

Night Falls

A supernatural novel

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Chapter Six

Saxon dropped me in a nearby alley and said he'd be on a roof where he could watch me just in case the church didn't like me. So I had a few minutes' walk to wonder what kind of pain I'd go through if it didn't. The burns on my hands hadn't really had time to start throbbing but they'd looked so hideous I knew that, in another few seconds, I would've been in agony. I stared at the doors for a minute when I finally arrived.

That's funny, I thought. *I'm so scared I almost feel like praying*. But the irony wasn't enough to cheer me or make the fear any less. I'd stood outside the door shifting my weight for long enough that I grew self-conscious, aware that Saxon was watching me, waiting. I took a deep breath and reached for the knob.

It was a second after the cool metal touched my hand before I realized that nothing had happened. My heart was thudding too loud to think. I sighed deeply and opened the door. The first step was the hardest but it, too, resulted in no pain.

I walked up to the front, where I could look at the statue of Christ. I wondered if it was real stone, or just plaster. I was carefully ignoring David, who was sitting alone in one of the pews, pretending I hadn't seen him. I lowered my head and shut my eyes, then turned around after a long while, acting like I'd been praying. Then I could really see him.

He didn't look as dejected as I'd been hoping he would be. I just looked at him a minute like I was making up my mind before I went up to him. "Mind if I join you?" I asked.

At length he looked up at me. "Sure."

I sat next to him. There was a long pause before I spoke. "I'm sorry," Somewhere I thought it funny that I'd been there while he died and now was apologizing for it.

He shrugged. "The only part that bothers me, is wondering who had the motive to kill him," he said finally. "I mean, killing alone is bad enough, but killing a priest?" I realized his tone was trying to make light of it. "It just doesn't make sense."

"The police will catch his killer," I said reassuringly.

"I don't care if they catch him or not. It won't right any wrongs."

There was another silence and he looked at me. "Did you come to pray?"

"Partially. I felt bad for you. I mean, I didn't know him personally, but I know what it is to lose someone you know or care about. And it's hard to cope with senseless violence." I kept a serious and interested face while I wondered where I was getting this stuff. I hadn't expected to come up with anything rational to say.

He looked away again. "Well, thanks anyway. But I don't really want to talk about me. What's going on with you?"

I sighed. "Just the normal problems of life," I finished silently, 'that develop when you live with a vampire' and almost smiled. "Nothing special, really. I just moved here, so I haven't

gotten to know anyone or anywhere really well yet.”

“You’d be better off moving away,” he said darkly. “All that happens here is shooting up and shooting others.”

“I had to get lost somewhere, though, and Manhattan is easy to disappear into.”

He looked back at me, interested. “Why were you running?”

“I wasn’t...” I sighed. “Well, maybe I was. I was running from depression I guess. I’d spent too long where I was and I wanted to start over.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” he looked forward again. “There’s nothing good in this city. Everything I touch has a layer of blood on it.”

I remembered anew that he was a clairvoyant at the same time he remembered that I’d said I had the power. “Do you want to talk about clairvoyancy yet?” he was happy to change the topic and turned back.

I sighed. “I don’t know. Not here. It feels too... evil sometimes, to think about it here.”

He nodded. “Do you want to go get a drink or something? It doesn’t sound like you know any good places yet.”

“Sure,” I was glad that it’d been his idea. Maybe this would end up being easy.

“There’s a place right down the street, we could walk if you want,” he said when we’d stepped outside. I resisted the temptation to look around for Saxon, and nodded.

I wasn’t sure if clairvoyants could see werewolves and vampires and stuff so I decided not to mention it as a topic of conversation. After all, anything could happen if I did. I might end up in the loony bin and that would not be the ideal way to spend a weekend.

“So, where did you move from?” he asked, apparently wanting small talk to fill the silence.

I might as well be honest. “California.”

“You really got as far as you could, didn’t you?”

I laughed. “I guess. Sometimes it doesn’t seem far enough.”

“What do you mean by that?”

I made up an on-the-spot traumatizing event. “My brother overdosed eight months ago. I spent too long living in the past, but by coming here, memories sometimes spring up to catch me defenseless.”

“Oh, I’m sorry,” he said softly. “How old was he?”

“Twenty three,” I sounded distraught on purpose.

He cleared his throat and we must’ve been to the bar because he slowed. It wasn’t an impressive place, but it was crowded. Either it was good service or there were just a lot of people who needed a drink. When we were seated in a startlingly empty corner table, as far from everyone else as possible, he relaxed a little more. Since neither of us seemed to want to call attention to ourselves we settled for a pitcher of beer.

He took a drink and sighed. “I felt like my head was going to explode,” he explained.

“How good a clairvoyant are you?” I asked then, curious. “I know hardly anything about it. The power seemed to be born from the agony of losing someone.”

“So you haven’t had it very long.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Right.”

“Well, it does tend to be genetic. Did you inherit it?”

“I don’t know. I was adopted.”

“Figures,” he sighed. “So was I. I wonder if that’s a pattern.”

Nope, I thought. But I didn’t speak, letting him continue. “Either way, the best way to find out about how powerful you’ll get is through whichever family member you got it from. Or that’s what I’ve heard. My legal parents were clueless in the matter. I’ve had it since I was a little kid.”

I nodded. “That must’ve been tough.”

He took a long drink from another glass like I reminded him of that truth. I finished mine, following Saxon’s instructions, though I wasn’t especially fond of the taste. “Yeah, actually. It hit hardest around tenth grade. I couldn’t finish high school. I ran away to Chicago, the closest town I could find, where I blundered into another clairvoyant. Like I said, when one of you doesn’t have control, simple contact can be disastrous.”

“Yeah.” Actually, I had forgotten completely that he’d said that. I doubted now I would be able to get him to go home with me. It was quiet for a moment as I had no idea what to say, but I tried to look shy instead of totally clueless.

“He trained me to use it only when I wanted to.” He sighed, and rubbed his temples like he had a headache. “It took years, you know. I don’t know if I could help you after all.”

I shrugged. “Statistically, I’m going to ‘blunder into’ another clairvoyant any day now. I mean it’s bound to happen in a place like this.”

He ordered another pitcher. I hadn’t noticed that the other one was empty. *At least this is easy*, I thought. I kept him talking until he got tired of being there, and he offered to walk me home. I wondered if he was drunk at all. Saxon was right, and I didn’t even feel a buzz, but I thought he’d drank more than enough to feel tipsy. “It is a dangerous place at night,” he justified. *You have no idea.*

“Sure, that’d be nice,” I smiled, thinking, *I don’t believe this is so easy. He’s walking into his own death.* I wondered how much time had passed, how late it was. I hoped it wasn’t too late. If Saxon had been waiting too long he probably would have gotten bored, and thus the kill count of the night had probably climbed.

Unfortunately that was about the last time I could think that it was going well. Saxon moved ethereal in the night, and pulled David back into the alley we were going past. I didn’t look away from his wide, scared eyes. “See what happens if you’re careless,” he growled. I remembered that Saxon had actually met David once, and seemed to recognize him for what he was. Maybe clairvoyants really could see wolves and vamps too.

I didn't have much time to think about it. While I was also concealed in the alley, I was standing a good distance away from them. I had no desire to watch, subconsciously waiting for that deep crack when he broke his neck. I wasn't expecting to be grabbed from behind.

The guy was taller than me, but not incredibly so. That was about all I could tell at the moment. He clamped one hand over my mouth, the other waving a gesture that made the air around us shimmer like water before wrapping his arm tightly around me, then he shoved off the ground like I was used to Saxon doing. That was when I *really* knew he wasn't human. I caught a glimpse of Saxon's face, eyes wide and surprised, before I was hauled into the air. Saxon snarled at him, nothing human in his face, and then we were on top of the next building. I remembered I had mace in my purse approximately two seconds before I realized it would do about zero percent good.

He spun me around and grinned down at me. I wondered why he didn't try to outrun Saxon; he'd obviously be there in another second, which was the reason that I wasn't scared. "My, you are a pretty thing, aren't you," the guy said. He was, like I said, only about four inches taller than me, with reddish hair tied back from his face. What surprised me the most was how his aura beat along my skin like nothing I'd ever felt.

"You're gonna kill me, aren't you," I said, starting to be afraid.

His grin flashed white in the darkness. "Oh, maybe. I don't know yet, it depends on how you behave." The air shimmered again and I couldn't move, like my muscles just wouldn't respond to run away. It was the strangest feeling I'd ever experienced. I didn't have long to think about it. He pulled me close against him and kissed me hard.

I felt Saxon land a dozen feet behind me. I felt him reassure me in my mind. At about the same time whoever it was broke off and kissed down to my neck, one hand on my ass. He licked my pulse and then he caught his breath and looked sharply up at Saxon over my shoulder. I still couldn't move but he looked afraid.

"Oh shit, that figures," he grinned again, a little nervously.

"Doesn't it though," I heard Saxon.

"You know I had no idea you were a vampire," he sounded definitely more nervous than ever, the only other sign of it his hand digging a fistful of my shirt. I thought distantly he would stretch the fabric.

He snorted. "Well then, you ought to be a little more careful. Let her go so we can get this over with."

I felt the spell dissolve and he let go of me, stepping back. I knew somehow he wasn't planning on running. I turned and was surprised to see that David had been left unconscious on the roof, but wasn't dead. I went to Saxon and he touched my face before he looked back at the other man. "Meet your very first faerie, Nicci," he sighed.

He bowed dramatically. "I am Aisling," he said, "And you...?" Saxon stared a long minute before he gave his name. "A pleasure, I'm sure," Aisling said courteously. "I don't

suppose you'll just accept my apologies and let me go on my way?"

Saxon glared at him. "What do you think?"

"No, I didn't think so," he sighed again, then grinned. "Well, c'mon then. We won't have much time."

That seemed to confuse Saxon but he didn't get out more than "Why—" before Aisling seemed to throw the air itself at him and knock him down. I got well out of the way, obviously.

Saxon shoved back to his feet. Aisling was much closer now and was still grinning. I noticed the air had cut Saxon's face, the blood running down his cheek a moment. He wiped it off on his hand, then licked it clean, not taking his eyes off Aisling. "You will regret that," he growled.

"I didn't *think* it would be first blood," Aisling, again, sounded almost sad.

Saxon snarled again and made a backhanded motion, returning the air attack. Aisling staggered, but had been ready for it. He didn't give much time for a response before he shot something back; I could barely make out what it was. Saxon dropped to let it go by and the backwash of air it left was hot on my face. Saxon shot to his feet and punched Aisling with an uppercut, having somehow moved close enough. The faerie landed hard and it surprised me that he'd let it carry through somehow.

Aisling lay on his back but Saxon just moved back to where he had been, watching intently. There was enough of a pause to make me think that he'd been knocked out before he got up. He touched his face and grimaced, but then grinned again. "Nice one," he said, and was gone.

I don't mean he ran away, he just disappeared with another air shimmer but Saxon whirled like he could see him and blocked his punch. Aisling materialized in front of Saxon, a wayward bolt of electricity shooting past. I wasn't sure which one had shot it, really, the only clue being its point of origin somewhere near Aisling. It was all happening so fast I could barely keep up.

David groaned suddenly and I looked at him, so when I looked back Saxon had more blood on his face and I didn't know how it had gotten there. He sneered at Aisling and punched him again, but Aisling caught his fist instead. Saxon grinned this time and a bolt of power like I've never felt shot out of his fist into Aisling, and he screamed. Saxon darted back again, giving him room, as though he expected his opponent's scream was faked. I wondered how often he'd done this.

Aisling dropped to his knees and both of them were breathing hard. I wished Saxon had taken the time to absorb David, he'd be much stronger, but no such luck. He still lay knocked out on the sidelines. I looked up out of nowhere, on a hunch, and saw that there were three figures suspended in the air above, watching. They hadn't noticed me; their eyes were on the fight.

"Saxon...?" I called to him and they both looked at me. They saw me looking up and followed suit.

"Oh, great," Aisling said, staggering to his feet. "Oh shit!" Bolts of electricity shot from

all three down to the ground, two of them narrowly missing Aisling, one grazing Saxon's arm.

He yelled in pain and confusion, jerking back. "Who the hell are they?"

Aisling had dodged the bolts and caught my arm, pulling me back with him. "They're here to kill me," he said vaguely.

"What the hell are you doing?!" Saxon shouted angrily when I was caught again.

"If you get me out of this you can have your whore back," he shouted, waving his hand again so the air shimmered, before he pushed up into the air, lower than the three were at.

They landed on the roof instead, looking at Saxon. "Is he one of Aisling's?" one of them asked the others, and received a dismissive answer. "It doesn't matter. Kill them all."

"Saxon, get David!" I shouted at him. If he had a moment to kill him than he might be strong enough to deal with this. He was suddenly next to him, picking him up and dropping him a few feet down to the alley floor. "I don't have time for him now," he growled. *At least he took the time to not drop him several stories*, I thought idly.

"Where do you live?" Aisling breathed in my ear. I didn't answer. "Tell me, dammit!" he shouted and Saxon flew up to us. Aisling kept a few feet of safety. Another bolt shot up and he narrowly dodged it. I felt its heat go singing past my face and I gasped. "Christ," he cursed in my ear.

Saxon didn't have long to consider. "This way," he said, reaching to touch Aisling's arm. He jerked back and shot a warning bolt towards him. "Would you calm the fuck down? If I touch you we'll disappear, you asshole."

I almost had to laugh at the oddity of the situation. "Fine, but don't try anything," he growled in response. Saxon had to fling himself down in the air first, another shot going past his head. "Why the fuck are they shooting at *me*?!" he yelled.

Aisling flew down toward him, apparently relishing the concept of invisibility. At least he was happy – he was holding onto me like it was an afterthought and I was left with the very distinct fear I'd be dropped. "I'll explain later, they think you're one of my friends or something."

"What retards," he muttered and I reached out to him. Aisling tightened his grip on me. "Not yet, lovely. C'mon," he prompted Saxon, managing to deflect two bolts that came one after the other. I could feel somehow that he was getting tired. Saxon reached out and grabbed his shoulder, and then I heard the three behind us shout in confusion. "Great," Aisling said, enthusiastically.

"Don't talk, stupid, they can still hear you." Saxon flew towards our apartment building, pulling me and Aisling after him.

Aisling was breathing hard in my ear, and I looked over my shoulder at him. "Are you all right?"

He grinned at me, face close. "Never been better," he squeezed his arms around me pointedly.

"Watch it," Saxon shot over his shoulder.

“Okay, okay, sorry,” he said, but I was more than a little thankful he didn’t let go. Then we landed on the roof. The three hunters or whatever had been left behind but Saxon didn’t let go just in case. “All right, let her go,” he growled.

“Won’t you invite me in?”

Saxon tightened his grip on his shoulder, and I knew he was preparing to shoot him full of power again. “If you don’t, fine, but then you’ll never know why they’re going to be hunting you, too,” he said quickly.

“Damn you,” Saxon growled, but pulled us through the door. Aisling winced, waiting for the impact, until he saw Saxon melt through first and then assumed it was all right. He was holding me with my feet off the ground so I didn’t have to worry about much. In a few minutes we were back in the apartment and Aisling let go of me, falling comfortably onto the couch like he was right at home. Saxon crossed his arms over his chest, glaring down at him. “You have ten seconds to keep me from killing you.”

“The High Court wants me dead, and now they might want you two as well,” he said instantly.

If looks could kill, Aisling would have been engulfed in flame. “How is that *possibly* supposed to keep you alive?”

“Well, you very well couldn’t kill the Court, and neither could I, so we might as well stick together.”

“This is, you realize, all your fault,” Saxon said. I stood there for a minute before I noticed that the bolt that had hit him had left a deep gash. While his arm had healed most of the way there was blood running down almost to his wrist. I touched his arm, frowning, and he glanced at me. “It’s nothing,” he shrugged it off.

“Yeah, but we can’t help that now,” Aisling answered.

“*Why* do they want to kill you?” Saxon sighed long-sufferingly.

“They have a problem with me,” he said vaguely. He saw Saxon’s warning glare and began to elaborate quickly. “Okay, okay, I’ll bite. I used to live in D.C.”

“I’m sorry,” I interjected, couldn’t help it, besides they were both so darkly serious I found it funny.

Aisling grinned but continued. “Okay, you need to understand me. I’m not like one of those tradition bound, got-a-rake-up-their-ass kind of faeries. I hate them with a passion. So pretty much I’ll do almost anything to piss them off. You know how it is,” he paused. “So I got a whorehouse running in D.C., target audience being werewolves, to see how long I could before they yelled at me.”

“And...” Saxon prompted when he paused.

“Well, it wasn’t working, so in a very abbreviated version, I ended up also dealing cocaine, and selling information on how faerie magic works. That only lasted about a month, needless to say,” He seemed very proud of himself.

Saxon laughed harshly at that. "Are you completely insane?"

He shrugged. "But anyway, they ran me out of New Jersey and I came here. They just found me tonight, but I knew they would. They target in on the frequency of my power whenever I use it, and so the scouts that they had planted in this city could find me."

"And now they want to kill me?"

"Apparently. Just in case you were one of the ones who bought information. They went on practically a killing spree in New Jersey. They hate my guts," he grinned like a child.

"Oh, perfect," Saxon said, rolling his eyes.

"Can I stay here, with you guys for a while? I don't think I could go home, now. They've probably already found it."

"You must be joking," was Saxon's answer. "After what you tried to do to Nicci?"

"Well, I was just bored, and I saw a pretty girl standing in a dark alley." His voice was quick to turn defensive. "I wouldn't have killed her. I wasn't going to force her to do anything. I can be persuasive enough without using force..."

"I would have argued if I wasn't paralyzed," I pointed out suddenly, and he looked embarrassed, getting up and coming towards me imploringly.

"I'm sorry. All right? I won't do it again." His tone was very sincere, and he looked like nothing more than scared and tired.

Well... I would like to know something about faeries. Maybe he wasn't really a rapist like I had first thought. Saxon was waiting for me to answer, which threw me for a loop. The idea that he wasn't going to just rip Aisling's head from his shoulders was pretty surprising. I looked at him and shrugged. "It's up to you, isn't it?"

He gave me an odd look but shook his head, warningly. "If you touch her again, then I will send you to them myself," he warned.

"If you insist," Aisling said with a weird cocky grin.

I shook my head to clear it and went into the bedroom, sitting on the bed to take off my boots. I could hear them talking for a few minutes longer – it sounded like a lot more threats – and then Saxon came in. He kicked the door shut as an obvious hint to Aisling and sat down next to me. I continued what I was doing, not looking at him.

After a long pause he made me look at him. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I got up and found a blanket, throwing it through the doorway at Aisling. "Here."

"Thanks," he said. He looked like hell. I knew then that Saxon could have killed him, if it hadn't been for the interference. They'd both taken about the same damage, but Aisling wasn't strong enough to take all that in stride, like Saxon had.

"Something must be wrong," he watched me.

I shrugged and went into the bathroom. I wet a washcloth and came back, starting to wipe the dried blood off his arm. Not all of it was dry, but the gash had finally healed over. "Does it

still hurt?" I asked.

He was watching me work on his arm, and he shook his head. "Very little. It's nothing, I told you."

"Well it looked like hell," I justified my actions.

"I wasn't complaining," he said softly. It was silent until I was done. There was only a pink line left from the shot crossing the muscle of his upper arm. I started to get up and he caught my arm, keeping me there. I looked him straight on, and he frowned, letting go. "Dammit, Nicci, what's the matter?"

I didn't answer him, almost couldn't. I was hardly sure myself. He took a guess. "Do you not want Aisling here?"

The question somehow startled me. "No, I really don't care. It seems logical to let him hide out for a while, until we could do something about the Court, or find out if they're really after you. They sound like they'd be a pain in the ass. And I think you'll keep me safe from anything he tries."

I started trying to wash out the washcloth, but it seemed sort of like a lost cause, so I just left it in the sink to dry a little before I threw it out. I wandered back in, and he was still brooding on the foot of the bed. "Did something happen while you were with David?"

I shook my head. "It went fine. It was his idea to go to the bar, and his idea to walk me home."

"Um..." he fell back on the bed, rubbing his temples like he was thinking hard. I found my purse again, and took out my brush, starting to work on my hair. All that flying tangled it. I hadn't thought to pull it back earlier so I was left with some work to do. He spoke so suddenly that it startled me. "I got it," he sat up quickly, pointing at me with his vehemency. "You feel defenseless because it's the second time that you've been harassed in a week."

I cowered back from him, raising my hairbrush defensively, and he grinned, dropping his hand. "I guess," I said, looking away and taking my earrings out.

His smile faded and he thought for a minute. "You could learn how to shoot," he suggested after a minute. "Silver bullets are no myth. They affect everything but faeries."

"Everything?" I frowned. "Meaning..."

"Wolves, vampires, pixies, most demons... actually all werereatures... witches and necromancers, since they're generally human anyway, zombies, if you get a good shot in, ghouls..." he stopped listing things off when he saw the look on my face. "What?"

"From the rate things are going, I'm probably going to end up meeting all of those, aren't I?" I said helplessly.

"Not if I can help it," he sounded strangely protective. "I wouldn't want to meet most of those either."

"Fine, but wouldn't I have to go during the day?" I asked. "To the shooting range, I mean."

“Yeah, so?”

I shrugged. “I dunno. I just thought you had to have a voucher or something, I haven’t got anyone.”

“It’s not hard to learn. I could probably teach you. I used to have a few guns,” Idly, I wondered what had happened to them, but decided that I didn’t really want to know.

I shook my head. “Think about that. Where could I practice during the night that people wouldn’t get either suspicious or angry about the shots going off?”

“Yeah, good point,” he said. “Whatever. It was just an idea.”

“I’ll think about it. But... thanks.”

As though he read my mind, he said, “Go eat. I’ll be here.”

I was starving, so I went out into the kitchen to find something to eat. It looked like Aisling was unconscious he was so asleep, although he had taken the time to put the sheet on the couch. Although it looked like he would sleep through a nuclear strike I tried to be reasonably quiet. But he’d have to get used to sleeping during the day, living with a vampire. I had, mostly.

Momentarily I wondered why it wasn’t weird to think that the man who had just tried to kidnap me with who-knows-what intent was now sleeping on the couch. I dismissed my concern with the knowledge that Saxon would protect me, and if he wasn’t worried about him than neither would I. But it was still out of character for him not to retaliate with violence.

I looked through what I’d bought and decided that I didn’t want to put any effort into it so I stuck one of the multiple frozen dinners into the microwave. I leaned on the counter, waiting for it to cook, and heard the shower come on.

My mind wandered to Aisling, so I found myself looking at him. He’d let his hair down and it was hard to tell while he was laying down, but I thought it would fall to about shoulder length. Under the light of the end table lamp, it was even more red than I’d first thought. I assumed it was natural. It would be really hard to get that color otherwise. The grin that I’d realized was almost perpetual was now absent and his face seemed strange somehow without it; definitely not so boyish. His eyes were a green so intense, it was like they’d been colored in with a Crayola marker, clearer than I’d ever seen. There was a kind of ethereal air to his looks, but I couldn’t quite put my finger on how I could tell he wasn’t human. After all he had no fangs, his eyes were normal enough, everything was right, but... it was almost like the air about him glowed with some special touch that made you want to look at him. Maybe that was how I ended up looking at him, I realized. It just seemed right to study his face, his bare chest...

I turned away, a little unnerved, because the longer you looked at him it seemed like the prettier he got, and that quickly became creepy. The last few seconds on the microwave counted down at last. I took the plastic off the dinner, letting it cool off, pouring myself some Coke while I waited for the food to reach a feasible temperature.

When I looked back at Aisling, he was awake and watching me. I nearly jumped out of my skin. “Holy shit!” I jerked so hard I spilled cola on the floor, and he grinned.

“Sorry,” I was almost glad he was smiling; otherwise he was so pretty it was almost creepy. I wiped up the spilled drink, and he didn’t speak again until I stood up. “D’you have anything I could eat? I’m starving,” he sat up, tying his hair back again.

I shrugged, moving around the kitchen counter to the table on the other side. “Help yourself. I thought you were asleep.”

He smiled at me as he went by. “I smelled food.”

I sat down to eat, doing a decent job of ignoring him. After he chose something to eat I felt him watching me but pretended I couldn’t see him. At length, he spoke. “You never really told me your name.”

I looked over at him, leaning on the counter. I decided Saxon wouldn’t mind if I talked to him a bit, but I knew Saxon had used my name in front of him already. “Nicci.”

He nodded. “That’s nice.”

I shrugged again, looking back ahead. “Saxon gave it to me.”

There was silence, broken only by the whirring of the microwave and the sound of the shower. Finally Aisling came to sit at the table with me. “How did you end up with him? You don’t really seem like his type.”

“He hasn’t finished with me yet,” I said, a little defensively. “If he wants you to know how we met, then he’ll tell you. I’ve got no reason to.”

He raised an eyebrow. “So you’re being remade, huh?” he ignored the fact that I was being rude to him on purpose. I nodded. “Why wouldn’t you be able to talk to me about the two of you?”

I wasn’t looking at him, concentrating on my food. He had to wait until I swallowed to get an answer. “If I tell you something, and it turns out he didn’t want you to know it, then he’d get mad at me.”

“Does he hit you a lot?”

I looked up at him sharply, appalled at the idea. “No, never once.”

He raised his hands in a defensive manner. “Well, sorry. Why else would you be afraid of him getting mad at you?”

Why else indeed? I wondered. “I’ve got no reason to make him angry. I wouldn’t gain anything. If I’m going to be with him for eternity or whatever, then I might as well try to make it go smoothly.”

He was studying me intently. “He forced you into this, didn’t he? It’s obvious. I mean, if he’d bound you to him out of love, then you’d be gushing to tell me how you’d met, all the details.”

I met his gaze evenly. “I will not discuss him with you, Aisling,” I said carefully. “Either ask him yourself, or forget it.”

He half smiled at me, but it wasn’t so nice. “Wow, he’s really making you a bitch, isn’t he?”

“Your food’s done,” I said, smiling sweetly at him.

He got up after another second and brought it back to the table, finding silverware himself. “Okay, I won’t ask about him anymore, I promise,” he said, sitting across from me.

“Good.”

“But I get the impression that there’s not much to you yet other than him, if he’s remaking you himself.”

I shrugged, and the shower cut off. “Why don’t you ask him what he’s going to make me into, if it means so much to you?”

He smiled again and started eating. I didn’t hurry to finish so I could leave. I wasn’t afraid of him, not when he so feared Saxon.

My vampire appeared in another minute, but he just leaned on the door frame, watching Aisling, who didn’t notice him, back to the door. I made no move to look at him, give him away.

Aisling gave in and spoke first. “Look, I’m not gonna apologize for asking questions, okay? It’s something that you’re going to have to deal with eventually.”

“Really,” I said casually, ignoring his sincerity.

He frowned. “I’m not kidding. One of these days you’re going to realize that you’ve fucked yourself by trying so damn hard at all the wrong things.”

Saxon came right up behind Aisling and I realized he’d become invisible. He leaned in close and said, “Boo,” and appeared again. Aisling jerked in surprise but managed to not knock over the chair. Saxon grinned. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

He pulled a chair from the side of the table and sat next to me. “Beautiful speech, by the way. You are quite eloquent, I admit.”

Aisling grinned again, apparently over it. I wished I could just smile and make it all okay. “You have to be able to talk your way out of things when you’re a faerie.”

“I get the impression that you need that skill more than most,” I said, standing to throw out the plastic tray. Aisling’s grin widened. “True, but it’s always fun.”

Saxon was still watching him carefully. I stayed in the kitchen a minute longer, to see what would happen from a safe distance. “Was it fun when you fought me?” he asked finally, sinister to the extreme.

Aisling’s grin faded. “Hell no. You were going to kick my ass if the scouts hadn’t shown up.”

Saxon smiled again, leaning back in the chair. “Keep that in mind.”

I leaned on the counter, watching, apparently forgotten. “Afraid of my potential?” Aisling asked, smirking. Saxon laughed harshly. “Or maybe you’re afraid that your serving whore will decide to serve me instead?”

Saxon shoved up to standing, backhanding a slash of power at him. It smacked Aisling in the face, drawing blood across his forehead, knocking him and the chair over backwards. I froze, for the first time worried about the state of the apartment with them both living here. Saxon

didn't move, hand still extended in the gesture. "You will not stay here much longer if you continue to speak of her like that," he said, low and sinister.

I scanned the room and realized there was no way for me to escape into the bedroom, out of the way. Aisling pushed up to sitting, but made no move to stand. He crouched on the floor a moment, almost in a combat stance, staring up at Saxon. Finally he raised his hands harmlessly. "Okay, man, I'm sorry."

Saxon lowered his hand and sat down again. After another minute, Aisling stood the chair up again, the tension thicker than concrete. I sighed. "Okay, I'm going to say this slowly," I said, walking to the bedroom doorway. "I'm going to have a shower. I would appreciate it if the two of you could restrain yourselves from destroying the apartment at least until I come out," Aisling grinned. "Okay?"

Saxon smiled a little, and nodded. "Fine," Aisling said, a little bitter. I turned to go and Aisling muttered loud enough to be heard, "He started it anyway."

Saxon laughed and I made an over exaggerated noise of frustration, but continued in. I turned the water scorchingly hot and tried not to think about anything. Too much weird shit had been happening for my tastes and I didn't really want to think about weird shit. I was just glad Saxon seemed even *slightly* amused by Aisling, as oppose to unstoppable rage or something. I shook my head and focused intently on thinking absolutely nothing. My head felt too full.

When I came out, Saxon and Aisling were still in the living room. I assumed that they were getting along. The bedroom door was only an inch ajar so I didn't worry that I was only wearing black jeans and a bra. After another minute I found a different shirt than the long-sleeved one; I was too hot after the shower to want to wear it. It was red with a keyhole neckline, and most importantly, short sleeved. I pulled it on and decided I had to socialize.

First I smeared on some foundation again, and some eyeshadow. I could overhear what they were talking about, but it was confusing. Aisling was saying that they were all stupid, but once in a while, you'd find one with a use, and he told a short story where someone had saved his life. Saxon argued that the giant furballs were only good for punching bags. I guessed they were making fun of werewolves. *Well, as long as there's no property damage*, I thought.

When I came out the conversation interrupted when Saxon spoke to me. He lay on the couch, Aisling sitting in a backwards chair from the table. The sheet was piled on the floor but since Aisling didn't care, and it would be his problem, I didn't care. "Hey, tomorrow night, remind me to go steal a computer," he said.

I nodded, ignoring how weird of a request that was. "Sure," I said it faintly dubiously. He held his hand out to me and I went up to him. "But where are you going to put it?"

He shrugged, holding my back to his chest, reminiscent of how I'd woken that night so long ago... "There's room in the bedroom if we try," he said. I remembered waking to hear him whispering things in my ear, remembered the blinding headache.

I thought for a second. "Saxon, how could you possibly steal a computer? I mean, security

aside, it's a big box, and awkward."

"I could figure it out," He sounded sort of sullen, like I'd made a good point.

"Okay," I sighed. No need to argue.

There was a knock on the door, strangely enough, considering how late it was. Saxon gestured to Aisling. "Would you get that."

Aisling shrugged, looking out the view first. "It's some middle aged guy," he said. I didn't point out how vague of a description that was.

"Open it, I don't know," Saxon said.

Aisling opened the door, and the guy frowned at him instantly. "Hey, who're you? This apartment's only supposed to have two people..." It was the landlord; a hyperactive, nervous man who Saxon had had no trouble intimidating. Saxon gave a long-suffering sigh and reluctantly got off the couch. I got up and watched. Saxon pulled him into the apartment and Aisling shut the door. "Oh yes, I meant to inform you," he said. "We've got a new tenant for a while, is that a problem?"

The shorter man shook his head quickly. "Oh, no, I don't care, in fact, that's even better, having a faerie here too, it's perfect."

Aisling stiffened. "Relax, he's a minor clairvoyant," I said, leaning on the kitchen counter. He shrugged and came over to stand next to me. Somehow the landlord ended up trapped in the kitchen, surrounded, and he looked nervous. "What do you mean, perfect?" Saxon frowned, crossing his arms over his chest. He was still wearing the wifebeater, and the resulting view of his muscled shoulders was pretty sinister when matched to his glower.

"I have an offer for you," he said, pulling an envelope out of his jacket pocket.

"An offer," Saxon raised an eyebrow.

"Oh yes, uh-huh, here," he handed the fat envelope to him.

Saxon opened it, and both eyebrows went up. He dumped its contents out onto the counter. A pile of cash resulted. "And this is because...?"

"It's the total rent that you would have owed by now, and two hundred dollars more," he looked apologetic. "I'm sorry, it's all I had."

"Why are you giving us money?" I asked. "Isn't that kind of what we're supposed to give you?"

"Well, like I said, I have an offer," he grinned, rocking on the balls of his feet. He was obviously proud of his plan. "There's a few wayward werewolves that live on the first floor, but other than that, you're the only preternaturals in the building, excluding myself of course. The wolves are constantly causing commotions amongst themselves, pack feuds or something. So the deal is; if you keep the wolves from bringing down the building around our ears, then I'll pay you twice the rent you'd owe every month."

Saxon gave him a look. "Of course it would be up to me when we'd back out, right?"

The man grinned nervously. "I'm not stupid. I don't make demands of vampires or

faeries, let alone a group of them,” I didn’t think two counted as a group, but it didn’t really matter. “So every month I’ll give you the cash and then when I call, you go check on the dispute, okay? They’re ready to rip me to shreds at this point, and I do not have the powers to challenge.”

“Like I said. Very minor,” I sighed softly.

“How many werewolves are we talking about here?” Aisling asked, wary.

“Four, actually. Three apartments. Two of them are brothers, live in the same place. They’re generally calm but around the full moon they get... um... antsy. I get complaints from the humans,” he grinned, apparently amused at that thought.

“Fine,” Saxon said. “As long as we’ve got the incentive.”

“Oh, great, wow, fantastic,” he beamed. “Thanks a lot, you have no idea...” he trailed off when Saxon forcibly pushed him out the door, locking it. While he was turned Aisling slid his arm around my waist. I pushed at his shoulder until he let go, grinning, and I went back to sit on the couch. Saxon went into the bedroom, stopping in the doorway. He looked back at Aisling. “You’ve still got blood on your face, you know,” he said.

“The bathroom’s in there,” I pointed helpfully. He touched his face and grimaced, having forgotten I suppose. He left to wash it off. I looked at the clock on the answering machine, and saw we had only about two hours until dawn. A few minutes later Aisling fell onto the couch next to me, not quite touching, but very close. “Don’t push him at this hour,” I warned him softly. “If you do I can’t help you, he could do anything.”

He nodded. “It’s a vampire survival rule, not to bother them near dawn.”

I yawned. “The blood’s gone, but you still look like crap, you know. Get some sleep already,” I said, getting up.

He laughed and I went into the bedroom. Saxon was sitting on the foot of the bed, holding his shirt in his hands. He looked up at me when I came in. I shut the door, falling onto the bed. I yawned again and he fell backwards to lay next to me. “You’re not getting tired, are you?” he murmured, suddenly very close to me.

I smiled at him. “I got up way before you did today, I’m allowed to be tired.”

“I remember,” he said seriously. “Do you have nightmares often?”

I shook my head, and started to ask a question. I thought better of it. “Never mind,” I said softly.

He frowned. “No, what?”

“It was a stupid question.”

“Ask me,” he instructed, and I sighed.

“I was just wondering if vampires dream when they die,” I looked up at the ceiling, fingers laced on my stomach. I could feel his eyes on my face.

“That’s not a stupid question,” he contradicted me.

I didn’t look at him. “Do you?”

“Yeah, all the time,” he said softly.

I decided not to push that subject, a little afraid to know what he dreamt about, and changed it. “You surprised me earlier, the way you yelled at Aisling about me,” I said suddenly, and wished I hadn’t.

He went very still. “What do you mean?”

I tried to act natural, even when he’d turned so alien. “It surprised me, that’s all. I think it surprised him too.”

There was a long pause until he, surprisingly, responded. “I’m not going to let him insult you,” he said, and made me look at him, touching my face. “Promise you’ll tell me if he bothers you again,” he frowned. “If he does, he’ll hear from me. He doesn’t have to stay here.”

I nodded. “I promise,” I said softly.

He moved in to kiss me, hand still on my face. It was shorter than I’d been expecting. He sat up. “Why don’t you get ready for bed,” he said.

I frowned quizzically. “There’s a couple hours more before dawn,” I said.

“So?”

“Well, I... just thought I was to wait until dawn to go to bed.”

He shrugged. “Both you and Aisling are exhausted. You did get up early and I beat the shit out of him,” he grinned. “It doesn’t bother me if you go to sleep early tonight.”

I nodded, moving to follow his instructions. I was in bed in a few minutes. Saxon put the lights out and I realized I was actually kind of tired when it was so dark throughout the apartment. A minute later he crawled into bed with me. He didn’t touch me, like he thought I was asleep or something. It felt wrong somehow to be sleeping with someone without touching them. I moved up against him, putting my head on his shoulder, arm around his waist. He put his arm around me but seemed surprised. “Maybe I’m not as tired as I look,” I said softly. He kissed my hair but didn’t speak.

I couldn’t sleep just yet, and found myself thinking. *So vampires do dream. That means I was right, and he does have nightmares when he grabs at me like that. But I don’t even want to know about what they are; that’s too personal to ask him.* I realized that the main reason I’d snuggled up to him was because I didn’t want him to have nightmares. *What, I marveled, it would bother me? Yeah, I guess it would, to just stand by while he suffered. Strange, but yet...* I tried to stop thinking about his sleep disorders and ended up thinking of how startlingly warm he was against me. Like a real person.

He interrupted my chain of thought. “I thought you were tired,” he said.

I looked up at him. “There’s a lot on my mind,” I said softly.

He was staring at me with the gleam in his eye that said he was thinking of sex. I turned my face away again, wondering if he knew I could tell. I sighed deeply, pressing closer to him. I could hear his heartbeat in his chest, under my head. After another minute I looked up at him and he kissed me again. This time it went deeper, more insistent. I broke off at length. “I thought you wanted me to sleep.”

He grinned. “Oh, I never said I *wanted* you to sleep. I just said you should,” I returned the smile and he fell serious again, almost too serious. “You know I wanted to kill him for touching you like he did,” he was so close to me I could feel his breath on my face. “But since I couldn’t I just got jealous.”

I started to remark casually, but frowned. “You got jealous because Aisling kissed me?” I asked, slightly disbelieving.

He didn’t say anything for a long minute. “Of course,” he finally said. “Why wouldn’t I?”

I didn’t have the endurance to wonder about that one. I tried to forget the issue. “At this point he’s got dozens more reasons to be jealous than you,” I said.

He smiled again, but different. “Really,” he said softly.

I found my hand on his neck, his face, by now a familiar touch. I nodded. “He seemed to want me for some reason,” I murmured, studying him, so real, so human, but so unknown. “And I’d think that the fact I’m shut in here with you would bother him.”

“Actually right now he’s probably asleep,” he said. “Why do you not understand how he’d want you?” I didn’t answer, looking away. He caught my chin. “You’re not ugly, you know,” he said.

“I know,” I murmured, still not looking at him.

“Didn’t I tell you once how hot you are?” he insisted, close to me again. I nodded.

“I don’t want to talk about me,” I whispered when he was just about to kiss me.

He closed the distance, but after a minute, he broke off. “We don’t have to talk about you,” he said, watching me closely. I didn’t look at him. He must have seen something, though, because he let go of my face, falling back onto his back. “Go to sleep,” he said, and I felt his power stir in me a moment before the exhaustion started to suck me down. I was so close to him, pressed against him again, the last thing I felt before I fell asleep how warm he was.

Chapter Seven

This time, when I woke up, I felt perfectly fine, and it was nice. It was also well after noon. I lay in bed a while, dreading getting up. I looked over at Saxon, on his back beside me. He was, again, breathing. I touched his face and he didn't move, and felt cool to the touch. I thought it was strange how human he seemed, even in death.

I got up and dressed, peeking out the door first to find Aisling without walking into him. He was sitting at the table, eating again, and he glanced up when I came out. "Good morning," he said.

"Yeah, right," I sighed, falling to sit across from him. "How long've you been up?"

He shrugged, answering after a moment. "About an hour. I had a shower already. You slept through it."

I nodded, a little startled that I'd missed a guy coming into my bedroom while I slept. He continued after a moment. "Aren't you going to eat?"

I shook my head. "I'm not hungry."

"You know," he said after a long silence, "I take back what I said."

"What'd you say?" I looked at him.

"That you didn't look right with Saxon, not his type. I take it back. You guys looked so natural sleeping together. He looked *so* human."

I slumped forward, hands over my eyes. "Aisling, why the hell are you trying to piss me off?"

"Natural talent," he said.

"You're not human either. I don't know what the hell I am now. What I'm turning into. What does it even matter? He looks out for me. He provides for me. I don't care if he dies every day."

"You 'provide' for him more than you'll ever know," he said. I looked at him again. "Vampires are very picky about who they feed from. And I don't mean for pleasure, because they certainly enjoy it all the time. You must have attracted his attention... oh, I'd say, a few weeks before he bit you."

I frowned. "He told you how we met?"

"Nope. I was guessing. The way I figure it, he sees you, follows you a while, and then attacks you, bites you, makes you his," He must've seen the incredulous look I was giving, and continued. "Look, I'm serious. Think about it. You've flown with him. He can see people from a mile off in the sky. You just must've gotten his attention somehow. Did you have a boyfriend when you met him?"

I shook my head, staring at him. He shrugged. "Well, then he didn't see any competition. No significant others to ask questions when you started acting funny. Don't feel bad. They do

that all the time.”

I already had a headache and I'd been up for thirty minutes. “You are such a bastard, you know that?” I sighed, rubbing my temples. “You're going to try any way you can to make me hate him.” He shrugged again, indifferent. I shook my head. “It's too bad. I was hoping that I'd get along with you, too.”

He looked at me differently. “Really?”

I nodded. “I don't know anyone since we just moved here. I was hoping that since you were going to be here for a while it wouldn't be just another way for life to suck.”

“I don't have to be a bastard,” he said. “But you're a bitch to me. It's a natural defense.”

I sighed. “Okay, fine. We're both horrible people, right?” He grinned, nodded. “So how about we start over, and try to be *not* horrible people?”

He extended his hand. “Sure.”

I didn't want to touch him for some reason, but I wasn't going to be a hypocrite, so I took his hand. “Deal,” I said softly.

Then I got up, finally hungry. Regardless of the time, I had some cereal. “What time does Sleeping Beauty normally get up?” Aisling asked after a minute, gesturing to the bedroom door.

I laughed for a while at that one. “Uh...” I managed after a minute. He smiled uncertainly, like he hadn't realized that would be funny. “Well, yesterday he got up at... some time close to four.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Really?”

I nodded. “Is that weird?”

He shook his head at me. “God, girl, you really are kept in the dark, aren't you. Most vampires can't get up until seven or eight.”

There was a long pause. “Seriously?” I finally asked. He nodded. “Wow.”

“He's eaten some of the devoutly religious, hasn't he?”

I nodded. “He was about to get his third when you showed up.”

“That was the guy he was about to do in?”

“Yeah. His name's David. I have no clue what I'll tell him now. He's probably figured out that I'm not a clairvoyant like him, just bait.”

Aisling grinned, but less humorously. “I could probably get hold of him.”

“I don't know where he lives or anything. This is going to suck, trying to get him from going to the police.”

“There's no telling how much he remembers, either. You did get him trashed first, didn't you?”

I nodded again. “Yeah. I don't know what to do. Saxon probably does.”

“Well, it's three fifteen now. He'll get up in about an hour. You can ask him then.”

I sighed, having finished eating. I put the bowl in the sink with water in it, then went to sit down on the couch. I didn't have time to do anything involving leaving the apartment, so I had to

kill an hour.

“Wait a minute,” he said.

I looked up at him quizzically. “What?”

He frowned. “You said you don’t know what you’re turning into?” I didn’t answer and he continued. “Well, why the hell didn’t you ask him? Don’t you want to know?”

I stared ahead. “Sometimes... I wonder if he isn’t supposed to be telling me without prompting,” I said softly.

“He is,” Aisling said.

There was a long pause. Neither of us said anything. I wondered for the first how much he hadn’t told me. “Look, I’m sorry if I shouldn’t have said that,” he finally said, breaking the long silence. “But I really thought that... he would have told you something.”

“All he’s said was that I had one of his marks,” I said softly.

He sat down on the couch awkwardly. I shook my head. “I can’t think about that now,” I whispered. “I... I really can’t,” I un-muted the television, killing the moment since I desperately wanted it to end.

Television is an easy way to kill an hour, so it wasn’t long before I felt the suction of Saxon’s power, like I had yesterday when he woke up. Aisling looked at the door when he felt it. “That’s Saxon, right?” he sounded a little nervous. “That’s incredible.”

I half smiled. “If you say so.”

“The two he absorbed must’ve been really pious,” he said softly.

“You are in awe of Saxon?” I said incredulously.

“Not awe, exactly,” he said, a bit defensive. “Fear, perhaps.”

“How strong are you?” I asked after a moment.

“Faerie magic has to be learned,” he said. “Needless to say, not many renowned elders are exactly jumping up and down to teach me the really powerful stuff,” he grimaced. “Lucky for you. If I knew anything decent then we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Suddenly my head was swimming and I got up when it faded. “He’s calling me,” I said, or I think I did. I went in instantly, sheepishly. I shut the door behind me. “I’m sorry,” I said quickly. “I was trying to find out how strong Aisling was.”

He looked at me for a minute, pretty much the only thing I could see in the dark room. “I’m not angry,” he said. “I was seeing if you’d recognize when I called to you.”

I smiled. “Good, I was worried.”

He moved so fast, it took me by surprise and he was suddenly sitting on the foot of the bed, on his knees. I went up to him and he slid his hands to my neck, brushing back my hair. “How strong is he?” he asked softly.

“He said that he didn’t get the chance to learn that much magic, since all the elders hate him,” I answered. “I got the impression that he knew you could kill him easily.”

He sighed tiredly. “Faerie magic works so strangely. It’s hard to tell how strong he really

is until his power is awakened.”

“What do you mean, ‘awakened’?” I frowned. He’d pulled me so close to him I could feel his breathing on my skin. He was watching my pulse but made no other move to bite me.

“When faeries are old enough, or experienced enough, they start to get more powerful than they were with just being taught. All their spells get more powerful, their glamours extremely realistic. Or, which is what most of them do, they go to their Court or whatever and ask them to awaken their powers,” he frowned slightly. “First, they have to prove that they’re ready, and then they are judged. In the judging, their full power awakens and the Court scans them for their potential. If they’re strong enough and cooperative enough, which means submissive, then they’ll be employed under the Council, most likely as an assassin or as a scout,” I was surprised that he was telling me so much, before he bit me. I knew he was very hungry. “If they’re not submissive, but have little powers, then they’re ignored, and go about their lives in peace. But the strongest ones are almost always aggressive. The Council kills those. It’s no wonder that Aisling hasn’t gotten awakened yet. Not only would the Council doubtless not judge him ready, but if they somehow did, he’s aggressive enough that they would probably kill him.”

I half smiled. “Did he lie, then, when he told me that he couldn’t get stronger without learning from an elder?”

“In a way,” he looked up at me for the first. “You’ll have to get used to faeries telling half truths. It’s how they keep you from learning too much, learning their weak points. He could, true, learn a lot more power, but he could also go to the Council, which is about as likely as him learning a soul blast or darkness rent,” I frowned at the last.

“A what?” He didn’t seem to mind answering questions tonight so I wasn’t afraid to ask.

“A soul blast is one of the most powerful faerie attacks you can ever see,” he said. “And it’s very hard to learn anything about their attacks anyway. All I know is that it supposedly reveals the soul’s true intentions. And I don’t know what the hell a darkness rent is. I’ve never seen one, luckily, they cause mass destruction they say.”

“How do you know all of this?” I finally asked him.

He smiled at me. “I know people,” he said, then fell serious. “Enough talk. I’m hungry.”

I tilted my chin up. “That’s why I’m here.”

He sat up the last few inches and I closed my eyes, waiting for the bite, as his teeth played over my pulse. So close, I started to pick up on his thoughts, but not enough to really know what he was thinking, until he bit me. I made a little noise and his arms were suddenly around my back, pressing me to him, and he fell back on the bed so I was suddenly laying on him.

The next thing I knew, it was over, and he was kissing up my jaw, still holding me on top of him. It was a minute before I could catch my breath, and then I looked down at him, expecting him to want to kiss me. Instead he just grinned up at me for a minute, pushing my hair back so he could see my face. The grin disappeared a moment later, and he rolled me under him. “What’s the matter?”

I blinked up at him, wondering that this was his choice position to start a conversation. “Nothing,” I said. I honestly didn’t know where he’d gotten the impression that I was upset.

He shook his head. “No, there is. I can see it in your eyes. Tell me,” he hesitated. “Or ask me. Is it a question?”

“Saxon, I... I really don’t know what you’re talking about,” I said, scrambling for something that was upsetting me.

He touched my face. “Subconscious, then...” he muttered, to himself, though he was staring me in the eyes. He inched up a little more, eyes closer to mine. “Did Aisling mention anything else?” I could smell his hair gel, although now his hair wasn’t spiked either way, just combed down into his eyes as he did every morning, for sleeping.

I thought back on the conversation. All he’d talked about was faerie magic and... Saxon. That must be what it was. I didn’t like thinking about him stalking me. I was hoping that it was a lie, but yet... I didn’t want to know if it was true.

I shook my head. “I don’t think so.”

“Well, you were fine last night. What happened?” He obviously wasn’t going to drop it.

“Saxon... nothing, I swear. I don’t know what...”

I trailed off with the look he was giving me. There was a long pause. “You’re lying,” he said, very softly.

He didn’t look nearly as friendly as he had a minute ago. I couldn’t come up with anything good to say. Was I feeling guilty? He finally spoke again, but still so quiet. “Why would you lie to me?” I finally had to look away from him, as best I could with him laying on me like that. I was really hoping he’d figure it out. I didn’t know what to say.

He pushed off me, angrily, and yanked open the door. I thought it would come off the hinges and from the noise it made it was pretty close. I covered my face in my hands, laying on the bed. *Ohh shit*, I thought. I heard Aisling, “What the hell...?”

“What fucking bullshit have you been telling her?” Saxon yelled. I sat up, hoping that he wasn’t... oh well, he was, holding Aisling by the collar up off the ground. I was glad he’d put on a shirt, otherwise it would’ve been his throat.

I got up, standing in the doorway. “Saxon, stop it,” I said.

He flung Aisling down onto the couch, which made a sickening groan like he almost broke it with his force. “She’s afraid of me now. What did you tell her?”

Aisling looked at me, eyes wide, back at Saxon. “I was talking about my power, Christ, nothing.”

He shook his head. “No, I know there was more. She won’t tell me. That means you’re going to.”

Aisling blinked for one more second before his face showed revelation. “I told her how you were stalking her for weeks before you finally showed yourself and bit her,” he said nastily.

Saxon smacked him upside the head, and I couldn’t really see from where I was if he was

really hurt. “You will *not* ruin this, you motherfucking bastard,” he growled. “I do *not* want you talking to her about *bullshit* that you don’t even *know*.”

Christ, I thought, since I could still at least think it, *he’s really mad*. Somewhere I decided that that meant it was all true. In the part of my brain that had idle thoughts I was glad that he slept in boxers, since he hadn’t stopped to consider what he was wearing, and nudity wouldn’t have stopped him from beating the crap out of Aisling but it would have been more than a little weird.

“Saxon, stop, you’re not helping,” I finally had to interject when I saw that Aisling had yet more blood on his face, from his lip I thought.

He looked at me and I almost stepped back, the look was so terrifying. Then he covered his face with both hands a second and looked at me again, calmer. “Nicci, it’s not—” I didn’t cut him off in case he was going to deny it, but he broke off, frustrated. Aisling hadn’t been lying after all. But what did it change? Nothing. I was still here.

“It’s all right, Saxon, I just didn’t know if it was true. I didn’t know how to ask,” I said. “I don’t mind. I can’t do anything about it, it’s in the past. Aisling was just trying to make me hate you or some shit. We worked it out.”

He blinked at me, silent. I walked past him to the freezer, and wrapped ice in a dishtowel, since Aisling’s lip was swelling. I handed it to him, both of them watching me. I wondered if I acted strange to them, seeing as neither of them were human. Saxon was looking at me like he’d sinned and wanted me to forgive him, which was more than a disconcerting look from a vampire, any vampire. I didn’t think it was that horrible. Maybe that was my own personal flaw, but it wasn’t as though he’d raped me before he bit me, or sent me threatening mail or phone calls, or any of the other traits that most stalkers have.

I touched his neck with the hand cold from ice, wondering if he’d jump. He didn’t. “Go get dressed, Saxon,” I said. “I’m not mad.”

He stared at me another minute, then nodded and went back into the bedroom, shutting the door. I looked at Aisling. “Damn, are you all right?” I asked, wide eyed. “I’m sorry, I guess that was my fault.”

He laughed, moving the ice. I saw his lip was almost healed. The joys of being preternatural. I guess it didn’t hurt anymore for him to smile. “No, I guess I should have figured that talking to you would lead to a beating,” he said.

“I told him there wasn’t anything wrong,” I said. “And I really didn’t know there was. He just told me that he could ‘see it in my eyes.’”

Aisling nodded. “He can. I can’t, no more than is normal.”

I half smiled. “Well, I guess that wouldn’t seem so weird if I could do it, too.”

He handed me back the ice. “Thanks.”

I shrugged. “You don’t seem to have needed it.”

“It’s the thought,” he said. I went into the kitchen and dumped the ice into the sink,

leaving the towel on the counter. "Uh, you know, it would be nice if we could take a little trip back to my apartment," he said. I looked at him. "I'd like some new clothes."

I smiled. "Makes sense," I rubbed my eyes, thinking. I wondered if I ought to go fix things with Saxon. I wondered if there was anything wrong. Well, only one way to find out, without Aisling being there to hear.

I went into the bedroom, slowly, so as not to surprise him. He was sitting shirtless on the bed, hair gelled down again, doing up his boots, and looked up at me when I entered. "Hey," he said, looking back at what he was doing. "What's up?"

"Aisling wants to get some stuff out of his apartment," I said, leaning on the door a moment. "I just wanted to make sure that we're okay."

He froze, looked up at me again. "Okay?" I nodded. He laughed, a strange laugh, and shook his head, moving again. He pulled on the second boot, tightening the buckles that went up the outside as he spoke with a weird smile on his face. "Sure. I'm fine, anyway. I guess we're as 'okay' as a vampire and his bitch can get."

I raised an eyebrow. "That doesn't sound that okay," I said.

He got up, finished, and came toward me, looking probably more delicious than he'd ever know, shirtless, wearing slightly shiny black pants. I only took a moment to admire him and wonder if it was natural or... vampiric? Was he deluding me even now? Could I ever tell if he was? "Maybe it's not," he said softly.

"Are you mad at me, or Aisling, or what?"

"I never said I was mad," he half smiled. "Just not okay."

I pushed some hair back. "I can explain why I'm not upset, if that's what's wrong," I said. It was so dark in the room, the bathroom light all that was keeping it from pitch black, so it was almost surreal.

He nodded. "That might help."

I took a second to wonder that he was insecure. His personality was so erratic that I could hardly tell who he was sometimes. But yet, I had to answer him. "It's not exactly like you were stalking me," I said first. "Stalkers harass people. I didn't even know you were there. I think it's flattering, that you were following me," I touched his face, realizing he was a lot closer to me than I'd first thought.

"Flattering," he mumbled. "That's good. I thought you were so pretty."

I smiled, hugged him, and honestly I may have been using the situation as an excuse to hug his bare chest. He didn't notice or didn't care, one, just held me there, and I thought it was almost picturesque. "I don't wanna go out," he complained, falling back onto the bed with me.

I sighed. "So far it's the way to make Aisling leave," I said.

He was playing with my earring again. "I know I have to. That doesn't mean I want to," he murmured, very close to me.

I shut my eyes. We just lay there for a minute before he sighed deeply and slowly sat up.

“All right,” he said resignedly. “Might as well go. He’s gonna get impatient.”

I looked up at him before I rolled off the bed. He grabbed a shirt and opened the door. I finished getting ready, following him out into the living room. Aisling was watching television. Neither of them mentioned the fight, I mean, the beating, or whatever it was. I hadn’t expected them to, really.

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“Nice place,” Saxon said.

“Oh, shit,” Aisling sighed. The apartment was completely trashed.

I wasn’t paying attention to them, but there *was* stuff everywhere. As I picked my way through his belongings, out of the doorway, I had a nagging feeling that I was missing something.

I righted the chairs of the dining room table to create more of a path, and Aisling disappeared into a room. I assumed he was going to start packing. “They really hit this place hard,” Saxon said, coming up to me.

I bent down and picked up some envelopes. Some of them were torn open. “They even went through his mail,” He gathered the rest of it, scattered across the floor, dropped it on the table. “I feel like I should help,” I said, looking around at the mess. Most of the furniture was knocked over, papers everywhere.

“I don’t think we can do much for it,” he said. “They must have really thought he’d have something for them.”

I nodded, pulled out a chair, sat down. He leaned on the counter. I focused on what was bothering me, but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn’t put my finger on what it was. I could feel Saxon just behind me, reminding me that he hadn’t noticed when I thought there was something wrong. He was always picking up on emotions that I didn’t even know I was having, but he couldn’t figure this out. “Saxon, I think—” I started. Something wasn’t right, but I couldn’t...

He sat down at the table with me. “What?”

I shook my head. “Something’s wrong. Can’t you feel it?”

He frowned. “Feel what?”

I sighed, frustrated. “I don’t know what, I just... feel something’s wrong.”

He took that surprisingly seriously. “Like what kind of feeling?”

“Just... this isn’t right, something isn’t...” I suddenly flashed on the image of someone, and it was gone. “Dammit, I don’t know,” I said.

Aisling came back, with a worried expression, and a duffel bag. “Don’t know what?”

“We’ve got to get out of here,” I said suddenly, getting up. “Open the window. There’s a guy... that’s all I know.”

“Hold on,” Saxon said, standing, turning me toward him. He put one hand on my forehead and closed his eyes. Something cool yet unfamiliar flooded through my head, like a new

variation of his power.

“The homeless man,” I said, suddenly able to see clearly. “He’s really a faerie scout.”

“Bullshit,” Aisling said. I wasn’t sure if he didn’t believe me or was just cursing.

“Good job,” Saxon said, taking his hand off. The clarity faded with his touch. “C’mon, we have to go,” he went to a window, pulling it open.

Aisling shook his head. “There’s no way. I would have sensed him.”

“You didn’t sense them before. On the roof,” I pointed out.

“Well, you can stay here if you want to,” Saxon said, unsatisfied with the opening, ripping the window bodily out of the wall. He set the frame down on the floor calmly. I blinked at the hole. “I’m getting out of here. I’d rather leave for nothing than fight one of them. I don’t want to be involved in this anyway.”

I went up to him, and he picked me up like by now I was used to. The doorknob turned, stuck with the lock. Everyone stared at it for a minute then Aisling nodded, and then we were through the hole. Aisling had just flown out, hesitantly using a little power, when he slammed Saxon back into the wall with a hand on my back. I didn’t speak, didn’t question, waiting for enlightenment. Somehow I knew we were invisible.

Then I noticed someone breathing, behind me. It wasn’t Aisling. He was next to us, flat against the wall, twelve stories up. “Shit, Lazarus, where’d they go?” I heard someone say inside.

It was the hobo behind us; Lazarus I presumed. “They didn’t go far. Aisling just used his power.”

“Yeah. How did they know we were coming? They must’ve had warning. That vampire ripped the window completely out, to get away. Fucking overkill.”

“That girl must’ve told them.”

“Fucking freak,” he said bitterly. “At this rate she’ll always know when we’re there. We’ll never have the element of surprise.”

*Oh my God*, I thought, my heart pounding in my throat. He was so close to me I could smell him, inches from accidentally touching my back. Saxon tried to press harder into the wall, without breaking it, tried to pull back from him. He was pressing hands into my back so hard, crushing me to him, that I could barely breathe properly. I hoped he didn’t accidentally crack my back.

*It’s okay*, Saxon said in my head.

*Why the hell does he just float there?* I screamed silently. *Get away from me!*

*He’s looking for us*, Saxon said. I realized that somehow I was speaking to him telepathically. My forearms were flat on his chest, and I wondered how he was holding me up; it must have been power. My head was turned to the left, I couldn’t see Aisling, but I was afraid to move. “I can’t get a reading on him,” Lazarus finally spoke.

There was another voice, close to me still. “They must’ve disappeared again. Come on, we’ll have to start over. They won’t come back here again.” It was a woman.

“They might,” Lazarus said.

“Well, we do know that they have to finish with the clairvoyant. Let’s send him to the girl,” the woman said. “Force it on them.”

“Good idea.” Lazarus agreed. “But probably not until tomorrow. I doubt they’ll do much of anything, tonight.”

“Let’s head back and report,” Man A said. “Get new orders to proceed.”

“Right,” Lazarus said, and I felt him move away.

I didn’t dare breathe until Saxon did, relaxing away from the wall an inch more. I dared turn my head to see Aisling, who had his shoulder pressed to Saxon’s, the only way he could disappear. His other hand clutched the duffel bag; at least this wouldn’t be a complete waste of effort. He was incredibly pale, but he half smiled at me.

*Don’t speak yet*, Saxon said, and moved hesitantly away from the wall. I didn’t dare whisper until we were back on the roof of our apartment building, minutes later. He was still holding me almost painfully hard against him. When we landed he let go almost stiffly, like his muscles had cramped. A nicely human detail.

“Fuck it, Aisling,” he said. “You didn’t say they’d be so close.”

He had barely regained color. “I didn’t think they would be.”

Saxon sighed and looked down at me. “Are you all right?”

My heart was finally slowing down. “I’ll be fine,” I said. “He was so close to me.”

He touched my shoulder. “Let’s go inside,” he said, realizing I must be cold, which I was, up at this height.

Inside, it dawned on me. “Saxon... they were talking about David. And me,” I frowned.

He looked at me anew. “I’d almost forgot,” he looked at Aisling. “Do you know what the hell they were talking about?”

He shrugged helplessly. “All I can figure is, they saw him lying on the roof when we were fighting. It wouldn’t be hard for them to get to him, control him.”

“They couldn’t have, not yet, though,” I said. “They didn’t know me and Saxon existed until last night.”

“Well, probably not. So there’s still time. We’ve got to kill him, he might have seen too much,” Saxon said.

“I’ll help you this time,” Aisling said. “Relax, man. I just want the leak to be secured. She can’t use force on him, obviously, or she would have. I’ll just... speed up the process,” he said quickly to Saxon’s dark look.

“Okay, okay, fine,” Saxon said.

“Help would be nice,” I said. “When are we doing that?”

“Right now. Or they’ll find him first.”

“How are you going to find him?” I asked, frowning.

He grinned sadistically. “The reason I didn’t deck him the second he caught you,” he

pointed casually at Aisling, “was because I was putting a sign on David, almost like a tracking device. He’ll stick out a mile to me. Don’t worry. He’s home now. He lives across the street, you know.”

“A sign? Like a spell?”

Saxon grimaced. “Vampires don’t cast many spells.” I realized I didn’t know much about magic, and said nothing else.

“He’s probably got a fucker of a hangover,” Aisling said. “I wasn’t even paying attention to him and I could tell he’d had a lot to drink. And possibly a minor concussion. You dropped him kind of hard.”

“Again, your fault,” Saxon said.

“All right, let’s go,” I interrupted. “We’ve used up the first part of the night already.”

This time we went down, to the street, since Aisling didn’t want to risk using his power even just to fly across to the next roof. The elevator opened to the first floor, and again I felt there was something wrong; but since I knew it had nothing to do with the faeries I didn’t mention it. This one was too vague. Probably just a relapse or something. Something, or someone, slammed into a door down the hall so hard a hinge cracked, from the inside.

“Shit, those wolves live down here,” Saxon said.

At that moment, the landlord was flung out of one of the rooms further down the hall. He whirled to see us. “Oh, thank God, I caught you,” he said. “This isn’t going to blow over,” He was bleeding from the head.

“Whoa, what happened?” Aisling frowned, looking almost like he was braced to sprint away.

“These kitten motherfuckers were busting my apartment, that’s what,” a werewolf that had followed the landlord (what the hell was his name?) snarled more than spoke, his face oddly shaped like he was starting to change. His fingers were inches too long, ending in claws.

“You’ve got to help me,” he pleaded. “I’ll give you all the money you want.”

Saxon looked down at me. “Go back upstairs,” he said. “I don’t want you getting hurt.”

Aisling nodded. I knew they were right. I hadn’t gotten a gun yet. “Oh, so you’ve gotten yourself a vampire and a faerie, is that it, Schyler?” the wolf growled, odd face contorting to a smile. “This will be fun.”

Something big and heavy and dark spilled out of the door and was up over my head, then landing behind me. I whirled around and was faced with the grin of a seven foot werecreature. Lean and sinewy, muscles covered in short shiny black fur, with short thick claws on hands and feet, I had no idea what it was, until I saw the short muzzle and fangs, round black ears, yellow eyes. I stood in awe of the werepanther. He morphed down to humanoid, like the wolf but slightly, somehow, different, clothes appearing, which startled me. Were they bound magically to him, or what? If I lived through this, I’d ask, maybe.

The next second was taken up by Saxon raising one hand toward the leopard and a thick

yellow bolt of power shot into it, hitting it square in the chest. He flew back a hundred feet but wasn't dead. "Stay the fuck OUT of this!" the wolf nearly roared, and as I watched, changed the rest of the way to another seven foot monster, shaggier fur in pure white, pointed ears, longer muzzle with the white blue of husky eyes. He was so beautiful and monstrous at the same time I was transfixed and couldn't move. The clothing melted into him, they didn't rip to shreds. Must be bound to him.

He swung a paw at Aisling that was the size of my head, and he narrowly ducked it, shooting a different kind of blast to its stomach. It staggered back, falling down, white fur soaked in blood. "Nicci, get out!" Aisling shouted. Saxon hauled me bodily off the ground into the air and then we were past the wolf, who snarled and swiped at him from the ground. He yelled in pain, the claws ripping over his side. I could see into the apartment now and saw five others, one leopard transformed all the way, two wolves halfway there, one wolf transformed, another leopard almost animal. The white one was up now and threw Aisling into the room. Saxon didn't take time to recover from the swipe, leaping onto the white one's back, bringing him to the floor with his power. He bashed its head into the floor three times and then the wolf slid to human form, not moving.

"You motherfucking prick, you hurt my *brother!*" one of the wolves yelled, or roared. From the floor Aisling caught his leg, before he could attack Saxon.

I found myself growing angry at these creatures as a leopard punched Aisling in the face when he stood up. He didn't fall down but kicked it so hard in the stomach it cracked the wall when it hit, blood spilling out of its mouth like water. The changed leopard screamed and went for Aisling, Saxon shooting something at it, jumping over a tipped couch in one bound. I couldn't believe how fast, how agile, he was. I'd never seen what he could do, not really. I got the impression that this wasn't his limit at all.

I caught a glimpse of Aisling glimmering the air and then a fireball smashed into a wolf that was coming for him. I remembered that I was supposed to be leaving and turned to go, when the giant furry paw caught my shoulder, spinning me around. I was suddenly dangling three feet from the floor, by my throat, staring down into the yellow eyes of the black leopard I'd seen before. "So this little bitch is a wolf-mate, eh?" he spoke deep and strangely Australian through the fangs and snarl of the leopard. The fur on his chest was matted with blood but other than that there didn't appear to be a mark from Saxon's attack.

"Nicci!" I heard someone yell. I thought it was Saxon. I was holding onto the thick arm to support myself, so I could breathe, switching hands as I tried to gain oxygen. Who the fuck was this guy to think he could just kill me for the hell of it? Who gave him the right to have a massive, bloody battle in this apartment building? What if there were kids walking past? "Well then, you'll have to die, so sorry," he grinned at me.

I screamed, but in anger, so overwhelmingly angry that it suffocated me and blue lightning shot from my free hand, into the leopard. His eyes bulged in terror and then he shrieked

too, an animalistic sound of pain and fear, as he was dissolved to so much gore and fur coating the hall carpet. I fell to the ground, shaking. I could hear things but they didn't get through my madness. I wanted to kill them all, kill everything, I had to help Saxon somehow.

Everything flashed red and then I was blinking up at the ceiling and pushed up to sitting, leaning on the wall. I saw that in the apartment the remaining leopards were scrambling to get out, and Saxon shoving one last ferocious wolf to the floor, sitting on its chest, ordering it to calm down. Aisling picked himself up off the ground, again.

What had happened to me? What had I done? I covered my face and started crying. I was terrified, I was a freak. How had I killed that incredible monster? I knew it wasn't supposed to happen. If I'd gotten this power from Saxon he would have told me how to use it so I could defend myself. No, this time it was all me, I was sure of it.

He sat down next to me, and hugged me to him so I could cry on him.

When the tears stopped coming I didn't move. I didn't want to look at him, face him. He kissed my hair, silent. Finally he spoke softly. "Are you all right, Nicci?"

"I don't know," I finally managed. "I feel okay, I guess."

Aisling, above us, spoke. "She has magic, Saxon," he said. "Not just yours. Magic of her own. You need to get her to a psychic before she hurts herself or something."

I practiced breathing, calming down. Then I finally could lean back from him, but he didn't let me, pulling me more onto him to hug me reassuringly. "Where," he finally said.

"I know a woman," he said after a short pause. "First you've got to do something for that wound."

I remembered seeing him get clawed, and looked down for the injury. The four claws had all connected, leaving deep gashes across his side. He was bleeding everywhere and I gasped when I saw how serious it was.

I got up off him, standing up. He blinked up at me, and he was so sad.

## Chapter Eight

The same hospital as before, but Saxon wasn't being admitted. And hopefully he wouldn't be recognized.

We had bandaged him up as best as possible, so he wouldn't bleed everywhere, since the blood loss really didn't seem to be bothering him. Aisling, for some bizarre reason that I didn't want to know, had medical tape in his bag, so after cutting up Saxon's ruined shirt for a makeshift bandage and taping it on he had taken me to the hospital. Since Aisling had to use magic to fly, he decided not to go, so he wouldn't show up on the radars.

After this we were going to the psychic that Aisling had recommended. I was trying very hard not to think about that. Saxon hadn't mentioned even one word about my action, and somehow that was more disturbing than pressing for information. I wished I knew how I'd done it. I wished I knew what was happening to me. I wished Saxon would have told me something about what he was doing to me.

"Where are we going?" I asked finally when he led me down an empty part of a hallway. I figured that we had to be invisible otherwise someone would have looked at us by now.

"The doctor's offices are down here. I have to find one with magic."

I tried to imagine how it would end up with a human treating a vampire without even knowing it, and couldn't come up with a positive result. He stopped outside each door, concentrating, then moving on. There was almost no sign at all that he was so wounded. I'd seen the injury. It was horrible. He was wearing a shirt and trenchcoat over the bandage, so it would hide the steady spread of blood that was staining his clothing. It scared me to see anyone losing so much blood. It wasn't clotting fast enough to slow the loss, not even with his power. I was starting to worry that we wouldn't find a preternatural doctor, until he sighed. "I guess this guy will do. He's a faerie, though."

"Do you think he's after us?"

"Probably not, but I can't tell for sure," I picked up a strain in his voice and he shifted his weight. It was hurting him after all.

"Well, it doesn't matter the risk, you have to do something for that," I said.

He closed his eyes a minute then nodded, going inside. The man was behind a desk covered in papers, filling out some forms, and looked up with a glare first. "This area is off limits to—" Then his eyes widened. "Hoooly shit," he said softly.

Saxon just looked at him a minute, and he shuffled the papers around nervously and then got up, coming up to us. "This always happens to me," he muttered.

"You know why we're here," Saxon said finally.

He nodded. "What happened to you? That's a horrible wound," I briefly wondered how he could tell. Smell the blood, maybe? Again, something I needed to know, needed to ask.

Maybe I should start writing down all my questions and just let Saxon pick one or two to answer every day. I had so much to learn I was forgetting it before I could ask.

“Thanks for the encouragement,” he said bitterly, bringing me back to the moment. “A werewolf happened to me.”

“At least you made it out alive,” Doctor said, still quite nervous. “I’m Dr. Erikson. Let me see it.”

I took his trench coat and sat down in a chair, almost afraid to look at him. The shirt he was wearing was stuck to him with blood but his coat seemed to have escaped unscathed. A small blessing. He pulled the shirt off carefully, trying not to use that part of his body. “It was smart to staunch the blood flow,” Erikson said. “I... I don’t have what I need here... I don’t think so,” he said, hurrying to the cabinets that lined the wall, pulling them open frantically.

“Look, I have stuff to do,” Saxon said. “Just stitch it up or something.”

“If you’re as strong as I think you are then you’ll have to cut the stitches tomorrow when you wake up. It’ll heal by then. It just needs a little help in the beginning.”

“Sure, that’s no problem,” but he didn’t sound so grateful. I didn’t really relish the concept of cutting your own stitches, but hey, that’s just me. Maybe he’d done it before. I supposed it was better than stitching it up yourself.

“All right, fine, but if we go next door we can at least put you on a gurney. I can’t work on that with you standing.”

“Well, do something,” I said when neither of them moved. The air was thick with power, mostly Saxon’s, although Erikson was leaking some energy because he was afraid.

“C—come on, let’s go,” Erikson said nervously. “We can’t take long. I go off shift in half an hour and the staff will wonder if I don’t leave then.”

“Well, let’s not waste any time then,” Saxon said. Everything he said sounded so threatening that I wondered if he was doing it on purpose or if the pain was getting to him.

Erikson gathered up some bandages and thread and other medical stuff and led us next door. There was, luckily, no one in the hall, probably because of how late/early it was. I followed with his trenchcoat like a good little minion.

I’d never really liked getting stitches, and it was somehow worse to watch someone else get them, so I didn’t pay that much attention to the process. Saxon lay on his back on a gurney, the doctor sitting on a metal stool beside him, working as fast as he safely could.

While I waited I had a lot more time to think than I wanted, and I really didn’t want to think about me. After forcefully stopping my brain from concentrating on psychics and faerie scouts and such several times, it got a little easier. Repressing a memory, that’s great. Instead I thought about how fast Saxon healed; a deep wound like that, with all that muscle and flesh exposed, gone by tomorrow? It didn’t seem possible, but that was only when I forgot that Saxon wasn’t human. Recently I’d been forgetting that he was a vampire, he was living dead, a bloodsucking murderer who had...

*Now that is not better at all, stupid,* I glared at myself. *At this point you are barely better than he. Regardless of the reasoning you have killed, and thus, you are damned.* I almost laughed. Yes, this was just so much better than thinking about me being able to shoot blue lightning. Oh well.

*No, remember, we're thinking about preternatural healing, Nicci, so think about it.* I realized he didn't have any scars, no marks from any past fights. I wondered what he had done when he was human. I wondered how he had become a vampire. How much had he lost, really, losing his humanity? Was he always an antisocial freak who hated humankind, or... I didn't want to think about the 'or,' I didn't want to know if he'd had a family. I was sure that it was possible for a vampire to force undeath upon someone. Saxon didn't seem to have any sort of master, a vampiric parent. I thought that it would make more sense if the vampire would keep track of his or her underlings, maybe teach them the ropes of surviving in the modern world? After all Saxon wasn't that old. Vampires, as a rule, always had tons of secrets and things to learn before one could live amongst the other undead. Where was Saxon's teacher? Had he been killed? Maybe Saxon had killed him, or he'd never had one.

*Yeah, I should write this stuff down,* I sighed softly. *I wonder if he'll ever tell me anything like that. How could I ask? I don't know anything about vampires— maybe it isn't normal to keep track of your progenies.*

It took longer than either of them had wanted, but finally Erikson was done. He got up, moving quickly back away from Saxon like he was almost afraid. No, he was definitely very afraid. Saxon sat up, and pulled his shirt back on regardless of the blood drying on it.

I looked up at him from where I sat when he came toward me, breaking out of my thoughts. "Are you all right now?"

He nodded. "I'm fine. It's just it was bleeding too fast for my power to catch up."

"That's what I thought," I said softly, handing him his trenchcoat. He slid it on and I got up. He sighed, looking back at the doctor who was very nervously drying his hands after he'd washed them.

"You know what I could do to you," he said.

Erikson nodded. "I won't tell anyone that you came here. I get werewolves in all the time. It's only because I'm a faerie."

"If you do, I'll know it was you," Saxon growled.

I wanted to go out into the hall but was afraid he didn't want me to, I mean, someone could see me or something. I just didn't want to be in here right now. "Let's go," I said. I was not in the mood for him to be pissed at someone for nothing.

He looked down at me, nodded. We went back to the roof. He walked to the edge, looking down. "I have to figure out how to get where Aisling said," he explained. "It's harder to follow directions from the air."

I nodded, but didn't go up to him, for obvious reasons. He just stood on the very edge of

the roof with no second thought, like he was standing in the middle of a parking lot. I almost envied him. At length he nodded and turned back to me. "Come here," he said, casually standing with his back to a several-hundred-foot drop.

I swallowed, remembering what had happened the last time I'd been on a roof. "Why?"  
"You'll be fine. Just come here."

I walked slowly up to him, staring hard at the ground. It was only when he touched my arm that I realized I'd gone all the way to the edge. I shut my eyes tight, my heart pounding in my throat. He stepped one step down to be next to me, sliding his arm around me. "Open your eyes," he said softly. "I won't let you fall."

Even if I seemed to have an intense fear of heights (which I hadn't known existed) I knew that he wouldn't push me over or anything, that there was no way he'd let me fall, so I finally managed to comply. It was still frightening no matter what he said to see the ground so far away and it was only his grip on me that kept me from running back. "It's all right," he said. "I won't let anything happen to you. It's perfectly safe."

I didn't feel like arguing the validity of that statement at the moment. "What am I supposed to be seeing?" I managed past my heartbeat.

"Just look," he said. "Look at how many cars there are. All the people running through their little lives. They're all oblivious to the things going on around them. The werewolves, the faeries, they're just normal people to them. Only we know any different. Millions of people don't even know that their next door neighbors are really monsters."

His words were starting to distract me from the height. I remembered how much he seemed to despise humans. "Doesn't that make you feel isolated? Like... no one can really understand?"

He laughed softly. "Not really. It's such power we hold over the world. Think about it. It would be so easy for me to just waltz into the White House and kill the president. Any werewolf can fight off dozens of marines before they even start to be hurt. To humans, silver bullets aren't even a thought, let alone something they'd make standard issue. Twenty wolves, even weak ones, could decimate squadrons of troops."

I frowned. "How come no one's killed the president? If it'd be so easy?"

"Because it would throw off the workings of the country. Nowhere but America is it so easy to live amongst the humans. You'd have to be insane to want to bring it down to anarchy. If anyone tried to ruin the system, then hundreds of different preternaturals would gang up and kill that one. Think about it. You think any faeries could be doctors in other countries? Without serious glamours twenty-four seven? Werewolves working office jobs, actually getting somewhere in life?"

I smiled slightly. "So this is the lesser evil, then."

He nodded. "The majority of vampires live in America. Until you're at least a few centuries old, no one's going to take you seriously in other countries. They're a lot more old

fashioned there.” I focused on what he was saying. He’d never told me anything about vampires before, and I really doubted he would tell me that much. “In France, for instance. There’s dozens of vampires there.”

“That’s not many, is it,” I said softly.

He shook his head. “No. Three or four extremely powerful vampires are constantly fighting with their younger minions to rule the country. They control each other out of habit, almost.”

I thought a minute on if it would be a decent question, but decided I didn’t care. “How many vampires have you seen?”

He was silent for a very long time. “Several. Most of them didn’t know I was there.”

“They were weaker than you?”

“Yes. Step up to the ledge,” he said, changing the subject abruptly. I figured that was the end of the question and answer period.

I stiffened. “I... I’d rather not.”

“I’ve got you,” he said reassuringly. “It’s just one step. You can do it.”

I swallowed. He shifted to be behind me, hands on my waist. “Go on.”

I took a deep breath, steadying myself, pressing his hands to me. “Okay,” I said at last, and put my foot on the short concrete edging that ran around the building.

“That’s it,” he murmured in my ear. “Come on, it’s just one step.”

“Most of the time people don’t try to talk other people into getting on the ledge,” I said.

“You won’t fall. You know that.”

I nodded. “I know,” I whispered. Finally I gathered my strength and stepped up one more to the very edge of the building. I gasped when I did, the toes of my shoes hanging over, so close to falling it was terrifying.

He tightened his hold on me. “It’s okay,” he said. “Good job. You did it.”

Finally I managed to smile. “I did,” I laughed faintly. “It’s so beautiful. All the lights.”

“I know,” he said. I grinned again, proud of myself.

We stood there like that for a long time before he sighed. “Well, I guess we better go,” he said. “It’s getting late.”

I nodded. “Let me down.”

He backed up slowly, not letting go of me, since I wouldn’t let him, and I stepped back. I moved several steps from the edge and he watched me. I could tell he was remembering what I’d done and it was scary, and depressing, to remember that I had to go to a ‘real psychic.’ Whatever that was. I was definitely not looking forward to it. “Are you sure you don’t mind doing this?” he asked after a minute.

“Do you want me to not be fine with it?”

He stared at me. “I think so,” he said at length. “This... I don’t know. Forget it.” He shook his head and came up to me. I put my arms around his neck again, somehow not afraid

when the ground dropped away from beneath us.

He was flying lower, I could faintly hear the sounds of traffic, probably so he could find wherever we were going easier. After a second of us just hovering in the air I bent my neck to look up at him. "We're here," he said, landing.

I swallowed a sudden lump in my throat, remembering everything that had happened. It wasn't fair somehow that not even he knew what was going on. I wasn't sure, but I thought I would rather have him know and not tell me than I would no one know at all. And it scared me.

He touched my face, and we went up to the door. The windows and door were covered in advertisement posters, claiming the abilities of some 'Madame Gillian' and 'Madame Rosa', the open spaces of the glass painted black. He paused, and I frowned at him. "I can't go in," he said finally. "I have to be invited."

I blinked in surprise. "You didn't need an invitation at the hospital."

"That's a public place. This is a private business, of a sorts anyway. I can't go in," He sounded irritated.

I shifted my weight. "Well, what should I do?"

"Just go find whoever owns this place. She'll know that I'm out here. She probably knows that I need an invitation. Tell her, I don't know, that Aisling sent us I guess."

I nodded, opened the door. I briefly wondered why it wasn't locked at this weird hour. Then I thought, *Well, she must get a lot of weird customers if she's a "real psychic."* Whatever that is.

The front room was small, or its size might have been exaggerated by the pictures and figures all covering all the 'bare' wall space. On the left was a small, low round table with two worn armchairs on either side of it. Directly in front of me a few feet was a door with a sign on it reading 'employees only.' I took a moment, peering at the things on the walls. Some photos of smiling people, all of them taken in black and white, and then some pictures that reminded me of crime scene photos: satanic symbols written in blood or salt, for instance, with gore spattered around. Burning designs in wheat fields, taken from the air. Some figurines that I didn't recognize exactly were glued up to the wall, but they resembled Celtic or Norse mythological creatures.

"Greetings, child," I heard someone say. I looked around and saw a short, elderly woman with black hair beginning to go gray smiling at me. I thought that so far, this place was almost too much what I was expecting. "What are you doing here at this late hour?"

"Um, Aisling recommended you to me. Us, I mean."

The smile faded a little. "Aisling, is it. Well then, I assume you are with the vampire outside?" I nodded, slightly relieved. "And you want him inside as well?"

"Yes," I said, but she was already going past me to the door.

She opened it. "Do come in, my dear," she said.

"*My dear*"? I thought idly. I felt a shudder of power around me, sliding out through the

open door like the room had been full of water. "I assume Aisling wanted me to take a look at you, is that right?" she asked, suddenly in front of me. I blinked down at her.

"Yeah," I said. Saxon was staying close to the door, a little more cautious than was normal.

"You wonder about him. Well, this building isn't exactly, shall we say, 'vampire friendly'." she said.

"Someone else who reads my mind," I said softly to myself. "Great."

"Enough of this. My name is Madame Rosa."

"Nicci," I said, a little bewildered. There was no blessing on this building, no holy items, or Saxon couldn't have entered the room at all. What had she done? Dammit, I wished I had a clue as to what was going on.

"Sit down, Miss Nicci." She gestured to a chair. I swallowed and complied. This was sort of creepy and, like I said, I wasn't looking forward to this. "I'm almost tempted to ask how it is that the two of you have connections with dear Aisling, but now is not the time." She sat down across from me.

Saxon hadn't said a word yet but, while slowly, he moved a little closer. She stared at me a long moment. "Are... you going to ask me anything?" I asked finally.

"No, dear, I can tell you don't want to be here. I won't make you talk about whatever has scared you so. I am, however, glad for your sake that you came when you did."

"Why? What's the matter with me?"

She smiled faintly. "It's not so much the matter as you might think. How much do you know about sorcery?"

I blinked. *Sorcery? What's that?* "Nothing."

She looked up at Saxon. "You keep her in the dark on purpose, don't you, Master Vampire." She smiled pleasantly.

Surprisingly enough, he didn't get particularly angry. "Look, whether or not you're a 'real psychic,' and no matter how many spells you've laced through this room, I'm still more than powerful enough to blow this whole place up," he said calmly. "Just do whatever you're going to do and get it over with."

"Yes, dawn nears, doesn't it," she smiled faintly. "Very well. Sorcery, my dear, is the most random kind of power that one could get. It's the only power like it, in that it can neither be inherited or received. You simply have it, or you don't. You might think of it as the wild card of the preternatural world."

"Okay..." I said. I found myself still wondering how much Saxon wasn't telling me, whether or not I needed to know.

"Most of the time, sorcerers go through their whole lives without even knowing that they have powers. It's only when the two worlds cross that sorcery is awakened."

"What two worlds?"

“The human world and the world of monsters. The real world, you might say, as opposed to the world of delusion that all humans live in.” Her eyes flicked around, like she was looking for something that she couldn’t quite see. “When they cross, anyway, to the extent that the humans involved cannot deny what happened, or pass it off as drug or alcohol induced, then three paths result. One, the person gains a new repressed memory; two, the monsters involved kill the witnesses, which happens most of the time; or three, the human discovers their powers as an act of self defense.” She looked at me again. “I’m going to assume that the crossing of your world happened when you met him,” She pointed at Saxon, but didn’t actually look at him. “And after the first bite you couldn’t deny what he was. That was the first step, the first twist between the two realities. And then, something must have happened where you had to act. Possibly, you had to defend yourself.”

I stared through the table. “A werepanther tried to kill me,” I said softly.

She was nonplussed. “Yes, that would do it. You see, sorcery isn’t exactly always a helping hand. It’s almost like it’s sentient at times. When its host is threatened with death, the power defends itself.”

Saxon shook his head. “This is bullshit. It’s too much of a fucking coincidence. You make it sound like there are thousands upon thousands of sorcerers wandering around but there’s hardly any of them. Like you said most of them don’t ever know it, either. There’s got to be almost no chance of a vampire biting a sorcerer.”

“She is a sorceress, my dear vampire, do not insult the girl with being grammatically incorrect. And it is a small percent chance, I admit, but it exists all the same. The first appearance of the power is almost always very violent and bloody, a visible attack of power.”

“Lightning would count, I guess,” I said softly.

“Yes, dear, it would.” She smiled almost sadly at me. Everyone was so damn sad, except me, because I didn’t know enough about what was going on to be sad. That wasn’t really reassuring.

“Humans always have some degree of preternatural strength, without it being ‘sorcery,’ ” Saxon said. “I would have been able to tell if she was a sorceress, I’m her fucking master,” It was unnerving that he’d admitted that. Very unnerving, even though I’d thought it would be nice to learn I had assumed right.

“Well, you would think so, except for what’s happened to her aura. It must be the combination of your power and her own. I could hardly tell what she was, at first, I thought it was nothing, until she mentioned Aisling. He wouldn’t have sent her to me unless it was serious. Since I do possess talents above the norm, I could decipher what’s been done to her aura.”

“What’s been done, then,” I asked. I felt violated that my newly discovered aura had been messed with. That wasn’t nice. I didn’t even know I had the thing until recently.

“Somehow the vampiric taint in the sorcery has made it almost interpretive. If you had come in and told me you were a clairvoyant, or a faerie, or just a normal human, I would have

believed you. It tastes almost like everything and nothing at once. I suspect that's how he trusted it was nothing unusual. Because he didn't want to think it wasn't."

"How come you could feel what I really am?" I had trouble saying this for some reason – trouble speaking about these things which they both were taking in stride.

"Psychics, sorcerers, and witches all can sense each other's powers and awaken them. Everyone else would be left in the dark."

I looked at Saxon, who didn't look back at me. Was this true? I was some kind of magical freak, but what did that gain me, or cost me? "I don't suppose I could just ignore it."

"Not safely, no."

"Then what do I do?"

"Give me your hand, child, and I will awaken it for you."

Saxon interrupted before I could comply. "How long is this going to take, exactly?"

Madame Rosa thought, then nodded, pulling back her hand. "I believe longer than you have. If you insist on finishing this another time, then come back any night at this time, except Sundays, I wouldn't advise a vampire visiting then."

I started to ask what happened on Sundays, saw the look in her eyes, and didn't. She did not like vampires, I could tell. I wondered if Aisling had known that when he sent us. I wondered if she didn't like me because of what Saxon had done to me. "We have to go, Nicci," Saxon said.

"Thank you anyway," I said idly to Rosa. I wondered a moment if we ought to pay her.

"Don't worry about it, dear, I have yet to do anything extravagant."

I nodded, and got up. Saxon left, holding the door for me. I almost asked about the pictures and figurines, but instead I stepped outside. "Come on," he said impatiently.

I blinked at him. "I'd like to talk to you," I said.

He came up to me, pulling me against him. "Talk to me in the air, then," he said. "The sun comes up in less than an hour and I still have to fly all the way home."

I didn't doubt that he would take off in seconds so I took hold of him. He jumped straight up, hovering in the air a few hundred feet off the ground for a minute, looking around. I knew he was getting his bearings again. "Does this explain why I can't speak scriptures," I asked at length.

"Just barely," he said. I could tell he didn't believe her. Or... he didn't want to? "Supposedly sorcerers, witches, and psychics have more of an affiliation with the devil than they do anything religious."

I tried not to dwell on the fact that I might be satanic. "You don't believe her, do you?"

"Like I said, it's a huge coincidence."

He started flying again, and I didn't say anything for a while. "Well, what do you think is the matter with me, then?"

We landed on the roof at that moment. He looked down at me. "Nicci, there's nothing wrong with you. You have to stop thinking like a human, that's all."

“I am a human,” I said defensively.

“No, you’re not, you must know that by now,” he said, then got an ironic smile. “And I guess that’s my fault, isn’t it.”

I blinked up at him. “If I’m not human, and you don’t think I’m a sorceress, what do you think I am?”

He studied me a minute. “I know that you’re not human. I know that I made you mine. Beyond that, well,” he left the sentence hanging, expressionless.

“Are you ever going to tell me what exactly you did to me?” I asked, finally irritated. “It’s been months, and you haven’t told me a word.”

“Let’s just go in, all right,” he said. I knew I was starting to make him mad. “This isn’t the time.”

“Is there ever going to be a ‘time’?” I frowned.

“Nicci, I’m not kidding, don’t start with me right now,” he said warningly.

“Fine, we’ll just go in,” I said sarcastically. “It’s only my life.”

He gave me a look like I’ve never seen before and I was suddenly reminded how much he hated humans. It was frightening to see that evil in his eyes and then it was gone, but he wasn’t any happier.

“I won’t hurt you, but you’re starting to piss me off,” he said carefully.

“Look, all right, let’s just go in,” I couldn’t keep all of the sarcasm out of my voice. He took hold of my shoulder so he could pull me through the locked door down into the building, but for once his fingers almost hurt. He pulled me down to the elevator and we took that to our floor. I almost wished he’d stolen a room on the top floor so it wouldn’t be such a pain in the ass every time we went somewhere, then I wondered what had happened to my morals if I was just wishing that he’d killed someone different than he did, like whoever he’d done in hadn’t been good enough. *Maybe someone with kids, you bitch*, I thought to myself.

Saxon didn’t wait for me to unlock the door, going through that one too. Luckily he didn’t forget me otherwise I would have seen how fast I could heal a broken nose, since he pulled me sharply behind him without a pause.

He let go of me in almost a shove, and I caught myself on the kitchen counter. He stopped and looked at me, just into the living room, beside the television. I sensed Aisling sitting on the couch, very still.

We stood warily, just looking at each other, and it occurred to me how easily he could kill me, with no second thought, that I had no defense against him except the butcher’s knives on the counter. And even that was a slim chance. I didn’t know if that would even make him waver. “Do... I even want to know...?” Aisling finally asked hesitantly.

“No, you don’t,” Saxon growled. I’d never seen him so mad.

“You haven’t hit me yet, Saxon, warn me if you’re going to start,” I said. I found myself prepared to take a beating.

“Nicci, I won’t hurt you, you should know that by now,” His face was sliding to empty again.

I scoffed. “How would I know that, Saxon, I barely even know you. The most I know of your entire life, undead or living, is that you got arrested in New Orleans, and you said you’ve been dead about fifty years. What the hell kind of conclusion am I supposed to draw from that?”

I was getting the impression that Aisling was trying to sink into the couch and disappear. “Look, are you pissed because you don’t know me, or because you’re not happy with what you’re discovering you really are?” he glared at me.

“Both of them, and then some. Don’t forget you haven’t told me what you did to me, either, that I know nothing about almost all of the preternatural creatures. I didn’t even know sorcery existed before tonight. How am I supposed to just live perfectly happy without even knowing what kind of things are crawling around outside my house? Or what’s crawling around inside my house?”

“Nicci, it’s too fucking early for this, pick something already, so I know what’s making you such a bitch,” he said carefully.

I made an exasperated noise. “All right, fine. Tell me what you did to me.”

He looked at me with disbelief. “Don’t you think if I had any idea what I was getting into with you I would have picked someone else? Nicci, the two of us make up a part of the one percent of vampire-sorceress cases. How the hell am I supposed to know what I did to you? I know what I was trying to do, but apparently my intentions weren’t the end result. I’ve got no fucking idea what I did to you, or what’s happening to you. So there’s two answers at once. Now go to bed. It’s almost dawn.”

I stared at him. The answer I had been expecting had been, well, some kind of information. My whole life had been altered by something and no one even knew what the outcome was going to be, and now the altering event was starting to be in doubt. I blinked and realized what he’d said last. “Don’t argue with me anymore, just go,” he said when I didn’t move.

“Fine,” I said softly. “I’ll go,” I went into the bedroom, feeling cold inside. When I got into bed I felt numb, and somehow afraid of when he’d come in. I looked at the clock radio beside the bed, knew there was only about forty minutes until dawn.

Being angry with him had been refreshing but once I’d learned that he was just as, well almost, as in the dark as I was, it was harder to be mad. It occurred to me that if he threw me out, or left, I would have no livelihood at all. He was bringing in all the money; my new name had no records of schooling or anything, so getting a decent job would be impossible, and using my old name would draw the attention of people I couldn’t see anymore. I mean, there was no way for me to explain where I’d been. Not to mention the fact that the slave in my head was banging on the walls of the cage I’d recently built around it so I could think straight, but I could still hear it yelling about how horrible of a person I was to treat him so.

At last the door opened and shut, and I could see him moving around. I didn't move, just staring at him. He either thought I was asleep or was just ignoring me. He pulled off his shirt, going into the bathroom without turning on the light. I heard the water running in the sink for a minute, then he came back in and stripped down the rest of the way. He stopped at the foot of the bed, noticing I was awake.

"Saxon, I'm sorry," I said. He didn't respond. "I don't like it when you're mad at me, so I want to apologize."

"You're afraid of me," he said emotionlessly.

"I'm afraid of how angry you get at humans. It makes me self conscious. But I don't want to go to sleep mad. Or with you mad."

He didn't move. "Fine. I'm not mad anymore."

I studied him, barely visible in the pitch dark. I couldn't read anything from him, but nodded anyway. "You know," he said, stopping again before he got into bed. "I slept in a coffin every day for decades. I sleep in the bed because I thought you'd want me to," I blinked at him, somehow surprised. He smiled faintly. "And it makes me feel closer to you sometimes."

"I wish I could be close to you, Saxon," I said softly. "But you make it so hard."

He threw back the sheets, sitting in bed. "I know," he said at last. "Sometimes I wish I didn't."

He sat like that, just staring into the dark, for so long I started to feel bad for him. I touched his shoulder and he looked at me, then slid down the bed, pulling the sheet up. He pulled me to him, and kissed me. It somehow wasn't the same as the other times. "You know, I like you better when you have personality," he said after he broke off.

"You like it when I'm mad at you?" I frowned, confused.

He half smiled. "Not as much, no. Just... personality. I can't do everything, you know, you have to fill in the rest. And I wish you weren't so afraid of me."

"I'm not afraid of you," I insisted. "I'm afraid of making you mad."

"Well, that's a nice thought, I guess," he said. "But you don't have to try so hard all the time." He kissed my forehead again, then rolled onto his back. "Go to sleep, the sun will be up soon."

I stayed against him, closing my eyes. I realized I hadn't eaten anything for dinner but didn't feel like going to eat. It was more comfortable in here. And I was unbelievably tired. My hand rested on his stomach and after a moment my fingers registered something odd. I opened my eyes again, frowning down at it.

"It's the stitches," he said when he saw me move.

I hesitantly traced the line with one finger. "Does it hurt?"

"A little. I'll cut them tomorrow. It's about half healed."

I nodded. He told me again to go to sleep. I sighed, trying to comply. The palm of my hand had an odd tingling sensation, a little like it'd been numb and the blood was recirculating, a

little like a burn. It was the hand that had shot the lightning. I closed my eyes tighter, trying to ignore it.

## Chapter Nine

This time I woke up only about an hour before Saxon was expected. I wondered if he was training me until we would get up at around the same time. Then I wondered if he was capable of doing that without me knowing. *Maybe I give him too much credit*, I thought idly. *Well, whatever.*

I showered and dressed and went to eat. I was starving by this time and knew if I didn't eat something before I had to feed him I just might pass out. While I lingered by the microwave, Aisling trapped me.

"Okay, you've got to tell me what happened last night," he said. I blinked at him. It actually took me a minute to remember what he was talking about. He continued, obviously thinking I needed convincing. "If I don't know what happened I'm bound to say something wrong and he'll just beat me up again. I'm getting tired of that."

I half smiled. "Sorry. That's probably my fault somehow. I'm starving to death, Aisling, give me a minute."

I turned to remove my finally finished food from the microwave and he sighed exasperatedly. "I've only got a minute before he wakes up, and then I'll never know."

I shrugged. "Look, it's a hazard of living here. I can't help it. He just doesn't like you."

"No shit, but that's not the point I'm trying to make."

I went past him to the table. I noticed that Saxon hadn't just left all his money on it like he used to in case I wanted to buy something. He probably thought Aisling would steal it, which I still found a possibility. He sat down across from me. I tested the food and found it too hot to eat. "Look, Aisling, the first thing he does is feed, and I don't have the strength to do that just yet. After that, he'll shower, and I can tell you whatever you want to know. I just don't want to pass out."

He sighed. "Fine, just eat." He said, giving up. I complied as soon as it cooled enough. He spoke again in a minute. "Does your stereo work, by the way?"

I thought. "I don't know. I've never tried it. It was here when we 'moved in.' I'd guess it does."

"Would he kill me if I put on a CD?"

I laughed slightly. "Only if I didn't like it."

Because life is just like that, Saxon overslept anyway, so I had plenty of time before he would feed. Aisling had put on A Perfect Circle, something I'd heard Saxon mention once as liking. I thought that maybe they would get along a little better since they had similar tastes in music. I hoped so. All this fighting was getting old very quickly.

While I waited for him to get up I started paying attention to the music for lack of anything else to do. It wasn't that bad. It just struck me a little hard at one point for some reason:

*“Gotta cut away/Clear away/Snip away and sever this/ Umbilical residue/Keeping me from killing you.../And from pulling you down with me/Here I can almost hear you scream...”*

Aisling, also obviously bored, was doing pushups in front of the couch. He looked up at me for some reason, maybe the look on my face held his attention.

“It fits me, doesn’t it?” I asked. “The song.”

He got up off the floor. “Sort of, I guess,” he frowned, puzzled.

I went over and sat on the couch, folding my legs up so I wouldn’t interfere with what he’d been doing. “She said I was a sorceress, by the way. Madame Rosa, that is.”

He froze, blinked at me, sitting on the floor again. “Really?”

I nodded. “I figured that you must have had a clue. It doesn’t sound like there are any other real answers as to what I could be.”

He hesitated a second. “Well, yeah, actually. But... I wasn’t sure. I just knew that you’d been taken by Saxon.” I didn’t say anything and he continued halfheartedly, maybe trying to distract me. “I mean, I could smell it on you. Your neck. When I first met you.”

*‘Met’ is hardly the word*, I thought, and from his ironic smile so was he. “You could smell it on me?” I realized what he’d said then.

“Yeah. All faeries can smell the touch of a vampire. Or... taint, most people call it...”

I laughed slightly. “I always thought that the only real taints in the world were those caused by humans. But... I didn’t know anything back then.”

The next song was playing now and I listened for a moment. Aisling kept watching me until I spoke again. “He makes it sound so sad,” I said softly.

“Do you like it?” he asked after another pause.

“It’s beautiful. But... mournful. Yeah, that’s it.”

He nodded. I closed my eyes, leaning back on the couch. It felt like my head was spinning with all the things I had to think about. I wondered what sort of thing I’d be able to do once I had all my power awakened, if I’d be an average sorceress, or stronger than normal, or what. If there were different levels of power. If Saxon would even let me go back.

*No, I thought, there’s no choice. I have to go. Even... even if he says I can’t. I’ll go tomorrow, before he gets up, if he says no. With Aisling maybe.* I laughed slightly at my own thoughts. *Saxon would kill Aisling if he took me when he’d said no.*

Damn, everything was so complicated. Less than a year ago the only things I’d been worried about were normal things, like relationships, work... that creepy guy in the apartment next to mine... and now I was worrying about faeries chasing me and my own powers and how to please my vampire. It was almost funny in its oddity.

I wondered what was keeping Saxon. It was getting late. I finally sighed and stepped over Aisling to go see. As usual the room was incredibly, painfully dark and I couldn’t see a thing. My supposedly improved eyesight only let me make out the outlines of furniture. I leaned on the door, blinking, hoping for an improvement that didn’t want to come.

Well, I could see that he wasn't in the bathroom, so he must be in bed still. I moved carefully forwards, until my foot nudged the bed frame, and sat down slowly on the edge of the mattress. I just sat there a minute, blinking into the darkness.

At last my eyes were adjusting a little more even though a tiny fraction of light was all that soaked through the "curtains" and I could make out that he was still in bed, curled up in a little ball, completely under the sheets. The suppressed music beating through the door, only drums and bass truly coherent, made everything surreal.

*I guess he's just still asleep*, I thought, slightly confused. *That's never happened before, he always wakes up as soon as the death sleep fades. Well, there's a first time for everything...* I started to get up and yet had this illogical feeling not to. My heartbeat slowly rose and I started to feel afraid.

"What's going on?" I whispered to no one. To him, maybe. Why was I feeling so scared, was it something triggered by my power? Or Saxon's? And why hadn't he gotten up yet, anyway? There were just too many questions to leave him be.

I crawled up the bed a little, and he made a little sound that froze me in place. I still felt that incredible fear in my stomach that made me want to hide under the bed, but it wasn't yet overwhelming. I slowly reached out and touched him, about where I thought his head was, and he made another sound that was almost...

*No way he's awake*, I thought. *Is he having a dream? Why is it bothering me?* I pulled on the sheet so I could see him, and he made a sound that was definitely a whimper. *What the hell?* I shook my head and pulled harder on the sheet, tugging it out from under him and he mumbled something, rolling his head.

"Saxon, wake up," I said insistently. I could tell he was breathing, thus awake, and shook his shoulder with one hand. He made another sound, louder. "Saxon, come on..." I kept shaking him another second and he woke with a gasp, grabbing my arm tightly, which scared me so I nearly screamed.

He stared up at me, wide-eyed and I just stared back a minute. "You were having a nightmare," I said finally, breathless.

He shut his eyes and let his breath out carefully, but didn't let go of my arm. "I was," he said softly, confused.

I nodded, and though he had his eyes shut and couldn't see me, he held my hand to his face in response. He just lay like that for several minutes before he reached for me with his other hand, my shoulder, pulled me down beside him. "I was..." he said again.

I touched his face and he looked at me, eyes close. "Are you all right?" I frowned.

He looked at me a minute, silent. I wished it hadn't been so dark that I couldn't read his eyes. "What time is it," he asked at length.

"It's after five," I said. "And don't avoid the question."

He looked a little disgruntled, not really smiling, an ironic look. "I haven't really been all

right for years. But... right now I'm... normal."

"I don't think that's what I was wanting you to say," I said.

He ignored that. "Why were you in here?"

"I just said. It's after five already. You were supposed to get up almost an hour ago."

"You were worried about me?" he asked, incredulously.

"I just came in here, and I started to get afraid," Now I was avoiding the question, but he didn't seem to notice.

He frowned. "Afraid?"

I nodded. "Yeah. I think... it was you. Your dream."

He shut his eyes a moment before looking back at me with a helpless expression. "Damn. No one ever told me how much you'd be able to pick up on."

"No one ever told me, either," I said quietly.

He sighed, closing his eyes again, frowning slightly as though he had a headache. I thought for a moment. "I'm sorry," I said then. "I didn't need to say that."

He shook his head and sat up, pulling me up with him. "I don't care. Just... don't speak," he said softly, putting his head on my shoulder. "Don't speak."

I blinked in surprise and then hesitantly touched the back of his head, putting my other arm around him. I wondered beyond belief what he'd been dreaming about that could scare him so, but didn't ask. Whatever it was, he probably didn't want to talk about.

After a little while he kissed my neck, warning me I think before he bit me so when he did I wasn't surprised. I closed my eyes until he was finished.

"Now what?" I finally asked softly, after he'd just sat there for so long, breathing on my neck.

"I... I don't know. I don't know what to do anymore," His tone was so different, and it took me a moment to realize that it was because he was showing an emotion, and one that he didn't normally, which seemed to be sorrow.

I played my fingers through his hair reassuringly. "You'll come up with something," I said softly, which I really did believe. Although maybe in hindsight I should have said 'we' instead of 'you' to be truly comforting, but at the moment, I thought that he would be the one to come up with a solution to all the confusion. That was sort of his job, right?

He made a little noise like a laugh and leaned back. "I guess I have to," he said with a strange amused tone of voice.

I wondered exactly what was so amusing but didn't say anything about it. He kissed me for a moment, and then rolled out of bed. I stayed there for a minute, thinking, just letting my mind wander. I idly wondered why I hadn't felt when his power retracted as he woke up, like I normally did. Maybe I was just distracted.

I sighed, rubbing my eyes, and then left the room. It was lit by the light fixtures alone, but still bright enough to startle me after the dark seclusion.

Aisling was sitting on the couch and he looked at me a minute. I sat down next to him, blinking in the brightness. "Can I ask one more question?" he finally said.

"Shoot."

He hesitated. "Do you normally fight like you did last night?"

I shook my head, staring through the television. I didn't know what to say. That kept happening to me and I was getting tired of it, but that didn't inspire me now. He just nodded, wisely silent. I wondered if the only reason he was being so nice to me was because he was terrified of Saxon, and figured, probably. I mean, if it wasn't for Saxon he'd probably rape me or something. I mocked myself. *That's a pleasant thought, isn't it.*

The curtains didn't glow anymore, but the sun was still up too high for him to go out. By the time the CD was over, Saxon came out. He glanced distastefully at the window, as if that would hurry the sunset in coming. Aisling looked at him, but said not a word. I felt almost like patting him on the head. *"Good dog, you've learned."*

"I can't go outside yet," he said spitefully, then turning serious, "but something has to be done about Zinc. I mean he's a fucking clairvoyant, he knows what he saw was real. There's no way he'll talk to Nicci now." I wasn't exactly sure which one of us he was talking to. We both sat very still and watched like obedient little kids. "He's at home, I can still feel him. Nicci, I want you to go kill him."

I nodded. "Okay," I said softly.

He sighed. "Then I can have his strength, too. But if we don't hurry up and kill him then he might lose faith and it'll all be for nothing."

Aisling shifted. "I could help her," he said.

Saxon looked at him, and it wasn't a friendly look. "I want you where I can see you," he said menacingly.

"Saxon, stop it," I frowned at him. He was acting like a child. "I botched up the job with David so he won't just let me into his house or anything. I haven't got any powers, not that I could use on him. I can't do it on my own anymore."

"She is right," Aisling said quickly. I got the impression that he didn't want to be left alone with Saxon. I didn't blame him. "I mean she can't punch through a wall, right? I can't exactly just look at the place and crush it like you probably could but I can at least get her inside."

He stared at him for a minute. "Go wait outside," he said. "I want to talk to her and your hearing's too fucking good."

Aisling opened his mouth to argue, shut it, and left. Saxon went back into the bedroom for a second and I got up to follow. He came back and caught my hand, keeping me close to him in the doorway.

"He won't hurt me, Saxon," I said softly.

He slid my switchblade into my hand, very close to me so I could feel his breath on my

face. "This is a silver blade," he said quietly. "Faeries aren't hurt extra by silver, but it'll still go in. If he touches you, I want you to push it into his stomach," he was murmuring the violence so it almost sounded intimate. He pressed the release with my fingers, still holding my hand. He touched the point to just below his ribcage, in the front. "Right here." He paused, still holding my eyes so intensely. "If he kisses you," he started, looking down to the knife. He lowered the point a few inches. I frowned at him.

"I'm not gonna freaking castrate him, Saxon, are you crazy?" I whispered incredulously.

He gave me a look like I've never seen before. "Yes, actually. But he's not. If he starts something," he pressed the release to close it, using my hand to touch the end of the handle to his jeans. "warn him. He'd have to be an idiot to keep going. But he might. If he kisses you, I'll be able to tell. I can smell it. If you don't do it, I'll do something worse when you get back, believe me, if you don't do anything about it."

I shook my head. "Damn, Saxon, you really hate him, don't you?"

He let go of my hand. I put the knife in my pocket anyway; it was what I had to do in David. "I'm allowed to hate him until he starts leaving you alone," He touched my hair, twisting a lock around his fingers, smelled it. "I've never liked the smell of faeries," he said, as though I smelled like Aisling.

I shook my head again. "Saxon, shouldn't I at least warn him? I mean he might..." I trailed off with the impassive look in his eyes. "Forget it. It's obvious how much you want to kill him anyway." I sighed, giving up.

He smiled lightly, still playing with my hair. He slid his fingers up my face, until both his hands were deep in my hair. He leaned forward, bending his neck to press his face into my hair. He was breathing hot on my scalp. "There's a little more to it than that," he said softly. "I could stand him living here except it's so hard to do anything while he's around." His mouth was on my ear and I felt under my hand that his heart was beating a little off. I knew what he meant by "anything" automatically. It was predictable, I guess.

He kissed my ear, playing his lips over my earring, and I touched his neck with one hand. It'd been... almost two weeks now since he'd last had me. I had been sort of wondering if it bothered him, and apparently it did.

"I don't want you to go. I want to send Aisling to kill him by himself," he said.

"Saxon, you said that the only way you could absorb someone was if I killed them. I swear you said that to me."

He nodded, still hiding against me. "I did. I know that. It sucks though."

I laughed and he moved back with a sigh, hands falling away.

"He's on the eleventh floor. Room..." He frowned, concentrating. "I think number 83. Not sure though. If you're lucky Aisling will be able to feel him. There aren't that many clairvoyants on that floor."

"Okay," I sighed. "Eleventh floor, 83." I shook my head and went to the bedroom, finding

my shoes. I heard him open the front door, and heard Aisling come back. I didn't bother to dress troubled or pseudo gothic or anything this time. I had real problems. Clothes didn't need to advertise them.

Aisling had changed shirts, black T shirt and jeans, his red hair tied back as usual. He sat on the couch, slumped low, pretending to watch the television. Saxon leaned on the wall like a bodyguard. My life was too weird to be anything but funny at this point. All I needed now was something like a zombie cat for a pet. Yeah, that would do it. I wondered if there could be undead fish. Somehow the concept of like a zombie goldfish was funny and I repressed a smile. I doubted either of them would think it was that funny. Aisling had a look like his dog had just been hit by a car and Saxon looked like the cops had just charged him with murder. And he was going to kill all the cops.

Sigh. "We can go any time now."

Aisling stood in one fluid motion, reminding me that he wasn't human. Saxon didn't move at all. I thought of asking if Aisling had a weapon, and didn't. I doubted he'd really need one— after all, he could take down a werereature, why would he need anything against someone relatively human?

Aisling went to the door, not looking at Saxon, although he did walk past kind of like there was a heat in the air. I went to Saxon, touched his neck, and he kissed my hair. Then I was out in the hall with Aisling. I wondered if it was redundant to lock the door when there was a vampire guarding it, and everything that would threaten him wouldn't be stopped at the lock anyway. I locked it. Who cares. Old habits die hard, as the cliché goes.

We took the elevator to the first floor, which I suppose is rather obvious. There was no one else in it. I leaned on the wall and he stood so he could face me, arms crossed. "Tell me about this guy," he said.

I blinked at him. "What do you want to know?"

He shrugged. "Whatever might be important. Will he know what I am?"

"I have no idea," I said blandly.

"All right, how could you talk to a troubled psychic and not find out something important?" He frowned. "He must've told you something."

"He's a clairvoyant," I corrected. "And I didn't even know that clairvoyants were aware of other preternatural shit. Saxon didn't tell me. I was supposed to act like I had mild clairvoyancy."

He sighed, exasperated. "All right, forget that question. Did Saxon tell you anything?" He said it sarcastically. "Somehow I doubt it."

The doors opened and we got off. I didn't say anything. We walked down the hall in silence. I glanced down and saw that the carpet was a different color than it had been. I guess wereleopard guts stained beyond repair.

I let him open the door for me. The sunlight was unfamiliar and bright, reflecting off the

mirrored skyscrapers and windows, although the sun was too low to actually be on the street. I blinked for a moment and he looked at me. "What's wrong?"

I half smiled. "Nothing, I just... haven't really seen sunlight in a long time."

He shook his head, smiling faintly at some private joke. We waited for a break in traffic and then ran across the busy street to the apartment building next door.

There were intercoms next to the door. Of course, someone had to let us in. Great. It didn't seem to bother him. The building wasn't exactly highest quality so there was a crack between the two doors, about half an inch. I could see the deadbolt type lock through the crack.

I looked up at Aisling and he glanced at me, and smiled again. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Shut your eyes."

"What? Why?" I frowned, confused.

"Because I don't want you to know everything I can do," he said, grinning wider. "I don't know if Saxon can look through your eyes yet or not."

*Yet? Great.* I sighed, and closed my eyes. There was a sort of metallic groan and then a snap. "Okay," he said. I looked and he was holding the door open, but there was no damage done that I could see. I shook my head and went in. He was grinning so wide it must have hurt.

I went right to the elevator without waiting for him. I punched the button and stood waiting for it. He leaned on the wall next to me, looking down at me almost expectantly. I looked up at him. "What?"

He grinned again but didn't answer. I was starting to regret asking for his help. He reached as though to touch me, stopping his hand close to my face. I looked at him and he must have seen something in my eyes.

"What's that look for," he asked, smile fading.

"Saxon told me to gut you if you touched me," I said softly. I found my hand had taken out my knife, and I didn't remember doing that.

He didn't lower his hand. "Really," he said it like he found the concept intriguing. "Let me see the knife."

I stared at him for another moment, thinking. The elevator doors opened and a woman with a young child got off. We got on and we both smiled at her, perfectly innocent, nothing going on here, never, of course not.

Right. I hit 11 and he looked back at me. "Let me see it," he insisted.

I pressed the release and there was a nice little sound as the blade slid out. I held it up for inspection by the handle.

"It's silver," He looked disappointed.

"Yeah."

"That's no good, it would hardly even hurt," Yes, he was definitely disappointed.

"Do not tell me why that's bad," I said sternly, sheathing the blade again. I kept the knife in my hand.

He laughed and it was strange somehow, alien. The look in his eyes wasn't. It was the same look he'd had when he tried to kidnap me. I looked away from him, at the digital counter above the door which said what floor we were on. Finally it reached 11, opened. I went down the hall, walking quickly. I didn't want him to catch up to me for some reason. The numbers on the doors counted up until we were in the 80s. I stopped outside what I thought was David's door.

"Is this the place?" Aisling asked, suddenly right behind me again.

I ignored that. "I think so, Saxon had trouble figuring out the exact location."

"Well, let's try it," He tried the knob. The door opened but one of those chain locks held it mostly shut. There was no noise from inside the apartment. He fit his hand through the opening and snapped the chain with little or no effort. Then he pushed the door to flush against the wall before walking in. I followed him. It was dark inside and not very big. For the first time I wondered if Saxon had spent those two days actually looking for a decent apartment, was he trying to find me a nice new home? I shook my head, back in the present.

There was a sort of crash from the next room but it wasn't Aisling, he was still in sight. He looked back at me with probably the same look of confusion and surprise that I had. Then he disappeared around the corner and I hurried after him. "Shit!" I heard him yell, then was in the bedroom. David had knocked out part of the ceiling to bare a length of rafter, and hung himself from it, feet hanging beside the dresser. There was a chair knocked over to the side. The crash? Was he still alive? Would he even still count as a religious man if he'd attempted suicide? I wish I knew more about the rules.

Aisling jumped up quite easily and caught hold of the rafter. He broke the rope that he'd hung himself from and David fell to the ground. I stood there in the doorway, stunned. Aisling's right hand was bloodied along the knuckles from fitting his fingers between the crude wood and the rope. But he barely seemed to notice, just glancing at his hand.

He broke the noose part and I realized David wasn't dead. The crash, I was right, he'd just hung himself. Unfortunately for him it hadn't broken his neck. "C'mon, hurry up, kill him," Aisling said. "He doesn't have to be conscious."

I flicked the blade out and kneeled beside him. For a moment I just looked down at him, remembered when I'd been talking to him. He didn't look hurt, he looked like he was sleeping, except for the nasty rope burn on his neck. I touched the mark with one finger, then found the pulse in his throat. It was weak, but he wasn't dead. Aisling looked at me. "What?" He frowned slightly. "Come on, do it," he prompted.

"This one is harder than the other two for some reason," I said softly.

"If you don't kill him, the faeries will turn him against you," he said. "Believe me. They will." I nodded and he reached to pull David's shirt open, the cloth ripping. I put the point to his chest, took a deep breath, and drove it home, aiming for his heart.

He gasped, eyes flying wide, spine bowing. He scrambled for air for a moment then fell back limp, breathing short and shallow, wide eyes on me. I looked down at him and put my left

hand over his eyes. I did not necessarily want to see the look on his face. With my right hand I dug the blade in until he didn't struggle anymore, falling limp with a little sigh.

I pulled the knife out and wiped it off on his ruined shirt. I sheathed it and returned it to my pocket, then got up and went out of the room. Aisling followed me after a minute. "I'll stay here and guard the body just in case. Go tell Saxon. The sun is pretty much down."

I shook my head. "You tell him. He wouldn't trust you to guard him," I said. "You know that."

Aisling shrugged. "Fine, it doesn't matter to me."

Then he was gone and I was left alone in the dark apartment with the body of David Zinc.

## Chapter Ten

I sat on his couch until Aisling and Saxon showed up; only a few minutes after I felt that pressure lift from the back of my brain that meant the sun had set. Saxon grinned at me and went into the bedroom. I didn't move. Aisling would have followed him but Saxon didn't want him in there. I almost wondered why, but for some reason I felt too tired to care.

I shut my eyes and in a moment I felt a huge power swell even further, not so much from the next room as it was from some other part of myself. I felt as the new power ebbed and flowed in that other part of myself, the part connected to Saxon. I knew he was ecstatically happy, and it made the killing almost worth it for his approval.

Aisling was gone, somewhere else in the apartment out of sight I presumed, although the place wasn't really big enough to lose track of someone in. *I'm just out of it. I have reason to be.* Saxon came back, and grinned at me from where he stood. I looked up at him. He was definitely happy, either with himself or me, I couldn't tell which. He came up and kneeled in front of me so he was just a bit below my eye level.

"I knew you could do it," he said softly, a smile still lingering on his face.

"He'd already tried to kill himself, it wasn't really very difficult," I said. Partially true. It had been sort of... taxing. I wondered if I should be finding it unusual for murder to be difficult.

"That isn't the point," he said. "Can you feel how strong he made me?" His voice was low, intimate. "Can't you taste it?"

I thought that was a weird way of phrasing that question but nodded, silent. I kept my eyes on his face. He reached to touch my cheek. I caught his wrist before he did. He blinked at me, a frown forming a second later. He wanted to touch me and he wasn't used to me stopping him. I was tempted to not give a reason, but I really didn't want him mad at me. "You'll get blood on my face," I said.

He blinked again, looked at his hand, slick with fresh blood. As though he hadn't noticed. He did a sort of shrug. "Yeah, you're right," he said. He stuck his finger in his mouth, sucking it clean, eyes on my face while he did it.

I stared at him still. "Do you want me to be horrified?" I asked softly.

He slowly pulled it out, savoring the taste. He didn't answer, just watching me, continuing to clean his fingers in his mouth like a child with chocolate syrup. Thinking that gave me a bizarre image of blood and ice cream, made me wonder how different it would taste, and I stood up. He was too close to me and he fell back on the carpet, catching himself on his hands. I froze. I hadn't meant to knock him over. He stared up at me for a minute, and I stared back. A smile pulled at his mouth until he threw his head back and laughed, eyes shut.

This was even weirder and I stepped to one side, watching him. He laughed so hard his eyes watered and he fell all the way down onto his back. Aisling materialized, frowned at him, at

me. I met his eyes. “What the hell happened?” he asked, confused.

“I have no idea,” I said, bewildered. Saxon laughed harder, until finally he caught his breath and could talk again. He got to his feet, leaving parts of bloody hand prints on the carpet in two places.

“We’d better get out of here,” Aisling said.

“Yeah, yeah, all right,” Saxon said, still grinning. “I have to sterilize the place.”

Aisling frowned. “Do what?”

“No prints,” Saxon said, eyes wide, voice soft. He wiggled his fingers at him, and started laughing again.

“As if life wasn’t weird enough,” I said, shaking my head. I went past him towards the door. He started to reach for me and stopped.

“I mustn’t stain your nice shirt,” he said, eyes wide again. He was acting like a child.

“Right,” I said, frowning slightly.

He waved his hand at the room in an overzealous gesture and I felt the same sort of sensation as I had when he’d wiped the fingerprints out of the hospital room. After it faded, he started toward the door. Aisling reached for the knob out of habit before Saxon smacked his hand away. “Don’t touch it, I just cleaned this place,” He was still trying not to laugh. It was so weird it seemed almost normal.

Instead he shoved him through the door with the back of his hand and part of his forearm pushing on his back— literally through it, and though I should have been used to that, it still looked a little weird. Aisling stumbled out into the hall. Saxon turned and in the narrow hall of the entranceway he was very close to me. He grinned down at me again. “If it wasn’t for him, I’d think this could hold promise,” he said. My confusion must have shown on my face, because he pushed me bodily back against the wall, his forearms flat on my shoulders so his hands were in the air on either side of my head. “No hands, right?” He hadn’t cleaned nearly all the blood off his hands and it was starting to dry to a sort of tacky substance.

“Right,” I agreed softly because I wasn’t sure what else to do.

He leaned in, kissed over the side of my face. I blinked, frowned slightly. “Why does your breath smell like blood?”

He gave me a bizarre smile. “Why wouldn’t it?”

I felt the urge to go see what David’s body looked like, what kind of shape he’d left it in. I shook my head despite how close he was to me and then he moved back a bit. He didn’t use his hands, turning me toward the door by pressing his arm into my back. I walked to the door and he kept just enough contact to push me through it, following close. He was making a big show out of not using his hands.

I sighed and just walked to the elevator. A woman got off, walked right past me. It was only in the elevator I realized she hadn’t noticed Saxon’s obviously-blood-covered hands. Not even I was that oblivious.

“Hey,” Aisling said, frowning at him like he just realized it too.

Saxon grinned, silent. When we got off, a guy got on and walked through Saxon’s arm, literally, right through him. His arm sort of shimmered like water. I sort of stared for a minute and Aisling ran into me. Did he think that was weird, too? Saxon didn’t seem to think it was, but then, why would he?

The street was dark, lit by car headlights and street lamps. I stopped beside the curb, the traffic too thick to go through safely in the dark, and Saxon shadowed me close enough where his breath stirred my hair. “My invisibility becomes more perfect,” he said, so low I was startled I could hear him.

I thought. “Could you go through a car?”

Aisling looked at me. “Did you say something?”

“He can’t hear me,” Saxon said. “Not even his special little faerie ears. I’m speaking only to you.”

*Flattering*, I thought. I didn’t speak. He answered my question. “Yes, I could. Moving ones can be harder. I think I should practice that before I bring you with me.”

That would be great, really— I mean, shouldn’t I know whether or not I could heal fully from being pasted by a truck? I wasn’t eager to find out. He laughed and it was strangely suggestive. At the moment I was finding him more confusing than winsome, but hey, that’s just me, right?

There was a break in the flow of cars and we crossed. Saxon seemed visible enough. I found myself wondering if I’d need to ask him whether or not he was perceivable before starting a conversation in public.

Again, we walked through that new carpeting. The hall was empty, and I was glad. I got the impression Saxon wanted to test his new powers, and whatever poor sap jumped him next would get a very unpleasant surprise. I felt bad enough for screwing the lives of the weres injured. I wasn’t at all sure what they were capable of healing. Somehow I doubted that being reduced to a pool of flesh was one of the possibilities.

Aisling pressed the button to call the elevator. Saxon stood unnaturally close to me, so every time he took a breath he touched my body. It was too construed to be an accident.

I didn’t look at him. He put his arms around me so they rested on my shoulders, hands loosely clasping his wrists, leaving faintly bloody fingerprints. It seemed wrong for me to just stand there, I should have reacted somehow, but for the life of me I couldn’t think of an appropriate action.

I had a thought. “Isn’t suicide going against one of the commandments or something?” I frowned.

Aisling looked at me, carefully. “Depends on the religion.”

“It is most of the time,” Saxon said conversationally, breathing into my hair.

“Well, then how come David tried to kill himself, and yet still was religious enough to

give you that much power?" I couldn't really look at Saxon, but it was obvious I was speaking to him.

Aisling looked at Saxon over me, then crossed his arms over his chest, looking like he wished he was somewhere else, looking away. "Good question," Saxon said. I wished I could see his face. Like magic he appeared in front of me, staring down at me.

I stepped back by mistake; he'd startled me. "That better?" he asked.

"Wh—what?" I stammered. I didn't move forward again.

"You wished you could see my face," he elaborated.

I stared up at him. "How much of my thinking can you hear?"

He shrugged. "I don't know. I hear what I hear. Supposedly at this stage I can only hear your casual thoughts, nothing secretive or really deep. But I don't know for sure."

"I might as well just think out loud," I said, voice faintly amused.

The elevator finally dinged and opened. Aisling got on and I followed him, going past Saxon, who looked at me for a split second before he moved. Then he got in to lean on the wall next to me. He started to press the button and stopped. I did it. He didn't want to leave bloody fingerprints.

I leaned back on the wall, sighing. It was still early in the evening, for the time of year, maybe seven o'clock? I wasn't sure but I was too tired for the time.

Saxon was looking at me. I knew somehow. "What's the matter?" he asked, proving me right.

I made a noise like a verbal shrug. "Don't know. I'm sort of tired."

The elevator opened and we left. Saxon went through the door and unlocked it for us mortals. A fact of my life I was beginning to wonder about. How, when, would I die? Could Saxon hear me thinking this? Did he know the answer? Every day I got more questions, and I only got an answer once in a while. I felt like I was drowning.

Saxon went to wash his hands off. Aisling and I just stood there for a moment. I wasn't sure what he was thinking, but I was wondering what I was supposed to do now. I sat down on the couch, in the corner, kicking my shoes off and pulling my knees to my chest. He spun one of the dining room chairs around to sit in it backwards, crossing his arms over the back of it and resting his chin on his arms, looking at me but not, sort of staring through me. I assumed he was thinking. I'd noticed that most of the time it seemed like he had a deep look of concentration hidden in his eyes, like he was always figuring, calculating, planning. It was sort of unnerving. His eyes flicked to mine when he realized I was looking at him. He did have amazing eyes. I looked away from him. I found myself wondering exactly what Saxon could hear.

Speak of the devil, as the saying goes, he returned, falling down onto the couch next to me. I glanced at him. "Now what," I asked, softer than I'd planned.

He looked at me. "What?"

I blinked. "What are we going to do now?"

He shrugged. "I don't know."

I blinked again, and he grinned, at the look on my face, maybe. "Shouldn't you go back to Madame Rosa?" Aisling interjected.

Saxon's smile melted and he looked at Aisling. I couldn't see the look he was giving him, but something told me it was a bit less than friendly. "Hey, man, I didn't do anything, all right?" Aisling said defensively. I sighed, exasperated, getting up. I went into the kitchen, opening the fridge.

"What's your problem?" Saxon asked, and I looked at him, confirming that he was talking to me.

My turn to shrug. "I just never thought I'd be living with a vampire and a faerie. Especially not ones that act like children," I took out the bottle of Coke and put it on the counter, reaching into a cupboard to get a glass. Now he was looking at me closely.

"What does that mean," he frowned slightly. Apparently I wasn't supposed to not hate Aisling, I was supposed to be on his side. Or not, maybe I was just pulling things out of the air that were just my imagination. Somehow I doubted that.

I poured the Coke and returned the bottle to the refrigerator. "Look, Saxon, Aisling hasn't done anything to you. You haven't got a reason to act so defensive and hostile whenever he talks to you." I considered walking back into the living room, but thought better of it.

Saxon's eyes flicked to Aisling again for a second. Aisling looked back at me, head resting on his arms, eyes innocent and sweet like a puppy's. I blinked, frowning slightly at him. *Is he pulling glamour on me?* I wondered.

"Now you're frowning at him," Saxon said defensively.

"But I'm not mad at him. He just confuses me," I said, making myself look away from him. I shook my head slightly to clear it. "And I'm wishing you'd told me how to tell when he was using glamour."

Aisling grinned at me, still sitting so Saxon couldn't see his face. "Stop it," I said to him.

Saxon didn't stand up, but I could suddenly feel his presence in the room, like a thickening of air almost. "He's using glamour right now," he said. His voice was normal and devoid of emotion but somehow sinister.

Aisling stopped smiling. Suddenly I didn't feel so much like I had to protect him from Saxon. I didn't feel like I was the only friend he had in the world anymore, when I hadn't even realized I'd been feeling like that. "You used too much this time, faerie," Saxon said, pleasant, conversationally. "She could feel the glamour this time."

"This time?" I said before I could stop myself. Letting their conversation play out would probably be more informative than asking questions, but I couldn't help it. I was worried because I felt suddenly like I had been living in an even darker spot in a dark corner than I knew.

"He's always trying glamour on you," Saxon said. "Not very much, but I can smell it on you when I feed."

“What are you trying to do?” I asked Aisling, frowning.

“I don’t suppose you’d believe I was just wanting to fuck you?” he said it mildly, and this time he used so much glamour even I could tell when he looked so alluring all of a sudden. But he still looked incredibly sexy and seductive when he hadn’t even moved. I frowned, and shook my head no, somehow not able to speak. The sexual feeling faded but the green of his eyes was instead brighter, deeper somehow as he looked at me. “Then you’ll just have to figure it out,” His voice was very soft, but clear, almost as though he were speaking directly into my mind.

I didn’t see Saxon move but he was suddenly directly behind Aisling. He turned to look at him, but it was like he was underwater, he moved so slowly. I could see Saxon’s hand move, blurred, but visible, catching Aisling on the side of his head. Then Aisling was lying on the floor, blinking up at the ceiling, the chair overturned. I hadn’t even had time to move. Aisling just lay there, staring up, sort of blindly. I wondered how badly that had hurt. Saxon was looking at me across the counter.

I stared back at him for a moment and then Aisling tried to move, or something, closing his eyes with a moan when he did. I blinked down at him. Then I went around the counter and kneeled next to him. “Are you okay?” I asked.

“I can’t see just yet, give me a minute,” he managed. There was a wonderfully colorful bruise forming on the side of his face, darkening faster than was normal where Saxon had struck him, near the temple. I looked up at Saxon.

“Step back,” he said softly.

I stood up. “Why?”

Aisling opened his eyes again, blinking hard to focus on me. “Don’t,” he said breathlessly. “He’s gonna kill me.”

I looked down at him, back to Saxon. “Step back,” he said it again.

Aisling took hold of my leg, clutching it like a child would his mother. He struggled to sit up. “Don’t let him kill me,” he hid his face against my leg so his voice was muffled. “Please.”

I stared down at him now, wondering what you were supposed to do when a fey caught hold of your leg like a little boy. Saxon smiled faintly like he heard the thought. “Saxon,” I said, half confused, half angry. I wondered vaguely when I’d gotten angry.

“Are you trying to protect him from me?” he asked, amused. The way he said it made the word protect mean much more than I had thought it did.

Aisling tightened his grip on my leg. I blinked at the vampire who didn’t look a day older than twenty three, who looked like he should be at a rock concert. This was just bizarre. “I... guess,” I said, bewildered.

Saxon took a step forward, closing the distance between us. His arm slid around my waist. Aisling made a little noise, like he was afraid. He hadn’t struck me as the submissive type. I looked up at Saxon and felt bad suddenly. I felt like I was betraying him by letting Aisling hold onto me. I felt like I should throw myself at his feet and beg forgiveness. That was not natural. I

didn't understand what was going on well enough to feel that strongly. I frowned, and he grinned. "What are you doing to me?" I asked.

"I'm not doing anything," he said, still grinning wide enough to bare fangs. "Neither is he. But he's trying to. If you're feeling his glamour, then great."

"I don't want to die," Aisling said, scooting away from Saxon as much as he could without letting go of me.

"Do you really believe he's so scared?" Saxon sounded amused still.

"I believe you'd kill him," I said.

He lowered his face to mine, close enough to kiss. "Why shouldn't I?" His voice was very low, just a step above a whisper. His other hand cradled my face. "He's trying to steal you from me by making you doubt me. He wants the fey scouts to kill me. Why wouldn't I kill him?"

"I was," Aisling admitted, before I could answer. "But you're strong enough now where you would be a better ally. I don't want to pit you against the Court, and I don't want to die." He nuzzled my leg.

It seemed wrong for me to just stand there with the two of them hanging all over me but it didn't seem right to do anything else. I didn't know if Aisling was telling the truth, but I was pretty sure that he didn't want to die. I was more than just pretty sure that he was afraid of Saxon. "Don't kill him," I said it again. "I know you could."

He smiled, and it reached his eyes. Most of them did. I could have taken the time to wonder why he wasn't more jaded but I didn't. For whatever reason, I felt obligated to keep Aisling alive. "I won't kill him," he said, still smiling cheerily.

I didn't believe him. "Don't hurt him."

He kissed my cheek several times. "I wouldn't dream of it."

I looked away from him, down at Aisling. Saxon kissed my hair instead. "Aisling, let go," I said, moving my leg insistently. He looked up at me with wide green eyes. "He won't hurt you."

"You believe him?" he asked, soft, careful.

"I do," I didn't hesitate. I did believe him.

"Fine," He crawled backwards away from me. The bruise on his face had healed almost completely. He got up and walked around us towards the front door.

I looked after him. Saxon didn't let go of me. I put my hands flat on his chest to try and gain some breathing space. "You're leaving?"

"I'll be back," he said. "And I won't use power. They won't find me tonight."

"I should hope not," Saxon sounded pleasantly concerned and yet mocking. Aisling slid out the door. I looked back at my vampire. He smiled down at me, and I frowned. "What?"

"You think of me as 'your vampire'," he said, grinning broadly. "That's... cute."

*Great, now I'm cute.* "Can you hear everything I think?"

"Some of it," he said. He was still smiling but it wasn't so painfully wide now. "I am glad he left. Aren't you?"

When he was this close to me it felt like I was almost inside his head, the only actual confirmation I had that he'd tied me to him. "Not as glad as you are," I said mildly.

He grinned wide again. "Probably not," he said, voice thick with laughter.

I started to say that I hadn't meant that to come out that way, but I didn't, partially because I wasn't sure if that were true or not. He kissed me deeply, crushing me to him with hands splayed on my back. My forearms were still flat on his chest. I looked out of the kiss. "Let go," I said, pushing against him. It was like pressing into a brick wall. The only way you even knew you were pushing on it was that your muscles would start to get tired. He didn't answer, but his aura changed somehow so I felt his displeasure. He didn't want to let go. If anything he tightened his hold.

"Let go," I insisted. "I can't breathe."

I had almost expected him to let go of me suddenly so I would stumble, but he didn't, just relaxing his grip so his hands rested lightly on my waist. I took several deep breaths. "I'm sorry," he said.

I blinked up at him. I wasn't used to getting apologies. Maybe I should get used to it. His brown eyes seemed very human, and very sincere. Other than that he wasn't striking me as very human at all. "It's okay," I said. He ran his fingers through my hair, and kissed my forehead. I shut my eyes. If I just fell into his arms, maybe I could delude myself enough to believe I was safe, that he wouldn't hurt me, that he wouldn't let anyone hurt me, and forget that he wasn't human and that I was turning out to be something different altogether. Maybe I could delude myself enough to be happy for a moment.

He touched my chin and kissed me again. Apparently he wasn't going to be distracted. I didn't feel much like making out. I felt like curling up in a little ball and trying to understand what was happening to my life. But I certainly wasn't going to make him mad. He'd never tell me anything if I angered him, and I had a lot to know.

*Surely he must feel how confused I am. Why doesn't he help me? Can't he at least make me feel better?* He broke off, frowning at me. "Your thoughts are so deep I can't touch them. Not even with physical contact."

I looked away from him for a moment. He didn't feel like a vampire, like one of the undead. He felt very much alive under my hands; his skin was warm and real to the touch, his pulse beat steady, his breathing was even a little off for a moment like he was out of breath. I looked back at him, but I couldn't keep eye contact with his worried eyes. I hid my face in his shoulder. I wasn't even sure if he was really worried or not, if he was just acting. I wondered if he had to try to put emotion in his eyes, if it was actual effort to breathe and keep a heartbeat. He didn't *feel* like a monster. I put my arms around him, shutting my eyes tighter. I could even smell him, for God's sake, what were the requirements for being dead? What was the difference between him and a walking corpse?

"I understand the analogy, but actual zombies are much different than I am." He said

softly in my ear.

I nearly flinched. "I didn't mean that," I said faintly, thinking it had sounded insulting.

"It's all right," His voice was very low, comforting, like I had nothing to worry about. There was a short pause. "But you don't have to worry."

I laughed, but not humorously. "I should just get used to you answering questions I have barely thought up yet," I said.

He ignored that remark. "You really don't, Nicci, I tell you what you need to know. You don't have to worry about things I don't tell you. That's the whole idea."

I frowned, and looked up at him. But he just smiled. He must have meant that to be reassuring but it hadn't really helped all that much. If anything, it was a little disconcerting. His smile didn't fade though, and I could almost feel apprehension sliding out of my gut, the constriction around my heart fading. He kissed my forehead. "I can make you feel better," he murmured. "See, I have a use."

It took me a moment to realize he had made a joke. I blinked up at him and he laughed, at the look on my face perhaps. I sighed and shook my head. "All right, so maybe I don't feel so depressed," I said, "but I'm still confused."

"Well, don't be... There's more interesting things to be than confused." He said it like an order. He added the last like he realized how he'd said it, but it lacked some of the effect it may have had.

"Aisling was right, you know," I said reluctantly. He didn't so obviously react as to glare or anything, but again I could feel a sort of displeasure floating in the air as he did not want to think of him. "I do need to go back to the psychic."

"No you don't," he said, this time not trying to soften the order.

I stepped away from him, out of his arms. "Yes I do, Saxon, I know it."

He crossed his arms over his chest, looking down at me. I ignored how impassive he seemed. "No you don't," he said again. "You don't have to talk to her."

"Why, because she's got a connection to Aisling? Is that what makes her so evil?" I glared at him. "Please, Saxon, don't be so shallow."

"You don't need her," he glared back. "If you can shoot fucking lightning without some witch telling you how, then you don't need her to tell you what to do."

I sighed, resisting pointing out that she wasn't a witch, and ignoring how he didn't need to point out me shooting lightning. "Saxon, that was an accident," I said. "I don't know how to 'shoot lightning.' I need to be able to control it."

"I haven't seen any signs that it's personally dangerous for you to not know how to use it." he said.

"What, you think both of them were lying?"

He didn't answer that. "Maybe when you start hurting yourself by mistake I'll think about it. But you don't need to see her."

“Just because you say so.”

He blinked, then shrugged. “If you want.”

“That’s stupid, Saxon. It really is.”

“Look, Nicci, you’re not going to see her, so just drop it, all right?” He didn’t look irritated, just peacefully blank. It was somewhat annoying that he was so expressionless.

“You are being intolerable and stubborn,” I said. I went into the bedroom, trying to get away from him. He turned as I went by, stepping into the doorway so I couldn’t shut him out.

“And you’re arguing for nothing. It’s pointless, I won’t let you see her.”

“Give me a good reason why not.” I said, turning back to him.

“Sure. If she talks to Aisling then he’ll know how strong you are. Then he could tell those faerie scouts. For all we know, that’s where he’s going right now. To talk to his superiors.”

I blinked. “That is logic so full of holes it’s not even reasonable,” I said. “They’re trying to kill him too. Not just us.”

He frowned then, the first real emotion. “Why do you keep defending him?”

“What are you, jealous?” I said disbelievingly. He didn’t answer. “Dammit, Saxon, that’s *really* childish. I don’t believe that he was lying about all the stupid shit he did to get the Court’s attention. I believe he can be stupid enough to do that. I’ve seen him bait you often enough. Of course that takes a lot less effort.”

“Well, then, fine. He is a stupid bastard, at least we agree on that. It doesn’t matter though. I’m still not going to take you to see that psychic.”

“Fine, I’ll go without you,” I said, pushing past him. He caught my wrist before I could get by him completely.

“No you won’t,” He was still perfectly blank but there was something stirring in his eyes that I didn’t like.

“Or what? You’ll kill me?”

I stared into his eyes for a long moment. “I won’t hurt you,” he finally said, each word carefully spoken.

“Then prove it. Let go of me.”

“Look, I’m not gonna hurt you, but I won’t let you go.” He pinned me to him easily with an arm around my waist and spun us around so I was back inside the bedroom. He kicked the door shut and the room was plunged into darkness.

“Thanks, I needed to be blinded,” I said crossly. “You’re the one who spends half of every day dead. What would keep me from going then?”

The expressionless mask crumbled and turned to anger, disgust and pain. “You’re *not* going!” he shouted it, shoving me back from him hard enough that I fell onto the bed. “That’s *final!*”

I pushed off the bed to stand again. I could see him better than I’d thought I’d be able to; maybe his power transferring over to me was finally going to have a use. “Why the *hell* not,

Saxon? You've already fucked my life, is it too much to ask for me to try and figure it out?" I shouted back at him. I'd stood up but he hadn't moved. I was too close to him, and I knew that like a flash in my stomach, almost fear, but gone too quickly.

"Just fucking *drop it!*" He was yelling, too.

"Damn you, Saxon, this is all your fault anyway!" I was so mad I couldn't think straight, he was being so... *stupid* I couldn't stand it.

"This is NOT my fault!" he took a step towards me with the words, hands in fists. I ignored the interjection.

"Would you let me at least try to reassemble what's left of my life? What are you so afraid of?"

"I'm *not* afraid!" he growled it, eyes flashing with anger.

I shook my head in disbelief, oblivious to the thin ice. "You have to be afraid of *something!*"

"*I'm NOT afraid!*" He screamed it in my face. I didn't see him move but I felt the impact on the side of my head, I felt my back slam into the carpet, sooner after contact than I'd thought it would be with how hard he'd hit me. I had expected, somewhere in my stunned brain, to fly farther with how powerfully he'd struck me.