt anyone you love when they all smell like food to you?"

Her palm cracked across my face. Son-of-a-bitch that hurt! I stood and turned away, not wanting her to see my pain as I rubbed my jaw. She didn't know her own strength.

"Oh God, Jesu, I'm sorry." She scrambled to her feet. "I didn't mean to hit you. I'm really, very sorry. Is it broken?"

I opened and closed my mouth a few times. "No."

"Oh, thank goodness. I'm sorry, but you can't say things like that to me. Besides, you promised you would help me get out of here."

I glanced over my shoulder at her. "Ema, you must have realized...didn't you?"

"No," she shook her head, frantic.

I could see the emotion welling in her eyes and knew that she was being sincere. She honestly thought she would go home. I felt like a schmuck.

“You promised you’d help me get home, you promised! Maybe not now...but I can learn. You said I could learn. I just need practice, right?”

I faced her fully and attempted an apology. “Ema, I do not know how long—”

“Shut up. You promised you would help me. You have to. I didn’t ask for this like you did.” She turned toward the cave entrance and took a step, blinking rapidly against the sunlight. I panicked. She wasn’t dressed for the sun. If she ran and got lost without cover her skin would burn.

I grabbed her shoulder and forced her to turn. Bewilderment flashed across her features as I gave in to the urge and pulled her close, wrapping my arms across her back. She tensed and for a moment I worried she would phase. Then her whole body went limp and she burrowed her face into my chest while sobbing. I held her tight and gently rocked. My heart broke for her, but nothing could be done about it. All I could do was be there for her, protect her. Not just because I had to, but because I wanted to.

Because I had fallen in love with her.