

# DANGEROUS THINGS

BLOOD BOUND SERIES BOOK 3



AMY BLANKENSHIP, R K MELTON

Blood Bound Book

Amy Blankenship

**Dangerous Things**

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

## **Blankenship A.**

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Steven Wilder had fallen for the bat-wielding temptress in more ways than just hitting the floor... he wanted to keep her. Finding out she was promised to the mob gave him the reason he needed to kidnap her and make her his mate... for her own protection, of course. Everyone says there are two paths in life, but for Jewel Scott it looked like both of them were very dangerous. One led toward Anthony, a murdering psychopathic Werewolf who was also the head of the city mob and her fiancé... against her will. The other road led toward Steven, a Werecougar whom she had knocked out with a baseball bat on their first meeting. He retaliated by kidnapping her and making her his mate. Steven Wilder had fallen for the bat-wielding temptress in more ways than just hitting the floor... he wanted to keep her. Finding out she was promised to the mob gave him the reason he needed to kidnap her and make her his mate... for her own protection, of course. Anthony Valachi had become obsessed with Jewel when she was no more than a child and, under mob rule, he'd gained control of his bride to be. If anyone thought they could steal her away from him they were wrong... dead wrong.

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## Dangerous Things

### Blood Bound Series Book 3

Amy Blankenship, RK Melton

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### Chapter 1

Envy bustled around her bedroom packing some of her things into her black leather suitcase. She stopped and glared at her brother when she noticed he was unpacking her stuff every time she turned her back to get more. He'd been breathing down her neck since she came home and she was starting to get really frustrated with him.

“Stop it,” Envy snapped as she jerked a handful of clothes away from him and threw them back into the suitcase. She tossed her long red hair over her shoulder and shot him a warning glare.

“But moving out? You’ve only known him what a week? Are you sure this is what you want to do?” Chad repeated like a mantra.

“The answer is still the same Chad,” Envy informed him in a steady voice, wondering how many times she'd have to say it before he actually heard her. She locked gazes with him and, treating him like a dim-witted child, she said the words very slowly, “I want to move in with Devon, and that’s exactly what I’m going to do.”

“How can you be sure that in a week or month from now, he won’t find some other girl and dump you?” Chad demanded desperately.

“He won’t.” She continued packing, trying to block out the nagging feeling that she was abandoning her brother. He was a grown man for crying out loud, and a cop to boot.

“You don’t know that for sure. I mean, he dances in that club half naked every night and you’ll be stuck behind the bar serving drinks to perverts,” Chad exclaimed ready to start pulling his hair out. What he really wanted to do was scream at her for getting involved in something so dangerous with someone so dangerous.

Envy stopped packing and looked up at her only sibling whom she loved dearly but was getting ready to throttle. “One, I do know for sure. Two, he might be half naked, but he looks great that way. Three, I’ll get to dance with him in the cage. And four,” she leaned closer as if parting with a dirty little secret, “you really need to get laid.”

Chad glared down at his sister, “I do not need to get laid.” He growled when she cocked an eyebrow at him.

“Yes, you do.” She jerked open a drawer and grabbed a handful of skimpy lingerie.

“No, I don’t.” Chad slammed the suitcase shut before she could add them to what he prayed was only a huge overnight bag.

“Yes you do.” Envy shook the lingerie in his face as if to make a point.

“No I don’t.” He jerked them out of her hand.

“No you don’t.” She narrowed her eyes angrily.

“Yes I do.” Chad paused then punched the fist full of lingerie in the air. “DAMN IT!”

Devon was in the living room leaning against the wall with his ankles crossed and his hands in his jean pockets trying not to laugh his ass off. Their arguing reminded him so much of his relationship with his own loving siblings.

He could tell Chad really did care about Envy, and because of that, he wouldn’t stand between them. Chad was doing what he did best he was being a big brother to one spit-fire of a redhead. Nope, he wouldn’t stop them, but he’d pay good money to just watch.

Devon laughed out loud then tried to cover it up with a fake cough. Someone knocked on the door and his ice blue eyes narrowed wondering who in the hell would be visiting the siblings before dawn.

“Devon, could you get that for me?” Chad called out.

“Sure,” Devon answered and pushed away from the wall before moving toward the entrance. Opening the door, he couldn’t help but smirk at the surprised look on Trevor’s face. “Hello Trevor, long time no see.”

As promised, Trevor had come to talk with Chad about what he’d seen at the church. The last thing he’d expected was for Devon Santos to open the door. Unable to control his reaction, Trevor instantly raised his fist and hit the jaguar right in the nose hard.

Devon stumbled back a couple of steps and wiped the blood from his nose. He looked at it then back up at Trevor, baring his teeth. Before Trevor could move, Devon tackled him out of the door and into the front yard.

Clothing ripped and fell away as the two of them shifted into their animal forms. Devon circled around the Kodiak and lunged with a loud jaguar scream. Trevor roared and rose up on his hind legs while trying to grab at the jaguar attached to his back.

Inside, Chad and Envy heard Devon’s roar and ran through the house to the front door. They froze when they saw Devon fighting with a huge bear right in their front yard. The cop was instantly grateful they didn’t live within seeing distance of any neighbors.

Chad flipped his mental switch, turning all his emotions off. It was something that clicked within him that always made him completely calm and cold even in the middle of a gun fight. Reaching to the holster on his right hip, Chad drew his pistol and fired it once in the air trying to get their attention. He frowned when it didn’t even faze them and he got a punch on his left arm.

“Let someone know when you’re going to fire that thing!” Envy exclaimed while holding a hand over her right ear and cringing at the loud ringing.

Zachary stepped away from his car with a huge sigh and stared at the two children fighting. Once more, cooler heads would have to step in. He smirked at his inside joke because no one would ever use the word cool to describe him. Raising his hand in front of him, he shot a heat wave toward the two shifters, making them leap back when a single stream of fire raced across the yard separating them.

“If you two don’t want your fur singed, then you had best change back into men and pretend to have a little common sense,” Zackary warned as another flame started to grow from his outstretched hand. “Are you two going to act like adults or children, because it doesn’t make any damn difference to me?” he smiled coldly as the flame grew higher and leaned toward its target.

Knowing Zackary would do it, Trevor changed back and glared across the licking flames at his opponent. Just looking at the man who had stolen Envy from him had his blood pressure up so high that he had to concentrate just to keep his human form.

Devon changed back but kept his fighting stance, not trusting Trevor as far as he could throw him. He was momentarily distracted hearing Chad’s loud “Good Lord” and quickly glanced toward the siblings. Seeing Envy staring wide eyed at Trevor who was now naked, Devon growled deeply wanting her attention back where it belonged on him.

Envy rubbed her temple now that both men were naked, luckily with only minor wounds. Devon had shown her how fast weres can heal so she knew nothing was as bad as it looked with them. Her gaze traveled over Trevor, still shocked that she’d been dating a freaking bear for so long and not known it.

Trevor smirked enjoying the fact that Devon’s growl was the sound of pure jealousy served the jaguar right.

Chad blinked wondering who’d slipped him the acid. Usually the calm one in bad situations, he inhaled deeply then pushed away from the door to stand at his full height. “This is my house, so we play by my rules. Envy’s staying here with me, and everyone that’s not human is leaving.” He tried to shut the door but Envy stopped him.

Not without my mate, Devon growled trying to shake off the echo affect he was getting. Damn, who knew Trevor was so strong? The knowledge didn't sit well with him.

Put your clothes on, Envy frowned then turned curious eyes toward Zackary. It looked like him and Trevor could have been brothers, their coloring was so similar. The only real difference was Zackary had short hair and was a little taller. Okay, I know what they are! but what are you?

Zackary bowed elegantly, You can just call me a guardian, he smiled as the flames went out. A guardian of both humans and paranormal creatures, he righted himself and glanced toward Trevor. Didn't you tell her anything?

No, he didn't, Envy shot Trevor a well-deserved dirty look then turned her attention back to Zackary. Guardian? What exactly does that mean? And are you and Trevor brothers? She couldn't help but ask.

It means we protect both sides from each other, Trevor answered then added, And no. As far as family goes, I don't have any.

Oh, now you're just full of information, Envy mumbled.

I tried to tell you, Trevor reminded her while he pulled on the spare pair of pants Zachary had just tossed him. It's not my fault you didn't listen.

Envy's lips parted to tell him off but paused guiltily remembering the last night she'd really seen Trevor. He'd told her he had something to do with the C.I.A. but she hadn't believed him. She'd even tasered him for thinking she was dumb enough to fall for such a lame lie. But then again, how did he expect her to believe him when he was out dancing provocatively with other women?

The flip side of that was, he'd told her it was the cover for his job. Envy frowned at the headache that was forming and decided that Trevor was a bigger ass than she originally thought for making her think about this.

Chad looked over at the jaguar before heading inside. He came out a couple seconds later with a pair of jeans and tossed them to Devon.

We don't need your help, Devon stated as he zipped the jeans then walked over to Envy and slid a jealous arm around her waist.

Oh yeah? I saved your sister while you were busy stealing my girlfriend, Trevor retaliated before directing his heated gaze back to Envy.

Envy raised her eyes and locked them with Trevor's bluish-silver ones. She could still see the hurt in them and it made her heart clinch uncomfortably. She really didn't hate him at all. As a matter of fact, she still loved Trevor, just not like she loved Devon. Her lips parted to try to explain, but Devon cut her off.

Why did you come here? Did you follow us? Devon asked, not liking the fact that Trevor kept putting Envy on the spot. She'd made her choice and Trevor needed to come to terms with that little fact before it got him hurt.

Actually, he came here to see me, Chad said as calmly as he could. Turning to his sister, he took her hand in his and pulled gently while looking over her shoulder at Devon. If you don't mind, I'd like a minute in private.

The second Devon let her go, Chad pulled her inside the door and shut it. He actually had to stop himself from locking the bolt. Besides, after what he'd just seen in the yard, it wasn't like a bolt lock would do any good.

Are you sure you won't stay here just one more night? For my sanity? he pleaded, even though he knew he'd lost control of his life a few exits back.

Envy wrapped her arms around her brother and gave him a much-needed hug, then took a step backwards to look up at him, I can't. You saw what happened at the church tonight. Everyone has scattered, so Warren is trying to get a meeting set for first thing in the morning.

She glanced back at the door as another thought struck her. Besides, staying with them is probably the safest place to be right now. As a matter of fact, I'll call and tell you what time to come to the meeting and if it's at Moon Dance or Night Light. I want you to do me a favor. Bring Trevor and flame boy to the meeting, because if what I heard is true we are going to need all the help we can get.

Vampires? Chad asked going into cop mode again even as he rubbed the back of his neck where the small fine hairs had decided to permanently stand on end.

Envy nodded, frowned, then shook her head, The vampires yes, but there's a demon on the loose and

Chad reached out and grabbed her by the arms, A demon? No one said anything about demons!

Envy inhaled then nodded, hoping what she was about to say would make him feel better, Yes, a demon. The good news is we have two angels on our side. She gave him a weak smile hoping he didn't faint.

Angels? Chad let her go and leaned heavily against the wall, Good God.

Exactly, Envy nodded watching him run his fingers through his hair as if fighting the urge to pull it out. Now you deal with Trevor. Can you do that for me? Bring him and Zackary to the meeting tomorrow. She bit her bottom lip not wanting to make another scene. And in return, I won't take my stuff tonight if it will make you feel better.

Chad nodded and gave her a small smile, Deal.

He opened the door to let them out but both of them paused seeing Zackary standing between the two men with a flaming palm pointed at both of them.

Oh dear, we're leaving, Envy said and rushed out the door grabbing Devon's hand as she made a beeline toward his car.

Trevor started to follow but Zackary stopped him, hold on there, lover boy. We need to deal with the brother first.

Let's go inside and I'll brew us some coffee, Chad offered, followed with a thankful sigh when Trevor turned angrily around and marched into his house like a man on a mission. He nodded as Zackary followed Trevor in, then closed the door wondering what the hell he'd gotten himself into.

Once the coffee maker was going, Chad turned toward his two guests. At the moment, he had more questions than answers and that wasn't helping anything. Now what's this about Envy saying there's a demon on the loose? She also said that Warren is calling everyone together tomorrow for some kind of meeting about what happened tonight and she wants the three of us to crash it.

Trevor couldn't help the small smile that played at his lips. So Envy wanted him involved wanted to keep him close. He couldn't blame her. At the rate Devon was protecting her, she couldn't feel all that safe. Knowing she needed him made most of his lingering anger fade into the background.

We'd have crashed that little party anyway. He glanced toward Zackary who confirmed the statement. He smiled again realizing he would see Envy in a couple hours. I guess it's time to tell you what's going on.

He inwardly cringed at how he was using his position to get closer to Envy again. He was also well aware of how it would look to everyone else. Devon would assume that he was using Envy again but that was the furthest thing from the truth. Then again, he wasn't above using her brother to get closer to her and do his job at the same time. Devon would just have to learn that all was fair in love and war and may the best shapeshifter win.

“I’m all ears,” Chad grumbled and crossed his arms over his chest to get Trevor’s attention back from wherever he was. He’d never thought of himself as psychic but he was doing a pretty good job of reading Trevor at the moment.

“We don’t know much about the demon, only that it had been trapped there for a number of centuries. Its existence predates anything we have on file at P.I.T. but we’re still searching for clues,” Zachary started and hoped Trevor would jump in.

“So you knew a demon was imprisoned under the cemetery for who knows how long and you didn’t do anything about it?” Chad demanded.

Trevor cocked an eyebrow at him, “What would you expect us to do about it? Help it get loose? It was trapped there and we don’t even know how the hell a fallen and a vampire were able to break the spell holding it.”

“Fallen?” Chad asked. “You mean one of the angels Envy told me about?”

Zachary nodded, “Yeah, we’ve known about them for a really long time. We know there are others, but we can’t locate them anywhere, and apparently the two fallen living within the city didn’t even know of the other’s existence trapped in the cavern until one went down there.”

“We also have someone that knows how to deal with demons,” Trevor offered. “With any luck, she’ll be able to figure it out once we call her in.”

“It’s not too late to back out,” Zachary said to Chad. “Just give the word and we’ll wipe your memory of everything that happened.”

Chad frowned and started to pour coffee for the three of them. He’d been a cop all his life because he wanted to make a difference. More than once though, he felt like he wasn’t doing enough. There was always one more drug dealer, one more murderer, one more traffic violation; it just didn’t seem worth it sometimes. But what Trevor and Zachary were doing did make a difference; the kind of difference Chad had always wanted to make.

Taking a long drink of his coffee, he set his cup down and nodded once. “I’m in.”  
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Angelica decided that phones were worse than demons when hers started ringing at three in the morning. Looking at the caller ID, she narrowed her eyes and grabbed the receiver. Turning it on, she pushed her dark hair out of her way and placed it against her ear.

“Unless the world’s falling apart, the seas have turned red, the seven plagues of Egypt have returned, or you’re dying, there’d better be a damn good explanation for you waking me up,” she growled.

“Aw, come on Boo! is that any way to talk to your Zachy-bear?”

Angelica hung up and dropped her head back onto the pillow. She’d just gotten back to sleep when the phone rang again. Without looking at the phone, she turned it on and spoke again.

“I’m going to get you, Zachary,” she muttered. “You and your little dog too.”

“Oh my, Wizard of Oz flashbacks,” Zachary gasped and Angelica secretly smiled at his antics, glad he couldn’t see her.

“What do you want?” she sat up, pushing her hair out of her face.

“We got a really nasty one for you named Misery,” Zachary offered.

Angelica climbed out of bed and turned on the lamp. “How big?”

“Not sure, but I’m going to guess a level seven.” He smiled into the phone knowing that would get her attention and he just loved getting Boo’s attention.

Angelica walked out into the living room and turned on her laptop. She typed in a few things and frowned.

“Level seven? Are you sure?” she asked. “Anything over a level five was very dangerous and extremely rare.”

“It’s just a guess,” Zachary answered. “It was able to trap one of our two fallen that we’ve been following and apparently another fallen had been down there with it for a long time.”

Since they are considered level seven then I'm assuming anything powerful enough to trap one is an equal.

Angelica was searching her database. More than three quarters of it had been illegally obtained from the vaults of the Vatican, but no one could argue with her results. The fact that a level seven demon might have been discovered in Los Angeles was more than enough of a reason to wake up not only her, but the rest of the P.I.T. crew as well.

Each demon was placed in a class of one through ten, with level ten being the equivalent of Satan himself. She'd hate to run into anyone who possessed enough magic to seal away a level seven demon; you'd need the thunder of God to pull it off.

I'm not finding anything on a demon named Misery in the Los Angeles area, she said after a few minutes. Let me hook up my external hard drive and take a look at those files.

She heard Zachary talking to someone in the background and figured it was Trevor until she heard another voice join in the conversation.

Who are you talking to? she asked curiously.

The newest member of our team, Chad, Zachary answered. He's a local cop that knows a little too much, so we brought him on to protect the masses, and by the masses I mean the other idiots he works with.

Angelica smirked, They're probably worse out there.

Not by much, Zachary said.

Okay, Angelica said. I got it hooked up, let's take a look around and see what all I've got on here.

You mean you don't know? Zachary asked in surprise.

Angelica sighed, You know how I am. I'd forget my head if it wasn't attached sometimes. I've only had a chance to explore a fraction of this thing.

Yeah, you did download it in a big hurry, Zachary said and sighed himself. Good times, good times.

Angelica accessed the hard drive and typed a word into her search prompt and pressed enter.

I take it you haven't been behaving yourself, Angelica asked leaning back on her sofa while the computer did its thing.

Hell no, Zachary laughed. You can't take me anywhere, remember?

Angelica winced remembering only a couple months ago when they'd gone to a big gala while chasing a four year old werewolf who had gotten lost and wasn't very happy about it. By the end of the night, Zachary had lost his pants because the werewolf had transformed during a child's temper tantrum and ripped them to shreds.

The funniest part was that Zachary hadn't said a thing, just took them off and walked around in his underwear and tuxedo jacket and shirt. Angelica couldn't make up her mind whether to be embarrassed or laugh her ass off. Seeing his legs with the knee high socks and dress shoes had nearly killed her when several of the young ladies crowded around him wanting to dance.

Her laptop beeped and she sat forward to look at what the search had found.

Find anything? Zachary asked.

Angelica opened a few of the files that had the word Misery located in them and started reading. Her cigarette slipped from her fingers as she read and landed on her foot.

Ouch, damn it! she cursed and picked her cigarette back up, quickly putting it out.

Everything okay? Zackary frowned worriedly and held up a hand when Trevor wanted to know what was going on.

Angelica read over the information again just to be sure. I'm catching the next flight out, she informed him before pulling the phone away from her ear. She hung up on Zachary's questions and looked back at the screen. It wasn't what she had read that made her so sure this was dangerous; it was that the head man of PIT had somehow just locked her out of the file.

If Storm was keeping secrets then she was wanted to know why.

## Chapter 2

Anthony paced relentlessly across the marble floor of his study. He ran a hand through his dark hair in frustration and anger. He knew he'd lost his temper when he killed Arthur and now he'd also lost his leverage for binding Jewel to him as his mate not that it would stop him.

He'd meant for the situation to remain calm but when Arthur had brought up Anthony's father, the werewolf part of him had lost it. Now he'd be forced to use coercion of a different kind on his runaway bride. The only problem was, he had to find her first.

Someone knocked on the door and Anthony stopped pacing long enough to straighten his hair and clothing. He was the alpha, and with that came a certain measure of decorum.

Enter, he called out in a cold voice.

The door opened and one of his wolves stepped in, closing the door behind him.

What did you find? Anthony asked.

The pack member looked very nervous and cleared his throat. I stayed behind just like you ordered to see if the priest came back to the church. I wasn't there long when all hell broke loose at the church and in the graveyard behind it. People were showing up right and left, most of them coming out of nowhere. He paused and swallowed nervously before adding, That's when I noticed Jewel was with them.

Then where is she? Anthony demanded as he closed the distance between them with rapid strides. Why didn't you bring her back with you?

The wolf backed away with panic in his eyes knowing bringing bad news to their alpha was never a good thing. I couldn't, he shuddered.

Anthony's hand abruptly shot out and grabbed the subordinate by the throat, lifting him into the air. You're a werewolf. Why didn't you just take her?

She was surrounded by weres too many of them, the wolf explained, lifting his hands to try and alleviate some of the pressure around his throat.

Anthony's hand tightened and his eyes changed to an eerie golden color. His brother had finally returned from Italy, he was sure of it. Did I or did I not teach you how to fight another pack on your own? My brother should have been no match for you. It was a lie. The wolf would have been lying in a ditch somewhere had he dared to fight Andreas Valachi.

Wasn't it wooolvesssss, the wolf rasped out while trying to breathe.

Anthony snapped his attention back to the man he was strangling and jerked his hand away, seeing he'd almost killed him. Who was it? he demanded with barely suppressed fury lacing his voice.

The wolf lay prone on the floor trying to catch his breath. He scrambled up to his hands and knees before dropping his forehead to the cold marble floor. He bared the back of his neck showing submission to his leader and wishing he'd run when he'd had a chance.

Cats! I smelled cats, he said after a few seconds, Cougars and jaguars... lots of them. He lifted his head and saw Anthony's eyes narrow threateningly. Quickly he added, There was a cougar shadowing her every step. The place was crawling with vampires as well. Part of the church blew up, then a cop car showed up.

Anthony stood there trying to reign in his growing anger. However, the longer he stood there, the more pissed off he became. His plan to retrieve his fugitive mate had been botched repeatedly by either his own actions or the actions of his ignorant subordinates.

He signaled his personal guards closer. Take him down to the basement where he can simmer in his failure.

The wolf sat up on his knees with a pleading expression on his face. He'd heard stories about the basement and what it contained. Some of the werewolves that survived the torture still had the

scars on their bodies to show for it. He whined pitifully when his arms were taken up by the guards and he was pulled to his feet.

The guards didn't look at his face nor did they say anything comforting or derogatory. If they had their way, they would have let him run. To them, Miss Jewel had every reason to run away from their Alpha. She was unhappy and, despite Anthony's best attempts, would never love him. Living like this, thriving off the misfortune of others was not the true werewolf way! it was the Mob way.

At one time, they had protected mankind from the evil that threatened to overtake the world. Now, with the exception of a few tribes located in across the United States and overseas, they were the evil. It was no wonder humans made movies depicting them like rabid dogs bent on causing death and destruction.

Anthony followed his guards down to the basement and smirked when the young werewolf whimpered quietly. The mansion basement had been converted into a large, underground torture chamber that covered several thousand square feet. Chains hung from the opposite wall with manacles attached to hold a person upright against the cold stone.

Off to the right was a table covered with whips and riding crops of various sizes. A cauldron where a fire was burning had a few irons sticking out of it used for branding purposes, which Anthony had rarely used. Finally, on the wall directly across from that was a row of cells that housed a few occupants.

A few werewolves moved among the shadows readying more devices for a special guest who Anthony had been fortunate enough to obtain a couple weeks ago. They stopped and watched with curiosity when their alpha entered the chamber with his guards and a new wolf to discipline.

Anthony stood back as his guards shackled the wolf to the wall and waved them out of the way when they were done.

“What would you have us do, Lord Anthony?” the oldest werewolf asked.

“I want you to make sure to teach this one a lesson, Boris,” Anthony answered. “He failed to bring back my bride and he must learn that failure is not tolerated.”

Boris looked over at the boy and inwardly sighed. “He is only a boy.”

“Then he will learn early,” Anthony's voice lacked emotion.

Boris lifted a scarred hand and waved two of the other werewolves over. They approached and ripped the back of the young wolf's shirt open. Boris lifted one of the whips, a cat o' nine tails, and cracked it in the air. The shackled wolf flinched making Anthony smirk.

Boris positioned himself about five feet behind the young one and snapped the whip forward. The young wolf screamed at the bite of the whip across his back. The screaming continued as Boris continued to strike the once unmarred skin. Finally, he stopped and another werewolf stepped forward with a large bowl of salt. More agonizing cries followed when the salt was thrown on the bleeding wounds.

The young wolf slumped against the wall believing the torture was over, only to scream again when the beating began anew! only this time two more whips joined it.

Anthony lifted his right hand so he could get a better look at it and frowned when he saw he would have to trim his nails again. Shrugging, he turned away from the beating and approached the cell furthest away from everything at the far end of the basement. A smile appeared on his face when the heavy chains rattled.

The man inside was suddenly on his feet and straining against the bonds trying to reach Anthony.

Anthony's bad mood suddenly evaporated seeing the proud male inside. His smile widened as he thought of a way to get Jewel back into his arms and away from the cougars she had sought shelter with.

“I'm glad I only shot you once Micah! I may have a use for you yet.”

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Tabatha looked around the apartment she shared with Kriss and shivered. Usually she didn't mind being alone but for many reasons, tonight it was very hard to handle. She looked out the window whenever she heard a noise thinking Kriss had come back. She thought she was fine when Envy and Devon dropped her off at home on their way to Chad's, but now she realized just how much she needed the company.

Envy had asked her if she wanted to go with them just in case Envy needed a tag team effort to handle her brother. But, Tabby had thought maybe Kriss would have come home soon and she wanted to ask him what happened, so she turned her down; now she wished she hadn't.

Thinking about Kriss led her to thoughts of Dean and how he acted at the church. She could still see the look on his face when he'd seen Kane.

Tabatha shook her head when the picture of Kane popped into her mind in a vain attempt to not think about him. Seeing him laying there dying had pulled at something deep in her heart and soul. She didn't understand why but, the thought of him dying made her want to curl up in a ball.

Get a hold of yourself, she whispered to break the silence. What you need is a distraction.

Picking up the phone she decided to call Jason at work to catch up and see if anything unusual had happened since Kriss flew her all the way to Florida.

The phone rang three times before it was picked up.

Forest Preserve, Officer Fox speaking, a sexy voice recited.

Hey Jason, it's Tabby. she smiled for the first time since walking in the front door.

Tabby? Jason cried and she heard something topple over, probably the chair because he was usually leaning it back in it at a dangerous angle on two legs. Where the hell have you been?

Kriss kinda kidnapped me and Envy and took us to Florida for a few days. Tabby answered. I just got home and thought I'd call and see what I missed.

Jason sighed, Other than the normal weird stuff, you didn't miss a lot. The only exciting thing that happened is the other night we got a call from a real whack job.

Tabby smirked and sat down on her sofa. Do tell!

Jacob and me were just sitting around, it was a slow night, and the phone rang. I picked it up and this guy was talking about seeing a jaguar chasing a cougar through downtown with a cell phone strapped to one of its legs.

Tabatha couldn't help it and started laughing. If she'd been in Jason's shoes a couple weeks ago, she would have thought the same thing. Oh damn, she exclaimed.

Tell me about it, Jason said with a chuckle. Jacob and I are taking bets on whether or not there will be any text messages on it when they find the critter.

Are you sure you're not drinking any of Kat's specialties? she asked around her laughter.

I do not drink on the job! Jason exclaimed and Tabatha heard Jacob's laughter in the background. So when are you coming back to work?

Tabatha shrugged, I don't know yet. I need a few more days and I got the vacation days to burn.

That's cool, we miss you though. It's just not the same without having a pretty face to brighten up the place. All I have now is Jacob, and he isn't much to look at.

I've missed you guys too, Tabatha said, and she meant it. We'll get together in the next couple of days.

Jason was quiet for a moment and Tabatha instinctively knew what was coming. How's Envy?

She's doing good too. Like me, she just needed a few days away. She bit her lower lip when there were several seconds of silence.

“Is it true?” Jason asked.

“Is what true?” Tabatha inquired trying to sound clueless.

“Is Envy really dating Devon Santos?” Jason’s knuckles turned white as he gripped the phone a little tighter.

Tabatha sighed, she knew this was going to hurt Jason in a big way, but to a certain extent it was partially his fault. Someone that cute should never be so hung up on the one girl who thought of him as a best friend and brother.

“Yeah, it’s true.” Tabatha said softly. “I know she didn’t mean to hurt you. She does love you, ya know.”

Jason exhaled softly and Tabatha felt sorry for him. He’d chased after Envy for so long that she was the only girl he’d ever looked at. Now she was beyond his reach but Tabatha wasn’t about to tell him. That was Envy’s job.

“I know she didn’t, Jason said after a minute. “I guess I should have gotten a clue when she didn’t even notice that I was flirting with her.”

“She noticed, Jason,” Tabatha said. “She just thought it would put a strain on your friendship.”

Jason hummed, “Yeah, I guess it probably would have but you can’t blame a guy for dreaming, right?”

“I can blame you for a lot of things,” Tabatha heard Jacob say in the background.

“You shut the hell up,” Jason growled playfully and Tabatha heard him slam the chair legs down in their right position. “Tabatha, I’ll call you later. The child here has decided to start throwing paper wads at me.”

Tabatha giggled and nodded her head, “All right, I’ll talk to you later.”

She hung up the phone and sat there for a moment before putting the phone back on the charger. Looking around the apartment again, it didn’t seem quite so lonely now. Jason would need her friendship now more than ever and being needed helped to make her feel more stable.

Standing up and stretching her arms over her head, she walked down the hall to her room. She got undressed and slipped into a pair of boy shorts and a tank top before sinking down into the cool, familiar softness of her bed.

This time she didn’t try to stop the scene from playing out in her mind as she drifted off to sleep. After all, she needed to decipher it and it wouldn’t go away until she did, so why fight it? She sank into the darkness of sleep still staring across the church and into Kane’s eyes.

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Jewel paced the expanse of Steven’s bedroom. Her arms were crossed over her chest and she had taken to biting her nails, something she hadn’t done since she was a child.

“This is my fault,” she said softly trying to blink away the image of her father crucified above the altar of the same church he’d attended for most of his life. How many times had he prayed right there below where he’d died? She’d known Anthony was twisted but that was sadistic.

Steven watched the woman pace back and forth and could even see her lips moving soundlessly as she ranted within her mind. He reached out a hand and laid it on her arm soothingly in an attempt to calm her down. “Jewel, none of this is your fault.”

She narrowed her eyes on his hand then glared up at him. “You’re partly right. It’s just as much your fault as it is mine. And now that Daddy is dead, I don’t have to marry Anthony anymore and I definitely don’t have to stay married to you.”

Jewel turned away from him so his hand would fall. The last thing she needed right now was to be absolved of her sins, she was guilty as hell. She’d given Anthony the nails to crucify her own father.

Steven wouldn’t admit it but her words stung him deeply. He responded the only way he knew how at this point since she obviously didn’t want to hear words of encouragement or kindness.

“Do you honestly think Anthony will stop coming after you just because he killed your father?” Steven yelled. He knew he was right and that she wasn’t going to listen to a damn word of it.

“He killed my father! I was dancing with the devil because I wanted father safe and alive. If Anthony dares to come near me now, I’ll blow his damn head off.” Jewel felt so strange. It was like she was perfectly calm on the outside, but shaking like crazy on the inside.

She’d cried for hours but the anger had finally sobered her up. She’d shed enough tears. Now it was time to take back her life. She had formed a plan to set a trap for Anthony and she prayed Steven was right that Anthony would come for her, because she’d be ready for him.

“I can’t let you leave,” Steven informed her. If she wasn’t going to protect herself, then as her mate he would have to do it for her. He watched her red rimmed eyes turn and lock with his.

“Then you’re no better than Anthony and I will hate you for the rest of my life,” she said stubbornly. She wanted Steven to get mad at her, to throw her out and wash his hands of her. If he did that then maybe Anthony wouldn’t kill him the same way he had her daddy. She didn’t want to be the blame for any more horrible deaths unless it was Anthony’s she’d gladly take the blame for his.

Steven glared at her for a minute then flung open the door and stood aside. “Go ahead then. I’m offering to save your ass and you want to go all gung ho? Go on, and let’s see how far you get against something you don’t have the slightest idea of how to kill.” Steven smiled wickedly at her, “Just so you know, the movies are nothing but a bunch of bull.”

“I guess you’d know!” Jewel yelled back and took a few steps forward. Why was he still trying to save her? Didn’t he understand she would just get him killed?

Steven closed his eyes and looked away. “Yeah, I would know! wouldn’t I?” he mocked then looked back as Jewel tried to dart past him. Panicking, Steven caught her around the waist and pulled her closer, “Damn it, wait!” he conceded.

Jewel started to squirm against him so he pulled her tighter to his chest. “If you want to set him up then fine, but you can’t do it alone. Let us help you.”

Jewel pushed against his chest leaning back so she could look up at him. “Why? So you can be hung on a cross too?” She wanted to scream as the vision made its way into her mind’s eye. “I don’t want that to happen.”

She wasn’t sure what she felt for Steven but the thought of him dyeing like that was making her feel like she’d been stabbed in the chest. “If you let me go now, then he’ll have no reason to come after you.” She gripped the front of his shirt in her small hands. “You’ll be safe and alive.”

“He’ll come after me anyway,” Steven informed her then traced his finger over the mating mark he’d given her. He smiled gently when he felt her shiver at his touch. “Like I said, this is real life. If you go back to him and he sees that mating mark, he’ll come after me regardless of what you say or do.”

Jewel leaned against the solid warmth he was offering and closed her eyes. She felt her anger fade in the safety of his arms and wanted to stomp her foot in frustration. The sadness of losing her father was starting to settle in again but she wouldn’t cry.

Steven wrapped Jewel in a reassuring hug. He couldn’t blame her for the way she was acting. If Anthony had just killed his father, then no force in this world or the next would be able to hold him back.

“Look, how about this?” he asked leaning back from her a bit and tilting her face up to his. “We’re having a meeting in the morning and everyone is going to be there. We’ll help you think of something better than just turning yourself over to him. Either way, with us you’ll have an army beside you. Without us, you’ll be facing an army of werewolves and no matter what you

doâ# Anthony will have you.â## He caressed her cheek as he searched her eyes, â##And I donâ##t want Anthony to have you.â##

Jewel lowered her head back to Stevenâ##s chest and took a deep, shuddering breath. He was right. She didnâ##t want to be anywhere near that monster after what heâ##d done. She pressed her ear to Stevenâ##s chest listening to his strong and steady heartbeat. How many times had he saved her from vampires, from Anthony, and now from her foolish self?

â##Will you hold me tonight?â## Jewel whispered knowing if he let go of her, the horror of the last couple hours would come back to haunt her. She looked up at him and locked her gaze with his steady one. Her lips parted in wonder as a streak of heat shot down through the center of her body.

How could he calm her rage and make her feel like she was on fire at the same time? She quickly looked away not wanting him to read her confusion.

Without answering, Steven lifted her in his arms, kicked the door closed with his foot, and strolled back across the room setting her on the edge of the bed. Pulling her shoes off, he quickly got rid of his own and laid down with her. He heard Jewelâ##s quick intake of breath as he pulled her against him so he could spoon his body around hers. It would still take timeâ# but he would be damned if he let Jewel go that easily.

### Chapter 3

Kriss entered the apartment he shared with Tabatha and locked the door behind him. Heâ##d searched high and low for Dean and hadnâ##t found a trace of him or the demon heâ##d been chasing.

One thing about their kind, if they wanted to hide, they knew how to vanish and leave no traces of where they were. Heâ##d been able to sense the demon everywhere though he never saw it. It wasnâ##t until it was freed that heâ##d realized he had always been able to sense its presence. He could still feel the malicious intent of that dark personality even inside his homeâ# it didnâ##t settle well in the pit of his stomach.

Walking through the dark apartment, Kriss made his way back to Tabathaâ##s bedroom and smiled at the innocent visage asleep in the bed. She was curled up like a kitten around her favorite stuffed animalâ# a Yorkie dog with its tongue sticking out. The stuffed animal was the only remnant of her childhood she had left. A few years ago, sheâ##d finally broken down and told him the story of Scrappy and how the dog had vanished when she went on vacation the last time with her parents.

Kriss sighed and lay down in bed beside her, curling around her like a security blanket. No sooner had he done so, Tabatha snuggled back against him.

â##Did you find Dean?â## she asked softly.

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Kane had managed to slip away; glad Warren had taken Michaelâ##s attention long enough for him to do so. Whatever Michael and Dean had done to fix what Misery did to him had given him the mother of all adrenalin rushes. He was antsy now and he wasnâ##t going to work it off sitting in Warrenâ##s office reminiscing about the soul-sucking demon who was sure to give him a few wiggly-booâ##s in his nightmares for a while to come.

He glanced up at the overwhelming darkness in the sky and knew the first streaks of dawn werenâ##t far away. Wanting away from the heart of the city, he moved through the streets so fast that if anyone had been watching, they wouldnâ##t have noticed him among them. The down side of that was that he was now miles from Michaelâ##s home.

He wanted to see Scrappy and curl up with the dog on the sofa with a nice bottle of wine, a ludicrously sized bowl of popcorn, andâ# a disaster movie? Kane shook his headâ# what in the hell was he thinking about? Scrappy would most likely pick the movie, which could or couldnâ##t be a bad thing at the moment. They both liked the movies where the animals could talk.

Kane slowed down and took in his surroundings when he realized something had drawn him in this direction. At first he thought it was Misery who had drawn him here. He shook his head again and discarded the idea when the image of Tabatha at the church flashed through his mind. He could

feel her presence and, for the first time all night, Kane forgot about the monsters fornicating under the bed and humping in the closet.

Tabatha was his soul mate and, now that he'd taken her blood, it only amplified the connection. The only reason he hadn't noticed it this last week was because the fallen Kriss... had taken her so far away from him, stingy bastard. He was starting to wonder if he was suffering from separation anxiety.

Moving through this part of town, he found himself at her home within minutes. Landing silently on the roof of a neighbor's house, he settled down to watch her through the bedroom window. His sharp eyesight took in the way her hair fell across the pillow and how her lips were slightly parted as she breathed deeply. He had never known such peace as he did right now just watching her sleep.

Kane wondered what he looked like through her eyes. Did he resemble the other monsters she'd encountered or dreamed of? Did she even realize how deep his emotions for her went?

He almost rose from his crouch on the roof, ready to go to her when he heard her cry out in his mind. The sound had come from her dreams but the mental sound made him stop as it reminded him of the way she'd cried out as a child so many years ago. To date, all he'd ever done was cause her pain cause her to bleed for him.

Kane turned to leave when he saw Tabatha's bedroom door swing open. His muscles tensed up ready to attack the intruder when he saw the fallen, Kriss, come into Tabatha's bedroom and crawl into the bed with her. Kane could tell the fallen was upset but he felt the rage well up inside of him when Kriss put his arm around her, holding her close in a very lover-like fashion.

He felt his peace shatter and more anger rush in to fill him up as he watched. Concentrating hard, his enhanced hearing started to pick up their whispered conversation. He frowned for a moment as he realized his power was stronger than before. He was surprised and his frown deepened when he heard their heartbeats even at this distance.

Dean doesn't want me to find him, Kriss sighed wondering if it was the demon Dean was stalking or if it was the fallen that had been down there with it. He wished Dean had waited. There was something about the aura of the other fallen that Kriss didn't completely trust. He secretly hoped Dean would fail in his search for either of them.

I wonder what happened, Tabby whispered, From what Envy and Devon said, Dean had been trapped down there most of the day. She couldn't help but envision Kane knowing he'd also been down there with the demon and almost not survived it.

I'll be sure to ask him as soon as I find him, Kriss answered unable to keep the worry out of his voice.

Dean loves you he won't stay away long. Tabatha closed her eyes hoping for Kriss's sake that she was right.

Sleep now, Kriss whispered back hoping she was right about Dean returning soon. He hadn't seen what the other fallen had looked like because he'd been moving too fast, but he'd felt him for a moment before the aura of the demon overpowered it. If just the fleeting feeling was haunting him, then he could imagine what Dean was going through.

The fallen were so rare that it took their breath away when they were anywhere near each other. Most thought they were the fallen angels of legend that had been cast to earth to help protect it but legends are often only half truths that are molded by the words of men who crave a hero or sometimes an enemy.

The fallen had come to earth from another dimension same as the demons. The legends called that dimension Heaven but they were wrong.

The myths said they destroy demons again it was only a half truth. The Bible had said the fallen had mated with the beautiful women of earth and been punished for it and that was the closest thing to the truth that the prophets had ever gotten.

The reason the remaining fallen kept themselves from mating with the females of earth was because the product of those matings were the birth of a demons. It was the fallen that created demons.

When the first fallen had appeared, there were many but as the demons were born and began destroying what the fallen loved, they turned on their own children and fought. The numbers on both sides had diminished and the seal between dimensions was slowly closing.

Some of the original fallen had disappeared, thought to have lost their lives to the demons they'd spawned. Most of the survivors chose to go back home so they wouldn't be tempted by the seduction of the human females. It was those few whom had sent the young warriors back into this world to watch over it, protect the humans from the monsters.

There was only one rule they could not mate with the females of this world lest they kill them. One child of the true breed had been placed on each energy spot of earth and only a few of them had survived this long. Legends said they were immortal, legends were wrong.

The fallen were not immortal, they only lived for very long periods of time, millenniums would come closer to their lifespan. They could also be killed by human and demon alike, though for a human to succeed would be extremely difficult.

Syn had known the true legends and passed them down to his children. Remembering those lessons, Kane now understood how much Kriss loved Tabatha enough not to take her as a mate and enough not to let someone he thought wasn't much more than a demon have her. It seemed he wasn't the only one with dark secrets. The corner of Kane's lips hinted at a knowing smile as he turned and walked away.

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Envy and Devon were waiting at the bar when the first people started trickling in for the meeting. She and Kat were busy talking and trying to finish catching up on everything that happened while Devon and Quinn merely stood back and stared at them with a quirked eyebrow.

What language are they speaking again? Devon asked.

There isn't a name for it, Quinn stated. It is a ritual females partake in quite regularly. It starts out innocent then, before we know it, they're out shopping and we're stuck outside the changing rooms holding their purses.

You're also stuck holding the bag while she goes inside girly stores and buys lingerie that you're not allowed to see until your anniversary, Nick chimed in with a smirk.

Warren clapped his hand on Nick's shoulder. Trust me little bro, you'll happily hold those bags when the time comes.

A pair of arms wrapped around Warren's neck from behind and Michael's face popped in between them. Does that mean you're taking me shopping?

Of course, Warren said with a smirk. I'll take you to that bondage shop you like so much.

Michael's expression became dreamy. Oh yes, whips, chains, stirrups, riding crops, leather.

What the! Nick suddenly stood up and moved away from them making Devon snort.

Homophobe, Devon muttered.

Shut up! Nick growled, They're either very good liars or it's disturbingly true.

The door opened and Steven stepped in with Alicia and Jewel. Alicia had gone through her closet and found a nice purple sundress for Jewel to wear until she could get some more clothes. Luckily, they were roughly the same size and height so Jewel would be able to make due for now. Alicia had also told Steven that until he could get Jewel more clothing, Jewel was welcome to raid her closet as much as she liked.

Steven immediately stepped over to where Quinn and Devon were sitting with Nick at a table directly across from Kat's bartending area.

“We’re not late I see.” Steven said smiling inwardly when he saw Jewel smile at Alicia. He realized he hadn’t seen her smile until now and he instantly felt a loss when it slid from her lips.

Warren looked around, “Actually I think everyone is here.”

“Not quite,” Envy said. “We’re still waiting on Chad.”

At that exact moment the doors swung open and Chad walked in with Trevor and Zachary behind him.

“What the hell is he doing here?” Devon demanded as he stood up.

“Chad’s a cop,” Envy reminded him. “He already knows some of what’s going on and he saw the tail end of what happened at the cemetery. He’s in whether he wanted to be or not. Besides,” she continued, “he’ll be able to keep the cops off your back for a while.”

“I wasn’t referring to your brother,” Devon’s voice had taken on a dangerous edge.

Kat nodded, seeing that Envy was getting ready to mistakenly take up for Trevor as well. Not wanting a full out battle royale to take place, she stepped away from the bar to put herself in their path.

“Trevor can stay too,” she said firmly and crossed her arms over her chest. “After all, he does play well with others.” Kat finished with a wink to the blonde man who gave her a mock salute.

Quinn stood up from his chair and walked over to Kat, putting his arm around her waist to pull her closer. “I’m going to have to keep an eye on you, aren’t I?” he murmured playfully, but the look in his eyes told a different story.

“Can we just get on with it?” Kane asked from the shadows.

Everyone except Michael jumped at the voice. He’d been so quiet no one knew he was there.

“Agreed,” Warren stated. “I think everyone knows why we’re here.” He looked at Chad who nodded once to indicate he understood before moving his gaze to Trevor and Zachary. “Before we go into what happened at the cemetery, I have a question for Trevor.”

Trevor narrowed his eyes, “Like what?”

“What the hell are you?” Devon asked interrupting Warren.

“I’m a shifter just like most of the people here,” Trevor answered.

Kane snorted in the shadows making everyone look his way.

“Do you know something about him?” Envy demanded. It wasn’t like she would take Trevor’s word for anything, he’d already proven what a great liar he was.

“I might, but you’ll have to be really nice to me if you want to know,” Kane said with amusement in his voice. He would have blamed his moodiness on getting up on the wrong side of the bed, but hell, he hadn’t been asleep.

Devon was on his feet and had Kane hoisted into the air by the lapels of his jacket. “I think we’re done with being nice,” the jaguar growled.

Kane smirked down at the shifter, “Aw, that’s too bad. I already told my puppy what a sweetheart you were and he was so happy about meeting a new playmate.” They both knew who the loser would be if they decided to tangle and it wasn’t the kitty cat.

“Your puppy?” Jewel asked, her eyes lighting up at the prospect of something cute and cuddly. Her lip twitched at the thought of a dog among all the cats in the room.

“It’s an oversized dust bunny,” Michael grumbled.

Warren pinched the bridge of his nose and Quinn had to fight to keep from laughing at his jaguar brother-in-law.

“Devon, put Kane down and get your ass in a chair,” Warren rumbled. “We’ll finish the discussion about Trevor later.”

Nick, Devon, and Kat all looked at Warren with wide eyes. If the average person didn’t know Warren, they would have missed it. Warren was excited about the prospect of a new shifter in the area and he wanted to learn more about the unknown breed.

Devon put Kane back on his feet and stomped back over to his chair next to Warren. The doors opened and Kriss walked in with Tabatha latched onto his arm. Devon let a slow smile grace his lips as he glared toward the blond vampire. He might not be able to put Kane in his place, but the man that just walked in could and he knew Kriss had no love for the reformed vampire.

“Are we late?” Tabatha asked happy that she’d won the argument with Kriss to come to the meeting. Some times Kriss could be just a touch over protective, a hard touch.

“No, you’re right on time,” Envy said. “We haven’t even really started yet.”

Tabatha joined the women at the bar and took a seat while Kriss stopped near Chad.

Kane’s heart leapt into his throat when Tabatha walked in and he had to fight the urge to grab her up in his arms and take her away from here. He stepped back further into the shadows so that only his silhouette could barely be seen. His eyes drifted toward the fallen and he inwardly cringed at the glare he was getting from the man.

“We need to learn more about this demon that’s been trapped in the cemetery,” Warren continued. “We need to know what it looks like and since Dean’s absent, Kane is the only one here who’s seen it.”

Kane had taken out a cigarette and flipped open his lighter. The light illuminated his face for a moment so they could see how troubled his eyes were.

Tabatha forgot to breathe as her gaze jerked toward the small flame and saw Kane. His perfect lips were curved slightly as he lit the cigarette and his eyes were shadowed by dark lashes. Shadowed or not, she could feel his gaze touch her the same as if it were his hands caressing her skin. Feeling the distraction of something brush her arm, she looked around to find Kriss now standing right beside her.

“Her name is Misery,” Kane said after a moment. “The problem is I’m not really sure what she looks like.”

“How could you not know what she looks like?” Kriss demanded with a deep frown on his face. “You were down there with Dean for who knows how long.”

“Can you let me finish, Feathers?” Kane asked in a sarcastic tone.

Kriss narrowed his gaze resenting the insult.

“Good,” Kane retorted. “The reason I don’t truly know what she looks like is she kept changing her appearance. One moment she was a pretty little girl with one creepy as hell personality, the next a rotting corpse, a cloud of black smoke, and the last was a beautiful woman. Those seem to be her favorite forms to take. She’s extremely powerful if she could hold two fallen in that chamber at the same time.”

Kriss took a deep breath and nodded, “Some demons have been known to have that kind of power.”

“We have a demon specialist coming in right now,” Zachary said finally. “Her flight should be arriving in the next couple of hours or so. When she gets here, it would be best if everyone just leaves Misery to her.”

Kane cocked an eyebrow, “Her?”

“Yeah,” Trevor said. “Her name’s Angelica. She’s got information on just about every legend, myth, and fairytale in the world. If there’s any kind of story about Misery, then she’ll have it in her flash drive.”

Alicia sighed in frustration, “Fine, she can have the demon. I want to know what we’re going to do about finding Micah.”

“Micah can take care of himself,” Quinn informed her.

The truth was that during that last argument between him and Micah, he’d ordered Micah to stand down but his brother hadn’t obeyed and that could only mean one thing; they now had two alpha males within the cougar clan and that had never been heard of. In the past, it had always caused a fight to the death.

Quinn loved Micah and was proud of him for being so strong willed. The last thing he wanted was for one of their arguments to get out of control.

“But he doesn’t know anything that’s happened,” Alicia exclaimed reaching for any reason she could to make them find him. “What if he runs into Misery and gets hurt or killed? Gone or not, he’s part of the clan.”

“You can’t argue with her logic old boy,” Kane prompted having read Quinn’s thoughts.

Alicia glanced at him in the shadows and blushed before looking away. It felt good to hear someone verbally take her side for once. What Alicia didn’t know was that her entire family had been thinking about Micah and the last time they’d really seen him; right after the fight he’d gotten into with Anthony.

Kane returned her smile though she couldn’t see it. Apparently, she was the only one in the group that had any spunk.

“The last time we saw Micah, he’d gotten into a huge shouting match with Anthony Valachi and threw him out of the club,” Steven said softly. “That was right before he vanished.”

“The werewolf?” Trevor asked with a tilt of his head.

“Yeah, and on top of that, Steven mated with Anthony’s fiancée.” Quinn informed him and anyone else that hadn’t heard.

Jewel frowned realizing Steven had been telling her the truth about the ties maybe linking his missing brother to Anthony. She bit her lip, silently wondering if that was the only reason Steven had helped her. No, that was wrong. When Steven took her from the church, he hadn’t even known Anthony was her fiancée.

She heard the unspoken accusation in Quinn’s voice and squared her shoulders. A protective instinct welled up inside of her and she had to voice it.

“Steven didn’t know who my fiancée was and I didn’t have a clue Anthony was a werewolf,” Jewel stated in a firm voice. “It wasn’t until we mated that I told him about Anthony. So, if you’re going to blame anyone for that, blame me.”

Quinn had the courtesy to look slightly chastised and Kat gave her a discrete thumbs-up.

Jewel leaned back against the bar and started chewing on her bottom lip again. Standing up to Steven’s older brother, the alpha of the cougar tribe, had given her a little bit of a scare.

She looked over at Steven and relaxed when she saw the pride shining in his eyes for her. Something inside of her softened and she fought like hell to build the protective wall back up around it. Her heart beat faster and she wondered if she was falling in love with him.

“Anthony Valachi has been under suspicion for a while now,” Chad spoke up. “The police force has reason to believe he’s involved in not only human smuggling, but slavery as well. Rumor has it that his men have been picking up prostitutes, kidnapping them and selling them as sex slaves, too.”

“Why haven’t the police done anything about it then?” Kat asked.

“We were told to stay out of it because the FBI had taken control of the investigation,” Chad answered. “Unfortunately, when the FBI shows up, we have no jurisdiction and can’t do anything but stay out of their way unless we want to wind up in jail beside the bad guys.”

Steven nodded figuring it was time to tell them all of it. “Jewel’s father was investigated by the FBI here a while back. It was the reason Jewel was engaged to Anthony in the first place.” He gave Jewel a soft smile before turning back to the group.

“Her father was the manager of the Palm Springs Resort and Anthony wasn’t happy about the search warrant they had or that Arthur allowed them to roam the property. Realizing his mistake, Arthur killed the agent and was arrested for murder. In order for Arthur to save his own skin, he handed Jewel over to Anthony as payment for getting him out of the murder wrap.”

“He’s the one that killed my father. I’m sure of it,” Jewel said clenching her fist at her side. “So, when can we go after him?”

“We don’t have to go after him,” Chad informed her. “We will form a plan, and then make it known that you are under the Wilder’s protection. When he makes a move, we’ll get him.”

“I think this may be a bit above the law,” Trevor corrected. “Keep Jewel a secret for a couple more days and let me and Zackary make sure the FBI doesn’t come in and turn everything into a clusterfuck.”

“Why would they interfere?” Kat asked. “You’re part of that paranormal organization, aren’t they above the FBI?”

“Only in certain areas,” Trevor answered. “Most of the FBI hasn’t a clue we even exist. Hell, the president of the United States doesn’t even know about us. We go way above their heads, and for that, we have to have proof that something paranormal is going on.”

“Does that mean that at least a part of the government knows about us?” Nick asked not liking the uneasy feeling that came with the knowledge.

Trevor shook his head, “Not specifically each one of you, but they are aware of the more unusual. You are protected the same as the humans are, maybe even more so and with more lenient rules and by a small but powerful government within and above the government.” He scratched his head hoping everyone could follow that vague version of the truth.

“My worry is the FBI digging more into it and finding out too late that they’re dealing with werewolves, not humans,” Chad frowned understanding and not liking what Trevor had just said. Was he to understand the paranormal had more rights than the humans? Maybe he was a bit biased but he was one of those lesser humans.

Trevor shook his head, “The mob isn’t going to go all furry and attack the FBI. Besides, if the world found out about werewolves, they’d be next in line to become extinct and the werewolves know that. The last time they outed themselves, they were almost hunted to extinction.”

“Let me make a couple of calls and see if we have full jurisdiction over the Valachi case,” Zackary offered. “If we do, then we have free rein and can recruit anyone we think is qualified.” He glanced around at the group knowing that would cover almost everyone in the room and give them immunity no matter how things turned out.

“Does anyone know what Micah was driving the day he vanished?” Chad asked. “I can run a trace from my patrol car and put out an APB for it.”

“His motorcycle,” Alicia chimed in then her eyes widened as she remembered telling Warren she’d road that same motorcycle in last night’s storm. Glancing over at him, she breathed a sigh in relief when he simply winked at her.

Nick added his two cents, “I’m all for staying away from Misery, but the vampires are breeding for her and we can’t have that.”

“Everyone’s on pest control duty,” Warren agreed.

“Not everyone I hope,” Trevor looked toward Envy.

Zackary discretely stepped in front of Trevor to block the heated stare Devon was giving his friend. “I think it’s also time for us to call in a couple favors and get more of the team in this area.”

“You mean there’s more of you running around?” Steven asked.

Zachary shoved his hands into his pockets and tilted his head slightly. The soft glow from the lights shown on his blond, spiked hair as he smirked, “Sorry to disappoint you, but there’s only one of me. I’ve been wanting to clone myself but fearful leader over here won’t let me, he finished by jerking his thumb at Trevor.

“Shut the hell up and make those calls,” Trevor exclaimed. “If there was another you running around, Angelica would kill it just to say she’d finally succeeded.”

Zachary's expression took on a glazed quality. "Oh, to be stomped by those wonderful Doc Martin's she keeps hidden in her closet."

Trevor took an agitated step toward his teammate and Zachary immediately ran across the bar area to hide behind Kane.

"Is there a reason why you're using me as a shield?" Kane asked.

"Yeah," Zachary exclaimed. "Give me a minute and I'll think of one."

Kane smirked, "Give me a minute and I'll go home long enough to find my Doc Martins."

Zachary backpedaled away from Kane with his hands held up. "Whoa there, I'm straight."

"Zachary!" Trevor yelled.

"Okay, okay," Zachary said and took out his cell phone. "Geez, surrounded by people with no sense of humor! Angelica's gonna love this bunch."

#### Chapter 4

Kane leaned against the cross several feet behind Michael and gazed out over the city wondering where Misery was hiding or if she was even still in the city. There was a whole world out there for her to terrorize, but karma was a bitch and so were the instincts that were telling him she hadn't gone very far.

He made a face imagining her walking down the sidewalk as a rotting corpse then stifled a shiver at the image of the freaky little girl and decided the corpse was less creepy. Over the centuries he'd seen moments when adult vampires had turned children.

What many of them never learned was children often were more vicious than their adult parents and they ended up dead by the adult's hand or the child killed the one that turned them. He had to admit that one woman that wrote the vampire books had the right idea.

He hoped whoever the demon expert Trevor had mentioned knew what she was doing but he doubted it.

The memory of the demon was what had led him to babysit Michael that and it would keep him from stalking Tabatha now that she was back in town. It was taking a huge amount of willpower not to do so. Just being in the same room with her had been physical pain; pain he knew he couldn't have held in for much longer had they stayed. His eyes strayed back to his friend and he leaned heavier against the cross.

He had to admit if you wanted to be alone and still be surrounded by humans, then the roof of the biggest church in the city was an intriguing place from which to do it.

Oddly enough, he knew Michael didn't come here for serenity and peace. This was where the vampire came to worry and brood. It didn't matter that they were out in the open because Kane had a feeling that if Misery wanted to find them, then four walls wouldn't save them. He had never hidden from an enemy before and he wasn't going to start now. Obviously, Michael felt the same way.

He smirked as an odd thought crossed his mind. As soon as he ran across Dean again, he was going to ask the fallen a favor. He wanted a handful of those feathers with whatever spell Dean had used on the feather in the catacombs. The bitch hadn't liked that much. He placed his palm on his shoulder remembering all the missing flesh that had somehow reappeared while he was out of it. Michael had told him that Dean had healed him.

Kane couldn't remember much from those moments after the cave in. He recalled hearing Michael's voice calling to him from the darkness but not much else. The next thing he remembered was waking up to a church full of people and Michael hovering over him like a mother hen.

Tabatha's face flashed through his mind's eye. He'd spent the last couple of hours desperately trying not to think about her, but most of that couple of hours he hadn't been listening to himself.

Michael could feel Kane's presence somewhere behind him but instead of getting annoyed at the unwanted distraction, he felt soothed by his friend's watchful eye. At least if Kane was worried about him, then he was getting some time off from his own paranoia. Besides, he loved Kane like a brother; the word brother echoed within his mind as his thoughts darkened and turned toward Damon. How could true brothers ever be so wrong about each other?

Trying to empty his mind of the disturbing memories, Michael laid back and let exhaustion claim him. He knew it was safe to sleep; Kane was watching over him.

Kane wondered at Michael's whispered thought. He hadn't known Michael was having trouble sleeping. What had his friend feeling so threatened the he was afraid to close his eyes? He knew lack of sleep would slowly drive you crazy; then yet, he'd also found out the hard way that too much sleep was even more damaging.

He looked across the road at Michael's building nestled between other city buildings. From the look of the circular room on top, it was a Victorian design. He had agreed to move in with Michael but it looked like now he would have to talk Michael into moving in with himself instead of sleeping on the roof across the street.

He raised an eyebrow at his odd friend. The house had every modern comfort someone as old as them could think of, including wards to keep demons out, so why the sudden need for fresh air that smelt like rain?

He knew Michael still felt guilty for not being around when he'd went and gotten himself buried. Although Kane had tried to stay out of his head, he still hadn't told Michael that if he tried, he could read his mind. It was just something a friend didn't really want to know; besides, he had a feeling he was the only one with that power.

Abandoning him wasn't all Michael was thinking about tonight; it was the reason he'd left the country in the first place that drew his attention; Damon, Michael's brother. Kane hadn't seen Damon since coming back to his senses; what was left of them, but the memories he did have were mostly good. Damon had a wild streak a mile wide and they both had given Michael one hell of a headache trying to keep up.

Kane glanced down and noticed Michael playing with the ring on his finger as he thought about Damon. It wasn't long before sleep overtook Michael and the vivid dreams started. The longer the dreams lasted, the more Kane learned what Michael had been hiding. He closed his eyes, blocking out the city and really concentrating for the first time on someone else's pain.

He was startled to find himself not only listening to the dreams, but also catching visual flashbacks from forty years ago. He saw it all unfold from an outsider's prospective as it played out like a tragic movie.

Michael had felt the urge to go see Damon for the first time in over a century. When he found his brother, all seemed well. Damon had been living it up in the social limelight of London and Michael had joined him for a while. They'd had a blast until they met a girl; Katie.

The most eligible bachelors had all been invited to her eighteenth birthday party including the brothers. She was truly the belle of the ball. What had started out as simple brotherly competition turned into a dangerous game of jealousy. Everything with them seemed to turn into a competition. They'd spent weeks waging silent war against one another to win her affection.

Damon had told him to leave; to go back across the ocean but Michael couldn't do it. He wouldn't let Damon win by running him off. As the sibling rivalry escalated, they were at each other's throats over the same girl. It wasn't that she was their soul mate or anything though they both had become enthralled with her. It seemed fated that Katie had the same problem; she'd fallen for both of them and wouldn't choose.

What was even more twisted about the love-triangle was that Katie thought the brothers were human; they'd never given her a reason to think otherwise.

They had taken Katie out dancing for the evening but that had been a deadly mistake. The tension between the men was too high. After only an hour of slowly dying inside while the other danced with her, the brothers had finally come to blows. They hadn't realized how much control they'd lost until their eyes changed color as they wrapped their hands around each other's throats and their feet left the ground.

They hadn't even seen her run. Michael and Damon had snapped out of their rage when they'd heard the squeal of tires and the crunch of metal outside the dance hall. By the time they reached her, she'd been killed.

When Damon raced toward her with every intention of trying to revive her with his vampire blood, Michael had stopped him because a crowd had already gathered. Damon had turned on him for real then, blaming Michael for not leaving when he'd told him to.

They had fought after that for months, calling truce for moments at a time for words with feeling but it always led to another fight. Michael knew Damon was getting darker and darker and that Damon wanted to kill him. If he did try, then Michael would defend himself and one of them would die.

It was then that Michael did something he swore he wouldn't do; he went to see Syn. Syn was the first vampire. He'd gone to sleep and not woken for centuries but Syn wasn't dead for he couldn't die; at least not that anyone knew of. They weren't sure why he'd chosen to sleep the last couple of centuries away, but it had seemed like Syn was waiting for something that hadn't happened yet.

Michael walked around the statue that marked Syn's resting place within the mausoleum. He knew Syn was deep below him. He talked to the empty tomb, hearing his words echo around him; sometimes in whispers and sometimes in deafening screams.

Fighting with Damon was driving him mad, he hadn't meant for it to ever go this far. He wasn't even sure either of them had truly loved the girl. He felt his heart spilling out because of the pain he had caused his brother and Katie. He didn't know if Syn was listening, but it was enough to at least tell someone else the truth.

The statue's eyes moved watching him. It was the likeness of Syn but without coloring. The candles that were lit around him shimmered and dimmed then flamed high as the statue moved. Whispered words drifted up from the ground in a language long forgotten.

The silence that followed was like soothing thunder and Michael knew Syn had forgiven him even if Damon had not. He rubbed his palms over his arms trying to chase the chills away. Syn was a man of magic and Michael wondered what spell had crawled deep inside him.

He picked himself up and made his way out of the catacombs and into the mausoleum only to find Damon was standing there waiting on him. Again, soft words conveying emotion were exchanged but it wasn't long before they became heated. Michael just wanted it all to end; wanted to embrace his brother and start over.

Damon had taken the first part of his statement literally and, before Michael could stop him, pulled a wooden spear from inside his jacket. Michael felt the timber penetrate his heart and he dropped to his knees. Looking up at Damon, he opened his mouth to say something but all that he could get out was a gurgle.

Michael fell on his side, feeling the blood pause in his veins and turn to ash as his vision slowly faded to black.

With tears in his eyes, Damon stumbled away knowing he was now damned. Syn's voice started echoing within his mind making him scream. He grabbed his head and doubled over trying to silence the voice but you couldn't silence Syn.

At that moment everything within Michael roared back to life with a vengeance. Feeling the excruciating pain of the stake in his chest still killing him, he reached for it and pulled the wood from his heart. It hurt just as bad coming out as it had going in.

Damon! Michael screamed as he struggled to stand and went in search of his brother. It was worth every ounce of pain to see the look on Damon's face when he realized Michael was alive.

Michael let the bloody stick slide from his sleeve and in an instant, he stabbed Damon. "Feel this brother!" he screamed as he returned the favor. It killed a part of him to do it but this had to stop somehow.

When Damon was resurrected, Michael had sat down on the ground to try to catch his breath. Michael understood what Syn had done! what the words in the air of the catacombs had been. It was a spell that only Syn could do and it would make it impossible for Michael and Damon to kill each other! maybe make it impossible to die at all. Oh, they could kill each other! but it would only hurt.

They had died several times after that night, always at each other's hands. Michael had finally given up and come home, leaving his brother halfway around the world. He knew it was useless to reach his brother and though his heart screamed at him that all was not lost, Michael was still unsure.

Kane wisely kept his mouth shut as Michael jerked from his remembered nightmare. He blinked wondering if going so deep into Michael's mind had caused him to relive the memory so clearly. If so! then he was instantly sorry when he smelt salt in the air. He vanished before Michael turned to look at the cross just as the sun started to rise.

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Alicia applied more lipstick trying to get rid of the innocent face that stared back at her in the mirror. She was mad, not at Kane for taking the spell book from her! after all, it was Kane's book. But she was mad at everyone else because they were treating her like a baby. She lived at a night club for crying out loud.

She may have been away at boarding school but it hadn't been a nursery. She was a cougar after all and could very well take care of herself. Because of the strict rules and watchful eyes of the teachers, Alicia had mastered the art of sneaking around to gain her freedom. Her animal side had never liked being in a cage.

Now that she was home and her family needed protecting, it wasn't fair that everyone was teaming up and leaving her out of it. If Micah had been here, he would have understood her needs and as protective as he was, he'd never have tried to take away her freedom. That was definitely something she appreciated about Kane! he'd taken up for her today as if he understood what she was going through.

Therein lay the bigger problem. Micah was missing and she was damn well going to find him if she had to take on every paranormal being in the city to do it! starting with the vampires and werewolves.

She frowned at herself in the mirror knowing she'd screwed everything up trying to use a spell at the graveyard. Up until that point, she hadn't realized there were two completely different types of vampires.

During her short visits home she'd never met Michael, or any other vampire for that matter, and the only one who had come to visit her at school on a regular basis had been Micah. He used to come to the school and sign her out for the weekend and holidays. That's when they would head into the forest where he taught her to fight with and without weapons.

When they weren't training, they would shift and run, enjoying the freedom. Because of Micah, she was smarter, faster, and tougher than most female shifters. Micah had always been her hero and he was the only one in the family who didn't think being a girl was a handicap.

She still remembered the first time Micah had taken her out of school for the weekend. They'd gone up into the forests and set up camp before Micah told her they were going for a run. Alicia had never had such an opportunity before and she was so excited that when she shifted, she took off running at top speed and made three complete running circuits around the camp.

When she stopped, she looked over at Micah who was holding his sides and laughing. At first she thought he was laughing at her but it turns out he was laughing at how stupid the rest of their family was. None of them had taken the time to teach her about her cougar heritage, nor did they allow her to run very much. Just watching her display of freedom gave him the impression of a kitten going outside for the first time.

She'd grown up thinking all vampires were monsters because that had been what Nathaniel had taught his children. Nathaniel had been wrong. If Kane hadn't been freed from the grave her father had damned him into, then she would have surely been killed at the graveyard the other night.

She was thankful Kane had been there to save her but she wasn't about to stop looking for her beloved brother. She would be more careful this time. She could thank Kane for one more thing to because of him Michael had kissed her. She wondered if Michael only saw a child when he looked at her. Somehow she doubted it. She smiled at herself in the mirror. It had been one hell of a kiss.

She turned around in front of the mirror making sure she didn't look like the child they were all treating her like. The black leather skirt had a zipper going from the hem at mid thigh all the way up and she purposely left it unzipped halfway up. The black shirt was made of mostly sheer lightweight material with a very small silk belly shirt built in underneath.

She tucked a couple of stray blonde strands of hair up in under the Cleopatra wig she'd found in a trunk of Halloween costumes stored in the attic. Even she had to admit the slinky outfit made her look sexy as hell.

She'd bet money that if Quinn or anyone she knew saw her now, they wouldn't have a clue it was even her. Quinn was so busy chasing Kat and trying to act like he wasn't that he hadn't been paying Alicia any attention anyway. Now that he and Kat were together he had turned all of his attention to his mate. The most he'd done was set two shifter guards on Alicia and ordered her to stay out of sight until they decided it was safe enough for her to come out and play.

Her bodyguards were dumb as rocks, all muscle and no brains. It wouldn't take much to outwit them and escape her little prison. She was going to hunt for Micah tonight with or without their approval.

Quinn told her Micah had left them on his own two legs and knew the way back if he wanted to come home, but she knew for a fact Micah wouldn't leave at least not without taking her with him. Micah was in trouble she could feel it. Alicia squared her shoulders and tilted her chin up in defiance.

With all the exposed skin, hopefully she would look like a prostitute for the kidnapping werewolves or dinner to some unsuspecting vampire. She was sure if she could fight either one on one, then she could get it to talk before she killed it.

She'd done enough spying to figure out what was really going on and she didn't blame Kane at all. As long as the vampire wasn't Michael or Kane, then it was killable. As for werewolves if they were into slave trade or had Micah then they were no better than the soulless vampires.

She slid the small heart-shaped crystal around her neck. It was more than a simple trinket. She'd been studying magic as long as she could remember and this crystal would make it impossible to put her under the thrall of vampire this time even a powerful vampire like Kane or Michael. And she'd also remembered some of the simple spells from the book Kane had taken from her.

Tonight she was going to find out what it was like to really be a part of this family she was going to fight in this war whether her brothers and the jaguars liked it or not.

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Damon leaned back in the over-stuffed chair and stared into the fireplace watching the flames mate with the shadows it cast within its brick enclosure. Picking up the glass of red wine, he watched it swirl and felt his complete calm slide away from him. He could hear Syn whispering to him again.

As the glass shattered against the brick he pressed his fingers against his left temple knowing he'd just woken up his midnight snack.

The luscious brunette sat up in the bed to his left and pouted seeing she was alone on the sheets. Climbing out of the covers, she made a show of sensually crawling toward him across the mattress but he didn't give her time to think it was going to work. Faster than the human eye could detect, Damon was beside the bed with his fingers wrapped firmly around her throat.

It wasn't meant to mar her beauty or hurt her, only to keep her still as his pupils expanded and he placed her completely under his thrall. Up until this point, he'd had no need to do so. She'd been a most willing partner but it was now time to end their lovely friendship. Slowly opening his mouth he revealed the sharp fangs. He didn't know why he did it, girls always reacted the same.

Her eyes widened in horror and he quickly choked off the scream that was making its way through her dimmed mind. Mortal girls were useless just like Katie had been. He could still hear the crunch of metal and it darkened his mood.

"I'm going to do you a favor little girl." One corner of his lip lifted in the hint of a sarcastic smile, "You came to LA to be a model, but this city is full of other little girls wanting the same thing so this is what you are going to do. Trust me, it's for the best."

He pulled her closer and gazed deeper into her eyes. "You hate it here. You hate LA and want to go back to whatever small town you crawled out of. If you stay here, the monsters will use you up just like I did. Go home and find the boy whose heart you broke when you split town and beg his forgiveness because no one will ever want you here."

He let go of her neck watching her blink back tears as she hit the mattress. He wasn't in the mood to listen to her cry. "You need to leave now." He turned his back to her and strode across the room to glare out the window. As far as he was concerned he'd just done his good deed for the day. This city was a mess anyway.

Out of the corner of his vision he saw a few young vampires flit around the corner of a building and into an alley. He wondered where all the soulless creatures had come from since LA seemed to be overrun with them.

He'd forgotten all about the girl on his bed until he heard the door to the penthouse slam yeah, he'd done her a favor. She was lucky he'd found her instead of the monsters that were crawling the streets of LA right now and he wasn't just talking about the paranormal. He opened the balcony doors and stepped out into the night air inhaling deeply.

He'd left the rolling hills of the quiet city the moment he'd felt Syn start to stir within his grave. Being so close to the vampire, he'd actually felt Syn's awakening coming on for months and he hadn't wanted to stick around for the reunion. Syn had little tolerance for the soulless and right now Damon was well aware that his soul was weak. He had a flashback of what Kane's soul had looked like at the church and wondered if his own soul was in that bad of shape.

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