

Never Have I Ever...

It was the 23rd of October and it had been five years since the last time Anna had seen any of her friends. After over three hundred years, these five-year reunions became the reason that Anna would bother being in society.

Anna rushed up the steps of the apartment complex, an older brick building with big metal fixtures. This was about as typical a place as Richard would bother renting: traditional, practical, and bland. He may even have designed it when he was an architect thirty years ago. Anna rang the bell a few times and waited, holding a paper sack in her arm.

After a few minutes in the brisk autumn night, the door opened and Richard smiled broadly. "Anastasia!"

"Rich..." Anna shook her head and hugged him. "I haven't gone by Anastasia since I left Russia. Just call me Anna now."

"That's something I hate about this century," Rich shook his head and took the bag from Anna. "Anastasia becomes Anna. Joseph becomes Joe. No one names their children Ludwig anymore. The names have lost all sense of gravitas for the sake of simple pronunciation and easy spelling."

Richard was wearing a green and blue sweater vest with khakis. He was a librarian these days and, if Anna saw him on the street, she would have never suspected he fought in the French Revolution. Even beyond his youthful appearance, Richard's calm demeanor didn't strike Anna as someone who was cheering next to her at the guillotines.

"Am I late?" Anna asked, taking off her knit cap and stuffing it in her coat pocket.

"You're the last one to come, but no one is planning on leaving anytime soon."

Richard walked up the second story of the building and opened the door that pointed out towards the street. Inside were three others: a slim redhead, a man with shaggy hair, and a third woman with long hair that she'd buzzed short on one side.

"Anna!" The redheaded girl cheered, ran over, and wrapped her arms around Anna. "I haven't seen you since Chicago! How are you doing?"

"I was working at an office there—remote work, but the schedule was murder. I'm hoping to find a night job again now that I've moved out to Seattle. How about you? Still an academic?"

"Ugh, I left the history department at the university because of 'creative differences.'"

Which honestly means my colleagues are absolute ignoramuses! Anytime I'd suggest the reconsider their facts, they'd talk over me until I might as well not be there. It was only a matter of time before I left such a toxic workplace."

"Becca, you take things too personally," Richard said, handing each woman a glass of steaming, dark red liquid. Anna took a sip and the warmth filled her normally cold body. She hadn't eaten all day.

"Those...puppies don't know the first thing about the American Revolution!" Becca scoffed. She adjusted her curls a little and licked some blood off her bright red lips. "I was there! Unlike those pompous professors, I lived it!"

"Weren't you just a maid for the Washingtons?" The shaggy-haired man asked. Marcus was wearing a plain t-shirt and jeans but had gotten another naval tattoo since Anna had seen him last. "It's not like you were fighting in it."

"I may have read some of Mrs. Washington's mail from time to time," Becca shrugged. "It's not my fault that she trusted me."

"I'd think it is," the woman with half-shaved hair smirked. "Not saying you don't know more than them, but Marcus fought on the front lines. Reading other people's mail doesn't make you an expert. It makes you a felon."

"Jamie?" Anna asked with a grin. "You changed a lot in five years! I don't think I've seen you wear that jacket since '85!"

"I got sick and tired of trying to keep up with modern trends," Jamie shrugged with a smile. She was wearing a leather jacket and leather pants. Jamie ran a hand over the shaved portion of her head and grinned. "So, I decided to make my own style...picked a few favorites and added some new stuff. The haircut was a lot of fun. All the girls at the salon got them after I did."

"Very chic! The blue looks nice, too."

"At least you have taste," Jamie sat with a fresh glass of blood and crossed her leather-clad legs. "Marcus was lecturing me like it's still 1957."

"I'm a bit traditional, so sue me!" Marcus said. "I just worry it'll make you stand out. We get by on staying covert over the centuries. People are gonna stare at you as you walk down the street."

"People look at me and they remember me as 'that chick with the awesome hair'. They

don't take time to remember anything else."

Anna sat on the floor with Becca and drank some more blood. She exhaled slowly and felt her fangs slide out further from her gums. The hunger had been twisting in her gut all night, but finally getting some fresh blood in her system took the edge off. The fresh blood brought out a part of her that she normally fought to hide, but she was among friends who would understand.

"Is this AB Positive?" Becca asked her.

"I had a bottle of it and figured I'd bring everyone a treat. Technically, we've been doing this for three hundred years."

"Mmm, it hits the spot," Jamie sighed and leaned her head back on the couch. "You always get the good stuff. Happy three-hundred-year anniversary."

"We should do something special for our tercentenary!" Marcus said. "I see more of you four than I see my coworkers out of the office."

"Mmm!" Becca perked up, sipping from her glass of blood. "Hey, let's play Never Have I Ever!"

"What?" Richard laughed. "What are you a college freshman?"

"As of next month? Yes! I re-enrolled in college again. It's getting harder to pretend I just look good for my age. Come on, it'll be fun."

"Don't be a killjoy, Rich," Anna nudged him with her foot. "It's not like there are any surprises between us."

Anna raised her right hand, splaying the fingers out. Becca eagerly joined and everyone else followed suit.

"I'll start!" Becca said. "Never have I ever drank a rat!"

"Becca, that was one time!" Jamie snapped. "It's not like I made a habit of it!"

"Hey," Marcus raised his glass and took a dramatic sip, "if you can't get any human blood, rat's not a bad substitute."

"Better than that time I had to drink fish blood," Anna gagged. "I might as well have been drinking saltwater."

"Don't get distracted," Becca said. "Jamie? Marcus played fair."

"Fine," Jamie took a sip and dropped one of her fingers. "My turn. Never have I ever faked my death to get out of a job."

“Do we have to put a finger down for each job?” Richard asked.

“Mmmm...nope,” Jamie shook her head. “Just one if you’ve ever done it.”

Becca dropped a finger, Anna dropped a finger and Richard dropped a finger. Anna furrowed her brow. “How many was it again, Richard? Three?”

“Four: that diner, the bookstore, that brief stint in Hollywood and working in the greenhouse at the conservatory.”

“Shame you couldn’t keep acting,” Becca said. “You were great when they cast you as Hamlet...”

“We had great chemistry when you played my Juliet about two hundred years later.”

Marcus made a gagging sound and laughed. It was no secret that Becca and Richard were together for over fifty years and four lives, but everyone in the group had married one another at some point.

“Never have I ever...” Marcus thought for a minute, “believed that coconut water could be a substitute to blood.”

“I was trying to go vegan!” Becca snarled, putting her finger down aggressively. “It sounded like a good alternative.”

“Never have I ever...” Richard mused, “gotten under the influence of drinking blood of someone under the influence.”

“The influence of what?” Marcus asked. “Woodstock got weird...”

“Anything,” Richard said.

“Wait, even alcohol?” Anna asked. “How do you get drunk?”

“Never have I ever,” Richard grinned.

Everyone but Richard put down a finger. “You are so dull sometimes, Richard,” Becca groaned. “This is why you live alone these days.”

“I live alone by design,” Richard said.

“Never have I ever...” Anna thought and sipped her blood. “Mixed blood with another drink.”

“Coffee and blood belong together, though!” Jamie said. “It’s not like I share.”

“Oh!” Becca smiled. “Never have I ever accidentally had a human drink blood!”

Marcus threw his head back laughing as he lowered one of his fingers. “I told him it was a protein shake.”

“Never have I ever downplayed an injury to avoid a hospital...” Jaime asked.

Anna dropped one of her fingers and shrugged. “In fairness, it was 1876 and it was barely a broken wrist. I was fine the next day.”

“Oh!” Marcus smiled and looked at Richard. “Never have I ever hid from a woman behind a bookshelf.”

“She was a reporter asking too many questions,” Richard said. “I left the state afterward... I kinda miss the small-town feel of Boston...”

“Idaho hasn’t been a small town in decades,” Jamie said. “You must not have been there since before we were throwing tea in the harbor.”

“It’s smaller than Chicago, I bet,” Richard shrugged. “Never have I ever...escaped through a backdoor to get away from a vampire hunter.”

“Becca and I did that one together,” Anna smirked, dropping her finger. “That time we were in that club in Miami?”

“Oh, Miami!” Becca laughed and dropped her finger. “I lost one of my shoes in the women’s room when we were squeezing out the window! I think it’s still there.”

“Never have I ever done a Sip and Dip,” Anna asked, looking around.

“Oh come on,” Marcus groaned, looking at the others, “no one else has ever dipped out before your blood bag wakes up?”

“I at least say goodbye,” Richard said.

“What and that’s somehow better?” Marcus asked. “Leaving someone to forget you is the key to vampirism...that’s Blood Drinking 101.”

“I don’t like loose ends,” Anna said, sipping her glass of blood. “Saying goodbye is part of that.”

Marcus scowled and dropped his index finger, flipping Anna off with his last finger. “Personal attacks are kind of cheap shot...especially when you pretend to be so superior to me for how I handle getting my blood fix.”

“Oh, don’t be so sensitive,” Anna rolled her eyes. “You’re almost five hundred, don’t act like a child...”

“And you shouldn’t act like you’re all high and moral for being around humans longer than expected!” Marcus snapped.

“Relax, Marcus,” Becca said. “It’s just a game.”

“Fine!” Marcus said. “Never have I ever drank someone until they were dead!”

“Marcus!” Richard snapped. “Come on...”

Anna looked down and dropped her last finger, her hand plopping in her lap.

“Guess I lost,” Anna said, sipping her blood.

“Anna,” Becca put a hand on her shoulder, “we all know it was an accident. You weren’t yourself when Alex—“

“I shouldn’t have brought it up,” Marcus dropped his head. “I was just...hotheaded. Sorry.”

Anna swallowed again and set her head on Becca’s shoulder. “I still think about him sometimes,” Anna said. “I dream about him.”

“It was a mistake,” Jamie said. “And it was a long time ago. We all have slip-ups.”

“I was the only one who put a finger down for that one,” Anna said. Becca opened her mouth but closed it again without saying anything comforting like Anna had hoped. Anna took another sip of blood. “I’m gonna get a fresh glass. Anyone want seconds?”

Anna stood and rushed over to the kitchen. She faced her back to the rest of the group, spilling a bit of blood on the counter as she rushed to uncork the bottle. Anna started wiping the counter with a wet sponge when Jamie walked over to her.

“It was an accident, Anna,” Jamie said, setting her hand on the back of Anna’s palm. “We all know it wasn’t intentional and you served your sentence for it.”

Anna stayed quiet as she poured her blood into a glass and put it into the microwave. The machine hummed dully as Anna felt everyone looking at her.

“I ran into his son,” Anna said. “It’s been...eighteen years and I thought I was being haunted. I almost screamed because I was so startled. Of course, he didn’t remember me, but...it felt like I was in 2002 all over again. All those memories came back to me and I felt like I was losing control again. I was on the run from a hunter and he took me in. They didn’t have to, but they did. I hadn’t eaten in a long time and I could feel myself losing control as soon as I got in there. They thought I was asleep and I—“

“It’s not like you went in with that express purpose,” Becca wrapped her arms around Anna from behind. The microwave beeped, but Anna didn’t take the blood out.

“I’ve been so careful...but this has haunted me for so long.”

“We know,” Richard said, leaning on the counter. “It sounds like something you’ve been

needing to get off your chest for a while.”

“Some things you can’t tell a therapist,” Anna said quietly.

“That was dirty,” Marcus shook his head. “I shouldn’t have brought it up.”

Anna smiled weakly and reached into the microwave. She quickly downed the whole glass of blood and refilled it from the still open bottle. Replenished, Anna turned back to the others and grinned. “No more personal attacks?”

“Water under the bridge,” Marcus nodded.

Jamie smiled and filled her wine glass with fresh blood. “Alright, my turn! Never have I ever...climbed through my window when I forgot my keys.”