

# HEAT

BLOOD BOUND SERIES BOOK 4



AMY BLANKENSHIP, R.K. MELTON

Blood Bound Book

Amy Blankenship

**Heat**

«Tektime S.r.l.s.»

## **Blankenship A.**

Heat / A. Blankenship — «Tektime S.r.l.s.», — (Blood Bound Book)

Damon moved in with his brothers for one reason... the girl that had staked him and left him for dead was living there and under vampire protection. When they wind up saving Alicia's life more times than he cared to count, Damon decides someone needs to get her under control before the little she-cat finally finds a way to escape him by getting herself killed. Jealousy becomes a dangerous game when she goes into heat and begins attracting more than just monsters. Alicia Wilder is tired of being shielded from the world by her over protective brothers. Trying to prove she can handle the vampire war gets her mauled, bit, kissed, shot at, and oddly enough, living with three very sexy vampires, one of which started the vampire war in the first place. When she finds herself going into shifter heat, Alicia realizes her safety net may be her undoing. Damon moved in with his brothers for one reason... the girl that had staked him and left him for dead was living there and under vampire protection. When they wind up saving Alicia's life more times than he cared to count, Damon decides someone needs to get her under control before the little she-cat finally finds a way to escape him by getting herself killed. Jealousy becomes a dangerous game when she goes into heat and begins attracting more than just monsters.

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Chapter 1

Micah was resting in bed wrapped up in so many bandages he was starting to resemble a mummy. He couldn't help but smile softly as Mrs. Tully clucked around him like a mother hen and occasionally shook her head. He also wasn't complaining about the amount of pain killer she'd stuck in his arm. He could see himself in the dresser mirror across the room and started to cock an eyebrow but decided against it when it instantly hurt.

They'd already assured him Anthony was dead but he couldn't help wishing the alpha werewolf was still alive so he could torture the bastard the same way he'd been tortured. The story they'd told him had sounded like a quick death. He wouldn't have made it quick.

"I think you shifters are going to end up being the death of me," Mrs. Tully exclaimed softly. The shifters... both jaguars and cougars, held a soft spot in her heart. She'd delivered every single one of them and had been very close to their mother. "Just look at the shape you got yourself into."

Micah pouted at the ceiling feeling dizzy when the ceiling fan kept going round and round. "It wasn't my fault that I got kidnapped and tortured."

Mrs. Tully softly tapped him on the forehead with the tips of her fingers. "I beg to differ, young Skywalker. If the stories I heard were true, you stood up to that horrid werewolf and that's what got you kidnapped."

"So you're saying I brought this on myself?" Micah demanded, ignoring the grins from the other people in the room.

"Don't interrupt your elders," Mrs. Tully came back with a stern look. "I wasn't finished. As I was saying... you stood up to that mongrel dog and I have to say it was something long overdue."

Micah looked pointedly over at Quinn with an 'I told you so' smirk. He wasn't ready to forgive his brother. He'd warned Quinn about Anthony and had been told to stand down. He hoped big brother was happy because now he couldn't stand up.

"Stop that!" Mrs. Tully growled and slapped him on the top of his head.

The action made his lingering headache start to thump and he squeezed his eyes shut. "Hey, I'm hurt here," Micah complained.

"You'll make it worse if you keep up this sibling rivalry," Mrs. Tully retorted and gave that same warning look to Quinn. "I need to call my granddaughter and let her know where I am. The poor dear will be worried if I'm not at home to answer the phone."

Mrs. Tully didn't wait for anyone to show her where the phone was. This wasn't the first time she'd been to the Wilder residence. She missed a step when she noticed Michael sitting quietly in a chair in the shadowed corner of the room. It wasn't like the charming vampire to be so dark and brooding. When the door closed behind her, all eyes turned back to Micah.

"It's good to see you finally back home where you belong," Steven said with a soft smile, trying to hide the fact that he was worried. Even though Micah was home, something was telling him he wasn't out of danger. Micah was pale and his eyes were a bit too shiny for his liking.

Micah returned the smile but was starting to get drowsy, "It's just good to be out of that hell hole."

"You were very reckless this time," Quinn stated from his position near the window and crossed his arms over his chest. "You could have died down in that basement if we hadn't seen that message you sent to Alicia."

Micah looked around the room for his little sister and frowned. "Speaking of Alicia, where is she? I thought for sure she'd be here."

"She's staying over at a friend's house until this all blows over," Kat answered. She glanced at Quinn wondering how long he was going to wait until he called their sister and told her to come home.

"Why didn't she come back with us from Anthony's?" Micah asked. "I thought for sure she'd..." again he glanced toward Quinn, putting the blame for Alicia's absence on him simply because he wanted to.

Nick shook his head but was inwardly cringing. He tried not to look at Michael knowing the vampire had erased everyone's memory except for his and Micah's. "Dude, you must have had one too many hits to the head... Alicia wasn't at Anthony's."

"But she was there," Micah insisted. "I saw her with my own eyes." He glared at Nick but the man just shrugged and shook his head.

He looked from one face to the next and realized that none of them would confirm Alicia being at the mansion. He remembered her in the basement... holding his hand. She was crying and it would eat at him until he saw her again and made sure she was alright. He didn't know which had hurt worse... seeing her cry or being almost killed. He glanced around one more time making note of the fact that the man who had been with Alicia was also missing from the crowd.

Huffing, he pressed back against the pillows and silently planned to find out which friend Alicia was staying with. He'd hunt her down and demand the truth from her.

"You must have been hallucinating," Jewel said softly.

Micah looked over at the pretty blonde and frowned. "Who are you?"

"This is Jewel Scott Wilder," Steven said and wrapped his good arm around her shoulders. Mrs. Tully had already taken care of his own bullet wounds and had his other arm in a sling for now. "She's my mate."

"Anthony's Jewel Scott?" Now Micah was even more confused.

"Only within Anthony's demented mind," Steven responded but couldn't stop himself from pulling Jewel a little tighter against him.

Micah blinked and looked over at Quinn to ask confirmation when he saw Kat was snuggled up against his older brother. With a sigh, he wondered how high a dose of drugs Mrs. Tully had actually given him because either he was losing his mind or everyone else was. He glanced up at the only other person in the room he knew that had any common sense, Warren.

"Did I pull a Rip Van Winkle or something? I mean, when I left... Steven was still single and Quinn had about as much romantic inclination as Dean."

Warren smiled, "Quite a bit has happened since you've been gone."

"Okay, my phone call is made," Mrs. Tully announced as she walked back in. She actually hadn't called her granddaughter. She'd only said that to give them a moment alone with Micah before running them off. "Now... everyone out and allow this little kitten to get some sleep."

Micah growled at the older woman. "I am not a kitten."

"Dear, my youngest cat could beat you in a fight with the shape you're in right now and she's a wimp, runs from her own shadow," Mrs. Tully informed him. While she talked, she took a needle from the odd-looking box she'd brought with her.

"I'm not so sure I need more drugs," Micah sighed. He had a lot of catching up to do. The mere fact that he hadn't seen Alicia yet made him ache worse than the broken bones did.

"And that's why you're not the doctor." Mrs. Tully was glad he still had that strange sense of humor... once he started healing he was going to need it.

Micah growled softly when the needle sank into his arm and had to look away. He hated taking orders from anyone and what he needed to be doing was tracking down his sister. Everyone filed out of the room when she pulled the empty syringe from his arm.

Mrs. Tully watched them go then turned back to Micah who was already asleep. His family was happy he was home, but the truth was... she worried for the cougar. His injuries were so severe she was surprised he was still alive.

Both of his kneecaps had been shattered by bullets, his ribs broken by being struck continuously over a period of time. It also looked like his back had been flayed by a whip of some kind. He was dehydrated, malnourished, and he had an infection spreading through his bloodstream. She would have given him penicillin had he been human, but sadly... human antibiotics did not have any effect on the paranormal.

Even though were-animals healed very quickly... it didn't mean they couldn't be permanently injured... or mortally wounded. She would consider him lucky if he survived the infection.

She glanced out of the corner of her eye at Michael, who hadn't left and was sitting very still in his chair. Mrs. Tully decided to leave him alone. She thought a lot of Michael and if he wanted to stay then she would not make him leave. He was another that often came to her but it was mostly to bring her the wounded, never for injury of his own.

With a sigh, Mrs. Tully packed away her equipment and stood up. With a slight nod in Michael's direction, she quietly left the room.

Michael knew it was time to leave... he'd only been waiting for his anger to fade. Alicia was a handful, but Damon should have never brought her into the middle of a gun fight like that. He could still see the possessive look on Damon's face when he'd wrapped his arms around her and wondered if history was setting itself up to be repeated.

His gaze returned to what was left of Micah and the image of Alicia crying as she held her brother's hand came back to haunt him. Another image flashed through his mind... the image of Dean grabbing his hand and laying it on Kane to keep him from dying. Between him and Dean... Kane's injury had healed right in front of them.

Michael had never thought about it, but he'd seen Syn do things like that in the past. There was one time in particular that stood out in Michael's mind... so long ago that he had all but forgotten it.

It was during one of their many traveling excursions and they'd come across an injured child. He smiled softly in remembrance of Damon and Kane's reactions to the little girl. One of her legs had been broken and she had several bruises that were in various stages of healing.

The child had insisted she'd only fallen but the guys knew there was nothing in the clearing that could have caused those injuries. When Damon knelt down in front of the little girl and started to compel her to tell them the truth, Syn had pushed him away saying, "You don't do that to an innocent child."

They'd offered to help her get back to her house but instantly smelt the fear that rose within the child. But, it wasn't fear of them, it was fear of going home that made the little girl's heart pound. Though the child hadn't said anything, Michael had known that her parents had been the ones responsible for all of her injuries... not just the broken leg.

Syn had said nothing to the child about it and dried her tears. Instead, he asked about her siblings and she replied that she had none. She started talking about her grandmother who lived in the mountains and her eyes shone with a grandchild's love.

While she spoke, Syn had placed his hand directly over the girl's hurt leg. When she finished her story, not only was her leg healed but all of her bruises had also vanished. That was when Syn had really shocked Michael. While Kane picked the girl up in his arms and started playing with her, Syn stepped closer to him and Damon.

Looking at Damon he said, "You are never to tamper with a child's mind... except for this time. She does not need to remember the beatings, but she does remember their deaths." His eyes had grown so cold as he added, "It was by fire." With that, Syn had turned and walked down the path that obviously led to the girl's home.

Kane made no secret that he wanted to keep the girl and raise her... he'd always had a soft spot for children. They all had soft spots but Kane's was really bad. He'd buy a whole toy store for them if the whim struck him... and it had... a few times. However, Syn had insisted on doing the right thing and taken the child to her beloved grandmother.

When the sun rose the next morning, word had quickly spread around the village of a home burning to the ground. The remains of a man and woman had been found but their child, a small girl, was missing.

The four men had quickly left the village on horseback, heading into what was now known as the Swiss Alps. After delivering the girl to her extended family, Syn had given the grandmother a letter and a sack of gold coins as he exchanged a few words with her. The older woman smiled and hugged Syn tightly before taking her granddaughter up in her arms.

Though Syn never said anything, they knew that he was the one responsible for the deaths of the girl's parents. To this day it made Michael shiver when he thought too long about it. Syn's moral code refused to let any child suffer such misery and, if he could do anything about it... he would. Syn didn't give a damn who the parent was or what they represented. He believed abusive parents deserved nothing less than what they would eventually do to their children.

When Michael had asked about Syn's healing ability on the child, Syn had given him a patient smile.

"The power resides within your immortal soul. Compared to immortality... you are still a child, so most of your power is dormant. As time passes, that power will grow. As to what power you have... only your soul can choose. If healing is the power your soul calls upon, then all you have to do is want it bad enough."

Looking back toward the injured cougar, he understood. Seeing Alicia cry like that was more than enough motivation to make him want it bad enough. Michael slowly stood up and approached Micah. As he moved closer, he could smell the hint of infection that was starting to take hold of the cougar's body. If anything happened to the cougar, he knew Alicia would cry and he didn't want Alicia to cry.

Michael laid his hand on Micah's chest and recalled the sensations he'd felt when he and Dean had touched Kane. Concentrating on his need to see Alicia smile, he felt that need flow through him into the one he knew could make her happy. Micah started to glow softly and Michael waited to see if he would be able to see Micah's soul like he had Kane's. After a moment, he realized that had been Dean's power... not his.

Had anyone been in the room with him, they would have seen the differences taking place. Michael's eyes had started to glow a deep amethyst and his own soul slowly became visible, superimposed within his physical form.

Michael could feel a part of himself deep inside the cougar's body... flowing through his blood. He breathed a sigh of relief when the smell of infection slowly faded from the room. He couldn't see under all of the bandages to be sure, but he watched as the bruises and cuts on Micah's face healed over then completely vanished.

Pulling his hand away, Michael took an unsteady step back. Lifting a hand to his eyes to ease the dizziness, he was surprised to feel tears on his eyelashes and cheek. He paused for a moment remembering that he'd also been crying when Dean had grabbed his hand and put it over Kane's dying body.

Is that what Syn meant by wanting it bad enough? Did his heart and mind need to be exactly in the same place in order for it to happen?

Michael looked down at his hands and sighed. How he wished Syn was here to answer his new questions. Syn was awake now, but as long as he could remember, Syn never stayed in one place... always just passing through. He'd asked Syn once what he was searching for, but Syn had only smiled with that distant look in his eyes and answered, "Some secrets are meant to be kept."

Perhaps he would find out soon enough... for now he would go home and rest. Healing the cougar had been taxing on him and he needed to rest and regain his strength. Looking back at Micah, Michael decided he had one more thing to do to cover his tracks and reunite the siblings.

Placing a hand on Micah's cheek, he whispered his name, compelling the cougar to wake up enough to listen to his words. When Micah's eyelashes fluttered, Michael told him the information that would keep Alicia's whereabouts secret until he could come for her.

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Trevor stopped the car in front of Moon Dance before slamming it into park. Seeing Envy injured had taken ten years off his life... or at least that's the way it felt. Her being shot like that only confirmed the fact that he'd done the right thing by keeping her from knowing the truth about the paranormal world and his involvement with it for so long. By keeping his secrets, he'd kept her out of the danger zone.

"Home sweet home," he grumbled without looking at them. Getting out from behind the wheel, Trevor walked around the car to open the door for Envy but Devon beat him to it.

Devon gave Trevor the evil eye as the other man followed them inside but didn't say anything. Devon hated the fact that he owed Trevor for saving Envy... but hated it more that it was Trevor he owed the favor to.

"You don't need to come in with us," Envy offered, trying to diffuse the tense air around the two men. She even gave Trevor a small smile and a nod to let him know she wasn't just being mean, but really appreciated his help.

Trevor's eyes softened when he locked gazes with Envy. "I'd feel better if I knew you were being taken care of."

Envy inwardly cringed... totally wrong thing to say.

"Are you saying that I can't take care of Envy?" Devon stopped and demanded as they reached the stairs that led up to the living quarters.

"Not in so many words," Trevor said as he followed Envy up the stairs.

Devon's eyes widened and he raced up behind Trevor and pushed him harshly against the wall. "Then explain it to me Care Bear."

Trevor shrugged against the wall, "Sure thing Thunder Cat... you suck!"

"Go to hell!" Devon growled loudly.

"I feel a flashback from Saturday morning cartoons coming on," Envy muttered and rubbed her forehead. "How about you two stop spraying testosterone all over the place and play nice for a change? I've got a major headache, my arm hurts like hell, and the last thing I need is for you two to start fighting over who the better man is." She looked at Trevor, "Either shut up or go home, right now I don't care which."

Devon smirked until Envy turned her glare on him. "And you... I have the right to deny you kitty cat. Keep it up and you'll be reduced to yowling from the alley fence."

Tabatha had been waiting to hear something for a while when she heard Devon tell Trevor to go to hell. She opened the door just in time to see Envy tell both of them off and couldn't help but giggle. At least she wasn't alone anymore.

"Are the boys misbehaving again?" Tabatha asked.

"You have no idea," Envy grumbled as she walked into Warren's office with the now-silent Trevor and Devon behind her.

Envy slipped the jacket off of her shoulders and Tabatha's eyes widened at the blood-soaked bandage around Envy's arm. She started to have a flashback of her and Envy being held hostage by Raven and his gang of bloodsuckers, but forcibly pushed the vision back into her mental lock box.

"Will one of you guys get the first aid kit?" Tabatha asked while looking Envy over to make sure her shoulder was the only injury.

"I'll get it," Devon answered and walked into Warren's connecting bathroom.

“What happened?” Tabatha demanded when she unwrapped the bandage and saw where a bullet had grazed her friend’s arm.

“Got shot at, growled at, nearly clawed, and barely outran an explosion,” Envy said with a grin but the grin disappeared when she noticed the look on her friend’s face. “I’m okay, I promise,” she quickly added.

Ignoring Envy, Tabatha glared up at Devon when he came back into the room. “Where the hell were you when Envy got shot?” She couldn’t help it. “This is my best friend and you’re supposed to be taking care of her!”

Trevor laughed inwardly, glad someone besides him was finally giving Devon a much-needed ass chewing.

“Fighting for our lives,” Devon said in his defense. “I couldn’t get to her but Winnie the Pooh over here got her out.”

“That was after Hello Kitty let her get separated from him,” Trevor finished trying not to crack a grin at the thought of Devon still thinking he was a werebear... if Devon only knew the truth about what he really was. The urge to grin went away when his gaze returned to Envy. If Devon knew the truth, then Envy would know and he was tired of getting caught in his lies by her.

Tabatha and Envy gave each other a resigned look and Envy mouthed the word ‘help’ knowing Tabby would understand.

“Hey Trevor, can you give me a ride home?” Tabatha asked trying get Trevor out of the room before Devon bit his head off... or Envy truly went off on the two of them.

Trevor sighed and shoved his hands in his pockets. “Sure, let me go down and get the car started.”

Once Trevor had sullenly left, Envy gave Tabby a look of relief. “Thank you!”

Tabatha smirked, “Don’t thank me because now you both owe me one.”

“I’ll give you everything I own!” Devon exclaimed with a grin.

“Does that include Envy?” Tabatha asked, her eyes twinkling.

“Not a chance,” Devon answered giving her a wink.

Tabatha made a disappointed face, “Well, that just takes the fun out of all of it.”

Envy giggled as Tabatha pranced out of the room, mock-slamming the door on her way.

## Chapter 2

“Put me down you bloodsucking lunatic!” Alicia yelled while clawing at Damon’s back from where he’d thrown her over his shoulder. The moment she’d realized they weren’t headed toward Night Light she had wanted him to stop... obviously wanting and getting were two different things. “I want to go see Micah!”

“Michael told me to bring you back here and this is where you will stay,” Damon ordered as he calmly walked into Alicia’s room. He tossed her down onto the bed and winced when her nails left long welts on his back. Growling he added, “I don’t think your boyfriend will be overly disappointed if you’re a little late to his bed... side.”

Alicia huffed and tried to scoot off the bed but Damon was immediately leaning over her with a palm firmly planted on each side of her shoulders.

Damon glared down at her, trying one more time to put her under his compulsion spell, “Damn it, I said stay!”

“I’m not a dog, I’m a cat you...” Alicia’s mind went blank for a second as she stared up at him, watching the way his hair dangled down around that perfect face. She felt something in the pit of her stomach awaken with longing. Lowering her gaze to his lips, she used the only thing she could think of to get her mind off kissing him... aggression.

“You’re not the boss of me!” Alicia hit him in the chest but regretted it when Damon squeezed his eyes shut in pain and leaned down closer to her.

“Did no one ever spank you growing up?” Damon growled breaking out in a sweat. He rolled away from her to lie on his back beside her.

“You wish.” Alicia frowned wondering how in the world he had just carried her across town like a Neanderthal and now looked like he was going to pass out because she’d hit him for it. “Are you all right?” she asked suspiciously, not wanting to feel guilt for her retaliation.

Damon opened his eyes only to come face to face with a stupid teddy bear. His amethyst eyes narrowed reading the collar it was wearing... ‘Micah’... figures.

“I’m just dandy... and you?” he answered as he pushed himself into a sitting position wondering why he bothered getting involved with humans... especially females. They were nothing but trouble. Standing up, he started for the door hoping he didn’t do something lame like pass out. “If you try to leave this house before Michael gets back, I’m going to feed that teddy bear to you.”

Alicia glared at the door until he was gone then cocked her eyebrow at her innocent teddy bear, “Well I know what I did... but what did you do to piss him off?”

She rolled her eyes and reached over to turn on the lamp. Damon had been in such a hurry to throw her on the bed they hadn’t even turned on the light. She was about to grab teddy but froze when something on the bed caught her attention. Right there where Damon had been laying was a fresh red stain. She brought her hand close and was about to touch it when she withdrew.

Getting up off the bed, Alicia stepped out on the balcony and slipped over to the other set of glass doors that led into Damon’s bedroom. What she saw made her heart spill out on the floor.

Damon slammed the bedroom door and ripped off his black shirt, flinging it across the room. Several bullets that had been lying loose inside the shirt hit the floor and walls as he did so. His body had been consistently pushing them out of his flesh in an effort to heal. He took a deep breath and looked down at the bloody holes in painful distaste. It was the bullets that were still being pushed that were causing the wounds not to close.

Seeing a bullet sticking halfway out of his chest, he pulled it out the rest of the way. He gripped the bed post so tight with his other hand that the wood began to splinter and crack. If not for the werewolf blood he’d drunk earlier, he would be on his knees screaming bloody murder right now. Come to think of it, he probably wouldn’t have made it out of that mansion.

The blood of a paranormal being held more of a power boost than human blood, but it was obvious if he wanted to heal faster, then he was going to have to find more blood. No one had ever accused him of being patient.

With a grunt, Damon dropped the bullet he’d just pulled out onto the floor and went to the closet to get another shirt. All he found in there were some pullover sweaters... he pulled the black one from the hanger and put it on before heading toward the balcony doors.

Alicia had cupped her hand over her mouth to avoid crying out when she saw the amount of damage done to Damon’s chest. Some of the bullet holes were still bleeding and some of them were actually pushing the bullets out of his skin. No wonder he’d cringed when she’d hit him. She felt a flash of pain clinch at her chest. How could she be so cruel?

She started to open the door but paused when Damon turned around and grabbed a sweater from the closet and jerked it on. She really wanted to cry when she saw his bloody back, which was in worse shape than his chest. How many times had she hit him on the back before they’d made it to her room? Alicia felt her knees weaken at the thought.

When he started walking toward the balcony doors, she quickly moved to the side and spun around, leaning back against the brick wall between the two glass doors. Laying her hand on her own uninjured chest, she held her breath and hoped that he didn’t come outside and catch her spying on him.

Her panic quickly gave way to hurt... then anger and confusion. Damon had lied to her back at the mansion... all that blood had been his. Why would he do that? Why would he shield her and then not tell her that he was hurt? He could have gotten himself killed... and for what? To save her?

Alicia's eyes widened when the balcony doors suddenly flew open and Damon leaped up on the thick ledge of the terrace facing the street below. He balanced on the solid railing but, before he could push off, he felt her presence behind him. He could feel all those emotions in her aura and sighed... he was tired and hurt and didn't feel like fighting with her anymore tonight.

"Michael erased their memory of you being there tonight. If you go running back to Micah before they call you... you'll undo everything he's done to help you. If you won't stay here for me... then at least do it for Michael." With that said, Damon flipped off the balcony and down to the grass below.

Alicia gasped and ran to the stone railing, looking down as he tumbled blindly. Her eyes widened and she gripped the stone when she realized that Damon's blind tumbling wasn't as blind as she thought. His arms shot out and it looked like he was pulling at the shadows around him, wrapping them close... then vanishing before he hit the ground.

Alicia searched the darkness for him, ready to follow the moment she saw him, but there was nothing... not even the sound of footsteps. She felt sorry for him and the pain he'd put himself through for her tonight.

She wrapped her arms around herself suddenly feeling more alone than she'd been ready for and wishing desperately he hadn't left. She needed to say she was sorry... she wanted to say thank you and she really wanted to hit him again for not letting her know he'd been wounded. Where was he going? What did vampires do when they were hurt?

He wanted her to stay and do what Michael had asked. With a sigh, she decided to obey for once... but she wasn't doing it for Michael.

Turning away from the balcony ledge, Alicia went back into her room and sat down on the bed. She stared at the phone for a few moments wondering what she should do if it rang. Should she even answer it? What if it wasn't Michael? What if it was someone like Warren or Quinn calling for Michael and she answered the phone?

Damon was right... she owed them both enough to at least wait until morning before she made any decisions or did something she wasn't supposed to. She remembered the edge in Michael's voice when he'd told Damon to take her home. No one had wanted her there tonight except maybe Damon... one more thing she could thank Damon for.

Wanting time to pass quicker, she got up and changed into a thin nightshirt. Pulling back the covers on the bed, she laid down and tried to go to sleep. It soon became too hot even though she'd left the balcony doors open to let in the cool breeze. For almost an hour, she tossed and turned and finally lifted a hand to wipe away the perspiration on her forehead.

Her skin felt hotter than it should have been so she threw the blankets off in an effort to cool herself down. Getting frustrated, she balled the covers up until they were like a long body pillow then rolled on her side, hugging it and throwing one leg over it. She started rocking against the blanket, liking the feel of it between her thighs and hugged it even tighter.

Alicia's eyes snapped open when she suddenly recognized the symptoms of what she was going through. She'd read about it and seen one of her friends at school go through it.

"No..." she whispered feeling fear slice through her at the mere thought. "Please don't let me be going into heat."

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Damon raced through the shadows across the city, heading toward the darkest slums in the search for something or someone that needed killing. He tried to block Alicia from his mind but it seemed every minute he spent close to her, the deeper she crawled under his skin. The strangest part was... he liked her there.

He'd built his life around not caring about anything... or anyone. He'd also prided himself for making it a rule to take what he wanted. He wanted her and she needed to stop tempting the devil.

When he'd fallen from the balcony, he'd prayed she was smart enough not to follow him. Luckily, the girl knew a little about self-preservation.

He finally reached his goal: a rundown area of Los Angeles. Damon kept to the dark edge of the sidewalk, smirking when the police cars drove by and everyone would vanish. As soon as the cops were out of sight, the scum of the earth would come back out of hiding and it was back to business as usual.

Damon sneered at two scantily-clad women and kept walking when they tried to entice him with their bodies. Perhaps a few weeks ago he might have vaguely considered it, but now... he wanted nothing to do with the opposite sex. The thought of drinking from either of them left him feeling slightly sick.

Rounding a corner, Damon noticed two thugs up ahead and that they both looked his way as he approached. Now this was more what he was in the mood for.

"How's it going," one of them asked in a deep voice. He had his hands deep in his coat pockets expecting a sale of drugs. When he caught a glimpse of the man's wild eyes, he decided to drop it figuring this guy had already gotten his drugs elsewhere.

Damon didn't answer and kept walking. He knew what was coming and was looking forward to it. These two guys were probably kings on this street with their bulging muscles and dark flat eyes. He could smell the old blood on their clothing and see the scarred knuckles bullies always carried. Yep, they were probably legends within their own minds.

"Hey," the second one yelled, "my friend asked you a question."

"And my silence should have warned him I wasn't in the mood." Damon warned then turned his head to look at them. He gave an evil smirk, his fangs gleaming in the dim glow of the street lamp when they saw the red irises of his eyes. "However, a dinner date with both of you sounds good."

Damon moved fast, grabbing the first one and draining him dry in less than a minute. He broke out in a sweat from the pain when more bullets started pushing out faster and landed on the ground with audible metallic clinks. Tilting his head back, he laughed breathlessly before dropping the dead man at his feet.

The echo of the second man running away drew his attention and Damon ran after him, once more pulling the shadows close to disguise his pursuit. Pain and adrenalin held its own high.

He caught up with the oversized punk and stalked him for a few moments, enjoying the smell of fear. When the man started to slow down, Damon merely chuckled in the darkness making the human start running faster again. Yes, this is what he needed... to rid the world of a couple low-life human scum while taking the blood he needed to heal.

Quickly growing bored with the chase, Damon closed in on the man and jerked him into an alley. The human's struggles were valiant to say the least, but when matched against Damon's superior strength... the outcome was inevitable.

Finally, the man's struggles ceased and Damon dropped him to the dirty concrete. During the struggle, small packets of white powder had fallen from the man's pockets along with a good-sized wad of money and a hand gun. Damon knelt down next to the corpse and, using a corner of its shirt, wiped his face clean of any evidence before taking up the money and tucking it into his back pocket then walking away.

Reaching the mouth of the alley, Damon shoved his hands in his pockets and started walking down the sidewalk like he didn't have a care in the world. Now that his need to kill and feed had been partially satisfied, he could pick his next victim with a choosier taste.

Misery watched the entire exchange between the vampire and the two humans he'd chosen as his victims. She wanted to approach him but was too weak to do so. Instead, she satisfied herself by feeding off the fear the two humans exhibited as the vampire bled them dry. Their death thralls had been delicious.

Her encounter with Kane earlier that evening had forced her to use up all the power she'd had stored away since escaping the cave. When she'd combined her power with Kane's blood, it had used up almost everything she had. Creating cracks in the dimensional walls of this world was a tedious process and would take a lot more power than she had at the moment. She could feel the evil heartbeat of this area and knew she'd awakened some of the weaker demons that slept here.

She would need to be stronger to thin the walls enough for the demons on the other side to sense it and take advantage. If the demons were powerful enough... they could finish the rip from the other side and join her in this world.

While her demonstration hadn't been enough to do what she wanted, the evil in this city was breeding and it wouldn't take long for her to build her power up to the necessary level. Once that level was reached... she would try to breach the walls of this dimension again. This vampire's aura wasn't as tasty as Kane's but the similarity and potential of the blood ritual was definitely there.

This vampire... though he did show a sadistic side that appealed to Misery... his power was completely different from Kane's. She already knew how to tap into Kane's real power but the more she stared into this one's soul, the more she saw the dangerous truth. The power this one possessed could only be released while protecting something he loved. It was a worthless power since the creature suppressed such emotion.

After studying the vampire for a few more moments, Misery decided it was best if this one remained loveless because if he ever tapped into such emotion... his power would be limitless.

Damon could smell soulless vampires flitting all around him and down the darker alleyways. He thought briefly about ridding the city of a few of them but decided he'd already done his good deed for the day. If they wanted to feed off the low-lives in this area, then who was he to stop them? It wasn't like he hadn't just done the same thing. As he continued to walk, more bullets fell out of his shirt and hit the ground, tinkling on the sidewalk like forgotten memories.

The small hairs on the back of Damon's neck stood up and he stopped walking, turning his head from one side to the other... he was being watched. Finally jerking his head back, his eyes narrowed when he saw a shapeless silhouette lurking on the roof of the building beside him.

Stepping back into the shadows, Damon wrapped the darkness around him hating how this city had no privacy with all the fucking paranormal breeds running around. Before coming here, he'd never been around shifters or the fallen. In his country, shifters had been purged back in the dark ages and been smart enough not to return. He'd never realized just how territorial he was while in a land he'd kept clean.

He'd never been one for traveling around the world like Kane and Michael... not when he'd been having so much fun where he was. But that wasn't a shifter on the roof... it was a fallen, and it wasn't either of the men he'd seen at the church. This must have been the one that got away.

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Zachary breathed a sigh of relief when the last of the news reporters finally got bored and left his quote-unquote crime scene. He turned his attention back to the soot-covered firemen and winced apathetically. Poor guys, they hadn't stood a chance in getting that fire under control, although they seemed thankful it had not spread beyond the boundaries of Anthony Valachi's land. Zachary smiled when he saw what he'd been waiting on.

He'd made the fire so hot that he knew it wouldn't be long before it ran out of stuff to burn. He'd done it for two reasons. One was to give pity to the humans who were sacrificing their lives on a daily basis playing with fire, and the other was to destroy any evidence the humans didn't need to see... including bodies to autopsy or bones to study.

"Looks like its dying down," Chad said as he approached Zachary. "I'm surprised Trevor isn't here."

"Oh he was," Zachary smirked. "Last time I saw him, he was dragging your sister out of here so I could blow the place up."

“What!” Chad yelled then stepped closer so no one could hear him. “I’ve been here for a fucking hour and you’re just now getting around to telling me that my sister was almost killed tonight?”

“The bullet only grazed her,” Zachary just loved hazing the new guy. He felt a little guilty when all the color drained from Chad’s face. “Relax, she’s fine.”

“You’re an asshole,” Chad informed him without remorse.

“I’ve been called worse,” Zachary shrugged. “But for now, you can call me boss. I fast tracked your paperwork so it’s already a done deal. You no longer work for the police department. They work for you and you work for the CIA as far as they are concerned. And this falls under the CIA’s jurisdiction since it was a mob hit.”

“So what am I supposed to do now?” Chad asked feeling a little lost and secretly wondering how he could beat up a jaguar for putting his sister in danger yet again.

“Enjoy the promotion because I’m leaving you to handle this for the night.” Zachary patted him on the shoulder before opening the car door and sliding inside. He counted to three before Chad rapped on his window. Rolling it down, he arched an eyebrow.

“What do I tell them?” Chad asked.

“That’s the brilliance of it all. You’re not at liberty to give out any information at this time.” Zachary laughed and rolled the window back up then laughed again when Chad kicked his tire as he pulled past him.

His humor faded once he was alone with his own thoughts. He knew most of the wolf pack was harmless and had only been under the influence of their alpha’s orders, but the rest of them would want revenge for the death of Anthony Valachi. Some would be pointing at Micah’s rescuers, but some would point the finger at Steven and the cheating fiancé. Either way, that would put Night Light on what’s left of the city’s mob hit list.

Pulling out his cell phone, Zachary put a call in to the member of PIT he had deep undercover within the most dangerous part of the wolf pack. If what he thought was brewing then it might be wise to go ahead and send a couple death threats to Night Light just to keep the cougars on high alert, or better yet... get them to shut the club down for a while.

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Angelica gazed out the window at the city below thinking about the nightmare that had awoken her. Seeing all the lights and life within the city even in the middle of the night gave her comfort and it was hard to look away.

She’d never had a nightmare before... she’d never had a single dream and that was what disturbed her the most. She rubbed her fingers across the mark on her palm blaming it for the nightmare. She’d been so lost in morbid thoughts that when the door behind her slammed, she almost jumped out of her skin.

Zachary had opened the door quietly just in case Angelica was still asleep. When he saw her standing there in a daze, he couldn’t resist the temptation and slammed the door. Her reaction was even better then he’d hoped.

“Had I been a demon, you’d been bitten,” he smirked then lowered his gaze to the dagger clenched in her fist so tight that her knuckles were white. “Maybe not,” he corrected with a frown. “What’s rattled your cage?”

“Nightmares,” Angelica said truthfully as she relaxed her grip. No use lying about it... not to him anyway. She inhaled deeply trying to release the tension in her shoulders then wrinkled her nose, “you smell like burnt toast.”

“Wanna scrub my back?” Zachary wiggled his eyebrows as he headed toward the bathroom.

Angelica spared one more glance out the window before moving away from it. Hearing the shower turn on, she sat down on the loveseat and grabbed her notebook from beside the laptop and started to draw the man she’d seen in the cave. Since he was the one that had marked her, then the

nightmare had to be his doing. She started with his eyes and softened the strokes of the pencil as the face came to life on paper.

Zachary came out of the steaming bathroom still towel drying his hair. Walking up behind Angelica, he looked down at the portrait of the man he'd seen her in the cave with. He watched the delicate way she arranged the man's long dark hair... as if the wind was still blowing around it. For a demon, he sure was a hansom devil in her eyes.

"You smell better," Angelica commented as she looked up at him. Tapping the drawing, she asked, "Can we get in touch with Dean so I can show him this picture?"

"I caught a glimpse of him tonight at the alpha werewolf's mansion. But he seems to come and go so quickly around here that it would be easier to just show it to Kane." Zachary suggested as he vaulted over the back of the love seat and sat down beside her taking the picture in his hand and studying it. "Kane said Misery is female."

"That's what I was afraid of," Angelica sighed. "If that's not the same demon that they released from the cave... then I'm afraid Misery isn't the only demon in the city."

"What makes you say that?" Zachary asked.

Instead of answering him, Angelica did the one thing she had thought she'd never do. Turning sideways on the cushion, she reached for Zachary and leaned toward him. When Zachary instantly tried to kiss her, she tilted her head so he wound up kissing her forehead instead. Then she let the dream play through her memories.

Zachary flinched as the scenery changed and he was surrounded by her nightmare. When the flickering images finally faded and Angelica slowly leaned away from him, Zachary opened his eyes and whispered, "Wow... that was a wiggly-boo dream."

Angelica nodded, "Yeah, especially for someone who has never had a dream, not even once in their entire life."

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Kriss had searched the places he thought a frightened fallen that had been imprisoned for longer than he cared to think about would hide. It wasn't really the fallen he was searching for... it was Dean. After exhausting himself with all the churches and small areas of the city that evil avoided, it dawned on him that he might be searching the wrong type of places. It wasn't as if he knew his prey intimately.

Going from one extreme to the other, Kriss started toward the heart of the city. Within hours, he was rewarded when he caught a flash of the creature running across the roof tops and leaping from one building to the next.

Following at a distance, Kriss took in the light coloring of the fallen along with the snow white wings that were now hidden from human sight but not his. He tilted his head to the side when the fallen chanced a look over his shoulder as if sensing he was being followed.

When the fallen turned his attention back to the streets below, Kriss had a feeling he wasn't the only one on the hunt tonight.

"Just who are you looking for?" Kriss whispered under his breath stalking him for several more blocks. Following him around a corner, Kriss skidded to a stop when the other man was suddenly standing on the ledge of the building... facing him. It was the aggressive stance and fierce look in his silver eyes that gave Kriss pause.

For a moment, neither of them moved. Kriss used the time to focus his powers and peer into the other man's soul. As the image of his soul sharpened, Kriss was expecting to see the glittering silver shimmer of a full blood, but to his surprise this fallen's soul was tainted. His eyes widened realizing this man was a hybrid.

So, that's what he'd sensed when the creature had exploded from the church. Kriss tried to determine if this hybrid was as bad as the full blown demon it had been imprisoned with. He felt a shove as his vision was pushed back and Kriss blinked. The only other person he'd ever run across that could block him from seeing his soul was Dean.

Inhaling deeply then slowly releasing it, Kriss decided there was only one other way to find out. Just as he started forward, the fallen gave him a smile that was nowhere near friendly and took a step back, disappearing as he dropped off the edge of the roof and out of sight.

Knowing an invitation when he got one, Kriss growled and with a running leap, he did a swan dive off the edge of the building in pursuit. Before he made it to the concrete four stories below, something slammed into his side and he felt arms tighten around him.

“No,” Dean hissed as he tackled Kriss in midair.

“I thought you wanted to find and catch him,” Kriss yelled suddenly angry. He’d been looking for Dean for days now and it pissed him off that Dean had obviously been close enough to know that he was there but wouldn’t come out of hiding.

“He’s not a rabbit,” Dean snapped as they switched direction and ascended back to the roof of the building. “Besides, I’ve been watching him for a while and would you like to know what he’s been doing?”

“What?” Kriss frowned.

Dean immediately stepped away to put distance between them. “He’s stalking Misery, the demon that trapped him in the cave.”

At that moment, the thin clouds above them parted allowing the moonlight to beam down on them and create the shadows on the roof that gave away their true identity. Dean had to look away from Kriss’s perfection... he always had to look away.

“Well, maybe he’ll let us help him get a little payback,” Kriss suggested. “It’s been a while, but together we could probably put her down.”

“I doubt it,” Dean gazed in the direction the fallen had gone. “Every time I get close to him, I can feel his anger and fear.”

Kriss stared off in the same direction knowing the truth. “Maybe he has a good reason to fear us.” He started to mention the fact that it was a hybrid... not a true blood fallen, but Dean cut him off.

“Doesn’t matter because he doesn’t trust us,” Dean stepped back to the edge of the building and looked out over the city.

He knew Kriss thought he had it all figured out. So this fallen wasn’t a full blood... he was close enough and that counted. Dean had seen into his soul several times in the last couple days and the evil that labeled most hybrids as demons was missing. In Dean’s eye, that made him one of them. On second thought... maybe it was time to let Kriss in on that little fact.

“He’s more true-blood than hybrid you know. His soul is different from ours, but evil does not live there... right now it’s full of fear, mistrust, and longing. I hope you haven’t changed so much that you can’t see the good within him.”

He knew Kriss had never maliciously hunted hybrids down and destroyed them without a very good reason. Kriss had been one of the last fallen to be sent here, long after the demon wars had ended... banished to this world just to get rid of some of the male population. Kriss didn’t know it, but Dean was so much older than that.

Dean had been one of the leaders of the rebellion that ended the demon war... even sending some of the pure bloods into the underworld for their senseless massacre of hybrids that were not demonic. Some things were a sin... no matter how you looked at it.

Kriss had a flashback of wanting to kill Kane only to find a tattered but strangely pure soul staring back at him. He’d never encountered such an oddity. If Kane had been human or demon with that much damage done to his soul... he would have been pure evil. He should have been pure evil. It made him wonder if Dean was right... that maybe he’d lost his ability to play judge and jury.

Living among the humans for so long had taught him that even the best intentions always had a shady side of gray. He’d decided a long time ago that death was only for the truest form of evil and to let the rest work itself out.

“How long do you intend to stalk him?” Kriss asked curiously.

“Until he sees that I’m not a threat,” Dean answered cryptically.

Kriss tilted his head and looked at Dean, noticing several bullet holes in his clothing. “What in the hell have you been doing? You smell like smoke and those aren’t moth holes in your clothes.”

“Let me ask you something,” Dean didn’t look at Kriss, “Are you really here for me? Or do you just need a distraction because you’re avoiding your feelings for Tabatha?”

Kriss reached out, snagging Dean’s arm and spinning him around so that they were facing each other. “Why is it always a fight with you?” he demanded.

Dean jerked his arm out of Kriss’s grip, “Maybe it’s because I can see into your soul where you are blind.”

Kriss looked away and when he glanced back Dean was gone.

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Kane quietly opened Tabatha’s bedroom window and ducked inside. He’d been watching her through the windows but feeling her unrest hadn’t set well with him and the fact that he couldn’t read her thoughts was driving him crazy. All he could hear were almost silent whispers coming from her mind.

He glanced up at the ceiling wondering whose bright idea it was to make her the only one he couldn’t eavesdrop on when she was the only one he really wanted to hear. Kane kept the darkness pulled around him as he leaned against the frame of the open bedroom door and watched her move from the sofa to the entertainment center.

Tabatha turned the radio down. She’d thought the background noise would help to make the apartment not feel so empty but it was only annoying her. She missed her roommate.

Kriss had disappeared for weeks at a time in the past and she knew he could take care of himself, but it had never stopped her from worrying. That demon, her skin crawled at the memory, she’d been able to trap Dean even if it had only been for a couple hours. It was hard to wrap her mind around the fact that there were things out there that could hurt Kriss.

She again ran her fingers over her shoulder and down her chest where she’d been wounded, feeling nothing but soft unblemished skin. She thought she’d been so slick making Kane think she was under his thrall... the joke had been on her. Still, he’d told her not to remember seeing Misery... yet she did remember. Slowly raising the same fingers, she touched her lips wishing she could remember exactly what Kane had done to her.

Maybe she’d been under his thrall the whole time but for some reason only remembered part of it. He’d said that he’d been watching over her... following her. Tabatha felt the small hairs on the back of her neck stand on end and the room seemed to shrink.

Removing her fingers from her lips she whispered, “Kane, are you here?”

Kane gripped the door frame to keep from moving toward her but no power on earth could keep him from answering, “Yes.”

His voice was haunted, making Tabatha spin around searching for him. She was caught between disappointment and fear when she didn’t see him standing right behind her. “Am I so wicked that you have to hide from me?” her breathing was coming a little faster and she silently wondered if this was the equivalent of playing with fire.

Kane let the darkness disperse from around him and watched as her gaze landed on him. “Maybe I am the wicked one.”

Tabatha swallowed. He did look slightly wicked silhouetted in her bedroom doorway... she’d admit that. “Maybe you wouldn’t feel so wicked if you had knocked on the front door,” she offered, wondering just how long he’d been inside her apartment. Feeling a slight weakness in her knees, she turned and forced herself to calmly walk to the sofa and sit down.

“Would you have invited me in?” Kane asked curiously as he moved into the room. He noticed the way she turned around and pulled her feet up onto the sofa, tucking them close to her as she leaned back against the pillowed armrest.

"I'm not sure," Tabatha answered. "Is this the first time you've been here?"

"No," Kane didn't bother lying to her. Why lie when he could just make her forget he'd even been here?

"Then I am inviting you in. Have a seat," she pointed toward the other in of the sofa. If he was here to hurt her, then he'd already have done it... right? She watched the way he kept his movements slow as he did as she asked. It was a lie... she'd seen the speed at which he moved when he wanted to. He was being careful not to frighten her and that made her even more nervous.

Kane cocked an eyebrow, "Is this how you treat all of your stalkers?" he asked in all seriousness. "Invite them in for tea and crumpets?"

Tabatha shook her head, "I don't drink tea and I hate crumpets. A cup of coffee and a bagel will do just fine."

Kane smiled wanly at her. "How do you know I won't hurt you?"

"If you were going to hurt me, you would have by now," Tabatha answered, voicing the thought she'd had just moments before. On second thought she quickly added, "Despite the fact that I tend to get injured whenever you're in the same vicinity."

Kane inwardly winced at that and finally took the place she'd indicated at the other end of the sofa, turning to face her and leaning against the opposite armrest. He brought his right leg up, bending it at the knee and sat in a half Indian style with one arm folded over his stomach.

"So tell me love, why did you invite me in?" Kane asked.

"Why are you here?" Tabatha sidestepped the question.

Kane smirked, "You do know that it's bad manners to answer a question with a question."

Tabatha was momentarily taken aback by the way the smirk changed the contours of his face slightly, making him appear just as dangerous and seductive as she believed him to be.

"That may be true," Tabatha said thoughtfully. "But I'm the one you've been following and I want to know why."

Kane shrugged, "Because I want to."

Tabatha glared at him, "Because you want to?"

Kane tilted his head to the side. "Why does a vampire do anything?"

Tabatha opened her mouth, closed it, and then opened it again not able to articulate an answer.

"Because they want to," Kane answered for her.

Tabatha sighed, "Look, if you don't want to tell me the truth then I can't make you. But, if we're going to be friends, we need to exchange at least one truth about each other."

Kane's eyebrows rose and he actually smiled, "Ah, so we're going to play truth or dare now?"

Tabatha blushed remembering the few times she'd played the game while in high school... talk about embarrassing situations. "Without the dare and you will answer first," she whispered.

Kane nodded, "All right. Since I'm the stalker, we will play by your rules."

Tabatha felt a thrill run through her at his easy admittance that he was indeed stalking her. "Why does Kriss not like you? He won't give me a reason why."

"Because you don't belong to him," Kane answered a little too quickly.

"What kind of answer is that?" Tabatha demanded.

"Your turn," Kane pointed out.

Tabatha grumbled, "Fine," then she tensed not knowing what to expect.

"Do you like dogs?"

Tabatha blinked. That question was about the furthest thing from what she'd been expected. She relaxed then smiled fondly, "I love them. When I was little we had a little Yorkie puppy but he ran away. I never really got over it... I still miss him sometimes."

Kane returned her smile with a slow smile of his own as their eyes locked, "You must meet my Yorkie sometime then... his name is Scrappy."

Tabatha got cold chills through her body and literally jumped out of her seat when the phone rang. Getting up, she rushed to the phone to pick it up hoping it was Kriss calling in. Picking it up, she turned around to look at Kane but he was gone without a trace of him ever being there.

She did a quick search of her bedroom, only to find nothing. With a sigh, Tabatha pressed the phone against her ear, “hello?” she cringed when she heard Jason’s voice.

“What happened to you? You just disappear and don’t call me to let me know why?” Jason paced back and forth. “Damn it Tabby, You had me worried sick.”

Tabatha smiled into the receiver. Somehow being yelled at by Jason made her feel a little more normal. She quickly did the math in her head as she started explaining what happened without giving him a single detail about anything that had to do with the paranormal.

Kane moved the limbs of the bush over a fraction as he watched Tabatha relax for the first time since Trevor had dropped her off. His lips hinted at a smile as he listened to her tell the truth to whoever was on the phone and lie like crazy at the same time. His smile faded and his expression turned longing. What he would give to have her smile at him with such ease. Backing away from the window, he knew it was time to go... he could feel Kriss closing in on him.

“Hold on a minute Jason,” Tabatha frowned as she got the odd feeling of being watched. Turning her head toward the window, she froze seeing Kriss standing there watching her. “Jason, I’ll talk to you tomorrow, okay?” she turned and hung up the phone but when she looked back Kriss was gone.

### Chapter 3

Mrs. Tully shook her head as she came out of Micah’s room and closed the door behind her before turning toward the crowd gathered in the hall. “He’s fine... still sleeping, but he is fine.”

“Then he’ll make a full recovery?” Quinn asked skeptically.

Mrs. Tully positioned herself between them and the door. “I mean it looks like he may have already made a full recovery. He doesn’t seem to have a single scratch on him.” She backed up a step and threw her arms out like a barrier when several of them tried to dart around her to go look for themselves.

“No,” she said firmly. “For now, I don’t want him disturbed. He’s in a deep sleep and that may be part of what’s speeding the healing. If you wake him up before he wakes up on his own, you may disturb whatever magic is being used on him.”

“Magic?” Jewel asked in confusion. She was starting to understand where the term ‘you learn something new every day’ had come from.

“Magic or miracle... they’re both the same as far as I’m concerned,” Mrs. Tully smiled at the new edition to the cougar family.

“Already healed?” Steven said with disbelief then held the arm that was still in a sling up a couple inches and pointed at it, “This still hurts like hell and nowhere near healed yet.”

“This isn’t no time to be getting jealous over your brother’s good fortune,” Mrs. Tully pointed toward Steven’s room, “Maybe if you listened to your doctor and stayed in bed, it would heal faster.”

Steven turned and looked down at Jewel. “Bed sounds really good.”

Jewel’s eyes widened and she blushed ten shades of red making Steven smirk.

Mrs. Tully just shook her head at the honeymooners knowing love was one of the best miracle healers available. He’d be fine within a couple days... exhausted but fine.

“I’ll make sure he isn’t disturbed,” Quinn added as he gazed longingly toward his own bedroom where he’d left Kat sleeping.

“Off with you too,” Mrs. Tully shooed him away.

Hopefully it would be several hours before either of the brothers would come up for air again. She silently wondered who Micah’s guardian angel was and where she could get one. Once the hallway was empty, she glanced back at Micah’s door one more time before making her way out of the club.

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Alicia felt his hand on her shoulder caressing her bare skin and she rolled toward him seeing the heated look in Damon's amethyst eyes as he touched her. He was fully clothed ... wearing all black. His hair was mussed and had never looked so sexy. She reached up and ran her fingers through the dark locks. His lips followed the action, kissing the vulnerable area of her wrist then smiling devilishly, letting her catch a glimpse of his fangs.

She inhaled deeply and rolled away from him... only to be caught in Michael's embrace. As she parted her lips in dazed surprise, Michael descended for a demanding kiss, stealing what little breath she had left. His hands were locked with hers as he pressed them into the soft mattress and hovered over her, making love to her with the deep kiss.

She felt a hot hand on her thigh... slowly drifting upwards under the long t-shirt. She knew it wasn't Michael because his hands were on hers. When Michael released her from the kiss and whispered a path down to her neck, she turned her face to the side to find Damon still there... watching them with those unnerving eyes and touching her so intimately as if Michael didn't matter.

As Damon's fingers drew closer to her core, Michael's passion also increased, making Alicia whither under him at the same time she strained toward Damon... wanting him to reach his goal. Just as the tips of Damon's fingers swept their fleeting touch across her nether lips, Michael breathed his hot breath into her ear and Alicia felt the quick downward spiral of tingling spasms as she came hard.

Jerking up from the bed she blinked, at first seeing the silhouette of someone looking in her balcony doors. As her vision cleared, the image vanished. She sat there for a moment trying to catch her breath from the dream while staring out at the sun that was now pretty high in the sky.

Wrapping her arms around herself, Alicia noticed how hot her skin was and the way the cover felt against her as it flowed with her movements. It felt like a caress on her overly sensitive skin and she had a sudden flashback of the dream, making her quickly crawl out of the cover and stand beside the bed.

She looked down at the innocent blanket as if it had lost its mind then tried reasoning with herself.

Maybe she was wrong about going into heat and was just running a small fever from the injuries she'd suffered the other night behind Moon Dance and that had caused the erotic dream. She blew her bangs out of her eyes wishing it was easier to lie to herself. Either way, it didn't matter right now because she didn't have time to deal with it.

She glanced back out the glass door wondering how she could have slept this late when she hadn't even seen Micah yet. Grabbing some clothes out of her suitcase, she snuck out of her room praying she didn't run into anyone as she crossed the hall to the huge bathroom she'd found last night.

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Micah opened his eyes feeling like he'd been asleep for years. His first instinct was to not move knowing it would cause pain if he did but the memory of last night gave him a fight or flight reaction and before he could stop himself, he was sitting up. Looking around the room, his gaze stopped on his own image staring back at him in the mirror. The bandages were gone... so was the pain.

Sliding from the bed, Micah walked toward the mirror scrubbing at his eyes and wondering if he was hallucinating. As he lowered his hand to the dresser, it came down on a picture frame making it teeter and fall over. With quick reflexes, he caught it before it could hit the floor and brought it up to eye level.

He gazed at the girl staring back at him with bright blue eyes. She wasn't smiling but it didn't distract from her beauty. Her long blonde hair hung in abstract waves around her melancholy expression.

He could hear others in the rooms around him but he could only think of one person he wanted to see... Alicia. And she was at Michael's. He wasn't sure how he knew but he did. Michael was the reason no one remembered her being at the mansion last night.

Setting the picture back on the dresser, Micah silently got dressed then opened the window. Landing on the hard packed ground outside he felt his muscles take the impact with ease and paused, wondering how it was that he felt better now than he'd felt before he'd been thrown into Anthony's little torture chamber. Figuring he'd find out soon enough, he headed toward Michael's to make sure Alicia was okay.

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Michael opened his eyes seeing nothing but blue sky and blinked. He'd fallen asleep on the roof of the church again. Sitting up he gazed across the street just in time to see Micah approaching the front door. Michael froze. The cougar was walking with the stealthy grace most were-animals only wished they possessed. He closed his eyes and thanked whatever god was listening, then flinched when a voice came from directly behind him.

"The shows over there... why are we over here?" Kane said with a smirk.

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Damon shrugged on a black shirt not bothering to button it. Pushing his fingers through his hair, he opened his bedroom door and leaned against the frame to stare across the hall. He could hear every sound she was making from within the spraying water, but that didn't intrigue him half as much as the sounds she'd been making in her sleep a little while ago. He wondered if she had any idea their beds were only separated by a thin layer of sheet rock.

He growled at the interruption of his thoughts when he heard the knock down stairs. Pushing away from the doorway, he made up his mind to get rid of the unwanted guest as quick as possible. It wouldn't be the first time he'd scared someone into not sticking around.

Jerking the door open, Damon cocked an eyebrow at the stranger. "What?"

"You're not Michael," Micah frowned recognizing the man who had been with his sister last night. He thought Michael lived alone. Seeing the man standing there half-dressed and blocking the doorway made Micah want to make sure he hadn't just left the same bed his sister was in.

"Okay, neither are you." Damon said in a deadpan voice.

Micah felt the beast within him try to raise its head. "Where's Alicia?"

The way the man said Alicia's name made it dawn on Damon just who was darkening his doorstep. Last night the cougar's face had been swollen, bruised and bloody... nothing like the rival he was now going to slam the door on.

Damon looked Micah up and down with a critical gaze deciding he didn't need this kind of headache. "She's indisposed. Come back tomorrow." He tried to shut the door but the bigger man was quicker than he'd expected and was inside the room by the time the door closed.

"I can smell her." Micah growled becoming annoyed. "Alicia!" he called out not liking this man more and more by the minute. He knew the guy had been part of the rescue last night, but that wasn't going to get him very far if he didn't tell him where Alicia was.

Micah started up the stairs but suddenly, Damon was standing on one of the higher steps staring down at him. Their eyes locked and Micah felt a moment of unwelcome fear... that is until the towel-clad girl came running down the stairs toward him.

Alicia had heard Micah yell her name and being so excited, she didn't take time to dress but just grabbed the towel closest to her and took off toward his voice. As she rounded the corner, her eyes lit up when she saw him standing there looking like he always had... perfect.

"Micah," she whispered feeling like she was going to cry. At first her steps were slow, but the closer she got, the faster she ran until she fearlessly threw herself on him, almost causing both of them to topple backwards down the steps.

Damon turned the moment he'd seen Micah's eyes widen on something behind him. He'd been speechless seeing her standing there clutching the towel around her... her hair soaking wet with sparkles of water dripping to the hardwood floor. He crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the wall as his gaze followed her past him then toward the man she loved.

Damon lowered his head, letting his bangs fall down to shadow his eyes. His gaze turned into a glare when she wrapped her arms around Micah, giving a new meaning to jumping a guy's bones. The gods must have had mercy on him when she didn't wrap her legs around the man's waist... though the image of that towel riding up would have been priceless.

Micah wrapped his arms around Alicia and lifted her up against him for a bear hug. He closed his eyes and just held her for a moment. The first thing he noticed was that her skin was hotter than his. He pressed his face into the crook of her neck wondering why her temperature was so high.

This was just another thing to blame Quinn for. He'd only been gone two weeks and they had let her get sick. Micah frowned, not remembering Alicia ever getting sick.

"Are you running a fever?" he asked as he let her slide back to her feet. He smiled seeing she was still shorter than him, even though she was now standing on a higher step, but then his eyes were drawn to the still healing bite mark on her neck. He brushed her hair to the side to get a better look but before he could say anything about it, she cut him off.

"Are you crazy," Alicia wiped at the tears blurring her vision. "Last night I thought you were dying... and now?" she cupped his cheek with her hand wanting so much to kiss him. "How are you standing here bigger than life?"

The front door opened and Micah looked over his shoulder seeing Michael and a blond-haired man staring up at them.

Alicia wondered if the gods were making fun of her when she chose that moment to remember she was more naked than not. Shifters usually didn't worry about things like that as much as humans did, but she could still feel the lingering effect of the dream she'd had only a few minutes ago.

Locking eyes with Michael, she could see the instant heat in his gaze then held her breath as his eyes lowered to her breast.

Micah moved his sister more in line with his body so she was hidden from the men below. That's when he glanced up the stairs toward Damon. His view was now better than anyone else's. To his surprise, Damon wasn't staring at Alicia. Instead, his angry gaze was directed straight at Micah's hands where he was still holding her.

Feeling the silent threat, gold flared within Micah's pupils as they enlarged. He had a feeling he was looking at the owner of the bite mark Alicia was wearing.

Leave it to Kane to notice the fact that Michael was frozen to the spot and Damon was about to commit murder. Kane quickly thought of a way to break the ice. "Alicia honey... I think you forgot something important upstairs." He smirked.

"I'm not going anywhere," Micah said keeping his eyes on Damon, "Go get dressed while I talk to Michael."

Alicia quickly kissed him on the cheek then turned to run back up the stairs. She almost missed a step when she saw Damon only a couple feet from her. His shirt was open and his pants were zipped but not buttoned, causing them to ride dangerously low on his hips. She felt her cheeks flame even hotter as the dream came back like a dirty thought in a nice clean mind.

The look in his eyes as their gazes met was dark and dangerous... soaked in sexual tension. She hoped she was imagining it as she felt that gaze follow her past him and the rest of the way up the stairs.

Micah wasn't the only one who watched the exchange between Alicia and Damon. It took Kane elbowing him in the back before Michael finally turned his attention to the man coming down the stairs. Clapping hands with the cougar, he nodded toward the living room, "I'm sure you have questions."

"If he doesn't then I do," Kane announced wanting to make matters worse. He'd complained before about hearing other people's thoughts, but it was times like this that made it all worthwhile.

The funniest part was the fact that Damon had no clue Micah and Alicia were siblings... though he would give Damon credit for detecting the fact that she harbored a not-so-sisterly crush on her

clueless brother. But, if the dream she'd been having a little while ago was any indication... it wouldn't be hard for Michael or Damon to change her mind.

Michael blinked trying to get the image of Alicia in that towel out of his head so he could focus. He wanted to get the obvious out of the way first. "I didn't expect to see you out of bed this soon."

Kane heard Michael's heart rate speed up and wondered at it. Trying to listen in on his thoughts, he was disappointed to find complete silence. Nice, his little Michael was keeping secrets.

"I haven't a clue," Micah answered honestly then changed the subject, "I thought you lived alone."

Kane rolled his eyes when he heard Michael sigh in relief.

Upstairs, Alicia ran for the bathroom where she'd left her clothes. Frowning at what she'd unthinkingly picked out to wear, she decided it wasn't good enough. Micah had said he wasn't going anywhere and she trusted him, so she went back into her room to find something nicer. She wound up blow drying her hair and even adding a touch of makeup before she was satisfied.

She glanced in the mirror seeing that the color was still high in her cheeks and that her eyes were overly bright. Waving her hand as if to erase the facts, she rationalized that it was just because she was happy that her brother was back and somehow uninjured.

"That better be all it is," Alicia mumbled self-consciously trying to second guess her first diagnosis. The last thing she needed right now was to be in a house full of attractive men and be in heat. It didn't happen often, but if a female shifter went in heat without a mate, then the female had two choices... lock herself away and suffer for as long as it took, or have a string of one night stands until it was over. Or at least that's what the girls she'd gone to boarding school with had told her.

"Either way," Alicia cocked an eyebrow at her reflection. "Getting out of this house is a good idea for everyone."

Packing all of her stuff back into the suitcase, Alicia figured she might as well take it downstairs since she would be leaving with her brother. She'd miss the freedom but smiled softly knowing she would be near Micah again. Still lost in thought, she left the bedroom and turned the corner to go downstairs only to run into what felt like a brick wall.

Damon reached his arm out and wrapped it around Alicia's waist, pulling her flush against him to keep her from falling down the stairs. Being in a bad mood, he had planned this little encounter if for no other reason than to prove a point... that he wasn't the only one feeling this attraction. He wanted her to notice before Micah took her out of his reach.

The moment he touched her, he could hear her pulse speed up. Already feeling justified, he let his hand slide just under the rim of her short shirt and across her soft skin as he righted her. He had to admit Micah was right about her having a fever.

Alicia's lips parted as she inhaled sharply and gazed up at Damon feeling every inch of him pressed against her and liking it. He was mad at her... she could see the anger in his eyes. And why shouldn't he be. She'd tried to kill him... and in return he'd saved her life. She owed Damon more than one debt and it wasn't right to just leave with Micah without telling him how grateful she truly was.

She would be leaving in a few minutes and that alone gave her the courage she needed. Rising up on her tip-toes, Alicia placed a slow gentle kiss on Damon's lips wondering if it felt the same way to him as it did to her. He smelled wonderful and his skin was smooth and cool to her heated lips.

"Thank you," she whispered as she withdrew.

"For what?" Damon asked feeling like she'd just thrown him completely off balance.

"For saving me again," she smiled.

For a moment, Damon felt the heavy weight that had been crushing his chest ease... until she had to go and ruin it.

"And for helping to bring Micah back to me." Alicia picked the suitcase back up and started to slip past him, but to her surprise Damon grabbed her upper arms and backed her up against the

wall, pinning her there. He leaned down within an inch from her and she watched his dark eyelashes lower as he gazed at her lips.

"If it's rewards you're handing out, then let's up the stakes." Damon slashed his lips across hers, showing her the difference in the kiss she'd just given him and the one he needed. He made sure it was one she would remember for nights to come.

Damon was ready for her to push him away or even fight to get free of his hold. When she did neither, he intensified the kiss feeling his own head rush. To his amazement, she was suddenly kissing him back and with just as much passion.

Feeling like she had turned his punishment back on him, he ended the kiss just as quickly as he'd instigated it and backed away from her... this time jerking the damned suitcase up himself. Turning, he started down the stairs two at a time, leaving her standing there in a daze.

Alicia took a moment to relearn how to breathe. She hadn't been able to stop herself when he'd kissed her so demandingly... she'd wanted more. She still wanted more. Damn it. What gave him the right to turn her on like that then leave her like this? Rubbing her temple, she gave him the benefit of a doubt. If she was in heat... would a vampire feel it?

"No," she answered her own question. It was a shifter thing. She was sure of it.

Damon was already in the living room relaxing on the sofa beside Michael when Alicia got the courage to come downstairs. Or at least he made it look like he was relaxing... not that she was staring. She looked away when he gave her that damned smile and turned her attention to Micah who was sitting on the huge overstuffed love seat. He was leaning forward, lost in conversation with Michael.

Micah glanced up as Alicia came further into the room. "So I hear you've taken up suicide missions as a hobby. You know, I was only gone for a couple weeks." He patted the cushion beside him and slid his arm across Alicia's shoulders as she sat down. After what Michael had just told him, he wondered who had been in more danger... him or Alicia.

Alicia nodded trying to keep her gaze averted from Damon's. She shifted it to Michael's and felt the butterflies take flight in her stomach. She finally decided: out of the vampires, Kane was the safest... though she doubted anyone would agree with her.

"I owe all three of them a huge thank you." She tried not to flinch when she felt Damon's glare. Feeling a touch vindictive, she gave him a slow smile letting him think she would. She quickly learned who would win that staring contest and turned her attention to what Michael was saying to her brother.

"The city is dangerous right now," Damon pointed out. He had saved her three times, though she was only aware of two of them. Add Michael and Kane's saves to that list and that was five deaths avoided within the last couple weeks. He suddenly didn't think it was very safe for her to leave their side.

"I agree," Micah shrugged sensing Damon's protectiveness. Michael had informed him that Damon was his brother and had come offering to help. When he'd questioned him about the bite on Alicia's neck, Michael had confirmed she'd gotten it during an attack behind Moon Dance. That still didn't mean he trusted Damon. Something in his blood told him the vampire was a threat.

Tightening his arm around Alicia and praying he was making the right decision, Micah directed his attention back toward the owner of the house. "And that's why I hope Alicia can stay with you guys for a little while longer. Right now, this is the safest place for her."

It was amazing how one simple request could change the atmosphere of a whole room.

"What?" Alicia shrank away from him. How could she tell her brother that right now this house was probably the most dangerous place in the world for her... much less this city?

Damon cocked an eyebrow hoping he was getting ready to see a horrible break up. He was an idiot anyway. What man in his right mind would leave their girlfriend in a house full of guys? Yeah, he'd be happy to throw the idiot out the front door... or window. Whichever was the handiest... or the closest.

Feeling her moving away from him, Micah reached out and grabbed her shoulders, making her turn toward him, “Alicia, you know I love you with all my heart, but think for a moment.” He ignored the growl that was coming from the sofa. “We just attacked the werewolves and killed their alpha. Anyone dumb enough to seek vengeance will be coming after our family. Plus, Michael tells me you’ve already been mauled by monsters.”

Alicia shot Michael a quick ‘thanks a freaking lot’ look, then turned it on Kane when he opened his big mouth.

“You do seem to be a magnet for the soulless,” Kane added trying not to laugh out loud at the fact Damon was counting the ways he could kill Micah without anyone knowing. The poor cougar didn’t realize how much trouble he was in. Knowing Damon would do it, he decided to drop the bomb. “You might want to listen to your brother on this one.”

Alicia growled at Kane then took the time to give Damon a threatening look, daring him to put in his two cents worth. When Damon gave her a slow, almost wicked smile, she knew he could blow her out of the water. She quickly turned back to Micah, not giving Damon enough time to tell on her, “If we are in so much danger, then maybe we should just take off together and not tell anyone where we’re going.”

Micah frowned at Alicia, tightening his grip on her arms for an instant knowing he was missing something. He searched her face and again took note of her overly bright eyes. Letting go of her arms, he pressed the back of his hand to her forehead narrowing his gaze.

Alicia pushed his hand away feeling defeated and in a world of trouble. The last thing she’d wanted to do was insinuate he’d run away from anything. That was one thing Micah would never do and they both knew it. If he figured out why she was... overheated, then she’d be lucky to see the light of day for months.

“I’ll stay on one condition,” she conceded.

“What’s that?” Micah raised an eyebrow.

“At Night Light, Quinn put the guards on me to the point that I had to dress up in disguise just to leave the club without being followed. If I stay here, then I come and go as I want to... no babysitters.” She made her voice firm. “I am not a baby.”

“No, you’re not,” Micah smirked down at her then turned to look at Michael for conformation.

“Agreed,” Michael nodded. “If it’s freedom she wants, then she shall have it as long as she’s living here.”

Damon kept his mouth shut because he didn’t agree to the amount of freedom, but no one had to know that little fact. He inhaled slowly, letting most of the tension drain from him now that she wasn’t leaving and murder was off the list. Brother... Micah was her freaking brother.

Michael’s phone vibrated as a text came in. Reading it he looked up at Micah. “It seems your sister isn’t the only escape artist among us.”

#### Chapter 4

The alley became a bit darker than the rest of the city as Misery descended on it to check the rip in the dimensional wall she’d created with Kane’s blood. She liked the fact that the humans couldn’t see it, though she was sure some with a stronger sixth sense would avoid the alley.

Letting the darkness implode, she stepped forward choosing the child’s form as she knelt beside the opening. She didn’t dare touch it for fear that it would drag her through the barrier, but she could now feel demons gathering on the other side. Those demons could see the rip and that was the purpose of its creation. Misery let some of her own evil slither down her body in dark smoky tendrils and giggled as it seeped into the crack.

Within moments, the same thing happened but this time in reverse. Misery’s back arched and her eyes turned blood red as the snaky darkness squirmed its way up her body then sank into her aura. The other side would wait until Misery gave them a sign... then they would have their strongest attack from the other side.

Misery's expression turned mischievous. She'd been careful up till now... feeling the pure blood fallen tracking her movements. Now was not the time to become careless but she needed the power it would take to break through the portal. Misery's expression slowly changed into one of anger as she felt a presence behind her.

Exploding into a cloud of darkness, she reformed as she attached her corpse's form around the demon that had been spying on her. "Misery will give you a closer look."

Zeb didn't flinch as the rotting arm tightened around his neck and he was suddenly staring down into the rift. "Would you banish Zeb for offering his help?" His plump lips twisted in a sneer, "Such lust I feel from you. What is it Misery is hungry for?"

"I can get what I need from the humans... why would I need your help with this?" Misery ran a hand over the short fat man's balding head then she released him only to circle his bloated body.

"Why don't you see for yourself?" Zeb had barely finished the invitation when Misery's bony fingers punched their way through the flesh he used to hide in.

Misery could feel the demon within and smiled sadistically as she read its soul. This demon had been in the city for a very long time and had been wise enough to keep a low profile. She could sense its fear of the fallen that lived here along with fear of other creatures she knew nothing about.

Zeb was a weak demon and useless in a fight. He would be easy to kill, but Misery could sense his other powers... powers she could exploit to suit her purposes.

This demon could detect the lust within a human and magnify that to deliciously evil measures. She saw some of the things Zeb had done recently as she tapped into his memories. Like the jealous husband losing his cool and killing his wife... an angry employee taking a gun to work for revenge... the desperate man robbing a bank and getting shot as he walked out the door.

Zeb could make a hungry human eat until their guts split open, or make someone depressed become suicidal. He could even go as far as to make a druggie or alcoholic overdose on their poison of choice... all pushed beyond their control. Zeb made people hungry for whatever they craved, their darkest of secrets and Misery could feed off the evil spawned from them.

"Misery will use you," she hissed as she pulled her hand from his flesh.

"I know," Zeb smiled as the blood spilling from him reentered his body in a backwards waterfall... sealing the wound.

If he were human, then he would have been labeled a business man of sorts. Making deals with other demons was how he'd survived this long. If he teamed up with Misery and fed her the power she wanted to bring more demons into the city, then he would not be so noticeable to the fallen.

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Chad stared at the crime scene in horror as he kept his gun trained on the man who was already cuffed and being dragged out of the operating room. The police department had called him in because this was the third time today they had found something this disturbing. What in the hell would make a man do something like that? He was a doctor for crying out loud... supposed to be saving lives, not take them.

"I just wanted to see what it would look like," the doctor yelled as he struggled to get one more look before he was taken away. "She's perfect now."

Chad felt the nausea rise and had to look away. Right there on the operating table lay the man's masterpiece. He'd taken an elderly bedridden lady whose body was shutting down and replaced her insides... including brain, with parts from a young woman who had come into the emergency room with an ear ache only a couple hours ago.

Hearing a female gasp behind him Chad turned his head seeing Angelica, Zachary and Trevor coming into the room and frowned. "I was going to call you."

Trevor shook his head, "Angelica has been tracking our demon all day and we've already been to your other crime scenes."

Angelica gazed down at the young woman who had been tossed on the floor like an empty rag doll. They'd been one step behind Misery and she could feel the demon's power growing but what disturbed her the most was the fact that even though Misery could feed off this... she couldn't cause it to happen.

"It's hard to believe one demon can cause this much chaos," Trevor kept his back to the carnage. He'd never been one to mess with the demon cases and he wished now was no different. He kind of felt bad for the loss of a good doctor who had probably just been in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"It's not just one demon," Angelica tried to ignore the cold chills crawling up her spine. "And I'm afraid this is only the beginning."

Zachary pulled out his cell phone and walked out of the room. Dialing Storm's number, he waited until the call was directed into the PIT message system. This wasn't the first time he'd left a message for Storm today. What was bothering him the most was that their fearless leader usually knew what he wanted before he called and often showed up before he finished even dialing the number.

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Micah had spent the last couple hours in Warren's office being brought up to speed on everything he'd missed. It was a lot to take in, but the fact that their families were once again united was something to be thankful for. His gaze strayed to Quinn and Kat knowing they were the ties that bind.

"It's good to have everyone back together," Quinn offered in Micah's silence.

Micah rubbed his temple wondering if everyone had completely forgotten that Alicia existed. To his surprise, it was the newest family member that mentioned her.

"Where's Alicia?" Jewel asked Steven wondering why she wasn't here.

"Spending a couple days with a friend from boarding school," Quinn answered then added, "It might be best if we find a college to send her to for a while."

Michael noticed Micah's knuckles turn white where he was gripping the arm of the chair where he was sitting. Honestly, he agreed with Micah's anger. If they hadn't spent all this time keeping Alicia at arm's length, then maybe she wouldn't get in so much trouble trying to do things by herself.

"I've already talked to Alicia," Micah glared at his brother. "She's spent years waiting to come home and the last thing she wants is to be told she's not welcome here. She got enough of that when Nathaniel was alive."

"That's not what I meant and you know it," Quinn growled in self-defense. "She's barely eighteen. Do you really think Night Light is the safest place for her right now knowing the mess we are in?"

"No, that's why I've already sent her to live with Michael," Micah smiled knowing no one would argue with his logic, "That way she's still here and a part of the family, but hopefully out of the direct line of fire."

Envy's cell phone chose that moment to go off much to the relief of most of the people in the crowded room. She quickly grabbed it trying to silence the song she'd picked to let her know it was Chad calling. She elbowed Devon in the ribs when he started singing, "I fought the law and the law won."

"Chad," she smirked, "perfect timing as usual."

"You might not say that when I tell you why I called," Chad ran his fingers through his hair. "It's been one hell of a day."

Envy held her hand up to silence Devon's horrible karaoke stunt. "What's wrong?"

"I hear Devon in the background. Put the phone on speaker," Chad sighed.

Envy clicked it on speaker phone, "Okay, but it's not just Devon, the whole gang's here."

"Good," Chad said then proceeded to give them a run-down of today's events. Once he was done he added, "Trevor's brought in a demon expert and she wants to talk to Dean about the demon

if you can get a message to him. I also thought that maybe you could get a hold of Kriss and see what you could find out.”

“I’m on it,” Envy nodded, “and Chad... be careful.”

Chad’s tone of voice changed as that reminded him of something, “Hey Devon.”

“Yeah?” Devon frowned.

“If you ever let my sister get shot at again, I swear I’ll...” Envy’s eyes widened and she snapped the phone closed, cutting her brothers voice off.

“O...Kay,” Devon gave a halfhearted smile hearing a couple chuckles from the group.

“Not to change the topic from Devon having his ass kicked but,” Warren shook his head, “I’m hiring more shifters here at Moon Dance and Quinn has agreed to do the same for Night Light. Now that we’ve cut off the head of the alpha werewolf... and the mafia...”

“We need to be ready for two to grow back in its place,” Nick finished for him.

Quinn’s cell phone went off and he smirked at Devon, “Well at least all of Kat’s relatives are within seeing distance.” Looking at the caller ID, he noticed it was from the cougar he’d left in charge. Harley could take care of about anything in his absence so he knew it was important.

Holding up his hand to hush the crowd he answered, “Yeah Harley, what is it?”

“Quinn, unless you ordered a dead cougar instead of the normal drinks we serve, then we’ve got a problem.”

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Boris had spent the morning with Anthony’s lawyer finishing off the paperwork that made him the new manager of one of the biggest bars in the city... Love Bites. As for whom the new owner would be... they’d both decided Anthony’s nearest of kin was the smartest way to go, legally and logically. Titus Valachi was one of the strongest and most fair-minded wolves Boris had ever met. He’d hated his uncle and refused to do anything mob related.

Boris smiled knowing he’d just helped the lawyer put over half the wolf pack holdings into Titus’s name without Titus being aware of it. Now all they had to do was convince Titus to become the new alpha before Lucca had a chance to claim it.

As for Love Bites, the previous owner had lost the club to Anthony only a couple weeks ago, and since Anthony’s lawyer was one of their pack wolves, he was taking care of as much paperwork as fast as he could in case the feds froze all of Anthony’s holdings.

Most of the clan had worked for Anthony in some way or another, but since the alpha no longer existed, it left a lot of wolves without a job. Wolves with too much time on their hands were never a good thing and Boris was already hearing talk about retaliating against the cougars for killing Anthony.

The majority of those wolves were hanging out with Lucca Romano who was Anthony’s protégé in many ways. Those were the wolves he did not want to be around.

Lucca was strong. Anthony had felt that and used Lucca for most of the mob work. That, and Anthony didn’t completely trust Lucca, so he figured keeping Lucca close and in control of a section of the mob ties would keep him busy enough not to try overthrowing him. Problem was... if Titus didn’t step up to the plate soon, then Lucca would.

With that in mind, Boris had been choosy while hiring pack members to help run Love Bites. It was a step up from spending most of his time dealing out punishment to whoever had pissed Anthony off for the day. But that was what he was... the punisher. And you had to be the alpha’s right hand man to become the punisher, so most of the wolves would obey him without much thought. Now he was Titus’s right hand man and that’s where he wanted to stay.

Looking around the bar, he listened as some of the wolves made fun of the gothic decorations, but Boris pointed out that the Goth crowd within the city was full of rich college kids with a movie-style vampire fetish who were loaded with money. That seemed to get their attention. Yeah, it was always the same with the wolves... money was the bottom line.

Feeling the power of a true alpha enter the bar, Boris looked toward the doors from his view through the office window. He smiled seeing Titus stop just inside the doors to look around. He had to admit this place was a little startling to anyone who had never been here. He was surprised Titus had made it here this quickly. He'd still been in Malta when he'd called him during the predawn hours.

Reaching over, Boris pressed the button on the intercom system, "Titus, there's a flight of stairs on your far left. Come up to the office." He closed his eyes knowing he had the equivalent of two minutes to decide how to tell Titus he had just inherited most of Anthony's holdings.

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Alicia was tired of sulking about it. If she had to stay here, then she might as well make the best of it. Plus, she was hungry and everyone was gone. The house was so huge that it took her a few minutes to even locate the kitchen... that and the fact that the door to it was closed. Most people didn't have a door on their kitchen, but then again... it wasn't people living in this house.

Shifters don't eat as much as humans because they didn't age at the same rate. They could even go months without it affecting them, though most shifters liked food enough to partake in it every day. Living around humans had a way of rubbing off on the paranormal. However, there were a couple things that would make a shifter hungry... injury, fighting, sex... or the need for sex... AKA heat. And at the moment she was starving.

Opening the fridge she frowned... lots to drink but no food. Checking the cabinets was equally as depressing. All empty, unless you counted the spider webs in the corners and the five cans of coffee. Now she understood why the door had been closed.

Hearing something behind her, Alicia spun around to find Damon coming into the kitchen with his arms full of grocery bags.

Damon withheld the smirk and kept his expression relaxed, "Figured you'd be hungry." Setting the bags down on the bar, he made his way back outside to get the rest.

Alicia was stunned. Damon had gone shopping... for her? Looking in the bags, her eyes widened at all the food... good food too. She pulled out a bag of seedless white grapes and started munching while putting the food up.

She rolled her eyes realizing Damon had done it again... made her so speechless that she'd forgotten to thank him. He must think she was the most ungrateful girl in the world. Alicia blew her bangs out of her eyes wondering how to pay him back for everything he'd done. She needed to find a way to pay them all back.

Damon walked back into the kitchen setting the rest of the groceries on the bar. He grabbed a couple of can items and he slowly walked toward her.

Alicia turned and watched him come closer but for the life of her she couldn't move. Oh he was a very bad boy when he leaned against her and placed the cans in the cabinet above her. It was a good feeling... his body pressed against hers making her thighs go up in flames. Maybe it wasn't food she was starving for.

"You don't get to do that," Alicia's voice was small. She tried to push him away but either he was like a wall or she wasn't really trying. She gazed at her traitorous hands when they stayed pressed against his chest.

"Admit it," Damon was suddenly in the mood to push buttons.

"Admit what?" Alicia felt fear slide through her like a wicked intimate caress.

"What you feel when you're alone with me... what we both feel," Damon pushed.

"It doesn't matter what I... what we..." Alicia raised her gaze to meet his realizing in a roundabout way she had just admitted it.

"What we want," Damon finished for her, his voice growing a little darker. Someone knocked on the front door. He didn't move a muscle as she slipped under his arm and headed for the front door. Hearing a male voice, Damon turned his head toward the sound and narrowed his eyes. That brother of hers was starting to get on his nerves.

Damon leaned in the doorway of the living room, watching as Micah lowered the suitcase to the floor then pulled her in for another hug.

The first thing Micah noticed was that Alicia was on fire... then the scent of her arousal hit him hard. Tightening his hold, his eyes slowly lifted to the vampire on the other side of the room.

Alicia quickly pulled away from Micah when she heard him inhale her scent. 'Oh god, please don't let him know.' She silently prayed.

Glancing up at him, she could tell by the golden color that was bleeding into his beautiful blue eyes. He did know... all male shifters would know unless they already had a mate. Panicking, she started talking animatedly about putting the suitcase in her room and nearly ran up the stairs with it.

Micah closed the door behind him a little too hard. He knew she wasn't a little girl any more... but that was taking it a bit too far for his liking. The emotion running through him was much like a father would feel when he realized his daughter had just figured out what sex was and had decided to start dating the thug from down the street.

"Alicia!" Micah yelled and took off up the stairs after her.

Damon was speechless as he stared at the empty spot Micah had just been standing in. What the hell was that all about? He ran the scene through his mind again trying to figure it out. Micah hugs Alicia and she pushed him away then runs upstairs... that must have pissed Micah off because now he was mad and chasing her. Something about that was just a little too Jerry Springer to be right.

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