

Night Falls

A supernatural novel

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Chapter One

Darkness. Blackness. Everywhere, and everything, from the floor to the ceiling, and it felt like it was filling me up. I almost didn't want to breathe, as though it would seep in through my lungs and work its way to my heart.

But that didn't make sense. It wasn't malicious darkness, it was just darkness, and I was wasting time.

I took a deep, reassuring breath, the climate-controlled air of the apartment filling me with cold. It didn't steady me as much as I'd been hoping. I let it out in a sigh and examined my situation again, continuing to pretend that I had all the time in the world.

Maybe it wasn't some evil darkness, but the room *was* dark, so dark it hurt to focus my eyes, and the moon had waned so the only light that filtered through the cracks under the doors was that meager shine of stars and distant streetlights. The resulting gray tones didn't improve what had already been turned into a depressing environment. It was a one-bedroom, dingy place, with barely enough room to be considered habitable. The windows had been painted black, curtains plastered over them threefold to block any chance of sunlight from entering. One of the windows had its glass removed, and the curtains hung unattached on two sides. It left a faint cool draft to flutter in around me.

From memory I knew the décor of the place was scarce, only the necessities and what had been left behind when he'd "vacated" the apartment of its previous tenant. I wondered why there were any furnishings at all; the coffin was all that he really needed, and it certainly wasn't because he wanted people to think he lived a normal life—I mean, he had a *coffin* in the middle of everything else. Through an open door to my right, there sat a sagging double bed, no pillows, covered with a black sheet, on a worn bed frame. It was the only object in the room. Those windows, too, had been thickly plastered with covers.

The room I stood in – I supposed it was a mix between living, dining, and kitchen – contained an old, tired armchair, but it was dusty like it hadn't been used in ages. It was obvious after speaking with him for just a few minutes that he barely used this apartment. In front of that sad remnant of human presence sat a smashed-in television of the ancient, knobbed variety. With no remote, its only controls were located on one side of the screen, and one knob was ripped off, lying a few feet away on the black carpet. The walls and ceiling were black as well, but it was a messy and uneven paint job, leaving streaks of gray where the black gave way to the white underneath. The odd, somewhat crunchy texture of the carpet revealed that he probably had used black house paint to stain it.

The only room in the apartment that might have seemed normal would be the bathroom; or the shower, at least. Although, he'd also painted it black, and whatever paint he used didn't take well to tile, so it was more of a streaked gray than the obsidian tone he'd been aiming for. Still, it was *almost* completely ordinary, with towels, soap, and everything. Apparently everyone bathed, regardless of their current state of humanity.

Looking around wasn't getting me anywhere. But when I reluctantly turned back to the coffin in front of me, sitting closed atop a little pedestal of wooden crates, I still wasn't ready to see him yet. The mahogany was stained so dark that this lighting made it also look black. Everything in this apartment was so black I felt like I was drowning, suffocating in darkness. It

seemed as though no matter how hard my eyes strained I would never see again. The faintly lingering scent of house paint seemed to be forming into some kind of black smoke that coated my lungs, and every breath felt just as thick as the surrounding darkness. Wanting to get out, for the moment to be over and done with, I stepped towards the coffin. Only then did I notice something marred the shiny wood, gleaming oddly. A hand print. I touched it curiously and my finger stuck slightly in the drying blood.

I retreated quickly, wiping my finger off on my pants, simply not ready to see him. I backed up and into the doorframe of the bathroom, bruising my spine nicely. Even the smeared tiles were a salvation after the complete and total blackness of the apartment, so I looked gratefully to the gray room. It looked dirty, now that I noticed, and I wondered why he had ever thought black paint would evenly coat porcelain. Only the upper walls and ceiling were successfully, thickly black. I didn't look up.

Numbly, I stepped across the threshold. The medicine chest's mirror had been broken by one sudden impact in the center. A blood-stained impact, I noticed. I used one finger to squeamishly touch the corner and opened it another few inches. The shelf that wasn't broken held about two hundred sleeping pills. More were scattered about the sink, loose outside their bottles. I blinked, didn't comprehend it, and left again.

Back to the coffin and its mysterious handprint. I wondered if it was his blood, since it was obviously his print, considerably larger than mine. There was no good reason for him to be still dead after ten o'clock unless he'd been wounded. I hadn't ever seen his blood spilled; maybe someday soon. But I wouldn't be seeing it the way he always saw mine— as he sucked it from my throat. So really, I realized, every time I'd seen my own blood, it was the same as seeing his.

Half-smiling at this sick joke, I pushed the lid open.

The lining of the coffin was stark white, painfully bright in the darkness. My first response on looking in was, as such, a strange wincing expression.

I wasn't sure where everyone got the rumors of such amazing creatures as vampires. He looked pretty normal to me, just a tall and lanky frame at rest, though the rest was inside a coffin. He was dressed in bloodstained blue jeans and black t shirt; hands, folded on his chest, stained with the dark reddish brown. I knew definitely why he still wasn't awake. He'd been out late the last night killing something – or someone, I should say – late enough that he hadn't had time to clean up before dawn; hence the blood. His hair, a variety of shades of red and blonde that was growing out to show brown roots, was shaved into a mohawk, though now it didn't look as rock-star-ish as it normally did – combed down into his eyes and unevenly around his head.

I'd never thought it would come this far. Somehow I'd always figured he'd kill me, I think. I remembered when first I'd seen him, months ago: wiping blood off his hands as he left a dark alley. I could still see the wolfish grin he'd given me, fangs glinting in his bloody mouth, before he knocked me unconscious with his aura alone. I'd woken up on the roof of some building like he'd grown tired of the idea of lugging me around any further since I obviously wasn't coming around.

He'd left a glass of water. That still struck me as odd and ironically funny; but I supposed he had no reason to kill me yet, having just eaten, so he'd wanted me to be comfortable. Or maybe he had come up with plans for me even then. I can't really justify that action. As it is with most of my unanswered questions, I will doubtless never know.

Already dazed and confused from waking up on a rooftop, as I was leaving the building, this fat old woman had caught my arm, rambling on about how I was “marked” and she could “see” his “evil taint” on my “pure soul.” Which meant precisely nothing to me. After abducting me back to her little cave of a home she nearly drowned me in holy water and insisted I kill this man who touched me. I thought she was crazy. Actually, the more I think about it, the more likely it seems that she really was crazy, even if she *had* known what had happened to me. What sort of sane person would tell a twenty-something girl who weighs in at less than a hundred and thirty pounds to kill a vampire? At least I was right in some of my presumptions.

Next night, he found me again. This time he was waiting for me in the window of my apartment. Thinking of it again, I figured he’d only come to wipe my memory so I couldn’t turn him in for murder, but the holy water still clung to my hair and it had, apparently, deeply offended him. I didn’t see him again for a week and I thought I never would.

Then he started sending me stuff.

God only knows why; at least it wasn’t like severed hands or eyeballs or anything. First he sent me *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and the bloody fingerprints on the pages somehow seemed appropriate. In the margins of the pages he’d penciled in corrections like Stoker had gotten some details wrong. I didn’t read it; I just thought it was weird. In another few days I threw it out when a friend would be coming over. What was the point in keeping something that creepy? After all, I hadn’t really seen fangs on him. It had been dark, you know. And I was just human. My eyes had lied. And maybe it wasn’t even from him – there was no way for me to be sure. I’d seen him in an alley, blacked out, woken on a rooftop. Yes, that was strange, but it didn’t mean he was qualified to be correcting *Dracula*.

Naturally, I believed he was a vampire after he bit me. It took me a while to convince myself that I wasn’t just crazy, however. I thought for sure that I’d be checking into one of those lovely white hospitals with their regularly scheduled medications.

But, the reality was undeniable. He was in my apartment again, and this time I had no holy water to offend him with. It wasn’t an unpleasant experience, that’s why I didn’t think he was a vampire. I mean, someone has creepy eyes with a slit pupil or no pupil or whatnot, you don’t think, *oh, that’s a werewolf*, you think, *oh, he’s got contacts*. I remember part of it very well, though most of my memories from that time grew foggy almost immediately.

I’d blinked at him, in shock for a moment at finding him there. “Are you stalking me?” was my initial thought. I wasn’t scared for some reason, just curious — maybe it was his power, deluding me.

“I don’t have to,” he said softly, sitting on the windowsill like he’d just climbed in. “You keep finding me.”

It somehow didn’t occur to me to mention that I couldn’t accidentally find him if he was in my apartment. But again, it was probably his power doing that. I stared at him and didn’t care that he’d broken in— no, flown in. I just stared at him and then continued into my apartment, putting down my bags and stuff, taking off my jacket. It was like he was an old friend who was supposed to be there, with me. It was, in hindsight, disturbing.

He said my name and I looked at him involuntarily. “Come here,” he said softly, more than a little sinister. I went slowly up to him and wondered if he could fall out the open window. He smiled at me when I obeyed and it thrilled me. I noticed, at this point, that his hair was orange

at the roots, fading to Crayola-marker red at the ends, separated into spikes that he had gelled down the sides of his head, the longest coming just past his ear. Maybe it was too hard to maintain a mohawk when flying. Whatever the reason, I liked it better this way.

I blinked up at him, a little lethargic from his aura pounding so close. He slid his left hand into my hair, brushing it off my neck, eyes sliding down to watch my pulse. “Aren’t you going to invite me in?” he asked softly.

I think it’s cheating to use power to convince someone to invite you in so you can bite them, really I do. But I just smiled. “Sorry, of course, come in,” I said. Again, I wonder why it didn’t occur to me that he was *climbing in* a sixth story window.

He smiled wider and slid off the windowsill, hand still on my shoulder holding me near him. I thought then that it would be so nice if he would just stay with me, just keep touching me. His touch made me feel safer, like there was someone always going to watch over me now. He cocked his head, frowning slightly. “What?”

I hesitantly put my hands on his chest, unable to think straight. My head hurt. “I have a headache,” I whispered.

He leaned in and kissed me softly, and I put my arms around his neck. It never occurred to me that I hadn’t even asked his name yet, only that it seemed to feel comforting when he held me. He kissed my jaw, down to my neck, then harder, and I thought for a minute he was going to give me a hickey before I passed out.

In the morning, the sun hurt my eyes so I shut all the blinds and took a shower. In the mirror I noticed an area on my neck, just over my pulse, that was red and a little painful, but I could see no bite marks. I shrugged it off. He must’ve given me a hickey. In all honesty, it was pretty hard for me to remember the incident clearly, or to pin down if I was upset or glad for what he’d done. The more I tried to remember, the more details seemed to disappear.

I saw him again that night, but this time he used the front door, like he didn’t need to fly in anymore. I was home when he arrived because I’d felt too ill to go anywhere, dizzy and a bit nauseous. I answered the door and felt a million times better when I saw him. His hair was spiked up now, same colors — he had a tendency to change them, I later discovered. He looked genuinely worried that I had to lean heavily on the door, blinking up at him. On seeing him I was bone tired, though no longer dizzy. He came inside and helped me shut the door, putting his arms around my stomach to support my weight, so he was holding me intimately against him. Then he pulled me over to the couch, falling onto me to hold me down. I blinked up at him, surprised, and he kissed me hard, drawing blood with his two delicate fangs.

Then he broke off, looking away, like he’d forgotten to act human. “What...” I said, wiping blood off my mouth with the back of my hand. That caught his eye and he took my wrist and sucked it away, his eyes holding a weird gleam. For some reason the look was appealing and my eyes widened with the odd feeling it gave me. He grinned down at me again, reminiscent of the first time I’d seen him, and then he bit me a second time.

This time, the feeling was incredible. It didn’t hurt at all; I was flying through a void, but always aware that he was above me, holding me down; I wasn’t breathing but my heart beat hard enough to suffocate me. Suddenly the world was crashing down around me, and I gasped when it did — was I falling? What was this pain, everywhere in my body hurting, aching? I blacked out again.

When the world faded back in again he was holding me to him, my back to his chest, still sitting on the couch with his legs around me. I thought first that the hold he had on my shoulders, arms under mine, was incredibly strong, like he was afraid I'd run away. But I didn't want to run away. I became aware of him whispering things into my ear right as he stopped. Then he was silent, watching, waiting to see what I'd do.

Now I knew he was a vampire, and not just because it was fairly obvious. I knew so many strange things like he'd told them to me subconsciously, random scattered bits of information about things like how long he'd been dead, when he'd killed the fat balding man who had occupied what he'd converted to his refuge, the guy he'd had for dinner last night, that he'd almost been killed by a werewolf once. I slowly tried to move, just lift my head up off his shoulder, somewhere conscious of the fact that he was watching my pulse beat in my throat and that it was turning him on.

I couldn't move at all, the pain shooting through my skull when I tried. I shut my eyes again, fighting vomiting, the world spinning wildly with the hurting. I moaned and touched my forehead with one hand.

He laughed softly, almost nervously. "Sorry," he said, kissing my temple. After a moment the pain dissipated, and I could move. But now I didn't want to, now that the pain was gone and I could think of something other than my brain exploding. I didn't want him to leave.

I thought for a second, just leaning on him, overwhelmed, before I came up with anything decent to say. "You never told me your name," I said softly.

He laughed again like it was a stupid question. "It doesn't matter," he said, almost to himself. I turned my head and hid my face against his neck, one hand sliding to the other side, like I was embarrassed to make him laugh at me. I guess I was, too. Then he sobered at this, like I'd surprised him, and he didn't say anything for a long time. Finally he sighed softly. "Names are just something that people call you," he said, like he felt he had to answer the question. "It doesn't matter what you call me."

For some reason this made an incredible, shocking amount of sense, all things considered, and I nodded against him. "How come I know what you're feeling?" I mumbled, curious but tired. He tensed like he hadn't known I could, and I noticed he wasn't breathing. He did, however, have a pulse. It was beating hard. He didn't say anything and after a moment I made a guess. "Am I one of you now?"

He laughed again. "No, nothing like that," he said. The laugh was, again, like he thought it was a stupid question, but also he seemed relieved. Strange that he could laugh without having to breathe. "It's only fair, I know what you're feeling," he shrugged it off.

I nodded and looked up at him then, sitting up at last. He stared back at me, and he looked perfectly normal. Frowning slightly, I touched his chin with one finger. "How come I couldn't see your fangs until tonight?"

"Because I hadn't bitten you yet," he sounded slightly exasperated. Even when he spoke they were obvious – nothing else they could be, really. "Humans can't comprehend things if they have no proof of it."

I felt revulsion at humans, and briefly I wanted to destroy them all, lots of bloody violent deaths. I knew for sure it was what he felt. The anger and hatred that radiated out of him was deep and frightening.

Then I saw something flicker through his eyes, a kind of awareness, and he got up to leave. I glanced at the clock and saw that dawn was two hours away, maybe another half. I got up, like I felt obligated to see him out, and I felt a dark satisfaction at that. He'd started to go to the window, out of habit or something, but instead chose to go out the front door. I stared at him, and I didn't want him to leave. I felt like something would come to kill me if he left. "You'll come back tomorrow night, won't you?" I asked softly.

He grinned at me, wide enough to show his fangs, and kissed me again, cradling my face in his hands. When he broke off I knew again that he wanted me, and that he also wanted my blood. "Of course," he said.

I felt a moment of crushing pain when he left and then it was like I was back in my own body and I realized how insane I was to ask him back. Other than that stupid decision, I didn't even debate on my sanity; from that second bite on I could simply glance at someone and know if they were truly human. I could see fangs, or identify werewolves by looking at their eyes, or necromancers when they passed with their aura of souls trailing behind that brushed you as a faint breeze of cold you never noticed before. At this point, of course, I hadn't yet seen any werewolves or necromancers. I realized that his aura overwhelmed me when he was around, and then instantly knew that wasn't it. Not his aura, something else. I went to have a shower, scrubbing at my skin like I could erase the taint of his touch. I also knew it wouldn't go away.

It wasn't that he was deluding me; in fact, the lack of delusion had been what had let me realize the awareness flicking through his eyes and the anger at humans in his tone of voice. If he'd been deluding me I wouldn't have thought to ask his name. No, I knew that he'd done something to tie me to him. Whenever he was around it awakened the part of me that was his and the first time it overwhelmed me. Even later, though, the next day when I could leave the house, I felt a little bit of sadness, like I missed him. The servant was not gone, but dormant. And I couldn't even kill myself.

That was a while ago. Exactly how long, I'm not sure. He's always in my head now, after dark I get so hungry until he eats, or so angry when he wants to kill. But it was his fault that it had come so far, come to this point. It was all his fault. I stared down at him. Wondering how long it'd been since I'd felt anything other than happiness at seeing him, I let the wave of insane anger blow through me. His eyes opened suddenly and he jumped when he saw me like I'd startled him. The anger inside me dissipated instantly.

"Christ, girl, what're you doing here? I told you not to come here," he growled, sitting up.

"That creepy witch thinks you're evil." I started. He got out of the coffin and went into the bathroom, washing the blood off his hands. I was sort of glad, even as I continued. "I really think she's nuts, I mean, she gave me a freaking stake. A *stake*. She says that I have to cleanse my soul or something by 'killing the one who touched me.' "

He laughed at this for a longer moment than I really understood. He pulled another T shirt from the pile of clothes in the corner of the bedroom and dropped the bloodstained one somewhere on the floor. "Right, then. C'mon, let's go deal with her."

He pried open that window, halfway out with habit before he remembered he had to bring me. "C'mon, hurry up," he waved me come closer. I hung back, wishing I wasn't there. He was suddenly right in front of me, hands on my arms. "Don't defy me, bitch," he growled, eyes very close.

“I don’t want to do this—” I stammered.

He forced my head up to look at him. “Don’t you *dare* defy me!” he said, louder, and I thought my brain would explode.

For one insane second I had to kill him. I had to stab him through the heart or shoot him or something— douse him with holy water, I didn’t care. I had to kill him. I had to get him out of my head, just out of my head again...

Spontaneously I blinked and he was looking at me oddly from the window. Had I imagined that? I couldn’t get my thoughts straight. Half of me wanted to sit down and think out exactly what’d happened to my life, the other half wanted to run along and kill people with him. “Are you all right?” He asked, going up to me.

“I... don’t know, something...” I shook my head. “I just feel really weird.”

He touched my shoulders and lowered his head to stare directly into my eyes. Like a switch had been thrown my mind snapped back into order. I felt normal again.

“How’s that?” He asked softly, and I thought I heard a little bit of relief in his voice.

“I’m fine now, thanks,” I said. Whatever he’d done, it’d left me without even the incentive to become confused by whatever he’d done. Weird thoughts, but they didn’t concern me anymore.

“Now come.” He pulled me gently towards the window, anger gone.

I nodded, putting my arms around his neck so I could fly with him.

I knew what had to be done. I found myself planning just how to do it. The old woman had to die. She could never learn of the things my vampire had done, the things he was capable of. She could hurt him and I couldn’t allow that. I had to kill her, lest he get near that blasted holy water. Evil stuff. I had this memory in my head of what it looked like when a vampire was hit with holy water. It would appear in my mind mysteriously, but whenever I tried to pin down who I was seeing get melted, it would disappear. Anyway – this weird woman had gallons from her cult church, and that creepy unshakable faith that meant certain death. But regardless of her recreational activities, she knew what he was. That was never allowed. No one could know. My vampire told me what to do. He left me on the roof of her house, and I knew he’d be watching to see I did it right. He was in my head again, but it was warm and comforting. I gripped the switchblade in my pocket and wondered how much blood he’d shed tonight. More than the foolish old crone had in her whole body, no doubt. I grinned wolfishly and pressed the release on my knife.

My first murder went fairly well. I pulled up some emotion so I could seem shaky and uncertain when she answered the door. “Did you do it?” she asked intensely, once she’d locked the door.

“I... I...” I stammered and she came close to me, peering up at me. My mind faltered, like the effects of whatever he’d done were wearing off. No matter, I still knew what to do.

“*Did you kill him?*” she shook me meanwhile, hands on my arms, and I brought the knife up into her stomach, ripping it upwards till it hit her ribcage.

I thought, *Is it supposed to be so easy?*

Her mouth opened in a silent scream, eyes so wide I imagined them falling out. The picture brought a sick smile to my lips and so I laughed at her as she fell slowly to the floor. But I remembered her unshakable faith and so punched the blade back into her heart, in case she had

any prayers or spells or whatever to use as a last resort. I didn't want to die a horrible burning death or be cursed for life or anything, after all. But it was all *so easy*.

I watched her for a while to see if she was really dead until her eyes glazed over and she hadn't breathed in several minutes. Then I went back out to the front porch where he was leaning on the wall, waiting for me to appear. It looked kind of like he should be smoking a cigarette. "I felt her die," he said. "You did well."

I smiled at him and then he escorted me back inside. I frowned. "I thought all the holy stuff was keeping you out?"

"Once the person's faith is gone it's just water, or just two crossed sticks with a guy on them, not holy water or a crucifix." he said, making a crossing gesture with his fingers. "Besides, you're not strong enough to carry the body."

"What are you going to do with it?" I watched him kneel beside her.

"Just watch," he whispered. He placed one hand on her forehead, one hand on her heart, closing his eyes. There was a pause and I saw the look of concentration on his face before suddenly his power swelled and he grinned up at the shocked look on my face. "Holy people, if killed by the servant of a vampire, can have their life-force absorbed into the master to increase his power and resistance to the church," he said like he was reciting it.

"Wow," I said. "But... if you're stronger then why isn't your aura knocking me out again like it did before?"

"You get stronger too, dear," he said distractedly, easily slinging the woman's body over his shoulder to carry it. "Clean up the blood while I dump the body. If anyone misses the old bitch, then they won't think she was murdered."

I nodded. He kissed me on the forehead before he flew away. And no, vampires do not turn into *anything* when they fly, let alone bats. Think how impractical that would be.

I searched the kitchen until I found cleaning solution and then started mopping up the pool of blood. Luckily she didn't have carpet, rather hardwood floors, and it didn't stain. I was just finishing re-waxing the floor in the spot where I'd taken it off when he got back. I noticed that his clothes were bloodstained again.

"Come on," he sighed, like he was tired. "We have to burn these," he picked up the rags that now were soaked with blood and soap, dropping them into the bucket after dumping out the dirty water I'd used. I got up off the floor and followed him outside again, using the spare key outside to lock the door behind us. Then I went up to him, putting my arms around his neck for support before he took off.

Chapter Two

I decided that I'd call him Saxon, Saxon Hyde, after a character in a book I liked. It fit him in that they were both extremely bad at acting human—I didn't tell him that part of my reasoning—but the main motivation for the christening was that he had almost the same hairstyle as the fictional character. When I told him, he didn't seem to mind, but said he was going to come up with a better name for me than what I had. Something more befitting of the servant of a vampire such as himself. Who was I to argue? It's just a name, like he said. I figured that he would know better than I what a vampire servant should be called.

A few weeks into this jumble of a relationship that had become my life, he decided that he was going to move on to a new city, and I was going with him. For a reliable source of food, you know. While he did sometimes prefer to kill for his meal, feel a nice bloody bout of agony and terror as a chaser to the fresh blood, he said my blood made a better meal now that I was his. That was fine with me, the feeding felt great. I liked it when he was around; it made me happy that I could finally be of some real use to someone. It was very easy to rationalize all the things I did for him, after what he'd done to my logical synapses. My brain said, my whole life I'd been doing a half-assed job of everything and I was, at last, doing something completely right. After all, it was simple; he never gave me intricate orders, so I couldn't mess them up. And I could still think for myself. I still had a mind left; I wasn't some kind of slave. I just couldn't hurt him. It never occurred to me to think otherwise.

I guess it was only a matter of time before he'd killed too many people in San Francisco for him to stay there; statistically speaking, the cops would've caught him sooner or later, with the kill count rising so fast. But he hated small towns, so where else would we go but New York City itself? A week prior, he'd flown to the city to scope it out and find a place to stay. He'd been gone for two days, and I'd come very close to killing myself, planning to kill him, running away, and going after him. The conflicting emotions of hatred and pain at his absence were overwhelming, to say the least. I spent two days feeling like my head was going to explode. In the end I hadn't done anything, naturally. I had been almost overly happy to see him when he'd finally come home.

I packed all my clothes to take, but he wouldn't let me bring anything else. I was getting a new name so I was going to get a new life. I left everything that would remind me of my family or old friends in California and had my car packed by dark. I found myself pacing in my living room, waiting for him. A half-hour or so after the stars had been out in full, he let himself in and nearly gave me a heart attack.

"What, weren't you expecting me?" he grinned at me.

"I was expecting some form of knock," I said, chagrined. "I'm ready to go. I packed, like, hours ago, now."

He looked at me for a minute, leaning on the closed door. I wondered what I'd done wrong. "The flight's not for another hour," he said finally.

"I thought you couldn't afford to fly towards dawn," I asked. "We'll only have a couple hours from when we land for you to get inside this way."

"I know," he sighed, a little angrily.

"Sorry," I mumbled, intimidated. I wasn't sure if he was mad at me or not, so I didn't say

anything else.

After a second he sighed, coming up to me. “S all right,” he shrugged, pulling me to him. Where his hands touched my arms they felt cool to the touch, and he wasn’t breathing. I hadn’t noticed until then the shift in his eyes that implicated he hadn’t fed. He’d told me once that it happens to all hungry vampires, a sort of quiet shine of insanity.

“You haven’t fed yet,” I said, startled. Normally he found someone before he came over, I figured so he wouldn’t bleed me dry with the first hunger.

He shook his head, eyes locked on my pulse. “Didn’t want to,” he mumbled. “The cops are all over the streets now, looking for me. And your blood is better.”

I made a noise for a response, his hunger a little much to stand. He leaned in to kiss messily over my neck, and I could feel the ache of hunger in him, gnawing through my gut. Still, he didn’t bite me, like he enjoyed the temptation of the blood so close, just under my skin. Then he gave in and I felt his fangs sink into my neck, drawing a gasp from me before I slid into the rapture of the feeding.

After a small forever, the bliss tapered off and I could focus my eyes again, finding him supporting me with his hands on my back, kissing over where the bite had been. I know he always enjoyed feeding more than I did, in more ways than having your hunger satisfied. After a moment I could hold my own weight again, looking up at his light brown eyes. “So where are we going in New York? It’s a big city, you know.”

He took the liberty of putting his hands up my shirt, fingers pressing into my ribs as he answered. “Not sure of the street address. It doesn’t matter to me, not really. Somewhere in Manhattan, there’s a place I thought would work. It’s close to a train station if you wanted to go anywhere and close to all the tourist shit where it’s mostly humans. I don’t need to get involved with anything complicated. There’s a ton of prey there, and even better, we can get some more of the devoutly religious.”

I liked that he admitted to needing my help to kill the holies for some reason. I just liked that he needed me around. “Got anyone in mind?”

“There’s a Catholic bastard that really got on my nerves when I was there,” he said. “I think I’d like to show him exactly what us “atheist freaks” are really capable of. You’ll kill him for me?” While a question it bordered close to an order.

“Sure,” I shrugged. “It’s nothing. I know they won’t catch me with a vampire behind the works.”

He grinned at me then, and it was only half from humor. Something must have just crossed his mind. Whatever it was he kissed me again, hard. I was getting better at evading his fangs, but he still managed to bleed me the majority of the time, and now was no exception. He pulled me onto the couch that he seemed to love so dearly, having apparently come up with some way to pass the time before the flight. He kissed me for another length, now holding me over him, probably so the blood would run into his mouth and not be wasted in mine. I guess I don’t appreciate things like the taste of blood the way he does. When at last he broke off, pulling on my shirt, he had that weird grin again. I took it off for him without argument, and he just lay back, staring up at me for a moment.

“What?” I asked finally. He shook his head but didn’t speak, pulling me back down onto him. He kissed me for a while more, fingers playing with my bra. Finally he pushed up under me

so I was more like sitting in his lap. He said nothing before taking off his shirt. He took hold of my wrists, placing my hands flat on his bare chest. Hesitantly, I slid my hands over his torso, feeling his muscles.

He was so lean, like if you saw him on the street you'd think he'd never had a hot meal in his life, but when you touched his chest the strength of his vampire power practically radiated out of him. He slid his arms around me, pulling me closer to kiss again, and the slight motion let me feel layers of hidden muscles under his white skin. He kissed over my neck, pushing me down under him. His fingers slid down the front of my pants so I took them off. I did like keeping him happy.

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I've never liked flying. Airplanes just give me the creeps for some reason. With a sheet of aluminum between me and oblivion, they make me realize how close death can really be, and I don't generally enjoy pondering that subject.

But this flight was different somehow. No, I knew exactly how it was different; Saxon was with me and that made it better. I mean, even if the wings got ripped off the plane, he could still fly. The greatest tragedy would be my lost wardrobe— oh yeah, and all the humans who got killed. Well, no plan is perfect.

I put my head on his shoulder, sitting by the window in first class. Apparently my vampire had quite an income since he did always rob the people he killed. He said it was surprising the amount of cash that some of the people carried around with them.

It was enough to keep him in decent clothes; he was wearing a black wifebeater under an open short sleeved black shirt with shiny silver designs swirling over it, and leather pants that he'd mutilated with a razor blade at the bottom so he could wear the bondage boots with them— black knee-high boots that buckled up the front, with straps of the same material connecting them. Personally, I loved the boots, though I was sure I'd trip in them. The bluish green of his hair was again gelled into spikes that went down his head, to make the trip easier. He didn't normally care all that much but he'd instructed me on what to wear for this flight; maybe so we'd look more like boyfriend-girlfriend than master-servant.

Though I'd originally bought the long black and purple skirt as part of a costume, he liked it enormously, especially the slit up my right leg. And there was a matching top, like a corset with added sleeves, also black and purple. Needless to say the result was that I looked very pale, very well-endowed, and very scrawny. An oversized trenchcoat completed the image, with my old lace up combat boots, although the outfit really would have looked better with heels. The coat was his and it was easily several sizes too big for me. But he'd seemed very proud of himself when I was dressed, like now I was even more of his creation. The fact that it made him happy to see me in it made me not mind wearing the gothic attire. I admit I could have looked worse, though if he wanted to play dress up with me more often, I'd have to buy some things that coordinated a little better.

He broke my chain of thought suddenly. "The guy who just went into the bathroom is a werewolf," he said softly in my ear. "Can you tell?"

I waited to see him walk by again, watching to catch a glimpse of his eyes. They looked

normal hazel. I shook my head no. "He looks fine to me."

"That's because he's extremely powerful," he said, almost inaudibly. "Maybe a leader of his pack. The really strong ones, you can't see it in their eyes. It's a... static charge in the air when they go by. I only realized that after I mistook one for a human one night and almost got a one way ticket to the underworld."

I couldn't quite believe that he'd come close to death. He seemed all-powerful, like nothing could ever hurt him. I wondered idly if it was strange for a vampire to be worried about death. Probably not.

"Why are you being so quiet?" I whispered back.

"They've got very good hearing," he breathed. About then, a stewardess came up to offer us anything to drink or eat or whatnot. He kept his face close to me, kissing softly over my ear and I realized that he couldn't look at her because she'd discover him. I just shook my head no, unable to respond in the face of her solid gray eyes. There was no pupil, no white, no iris, just swimming tones of gray in her eye sockets. Saxon didn't say anything until she'd gone by. "You mustn't get bothered by their eyes," he whispered sternly. "If you stare, they'll be on to you. Only the weakest ones have really obvious eyes, almost all the time."

I nodded, only a little worried by the "almost." He continued after a moment. "I can't look at them, or even talk to them, they'll sense what I am, so you *have* to answer."

"I will next time," I whispered, unable to meet his eyes in shame. "I'm sorry."

He touched my face and I felt forgiven, slumping back in my seat, eyes shut. I felt someone looking at me after a few minutes, and opened my eyes to see if he was. He blinked down at me when I looked up at him, fooling me a little into thinking it wasn't him. "What?"

"I thought someone was looking at me," I said.

He smiled slightly. "I was," he said. "You look really hot."

I grinned at the compliment, leaning up to kiss him, since he seemed to want me to. He broke off after a moment, pushing me back into the seat. "Go to sleep," he instructed. "It's a long flight."

I nodded, sinking lower in the seat and angling to lean on the window a little to get comfy. Now I knew that he was watching me, but I didn't mind it enough to stay awake. I knew I wasn't getting enough sleep with him around, because I worked during the day, and then at night I'd go out with him or something similar. I'd have to find a night job in Manhattan so that I could sleep during the day. I dozed off thinking about it.

A few hours later he shook me awake. "Wake up," he said. "We're landing."

I sat up stiffly, blinking in surprise that I'd slept that long. *Maybe he did it to me*, I thought. *He could if he wanted to*. I watched the lights of the runway come quickly up towards the plane, and had to look away. He frowned. "What now?"

I shook my head. "I don't like flying," I said.

He kissed me on the forehead, touching my cheek. "You're safe with me," he said. This time I was more confused than I was comforted, but I wasn't scared anymore. He hadn't ever just consoled me before, not really, and it was unusual but nice.

I didn't mention it, not sure of what to say. We got off the airplane in silence. He led me towards the section where you rented cars, with a hand on my arm, walking right past the attendants as if they weren't there. Or rather, as if we weren't there. I looked right into the guy's

eyes and he didn't notice me. It was kind of weird. "Pick a car," Saxon said, gesturing broadly to all the ones in the lot.

"What?"

"Pick one. It's yours. I'll be right back. Wait here, and I'll get the bags."

I wondered if I should really just stand around in the parking lot by myself, and wondered if he could make me invisible just by willing it. He was already gone so I didn't have a chance to ask. I tried not to look as out of place as I felt.

He was back after what felt like ages, carrying everything like it didn't weigh anything at all. "What did you decide?"

I looked back at the parking lot. "I like Jaguars," I said after a moment.

"Sure," he said, scanning the lot until he found one in dark blue, leading me up to it. He stared at the window for a moment and I realized he was looking through the glass. "It's clean inside. Want it?"

"Sure," I said. "Thanks." Why was I grateful for him stealing a car and giving it to me? Wasn't that exactly like thanking someone for giving you stolen money?

"It's no problem," he said, and suddenly the doors were unlocked. He put down my bags and flicked his hand, the trunk opening. "Put your stuff in and I'll go get the keys."

The fact that I was stealing a car, an expensive car to boot, didn't seem so important when there was little or no effort involved. I just looked into the trunk for a moment and then shrugged, following the instruction. He came back in a minute, spinning a set of keys around his finger. "Did you kill him?" I asked.

He looked offended. "No, of course not," he said indignantly. "He never even saw me."

"Sorry," I winced at the abrupt question. "Am I driving?"

"Not tonight," he said. Then he started to get in and stopped, looking up at me. "What was your license plate number on your other car?"

I frowned, thinking. "It was... 6XV 8..."

"Yeah, that's right, 6XV 8122," he said. I didn't even ask how he knew. It would have been a stupid question.

"Why?"

He didn't answer, just kneeling down by the bumper and placing his hand over the plate. He closed his eyes and concentrated for a moment and I saw the numbers warp to my plate number. I laughed softly. "Cool."

"It's only temporary. Tomorrow you have to go register for this car or else they'll figure out there are two cars with the same plate, after this one turns up missing they'll be looking for its make and model. I'm not quite influential enough to prevent *that*."

I nodded, and then we got in. I hadn't realized that he could drive. But it made sense, really. I remembered learning, at some point, that he'd died at twenty-something about fifty years ago. Enough time to learn to drive. *Immortality, what fun*. My brain had to work out the logistics so that it wouldn't seem so weird. It was like over thinking something made it normal. That was a trait that Saxon had been bringing out more and more.

He drove around until he'd found the place where he'd gone before. He said that it was hard to find places he'd flown to when he was driving because the angles were all so different. But within an hour he escorted me up to the new apartment, which wasn't unlike my old one

really. “Am I going to be paying rent on this?” I asked, looking around.

“Only until I make an ‘arrangement’ with the landlord,” he said, smiling. It was a typical laughing-at-humans vampire smile. Also known as, creepy.

But paying no rent was still paying no rent. Plus, it was already furnished. “Great.” I took off the trenchcoat and went into the bedroom, starting to unpack the bags, sitting on the floor by them. He sat down on the bed, watching me. I found the bag without clothes in it and threw a sheet at him. He caught it deftly but looked confused. “Put it on the bed,” I said, trying not to sound like I was wondering what else you could do with it.

He blinked down at me like he had no idea who I was or what I was doing there. “I’m not going to sleep here if I don’t even know whose bed I’m in,” I said. “At least change the sheets.”

He raised an eyebrow like he still couldn’t believe it, but put down the sheet and started to comply. I smiled at everything and nothing and sorted the stuff in the bags. At times, one could almost forget that he wasn’t human. You could almost not feel the pounding of his power over your skin. I guess I had more of those moments than anyone.

It wasn’t until five-something in the morning that everything was unpacked, and I was getting tired. I yawned, standing and stretching after I’d been kneeling to put clothes in the bottom drawer of a dresser. He’d layered fabric over the windows, since he didn’t have time to paint them black, so thick that I knew not a ray of light could get in. He materialized behind me, clamping his hands onto my ribcage, and I collapsed out of the stretch with surprise. He didn’t speak, lowering his mouth down to my neck. Apparently he was getting hungry.

I closed my eyes, waiting for the bite as he kissed over my pulse. It didn’t come. He turned me around suddenly and crushed me to him. I opened my eyes, startled again, and he kissed me hard. There was a miraculous lack of bloodshed, though, until he finally broke off. The look in his eyes was heavy and strange and I was confused, just watching him to see what he’d do next.

“I missed the company, you know,” he mumbled, cradling my face. This added to the scenario of my confusion so I didn’t respond, just trying to read something familiar in his eyes. “I really did,” he sighed, and then his eyes changed like a switch and been flipped and I recognized it all again, and he kissed me again, biting my lip open to suck some blood out. I was used to this and was glad for the familiarity, then he broke off abruptly. “I want to go kill that Catholic bastard,” he said heatedly. “Wanna go kill something.”

I would have shown him I was ready to kill again for him but I didn’t think he’d want me moving away to get my knife. Something occurred to me and I spoke despite the fact that I could feel, again, how much he hated humans. “It’s awfully close to dawn, Saxon,” I said softly.

He glared down at me, as though only by my saying that would the sun rise, but he looked away after a second. “I know,” he growled. “I still want to kill him.”

I could feel dawn coming like an ominous presence and I studied him, knowing something bad would happen if he was in denial that he could feel it too. Then he pushed away from me and was gone, leaving me standing alone in the strange apartment, once more lost and confused. I sat down on the bed when the front door shut and tried to figure out what I had done wrong.

He came back an hour later and fucked me again. The sun rose while I was asleep and I woke up next to a dead man and wasn’t used to it. He’d always gone ‘home’ before dawn and I

sat up to look at him, curious. *I had better get used to him dying around me, or else...* there was no or else. I'd just adapt. The sheet exposed his chest, the pale skin tinted slightly blue in death. I touched his cheek, his sternum, and felt his skin cool and unreal, not unlike touching a mannequin. In fact it was the closest thing to what he felt like that I'd ever touched before. He wasn't breathing and my hand resting on his chest felt no pulse, but then he sighed, rolling onto his side, and it was like he was asleep. But he wasn't breathing, aside from that tired sigh.

It seemed really wrong, and I started to be horrified, before the wall of exhaustion struck me. I could practically see his aura in the room because his power hadn't died, but he was controlling none of it. It infiltrated my mind and I fell back next to him, asleep in seconds. I couldn't resist the draw of sleep any more than he during the middle of the day. The room was nearly black it was so dark, only a hint of many-times-reflected light sneaking in. It was comforting in its oblivion. Even with a dead man beside me.

It wasn't until the sun was well started on its way down that I woke, and I had to go shower instantly, feeling nasty after oversleeping so much. When next I went into the bedroom he was awake and watching me, silent.

I said nothing, beginning to dress as though he wasn't even there. I knew he watched me still. "Why are you just now waking," he asked finally, voice thick with power. I thought it seemed too strong to be on purpose, like he couldn't help but be so dramatic.

"Your aura just about killed me this afternoon," I said, pulling on a shirt. "It was too much, at noon, with you so close. I'm not used to it."

He studied me a while more before nodding. It was like he was judging the truth of my words. "I have been waiting for your blood," he said, and I knew I was expected to feel guilty. *What a stereotypically vampiric thing to say*, is what I really thought, even though he controlled me enough where I did feel horrible.

I crawled onto the bed up close to him where he sat, slouched against the wall, sheets piled at his waist. "Forgive me," I said, and pressed my wrist to his mouth. I knew he could feel the blood beating just under my skin, so close to his lips. I knew it practically hurt him to refuse even a second, but that he absolutely loved the feeling of the blood beating against him. If he hadn't liked it I wouldn't have done so.

His eyes fluttered closed and his hand came to my arm, holding my wrist against his mouth. "Of course," he mumbled, and sank his teeth in. It made me gasp because it hurt terribly, nothing like when he fed from my neck. He didn't notice the sound, lips closing over the wound to drink my blood. The pain staggered my mind and it grew until everything started fading to black. I thought for the first that he might just kill me by mistake, right before I passed out against him.

When I woke up it was so utterly black I couldn't tell if my eyes were opened or closed, and it scared me. I was lying on the bed, dressed still. "Saxon?" I called hesitantly, unable to move. "Where are you?" My heart beat hard, afraid.

I tried to open my eyes but it was hard to tell if I had or not. Then he leaned over me, and I realized he'd been lying on the bed as well. Only by his proximity, and sheer whiteness, could I see him at all. "I'm here," he murmured. "Are you all right?"

I let out a relieved breath and slid my hand up his face, reassuring myself of his presence, the protection. I closed my eyes briefly. "I think so." I continued after a pause. "It hurt a lot when

you bled me from the wrist.”

“I know, I’m sorry,” he said. He was barely touching me, one hand flat on the bed on the other side of me, holding him up. “I didn’t know it would. I finished feeding, and you were unconscious,” He sounded sincere but I knew he would. It didn’t occur to me to wonder if he pitied me, I just knew he’d sound like that. I never questioned even the slightest thing he did.

I hadn’t moved my hand from his neck. I found it slightly interesting that it felt like he needed to shave. Apparently, vampires would still need to get a hair cut, just like humans. Some of the similarities between the two... species were startling. “What do you want me to do tonight?” I asked after a moment.

“What?” he frowned, like he didn’t understand what I meant.

“I’ll go kill the Catholic guy, if you want me to,” I said. “Or I’ll stay here with you, whatever you want.”

He looked at me for a long time and I got the impression that I wasn’t doing something right, but I was supposed to figure it out for myself. “You need to eat,” he said. “Go get something to eat and then you can go meet the devout Catholic. Be careful, though, because he could tell what I was without me even looking at him.”

“He’s, what, magically aware?” I frowned. He hadn’t told me of that ability yet.

“He’s a clairvoyant. He touched my aura when I walked by and knew instantly. But your aura is still human, and it feels kind of like his did. Tell him that you could tell he was a powerful clairvoyant and wanted help dealing with your power.”

I nodded. “Sounds easy enough,” I said.

“Don’t kill him tonight,” he added after a moment, still leaning over me. “No, not tonight. It would be too much of a risk for you to try, he’s strong. We’ll figure it out, later.”

I nodded again and he moved away from me. “Get up,” he said. I crawled off the bed and squinted in the black. My eyes were better, thanks to his influence I assumed, but not perfect like his. It was still damn dark. He didn’t move. “Go eat,” he said again and I nodded, not questioning; whatever he wanted to do was fine with me. If he wanted to sit in the dark he was welcome to do so. The fridge was empty still so I took money which he’d stolen and left to buy some fast food.

Manhattan was immense and busy and a little frightening, but it wasn’t impossible. I managed to find food. Back at the apartment he outlined a plan for me to kill the pious man. I never felt guilty. After all, it was what he wanted, and that was all I knew how to do anymore.

## Chapter Three

It wasn't for three days that the plan started to work. We'd had to wait until he was alone, or else it wouldn't be possible, and he hadn't been alone until that night. "Ah, there he is," Saxon said after we'd been waiting for nearly an hour.

"Where?" I frowned, peering down. "I can't see."

"Yes, you can. Try harder. He's right by that red car, under the streetlight, walking north."

I looked where he pointed after I remembered which way north was. He held me against him with an arm around my shoulders, because otherwise there was no way I'd be there. We sat on the edge of an apartment building, legs dangling over the edge, across the street from where we lived. I pressed to him, heart thumping in fear even as I looked for my prey. "Oh, there he is," I said finally. My eyes were definitely growing stronger with every day that he fed from me. I could see the people on the street like they were a hundred feet away, not like they were stories and stories down. But I still held onto him because I was afraid of falling. Unless he was there to catch me I knew I'd make a nice messy splat on the pavement regardless of my vision. Thus, he could not convince me to sit there without him holding onto me.

"Okay, now, he's alone. What he's been doing is going to his church every day at three, so you say, and every other night he goes again at about ten thirty. It's ten now," he paused to check his watch. "So let's go to the church. We can beat him there."

I nodded and he pushed off the air and threw us back away from the edge, towards the center of the roof, and I found myself held to him suddenly, hugged against him while he flew. I was slowly getting used to how fast he was, and it didn't seem quite so shocking that it seemed like I'd missed thirty seconds of time.

The wind whipped at my hair, pulling some of it loose from the tie with which I'd pulled it back. I pressed my face into his neck, glad I couldn't see down. Someday I'd get used to it, but not quite yet. Give me some time, and maybe.

He slowed down and landed on a roof. "Hold on," he said, when I started to move away from him. Then he jumped down into an alley, absorbing the impact like it was nothing. He was tall enough that my feet didn't even touch the ground. I wondered if it hurt at all. It should have collapsed his legs into themselves, but he was more than fine.

"There," he said, and I stepped back a bit, looking out of the alley. "The church is right around the corner from here. Go in and look like you're praying until he goes in."

"Will killing all of the holies take this long?" I asked.

"We got lucky with the old woman. This'll be the test to see if you can handle anything hard yet. After all you're only a few months old," he grinned at me. According to him I had been "born" when he "killed" me, or made me immortal at least, so my age started over. It was to keep track of how long he'd been my master because he said in a few centuries we'd start to forget.

"I'll do my best. I'll succeed for you," I said confidently. Of course I would. It was impossible for me to let him down. I just wouldn't fail.

He didn't say anything. "I'm gonna find some rich people to rob, so you can buy food for yourself, while you're doing this. He shouldn't leave for a while after he goes in, twenty minutes or so, but I'll be back by then. Promise. I'll be keeping an eye on your emotions in case something goes wrong."

“I know,” I said. He kissed me and then stepped back into the shadows, disappearing.

I took a breath and went out of the alley, blending casually into the people as easily as he had melted into the wall. The church was covered in blasphemous graffiti on the outside, but I’d never been in. It was a Catholic church so I figured I’d be able to come up with something to do. I knew the religion pretty well.

Actually it was a lot easier to “run into him” than we’d planned. I sat in one of the pews, staring up at the statue of Christ on the cross, thinking, looking like I was troubled. It wasn’t hard. I was thinking of Saxon and living forever and if killing him would be possible for anything.

I didn’t look over when he came in, letting my eyes get a little wide like I was thinking about crying. I didn’t want to push it though, so I just sat and stared up at Him.

I was alone in the church. It was a Friday night and most people had better places to be. I guess we hadn’t planned on that so I was surprised when he came up to talk to me. “You have a very troubled soul, if you don’t mind me saying so,” he said, suddenly next to me.

I blinked slowly up at him, like I was coming out of deep thought. I pointedly flicked my eyes over him, lingering on his collar without the white square. “You’re not the Father,” I said, making it sound like, “it’s none of your business.”

“The Father’s very sick right now. There hasn’t been a service in months.”

“Then what are you doing here?”

“I could ask the same.”

I raised an eyebrow. “I thought you were supposed to go to church for guidance in life?”

“You are,” he smiled, glad I said so.

“Then...” I trailed off.

He nodded. “Point taken. I come to maintain the building, interior at least. Father Matthews asked me to make sure it didn’t fall into disrepair while he was gone.”

“So, you’re just one of the devoutly religious,” I said.

He didn’t answer but I felt him get a little angry. He was young, in his twenties, short black hair, and other than his boom of an aura he was nothing special. Of course, he would be an immense power booster for Saxon, once he was dead. I knew I couldn’t kill him in the church, though. Saxon couldn’t come in to feed off his strength if I did. I’d hate to see him try. I realized for the first that if I had truly believed in God then Saxon couldn’t have made me into his creation. If I stayed in the church, he couldn’t get me. Unless it wasn’t really a holy place, if its sanctification had been lost somehow.

There was a long silence, and I studied the statue again. Of course I couldn’t get rid of him, and I didn’t want to. Not only did he protect me and provide me with everything I’d need, but if I somehow did get away, then he’d kill me, no doubt. I had no desire to die. I pointed at Him then. “That’s wrong, you know,” I said.

He stiffened then, not hiding the shocked anger. “What?”

“The statue. It’s wrong. Christ wasn’t crucified through the hands. The hands can’t support the weight of the body like that. They drove the stakes through His wrists.”

He relaxed again. “Oh. It’s a technicality. Both versions are seen across the world. The meaning remains.”

“I guess,” I said. “Why did you say I had a troubled soul?”

“You look depressed,” he said simply.

I narrowed my eyes. “Oh, you’re a clairvoyant,” I said. “Thanks for violating my soul.”

He looked as surprised as if I’d slapped him. “How do you know?” His voice was low and urgent.

I looked back up at him. “I’m trying to be one.”

One of his eyebrows raised and he sat in the pew beside me – but not too close. “Trying,” he repeated.

I nodded. “My power comes and goes. I guess that’s why I’m here. It’s controlling my life.”

He sighed. “Then you should be glad I *am* here. I’m the only one for miles who could understand what you’re going through.”

“I’ve managed so far,” I said defensively. “I don’t need your help when you haven’t even told me your name yet.”

He looked slightly embarrassed. “Oh. I’m David Zinc.”

I almost said my birth name and remembered that I wasn’t that person anymore. “Nicci Alexander,” I said, using my new name. Saxon had said it fit me better than the one I’d had.

“I’d offer to shake your hand, but if you’re not in complete control of your clairvoyancy...” he left the sentence hanging. Obviously I was supposed to know what he meant, though I didn’t for sure. I supposed it wouldn’t be fun to experience.

I nodded anyway. “Do you want to talk about it?” he asked. “I know a lot about the power.”

“It depends. What time is it?”

“Got somewhere to be?”

“Someone to meet,” I said, deciding that being too vague would make him ask questions and I couldn’t really explain Saxon to him. Yeah, I could hear it now: ‘Meeting someone?’ ‘Yeah, my boyfriend.’ ‘What’s he like?’ ‘Oh, he’s undead.’ *Sure*.

“Quarter to eleven,” he said, checking his watch.

I got here at ten fifteen, so I knew Saxon would be waiting for me. “Can’t, then. Maybe... I’ll come back some other time.”

“I’m here every other night at ten thirty to maintain it until Father recovers,” he offered, letting the sentence hang. I thought he sounded as though he wanted to see me again. Maybe he didn’t get to talk to many people with his power. Too bad for him, since I wasn’t going to be one of them. We’d have to come up with a new subject of discussion or else he’d be on to me.

I nodded, and left without saying goodbye. It honestly hadn’t occurred to me to say it, but as I walked away I realized he would think me a lot more aloof, now. *Maybe he likes a challenge, and it’ll work to my advantage*, I thought.

I stepped out of the church and glanced around first, to make sure Saxon wasn’t right there. But I knew almost immediately where he was; up on the roof, watching me, like he said he’d be. I went casually down the street, until I was out of sight of the church and stepped into an alley. I leaned back on the wall, waiting for him to show.

“Hey, babe,” I heard a raspy voice say from a different shadow than the one I was in. I looked over nonchalantly.

An emaciated, extremely pale man with stringy blonde hair got far too close to me. I said

nothing, staring him in the face. “What’s your specialty?” The lines engraved under his eyes said he was on too many drugs to count. I saw the slightly crazed look that meant he needed a fix and he probably was out. Great. He either thought I was a prostitute or was too far over the edge to really care. Other than the deep marks under his blue eyes he looked to be no older than twenty-five, but the drugs eating away at him had aged him so he seemed nearly forty. It was sad, really.

“What’s your drug of choice?” I asked.

He laughed and it was strange somehow, not right even for humans. Saxon landed silently behind him but I didn’t look at him. After all he might feel like killing this man or something and the element of surprise was always best. I didn’t want to betray him. “Acid, speed, whatever I can get. Rape, sometimes,” he said, his voice dropping low enough to be creepy. His hands caught mine so I couldn’t fight and he pressed against me, into the wall.

“Am I supposed to be afraid of that idea?” I asked, somehow managing to not sound sarcastic.

His eyes narrowed because he’d been expecting me to be scared, and I thought he probably got the biggest kick out of that. I dug my fingers into his hands so he couldn’t let go and held him to me. His eyes widened in surprise and then Saxon put his hand over the man’s mouth, holding back a yell of surprise and fear.

He was taller than the druggie and bent a little to growl in his ear. “You know it really makes me angry when guys threaten my girlfriend,” he said, getting no response. Eyes wide, hooked on mine, but he didn’t try to speak or get away. He wasn’t as stupid as he looked. “Do you know what it means to feel true anger?” Saxon asked and it started to scare even me. I knew what he wanted me to do and I kept myself against him, holding his hands tight in mine.

Then Saxon laughed harshly. “You disgust me. Even now you ache to have her...” he said and I felt his power slide through the druggie, “...when you are so close to your own death. All you can think of is rape and sex when you’ll soon be facing the trials of the afterlife.” From the painfully wide eyes I realized that Saxon had given the guy some feeling that he hadn’t been going through before, much more intensely than he could handle. Saxon said something in my mind and I marveled slightly that he had so much power as to control both of us at once, with some left over. Or maybe it wasn’t as difficult as I’d first thought.

Saxon moved back a little, one hand over his mouth, pulling his head back like he really wanted to snap his neck but had other plans instead. “Did he anger you too badly, Nicci?” he asked then, out loud. “If he did you may do as you wish with him.”

I shrugged. “That’s all right,” I said, and a flash of relief lit the air about us for a moment when the addict actually thought he’d go free. “You can do what you want to,” I finished.

He grinned at me. “It will take only a moment,” he said. I nodded and moved away again, Saxon dragging the man back into the deepest shadows. I went to where he’d been hiding and found a few belongings, suggesting that he’d been recently evicted. A dirt-encrusted blanket left in a pile, where he no doubt curled up against the dumpster beside it. Some porn magazines underneath it. A lighter and burnt spoon, an empty pill bottle. A mangled syringe. I thought he must’ve smashed it when he’d run out of drugs, angry and scared. I wasn’t watching Saxon, I didn’t need to. If I asked he’d tell me all about it later that night. But he’d probably fuck me first. I thought the killing made him horny.

When I thought this was when he broke his neck, the deep snap startling me to look. I

thought for a moment of the now dead man, wondered if he'd had any family, or friends, or anyone who would even notice if he was gone. The look of terror had faded from his face and he was even paler than before. Saxon then continued to drink every last drop from him. He dropped the corpse disgustedly when he was done, licking his lips, and then going back up to me. The gleam in his eyes told me that this killing was no exception to the rule of vampire lust. He touched only my face with one hand, serious for the moment. I swallowed. His hand felt cool from the body's lack of heat. "Did he hurt you?"

I shook my head, a little defensive. "Of course not. I knew you'd come."

He looked satisfied and I put my arms around his neck so he could fly, acting as though I wasn't aware of how fast his heart was beating with not only the new influx of blood but with desire. For a second he held me to him, touching my hair, before he pushed off the ground and we were airborne.

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I dreamt that we were flying again, except this time I wasn't hiding against him. He had his arms under mine, hands on my shoulders, holding me so I could see down. The wind whipped past my face, the lights of the city zipping by beneath me. I hadn't realized he could go so fast. He started to say something to me when I woke up.

The speed of the flight cut off so abruptly it was startling and I woke suddenly, catching my breath in surprise. I didn't let it out for a minute because it was also somewhat surprising to find Saxon staring at me, sitting at the foot of the bed.

I looked at him for a while and he didn't say anything. Finally I had to. "Do you want something from me?" I asked. I hadn't yet explained anything about what I'd said to David; as I had predicted Saxon hadn't asked me much of anything when we got home.

The silence continued and for a moment I wondered if he was dead, like permanent dead, because he hadn't so much as blinked since I'd looked at him. At long last he took a deep breath, letting it out in a sigh. "No," he said. "Tell me what happened with Mr. Catholic."

I stretched and pulled the sheet up a bit more before complying. I left out no details in the story. He didn't move until I was done. Then he frowned. "He wants to talk about clairvoyancy, right?" he asked.

I nodded. "That was what you told me to say," I said meekly, hoping he wasn't mad.

"Okay. You'll go back in a few days. First we have to register Nicci Alexander as a real person." He got up and left for a moment, tossing an envelope to me when he came back in. "I started last week. Your birth certificate, records of adoption by two fictional parents. Birth and death records of those parents. It's all cleared by the law."

I looked at the records. "It makes me wonder how many people are really who they say they are, let alone what species."

He gave me a strange look. "More than you'd think. It took a lot to get those records."

I looked at him but didn't say anything, deciding that it was better I didn't know. He continued. "You have to get a new driver's license tomorrow. Just in case anyone realizes that you're driving someone else's car." Then he frowned. "But you had better be back here by sunset. Don't make me wait for you."

I nodded quickly. "I'll be ready."

He studied me a minute more and then left without saying a word. "Buy some food for yourself," he said at the last minute, out of sight. "There's money on the table."

As soon as he spoke I realized I was starving and I got up to do exactly that. I didn't hear any noise but I knew that he was gone again. For the millionth time I got the feeling that I was doing something wrong, but for the life of me I couldn't figure out what. I did everything he told me to, as soon as he said. I'd never put him in danger. What the hell was I missing? What did he want from me?

Chapter Four

I didn't need to go out to buy food, because I had some leftovers in the fridge, which is what I chose since it took less time. After I ate, I climbed up onto the roof to wait for him to come home. I wanted to apologize about whatever I was doing wrong, and find out what it was.

The wind was incredible from this height. I stood just outside the door for a few minutes, simply looking. I walked slowly out to the edge and made myself look down.

The world swam in black for a moment and I staggered back, gasping. I couldn't breathe. I fell back on my butt and tried to get some air. Everything was so far away, it was so far down, and I knew I'd nearly fallen off. If I hadn't tripped backwards then Saxon wouldn't have had much to come home to. Or maybe just the fall wouldn't kill me, thanks to his power, and I'd experience firsthand all the bones in my body breaking. Yum.

I lay down on the roof, covering my eyes, trying to slow my heartbeat. "Lord," I said breathlessly, and it sounded strange. I frowned then, distracted from my near death experience. I started to recite the Lord's Prayer and couldn't get through the second line. Each word seemed to make my mouth thick until it started to hurt to talk. *Well, there's a hole in my human guise*, I thought. *No scripture for me. At some point I might not even be able to enter a church.*

But Saxon had never mentioned any of this to me. Aside from the effect of religious objects on him, he hadn't mentioned it at all. Why would I be suffering, too? *It's probably just my weakness*, I thought, and took a deep breath to try again. "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven—" I said it quickly like I could get past the vampiric taint if I tried hard enough. But when I got to that point again, the end of the second line, a searing pain struck my throat and I coughed up blood on the concrete of the roof. "Give us this day..." I tried to go on, but I couldn't speak around the blood, ending in a kind of gurgle. I pushed up to my hands and knees so it wouldn't get on my clothes, coughing up AB positive into puddles.

"...Our daily bread..." I managed, and suddenly a white-hot light flashed from the ground where my hands, knees and feet touched, light that seared through my body. I screamed though it lasted only a moment. As soon as I stopped talking, the blood stopped coming up, and I spat the last of it on the pavement. Then I looked at my hands, and my palms were burned a painful, reddish black. I almost cursed 'Mother of God' but thought better of it. I just said, "Shit."

I felt a soft whoosh of air and heard footfalls behind me. "Fuck it, girl, what're you doing?!" I heard Saxon say. He came up to me, and I looked up at him, palms up, sitting on my feet. "What the hell..." he muttered.

"I was looking for you," I said, swallowing against the taste of my own blood. "I came up here to wait for you to come home but I blacked out and almost fell over the edge."

"What happened?" he insisted, kneeling down next to me, taking my wrist to examine the burns. I continued. "I cursed, but I said... Lord," I stammered through it, not enough to make me bleed again. "It felt weird so I started reciting a prayer and... it broke something in my throat, and then the ground lit up and burned me."

He frowned at me. "What?" I asked finally. "It makes sense, I mean, now that I belong to you, religious stuff hurting me."

"No, it doesn't," he said. "It doesn't bother me to recite prayers. I don't really remember

them, but I could speak it..”

My stomach felt cold at the look he was giving me, because it was a look of fear. “I’m... I’m sure I could if I tried,” I said quickly. “It was probably just my weakness. I’m susceptible to your aura and stuff so it’s probably just me.”

He shook his head, frowning. “Don’t try it again,” he said. “In fact, I don’t want you to go back to that church, either. We’ll come up with something else,” He still held my hand, and he looked down at the third-degree burns again. It was just starting to hurt, the kind of delayed reaction you get from being too scared to realize you’re injured. He concentrated, eyes closing; my hand starting to glow again, and I winced, expecting it to hurt. But it didn’t. He healed the wound with his own power, and then my other hand. “Don’t you ever do that again,” he added softly.

I didn’t say anything and for a moment he just looked at me. Then he touched my chin, fingers coming away bloody. “You coughed up that much blood from a couple lines of scripture?” He looked at the puddle, surprised.

I nodded. “Two lines,” I said softly. He licked the blood off his fingers absentmindedly, staring through the ground as he was thinking. Finally he nodded and wiped the rest of the blood off my face, sucking it off his hand. I wondered if it had occurred to him to lick it off me instead. “C’mon inside, you shouldn’t be up here if it bothers you that much,” he said, getting up. He hadn’t let go of my hand so he pulled me to my feet.

“Why didn’t it burn through my pants?” I asked as I stood, finding the knees of my jeans intact.

“I dunno. No flesh touching,” he shrugged, and we started to leave. He turned to look at me one more time. “Why did you want to see me?”

I looked up at him, staring into the brown eyes that saw through me. “No reason,” I said finally. “I don’t remember.” I couldn’t make myself tell him, ask him what I was doing wrong. For some reason the words wouldn’t come out. He looked down at me still, until I was sure he’d know I was lying, then he shrugged and we went in.

“It’s my fault that you’re this easily overcome with religious things,” he said, back in our apartment. “Not literally, like I said, but it must have something to do with my power.” He paused now, and rounded on me again. “Religion only hurts me if it’s something they truly believe in. I told you that before. Do you believe in God?”

The intensity of his tone, and the seriousness of the question, intimidated me. “I... I wasn’t *raised* religious. I don’t know. I mean I guess I... I never thought about it.”

Scrutinizing my face for a long time, he finally nodded. “Doubt might be enough to trigger the power. So I don’t want you to go back into that church. I have to keep feeding from you so it’ll only get worse. I can’t afford to kill any more people, not for a while.”

“If you want,” I said. “Where do you want me to meet him, then, if not the church?”

He thought for a minute. I sat down on the couch, waiting. “He said that the reason he goes there is because the church’s father is sick, right?”

I nodded. “He’s taking care of it.”

He grinned, and it wasn’t humorous. “Well then, let’s go visit this Father. I bet we could make him feel better.”

I raised an eyebrow. I wasn’t quite sure if he meant that sarcastically, or if he’d just heal

the man so that he could get back to work. Either way, it seemed like something he was more than capable of. "I'm sure."

"Well, let's go. The night is still young," he said.

My hands didn't hurt anymore; other than a lingering taste in my mouth, I felt fine. "Sure, why not."

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The hospital was cold and white and uncomfortable. *I haven't liked going into hospitals since... wait, I'm not that person anymore. So never mind. I just don't like hospitals.*

But we weren't exactly in the hospital just yet. We were, as usual, on the roof. "Matthews is the last name," I said. "David didn't tell me any more of it than that."

Saxon sighed. "Great."

"Well... can't you look for him, like, with power or something?" I asked. "Or do you want me to go in and look around?"

"I don't know what the man's aura would feel like, but maybe it'll taste like God," he said, which struck me as a very strange sentence. I started to ask what God tasted like but he distracted me. "Here, I get a rush of power with your blood," he said, offering me his hand. "It'll help." I took it cooperatively and he pulled me against him to bite me. Or so I thought.

Instead he lowered his mouth to kiss me passionately. His fangs slit open my tongue and I felt his power, once he'd mentioned it, spike to a higher level. It was a long while before he broke off. His breathing was accelerated as he stared down at me, cradling my face in one hand, the other holding me against him. "Did you find him?" I asked finally.

He closed his eyes. "There's only three patients in the hospital that are extremely religious," he said. He licked his lips and spoke again after a moment. "God, I love your blood."

I laughed softly and put my head on his shoulder, just leaning on him for a moment. His fingers found the edge of my shirt, warm on the skin of my back. "We could go back to the apartment if you want," I said then. "We don't have to do this tonight if you'd rather do something else."

He looked down at me. "You think that you're my whore, don't you?"

I blinked up at him in surprise. "I'm whatever you tell me to be," I said finally, thrown.

He shook his head and laughed for a minute, and I couldn't interpret his expression. I hoped I hadn't done something wrong. Finally he said, "C'mon, I think I know where he is," and led me down through the roof.

It wasn't until we went through another door or two that the hospital began to fill my memory of cold and white and uncomfortable. I caught his arm before we went out of the last door at the foot of the stairs. He looked down at me expectantly. "Shouldn't we be invisible, or whatever? I mean, we don't look like the best people to be wandering around a hospital in the early morning hours."

He raised an eyebrow. "That is a good point," he said. I belatedly realized he was in a good mood. "There, we're safe," he added, though I hadn't seen him change anything to activate it. He leaned against the door. "Close your eyes," he said softly. "We're going through the door."

I grinned. "Cool," I said. I closed my eyes and he pulled me forward. I kept walking until

I bumped into him, when I looked around and we were in the white hall. He got his bearings and then pointed down a hall. “Don’t talk out loud,” he said. I blinked up at him until I realized that he’d spoken inside my head. I nodded, not mentioning that he hadn’t ever taught me how to speak in his mind, and we went past a few security guards before finding an elevator. I glanced through a few little door windows of some rooms as we went by, and saw some old people sleeping, being monitored. *I guess there are no crises on this floor*, I thought.

He waited for the elevator to go up before he picked me up, holding me against him. “Close your eyes again,” he said — I couldn’t tell if it was out loud or in my head — and I complied. I opened them when we started flying down the elevator shaft, and found myself staring him in the face. I think he wanted to kiss me again. I nuzzled him affectionately, something that I knew he liked. Then he pushed us forward and through another set of doors, without warning this time, so I was very much aware of us passing easily through the solid metal. It was amazing.

He set me down again and led me to a door. The hall was empty so we became visible, and he spoke out loud. “The guy, David, he said that this Father was old, right?”

“Not in exact words, but that was the impression he gave me.”

He nodded. “If he’s in this hospital all the extremely religious people were old. He could be in some private clinic or something, you know.”

I looked in. “Well, why don’t we just ask him? Otherwise we could just act confused.”

He shrugged, and gestured me enter before him. The silent door didn’t warn our arrival but he wasn’t asleep anyway. The man had short, silver hair, and was well into the balding process. Being in the hospital had doubtless deepened the lines in his face. “Excuse me, do I know you?” he frowned.

“Are you Father Matthews?” I asked. He nodded, and I smiled, trying to seem friendly. “Good, we were looking for you. You preach in the church on 40th, right?”

He nodded again, smiling slightly now. “Do you listen to me?”

“Occasionally,” Saxon said, standing close behind me. I still wasn’t sure if we were going to help or kill old Father Matthews. “What’s your condition?”

He sighed, and it showed years of weariness. “I’ve been battling kidney disease for almost thirty years now. It comes and goes. The doctors want to keep me here until I can get a transplant, but I’d much rather be preaching. Tell me, you are...?” he asked again for our names.

“Nicci and Saxon,” he said. “We’re friends of David Zinc.”

A whole new level of understanding lit his face. “Oh, I see. He sent me bodyguards into spooking the doctor into releasing me, eh?”

I found that concept amusing but I kept quiet. “Something like that,” Saxon said, moving from behind me to stand at the foot of the bed. *Distract him*, he said sternly, and I perked up, walking closer.

“I really had to come see you, Father. Or David told me I should,” I said, pulling up a chair to sit beside his bed. He sat up a bit. I looked worried suddenly. “I hope it’s not too late for you, it is after midnight...”

He shook his head. “Oh, no, I could never sleep with the medication they have me on. It’s fine, my dear. Tell me, what is it that troubles you?”

Saxon, purposefully forgotten, was fingering a syringe full of something and now was

leaning casually on the heart monitor on the other side of the bed. *You can't decide if you should get an abortion*, he told me.

*Well, whatever he says.* "It's about a baby," I said, lowering my eyes.

Matthews made a noise of revelation. "Tell me more, my child." His voice was soft, kind, understanding, a bit practiced.

"Well... it was a few weeks ago, like a month and a half, I was coming home from a party. It was close by, so you know, I was just going to walk rather than spend all that cash on a taxi." Saxon had found an IV tube and was slowly injecting something in. I continued. "But I guess I should've, because a couple guys caught me, and..." I broke off, voice wavering as I looked down at my hands. "I went to the doctor, and... I'm not HIV positive but I am pregnant."

"I begin to understand your dilemma," he answered, yawning. "I believe in the strength of every... individual human life," he yawned again. "Excuse me, but... maybe... tomorrow... it is a little... late... you know... so tired..." his eyes slid closed and Saxon turned down the blaring drone of the heart monitor as it flat lined.

"You're pretty good at that," he said to me, gesturing with the empty syringe. "For a minute I thought you'd been raped."

I smiled uneasily, because his tone of voice wasn't entirely happy. "I guess drama class paid off. What'd you give him?"

He studied the syringe for a moment, then shrugged. "I dunno. I'm just glad he didn't go out screaming." He leaned over the bed and placed one hand on Matthews' forehead, the other flat on his chest even while it still held the syringe. There was a familiar swell of Saxon's power and then he grinned at me. "Wow, he really believed. It's too bad for him that public places like hospitals don't require an invitation."

I nodded. "Too bad indeed." I put the chair back, standing. "Our fingerprints are all over this place, Saxon," I said, suddenly worried.

"Well, I'm already legally dead, but you're missing in California, so I guess I'll have to do something about it," He came up to me, taking my hand and disappearing us again. Then he made a sweeping gesture with his hand and I felt power flood the room in a burning wave. "There ya go, it's all clean," As an afterthought he flicked one finger and from the doorway turned the monitor volume back up to how it was, and we left it screaming over the corpse. I wondered briefly how he could have just erased fingerprints – why would a vampire's power ever need to do that? How useful would that have been back in ancient Europe? But I figured that he had practiced it before while hiding from the law, and didn't ask.

He tossed the syringe into an empty trash can and we went out the way we'd come in. Back on the roof. "Well, that wasn't hard," I said. "And you got even stronger. I guess it was successful."

He put his arms around me like we were going to fly again. "Not yet," he said softly.

I frowned, confused. "What's wrong?"

He kissed me again and we shot up into the air, and I gasped into his mouth. After a little bit he broke off and grinned at me. "Now we're done," he said.

I glanced over my shoulder at the ground after a pause of silence. "Why don't you fly lower, like through the alleys or anything? Since the people can't understand it, shouldn't they not even see you?"

“Yeah, but it’s not the humans we have to worry about,” he said over the wind. “It’s the weres and vampires. And I’d hate to meet a faerie in the dark.”

“You mean faeries are real too?” I asked, just as we landed.

He nodded. “They’re not pixies, though, don’t confuse them. Pixies work with other creatures, like they’ll lure humans into the clutches of a vampire or werewolf if you give them something they want. And they don’t look very much like humans. But faeries are, like vampires, quite protective and territorial. They’ll really get you if you surprise them, especially.”

“Isn’t there like a book or something I can read, to know all this stuff?” I sighed hopelessly.

“Well, I gave you my copy of *Dracula* that’s corrected.” I didn’t mention that I’d thrown it out mere days after he’d given it to me. That’d probably hurt his feelings. He continued, “Stoker got some of it right, but I haven’t found anyone brave enough to put the truth into a novel, really. If you find a good collection of fairy tales, or fantasy at least, I’ll tell you which ones are true. It would probably be easier if you just asked me.”

The apartment hall wasn’t empty so we stopped talking and I unlocked the door, otherwise I think we’d have gone through it. “I might do that tomorrow,” I said, taking off my coat. He threw his on the couch. “After I get my license as Nicci Alexander.”

“K. C’mere a minute, I want to try something now that I’ve had two holies,” he said, falling onto the bed with a comfortable sigh.

I could only imagine what he wanted to try. I followed him, though, taking a moment to pull off my shoes. He sat up just enough to take off his shirt and then the wifebeater underneath it. “C’mere,” he said insistently.

I crawled onto the bed, sitting on his stomach with a leg on either side of him. “What?”

He took my hand in his. “Remember how it felt to feel my power in your hand?” he asked softly. I nodded. “My power still rests inside you. Feel for it; put it back into your hand.”

I closed my eyes, searching with a sixth sense for that cool power that swept through me. I found it nestled somewhere between my stomach and my spine. After a little while I managed to move it, and then it came naturally, until I could put it into my hand. I looked at him, waiting for the instruction.

He’d long since let go of me. “Now touch me with it,” he breathed.

I frowned, but put my hand flat on his chest, full of his power. He gasped, back arching, eyes closing in pleasure. I grinned down at him and took my hand away so he could speak. “Ohh, shit, yeah that’s right,” he said breathlessly. “God, do it again.”

I laughed happily that I could do something to please him so. And it was so easy, natural; once I activated the power in my gut, I could feel it moving around, circulating through my stomach, almost pleasantly. I straightened to lay on him, hands on his chest, and pushed the power into him. He gasped again, holding his breath until I cut it off again, when he kissed me hard.

I broke off after only a moment and he blinked up at me in surprise. I could feel the warm skin of his chest, hear his breathing, feel his pulse under my hand, see a tinge of sweat on his face, and staring down into his wide brown eyes for a moment, he was almost too human. Slowly, carefully, I lowered my mouth back down toward his. In that second, when I slid my hands up to his face, with him leaning up to kiss me, breathing hard, I saw the part of him that

had died so many years ago, the part that was left after a couple decades of living alone and undead. For an instant he was so human and real it almost scared me. I kissed him again to block out the fright, feeling his fangs with my tongue. He slid his hands up my shirt, pulling it up until my stomach touched his. Then he broke off the kiss to make me take it off.

Curious, I used the power that I had awakened, coating my stomach with it, and pushed it into him wherever my skin touched his. He caught his breath hard, eyes almost painfully wide, half trying to make me stop, mouth moving silently. I kissed his sternum with the power, and something opened in my chest, with a feeling like I was melting into him, blossoming near my heart, and he cried out.

The next second it was over, and now I was on my back beside him. A heartbeat thundered in my ears and deafened me for a minute, until I became aware of him gasping to breathe like a drowning man. I half expected to have a monstrous headache like a hangover but I could sit up just fine. I pushed up onto one elbow and looked at him. He had his face covered in both hands as he caught his breath, and I felt obligated to speak. "If you want, I'll... I'll try to do it again," I said at last, managing past that heartbeat.

"Fuck no," he shook his head and I could hear him a little better, the pulse in my head slowing. "God dammit, girl, what the hell are you trying to do, anyway? Kill me?" he glared at me.

"Wh, what? No, I just... I was using the power, like you told me to," I stammered, eyes wide.

He burst out laughing. "It's all right, calm down, I was kidding. But don't do that again, not right now. I couldn't take it." I nodded, relieved, and he went on. "It's almost dawn anyway. Why don't you get some sleep?"

"Sure, whatever," I said, crawling under the sheet. The power had left me exhausted and sleeping sounded like a fantastic idea. I took a moment to take off my jeans first. He didn't move for a while, just lying there, like he was recovering. Then he got into bed with me. His arm slid around my stomach, holding me to him. I could feel his breathing in my hair before I went to sleep.

I was back home, in California, for some reason. I walked into my old apartment and frowned in confusion. "This isn't right," I mumbled to myself, closing the door. I turned back to the living room and saw people. For a moment I just stared and then I recognized them. Alison, pale and Irish, red hair lost under the blonde hair dye, her wide green eyes fixed on me. Zackwell, tall and skinny, dark blonde hair cut short after his last girlfriend made him cut it, watching me so intently, like he always did, like a bug in a box. Frankie, dark rich tan starting to fade around the edges, sunbleached-blonde hair in pigtails like a little girl's, blue eyes huge and sad like a puppy's. They all looked so sad, so hurt, it worried me automatically. "Oh, hey, it's you guys," I said, smiling. "What're you doing here?"

Alison replied first. "We've been looking everywhere for you, Julie," she said softly. I saw Zack and Frankie nod. I instantly realized that the reason it all felt wrong was because I wasn't supposed to live there, that I lived in New York.

"I'm not Julie," I said. "And I don't live here anymore."

"What happened to you, girl?" Ali frowned. "You used to be so strong, so solid, it was us always asking for your help. Then one day you show up for work in a stupor and then you barely

say two words to any of us until you disappear, three weeks later. What's going on, Julie? Where are you?"

"Why would you leave us, Julie?" Zack asked. "Why wouldn't you call us and at least tell us where you are?"

"We thought you were our friend," Frankie said.

"*Julie* was your friend," I corrected softly.

"But you're not Julie," Ali said dubiously, raising an eyebrow.

I shook my head. "And I don't live here anymore," I turned back to the door, trying to open it. But it wouldn't. The doorknob wouldn't move; the locks were jammed. *Shit*, I thought.

"You should just call," Zack said softly, suddenly right behind me. "Why don't you just call?" He touched my shoulder and I found myself staring up into his blue eyes, before the dream shattered.

I gasped, sitting up as I woke. I closed my eyes, but I couldn't forget the image of the dream. I couldn't stop thinking about what Zack had said. *Why don't you just call?* Five years of friendship left behind in a night, and I hadn't even called. I looked over and knew even as I did that Saxon was still dead, since it was too early for him to rise. I crawled away from him, carefully, like it would wake him up.

The morning was cool, colder than I was used to, with no sunlight piercing the curtains, farther north than I'd ever lived. I shivered and pulled on some clothes, fixing my hair into a messy bun, sweeping on foundation and eyeshadow as I tried not to think about everyone I'd left behind. I stared at my reflection in the dresser mirror, aware of Saxon's aura mixing through the air around me, like smoke, except it didn't hurt to breathe.

*I look just like I used to, but I'm not just how I used to be*, I thought. My hair was unfashionably long, and normally fell down to my lower back, almost my butt, and shone reddish brown in sunlight. *Of course*, I thought, *I haven't been spending much time actually in the sunlight*. These days it was mostly dark, nearly black. My conflicting ancestral history had left me able to tan, but it never lasted, so now, as usual, I was almost as white as Saxon, only a faint golden color on my shoulders and arms left of the last trip to the beach. My eyes were the only part of me that I'd ever liked, the edge of the iris almost blue, surrounding a pure green. I sighed, exasperated, and tired of looking at myself.

I went out into the living room and fell onto the couch. Still, the dream haunted me. I stared at the phone, Ali's number ringing through my ears. But I knew I wouldn't call her; if anyone, it'd be Zack. I'd known him the longest, and the way he'd looked at me... *You should just call*, he'd said. *Dammit, he was right. My subconscious is always a whole lot smarter than I'll ever be.*

I picked up the phone and stared at it in my hand, still unsure. I desperately wanted to talk to him, but what would he think if I called? *Just think it through, Nicci*, I thought. *What could happen if you called Zack? Your conscience would be satisfied, right? That sounds good. But he'd want to see you, maybe even fly out to find out why you left. And he'd think you were Julie.* "I'm not Julie," I whispered to myself. *Saxon would have a cow*, I realized. *If I contacted anyone from my life it would be directly disobeying his instructions and he'd freak out. He might... he might even kill Zack if he came to see me.* My eyes filled with tears and I slammed the phone back into its cradle, on the corner table by the couch. "Dammit, don't kill Zack," I whispered,

and I wasn't sure if I meant me or Saxon.

I sniffed, trying not to cry, not to be weak. Instead I looked around the living room, the place still unfamiliar to me. The other end table had a lamp on it, but they both looked surprisingly bare. Saxon had chucked all the guy's pictures away first thing after he'd killed him, so the places reserved for frames were too empty, giving the room a bare, blank feeling.

I got up and looked out the window, pulling back the layers of curtains that Saxon had stapled over it. The sunlight streamed in, warm and familiar on my face, but the room was so dark that it stung my eyes to look. I glanced back towards the open bedroom door, away from the pain, seeing the rays falling far short of touching the bed frame where I knew he still lay. The other room was so black inside it surprised me that I hadn't noticed; he'd done an amazing job of keeping out the sun. *I guess he's developed some techniques by now*, I thought. *And I guess I'm getting more used to living in the dark.*

I turned back to the window and looked out, turning my face away from the sun itself, trying to let my eyes adjust again. It faced the street and I looked down at all the people, all the people just living their lives like I used to do. There were so many people, even this early in the morning. Well... I realized it was ten o' clock, so it wasn't really early anymore. Such a cross-section of American culture was suddenly outside my window that I had to smile at it. "Frankie would love it here," I said softly. She'd always wanted to move to the East Coast. I remembered that and started to cry again, covering the window again with a feeble motion. I curled up in a little ball on the couch, and I'd never felt so alone in my life.

Suddenly there was a hand on my shoulder and it startled me. I jerked back and found myself looking up at Saxon. I frowned, distracted for a moment from the loneliness. "I thought you were still dead?"

"You woke me up," he said, sitting down next to me. "What happened?"

I sniffed, wiping my eyes. "How... how did I wake you up?" I found that concept more interesting than the question, and I didn't know how to explain it to him.

He looked exasperated. "There is something binding you to me, you know," he said. "You were distressed, and it woke me up. In case you're in danger it's a reaction for me to help you. Why were you crying?" he added, softer, touching my face.

I shrugged. "It was just a dream," I said. He was looking at the tears on his fingers. "That's all."

He looked at me for a long while, as though gauging my response. "What kind of dream," he finally asked, a little flatly.

"It... I... I don't really want to talk about it," I said, looking down. I hoped he wouldn't push me. If he did I'd have to find some way to explain.

There was another long pause as he studied me, deciding. Finally he sighed, and kissed my forehead. "Fine. I can't stay awake like this, it's too early," he said. "There's money on the table, go out and buy some stuff," I nodded. He got up but paused, like he was trying to find some way to tell me something, but that could have been just my imagination. Then he shook his head and disappeared back into the bedroom. I looked after him a moment, wondering how he could just control when he died, if he could choose when to wake, like sleeping. I shook my head, and I went in to fix my makeup, washing my face first to deny that I'd been crying. I still wanted to call, though I knew better. Saxon could seem deceptively human at times, but I hadn't

forgotten what he was.

## Chapter Five

It only took me about an hour to find the driver's license office, once I'd made an appointment. I figured that if I didn't call first then I'd be in line for hours, and make Saxon wait for his blood, which was not something I wanted to do. He'd directly told me not to, and he might come up with a punishment for me if I disobeyed. I doubted it, but I knew so little about him anyway... I didn't want to risk it. I didn't want him unhappy with me. If he was going to be all I had, then I might as well try to keep him happy.

The office was crowded as I'd ever seen one, but I supposed that in New York I had better get used to crowded places. I also didn't think I'd be driving as much as I did in California but hey, you never know. I had, as usual, a lot more trouble with the written exam than I did with the driving part, but I passed. As it was, I'd just taken the test again to renew my license when Saxon first showed up, so it was relatively fresh in my mind. Whatever differences were between the laws of the two states, I figured it out enough to pass.

I also took the time to buy some food, and get the number of a few restaurants that delivered, so I would be able to actually eat something for the next week until I got used to the city. So it wasn't until almost four in the afternoon that I got home.

I dropped the grocery bags on the floor in front of the fridge, continuing in to put my purse on the table and throw my coat on the couch. Then I went back in and took out one of the trash bags that I'd bought. I opened the fridge and scooped everything out of it into the bag, tying it shut. I wanted no leftovers that were leftover from the previous resident of the apartment. That was just disgusting. The garbage disposal down the hall managed to eat the bag of leftovers and the other stuff from the previous tenant as well, and I was almost done claiming the abode as my own.

Back inside I replaced the food with the few things I'd bought; after all, while there were two people living there, I was the only one that needed actual sustenance anyway. One person doesn't eat as much as one might think. Most of what I got went into the freezer; I ate out of the microwave and the delivery bags more often than I cooked. It was easier.

I stuck something in the radiation box for my late lunch and then I took off my shoes, throwing them by the couch as well. After a moment of hesitation I wandered in to check on Saxon. I wasn't really worried about him – I wouldn't unless he was gone, in which case, I was probably in trouble, but the sun was still up and I knew he'd be home. I was more curious than concerned.

I leaned on the door frame, looking in at him. When I was still in bed, after dawn so he was already dead, I'd noticed the one inconsistency in the personality I'd come to know. He had a tendency to grab hold of my arm, or just me in general, almost like he was afraid. In fact I knew it was fear. I hadn't ever asked if vampires dreamt so I didn't know if he had nightmares, or what the reason was, but now he was curled up around a pillow, the sheet tangled over and under him like he'd been unusually restless. I'd brought dark blue and black sheets because I'd noticed that blood shows up the least on them, and sometimes he didn't feed so neatly. I was tired of having trashed sheets so I'd just given in and bought dark ones. Now, they and the darkness of the room left him glowing white in the surroundings. The closest thing I could think of to the way he glowed was alabaster under moonlight, which I knew was a cliché, but it wouldn't be if it wasn't

the most apt description. What else looks like that? I didn't know anything that did.

His hair was down in his eyes again, tousled some from his form of slumber, and I noticed that the part of it that was supposed to be shaved off was starting to get too long. It didn't look right. My theory of vampires needing haircuts apparently was accurate.

I sighed, turning to leave him be, when I felt something odd happening to his power. I turned back with a frown. As I'd noticed, when he was out for the day, his power, or aura, or whatever it was filled the entire room like fog. I could practically taste it with every breath. It circulated very faintly, almost as though there was a wind emanating from it as well. But now it suddenly was sucked in towards him, like he was its opposite magnet.

I felt it draining from the room, filling him, and he took a deep breath when it was almost gone from the bedroom. He held it a long time before he let it out, and then continued breathing normally for a minute. I watched, fascinated. I'd never before studied what happened to him when he woke. Distantly I heard the microwave go off, done.

I became aware with that sixth sense that he was awake now, just coming out of the sleep stage of the undead rest, and as soon as I put words to the feeling his eyes opened. He didn't look at me, just staring ahead at something, through the sheet, like he was spacing out. There was a look of complete, utter exhaustion on his face, slowly disappearing as I watched. At last his eyes flicked up to see me, and he just looked at me for a while.

Neither of us said anything. He didn't move. Finally I checked my watch. "It's only four thirty," I said, voice strange as it broke the thick silence. "Isn't this a little early for you to be waking?"

"It would have been, but I absorbed again last night, remember?" he reminded me, not moving an inch.

I nodded, understanding. "So, if you get enough of them, will you not have to die every morning?"

"Perhaps," he said softly. Then he stretched out of the little ball he was curled up in, holding it a minute. I studied the muscles of his chest and considered that the sun still pressed to the glass of the windows, straining to get in to burn him. It would be a while before it set. He fell out of the stretch with a deep sigh, now laying out on the bed, arms over his head on the pillows.

"I got my license," I said. "Like you told me to. I cleaned out the fridge and bought food."

He didn't respond for a while, just looking at me. I couldn't read the expression. "That's good," he finally said. I leaned on the door frame again, waiting for him to act. Finally he gestured me come to him and I complied. I crawled on the bed, letting myself fall on my stomach next to him, lower on the bed than he. My feet hung over the edge, and I held myself off the bed a little with my arms.

He took my hands suddenly and pulled my arms out from under me. I fell down on the bed for a second with a noise of surprise and he continued to pull me up halfway onto him, suddenly very close. I half smiled and shook my hair to the other side, watching his eyes trace down from mine to slide hungrily over my pulse. He was cold, but not freezing; vampires don't die exactly like dead people do. Or did, I mean, like they did. I think. Whatever. They don't feel the same. He was, however, breathing, which was a new development. Normally he didn't take in air until after he'd fed from me.

He must've noticed it too but neither of us mentioned the change. He was too enraptured

by my heartbeat to speak. He touched the spot with one finger, almost hesitantly, before he slid his hand to the back of my neck. He pulled down a little with the hand, until my throat was close to his face. I moved agreeably, just happy that I hadn't made him wait. I knew he hated that. My life was easier when he wasn't mad at me.

Finally his lips touched my throat and I closed my eyes, waiting for the bite. He made no move to continue for a little while, just pressing his mouth to my neck, until his tongue slid out to lick over the spot. It surprised me but I didn't speak, not wanting to ruin it somehow. After all he was only doing it because he enjoyed it; what was wrong with that?

I could almost feel his resolve breaking down and his lips parted, fangs sliding over, not quite breaking the skin, almost hurting. His breath was so hot on my neck, so real. After what felt like ages, he sank his teeth in and drank greedily. Even through the induced ecstasy of the feeding, I could feel the warmth spreading through his body under my own as my blood started his heart. When he fed off me it was almost like a kind of mind meld, where I could feel all these things that he was feeling, know what he was thinking. Small, idle thoughts didn't transfer, but if he was concentrating on something then I'd know.

I felt that some degree of bliss slid through him as well, that it was almost mutual, that with every swallow he started to want me more, that the taste of fresh hot blood never failed to turn him on, every drop that slid down his throat a piece of an exquisite moment ready to be savored. I knew he hated to break off but he did all the same.

The world crashed back down onto me and I fell onto him, trying to breathe. He kissed messily over the side of my face, holding me on him, his hands playing over my lower back and sides as he searched for a remnant of the bliss that had left. Against my face I felt the strange texture of the fallen spikes of his hair, the fuzz growing underneath softer and more real. I became aware of the smell of him, fading in once he'd fed, like the body heat activated it. He actually smelled kind of good.

A few moments later I'd recovered enough to move and I stirred, causing him to turn my head so he could kiss me. After a long while he broke off and stared up at me regretfully. "I guess you've got to go back to church tonight," he said. "I can't think of any other way for you to meet Zinc. And I want him dead soon."

I nodded, one hand on his face. I touched his hair. "You need a haircut," I said softly. "I didn't know vampires' hair grew out."

He raised an eyebrow dubiously. "Of course. And I know. I'm gonna re-dye it, too. But not tonight. I'll be close by in case you have a reaction to the holy ground."

I nodded, still so close to him. "But it's at least two more hours till sunset, what're we doing until then?"

"It won't be wasted. Go eat whatever you've made. I'll have a shower, and then we'll see."

I rolled off of him and the bed, going back towards the kitchen. He turned on the bedside light and I stopped, caught by my reflection in the mirror. I touched my neck, frowning. He'd gotten up but stopped next to me, on his way into the shower. "What? What's wrong?"

"This healed so fast," I said, almost in awe. "You bit me not five minutes ago and it's almost gone," Two little pink marks were all that remained of the puncture.

He shrugged. "Like I said. The powers that I get from each draining session carry over to

you.”

“Wow,” I said softly. He touched my arm and then went on into the bathroom. I shook my head after a moment and went into the kitchen, starved and lightheaded now that he’d fed.

I turned on the television after I ate and was flipping through the channels idly when the shower cut off. “At least whoever used to live here had a satellite,” I said to myself, finding MTV on the guide. It was, unsurprisingly, a boring reality show, so I continued surfing until a news story caught my attention. I was frowning at the television when Saxon came out. I think he said something to me but I didn’t notice.

“Look at this,” I said instead. He sat down next to me on the couch.

The newscaster continued. “Fifty-seven-year-old priest James Matthews was found dead of a morphine overdose this morning in his hospital bed by a nurse coming to check on him. Father Matthews preached at a Manhattan church but hadn’t given a service in weeks, as a result of his kidney disease, which he has been suffering from for nearly three decades.” The screen cut to a shot of the hospital room. A pre-recorded interview with a doctor played. “What makes you think that there was foul play, Doctor?” the reporter asked. Reply: “The Father wasn’t prescribed to be taking morphine at that time, for one thing,” he said. “And the police found evidence that it was injected into the IV tube. No one was seen entering or leaving the room.”

Saxon yawned, disinterested. I suppose he was used to being on the news. I looked at him. “How did you keep the cameras from seeing us when we went in?” He shrugged idly. “It’s not hard,” he said vaguely. I kept watching just in case, paranoid I suppose. Then it cut to an interview with a police officer. “We found a syringe containing morphine residue in a trash can down the hall,” the uniform said tiredly. Saxon kept watching, frowning slightly like he’d forgotten something. “We’re trying to pull some fingerprints from the tube,” Reporter: “You suspect the killer used that syringe you found?” Officer: “Yes, we’re working on finding him or her.”

“Aw, shit,” Saxon said. “The syringe. I knew I forgot something,” He got up and I watched him moving around. “The woman reporting was a Spanish chick, right? ...Rodriguez or something.”

“You can’t go kill her,” I interrupted.

He stopped and looked down at me. “Why not?”

“Then it’ll be like a conspiracy. If you go around killing anyone working on the case of the priest then someone’s bound to put the pieces together. Everyone you kill will only be another clue. This’ll all blow over. It’s hard to get prints off something round anyway, right?” I took a wild guess, as I knew nothing about the process.

“They’ve done it to me before,” he glared at the memory. “God dammit, though, I guess you’re right,” he sighed angrily. I started hoping it wouldn’t end up aimed at me.

“What will they do if they trace them back to you? Aren’t you dead?” I asked hesitantly, aware that it could be a very stupid question.

“Yeah, that’s true. The last place I was officially seen was in New Orleans anyway, that’s the last time I got arrested. I didn’t buy this place with any legalities, and it’s a fake name on all the bills, so they’ll probably just think the computer’s wrong.”

“I’m glad I didn’t touch that,” I said softly, looking away. The next story was on a statement the Mayor made about the druggies in his city or something. I found that ironic, since

Saxon had killed that addict right before the father. He was still looking down at me, stopped, also thinking. I finally looked back at him. “Uh... what happens when they find the bodies that you leave? The ones drained of blood?”

His expression didn't change. He answered distractedly, staring through the wall as he thought. “Most of the time they go under the category of ‘unexplained.’ I don't really know. Sometimes it's weeks before they find them and so there's not much anyone can do.”

I nodded. He didn't speak or move for so long I got worried. “You know it'll be fine, you wiped all my prints and I'm the one they could find.”

He looked down at me suddenly like he just noticed I was there with a weird look. “I know. I'm wondering how you can kill Zinc,”

“Oh,” I said. “I'm willing to try going to the church. He'll probably be there, after he heard on the news.”

“That's not what I'm worried about,” he raised an eyebrow. “If you can't even recite a prayer then anything could happen when you try to enter a church.”

I shrugged. “Nothing happened last time,” I said. “And that was the same night as I had that first reaction.”

“Well, you've gotten stronger since then, and I've fed, too,” He sighed, thinking. Finally he continued. “I don't know if there's another way. You'll just go, and see if you can get him to head back here.”

I frowned. “What if he won't buy it?”

“Then get him to take a walk with you. I'll get him in the alley. Whichever way it goes, I want him dead tonight, I'm tired of dealing with him.”

I nodded, glancing at the window. “The sun isn't down yet,” I stated the obvious.

He didn't say anything, like it wasn't worth a response. Instead he came up and kissed me, moving slowly down onto the couch next to me as he did. My hand came to his face, the cool dampness of his hair somehow comforting on my fingers. I found myself underneath him when he broke off, kissing down my neck. He nuzzled the neckline of my shirt, tongue hot and startling. I gasped and he came back to my mouth.

We made out for a long time, until he'd had enough. Then he broke off again, nuzzling my ear. I closed my eyes again, trying to catch my breath. His tongue slid into my ear, and then he moved away again, scooting down so his face was hidden in my neck. I could almost feel his eyes on my pulse, my heart beating too quickly. His fingers toyed with my earring on the far side, and I could feel his breath hot on my skin.

“Now what,” I asked finally. He didn't answer, lips brushing my pulse again. Suddenly, like a switch being thrown, I knew in the back of my head when touching the beat sent a twist of desire through him, like I had known right after he'd first marked me. When I felt his breathing accelerate I knew I was right, that I did somehow know what he was feeling.

His tongue touched almost hesitantly, so hot. “You know,” he mumbled finally.

“What,” I asked and wondered when my fingers had started playing with the hair on the back of his head, other hand on his back. I noticed that he hadn't ever put on a shirt after his shower and that the smooth pale skin of his back was tinged with sweat.

“...it undoes me, your blood...” he said, almost incoherently with lips brushing me as he spoke. I didn't respond, my fingers moving independent of my mind to spin one of the long

spikes around my index finger, noting that it was still wet. He continued after another moment. "It's because of what I did to you, I know, but it's unlike anything I've ever..." as he spoke I knew that his resolve was breaking because my sixth sense told me so; apparently the ability to feel my heartbeat on his mouth was getting to be too much to bear when he broke off.

I had a thought, and wondered if he'd let me get away with it. He looked up at me, half frowning. "What?" he asked, and I realized he could feel what I did just like I shared his thoughts.

"I don't think it's the feeding you enjoy, so much as you like to see how long you can go without biting," I said. He didn't move and I spoke again. "I just was wondering if you might like it more if you weren't allowed to bite me."

As I spoke one of his fingers played over my beat, almost like he was reassuring himself of its existence while he couldn't kiss it. "I might just," he said softly at last.

I felt an enormous pressure lift off of my shoulders suddenly, freeing me to breathe deeper and relax when I hadn't realized I was constricted and tense. Then he was looking down at me calmly again, no trace of want of my blood. "The sun's set," he said simply.

I couldn't quite believe that I'd felt how it was to be released from hiding like he was, that I had shared something so important to his life with him. So I didn't mention it.

I blinked up at him, wondering what I was supposed to do, now and for the rest of the night. He just looked down at me, offering no answers to my silent questions, so I spoke at length. "What do you want me to do?"

His fingers touched my cheek, the side of my face. Still he didn't respond, watching his fingers move. At length he sighed, leaning in to kiss me again. His lips brushed my cheek first, and he stopped. "Will you ever stop asking me that?" he breathed, and I froze. Was he serious? Had I failed so incredibly to reach whatever standards he had set? I swallowed, suddenly afraid. I only partially wanted to be able to meet his eyes, ashamed, but confused.

"I..." I tried to come up with an answer, a decent response. "I didn't mean that..." I couldn't think of anything and what happened next should have surprised me, it would have stunned my old self. I started to cry. My eyes filled with tears and I was unable to speak past the lump in my throat. He moved back to watch me. I shut my eyes and a tear ran down my temple, I was so ashamed.

He touched my chin and somehow forced me to look at him. His face was empty, expressionless, calm. Once he had my attention he touched one fingertip to the tear, then studying it on his finger. "There's no need for this," his voice was so casual that it threw me. I sniffed and he continued. "I never meant to make you cry. I was wondering how much closer I would have to bind us before you were able to figure it out on your own."

Again I was obligated to speak and struggled to do so. "I... well then I'll go kill David for you, and you'll get stronger, and then maybe I'll get smarter."

"You're not stupid," he frowned. "Just ignorant. It will fade with time. But you're right." He pushed up off me and the couch and went back into the bedroom. I sat up slowly, following him in a daze. I stopped in the doorway, the room oppressively dark. He materialized a few feet away, coming towards me as he pulled on a shirt. "As soon as you're ready, we can go," he said. I nodded then, understanding. My eyes were adjusting faster than they used to but I still moved slowly in the darkness at first. He turned on the bathroom light, suddenly flooding half the room

with brilliance, so I blinked in surprise before I found my boots. I had to maintain the same kind of aura tonight that I had the night I'd met David, so I had to change a little.

I put on some black jeans and a tight, black, low-cut long sleeve shirt; the sleeves were made of lace with a rose pattern sewn in. I adjusted the scoop neck to show as much as I could. After all, I had to convince this guy to come home with me, one way or the other. Saxon was gelling his hair in the bathroom with the door open, so I spoke to him as I sat on the bed, putting on my boots. "Should I get him to go to a bar with me or something? Maybe knock him up a bit?"

There was a pause before he answered. "Sure. And don't worry, you've got extreme alcohol tolerance now, so you can drink as much as he does and he won't get nervous, since you won't be affected. It will throw him off guard."

I nodded, and stood, ready to go. I put some mace in my purse just in case, then waited in the living room. It was only a minute more before he came out. He wore loose black cargo pants and a black wifebeater that had a red biohazard symbol on the front. He'd just gelled his hair down like it was. Maybe it was too long to spike up, I didn't know the rules of a mohawk. Anyway, I locked the door behind us and we were off. I hoped that this kill would be easy. I had a lot to think about between my 'ignorance' and my nightmares.