

## An Important Question

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Hello, Father.

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I am in need of guidance.

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Thank you. Well, you know most of what happened, you conducted all the services, but if you don't mind, I'd like to start from the beginning. Get my thoughts sorted out a little.

As you know, everything started some three and a half years ago. **Only three and a half years!** I can hardly believe it, it seems like a lifetime. I don't know why I chose this area for my hiking trip, I can't help but think that God had a hand in that. It was a beautiful afternoon in June, I was walking through the high pastures when the weather suddenly took a turn for the worse. Dark clouds moved in with almost unnatural speed, the wind picked up and soon it started to rain. I walked as quickly as I could, hoping to find some shelter. There were a few animal shelters around, but I kept those in mind as a last resort, I didn't really fancy standing in ankle-deep mud. The rain was already quite strong and the first thunder shook the skies when I saw a small hay shed.

I ran there and let myself in. When I turned around, I saw her. I almost wet myself, I don't know why I did not run screaming, maybe I was just frozen in fear. Maybe because her eyes showed almost as much fear as my own must have. It was Anastasia, of course. I could not believe that someone like her actually existed, I was almost sure that I was dreaming, but it seems I wasn't. Unless, of course I only dreamed the last three years.

Anyway, after a few very tense moments we started talking. Once I realized that she was not a monster and that she did not intend to hurt me and after I promised her that I would not tell the rest of the world about her, the tension lessened considerably. We talked. If anything, the weather turned even worse. The shed kept the rain off but it did not do a very good job of keeping the wind out. We were both uncomfortably cool and soon we sat huddled together in the hay. We kept on talking, she did not tell me a lot about herself, but that was fine with me. She didn't really refuse to tell me about herself, but she always turned the topic back to myself. And, well, her interest made me feel good. I really liked her, I enjoyed myself more than I had in years.

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Yeah, I've never been particularly successful with the femmes. I'm too just too shy to really engage them in conversation, especially if other, more assertive males are around.

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I don't have a problem talking to a femme, just getting things rolling. Since we were basically stuck there and had nothing better to do... I would not have pressed her if she'd shown me the cold shoulder. She was easy to talk to. In a surprisingly short time I almost forgot that she was not human.

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It was still raining by sunset. We shared our food, then we decided to stay the night right there. Well, I guess it was mostly her initiative, but I did not resist very much. I pretty much gave in and went with the flow after the first kiss. We made love, then we put our clothes back on and fell asleep. The wind howled all night, but I was warm, huddled close to her and covered by her tail.

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Well, I'm not proud of it, but I'm not sorry either. We both enjoyed it and I like to think that there was a certain spark between us right from the beginning. Ana certainly had a good reason for acting the way she did, but I didn't find out about it until later.

A stray sunray woke me up not very long after sunrise. I almost ran in terror when I saw her, the momentary panic before I remembered the events of the previous day was enough to wake her as well. We spent another hour or so in the hay, then we put our clothes back on and left. When she invited me to her place, I was only too happy to follow her. The clouds were gone, the sun warmed us as we walked hand in paw. She did not tell me that she lived with her parents

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until we were almost in sight of their home. Her promise not to tell them exactly what we had done that night and her reassurance that they would be happy to meet me was barely enough to keep me from panicking. I didn't notice the slight emphasis she put on the word 'tell'. I did remember it the next week, though.

After spending a night with Ana, the fact that her father was a squirrel like her seemed somehow hardly unusual. What did surprise me was that her mother was a regular human. I know now that they realized just how intimate we had been within a minute or so, but they did not give any sign that they knew. Ana introduced me and told them a sanitized version of the events that had transpired the previous night. While they had not been particularly concerned about her safety, they were still very happy to see that she had made it through the bad storm without any ill effects. They thanked me profusely. To be honest, I was rather embarrassed by it.

They invited me to a late breakfast and then they invited me to stay until the next day. Ana's mother promised to drive me to the town where I had left my car. After losing all the time, I would not have been able to make it in the time I had planned anyway, so I agreed. I spent most of the day with Ana, she showed me the farm and told me more about the area. I was surprised to learn that more than 500 furs of various species lived in the area, together with a similar number of humans. The more I learned about Ana, the more I liked her. Her parents treated me almost like family. At dinner I met her sister Tanya. We talked until late in the evening. Her parents had set up a place in the living room where I could sleep. It was just a mattress, but I didn't care. Not that they did a lot of 'living' there, most of the time we stayed in the kitchen.

I went to bed, but I could not fall asleep. The wind had picked up again and the way their house creaked unnerved me a little, it sounded as if someone was sneaking around. When the door opened, I nearly wet myself. It was too dark to make out any details, I could barely see that the person who entered was not a regular human. I was paralyzed with fear and I nearly wet myself, for a moment I really thought that he or she intended to kill and eat me.

It was Anastasia. She knelt next to me. Her voice was husky "Hi! Is your bed warm and comfy enough?"

"I... What about your parents."

"They don't have to know that I'm here..."

"I... we really shouldn't..."

She leaned close and licked my nose "Well, if I go back to my room now, they'll probably hear me and wonder where I've been..."

"Ummm..."

"Well?"

"Ok, come in." I lifted the covers and she slid in next to me. She wasn't wearing anything but her fur. I didn't fall asleep until much later.

I woke briefly when she slipped out well before sunup and sneaked back to her room. The bed felt uncomfortably empty and cold after that.

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Yes, things were moving much faster between us than I would have thought possible, but it felt good. It felt right. To be honest, I've always been a little shy around females, I've been a little reluctant to... push things, afraid I would be rejected. So I didn't mind that Ana took the initiative. That the whole world seemed to be painted in pastel tones whenever she was around didn't hurt either.

Anyway, her parents gave no indication that they had noticed anything about our nightly activities. After a leisurely breakfast, I packed my things and got ready to leave. Ana invited me to come again the next weekend. I was a little anxious about this, pretty sure her parents would figure out that things were happening between us, but they assured me that it was fine with them. So I accepted and we said goodbye. Then I got into the car with her mother.

We were already on the road when Ana suddenly ran up to the car and knocked on the window. I lowered it, thinking that I had forgotten something and that she had found it. I wasn't really ready when she leaned in, grabbed my head and kissed me passionately. I almost passed out from lack of air before she released me.

She gave that chattering laugh of hers and called "See you!" She disappeared in the house before I could think of anything to say.

Her mother put the car in gear. We drove in silence for several minutes before she commented "Ana likes you, Tom."

"So it seems." It seemed like a bit of serious understatement "What gave her away?"

Her mother laughed at that.

"Are you..." I didn't quite know how to ask it.

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"Concerned? Angry?"

"Something like that..."

"No. Anastasia is old enough to decide who her friends are. And I don't think you are the type of male who'll do something stupid and hurt her or break her heart or something..." Her tone made me wonder if she knew more than I thought she did, but I didn't ask.

"I... I hope so."

We did not talk much else, she only spoke up to mention certain landmarks that I should look for to find the way back to their house. Then we said goodbye and I started the three-hour drive back home. I couldn't think about anything but Ana.

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Well, not really. I mean, in an abstract way I knew that we might end up married, that I should ask her if she got pregnant, but somehow my mind refused to think about this. I liked Ana a lot, I'm not sure if I was in love, but I was definitely in lust. I was a little anxious about her parents, but I never really considered not going back the next weekend. The apartment where I had been living for years suddenly did not feel like home any more. I had to see her again. On Friday I left work shortly after lunch. Traffic was bad and by the time I got to their farm it was dinnertime.

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A little bit, but not seriously. Sure, it would have been nice to have my 15 minutes of fame, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized that I didn't want to. For one, her father had hinted that they had good friends in important positions. I figured that if they had managed to hide for so long... I couldn't have been the first person to have found out about them, they would know how to deal with someone who tried to blab on them. I figured they'd have friends in the CIA or something who'd disappear me or have me committed to a nuthouse or something. And I realized that I would only hurt Ana and her family if I tried to go public.

It felt good to be back. Ana nearly suffocated me with kisses when I returned. But the mood during dinner was strained. Ana alternated between anxiety, even fear, and overjoyed affection. Her parents were hospitable enough, but the tension in the room was unmistakable. I was getting convinced that she had confessed and half expected her father to get the key to the gun rack. When her mother served dessert, the tension became too much for me and I accused Ana "You *told* them, didn't you?"

She looked at me with huge pleading eyes "I... I didn't tell them about that." Then she dropped the hammer "But I told them that I'm pregnant."

"You... I..."

"Yes."

I stared at her, my mouth working uselessly, my brain frozen. Suddenly it was too much for me, I had to get out. I nearly toppled the table in my haste. Ana's wailing "**No!**" was the last thing I heard before the door closed between us. I ran out of the house, but I did not go very far. After a minute or two I returned to the porch, leaned on the railing and tried to get my brain back into gear.

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I was pretty upset. Not really angry, more surprised than anything. I had a little time to calm down and think about what I had to do. Thinking about her parents did not calm me, I was actually a little surprised that her father didn't carry a gun when he joined me a few minutes later.

"Well, Thomas?"

"I... I don't know..."

"What to do?"

"Yes. Well, no. It's... just so sudden."

*He must have caught my anxious looks because he suddenly grinned at me "Wondering why a redneck like me hasn't gone for the shotgun yet? Now that you've 'dishonored' my daughter?"*

*"Something along those lines has crossed my thoughts..."*

*He laughed "Well, if it makes you more comfortable, I can fetch one..."*

*"No. You don't have to do that..."*

*"Wondering why I don't plan to?"*

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"Yes... Ummm, sir... how long did you know... about us?"

"Since about five seconds after I first saw the two of you together."

"**What?**" I suddenly remembered Anastasia's promise and I realized that she had known that her parents would know everything.

"Yes. Well, since you have obviously never met one of us animal people before, let me tell you about the birds and bees. As they apply to us. Do you have any idea what Ana was doing up in the pastures when you met her?"

"Not really. She told me she was looking after the animals."

"She did that as well, but that was not the main reason. You see, our females don't have a monthly cycle like humans but they go into heat once or twice a year. Ana goes into heat once a year for about two weeks. She was up there to hide from males, basically. Things can easily get out of paw if males are around, especially ones of her own species. We don't want that. I don't really fancy becoming father and grandfather at the same time, if you get my drift."

"Uh... yes."

"She had gone up there only two days earlier, so I knew that her heat could not possibly have run its course. The only way she would have come down was if she had found someone to mate with. And when I saw her holding hands with you..."

"It didn't take Sherlock Holmes to add up the facts."

"Exactly. And, well... Unless you were shooting blanks..."

"She'd be preggers as well."

"Just so. I was pretty certain and by evening I was sure."

"How so?"

"You probably can't smell it, but I can. Normally her heat lasts about two weeks. But if she conceives... her body knows right quick and her heat ends rather soon. At the midday meal I noticed the first signs, that her scent was returning to normal, and by evening her heat was almost over."

"Ok. I see. Ummm... now that her heat is over, will she want..." I didn't know how to go on.

"Still want to share your bed? I guess so, we are enough like humans to enjoy the physical side of marriage all year round. Maybe even more than humans do. As far as I can tell, most of us enjoy physical contact a lot more than humans do, even if it is just holding paws or catching each other's scent."

"Ok. Thank you, sir."

"As to why I wasn't angry or worried about you two... Well, for us animal people it is something that is just between her and you. For many of us it is 'love on first sight' or very nearly so. Ana may not have realized it, but I wouldn't be surprised if she was set to stay with you an hour after you two met."

"Oh."

"It is our way for the parents to stay out of it, at least unless our kits ask for help. This is for the two of you to sort out. I understand that this came very suddenly for you and I won't be very concerned if you need time to sort this out. I won't be angry if you can't make such an important decision right away... or this weekend. But remember that Anastasia is my daughter... I won't force you to do anything, but if you make her really unhappy, then it may be unhealthy for you to show your face anywhere in this area."

\*Gulp\* "Ummm... I think I understand, Sir." Then I remembered Ana's panicked scream "How is she?"

"Ana? She was frantic when you ran out, she was almost convinced she would never see you again. Olga was still trying to get her to stop crying when I left."

"Ow. I'm sorry."

"To be honest, it was a trying week for all of us. I don't quite know why she didn't tell you about her pregnancy last week, she probably thought you would run out right away. She was a bundle of nerves all week, alternately bemoaning the fact that she had not told you, afraid of your reaction when she finally did and crying because she was sure that you would not come. Yeah, and gushing out how much she loved you." He gave me a lopsided grin "It takes quite something for a squirrel to admit that, but she drove us all nuts."

I could not help laughing at that.

"She was really happy when you showed up, but when you ran out after she told you about her condition..."

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"Yeah."

*We stood silently for several minutes before he asked "Well?"*

*"Hmmm... does it work out for you people?"*

*"What exactly?"*

*"This 'love on first sight' thing?"*

*"You mean getting married after knowing one another for only a short time? With the femme very likely to be pregnant already?"*

*"Yes."*

*"Well, usually yes. Most marriages are between people who have known each other since they were kits, foreigners do occasionally find their way here, but not too many. On the whole things work out quite well. As far as I know, there have been a total of three divorces in our community."*

*"That few?"*

*"Yes. I don't know very well how things are on the outside, but from what I have seen on TV, we would be considered to be 'very old fashioned' out there. Breaking up is not done lightly here. We don't really shun people who do, but..."*

*"There is some pressure to stay together?"*

*"Something like that. Plus, I guess, life here is not as stressful. No one lacks friends here, and you can always find someone who will do his best to help a couple try to work things out. Or someone to look after the kits if they need some private time to hash things out."*

*"Ok. I think I see... Do you have many mixed marriages? I mean a human and an animal... person?"*

*"Yes. Mixed couples are the norm here, there are also some human couples, but couples between two animal persons are strongly discouraged and quite rare."*

*"Why?"*

*"Well, the way I was told, in biology class, our 'animal side' is dominant. Ana's kits will have a 50/50 chance of being human or squirrels."*

*"Ok."*

*"A kit who inherits animal traits from both parents is much more animal than human. He'll be quite stupid, behave much more like an animal than a human and he will usually not live long past 20 or so."*

*"Ok, I can see why you don't want that."*

*"Yes. One other thing you should know: Ana will most likely have more than one kit. With this pregnancy, I mean."*

*"You mean... a whole litter?"*

*"Not that many, but twins or triplets are much more common for our femmes than single births."*

*"Oh. I see" I was silent for a minute, then I sighed "I know what I should do..." I shrugged my shoulders and shook my head "Ok. Ummm, sir, could you give me five minutes alone and then ask Ana to meet me out here?"*

*"Sure, Tom. But call me Mark."*

*"Thanks... Mark." With that I turned back to look out over the countryside spread out below the house.*

*He gave my shoulder a short squeeze "I know you'll do the right thing... son." With that he went back into the house.*

*Some time later the door opened. When I patted the railing next to me, she came over to stand beside me. She looked up at me, smiling shyly and hesitantly, her eyes were full of concern "Tom?"*

*I motioned at the panorama and asked "What do you see, Ana?"*

*"Ummm..." She was confused "I don't know what you mean... Meadows, fields, woods, a few of our neighbor's houses, the tip of the church tower. Nothing special. I mean... what's special about here? It's just my home."*

*I turned to her and smiled "Yes, that's what I see as well. Home." With that I went down on one knee and took her paw "Anastasia Greyfur, will you marry me?"*

*She stared at me for at least five seconds in shock. My ears almost shut down when she screamed, her "Yes!!!" must have been audible back in the big city. A lot of kissing and hugging followed before we headed back into the house to officially announce our decision to her parents.*

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After that things happened quickly. Ana insisted that I live in her room from then on. We carried my things there, she cleared some space on the floor and I put my mattress next to hers. I never got to eat dessert that day. She started what would become something of a tradition. Except for a few times, we always used only one of our mattresses. She said "Husband-to-be, would you join me in my bed?" I did, of course. It wasn't that late when we lay down, but it was plenty late when we finally curled up together and fell asleep.

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I guess so. I'm pretty sure God wouldn't have made them behave like that if he really objected. As long as there is love between them and they intended to rectify that in the not-too-distant future. Anyway, the next evening I invited her to my side of our bed. I think I said something like "Future mother of my children, will you spend the night with me?" It was definitely the right thing to say. This became a tradition, one of us would always invite the other into bed.

I was really sorry to leave Ana and her family on Sunday, but I had to go back to work. You know what happened next, it was a bit of a hassle to arrange everything so quickly, but four weeks later you married us.

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I'm happy that I did. My only regret is that Ana didn't let us help her and that I won't see her again. Not in this life, at least.

Well, we agreed that I wouldn't give up my job yet, but continue and save up some money before I found a job closer to home. I had looked around and I had even found several possible jobs in one of the towns around, but I would have to take a huge cut in my salary. I gave up my apartment and rented a cheap studio. Without Ana it did not feel like home anyway, it was just a place to sleep. One good thing about that job was that I didn't have a lot of contact with customers, so I could talk my boss into working only four days per week. Even so I managed to put in a lot of overtime. I managed to save up a lot of money and could spend three days with Ana.

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Strangely enough, I didn't really mind that we didn't have our own house but lived together with her parents. They left us alone whenever we wanted to be alone and never got on my nerves.

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Well, the only thing I did not like about their home was the Internet connection. Dial-up sucks! Well, I didn't spend a lot of time on the computer, but...

Anyway, life was pretty good. I really fell in love with Ana. About seven months after our wedding Bethany and Katarina were born. Things became a little more hectic after that, but since both her sister Tanya and her mother helped us with the kits we always had someone to babysit when we wanted to spend some private time together.

Well, a year later Ana's heat lasted barely two days. It didn't really surprise me, considering how little resistance I put up to her advances. A month or so later we found out about Tanya. She was two years younger than Ana and should have had her first heat by then, but she didn't. After examining her, the doctor confirmed that there was something wrong with... her equipment, that she would never have kits of her own. She was crushed and we all felt terrible for her. But life goes on and she learned to cope by helping us with our kits. A few months later Luke, Rafe and Sheila came along.

Things became a lot more hectic after that. I don't know how we would have managed to cope without Tanya, especially once Beth learned to climb. Tanya became a second mother to our kits, she cried the first time Beth called her mum. Ana was mom, Tanya was mum.

The next year, when the time for Ana's heat came around, I stocked up on condoms. We made it through all of four days. Then Ana woke me up early in the morning... By the time my brain had woken sufficiently for a halfway coherent thought about anything except sex and Ana, about something like putting on a condom, it was too late. When we went to bed that evening, she told me that I wouldn't have to bother with them any more.

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No. I... well, I have always dreamed about having a house full of kids, but things were moving a little too fast. One kid every two years or so, ok, but two or three every year? We'd have had to move to a shed if we had gone on like that. Ana could not take the pill, of course. It probably would not have worked in any case and no one wanted to try it out on her. I even offered to have myself fixed, but Ana would not have anything to do with that. She threatened to *'make sure'* if I dared to do that to myself... and the way she looked at her claws as she said that...

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No, I didn't bring the topic up again. I love Ana more than anything, but by then I had figured out that if she felt strongly about something I had no chance of making her change her mind. Not quickly at least. And, well, she is a squirrel. She's cute when she is angry, but I don't want to be around when she is *really* angry.

Ana was in her third month when we got the next piece of bad news. One day she felt a pain in her chest. I took her to the doctor. Later she admitted that she had felt the pain before, only not as strong. She would not have said anything if I had not noticed it. It took a lot of convincing to get her to visit the doctor even so. Anyway, she spent the next two days at the hospital where they poked and prodded, x-rayed her and ran just about every other test they could think of.

To say that I was devastated when I heard the diagnosis would be an understatement. Her heart had a serious defect. The doctor estimated that she would only have a few years to live, and that it could fail at any time. They had some pills that would help her, but the only real solution was to get a transplant. Not that this would not be dangerous, no one had ever tried to do a heart transplant on one of the animal people.

I was even more devastated when Ana flat out refused to even consider this. She would take her medicine, she even agreed to have a minor corrective operation done, but she would not live with someone else's heart. We had several rather intense quarrels over it, I did my best to change her mind, but after a while I had to give up. I felt horrible, but there was nothing I could do. If nuts were as hard as Ana's skull, squirrels would have long since died out.

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I love her so much, I felt a stab in my heart every time I looked at her. I was angry with her, we had some bad quarrels over it, but in a way it made me love her even more. Well, anyway, life went on. Several months later Patrick, Alex and Maggie were born. Things got even more hectic after that. I have no idea how we could have done it on our own. Without Tanya, especially. She really became a second mother to our kits, she spent almost all her time caring for them. I was sorry for her that she could not have her own, and glad that she compensated by helping us.

Ana didn't say anything directly, but she hinted every now and then that I should go on with my life and find someone else if she died. We both knew that it was '*when*', not '*if*'. And she reminded me that the kits would still need a mother. Most of the time when she did, she used the word '*mum*', the one the kits used for Tanya. Several times her pain got so bad that I took her to the doctor. He gave her an injection that helped for a while, but he could do nothing else. He did warn her against another pregnancy, that the extra stress would wear her heart out even faster.

A few weeks after we found out about Ana's heart problems, I gave up my job in the city and found one in the next town. It was only part-time and paid a lot less, but it gave me a lot more time to spend with Ana and the kits. I earned enough, we don't need a whole lot of money, living the way we do.

I don't know what went on in her head, but when her next heat came around, she begged me not to use any contraceptives. I tried to talk her out of it, but I just can't resist her. Not in something like this, not when she really turns on her charm. The results were rather predictable and a few days later I had a discussion with her father about enlarging the house.

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Her father assured me that there is no rabbit blood in their line, at least not in the last few generations. Anyway, about two weeks later something happened that might have changed her mind. Maybe I could have convinced Ana to try the operation if we had had more time.

Apparently I talk in my sleep. And my favorite dream and topic of '*discussion*' seems to be... well, our private times together. I almost never remember the dreams. She woke me up more than once so she could participate in what had been only my dream. Or, if she didn't wake me in the middle of the night, we would rectify that in the morning. A rather interesting discovery about myself, and one I was rather pleased to make.

That one night Anastasia woke me to make love to me. Something was different from the other times, but it took me some time in the morning to figure it out. Ana was more rough than usual, but not that much more than usually. There was a hint of desperation in her lovemaking and the fur on her muzzle had been wet with tears. I felt different than usually, I felt bad, afraid of some unknown terror, but I soon forgot about it. When I asked her about it later, she told me what had happened:

My talking and the noises of our imaginary lovemaking had woken her. She had listened to me. Usually she woke me only after my dream was over, she loved to listen to this, she said it made her feel really special, that I would make love to her even in my dreams.

That day, in my dream, she died during our lovemaking. I started begging her not to go away, not to die, started crying. The worst thing for her was that she could not move for a long time, that she could not wake me. She was paralyzed by fear or something. She had to listen to me. It was probably only a few minutes, but to her it felt like forever.

I could tell that this had shaken her badly. I think she suddenly realized what her death would really mean for me, for all of us. I could tell from the haunted look in her eyes that this had hurt her worse than anything.

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Not really. I was sure she had begun to consider it, but I did not think it was the time to pressure her about it. It would take a bit more time before I could try to talk her into undergoing the operation. I did hint at it by saying something like "I love you, Ana and I want to spend the rest of my life with you."

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If we'd had more time I might have changed her mind, but we never got the chance. About a week later the same thing happened again, the dream and our desperate lovemaking afterwards, that is.

Three days later Ana died. It was the most horrible thing I have ever experienced. I guess it went as well as anyone could hope for, but...

In the evening we made love and fell asleep. When I woke, Ana was dead. She was still smiling and her body was still warm. The doctor said that she had died about an hour before I woke up and that as far as anyone can tell, she had not felt a thing, her heart had stopped while she was asleep. My screams woke up the whole house, of course and we had the hardest time to calm the kits down again.

I was a total wreck for days.

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Well, sometimes, but never really seriously. I did want to join Ana, I still do, but... I can't. I know she would not want me to, she would be really angry with me if I threw my life away, if I left the kits to fend for themselves. I just can't leave them alone. I don't want to... go any more, as much as I lost, I still have a lot to live for. Tanya is a godsend, of course. I don't think I could have made it without her. And her parents, of course. It was bad enough for the kits to lose one mother, it would have been horrible to lose their only mother. And she helped me a lot, not just with the kits, but she is always there when I need a shoulder to cry on or someone to talk to.

Should I marry her?

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Well, kind of. I love her, but... as a sister. We are really close, but... I'm missing the real spark that was there between Ana and me.

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Ummm... actually, yes. Well, kind of...

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Well, it was on the day of the funeral. I don't really remember much, I felt like a zombie. Tanya helped me to bed and somehow we ended up in it together. I don't really know why, I think we both needed something to think about, anything but Ana, or maybe something to make us stop thinking for a while. You know how much alike they look?

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Well, a small part of my mind knew that it was Tanya who was in the bed with me, but the rest of me made love to Ana. We didn't do it again. I don't know... it felt good... I'm ashamed that I did...

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That night is just about the only thing we have not talked about.

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No. I'm quite sure that Tanya wants to, she has not said anything outright yet, but she made several comments that can't really be taken any other way. I... can't really ask her before I know my own mind.

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That should be obvious. I mean... I'm pretty sure that she will say yes. I can't ask her directly and then tell her I don't want to.

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I don't think I'd find anyone else. What woman would want a male with eight kids and most of them not even human. Or not entirely human, at least. And... I can't take them away from Tanya... it would break her heart if I did. She wanted kits as much as Ana did and this is her only chance. Or at least as close as she can get. She's their mother as much as anyone who isn't their biological mother can ever be. She has cared for them from their birth.

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## An Important Question

I don't think we want to change anything with... our current arrangement. I... just don't know if I can make that kind of commitment to her...

Anybody got an answer?