

# NIGHT LIGHT

BLOOD BOUND SERIES BOOK 2



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*Night Light:*

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### **АННОТАЦИЯ**

Kat Santos hadn't seen the owner of Night Light for years. That is until Quinn suddenly decides to kidnap her and accuse her of setting him up for the vampire murders. Realizing the enemy is playing them, the two families combine their strength to stop the vampires from terrorizing their city.

Quinn Wilder has watched her with the hungry eyes of a cougar since the day she was born. When she became a teenager, the temptation to claim her as his mate quickly became a rift between him and her overprotective brothers. When their fathers killed each other in battle, the ties between the two families were severed and she was taken safely out of his reach. Stalking her from a distance, Quinn finds the vampire war has its good points when she forgets to stay away.

Kat Santos hadn't seen the owner of Night Light for years. That is until Quinn suddenly decides to kidnap her and accuse her of setting him up for the vampire murders. Realizing the enemy is playing them, the two families combine their strength to stop the vampires from

terrorizing their city. As the underground war escalates, so do the flames of desire as what started out as a kidnapping quickly turns into a dangerous game of seduction.

## Night Light

Blood Bound Series Book Two

Amy Blankenship, RK Melton

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### Chapter 1

Quinn Wilder looked around Warren's office not knowing if finding out who was behind the murders was a good thing or a bad thing. Most of the shouting match was over or at least he hoped it was. He glanced at Kane now that the vampire had his back toward the room. Kane hadn't bothered to defend himself. Michael had done a good job of that for him.

He should have been mad at the blonde vampire and he should apologize in the same breath, but right now all he felt for Kane was an odd fear and, as an animal of prey, he didn't like that feeling.

Kane smirked as he stared out the window. He really needed to turn the volume down on hearing other people's thoughts. So, the jaguars and the cougars were together again. Big fucking deal. What did they want him to do, a happy dance? Well tough, he wasn't in the mood.

The soulless vampires outnumber us at least ten to one. If I remember correctly, Devon was always an aggressive fighter. Maybe we should call him and have him come back and help. Steven offered his two cents, At the rate the vampire army is

growing, it's quickly becoming a losing battle. If we don't rally an army of our own, then we might as well pack it up and get the hell out of Dodge.

If the families hadn't been banned from each other for so long, you would have known Devon is busy chasing his reluctant mate half way around the world right now, Kat answered Steven, but she was glaring at Quinn when she said it.

Sarcasm noted, Steven grinned. His big brother had pissed Kat the hell off by kidnapping her. Glancing back at Quinn, he wondered why his brother hadn't said anything about Dean helping them with the vampires near the club. Having one of the fallen on their side was bragging rights, not something to keep a secret.

He'd heard about the other fallen who had helped retrieve Devon's mate and her friend, but now that he'd left with Devon and the two girls, Dean was their only trump card. I second the motion of calling Devon back home in hopes that the fallen, what was his name?

Kriss, Kat offered.

If Kriss comes back with Devon, then we'll have evened the odds because we already have one of the fallen here that is willing to help us, Steven finished.

And just how do you suppose we get them back? Quinn asked glancing toward Warren. You know how the males of our species react when we've found a mate. The only way Devon will come back is if his mate is with him.

“Here’s a new idea for you!” Tell him the truth,” Kat growled and locked eyes with Quinn when he turned to look at her. She cocked an eyebrow at him then smiled in satisfaction when he jerked his gaze away.

Quinn inwardly winced at her barb but said nothing in retaliation.

Kane took a cigarette out of his case and lit it. “I dare say, the young lady among us does have a point. If you want the kittens to come back, you have to entice them.”

“Sure,” Michael said trying to lighten the mood in the room. “I’ll just set a bowl of cream outside the back door and wait there with a butterfly net.”

Kane and Kat both grinned at the visual of Michael sitting in the dark with a butterfly net in his hands waiting for some unsuspecting kitten to come and start lapping up a bowl of cream.

“Kriss does need to come back,” Kat finally conceded. “I’ve seen him fight and it’s the equivalent of a serious f-bomb. But if I read him right, he won’t come back without Tabby.”

“How do you get a fallen to leave his charge and pick a side in a war?” Steven asked.

“You don’t,” Michael stated. “The fallen are few and far between. The only two I’ve ever met are Dean and Kriss, and you don’t want to piss either one of them off.” He glanced at Quinn, “Is there any chance Dean would ask Kriss to cut his vacation short?”

Several more questions were asked from the jaguar side of the room but Kane felt cold chills crawl across his skin as he blocked them out. He knew exactly who they were talking about. If Kriss came back, then Tabatha would follow.

Everyone but Michael twitched when Kane suddenly turned around and faced them.

The war already started, so when you guys are finished kissing and making up, maybe you can join in the hunt. He pushed the window open and jumped out, not caring that it was on the second floor. His long black duster flapped out behind him looking very similar to dark wings before he dropped out of sight.

As Kane disappeared, Michael rolled his eyes at his friend's dramatic exit and reached over to close the window. Everyone else thought Kane had landed on the ground but he could sense him above them, on the roof. The meeting had actually gone better than Michael thought it would.

Michael wondered if Kane even realized what he'd done when he'd shoved that bloodstone deep into Kane's flesh. When he bit his own wrist and bled into Kane's wound, it had been for two very good reasons. One was to help the stab wound heal faster, but the second reason had been purely selfish. With his blood now deep inside Kane's veins, he could track his friend's every movement.

It still ticked him off that Kane had been within the city for quite a while and he'd not known it. He hadn't even

been looking for him because heâ€™d thought Kane was dead. If heâ€™d found Kane a little soonerâ€”maybe he could have stopped this mess before it had spiraled out of Kane's controlling hands. But now that heâ€™d given blood to Kane, it would be better than a tracking device. If Kane decided to runâ€”he wouldnâ€™t get far.

â€”I donâ€™t see why Kane has such a bad attitude about this since heâ€™s the one who caused the vampire explosion to start out with,â€” Nick said from where he was leaning against the door. He didnâ€™t mind Michael in the mix, but counting on Kane was a bad idea. The man didnâ€™t exactly seem stable.

â€”Youâ€™re just pissed because Kane decided not to be the enemy,â€” Warren informed him even though he wasnâ€™t too happy with Kane himself. But he wasnâ€™t going to bring up the fact that Kane had also set his sister up for Quinn to kidnapâ€”not until he had a better idea of just how sane the resurrected vampire really was.

Michael started to take up for Kane, but there were too many toes to step on and enough guilt to go around. He knew Kane was still hiding something from him and he was dying to find out what it was before it wound up eating his friend alive. He wished Kane would hurry up and realize that he wasnâ€™t alone anymore.

On the other hand, Michael knew Kane had gone through an experience he would never be able to completely understand the horror of. If faced with the same situation, Michael wasnâ€™t so



sure he could keep his sanity either. Kane was betrayed by one of his best friends and sentenced to an eternal exile with almost no hope of escape.

His eyes narrowed toward the window realizing that was one question heâ##d completely forgotten to ask. Just how had Kane been freed from the grave?

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Kane paced back and forth on the roof of Moon Dance, his hands fisting and uncurling at his sides. He could still see the look on Krissâ## face when heâ##d thrown him across the warehouse like trash. He couldnâ##t fight the fallenâ##; no one could stand up against the power one of them possessed.

Even if they did call Kriss in as reinforcement, and Tabatha came back with him, Kane knew Kriss had no intentions of sharing her. It didnâ##t happen very often, but Kane would bet the bloodstone buried in his body that the fallen was in love with Tabatha. If that was true, then Kane stood no chance of getting anywhere near his soul mate.

Heâ##d blown his chance and it hurt like hell. Even if she didnâ##t have a fallen angel sitting on her shoulder, Tabatha wouldnâ##t have anything to do with him now. As for the others, he didnâ##t care if the shifters liked him or not. This wasnâ##t a popularity contest by any means.

â##Maybe itâ##s best they donâ##t like me,â## he whispered as he gazed out over the city.

Kane nodded his head firmly and buried his hands in his

pockets. He would stay long enough to help rid the city of the vampire riff-raff he'd unintentionally created. But once that was done, he would go out on his own again. That way, when he decided to take off, there would be no one that cared enough to follow.

The thought left him on edge.

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Trevor pulled up in Envy's driveway and shut off the car. He really wanted to talk to her and see how she was doing. Maybe she'd had time to think about what he'd told her; after all, it had been the truth.

Glancing at the item in the passenger seat of his car, he smirked before grabbing it. He'd really done a number on the jeans he'd borrowed earlier in the week from Chad, and now he was going to return them. This was his good deed for the day. Hopefully, no one had ever been sent to hell for having a sense of humor.

Unfolding the jeans, he took note of the dirt and black motor oil smeared all over them. He laughed inwardly when he again saw his handiwork on the crotch. Trevor had made a special exception and shifted back into his dog form to happily rip out the crotch.

Hanna, Mrs. Tully's old cat who had decided to start living with him, had actually walked up and sniffed the jeans before turning around, lifting her tail in the air and spraying them to get rid of the canine scent he'd left on them. Trevor didn't

think he'd ever laughed so hard in his life.

Perfect, he whispered.

Getting out of the car, he approached the front door and tossed the jeans over onto the bushes, almost laughing again when they slipped off the foliage and landed on a giant ant bed. This was too priceless.

Ringling the doorbell, he shoved his hands in his pockets and waited for the door to open. When it finally did swing in, Trevor put on his best chastised expression.

Hey, he said quietly.

Chad sighed and leaned against the door frame, Hey yourself, stranger.

Look, I know I messed up and I wanted to talk to Envy or at least try if you promise to keep the taser away from her, Trevor explained with a small smile.

I would, but Envy's not here, Chad answered as he pushed himself off the door frame and stood to his full height. Jason had mentioned Trevor's name in the same sentence as the word stalker and he hoped Jason was wrong. She decided to take some time off and go hang out with Tabatha and Kriss. I'm not sure when she'll be back.

Trevor inhaled deeply and nodded when he noticed that Envy's scent wasn't fresh in the house. At least Chad wasn't lying about her not being home. I need you to give her some information then.

Like what? Chad asked, looking very serious.

â##She needs to stay away from Devon Santos. Heâ##s bad news and will end up hurting her,â## he hedged, hoping to drag Chad over to his side by playing on his protective brotherly instincts.

Chad frowned at Trevorâ##s warning and crossed his arms over his bare chest. â##Kind of like you?â##

Trevorâ##s complacent attitude took a nosedive, â##Hey, what I did was part of my job. I didnâ##t want to hurt Envy with my line of work. Thatâ##s why I never told her what I do for a living.â##

He looked away and shoved his hands deeper in his pockets knowing Chad didnâ##t have a clue. He hoped like hell Envy hadnâ##t repeated exactly what heâ##d told her to Chad. Civilians didnâ##t need to know about the things that go bump in the nightâ##, especially not a cop.

â##I told her the night you found me at the club that I was undercover but I donâ##t think she believes me,â## He added, watching Chadâ##s reaction closely for any hint that he knew more than he needed to.

Chad sighed, â##Look, I know you liked my sister but sheâ##s moved on. I think you should do the same thing. Iâ##m not just telling you as a co-worker or even a friend, Iâ##m telling you as someone thatâ##s been through it. Leave her alone and let her make her own decisions. Despite your best intentions, I think sheâ##s going out with Devon now.â##

Trevor lifted his eyes to Chadâ##s face. â##What?â## he

asked dangerously.

She's dating Devon as far as I know," Chad repeated point blank.

Trevor felt a chill race down his spine, turned around and stalked away from the door without another word. Chad frowned when he noticed a cat through the front window of Trevor's car leaning up on the dashboard. The other man hurriedly got in his car, revved up the engine, and peeled out of the driveway.

Jason," Chad announced to the air, "You had best not be right about him being a stalker."

Chad knew Envy had left town with Devon to join Kriss and Tabatha for a short getaway. He wasn't about to tell Trevor that news as Envy had sworn him to secrecy. It didn't matter anyway, because it wasn't any of Trevor's business what Envy did now.

Chad shook his head and started to go back inside when he saw something blue out of the corner of his eye. His expression lit up when he saw his jeans laying on the ground and rushed over to pick them up, grimacing at the ants crawling all over them.

His happiness faded when he saw all the rips and tears in them and his eyes widened comically when he saw the crotch had been ripped out completely.

Chad lowered the jeans and glared out at the street, "Dog, your ass is grass."

## Chapter 2

Kat had moved over to stand beside the window. She wanted

to be as far away from Quinn as possible. She nearly rolled her eyes realizing her move had only brought him into her direct line of vision. She wished that Envy were here. She really needed to talk to the other woman or just another woman in general. It would have been nice to have a little back up with this testosterone-induced conversation.

Looking around the room, she realized that not all the main members of the cougar family were present.

Where are Micah and Alicia? Kat asked knowing they should be part of this whatever it was.

Quinn looked at Warren with an expression that he hoped the jaguar would read between the lines of and back him up on what he was getting ready to say. Alicia hasn't been home from boarding school but a month and we are not bringing her into this fight. It's too dangerous for girls.

Kat's expression darkened further and she looked ready to rip the head of the cougar family apart.

And Micah? Warren asked before Kat had time to start a war over that last remark.

Unreachable, The anger in Quinn's tone had everyone looking at him curiously. We've tried repeatedly but he refuses to answer his cell phone.

Steven sighed at Quinn's stubbornness and interrupted, Micah has been missing for over two weeks.

What? Warren asked suddenly angry. Why didn't you come to us for help?

“Because of the stupid journal,” Kat mocked. “Obviously, he was afraid we couldn’t handle what it said because of our touchy sensibilities.”

Michael shook his head knowing that until the two families worked out their differences, he would likely have to play referee. “Okay, while we’re working on the vampire problem, we’ll also keep an eye out for clues of Micah’s disappearance.”

“Logic indicates that Micah will eventually come back on his own, he always does,” Quinn shrugged.

Kat glared out the window still steaming. How dare Quinn hint that girls shouldn’t be involved? They could keep Alicia out of it if they wanted, and they probably should with her being younger than any of them. But if they dared to try and stop her, then they were in for a huge surprise. The problem was, now she was also worried about Micah.

Quinn should have just pushed everything to the wayside and called them. He knew they would’ve helped despite their differences. So what if their fathers had killed each other; the sins of the fathers should not fall to their children.

Though she didn’t know it, Warren silently agreed with Kat. Quinn should have contacted them the moment Micah came up missing. He was well aware of the explosive arguments the brothers could have with each other. The disagreements would usually end with Micah storming out and disappearing for days at a time; but not weeks.

Steven and Nick had stayed in touch over the years and Nick kept him up to date on the cougar family. When Micah and Quinn fought, Micah would always tell Steven where he was going if he was going to stay gone more than a day. This time Micah hadn't left a message with anyone, meaning he wasn't going to be gone that long.

After the dangerous vampire nest Steven and I found at the church, no one needs to go out alone tonight. We need to pair up," Quinn said changing the subject.

Steven felt odd when the image of the girl he'd found and lost that night flashed through his mind. "I think I'll head back over there tonight and make sure the church is still clean. We could have missed something."

"I'll go with Steven," Nick offered wanting to spend time with his old mischief-making partner.

Kat felt a moment of panic as she silently did the math. Michael would no doubt go with Kane, and she really didn't want to team up with Kane anyway because he was far from stable. That left Warren and Quinn.

"I'll go with Warren," Kat offered.

"No," Warren corrected her. "We need someone to watch the club."

"Just because I'm a girl doesn't mean I can't hold my own," Kat warned them, then calmly walked out of the room.

All the men in the room cringed when she softly closed the



door behind her.

“Damn,” Nick whispered. “I almost wish she slammed the door.”

Steven and Quinn hadn't seen Kat in a few years but they could remember her temper extremely well. A softly closing door behind an angry Kat was ten times worse than storming out. She was angry! no, she was well beyond the angry point. She was pissed.

“I'm going to call Devon and fill him in on what's happening,” Warren stated and pulled the cell phone from his front pants pocket. He hated to do this to his brother but if he didn't get his ass home he might not have much of one to come back to. Pressing a number on the speed dial, he walked toward a different door leading to the adjoining bedroom.

Warren waited while the phone on the other end of the call continued to ring. Finally he heard someone pick it up and a muttered curse followed immediately after.

“What the hell do you want?” Devon asked sounding groggy but happy.

Warren quickly conveyed what had happened since Devon and Envy's departure not more than twenty-four hours prior.

Devon sighed, “Damn, I leave town and everything goes to shit.”

“I'll give you a few days then you need to be home,” Warren said. “I also need you to do something for me during those few days.”

“What’s that?” Devon asked sounding much more awake.

“I need you to ask Kriss if he will assist us. Tell him Dean has already signed on but we’re probably going to need him, too. If you have to, get Envy to convince Tabatha that we need Kriss here because from what I hear, if she comes back then the fallen will follow.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” Devon said. “Kriss is a strange one. He walks to his own beat, you know.”

Warren nodded, “Reminds me of someone else I know.”

Devon chuckled, “Okay big bro, I’m not making any promises though.”

“I’ll see you in a few days.” Warren said and hung up the phone.

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Quinn noticed Kat in one of the surveillance monitors on the wall. Since everyone was waiting on Warren to finish his phone call, he stepped closer to the monitors like he was bored. Boredom was not what he felt when looking at Kat.

He’d thought she was beautiful years ago, but he’d underestimated what she would become. Over the years, he had kept watch over Kat from a distance. He’d even hired spies to work here at Moon Dance and report back to him; though the last one he’d sent wound up as one of the latest murder victims.

He tensed when a guy walked straight up to where Kat was

standing behind the bar and reached for her arm. With the camera angled perfectly, Quinn could tell the guy wasn't in a friendly mood.

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Trevor strode into Moon Dance not knowing if he wanted to tear the place apart or drown his anger in a couple gallons of alcohol. He'd tried to contact Envy but she was obviously hiding from him. Tabatha and Kriss were probably screening their calls right along with her. When he'd asked the all-knowing brother where the hell Envy was, he'd wanted to rip Chad's head off for being so vague about her location.

Trevor spotted Kat serving drinks behind the same bar where she always worked. He reached out and gripped her arm to get her attention but the look she swung toward him had him backing off and taking a seat.

The special on tasers has ended. Can I get you something else? Like a life time membership to one of the other bars? Kat batted her eyelashes at him innocently. Finally looking him in the eyes and seeing the misery swimming around there she shrugged, Sorry, my true target is out of reach. What can I get you?

Trevor rubbed his temples with his fingertips. He'd be damned if he ever figured out the opposite sex. It wasn't like they made it easy. Some answers would be nice.

Like? Kat prompted.

Like where my girlfriend is hiding. There was a slight

raise of an eyebrow as he waited.

“Your girlfriend? Did you replace Envy that fast?” Kat smirked when his gaze turned into a silent glare. “Oh, you’re referring to Envy.”

“You think?” Trevor retorted sarcastically.

“All I know is that your ex-girlfriend and my brother took off on a type of honeymoon.” Kat shrugged knowing it was closer to the truth than Envy would think.

“I thought she was with Tabatha and Kriss?” Trevor felt his blood pressure rise dangerously as he wondered if Chad had lied about that.

Kat quickly poured him a shot of Heat hoping it would tame the anger that was flaring within his eyes. “She is. Tabby and Kriss are with them.” She slid the drink in front of him adding, “It’s on the house.”

Watching him down the shot, her lips parted when she noticed the light above them reveal the unshed tears that were trying to gather in his eyes.

Damn, that sucks. She instantly regretted being such an ass to him. She wished Quinn had felt that way about her. It would be nice if he could show some emotion regarding her or what she’d felt for him. Hell, she’d even be able to live with Quinn blowing her off, if he only had the guts to tell her to her face.

Reaching over, she placed a gentle hand on Trevor’s shoulder then thought of a way to distract him and get her a

hunting partner at the same time.

Kat smiled as an idea started to form in her head. He'd all but flat out called her a jaguar the other night, so he obviously hadn't been lying about being a paranormal investigator. If it was an army the boys wanted, then the least she could do was help recruit, right?

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna go make myself a good target for the vampires that have been leaving bodies on our doorstep. She went to walk around the bar but Trevor grabbed her wrist so fast she hadn't even seen him move. She simply cocked an eyebrow at the restraining hand. Unless you're going to help me, you might want to let go.

You're serious? Trevor asked.

He'd also been leaning toward thinking it was vampires for the mere fact that there seemed to be a baby boom of them right now, oh, and the little fact of half-destroyed fang marks. The downside to this was he hadn't dealt with vampires before, only during training. He needed a reason to stick around until Envy resurfaced, so why not hang around with the competition's sister?

When Kat nodded and slowly pulled her hand away, Trevor shook his head knowing he would regret this, Are your brothers going with you?

Oh, they're going all right, but in different directions. She made a pouty face. It seems no one wanted to team up with the girl.

As if to prove her point, Steven and Nick chose that moment to come downstairs and head for the door together. Nick gave Kat a hard stare, hoping she would get the message and do what Warren had asked her to do—stay here where it's safe. He felt a little easier when she gave him a small smile as if all was forgiven.

Glancing back toward the door leading upstairs Kat nodded, "See, it's tag teams tonight except for the odd number—aka me." She flashed Trevor a big smile as if she didn't mind. "But that's okay, I don't mind hunting on my own."

Trevor smirked and crossed his arms on the bar top. He leaned forward a little signaling Kat to do the same and whispered two words.

"Not alone," he shook his head.

Quinn and Warren stopped as they came down into the nightclub. Warren knew they were overstaffed tonight so the bar would be covered but that didn't stop him from issuing a couple of last minute orders.

While he was doing that, Quinn nearly glared a hole in Trevor. He hadn't missed the monitor, seeing the way Trevor reached out and grabbed Kat's wrist—or the emotional dance that had followed. How close was Kat to this man? The way they were acting, it was like they shared some secret that the rest of them weren't allowed to hear and it grated on his nerves.

"Who is that man with Kat?" Quinn asked when Warren was finished with his com-link.

Warren turned to look seeing Envy's ex-boyfriend. He figured Kat was telling Trevor that Envy was no longer available, which was a good idea because without Trevor's eye-candy hanging out at the bar, maybe the paranormal investigator would go investigate somewhere else.

That's just the local masochist that likes to be tasered by attractive women," Warren smirked at his own joke. When Quinn didn't smile, it made him suddenly miss teaming up with Michael. He wondered if it was too late to change partners then deleted the thought. Quinn and Kane teamed up together would be a disaster waiting to happen.

Trevor felt someone staring at him and glanced over toward the door. He was barely able to keep the surprise out of his expression when he saw Quinn Wilder with Warren Santos. If he hadn't suspected what he did, Trevor would believe the two were involved in the murders and were plotting their next move. But that line of thought was reserved for the dumb asses on the local police force.

What is the owner of Night Light doing here?" Trevor asked turning back to Kat.

We are all trying to fix the problem with the vampires," Kat said as her eyes locked defiantly with Quinn's. Oh my, he looked a bit rattled. Just to test the theory, she leaned closer to Trevor like she was whispering sweet nothings in his ear, "Do you have any weapons we can use to even the odds?" she winked knowing she'd just gained a partner for the night.

Trevor thought about it for a moment, making a mental checklist of what he did have in his trunk.

“Yeah, I’ve got a few things in the car,” Trevor admitted. “We may have to go back to my place to get some extras I’ve stashed in my gun safe.”

“Perfect,” Kat thought to herself.

As Warren and Quinn walked past the bar, Warren was again distracted by the com-link going off in his ear. Quinn didn’t mind the delay. It gave him a moment to find out what was going on with the happy couple at the bar.

Kat saw Quinn coming and quickly moved down the bar so Trevor couldn’t overhear and Quinn couldn’t blow her cover. Reaching for a bottle, she turned around to find Quinn standing between her and the bar.

“Can I help you sir?” Kat asked with a sarcastically raised eyebrow. “You do know there are no patrons allowed behind the bar.”

Quinn took a step toward her even though it was already a tight fit. Placing a hand on the shelf beside her arm, he efficiently trapped her where she was. Seeing her eyes stray over his shoulder to the man she had been talking to! Quinn growled, “Don’t get distracted tonight Kat. I’m warning you. Just because you’re not coming with us to hunt doesn’t mean a vampire can’t just walk in the door of this bar.”

Kat sighed knowing that was the oldest trick in the book. Make someone think they were important by giving them a safe little



side job. "It'll be fine," she informed him as she ducked under his arm and headed back toward Trevor. "And if I need anything, I already have someone willing to give it to me." The last was said with a seductive hint in her voice. It was a lie, but Quinn had pissed her off.

She smirked inwardly knowing Quinn thought she meant sexually and Trevor thought she meant on the vampire hunt tonight. Warren chose that moment to finish up and motion for Quinn that he was ready to leave.

Quinn's lips thinned as he stepped behind Kat and leaned down, almost brushing his lips against her ear, "Have a safe night." He watched the goose bumps spread down her neck and across her shoulder with satisfaction.

Kat gripped the edge of the bar when her knees went weak. Steadying herself she jumped when Michael's voice came from right behind her.

"Be careful how hard you pull that cat's tail, love," Michael reminded her then nodded at Trevor before going to meet Kane on the roof.

Trevor frowned at the startled look on Kat's face. "Wasn't that a vampire?"

"No, that was a gentleman and he's helping us track the real monsters," Kat said confidently as she silently added, and he's the only one that didn't put up a fuss about me going out tonight. "However, it looks like we're falling behind. Are you ready to leave?"

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Kane was pacing back and forth on the roof, smoking a cigarette and occasionally waving his arms around. He was starting to get antsy waiting for Michael to show up.

“Jaguars and cougars,” he grumbled. “They’re worse than domestic house cats. Everyone has to have domination over the others. I’d rather team up with the Coyotes than deal with this.”

Michael came up over the edge of the roof right behind Kane, catching him in his agitated rant. He frowned when Kane immediately fell silent and glanced to the side acknowledging his presence.

“Damn it Kane, are we going to talk about what’s bothering you or not?” Michael asked as he crossed the distance between them.

“Or not,” Kane responded.

“Fine,” Michael waited knowing Kane hated the silent treatment worse than arguing. He loved it when he was right.

Kane walked toward the edge of the building, putting the distance back between them. He’d forgotten how Michael could sneak up on him; it hadn’t happened in so long. Raven seemed a little disappointed that his army was lacking at the warehouse; some of his crazies were missing. My guess is the vampires that missed our little death party probably needed a place to spend the day, so I’m going to check it out.”

Michael didn’t say a word when Kane once again dropped

off the side of the roof and landed on the pavement below. Just as he stepped to the edge ready to fall as Kane did, something on the roof across the road caught his attention.

Jerking his gaze toward it, Michael caught a glimpse of the shadow as it disappeared. Something about that shadow had seemed familiar but he couldn't put his finger on it.

Did Kane have a stalker or was he the target? Trying to suppress the feeling for now, he glanced down and smiled as he fell. Although he could no longer see Kane, and he knew the way to the warehouse, instead of following a route he followed the pull of his own blood within Kane's veins. By the time he made it to the warehouse, he could hear the screams of the vampires Kane had caught off guard.

He paused in the doorway using his enhanced vision to see into the darkness of the huge room. Kane already had two vampires on him and several more thought the tag team tactic was a great idea. Stepping inside, he pulled the door shut behind him and started forward when Kane's voice echoed.

Let me handle this. Just don't let any of them past you, Kane said a little breathlessly as he twisted the neck of the vampire that was trying to rip his throat out. He jerked when fangs sank into his shoulder, causing him to lose his hold on the first one.

Both of Michael's eyebrows disappeared under his windblown hair but he backed up against the door. Fine, if you're sure. He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back

against the metal.

“Well! I’m bored,” he said after a moment and looked toward the soulless vampires that weren’t yet in the fight. “I don’t suppose one of you would do me the honor of running for it?”

When Kane managed to decapitate the first vampire, one on the sidelines turned to do just what Michael had suggested, but Kane’s arm reached out and grabbed him by the leather jacket he was wearing. “I don’t think so,” he growled as he pulled it into the fight.

“Didn’t your mommy teach you to share?” Michael smiled as he watched Kane get the hell knocked out of him. He had a feeling Kane needed the pain to help him feel alive right now. He had no doubt Kane would be the last vampire standing and this release of anger and violence might even help to open his friend back up! Therapy at its best.

“My mother was a thief,” Kane answered, leaping up and pushing both of his feet into the chest of a vampire who was running hell bent toward him. The vampire went flying and Kane landed on his back. Kicking his legs up, he was back on his feet in an instant. “She didn’t believe in sharing.”

“We both know your mother was no thief,” Michael chided. “She was a well bred lady.”

Kane was punched in the face and flew backwards. Michael followed the movement as Kane sailed past him and into the very same pile of rubbish Kriss had knocked him into. He sighed when

he fully noticed Kane was becoming a bloody mess. Kane rushed into the fight again, tearing the bastards apart as he went.

“Need some help yet?” Michael asked above the sound of bones snapping and feet splashing in puddles that were growing bigger by the minute. He actually laughed when Kane started mumbling one of Syn’s spells but was punched in the mouth before he could finish it.

“No,” Kane growled as he spit blood in the face of the one who had punched him so hard he’d seen stars. Grabbing a piece of wood from a chair they had broken during the fight, he shoved it into the vampire’s mouth so hard that it came out the back of his neck.

Michael made a face but didn’t interfere. He watched closely, counting three vampires down and four to go. Kane was a fearless fighter, more so now than before he was buried alive. Which reminded Michael of the one question he hadn’t asked yet: how did Kane break the binding spell without the blood of his soul mate?

Less than twenty minutes later, Kane collapsed to his knees. He looked through the red haze of his vision toward the sound of clapping that was coming closer. He wiped the blood from his mouth and tried to push himself up from the floor. He laughed when it didn’t work because the floor was so slick with blood.

“And the winner gets a hundred Band-Aids and a good night’s rest at Michael’s house.” He bent down and wrapped his arm around Kane’s waist to help him up. They both swayed

before he got them balanced.

“You have a house?” Kane asked hoping if he kept talking he wouldn’t pass out before they got there. He knew where Michael was living, but he didn’t want to admit it because that would just remind Michael to be mad at him for staying away. He wasn’t exactly happy with himself over that but he’d felt the need to keep his distance.

“Yeah, I’m all grown up now. Besides, caskets are so yesterday.” He cringed inwardly realizing Kane might not think that joke was very funny. “The place is huge. It used to be some kind of Victorian style art museum until they built an upgraded one in Beverly Hills. Maybe if you moved in with me, the place would feel more like a home.”

“I want a puppy,” Kane stated out of the blue while concentrating on the putting one foot in front of the other routine that usually keeps you from falling.

“You want a what?” Michael asked.

“If we are moving in together, then I get to pick out a puppy.”

Michael had to smile at his old friend. It seemed Kane’s love for canines hadn’t diminished over the decades.

### Chapter 3

“So, what’s up with Micah?” Nick asked Steven as they pulled into the parking lot beside the church and parked in between two of the busses.

“Micah and Quinn got in their usual fight about who makes

the rules and Micah left to blow off some steam.â## Steven answered as he got out of the car. He still thought it was funny that all the jaguars droveâ#; you guessed itâ#; jaguars. â##Hell, they taught each other how to fight, so decking each other is no big deal.â##

â##Then why hasnâ##t he come back?â## Nick pointed out.

â##That is the question isnâ##t it,â## Steven sighed. â##Quinn thinks Micah ran off but I know better.â##

â##What makes you so sure?â## Nick asked curiously.

â##Because Alicia had only been home a couple weeks before he disappeared. Micah had been counting the days for when he could bring her home. Even when Nathaniel was alive, it was Micah who acted more like a father to her. Heâ##d never just up and leave now that sheâ##s home.â## He shrugged and added, â##Or if he did decide to abandon the family, then heâ##d at least take her with him.â##

Nick nodded wondering if the vampires were responsible for Micahâ##s vanishing act. Somehow that really didnâ##t sound like a good thing, so for Micahâ##s sake Nick hoped Micah had just lost his temper and hadnâ##t found it yet. Heâ##d ask Alicia more questions tomorrow.

Steven looked up at the huge church with all its intricate carvings and statues. The fact that it looked like it had been imported from Rome spoke of the money the sinful humans that graced its door must have. The extremely rich were the most sinful, thatâ##s why they made such a show of their religion.

The truth was this place is where the Mayor of the city came to shake hands and exchange money with the mafia every Sunday just after mass. So the question he'd been asking himself was why had that girl been here alone in the middle of the night?

The church was mostly dark except for a couple of windows that still showed light on the second floor. From what he remembered, that was probably the office area. He wondered if the priest he'd left safely in the closet actually lived here. It was something he'd never thought to assume until now. The Catholics were a dedicated lot, he'd give them that.

He'd already filled Nick in on what happened the other night, well most of it anyway. There was no way in hell he was going to recap the choir boy robe incident. Shaking his head, Steven pulled on the front door expecting it to be locked but sadly, it swung open.

Not very smart, Nick frowned as he pulled the bone-handled knife from his sleeve and slipped inside. You think after what happened the other night, they'd start locking the doors.

Maybe like the saying goes, it's always open, Steven shrugged but entered cautiously. Or maybe the old priest is expecting company.

I repeat, not very smart, Nick snapped knowing they weren't the only paranormal creatures within the building. I smell humans upstairs but there's something else here



and I doubt it came for confession.â##

â##Iâ##ll go make sure the priest is safe. If you find vampires, be smart and leave them alone until we call for backup.â## Steven made his way up stairs leaving Nick to make his own decision.

Nick nodded and started looking for the basement of the church. Usually the worse the monsters wereâ#, the further underground they liked to be. He didnâ##t bother hiding as he investigated because the enemy could see in the dark just as well as he could.

Finding the door labeled â##basementâ##, Nick opened it and quickly descended the stairs. He wrinkled his nose at the dank, damp smell and sneezed. Heâ##d always hated basements.

Steven was doing the same thing upstairs, opening doors and peering in as he passed them. Seeing the light filtering in under the door of the same office from the other night, he knocked this time. He could smell the scent beyond the door and knew the old man was alone.

â##Is that you, Jewel?â## the old voice came.

Steven took a quick step back when the door swung openâ## him and the priest coming face to face. The kind old face with the soft expression slowly changed, his eyes going wide as his lips parted. Steven put his hand out knowing what was coming next, and he wasnâ##t disappointed when the priest tried to slam the door in his face.

Pushing against the door, Steven entered the room letting the

old man's weight on the door shut it behind him. Swinging around, he grabbed the weapon that came next and tossed it across the room getting annoyed. "I told you last time, I'm not a vampire."

"I woke up in the closet." The priest reminded him as he backed up against his desk. Steven sighed as he watched the old man's hands rummage across the desk obviously trying to find another weapon. He cocked an eyebrow seeing his fingers wrap around a heavy-duty stapler.

"I don't want to hurt you," Steven informed him. "But if you don't let go of that stapler, you'll be waking up in that closet again." He nodded thankfully when the man slowly released it and stood to his full height, which was lacking compared to his.

"I have a feeling you didn't come here to confess." Fear could still be heard in the old man's voice.

"Oh father, I know I have sinned," Steven smirked but seeing the joke wasn't shared he grabbed a chair and turned it around noticing the man flinch at the fast movement. He refrained from rolling his eyes and straddled the chair, laying his arms across the low back. "Does it not count that I am part of the reason you're still alive? If I hadn't gotten you out of the way, you might not be on the side of the angels anymore."

"How did you?" the priest suddenly looked older as he walked behind his desk and sat down heavily. "When I came to, I went downstairs and found strangers cleaning up. The

mess! I stayed hidden. They were so quick and quiet about it. You could do all that?

Would you believe me if I told you we had an angel on our side? When the man raised his chin and gave him a hard look Steven continued, My friend and I are here to make sure the church is still clean.

You think there are more? the priest rubbed his face.

I know there are more. Question is, are they here? Steven stood up knowing he'd left Nick alone for too long already. His friend was known for being fearless and that made him nervous. We don't want a repeat occurrence of the other night.

The priest eyed him closely as if looking for a lie. Finally, the older man sighed and nodded his head, Okay, for some reason I believe you. Sometimes God works in mysterious ways. Do what you must.

Hopefully, this time we won't find any demons and you can stay awake if you promise to stay in here. He remembered what the priest said when he'd opened the door. Are you expecting someone?

Yes, she was supposed to come the other night, but he jerked his thumb toward the closet. She called an hour ago saying she was on her way.

Steven felt his pulse rate jump. There was a girl here the other night and I need to talk to her! blond hair, beautiful. Do you know her?

“Jewel?” the priest asked. “Sure, I’m supposed to marry her.”

“What?” Steven said a little too loudly then growled, “Since when do old priests marry young girls?”

“You’re a bright one,” the priest shook his head then hardened his resolve. “Not to me! and it’s not your business anyway. You leave that child alone. She has enough problems with the monsters she already knows. Don’t go dragging her into a demon war.”

Steven frowned not liking how that sounded. He’d bet money the priest had been about to say mobsters not monsters. He didn’t care for either breed, having to deal with his own share of mobsters. They liked to hang out at Night Light because it was one of the classier nightclubs in town. It helps you relax when your lower class clientele can’t afford to get through the doors.

He’d been slowly running them off for years and whenever there was a problem, something always came up and they’d move away or vanish altogether. Irish mob, Italian mob, Russian mob, IRA members, ex-KGB, Yakuza, and even rumored members of the fabled Illuminati! Steven didn’t give a damn. They were all cut from the same cloth as far as he was concerned. But sometimes it didn’t hurt to have a few on your side.

“Call her and tell her not to come here tonight.” He pushed the phone closer to the old man and crossed his arms

waiting to make sure the priest did as he asked.

The old man's lips thinned. If he called her house and her father answered, Jewel would be in big trouble and possibly wind up face down in an alley somewhere. Him being a priest probably wouldn't save him either. She's not coming, he said hesitantly, then repeated more firmly as he looked at the clock on the wall. She would have been here by now if she was.

Steven felt the disappointment of not seeing her and the satisfaction of knowing she was safe collide somewhere in his chest. Needing a distraction, he stood up and set the chair back the way he had found it. I'll be back to let you know when we're done.

Wait! the priest called when Steven opened the door. If you should see her!

I'll send her right to you, Steven promised and walked out.

Closing the door, Steven shook his head and started down the hall. This floor was clean and he needed to catch up with Nick before something went down. Going downstairs, he looked around but couldn't see Nick anywhere.

All right, where in the hell did you go? Steven muttered and started looking behind the closed doors.

He found the basement door ajar and could have slapped himself when he realized Nick's train of thought. Dark places, underground! DUH!

Making sure to create a lot of noise, Steven descended the

stairs and wrinkled his nose at the damp heat. â##Damn it stinks down here.â##

He approached another open door and stepped through. Nick was standing in front of the boiler with its door wide open and poking around at something in the fire with an iron rod.

â##Find something?â## Steven asked.

In answer, Nick removed the iron from the fire with the burnt remains of a skull dangling from the end by its eye socket. â##I think itâ##s safe to say that some of the humans on the missing personâ##s roster won't be found any time soon.â##

â##I think this church is a normal place for some of the local mafia to do their business.â## Steven elaborated.

â##In a Catholic church?â## Nick demanded. â##Isnâ##t anything sacred anymore?â##

Steven shrugged, â##Kind of like the saying goes, nothing is certain except death and taxes.â##

Nick dropped the skull back into the boiler and shut the door. â##Or in our case, fur and kittens.â##

The two men snorted in amusement before Steven sobered a bit. â##Okay, we really need to get serious.â##

They separated, each one searching a different side of the large room until Steven saw something behind one of the huge garbage cans full of wooden planks. â##Hey Nick, give me a hand with this.â##

Nick approached and helped Steven move the can aside just enough to get a good look, which wasnâ##t very far. A small,

cramped tunnel had been carved out of the stone and straight out into the earth. The darkness was absolute and the two felines had difficulty seeing inside.

“Might as well check it out,” Nick stated and moved forward to squeeze his thin frame into the opening.

Steven reached out and grabbed hold of Nick’s arm and shook his head. “No, we go back and let Warren and Quinn in on what we found. One cougar is missing and, in my opinion, that’s one cougar too many. I don’t want to add a jaguar to the list, too.”

“Aw gee,” Nick smiled and wrapped his arms tightly around a shocked Steven. “You...” he gave an exaggerated sniffle and continued in a wavering voice. “You really do care.”

Steven frantically pushed Nick off of him, sending the jaguar against the wall. “Moron,” he muttered while Nick was laughing. “Let’s get out of here.”

By the time they reached the top of the stairs, Steven was convinced Nick had lost his mind somewhere along the road. The church was deathly quiet and Steven looked toward the hall that led to the upstairs office where the priest was waiting.

“Hang here for a minute,” Steven said. “I need to go talk to the priest.”

Nick shrugged and leaned against one of the pews to wait.

“Hello, Steven.” A voice came out of nowhere.

Nick jumped and Steven cried out in surprise before tripping

over his own feet and falling down. Nick blinked when a man with dark hair stepped out of the shadows grinning madly down at Steven.

“Damn it, Dean!” Steven yelled as he pushed himself off the floor. “Stop trying to scare the shit out of me.”

Dean smirked and leaned against one of the pillars next to the pews and crossed his arms over his chest. “Unfortunately I don’t have to try.”

“Screw you!” Steven growled. “I’m going to talk to the priest, I’ll be back.”

“Make sure you return the choir robe you borrowed.” Dean teased him. “I’d hate to see some poor boy not able to dress for church.”

Steven froze when Dean said those words and spun around to glare at the fallen.

“Choir robe?” Nick asked and lifted his eyebrows almost to his hairline. “You wore a choir robe?”

“I shifted, it was an emergency. I had to save this girl from being drained by a fucking vampire,” Steven defended.

“Yeah,” Dean chirped. “The very same girl you got your ass beat in front of.”

“Like you’ve never gotten your ass beat,” Steven shot back.

Dean stopped and thought for a moment. “No, I haven’t gotten my ass beat but it has been pounded.”

“Argh!” Steven roared, throwing his arms in the air and



stalking down another hall.

Nick looked over at Dean, "Any idea where he's hidden the robe?"

"Under his bed," Dean answered.

Nick smirked, "Perfect blackmail material, thank you."

"Sure thing, I like watching him squirm! that and he seems to think I'm constantly going to kick his ass or something."

"Sadist," Nick said with a chuckle.

"I'm a fallen," Dean said. "We don't have much to keep us entertained."

Steven approached the priest's office door and raised his hand to knock when he heard voices on the other side. One he recognized as the priest, the other was female. Lowering his hand, he pressed his ear closer to the door so he could listen.

Jewel paced back and forth trying to stay focused but it was hard. The first thing that came to her mind when she walked into the office was when she'd been attacked by vampires and seen a naked man or shifter, whatever he was. She just spent the last five minutes answering the priest's questions about the other night but right now she had bigger problems than that.

"You shouldn't be sneaking around in the middle of the night," the priest said. "It's dangerous. What if your father or your betrothed catches you?"

Jewel marched straight up to his desk and practically slammed her palm down on it. "No, they are the ones making it

dangerousâ€¦ climbing out my own window and sneaking past the armed guards that are keeping me prisoner and trying to sneak back in without getting caught.â€¦

â€¦Your father is just trying to protect you.â€¦ He tried to calm her down but knew what she was saying was true. Her father was in here every week confessingâ€¦ washing the blood from his hands and conscience.

â€¦No, heâ€™s trying to force me to marry his business partner to pay back a debt! A debt I had nothing to do with. Isnâ€™t there a law against slavery in this country?â€¦

â€¦But when you and Anthony came in here for the meeting, you said you loved him with all your heart.â€¦ The priest pointed out. â€¦That is not the type of thing you should lie about. Itâ€™s a disgrace in the eyes of God.â€¦

â€¦Yes well, the two body guards standing behind our chairsâ€¦ do you remember them? The one behind me was digging the barrel of his gun into my back. I could never love an egotistical heavy-handed barbarian like Anthony. He promised to kill me and my father if I donâ€™t go through with the wedding. And earlier tonight, when I tried to tell father that I didnâ€™t want anything to do with Anthony, he smacked me so hard that I know where the stars are located now, because I could count them.â€¦

Both Jewel and the priest were startled when the office door flew open so hard it banged the wall making several pictures and a gold-plated cross fall.

Steven stood in the doorway glaring at the two of them. However, the darkening bruise on Jewel's cheek made Steven see red. "You both need to come with me."

Jewel's knees felt weak seeing the mystery man still alive. She had thought about him being killed by vampires so many times since running from him. Several times she'd even regretted running to the point of tears. Now that she could breathe easier, she wanted to scream.

Why was it every time she came to talk to the priest in confidence, they had an emergency? She was less afraid of this shifter than she was of her gun toting fiancé and until she heard fire alarms or saw a fang face, she wasn't going anywhere.

"Not this time," Jewel informed him crossing her arms over her chest.

"I can't just leave the church unattended," the old man started but Steven quickly cut him off.

He took deliberate strides closer to the desk as he spoke, "Have you made a deal with the devil and decided to feed your parish to the vampires? Is it you burning their bodies in your boiler room?" When the priest just opened his mouth but didn't say anything Steven continued, "Or is it the sinners you preach to that have committed mass murder in your basement and dug a tunnel to escape through?"

"Oh my," the old man gave Steven a grim look. "If I leave the church, how long will it be until I can return?"

“Give me your cell number. I’ll call you within a couple hours. Do not come back until we give the all clear.” He sighed knowing he’d won the argument when the old man started rifling through his drawers getting things he deemed important enough to take with him.

Jewel tried to remain perfectly calm while edging her way toward the still open door. Freedom! why was it she always found herself running from mad men?

“Don’t make me chase you,” Steven gritted out as he jerked his head to the side and locked his gaze on her. “I said he could go home! not you.”

Jewel’s lips parted as she froze in mid motion. How dare he give her an order? She gritted her teeth realizing she’d obeyed him anyway. She raised her chin up a notch in defiance as she came to a conclusion. The moment she got away, she would keep running! from all of them, including her father.

“What are you going to do with her?” the priest demanded indignantly.

“I’m going to do what you can’t do! keep her safe,” Steven yelled not wanting to fight about this. The bruise on Jewel’s face had quite literally shattered his nerves and he’d be damned if he was going to send her back to the man that did it.

“I don’t need another protector,” Jewel turned to leave but stopped short seeing two dangerous-looking men blocking the doorway.

Dean had felt Steven's distress all the way down the stairs and now that he was looking at the girl who was causing it, he could see why. Reading her soul, he caught a fleeting glance of the elusive angel of death.

"You're wrong." He moved so fast, even the two shifters in the room missed it. "You do need a protector."

Jewel stifled a scream when the man's palm pressed against her sore cheek and his eyes turned the color of mercury. The cold hand that had been clinched around her heart with icy fingers for so long melted. Suddenly, she was reminded of feelings she had forgotten existed: warmth, safety, love.

The priest leaned back against his desk when the shadow of wings sprung out from the man's back, flickered brilliantly, then disappeared.

"I'll be downstairs," Dean stated as the wind rushed in to fill up the space he vanished from.

Steven didn't know why Dean had chosen that moment to reveal his power but he was glad the fallen had done it. Jewel's cheek was healed and the priest looked like he'd just seen the light.

"We need to leave now," Nick said from the doorway.

Steven grabbed Jewel's hand and started for the door, glad the shock had taken the fight right out of her for the moment.

"Wait," the priest called, making Steven and Nick stop to look back at him. "Was that?" he faltered, pointing at the spot where Dean had stood moments before.

Steven smiled genuinely at the excitement in the old priest's eyes. "Yeah, it was."

The priest smiled when Steven and Nick left the room with Jewel in tow. He nodded once and began gathering the tools he would need. In his mind, God was preparing the earth for His return.

Steven and Nick stepped out of the church but Steven pulled Jewel to a stop so he could glance up at the office window. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the office light go out.

"Looks like the old geezer is taking your advice," Nick said.

Steven shook his head, "More like he saw Dean for what he was and is having some kind of religious experience. He gave me his phone number, I'll call him when the coast is clear."

"I don't think a couple hours will be enough time," Nick informed him.

"It is what it is," Steven responded. "Right now, let's get back to the club so we can give the news to Warren and Quinn."

Dean sat on the roof of the cathedral and smiled down at the trio as they left the church behind. He'd given Steven all the help he could but the calming spell he had put on the girl wouldn't last forever. He could feel the darkness under the building starting to mount as the vampires began emerging from their tunnel.

Unlike those from the other night, these were being influenced

by something even darker, more sinister, than Dean had ever encountered.

Dean frowned wondering why he hadn't sensed it when they cleaned out the first group that had taken residence here. This influence was very old and very powerful. As suddenly as he sensed it, the darkness was gone and only the vampire presence could be felt.

The fallen gained access back into the church to check up on the old man and make sure he got out alive.

#### Chapter 4

Trevor and Kat had tracked the vampire they'd discovered halfway across the city.

"What the hell is he doing?" Kat whispered, starting to get suspicious.

"Looks like he's going shopping," Trevor answered when the vampire stopped in front of a shop window and looked at the darkened display.

This vampire was young, barely eighteen from the looks of him. He had straight black hair and wore round-rimmed eyeglasses. With his hair pulled back, he would have looked almost presentable except for his pale skin.

The two picked up their pace when the vampire abruptly turned away from the window and started walking down the street again. Even with the shops closed, the sidewalks were busy this time of night.

They'd discovered the body of the vampire's latest

victim sprawled out on a well-manicured lawn. With their sense of smell, they'd been able to catch up with the bloodsucker just as the vampire reached Rodeo Drive. From there, Trevor had to hold Kat back a bit explaining that there were too many people around for them to just run in blindly.

Now, here they were, following a vampire on foot and neither one in the mood for conversation. Next thing they knew, they were on a city bus not really paying attention to its destination. Finally, the vampire reached up and pulled the cord to get off. Kat and Trevor rode down to the next stop and got off themselves before resuming their pursuit. The vampire continued walking and Kat growled in frustration.

"I'm starting to think this vampire is on drugs. We've almost made a complete circle." She complained. "We're only a few blocks away from the club."

"There he goes!" Trevor exclaimed and ran toward an alley where the vampire abruptly vanished.

Trevor's sneakers made a skidding noise when he reached the mouth of the alley and peered into it. Kat stood beside him, ducked down a bit so they could both peek around the corner.

"Damn," Trevor cursed and drew out his 9mm.

"I still don't understand why you carry a gun," Kat said even though she knew Nick carried one too. It wasn't the gun Nick relied on; it was the specially made wooden bullets that filled it. "Those things are useless against vampires."

Trevor smirked, "You forget who I work for. These bullets



are specially designed to explode on impact and the center is hollowed out and filled with just a bit of muriatic acid. That shit will eat through just about anything.â##

â##Why doesnâ##t the acid eat through the bullet then?â##  
Kat asked, secretly gathering info to bribe Nick with.

â##Thereâ##s an inner casing placed inside the bullet when itâ##s hollowed out that the acid canâ##t eat through. I forget the name of it at the moment.â## Trevor explained. â##Itâ##s strong enough to not be damaged by the acid but fragile enough to break when it collides with something.â##

Kat slowly stood upright, â##Shall we go in?â##

Trevor tightened his grip on the gun and headed in first, followed by Kat who had a razor sharp dagger in each hand; courtesy of Trevor. They combed the entire alley before they realized the vampire had vanished.

Trevor released his stance and let his gun arm down. â##Heâ##s gone!â##

Kat released a frustrated sigh, â##Well, since weâ##re this close, we may as well go back to the club.â##

â##As much fun as I had tonight leading the two of you idiots all over the city,â## a voice said from behind them. â##I must insist that you stay for dinner.â##

Kat and Trevor whirled around toward the voice and froze when they saw the vampire theyâ##d been tracking along with five others.

â##The son of a bitch knew we were following him,â## Trevor

growled as he brought the gun back up and steadied it.

With walls on three sides and the vampires in front of them, Kat knew she and Trevor would have to fight their way out of here. She crouched down low when the vampires quickly closed in on them. One with flaming red hair leapt up hoping to get the drop on them, quite literally.

Kat immediately pushed up from her crouch and tackled the vampire in mid-leap. Her long nails now resembled claws even though no change had taken place. They crashed to the ground with the vampire on his back beneath her.

The bloodsucker gripped her right wrist so tight, she felt the bones start to grind together painfully. Swallowing the sickly pain, she flicked her wrist downward, driving the dagger into the vampire's wrist as payback. Gaining her freedom, Kat wasted no time driving her right hand into the monster's chest and pulling out his heart.

Trevor took aim and fired at the vampire they'd been tracking all night. The bullet hit the creature in the throat and, for a moment, he just stared at Trevor with an expression of disbelief before he started to scream and claw at his own throat. The scream abruptly cut off when the acid released from the bullet reached the vampire's voice box.

Trevor didn't actually see what happened next as he was immediately attacked by another vampire. His body was thrown against the alley wall where he slid to the ground. His 9mm went flying while he tried not to count the stars forming in his vision.

The other vampire was closing in when Trevor felt something against his leg. Looking down, he saw the head of the vampire heâ##d shot and reached for it.

Taking the severed head by the hair, Trevor threw the still disintegrating object at the approaching bloodsucker. The creature dodged it and snarled at him, ready to pounce. Something shiny flashed across his vision and Trevor saw a long dagger sticking out of its chest. Turning his head, Trevor saw Kat standing there looking like a bloody mess.

â##Look out!â## Trevor yelled.

Kat raised her other dagger and gasped when the vampire took hold of her hand and drove the blade downward at an angle, directly into her inner thigh. The pain alone gave her the strength to push the vampire off her. She quickly stumbled backwards toward Trevor and managed to pull the dagger out of her thigh. Warm liquid quickly followed and made a path down her leg.

Trevor knew something had to be done. They were both injured now. He could feel the pain in his ribs and shoulder where heâ##d hit the wall and was finding it hard to breath. Looking up at Kat, who was standing protectively in front of him, he thought about their next move.

He needed to shift into something big enough and strong enough to fight them and survive. The downside was if he shifted, heâ##d give away his true nature to Kat. His kind had never gotten along with the other shifter tribes because of their diversity. They could blend in with any of the clans and disappear

without a trace, sometimes for decades at a time. They were the perfect weapons in a war.

Because of this, any animal he chose would always be ten times stronger than that particular animal. In his human form the same rules applied, but it hadn't helped them much so far. However, if he didn't shift, their asses were goners.

Suddenly Kat dropped her weapon and hunched over. Because of her injuries, the change was seconds slower than normal. Her body shifted until she was on all fours. The clothes fell from her body and a beautiful tan and black spotted fur coat took their place.

One of the remaining vampires attacked and Kat rose up on her hind legs, blocking him with some kind of wrestling hold. Her claws dug into the creature's shoulders and her long teeth were bared at him. Without thinking twice, Trevor chose that moment to shift.

The two remaining vampires hissed angrily when the human they were closing in on transformed into a Kodiak bear. Trevor swung a giant paw at the closest one and took the entire half of its body clean off, leaving the legs to fall lifelessly. Knowing the vampire wasn't dead, Trevor ambled over to it anyway and crushed its head with his powerful jaws.

He rose up on his feet to help Kat when the last two vampires attacked him full force. Trevor stumbled back a few steps before roaring loudly and pulled one off, throwing him down the alley. He roared again when the last one sank its teeth into his shoulder

blade. He heard Kat's jaguar scream and felt the brick wall ram into the side of his temple before he fell from the impact.

\*\*\*\*\*

Quinn and Warren had combed the entire area in a five-mile radius from the club.

There's nothing around. Quinn stated and tried to let go of his frustration. Something wasn't right; he could feel it in the air.

Warren heard the tightness in Quinn's voice. After the fight at the warehouse, I'm not that surprised. His phone buzzed causing both men to jump and realize just how tense they were. He pulled the cell phone out of his jeans pocket.

Hello, Warren said into the cell phone and then nodded after a moment. Okay, we'll go check it out. He hung up and slipped the phone back into his pocket. That was Nick, seems they found an underground tunnel under the church.

We should go check it out, Quinn stated trying to ignore the fact that his skin was crawling with adrenalin and he hadn't a clue where it had come from.

The distinct scream of a jaguar pierced the quiet night making both men freeze in their tracks. They turned their heads in the direction of the sound before looking at each other.

Kat! they exclaimed in unison.

Warren immediately removed the cell phone from his pocket and placed it in an elastic holster around his ankle.

There was no hesitation and a few seconds later the two

men had shifted and were racing down the street. People screamed and ran to get away from the huge cats, causing quite a commotion. Quinn took the lead and ran out into traffic causing a car to slam on its brakes. The car behind it crashed into the first one from behind, creating a chain reaction.

Warren leapt onto the hood of the first car and glanced in to make sure the people were all right before chasing Quinn across the roadway.

The driver of the car was shaken by what just happened and picked up his cell phone.

\*\*\*\*\*

Jason was bored out of his mind. Nothing had really happened for the last few days and with Tabby and Envy out of town, he was going stir crazy.

When the phone rang he nearly jumped out of his skin and quickly reached over to answer it.

“Ranger station,” Jason said in a dull voice.

“Yes,” a shaky voice answered. “I’d like to report something unusual.”

Jason mentally sighed and grabbed a pen and paper. “Okay, tell me what you saw, sir.”

“The damnedest thing I’ve ever seen,” the man said breathlessly. “I just saw a cougar and a jaguar running loose in the middle of town. I slammed on my brakes when the cougar ran out in front of me and a jaguar appeared on the hood of my car, looked at me, and then took off after the cougar.”

“It’s probably another escape from the zoo,” Jason said, even though that was a lie they told the public to hide the fact that the city seemed to be teeming with dangerous wildlife these days.

“No,” the man exclaimed. “The jaguar had a cell phone strapped to its hind ankle.”

Jason looked up at the other ranger in the office with him, Jacob Savage.

“So you’re saying the jaguar had a cell phone strapped to its leg?” Jason asked.

Jacob nearly choked on his coffee and set the cup down, wiping his nose indicating that some of the liquid had gone up into it.

“That’s exactly what I’m saying!” The man shrieked loud enough for Jacob to hear it.

Jason nodded, “All right sir, calm down. You said it ran off, so you’re safe. Thank you for calling, we’ll look into it.”

Jason hurriedly hung up the phone and stared at it for a moment like the device was going to jump up and eat him.

“Alrighty then,” Jacob managed after he cleared up his coughing fit.

\*\*\*\*\*

Warren finally caught up with Quinn just as they neared an alley where Kat’s scent was the strongest. Rounding the corner, they were just in time to witness Kat rip the throat out of one vampire and an enormous bear drive its huge claws through

the chest of another. The bear claw came out the backside of the vampire, clutching the vampire's bloody heart before squeezing it like a water balloon.

Kat blinked, realizing somehow during the fight the vampires had multiplied. She barely had time to take a breath before she was attacked by one of the remaining vampires. She released a primal scream when the sharp fangs dug into her flank. Her claws pierced the back of the attacking vampire trying to pry him off. Suddenly, the weight on her side was gone and she fell over, passing out from pain, blood loss, and exhaustion.

Quinn saw the vampire attack Kat and felt rage well up in his chest. He ran down the alley not caring if Warren was with him or not. Tackling the vampire to the ground, he snarled menacingly in its face before ripping into its neck with his sharp teeth. He could feel its claws digging at him in panic but he didn't care as he kept ripping. Tossing the head aside, he turned back to Kat and growled.

Trevor had made short work of the last vampire, ripping it apart until there was nothing left but a headless, limbless torso. He looked up when he heard Kat scream then saw a cougar pounce on the vampire attacking her. When she transformed back into her human form, Trevor moved to stand over her nude and unconscious body, hunching down to protect her from further attack.

A deep growl caught his attention and he met the gaze of a very angry cougar stalking toward him with a very obvious intent



to killâ#; Quinn Wilder.

Due to the fight, Trevor was tired and that made his reflexes slow. He wasnâ##t able to drive Quinn off and took the full force of the attack in the side. Trevor was knocked across the alley and into the brick wall for the second time that night.

Trevor growled and was able to stand up on his hind legs for a total of two seconds before he leaned back and slid down to the ground. Quinn was coming closer and he didnâ##t want to shift back in front of the cougar but knew he had to. Kat would eventually tell them anywayâ#; so what did he have to lose? Unable to see his wounds under all the fur, he slowly shifted back and tried once more to rise to his feet.

Quinn paused when he saw the human male from the barâ#; Warren had called him Trevor. He hissed when his sense of smell told him that Trevor wasnâ##t a normal shifterâ#; or at least not any kind heâ##d ever run across. Not knowing what he was up against didnâ##t do much for easing his temper.

He took another step forward but Warren strode into his line of sight and approached Trevor, shifting back to human form as he did so. When Trevor swayed, Warren grabbed him by the arm and brought it over his shoulder. He hadnâ##t seen a reason to let Quinn kick a man while he was down.

Trevor looked up at Warren and smirked when he realized their predicament. â##Fine mess, now were all naked,â## he murmured and promptly passed out.

Warren shook his head and couldnâ##t help but grin because

Trevor had a very good point. It was times like this he was glad he brought his cell phone with him and carried it in the fashion he did. He gently set Trevor against the wall and was about to get the cell phone when he heard Quinn start growling.

Quinn had shifted and was looking over Kat's unconscious form. Her clothes were a few feet away, shredded by her transformation and not wearable. Deciding to think on that later, Quinn started examining her wounds and paused when he saw the blood still oozing from her inner thigh.

Moving her leg just enough to examine where the blood was coming from, he froze when he saw a mating mark. The growl erupted from his throat before he could stop it. Someone had mated Kat, given her the mark and abandoned her.

Quinn felt jealousy rise up deep inside and leaned close to sniff her skin to see if the scent still lingered. That only infuriated him even more; she didn't smell like another man, she smelled wonderful.

Looking up at the other man Warren was crouched in front of, Quinn wondered if the mating mark was given to her by the blonde bearshifter.

Warren took out his cell phone deciding to ignore Quinn's little tantrum for the moment. Kat needed help and he wasn't about to tell Quinn who the mating mark belonged to. Let him go through the hell of figuring it out for himself.

"Mrs. Tully?" Warren asked then smiled. "I'm doing just fine ma'am. I was wondering if you could meet me

at Moon Dance. My sister and her friend Trevor have been hurt and they need medical attention only you can give.â##

Warren was quiet for a moment then nodded, â##Thank you, Mrs. Tully.â##

â##I didnâ##t know you knew Tully.â## Quinn said quietly. Heâ##d met Tully not long after the families had split up.

Warren smirked while dialing another number. Did Quinn think he was the only one allowed to spy? â##Nick has gotten into more trouble than I care to remember. Mrs. Tully is forever patching him up and her home is always open if we need a place to lay low.â##

â##Iâ##m surprised we havenâ##t crossed paths before now.â## Quinn responded becoming a little more suspicious.

â##Nick, weâ##re in an alley ten blocks west of the club and we need a ride. Bring clothes for three men, your sister, and drive the Hummer.â## Warren hung up the phone without waiting for Nick to respond and turned his attention back to Trevor.

â##Is he the one that gave Kat the mating mark?â## Quinn demanded.

â##That, my friend, is not my story to tell.â## Warren said cryptically.

## Chapter 5

Nick had just dropped Steven and Jewel off at Night Light when he got the call. Jewel had been very quiet since Deanâ##s little stunt at the church but he could tell that whatever the fallen had done to keep her calm was starting to wear off. The further

away from the church they got, the more paranoid sheâ## become. He could only imagine the hell his friend was about to go through.

Waving to Steven, Nick quickly picked up his phone and juggled it for a moment when he almost lost his grip. Finally he caught it on the third ring and flipped it open.

â##Speak,â## he growled. His expression melted into one of deep concern before pushing the gas pedal to the floor. Luckily, he had decided to drive the Hummer to take Steven and Jewel back to Night Light.

He did a quick mental inventory and breathed a small sigh of relief when he remembered that Warren still had some extra sets of clothes in the vehicle from their last camping trip. No one had bothered to remove them and it saved Nick the trip back home. It was a good thing that Warren and Quinn were around the same sizeâ## there was nothing worse than trying to squeeze into clothes that were too little.

Turning on the GPS tracker in his phone, he got Warrenâ##s exact location. Turning the next corner without slowing down, Nick knew he wasnâ##t going to like what he saw once he got there.

As an afterthought, Nick took out his cell phone and called Devon to let him know the new developments. Devon may have left the city willingly, but heâ##d made Nick promise to call him several times a day to keep him up to date on everything.

\*\*\*\*\*

Steven got Jewel inside the club and quickly escorted her upstairs. When they made it to his room, he closed the door but didn't lock it. He didn't want her to feel trapped.

Jewel blinked her eyes and looked around at the room she'd been brought into. The bed was king sized with a deep green comforter spread over it. A couple of decorative pillows sat on the bed and, of all things, a stuffed animal—a cougar. She couldn't help but smile at that and a nervous giggle escaped before she could stop it.

The dresser was a black lacquer with a large mirror and in the center was a small bamboo plant. On the other side of the room was a pair of beanbag chairs, a huge flat screen television mounted on the wall, and a game console with numerous games scattered around in front of it.

Jewel couldn't understand why she felt so calm but it was slowly fading and being replaced by dread. What the hell did she think she was doing here?

“Why did you bring me here?” Jewel asked spinning around to face Steven.

“Because you'll be safe here,” Steven answered. “You're not going back to your fiancé or your father.”

What was left of the calm feeling immediately fled and Jewel shook her head vigorously. “No, I have to go back! If I don't, Anthony will kill me.”

“He can't kill you if he can't find you,” Steven reasoned in a voice that was so cold it sucked some of the warmth

right out of the room.

“What about Father Gordon?” Jewel demanded her voice level rising. “If they go to him, they’ll find out where I am.” Jewel started pacing. “Daddy’s gonna be so mad and Anthony! I don’t want to think about what he’ll do.”

Steven had a flashback of the handprint-sized bruise she had been wearing earlier. “Why the hell would you protect your daddy when he obviously doesn’t protect you!”

“Who gave you the right to give a damn!” Jewel yelled back more comfortable now that he was yelling at her.

“You know what? Fine,” Steven opened the bedroom door. “There’s the way out, go back to your fiancée and a marriage you’re being forced into because of Daddy’s inability to take care of business. No real father would ever sacrifice his children to pay off a debt he created.”

Jewel stared at the door and took an uncertain step forward before backing up and sinking down on the bed. She gazed toward the alarm clock and knew it was too late to sneak back in either way. Two AM that’s when the guards changed shifts and that had been the only time she could return without being caught.

“What do I do now?” Jewel asked and looked up at him with tears in her eyes. “Where would I go?”

Steven shut the door and knelt down in front of her. “How about you start by telling me everything?”

“Like what?” Jewel asked.

Steven gave her a small smile, “We can start with your last name.”

Jewel sighed, “My last name is Scott and my father manages a resort in Palm Springs for my fiancée. God that word leaves a bad taste in my mouth.”

Steven felt a huge weight lift from his shoulders seeing again how much she hated the fact she was being forced to marry this guy, not that he would ever let that happen now. “Okay, calm down and back up. Try starting from the beginning,” he suggested.

Taking a deep breath, Jewel calmly started talking, just letting it all go. “I was in boarding school when Daddy ran into some trouble at the resort. A government agent had checked in undercover and was trying to uncover all the mafia activity going in and out of the place. When Daddy found out what the man was, he was given orders to kill him.”

Steven nodded, “What happened?”

“Daddy waited too long to kill him; the agent had already given his superiors all the information. When the agent didn’t check in or whatever it is they do, the FBI sent more agents and Daddy was arrested. Anthony Valachi bailed him out of jail after he did something, probably bribed one of the top officials, and all the charges were dropped.”

“Now Daddy’s in debt to his boss. Not knowing how else to pay off the debt, when I came back from school, Daddy told

me I was engaged to Anthony and he was actually happy about it.â##

Jewel took another breath and swiped her hand over her eyes.â##I donâ##t want to be married yetâ##! I wanted to do something with myself, go to college and work for a living, maybe travel a little bit. This man is twice my age. Now Iâ##m a prisoner, a slave to that bastard and my fatherâ##s mistake.â##

Steven nodded and fought the urge to get up and pace the room. Losing the battle, he did start pacing. â##I can fix this,â## he stated firmly but kept pacing. His mind was going a mile a minute.

â##Yeah right,â## Jewel frowned, â##you and what army?â## She suddenly remembered the angel she had seen at the church and glanced up hopefully.

Steven recognized the name as the same guy Micah had gotten into a fight with a couple weeks ago before he vanished. Micah had thrown the man out of the club after giving him a face full of his fist, knocking the smart ass right out of his chair. Steven still had trouble not laughing when he thought about it.

Quinn hadnâ##t thought it was too funny though. Maybe Quinn had known Anthony was a big wig in the mafia and was trying to just watch out for Micah. As a matter of fact, it was the same night Micah had disappeared.

He glanced back at Jewel as he passed in front of her. She was rightâ##! Anthony Valachi had been twice her age and a self-righteous asshole to boot. There was no way in hell he was



going to let her anywhere near that man or her abusive father the priest at the church. Now that man owed him a favor, and with a little help from Dean he was going to pay up.

Flipping open his cell phone, he clicked in several numbers and smiled as the other side picked up. "Dean, are you still at the church? Good, retrieve the priest and wait for me there." He ended the call and closed the distance between him and Jewel. Dropping back to his knees in front of her, he took her hands in his, rubbing his thumbs soothingly over her soft skin.

"How far are you willing to go?" he asked in a steady voice as he searched her face.

"It needs to be more than just running away," Jewel hated how her voice had sounded so tiny. She hadn't meant for her fear to show through like that. She bit her lower lip wondering what Steven was up to.

"If we can do this right, you won't have to run any further than here."

"What are you thinking?" Jewel started to pull her hands away but he held them firm.

"I'm thinking that you can't get married twice." Steven flinched when she jerked hard enough to gain her freedom. Pushing up from the floor, he stared down at her as she nearly crawled across the bed in her attempt to put distance between them.

"Listen!" he started.

"No," Jewel almost yelled as she climbed off the other

side of the mattress, feeling a little safer now that the bed was between them. Her face instantly went up in flames realizing the bed was between them in more ways than one if she agreed to go through with this insanity.

She snapped her gaze from the bed. "I didn't want to get married in the first place! Why the hell would I marry you?"

Steven's eyes narrowed at the insult but he wasn't going to let her pride get her killed. If he had to scare the hell out of her then it would be worth it. Besides, at the moment, she was the only lead he had on Micah. Steven's lip hinted at a devious smile now that he'd successfully added another reason for doing what he was about to do.

"Why marry me, you ask? Because if you can pretend that the marriage is real in front of my family and yours, then in the bedroom it will be in name only. And that army you were wondering about, remember I'm not human and neither are my family or friends. So when you're jilted ex tries to retaliate, we will be waiting on him."

"Why would you do any of this?" Jewel shook her head. "And what do you mean pretend?"

Steven held his hands out indicating the bed between them. "To answer your first question, I have a brother who's been missing for a couple weeks now and the last person besides his family that he was seen with was your intended and it wasn't friendly. So, what better way to get his attention than to yank his chain."

As for your second question, in order for this to work, everyone will have to think we are in love and intend to stay together. But when we are alone, you sleep on your side of the bed and I'll sleep on mine. It's not like I want to give up my freedom either. If you can fake it then so can I.

Jewel relaxed some of the tenseness in her shoulders seeing where he was going, "no one else will know the truth?"

Just our guardian angel Dean, Steven smirked when her fingers instantly rose to brush across the cheek that Dean had made a show of healing.

And once Anthony is no longer a threat? she murmured.

Then our good friend the priest will give us our annulment and we will go our separate ways. But first, he has to marry us and, in order to get him to do that he has to be convinced we are in love and have already consummated it. When she gave him an appalled look he shrugged, "He's a priest and above lying so we will just have to do the lying for him. Once it's over, then we can tell him the truth."

But there will be no consummating our marriage, Jewel confirmed with a hard look.

I can control myself if you can. His pointed gaze matched hers knowing he'd just won the first battle. Now he would just have to pray he could control himself because right now it was taking every ounce of willpower he had not to come across the bed after her and claim her before Anthony Valachi

got another chance.

One thing was for sure. His family was already at war with the vampires, and they weren't equipped to take on another war right now unless they believed it really was for a family member.

How good of an actor are you? Because if my family doesn't think we are completely in love, this will be doomed before the ink dries on the marriage certificate.

Steven's lips parted when Jewel slowly smiled at him and started crawling back across the mattress toward him. He didn't move a muscle, waiting to see what she would do. Coming up on her knees in front of him she slid her hand around the back of his neck and pulled him forward and down until their lips were touching.

It was an innocent kiss and the realization that she was still a virgin slammed through Steven without mercy.

Jewel tried not to flinch when his arm went around her back and he pulled her flush against him. Her lips were still closed against his but when she felt his hot touch slide across the seam of her lips, she parted them in surprise feeling it tingle somewhere in the bottom of her stomach.

Just a taste! Steven repeated the words to himself as he leaned into the kiss and deepened it. Feeling himself instantly harden, he placed his palms on her shoulders and gently pushed them away from each other. Seeing her startled eyes snap up and lock with his, he detected the desire he'd barely flamed within her and smiled.

Yes, like that! just like that. He touched his fingers to the bottom of her chin and then turned away. Shall we go get married?

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