



Darlene Kuncyter

A Wolf's
Savage
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This is a work of fiction. Names, places and characters are solely a product of the author's imagination, and any similarity to people or places is purely coincidental.

This book is dedicated to my family and friends - who mean the world to me, and of them, I am fiercely loyal. I love you all. You are my strength, my soul and my heart – forever.

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Chapter 1

Katrina Winslow pulled the thick blanket over her head, and groaned into her pillow as the sounds of Hall & Oats *Maneater* blared through the bedroom. "Shit," she swore, as she blearily grabbed her cellphone from the bedside table – not in the least bit happy about being jerked from her sleep.

"What?" She bit out.

"Katrina?"

Kat sat up in a flash, her mouth going painfully dry. "Mother?"

"Oh, thank the Gods you haven't changed your number!"

Kat hadn't heard from her mother in almost three years, and the sound of her voice coming from the other end of the phone was a shock - to say the least. She ran her fingers through her long, auburn hair and sighed - a small part of her wishing that she *had* changed her number. She knew without a doubt that hearing from Elaine Winslow was *not* going to be good. She and her mother had never been what anyone would call close, and Kat knew that if she was calling her now it was only because she wanted something from her. She hadn't heard from the woman in almost three years and even on the rare occasions that Kat went to a gathering of the Coven – Elaine was always absent.

"What do you need, mother?" she asked on a sigh - her voice tight.

There was silence for a long moment, and Kat held the phone away from her ear and looked to make sure that the connection had not been lost, before she finally heard her mother speak. "Katrina...you're in serious danger." She finally said softly, and Kat almost burst out laughing at the ominous tone to her mother's voice. Geez - she thought with a shake. Her mother always had been a drama queen; but this was a little much - even for her.

"Oh, really?" Kat asked, shaking her head with a grin as she threw back the covers of the bed and eased herself over the edge. She rested her elbows on her knees and sighed heavily. It was just too damn early in the morning to have to deal with this. "What is it now Elaine? Did another boyfriend

dump your sorry ass? Did you break a nail? Oh, let me guess, your hi-lights didn't come out right?"

"Katrina, I wish you wouldn't talk to me like that. This is not a joke!"

Kat rolled her eyes and glanced around the room. She had been staying at Lucas Blackwater's cottage ever since she, Luke, Desmond and Marcus had saved her best friend Abby from a hell of a nasty demon. And she found that she enjoyed Luke's company more than she was willing to admit - even to herself, and the thought of leaving and going back to her old life of working at the bar Echo's was becoming less and less attractive. Even though the Were tried her patience at every turn with his macho, he-man ways - Kat couldn't lie to herself and not admit that she wasn't attracted to the mangy cur. The man was make your knees weak sexy.

"...have its consequences." She heard her mother say and she shook her head, trying clear it and concentrate on the conversation at hand in order to put it to an end - and quickly.

"I'm sorry, mother. What did you say?"

Elaine puffed out of breath of disgust and cleared her throat. "Damn it, Katrina!" She bit out -and Kat could feel her anger. "*You killed another witch!*"

Crap! How the hell could she have found out? Kat wondered, twisting a strand of her hair between her fingers in a nervous habit that; at thirty years old, she had yet to break. "How did you hear?" She finally asked - not liking the pit that was developing in her stomach at all. This was *definitely* not going to be good.

"Katrina," she replied, sounding completely exasperated. "Alexis came from a very powerful coven. They knew she had raised Argramon; and they welcomed it. You and your little band of Vampires ruined that."

"Don't forget about the Weres," Kat mumbled under her breath - her mind instantly going to Luke, and she felt the heat rise in her cheeks.

Yes, Katrina had killed Lexie. But the bitch had brought back a powerful Demon, and had captured her best friend in order to bleed her dry and give Abby's fey blood to the filthy beast - making him almost

impossible to destroy. What in the hell was she supposed to do? - Kat thought with a grunt. Let the witch get away with it? Not in her lifetime!

"Oh, yes," her mother hissed into the phone, and Kat felt an icy chill begin to creep up her spine. "The *Were*. Well, you listen to me closely Katrina Margaret Winslow! Because of your little stunt, this *Were* that you have become so fond of, is in as much danger as you!"

"Mother..." she started to say, but Elaine cut her off - her voice now raised to the point that she was yelling into the phone and Kat winced - the sound reverberating through her head and causing it to instantly start to pound. Ah, crap.

"No! You listen; and you listen close little girl. The witches from Alexis's coven are *pissed*, and that is putting it mildly! You killed one of their own, and when you did - you took on some of her powers," she said, and Kat felt her heart jerk. She hadn't noticed any new powers since they'd been back, and her mouth turned down in a frown - her brows furrowing. Had she?

Kat tried to think over the past few days and came up with nothing. She, Luke and Marcus had brought Desmond and Abby back to the estate and had spent the next three days waiting for Abby to wake from some type of sleep, or coma...or whatever the hell she had been in - and in that time she had noticed nothing. Not that she had any powers at all to speak of anyway. Her powers were bare minimum at best.

She shook her head to try and clear it as she stood and walked over to the window - looking out at the rising sun. Hell, she thought with a groan; it's barely dawn. "Mother, I have no new powers," she replied, trying desperately to keep her voice steady.

Elaine huffed out a breath and *tsk'd* into the phone. She actually *tsk'd*! "Katrina, you might not be aware of them now - but you will be. Believe me when I say, you took her powers when you took her life. I don't know what powers she had exactly - but I'm fairly certain they aren't good. *And* if you had not practically turned your back on our Coven, we could have warned you." There was another long silence as Kat tried desperately to take in everything her mother was saying; but when Elaine finally spoke again - she dropped the biggest bomb on Kat that she had ever had dropped

on her in her life. "Because of your foolishness, Katrina- and this misplaced loyalty to these *people*," her mother barked into the phone. "You have now put your sister at risk!"

Kat braced her hand against the wall as the air came rushing out of her in a whoosh. *Sister?* -her mind screamed at her. Did her mother just say sister? She didn't have a sister! "Mother; just what in the hell are you talking about now? Have you finally lost your mind?"

"I only wish that I had, but I'm afraid I'm completely sane." She said, sighing heavily into the phone, and Kat could *feel* her mother struggling to maintain her control. "Do you remember when you were thirteen and you went to spend the summer at your Grandmother's?"

Kat nodded absently, her mind going back to the summer she had spent at her Grandmum's. It had been a wonderful few months, and Kat found herself missing the woman constantly. Her Grandmother had been a warm, loving, nurturing force that had made Kat feel safe and loved as she never had before. She had taught her to be strong and independent, and to stand on her own. And she missed the woman horribly every single day.

"Yes," she croaked out, her eyes filling with tears at the thought. She had taught Kat so many things that she still carried with her today, and the woman's loss was something that gnawed at her heart constantly.

"I sent you there so that you wouldn't notice that I was getting close to delivering your sister. You couldn't know," she said, almost apologetically - yet she couldn't *quite* pull it off. Her mother was a heartless bitch - that never thought of anyone but herself.

Kat thought back to that time, and realized with that sudden light going off above her head, that her mother *had* been acting strange. She had suddenly started wearing loose fitting clothes - whereas before she had always favored skin tight clothing to enhance her ample figure. And then there had been the bouts of 'food poisoning' that had plagued her mother.

Oh, sweet Lord - Kat groaned - resting her head against the wall as realization dawned on her. Her mother had been pregnant!

"How could I have not seen it," she whispered.

"Darling, I did whatever I could to hide it from you. And when Harper was born; I had to send her away."

Kats head snapped up and her eyes blazed. "You sent her away?" She ground out, angry as Hell at this woman; who chose to hide the fact that she had had a sister! A *sister* for God's sake! "You selfish, heartless bitch," Kat spit out; her voice filled with venom. "What was the problem Mother? Where you afraid that a baby might cramp your style? Do you even know who the father is?"

"Katrina, that isn't fair. I did it to protect her. She's...she's special."

"What do you mean *special*?"

Again there was a long silence, and Kat found her mind focusing on the fact that she had a sister! Holy crap!

Harper - she thought with a deep, growing twist of her gut. She had a sister named Harper! Kat bit her lip, her mind reeling. My God, she thought as she quickly did the math. She would be...seventeen! Sweet Lord, she had missed her entire childhood! She never had the chance to watch her grow - to teach her to ride a bike, to brush her hair...or to pick her up when she fell.

"Her father was a very powerful witch," she heard her mother say. "And it has been foretold that if he ever fathered a female child with another witch...well, she could upset the balance of the supernatural world."

"What do you mean 'upset the balance'?" Kat asked, her eyes filling with hot, angry tears.

"Katrina, there is just too much to explain right now. Once you go and get your sister, I'll explain everything."

"Go and get her?" Kat bit out angrily. "Because of you - I don't even know her! What the hell makes you think she would go anywhere with me? And why don't you just go get her yourself?"

"I can't," she whispered, and Kat could feel her mother's frustration, and knew that the woman was trying extremely hard to keep her tone even.

"Why?" She asked, brushing the tears from her eyes and taking a deep, ragged breath.

"It has to be you, Katrina. And you *must* go alone." Again there was a disturbing silence, and Kat could feel a distinct shudder run across her body - causing gooseflesh to break out. "And you must leave now. You have to get away from the wolf as soon as you can. I cannot stress this enough."

Luke! God, Kat groaned inwardly as her heart flipped over in her chest. She had to leave Luke? They never even had a chance, she thought sadly. "Why mother?" she asked shakily, her throat constricting with emotion. This was just way too much to deal with first thing in the morning before she even had her first cup of damn coffee.

Her mind drifted back to Luke. For all of his faults - she felt a strange pull towards the man that she had never felt with anyone before, and the thought that she couldn't stay with him and see what happened - felt like a kick straight to her gut. Shit! Would she ever catch a break?

"I'm sorry Katrina," her mother replied quietly, a tiny hint of sadness in her voice - although to Kat it just didn't seem completely genuine. "But if you stay with the Were - he *will* be killed. There will be no other choice."

Kat felt her knee's get weak at her mother's words. *Killed?*

Oh, God; her life sucked! The one man that she could quite possibly care for - maybe even fall for - was being ripped right from her fingers in an instant.

"Mother," Kat choked out - that pit in her stomach growing to dangerous proportions. It suddenly felt as if she was swallowed a large rock. "Just what in the hell is going on?"

"You have to trust me, Katrina," Elaine whispered. "I need you to tell me the truth about something."

"Oh, that's rich, *mother*," Kat ground out. "You...asking for honesty!"

"Katrina! Enough of this! We don't have time to argue about this anymore. I need to know if you have slept with the wolf yet."

Kat groaned into the phone, her entire body tensing. Was she serious? "No," she murmured, her eyes glazing once again with hot, angry - *hurt* tears. Not that she hadn't thought about it - every damn second of the day.

"Thank the Gods," she heard her mother say, and Kats temper finally hit the boiling point and exploded.

"Yes, thank *God* you lying witch!" she spat out, her entire body trembling with her pent up rage. "Thank *God* I didn't sleep with the one man who could have possibly made me happy! That I maybe, just *maybe*, could have had something with! Why should anything change for me now?" Kat knew she was ranting, but was unable to stop herself. So much had happened over the past week that her head was reeling - and now her mother comes back into her life with all this shit! It was just too much! "Why the hell should I *ever* have a chance at happiness, huh?" she asked, her voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Sweetheart..." her mother began, but Kat cut her off.

"Don't even bother, mother. It is just too damn early in the morning to deal with you any longer. Just tell me where my sister is; and I'll go get her for you." She sighed heavily and shook her head, the beginning of a headache seeping into her brain with a vengeance. "But, I am telling you right now - I am bringing her to you, and then that is it! I don't want to have anything more to do with you ever again. Is that understood? I don't want you to try to contact me again. I'm done! Done with you - done with the Coven! Done!"

Elaine sighed heavily. "You don't mean that Katrina," she said softly.

"The hell I don't! No more - do you understand me? My entire life I've had a sister that I didn't even know about. It wasn't bad enough that you left me alone every time some guy came along; but to find out that I could have had someone there with me to love..." she paused as she tried to bite back her tears. "And now when I *might* have a chance at some real happiness in my life, you come along - *after three fucking years* - and tell me that if I stay and try - he'll be killed! Christ, mother - what's next?"

"Katrina, I don't expect you to understand or forgive me right now, but in time..."

"In time - I'll just grow to hate you even more," Kat finished quietly. "Just tell me where she is." Kat stormed over to the dresser and grabbed her purse, pulling a pen and a piece of paper from it. "Where did you send her mother?" she asked; her voice clipped.

"I sent her to some friends of mine," Elaine replied softly. "They are good people, Katrina, and I know they gave her a good life."

"Really?" Kat bit out, unable to control the contempt in her voice. "Did you ever bother to check up on that?"

"I...I couldn't..." she stammered. "No one could know."

"Yeah, I guess not. We wouldn't want to have your sparkling reputation tarnished by people finding out that you dumped your kid on someone." She took a deep, steadying breath. "Just give me their information."

Elaine rattled off an address in South Carolina and Kat felt her body stiffen. My God, she had a sister not eight hours from her, and never knew it! Damn her mother!

"Their names are Constance and Jack Bradford," she went on - beginning to sound very business-like, and that only served to increase Kats anger. She was making it sound as if she was going to pick up a sofa or some other incidental object; and not her sister.

"What do I tell these people after seventeen years, mother?" Kat asked, her eyes blazing. "Hi, you don't know me, but I'm here to pick up my sister. You know, the girl who you've been raising as your own. Thank you very much for taking such good care of her - here is your gift card to Olive Garden." Kat barked out a short, bitter laugh. Christ, she thought again, could her life suck anymore?

"I'll call them right after we're finished here," she explained, her tone becoming even cooler as she went on. "They knew that this day would come, and they will need to get some things ready."

"Well, isn't that comforting," Kat seethed - just growing angrier by the minute. She needed to end this call - and to end it fast. This was just way beyond screwed up.

"Katrina, I can't stress to you enough...you must leave the wolf behind."

"Yes, mother. I heard you the first time." She ground out between clenched teeth - her heart twisting painfully in her chest so tightly that she was finding it hard to breathe.

No! She silently screamed at herself. She needed to stop this nonsense. She and Luke had nothing. He irritated the hell out of her, and tried her patience at every turn. She nodded her head harshly - trying desperately to convince herself that the thought of leaving him didn't twist at her insides like a vice.

"Well, then," her mother replied, "I'll let you get to it then." She cleared her throat. "Save my number and call me when you have Harper. We will meet up then. Goodbye, Katrina." With that, the phone went dead and Kat cursed under her breath.

At the moment, she was completely and utterly angry at the world.

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Chapter 2

Kat crept down the stairs as quietly as humanly possible - her backpack slung over her shoulder. She held her breath as she listened for any sounds coming from the house - but thankfully there was only silence.

She had packed her stuff quickly and dressed - hoping to be gone before anyone woke. The pack had accepted her without question, and she was going to miss each and every one of them. Not to mention their Alpha. Kat's throat tightened at the thought of Luke - once again her eyes welling with tears. Damn it to hell! She had to stop pining over the arrogant ass. He would have most likely just used her and tossed her aside anyway. That's what those self-centered, mangy curs were famous for! They all thought that they were doing the women of the world a favor with their stud services.

Just as Kat reached out to grab the handle of the front door, a slow, silky voice stopped her cold, and her entire body stiffened with awareness. Oh, *Crap!*

"Just where do you think you're going, red?" Luke asked, and Kat turned to find him standing in the doorway of the kitchen, a mug of steaming coffee in his hand.

Her entire body heated at the sight of him standing there; wearing nothing but a pair of flannel pajama pants - slung low on his tapered waist. His gloriously tan, muscled - *broad* chest bare - and she swallowed hard. Good Lord! The man was beyond sexy, and Kat felt her blood rushing through her veins like a tidal wave - causing her skin to grow warm in an instant. He had that sultry, just woke up look that made her weak in the knees.

"I'm leaving," she said, trying desperately to sound as nonchalant as possible. "Abby's fine; Argramon is gone - there's nothing to keep me here any longer. I'm getting bored, and I've got a life to get back to."

Luke set his coffee down on a nearby end table and walked over to her - his eyes intense. He studied her silently a moment before running his finger up her arm - causing her to shiver. "Would your leaving have anything to do

with your early morning phone call?" he asked softly, his gaze boring into hers, and Kat began fidget nervously.

"Yes and no," she lied - damning his bionic wolf hearing. "It was a friend checking up on me, and it made me realize that I need to get back. My...my job is probably already gone as it is."

Luke leaned in towards her; his mouth dangerously close to hers. "Male or female friend?" He asked, his warm breath caressing her lips like a gentle breeze - and she could smell mint and spice...and Luke.

"That is none of your business, wolf-boy." She replied, bristling slightly.

Luke chuckled, his eyes gleaming, and lightly brushed his lips across hers with the lightest of touches. Kat jerked back, hitting her head on the front door with a sound thump; then proceeded to spit out a string of very un-ladylike curses as she glared at him.

"You seem a bit on edge, Katrina," he whispered, his silky, smooth tone causing that damn, pesky little shiver to run up her spine once again, and she fought it with every ounce of strength that she had - but the coiling of heat in her belly had other ideas. It hit her full on with a mighty wave.

Kat pressed her hands against his chest and shoved - unfortunately not moving him an inch - and clenched her teeth. Geez, the man was a fricking mountain!

"I'm no such thing," she ground out; holding his gaze. "I just want to get out of here - and you're holding me up."

Luke watched Kat closely - knowing without a doubt that she was lying through her teeth. If he had learned anything in the past few days about the comely witch, it was that she was enjoying spending time with the pack; and hopefully with him.

He found spending time with her was enjoyable and easy, and even though they butted heads more often than not - he found himself looking forward to their little riffs. She heated his blood as no other woman ever had, and he was not about to let that end - not yet at least.

Kat was not only beautiful with her thick auburn hair, and sparkling hazel eyes - but she was smart and witty and Luke found himself wanting to

talk with her for hours; something that he had never cared to do in the past with any woman.

His eyes traveled over her face, only to land on her full, plump lips. Lips that men would die to taste; and women would pay dearly for.

"What's got you running, Katrina?" He asked; his brow raising.

"Nothing...I..." she stammered, feeling quite uncomfortable under his close scrutiny. Why in the *Hell* did the man have to be so infuriatingly yummy?

"Don't lie to me sweetheart. I'm not stupid."

"I didn't say you were stupid," she retorted – but a moment later her lips turned up in a snarky grin. "Although..."

"Don't even try and go there," he murmured, taking a step closer, and Kat flinched as the lengths of their bodies touched, and she felt the heat radiating off of him. Oh, sweet Jesus, she silently groaned. "Where are you running, Kat?" He asked again, and she swallowed hard.

"Luke, let's just say that I need to get back to my life and leave it at that...ok?" She winced at the pleading tone of her voice. Jesus! This man instantly turned her into a blithering idiot, and she was not happy with that at all. Damn him!

Luke's arm snaked around her waist and pulled her even closer; his eyes narrowed. "If you don't tell me, red - I swear to God, I'll just track you and make your life miserable."

She knew in an instant that it was a promise, and not a threat - and gulped back the tears threatening to spring to her eyes. Stay strong, she told herself. You have got to stay strong!

"I...I can't," she choked out, her expression tortured. "I need to... to pick something up, and I need to go alone."

"That sounds a bit mysterious, red - and I'm a very curious creature by nature," he explained, his mouth whispering along her cheek as he spoke. "Not to mention that I'm quite perceptive. Something has you upset enough to take off running like the Devil himself was at your heels." He brought his lips to her ear and gently took her lobe between his teeth and gave it a

gentle tug before whispering, "So give, sweetheart. Where are we going and what are we picking up?"

Kats eyes rolled back in her head and her mind buzzed at his sensuous onslaught. It would be so easy...she thought, gulping slightly. Just so damn easy to just turn her face, - just a fraction of an inch, and touch those wonderful lips with hers. To feel what it would be like to taste him – kiss him.

As much as she hated herself for it; her survival instinct kicked in and she once again tried shoving him away. This time, he let her bridge some distance and took a step back. Kat glared at him, her face flushed red. "We, are not going anywhere, Benji! Got it? Or do I need to find someone who speaks dog to make you understand? Cesar Millan, perhaps?"

Luke chuckled, deep in his chest – his expression unreadable. "Well then, since I highly doubt that the dog whisperer will be available on such short notice - I guess you're staying," he replied simply, reaching down to pick up her backpack from the floor. Kat looked down in horror. Just when in the hell had she dropped that?

"You can't!" She shrieked - making a grab for it - but Luke easily held it away from her. "You can't keep me prisoner! That's...that's kidnapping, you arrogant ass!"

Luke broke out laughing, his eyes gleaming devilishly. "Yes, I suppose it would be," he replied evenly, as if they were discussing the weather.

Everything that had happened in the last hour came crashing down on Kat all at once, and she burst into tears - something that she was most definitely *not* prone to doing. She hadn't cried since she was ten years old - but there was just no holding it back.

All of the anger and hurt and frustration hit her full force like a Mack truck, and she just couldn't stop it. The flood gates opened and were not about to close anytime soon - and her body shook from the impact of it.

"I...I have to go get my sister," she sobbed, and Luke pulled her into his arms - holding her tightly. "It was my mother on the phone and she told me...she...she...that *bitch* told me that I have a sister that I never knew about. And now because I killed Lexie - she's in danger! Everyone's in danger!" She sobbed against him, sounding completely broken.

"Ah, baby," Luke cooed, his hand tenderly stroking her hair as he held her snugly against his strong, firm chest. "I'm so sorry. But it's going to be all right. We'll go get her, and everything will be fine - I promise." He kissed her tear-stained face before gracing her with a gentle smile. "Come on," he urged, leading her into the kitchen. "Let's get you a cup of coffee and we'll work this all out. I just need to dress, and pack a few things..."

"No!" She squeaked, shaking her head wildly. "I told you - I have to go alone! I ...I don't want you to come with me," she cried. "I don't even like you!"

"Yes, I know," Luke chuckled, as he eased her into one of the chairs at the table. He grabbed a mug and poured her a cup of coffee, setting it down in front of her. "But, whether you like me or not, Kat - I am going with you. End of discussion."

Kat buried her face in her hands and groaned - knowing that she was fighting a losing battle. This man was as stubborn as the day was long, and was not use to being told no. He was a damn *Alpha* for God's sake! That meant that he was not questioned when he gave an order. Damn it all to Hell! She silently screamed. This was beyond a cluster fuck!



Thirty minutes later, Luke came strolling back into the kitchen - freshly showered and dressed in a pair of faded jeans that hugged his muscular form *much* too favorably. His long raven hair hung in a single braid down his solid back.

Kats breath caught in her throat at the sight of him, as her eyes scanned up to his black t-shirt -which hugged his broad chest like a damn second skin - accentuating his wash board abs that were much more than just a measly six pack. The man was packing at *least* a twelve!

Sweet Lord, she inwardly groaned - the man was a God – and at that moment - she despised him for it. The thought of being alone with the arrogant ass for God only knew how long, caused her entire body to clench with need.

She chewed at her lower lip as a small part of her wondered if they could pull this off. She guessed her mother or someone from Lexie's Coven

would be none the wiser that he was traveling with her, if they just got in - got her sister, and then got the Hell out. *Then* she could have him drop them off at her apartment and part ways - keeping him safe. Yes, her inner voice agreed - it might just work! And her bitch of a mother never had to know. What did she owe the woman anyway? Her main concern was keeping Luke safe, and if they kept the fact that he was traveling with her on the down-low – well, she just might be able to pull it off. Couldn't she?

"So, sweetheart," Luke said, giving her a smile. "Where're we heading?"

Kat sighed and stared into her empty cup - wondering if she was making the biggest mistake of her life. "Destiny Ridge, South Carolina," she sighed in defeat.

"Sounds promising," he laughed, pulling her to her feet and walking towards the door. "Let's get a move on. I want to stop and see Des before we head out."



Luke took Kats hand as they walked up the steps to the front door of Desmond's estate - his strong fingers intertwining with hers. When he paused at the door and knocked, she gave him a curious glance. The two men were as close as brothers, and each time that they had been to the house, Luke had always just walked through the entrance - never bothering to announce himself.

"I'm not taking the chance of walking in on them running around the place naked," Luke explained with a grin. "I'm fairly sure Des would kill me if I ever saw Abby in any form of a state of undress. And I am just not in the mood to have my ass handed to me on a platter by the possessive bloodsucker at the moment."

Kat couldn't help herself - she burst out laughing. Yes, from what she had seen of Desmond and his protectiveness of Abby, she had no doubt that he would do serious damage to the poor fool who ever stumbled upon his mate in the nude. She nodded her understanding and waited – painfully aware of the feel of her hand in his.

The sounds of laughter reached their ears and Kat rolled her eyes as Luke fidgeted beside her uncomfortably. Suddenly the door opened and

Desmond stood there, a slight scowl marring his face.

Desmond LaGrange was a foreboding sight standing there. Well over six foot tall, with his muscular body covered only in a black robe - his jet black hair and piercing sea blue eyes, completely mesmerizing – and Kat was again taken by his impressive figure. There was no denying that the man was a spectacular sight, and just oozed with a quiet intimidation.

His expression softened somewhat when he saw Luke and Kat standing there; but there was still a subtle look of annoyance that he couldn't quite hide at being disturbed. He and Abby had only been bonded a little over a week, and Kat was quite certain that he was not willing to share her yet - or *ever* if she had to guess. The two of them were completely and utterly in love.

"Katrina, Luke," he said, motioning them in.

As Kat walked through the entryway, she caught sight of Abby rushing down the stairs - awkwardly cinching one of Desmond's robes around her waist.

As she hit the second to last stair, her feet caught up in the much too long hem of the robe and she tripped, propelling herself forward with a shriek. Kat gasped, but in a flash, Desmond was there, catching her securely in his strong arms.

"Are you all right, my love?" she heard him whisper in her ear lovingly, and Kat couldn't help the sigh that passed her lips.

Their love was a powerful force that radiated off of them and touched everyone that was witness to it.

Oh, to only experience something half as pure, Kat thought to herself, and was suddenly aware of Luke standing behind her, his arm wrapping itself around her waist - and she tried desperately to keep her beating heart quiet.

"Always the graceful one, Abs," Luke chuckled - his breath blowing against Kats neck as he spoke - and she involuntarily shivered.

Abby graced him with an earthshattering smile; her emerald green depths sparkling with happiness. "Captain Klutz at your service," she laughed, then turned her head back towards Desmond; who still held her

firmly in his embrace, as if afraid to let her go. She raised her hand to his cheek and cupped it gently. "Thank you, darling," she murmured softly. "for catching me once again."

Desmond lowered his head and kissed her. "Always, sweetness," he replied before dipping his head to whisper something in her ear that made Abby's cheeks flame red - and Kat was once again awed by the perfect beauty of this couple - all dark and light, complimenting the other. It was as if some higher power had created them for the soul purpose of being together - and it was beyond humbling. To be witness to their bond was nothing less than awe-inspiring.

"Oh, for God's sake - can't you two give it a rest," Luke laughed, his hold on Kat tightening just a fraction, and her entire body tingled.

After only a moment, she gathered her strength and stepped away from him to move closer to where Desmond and Abby stood.

"You just wait, Lucas!" Abby tittered, walking over to give each of them a hug. "How about some coffee?" she asked, pulling Kat along with her towards the kitchen without giving them the opportunity to protest - but Luke was grateful for the distraction. He needed a minute alone with Desmond.

"Sounds good," Luke called to their receding backs - then gave Des a look that the vampire immediately understood and motioned him toward his study.

"We'll be along shortly, my love," Desmond informed Abby with a smile.

Desmond closed the door to his study and motioned for Luke to take a seat. He made his way around the large mahogany desk and sat down, giving Luke a knowing smile. "So tell me, my friend. What has you so troubled?"

Luke took a deep breath and gave Desmond a weary smile. "I don't even know where to begin," he said, running his hand over his eyes. "Kat found out this morning that she has a sister."

Desmond's eyes widened slightly, but he remained silent; knowing that there was more to come.

"Shit, Des. She's in danger because she killed that witch. And she says that now we're all in danger, and she wants to go get her sister alone, and I know there is more - but she just won't tell me. And it's frustrating the hell out of me." He finished with a shake of his head - completely exasperated.

Desmond squeezed the bridge of his nose and sighed. "What do you think she is keeping from you?" he asked quietly, and Luke shrugged.

"I just don't know. But I get the feeling that Lexie's Coven is much more of a threat than she is letting on. She's really scared, Des."

"Let me see what I can find," Desmond offered, his tone quiet and serious, and Luke knew he was worried that Abby might yet again be in danger. Her Fey blood was a commodity that many in the supernatural world still desired, and Luke knew that Desmond worried constantly that someone would eventually get to her- even though his reputation was a huge deterrent - and the Vampire would move Heaven and Earth to insure her safety.

"We're heading out to South Carolina to pick up her sister," Luke went on. "I think that the Coven is more interested in Kat and her, than anyone else - but I wanted you to be aware. I don't want to take any chances with yours or Abby's safety."

"I appreciate that, my friend." Desmond said, standing and walking over to Luke. "I will find out all I can of her Coven - but I want you and Katrina to return here once you have retrieved her sister." He laid his hand on Luke's shoulder and gave it a gentle squeeze. "Safety in numbers and all that," he said lightly, trying to ease Luke's worry. "Is there anything you need? Cash...credit cards? Anything at all, just ask."

Luke shook his head and stood also; smiling at his friend in gratitude. "Can you take that woman's damned stubbornness away?" He asked with a grin, and Desmond burst out laughing.

"If I could, don't you think I would have done that with my mate?"



"So," Abby said as she poured the water into the coffee maker. "Tell me what's going on with you and Luke?"

Kat groaned, and dropped her head in her hands. "Nothing! Absolutely nothing."

"Oh, come on Katrina." Abby scoffed; taking a seat beside her and pulling one of her hands into hers. "I see the way that man looks at you."

"Abs, it's complicated. The man infuriates me - he's stubborn and arrogant and..." she shook her head sadly, her throat suddenly feeling tight. "And I need you to talk him out of going with me."

"Going?" Abby asked in confusion. "Where are you going?"

"Oh, Lord Abs. Everything is just such a mess. My mom called me this morning and told me that I have a sister." She shook her head angrily. "A sister for God's sake! And that I have to go get her - that...she's in serious danger."

Abby's mouth dropped open - her eyes as huge as saucers. She knew that Kat and her mother weren't close - but to hear that she had a *sister* came as a complete shock. "You never knew?" she breathed and Kat shook her head miserably.

"And now because I killed that bitch Lexie; she says that we're all in danger. Abs, something big is happening. I can feel it - and I'm scared. My mother was adamant about me leaving Luke behind, but as usual, he's being an ass and insisting that he come with me." She took a deep breath and looked at Abby beseechingly. "You need to talk him out of it. She said that he'd be killed if I didn't leave him, and I just can't risk..."

Abby pulled Kat into her embrace, and rubbed her back soothingly. "Oh, honey. Stop worrying so. Luke can take care of himself - believe me. And, I think it's a good idea that if you must go - you don't go alone. If you have a bad feeling; then you have to trust your gut."

Kat nodded miserably, feeling as if her world - actually *their* world was on a precipice of something that none of them had any control over. And her only hope was that it wasn't going to get any of them killed.



"Promise me that you two will be careful." Abby said, hugging Kat tightly. She kissed Luke on the cheek and walked back to Desmond, who

stood in the shade of the porch - and he instantly wrapped his arms around her - kissing the top of her head tenderly.

Luke helped Kat into the SUV and walked back over to where Abby and Desmond stood. "Thank you." He said with a nudge to Desmond's shoulder.

"There is no need for thanks, my friend," Desmond replied with a smile. "Just be safe."

Abby smiled up at Luke, her eyes shining with humor. "Play nice, Lucas," she warned, and Luke grinned at her.

"Don't I always?" he asked; and Abby burst out laughing.

"I mean it! Take things slow with her. Remember - patience is a virtue."

"Well; then I'm about the most *non-virtuous* man that you will ever meet. Patience is definitely not my thing." He laughed and kissed her once again quickly on the cheek. He graced her with a wink, and walked over to the SUV and hopped in.

Abby and Desmond stood and watched as they pulled away. Finally, she turned and wrapped her arms around her mates' neck – gazing up at him. "You know, they'll most likely end up killing each other - don't you?" She murmured with a teasing grin – before leaning up on tiptoes, and gently nibbling on his chin.

Desmond pulled her more securely against him as laughter rumbled in his chest. "I'd put money on it," he replied before sweeping her up into his arms and carrying her inside.



"So, I take it that you're not close to your mother?" Luke asked, as he kept his eyes on the road ahead of him.

They had been on the road for a little over an hour, and in that time, Kat hadn't said two words. She had just stared out the window; glaring at the passing road, nibbling on that damn perfect bottom lip of hers to the point that he couldn't even look at her anymore because it was so damn distracting.

“No,” she replied, not even bothering to glance at him – she just continued to stare out at the passing road.

“Listen, red,” Luke began, glancing at her from the corner of his eye – and he was again struck by her absolute beauty. Her auburn hair shimmered with streaks of gold, and her skin was the color of sun kissed alabaster. God, he would never tire of looking at her, he thought with a grin twitching at his lips. “We’re going to be together for the next few days, and I really think it would go a hell of a lot faster, if you would just lighten up a bit and enjoy the ride.”

Kat finally turned and looked at him; her mouth set in a tight line. “I didn’t need you to come with me, Benji.” She snapped. “In fact – if I’m not mistaken, I was quite set on leaving you behind. But as usual, you just didn’t listen.”

“Yeah, well...” he laughed, good-naturedly. “I’m here. I’m going with you – so you might as well man up and deal with it. Why not enjoy yourself? I mean, you are going to meet your sister.”

“Oh, yeah.” Kat huffed in disgust, looking back out at the passing scenery. “That’s just fantastic, isn’t it? I don’t know anything about her. She’s seventeen for God’s sake! She probably won’t even like me.”

Luke reached over and laid his hand on her knee, giving it a gentle squeeze, and Kat gasped. “How could she not,” he replied softly; and Kats mouth fell open. “You have to give yourself a little credit, red.” He said quietly, and Kat fidgeted in her seat; a little too aware of the heat coming from his hand. It was sending a tingling up her leg, directly to her core, that she was not in the least comfortable with. She smacked his hand away and scowled at him when he burst out laughing.

“You don’t know anything!” She bit out, mad at him for doing what he did to her with just a simple touch – and hating herself for letting herself get into this mess. She felt like the biggest coward on the planet, and was angry as hell at herself.

“I know that you’re a good person, Katrina. And if you can’t win over your sister – well, then, there’s something wrong with *her* – and not you. You just need to believe in yourself a little more.”

Kat sighed and shook her head. Damn him! Why the hell did he have to be so damn sweet and considerate? She wanted nothing more than to stay angry at him – but the damned oaf was making that impossible. How could such an arrogant, self-centered ass be so thoughtful and sweet at the same time?

“I’m sorry,” she finally whispered, reluctantly admitting that he did have a point. If they were going to be together for who knew how long – she might as well make the best of a bad situation. “I’m being...”

“A bitch?” He broke in with a smile; and Kat couldn’t help but to return it. The man sure as Hell said whatever popped into his head.

“Yes, well, I wouldn’t have chosen that particular word; but I guess you’re right. And I do apologize. Since I seem to be stuck with you for the time being, I might as well *man up*.” She gave him a grin when he chuckled at the use of his words.

“So, tell me about your mom, red.”

“Elaine? Well, Elaine has always been sort of...” she paused; trying to find the most diplomatic words she could to describe her mother. After a long moment, she shrugged and decided that there was no way to describe her mother nicely. “Well, she’s a selfish, self-centered bitch.” She finally said, and was stunned when Luke burst out laughing once again, and she realized with a strange tugging to her heart that he had a wonderful laugh. It was deep and masculine and it caused her heart to flutter in her chest. “Why is that funny?”

“You’re sure not one to candy coat anything, are you, sweetheart?”

Kat returned his smile with one of her own. “No, I guess not,” she admitted. “I never have been. Why bother?”

“What about your father?”

“Well, *that* is a whole other can of worms,” she said with a shudder. “He and my mother met when they both joined the Coven, not long after; she got pregnant with me. They tried to make it work for a while I guess – but he enjoyed drinking and screwing around much more than he enjoyed family life. And after he left us, my mother decided that she didn’t want to be tied down either.”

Luke looked at her and watched the play of emotion on her face with interest. Damn, but the woman had moxie. She had had a hard life – yet she wouldn't let it break her. She stood tall, and proud and his opinion of her only skyrocketed.

“So you basically raised yourself?” He asked; a hint of admiration in his voice.

“I suppose,” she said, shrugging slightly. “My grandmother was there a lot when I was younger,” she murmured fondly. “All of the good memories that I have are because of her. In fact, the medallion that I gave to Abby was hers. Elaine gave it to me when I entered the Coven when I turned sixteen. My grandmother passed away right before my birthday and made her promise to give it to me. And surprisingly, for once my mother did what was asked.”

Again Luke's hand went to her knee and squeezed, but this time – she didn't slap it away. “What about you, Benji? What's your story?” She asked; realizing with a start that they had never talked about his family. It seemed as if his pack was his family, and she had never thought to ask him about his parents.

Luke's brows furrowed at her question, a part of him not wanting to go there – but he wanted her to know everything. “My parents were killed in a car accident when I was five,” he said, and couldn't help the grin that touched his lips when he felt her hand rest over his; her thumb gently stroking his skin – and God help him, but it felt good.

“I'm sorry, Luke,” she replied softly.

“Yeah, well. Shit happens.”

“Did you have other family?”

He snorted out a short, bitter laugh and glanced at her. “My Grandmother,” he answered, and Kat could hear the anger in his voice. “You were lucky - my memories of my Grandmother are not fond ones at all. She was a nasty, bitter old woman who didn't feel that I had the right to know what I was. Hell, she didn't feel that I had the right to even be *alive*.”

Kats mouth dropped open at his confession, her eyes widening in surprise. “You mean, you being a Were?”

Luke nodded, and turned the hand that was resting on her knee over, so that he could intertwine his fingers with hers. He watched as she glanced down at their joined hands, and her cheeks flushed – but she didn't pull it away – and Luke couldn't help the warmth that spread through his belly. This was progress, he thought with a grin.

“She detested what we were, and turned her back on her pack long before I was born. She believed it was a curse.” He went on; loving the feel of her tiny hand in his. It felt so freaking right. “She hated my parents for falling in love and having me – but after my parents died, I had nowhere else to go. So she had no choice. God forbid anyone find out that she had turned away blood.”

Kat fought back the tears threatening to spring to her eyes and pulled her hand from his – hating how she instantly felt the loss of his touch. She cleared her throat and tried to shake off the reaction she always seemed to have when he was near.

“Boy, talk about f'd up childhoods,” she laughed, although it seemed forced – even to herself. This was getting just way too heavy, she thought with a frown. And all their little talk was accomplishing was to make her like the man even more – and that just was not acceptable. She couldn't let herself care for him anymore than she already did. “Hey,” she said, trying to keep her tone light. “I'm starving. Could we maybe hit a drive-thru or something?”

Luke seemed to sense her need to lighten the mood, and gave her a grin. “I'll do better than that, red. I'll take you to an actual sit down restaurant.”

Kat couldn't help but smile, and nodded emphatically. “Oh, pancakes sound like Heaven!” she giggled happily, and Luke felt that infernal tightening in his chest once again. Damn, but this woman made him want things he never thought he would.

“It's lunchtime,” he stated with a raised brow.

“It's always time for pancakes!” She laughed happily.



True to her word – not forty minutes later, Kat sat across from Luke, diving into a plate of chocolate chip pancakes. She groaned in appreciation with each bite that she took, and Luke found himself mesmerized with watching her eat - and a small, wicked part of him couldn't wait until *he* made her moan like that. He just needed to heed Abby's words, and remember that patience *was* a virtue. Kat was almost as stubborn as he was, and he knew that it was going to take her time to realize that there was something between them. Something strong; and very, very right.

“Enjoying yourself?” He asked when she shoved another forkful into her mouth and her eyes rolled back in her head. She gave him a saucy little grin that had his heart beating triple time, and nodded - her full, sweet lips glistening from the sticky syrup.

“These are fantastic,” she mumbled between bites, and Luke burst out laughing. God, she was adorable when she let down her guard. She was funny, and as soothing as a cool summer breeze.

He watched in fascination as a drop of syrup hit her chin and her tongue darted out; trying to remove the sticky substance. When she couldn't quite reach it, she lifted her hand to wipe it away, but Luke's hand around her wrist stopped her.

“Allow me,” he murmured, raising his free hand to gently wipe it away. His eyes held hers as he brought his finger to his lips and licked it off. “Mmm – you're right; damn good,” he whispered, his voice a low, husky whisper that caused her body to instantly take notice.

Kat felt her cheeks burn from his seductive little display, and she fidgeted uncomfortably. The restaurant suddenly got extremely warm, and she nervously took a gulp of her soda – trying desperately to cool herself. Sweet Mother of God!

“Would you like some?” She stammered, and cursed herself for letting him affect her the way that he did. The man was completely edible, and she was finding it hard to even breathe – let alone concentrate.

“No.”

“Are you sure? They're really very good,” she said in a rush - trying with everything she had to get her mind off of the fact that he was watching her every move with an intense interest that had her heart pounding in her

chest and the warmth in her body spreading through her belly – and dangerously lower.

“No, thank you.” He raised his hand once again and ran his thumb along her lower lip, and she couldn’t stop herself from gasping softly. It was just a gut reaction to this man’s touch.

Kat leaned back and gave him a nervous smile. She wiped her palms on her jeans - suddenly aware of how clammy they had gotten. “Are you through?” She asked, her voice squeaking, and she inwardly cringed.

“Not even close,” Luke replied, his voice a low, throaty whisper; and Kats eyes widened. Oh, Damn.

“Can we get a move on? As it is; we won’t get there until well after dark. I don’t want to have to wake these people up in the middle of the night.” She burst out; feeling quite uncomfortable under his close scrutiny of her. Damn it to hell! It was as if his eyes were actually caressing her, and it had her trembling and fidgeting and blathering, and...hot!

“Of course.”

He motioned to the waitress who immediately came rushing over. She eyed him up and down a moment, her face breaking out in a flirtatious grin that had Kat rolling her eyes. “Could I get the check please?”

“Why sure thing, handsome,” she cooed, giving Kat a quick glance that said her presence was not going to deter her whatsoever in making a move on the gorgeous Were - and Kat felt her temper bubbling to the surface.

“Could I take the rest of these...?” Kat began, reaching for the plate that contained the remnants of her pancakes, and in the process, she hit her glass of half-full soda – sending it flying off of the table and onto the busty waitress. “Oh! Wow,” she said sweetly. “I am just *such* a klutz!” Kat glanced at the woman’s name tag and smiled. “I am so sorry about that, *Julie*.”

Julie shrieked and jumped back - wiping the front of her uniform off with her hands as she glared at Kat – who only smiled innocently and gave her a shrug. She ripped the check off of her pad and handed it to Luke – who just sat there quietly, an amused smile plastered across his face. He

glanced at the check and pulled out two twenties, handing them to the very pissed off woman.

“Keep the change,” he said with a low chuckle, eyeing Kat suspiciously from the corner of his eye. “And I’m really sorry about that,” he finished, flashing her a smile that had the woman flushing straight down to her overly exposed, and more than obviously *fake* cleavage. He stood and held out his hand towards Kat. “Come on, red. Let’s get going before you burn the place down.”

Kat ignored his offered hand and stood. “I guess I really don’t need to take those with me after all,” she murmured, gracing Julie once again with a sickly sweet smile, “And again, I am just so sorry.” With that, Kat turned and walked through the restaurant and out of the door.



Luke found Kat leaning against the SUV as he walked out into the parking lot – her face set in a tight scowl, and her arms folded across her chest – tapping her foot impatiently.

He burst out laughing at the look on her face as he approached. She was glaring at him as if she wanted to kick him squarely in the nuts. “That was interesting,” he said, stopping to stand in front of her.

“Why, whatever do you mean?” She asked sweetly, raising her brow at him - and Luke had the overwhelming urge to pull her up against him, and kiss her senseless. Instead, he just grinned at her.

“Jealous much?”

“What?” She cried out indignantly, her eyes blazing. “You sure do think highly of yourself; don’t you, Benji? It was an accident!”

Luke took a step closer and leaned in, his eyes holding hers. “Really?” He asked, and she stiffened at the feel of his warm breath against her lips.

She nodded slowly, basking in the heat coming from his body. Dear Lord! The man was a human furnace. And she could smell that wonderful, musky scent of his - and she swallowed... hard.

“If that’s what you want to believe,” he murmured - and finally did what he had been wanting to do since he had first laid eyes on her.

He grabbed her by the arms and crushed his mouth to hers, his tongue sweeping past her lips that had parted in surprise without preamble, and taking possession with a deep pounding need. Delving deep into her honeyed sweetness, his tongue teased and tempted hers - exploring the warmth of her mouth with complete and total abandon.

Luke's mouth was a strong and demanding presence, and Kat couldn't help the moan that escaped her as her body melted into his. With a will of their own - her hands lifted to his waist and gripped hard - pulling him closer as he pressed himself more firmly against her soft pliable body - and it was wondrous. It was an explosion of sensation that had her knees shaking.

His leg stationed itself between hers and he ground his rock hard erection against her hip, as his hand slid up her arm to cup her breast - causing her to moan yet again as her tongue chased and toyed with his. He just tasted so damn good! All mint, and musk...and Luke.

She arched slightly to give him better access, and he took her lead immediately - his fingers stroking her nipple into a hard peak beneath the t-shirt that she wore- sending a delightful shot of desire straight to her core and causing the trembling in her knees to increase.

From somewhere in the recesses of her passion addled brain, Kat was suddenly aware of the sound of hoots and hollers coming from somewhere off in the distance - and she felt Luke stiffen. He broke away and glanced over to the group of teens standing by their car.

"That's it, man! Nail her!" One of the boys yelled, laughing raucously as the others whistled and laughed, giving high fives and the thumbs up as they nudged and smacked each other.

Luke sighed, and leaned his forehead against hers, taking a deep ragged breath. Christ, he was about to take her right there against the car - and there was a part of him that wanted to go and beat the shit out of the teens for interrupting them.

Instead, he shot them a look that quieted them immediately and reached into his pocket - grabbing his keys and unlocking the doors. Taking a step back, he opened the door for Kat - trying desperately to get a grip on himself. His entire body was on fire, and it was entirely too hard to

concentrate. He mentally shook himself and took another deep, ragged breath.

Kat slid into the seat without saying a word – although she highly doubted that she *would* be able to put two coherent thoughts together at the moment. Her heart had jumped to her throat the moment his lips had met hers, and her body was still trembling with a deep, gnawing need. Damn, she thought with a shudder, things were just getting worse and worse.

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Chapter 3

Harper Bradford silently climbed the trellis to her bedroom window and quietly slipped inside - praying that her parents wouldn't realize that she had snuck out.

When she came back home and saw all the lights on in the house, her heart had jumped to her throat – fearing that she had been found out once again- but the silence of the house as she crept inside gave her a strange, deep sense of foreboding. There was not a single noise to be heard – not even the sound of a television or her dad's snoring - and a shiver ran up her spine. She quietly set her backpack down on the floor and listened for any signs that her parents were still up and waiting - but only an eerie stillness hung in the air and she shivered again. Something was definitely off.

She noticed an envelope with her name on it sitting on her desk and walked over to pick it up - recognizing her mother's handwriting immediately. Her brows furrowed as she turned the sealed letter over in her hands, wondering just what in the hell it could be. She was about to rip it open when a strange noise caused her to jump.

Not liking the eerie feel to the house, she stuffed the letter into her backpack and crept over to her bedroom door slowly, opening it and peeking out into the hall. Again there was only an intense silence - so she made her way down the hall as quietly as she could and towards her parent's room.

“Mom? Dad?” she whispered as she stood in front of their door – which was cracked open. She got a sudden whiff of a tinny, coppery smell, and she crinkled her nose in disgust. What the *hell*?

“Mom?” she called again, and was greeted by a strange gurgling sound. She gathered her courage and slowly pushed open her parent's door. Her eyes widened in shock when she noticed the wet, red splashes on the walls and carpeting. Blood! “Da...dad?” Harper stammered, afraid to go in – yet more afraid not to.

She glanced around, and her eyes filled with tears when she caught sight of two sets of legs beside the bed, also covered with red splashes. Oh, God

no! She silently cried as she made her way over – her entire body shaking with fear.

Her parents lay on the floor, their nightclothes covered in their blood and strange markings carved into their arms and chests. Her father's hand moved slightly and she again heard that watery, gurgling sound, and realized with horror that it was coming from him. "Daddy?" she sobbed, dropping to her knees beside him. His eyes opened slightly as his lips tried to form words – but his throat had been cut, and Harper knew in an instant that he was drowning in his own blood. "Oh, Daddy," she stammered; grabbing his hand in hers. "Hold...hold on. I'll call 911." The shaking of his head stopped her and he weakly tugged at her hand so that she would lean in closer. She watched as he struggled to make her understand what he was trying to say, and her eyes widened in complete terror a moment later when she realized that he was mouthing the word *Run*.



As Luke turned into the winding driveway of the Bradford's home, he suddenly stiffened - his eyes narrowing in concentration as he seemed to search for something. Kat glanced over at him, wondering what had made him suddenly so tense.

"Luke?" she whispered, her own body tightening at his reaction. He remained silent as he pulled up in front of the large house and shut off the engine.

He turned to Kat, his expression somber. "I want you to stay in the car," he said, his gaze locking with hers - and his expression grim.

"No way," she protested immediately, her eyes growing wide. "I need to go with you. I...I have to explain to them..."

"Katrina," Luke replied, his tone low, and deadly serious. "That was not a request. I am *telling* you to stay in the car."

"You listen to me, you arrogant..." she snapped, but Luke's hands on her shoulders stopped her cold as his fingers gripped her tightly.

"Damn it, Katrina!" He barked, his eyes blazing now. "Something is very wrong here. I want you to stay in this damn car until I tell you

otherwise. Do you understand me?"

After a long moment; she nodded, her lips trembling as fear began to grip her. If Luke sensed something was off, she was sure as hell certain that there *was* something indeed wrong. *Very* wrong. Her biggest problem at the moment was the fact that she didn't want him to go in alone. She would not be able to handle it if something happened to him. It would be all her fault.

"Luke," she whispered, wanting so much to beg him not to go, but he just shook his head and leaned in to kiss her softly on the lips - and it ripped her heart to shreds.

"Stay." He said against her mouth, and Kat fought back the tears that were threatening to flow. God, she thought with a shudder; just when in the Hell had she become such an emotional wreck? All this tearing up was *definitely* not like her.

"Be careful." She stammered - her eyes imploring him as her lips began to tremble.

Luke kissed her gently again, and gave her a grin. "Aren't I always?" He got out of the car and cautiously walked toward the front door, glancing back over his shoulder to make sure that she was doing as she was told.

As Luke entered the house, he was instantly hit with the overwhelming scent of blood, and his body immediately went on full alert - his eyes scanning the entryway and adjoining rooms quickly, yet thoroughly - searching for any sign of danger.

He made his way to the stairs and started up - listening for any sound within the silent house. He caught the scent of witch as he climbed the stairs and his anger bubbled up inside him - having the sinking feeling that he was too late.

Kat watched nervously as Luke entered the house, her mouth set in the tight line of fear and grim determination. She waited only a few minutes before quietly opening the door and sliding out - following him.

When she walked through the door, she searched the area - looking for the headstrong Were - but he was nowhere to be found.

She walked into the sitting room, glancing around at the various pictures and knickknacks that filled the space - mapping out the Bradford's

happy life - when her eyes fell upon a picture of what had to be of Harper and her parents. Kat gently lifted the frame and studied the photo of the smiling family in fascination.

Harper was not at all what Kat would have thought. Her waist length hair was dyed as black as Luke's, and her eyes were outlined with dark liner. Her lips were painted blood-red in typical Goth fashion – yet she smiled happily in the picture, and Kat realized with a start that her eyes were exactly like hers. They were the same large, hazel eyes that Kat had. She felt a tug at her heart when she noticed the similarity. This was her sister, and the resemblance between the two of them was startling.

Kat's head snapped up and she glanced at the ceiling when she heard movement, and realized that Luke must have gone upstairs.

For some unknown reason – maybe it was the need to have *something* of her sister; Kat turned the frame over and quickly opened up the back - pulling the photo from it and jamming it into the back pocket of her jeans. She turned to head upstairs when an envelope sitting on a coffee table caught her eye. It had her name written on the front in a smooth, feminine handwriting, and Kat slowly walked over and picked it up – noticing that her hand shook.

As soon as Luke stepped in front of the Bradford's bedroom door, he was assaulted with the overwhelming scent of death. He stepped through the doorway and took in the blood-splattered walls.

“Holy Christ,” he growled as he walked over to the two bodies lying on the floor. He leaned down to check for any signs of life, and felt his gut wrench when he found that there was none. Shit! He silently seethed – realizing that these assholes were definitely playing for keeps. He studied the strange markings on the couple's bodies a moment before straightening up, grabbing the comforter off of the bed and covering them.

He turned and left the room, needing desperately to find Harper's bedroom and see if she had befallen the same fate. And the thought that she had tugged at something deep inside him at the pain he knew it would cause Kat.

It didn't take him long to find her empty room, and he felt a slight rush of relief when he saw her open window. Praying that she had gotten out, he

grabbed a discarded t-shirt from the floor and headed back downstairs.

Kat was just about to rip open the letter, when she heard footsteps on the stairs. She gasped as she shoved the envelope into the pocket with the picture, and walked slowly to the entranceway. Her heart beating in her chest so hard she feared it would explode.

Luke was halfway down the stairs when he first smelled, then saw Kat standing there – watching him with wide and frightened eyes.

“Damn it!” He growled, picking up his pace and storming over to her. Without saying another word, he swept her up in his arms and carried her out of the house and to the waiting car. He opened the door and dumped her onto the seat, tossing the t-shirt he had taken onto her lap. He dashed around the front of the SUV and hopped in – his face a mask of anger.

“Luke...” Kat whispered, so softly that she wasn’t even sure that he would hear her, and reached over to lay her hand on his arm. He flinched slightly from the contact and shot her a look that said he was not about to discuss anything with her at that particular moment in time, and started the car. He slammed it into drive and tore out of the driveway – spewing gravel in his wake.

After about ten minutes of gut-wrenching silence – Luke took a deep, calming breath and glanced at her. “Why do you insist on defying me every damn second of the day?” He asked, a muscle in his jaw twitching dangerously.

“I...I...” Kat stuttered, at a complete loss for words. How could she tell him that she was terrified of him being hurt – or worse yet, *killed* because of her? That the thought of losing him was like a knife to her soul? Instead, she clamped her mouth shut and stared down at her hands.

“They’re dead.” Luke said quietly after a long pause, and Kat’s head snapped up.

“Har...Harper?” Kat whispered in disbelief, as her heart clenched in fear.

“I don’t think so,” Luke answered, and reached over to grasp her hand in his, giving it a reassuring squeeze. “Her bedroom window was open,” he

said softly. He brought the hand that he held to his lips and gently kissed her palm. “I believe that she got out, red.”

“What happened?” Kat asked, not sure that she even wanted to know. This all just brought the fact that these people were playing a permanent and serious game home - and she needed to get Luke out of the line of fire before it was too late.

“You don’t want to know. Just trust me when I say; it wasn’t pretty.”

“What do we do now?” she asked, then suddenly remembered the letter. She pulled her hand from his grasp and twisted in the seat, pulling the envelope from her pocket. She sat there quietly and stared at it – turning it over and over in her trembling hands.

“What is that?” Luke asked, glancing down in curiosity.

“It was sitting on a table,” she explained softly, part of her afraid of what it might hold. “It was addressed to me.”

“Go ahead and open it,” he urged, and Kat hit the overhead light and tore it open – her damn hands still shaking.

Katrina,

It seems so strange for me to be writing this letter after so many years, but I fear that Jack and I won’t be here when you come to pick up Harper. I am frightened of what will happen to her without your help. Please know that we loved your sister with all of our hearts and gave her the best life that we could. We met your mother so many years ago, and were more than happy to bring Harper into our family, but I must warn you. Things are not what they seem to be. Be careful, and please protect your sister. She is so very special and although she did not know that Jack and I were not her real parents, she does know what she is. I have tried very hard to teach her to use her powers for the light, but there are those that wish to urge her to a very dark and dangerous world, and she must be protected. You must both be protected. I have instructed Harper that if anything were to happen to us that she is to try and find your mother. Thomas Kern, who I believe you know, should be able to help you with this. I have not heard from him in almost a year, but if you go to

the club Masquerade in town, the bartender there can help. I only urge you to be careful of what you tell these people. Katrina, I am not certain who can be trusted.

Thank you for protecting our baby, and I beg you to keep your heart pure and watch those around you. This is so much bigger than I could have ever imagined. I cannot implore you enough to keep yourself and your sister safe.

Bless you, Katrina

Constance

Kat folded the letter, and looked at Luke - her overwhelming sense of dread growing as she looked into his perfect amber eyes. This man was in serious danger because of her, and the guilt of that was eating away at her – making her feel sick.

“What now?” she asked, her voice a hoarse, shaky whisper.

“We go get your sister,” he replied, a small smile touching his lips. “Haven’t you been listening?”

Kat’s mouth turned down in a frown. She knew that he was trying to make her feel better, but the reality of it was that she needed to get away from him at the first possible opportunity – and that reality just sucked out loud.



Harper ran blindly through the woods – tripping every so often on a stray root, and cursing loudly. Her vision was blurred with her tears and she could feel the branches slapping at her face – but she didn’t care. In fact, she thought with a sob – she relished the pain. It masked the harsh stabbing hurt in her chest.

She skidded to a stop as the lights from the city broke through the darkness of the trees.

Harper slowly made her way to the all-night diner on the corner of Third and Maple – hesitating a moment outside of the door – wondering if she should go in. She glanced down at her watch and realized with a start

that it was close to midnight. Deciding that she needed to gather her wits, she wiped her face with the backs of her hands and pulled open the door.

Luckily, the diner was near empty as Harper slowly made her way inside and slid into a back booth. The older waitress came over, eyeing her up and down a moment before setting a menu in front of her.

“Would you like something to drink?” she asked, her mouth set in a tight line that Harper was quite use to because of her choice of dress. It didn’t matter that she was a good person – her choice of clothing always caused the stares and whispers.

“Coffee, please.” Harper croaked in reply, her lips trembling. No! She silently screamed, she couldn’t cry anymore! She had to be strong and try to figure this entire fiasco out.

The waitress nodded and turned away, only to return a moment later with a steaming cup of coffee. She set the mug down in front of Harper and studied her a moment, finally giving her a small smile. “There you go, honey. Did you want to order something to eat?”

Harper’s eyes glistened slightly as she shook her head. “No, just the coffee thanks.”

The woman gave her a sympathetic look, and Harper realized that she probably thought she was a runaway, and her eyes welled with tears once again. No, she thought sadly. She wasn’t a runaway – she was an orphan.

She waited until the woman walked away, before turning and opening her backpack - taking the letter her mother had left her out and holding it in her trembling hands. She chewed at her bottom lip as she tried to garner the strength to open it. After several, long, agonizing moments – she took a deep, steadying breath and tore the envelope open.

Harper,

My darling, baby girl. First and foremost, I need you to know that your father and I love you with all of our hearts. You have been such a blessing to us, and this is the hardest letter that I have ever had to write. Honey, things are happening around us that will forever change our lives. This is so hard for me, but you need to know that we are not your biological parents. You were

sent to us when you were just a baby and we love you as much as if you were born to us. Please know that. I fear that your father and I will not make it through this, so I need you to pay close attention to what I am about to tell you. You need to find Elaine Winslow. She is your biological mother, and will be able to give you the answers you need. I have not spoken to Elaine since the day she brought you to us, but I have tried to keep abreast of the happenings in the Coven. You need to find Thomas Kerns. He makes it a point of keeping up with the people you need to seek out. Go to Masquerade in town and speak to the bartender there. She will hopefully be able to help you. Please, my darling girl; be careful and stay as pure and loving as you are. Always remember that your father and I love you. We have always loved you. You are a beautiful and special girl that I know will stay true and faithful to what we have taught you. I have given you enough money to help you on your way. Be safe and please watch who you trust. We love you Harper, so very much, and will always be with you.

All of our love, now and always,

Mom & Dad

Harper read the note over once again, trying desperately to see through her tears – feeling as if she had been punched in the gut. She shook her head slowly, a part of her refusing to accept what she had just read. Oh, God! This was a total nightmare. Her world and everything that she had ever known had just been ripped out from under her feet and she felt an overpowering wave of nausea hit her.

“Is everything okay, honey?” The waitress asked, her face tight with concern, and Harper jumped at the intrusion – nodding slowly. “Are you sure I can’t bring you something to eat?” She asked, laying her hand on top of Harper’s. “It’s on the house.”

“No...no, thank you. I’m fine.” The woman nodded sadly, and walked away - but not before giving Harper a glance laced with pity over her shoulder.

Harper pulled the cash from the envelope and quickly shoved it into the pocket of her jeans. She needed to get out of here – she needed air. Everything suddenly felt as if it was closing in around her. She threw a few dollars onto the table and rushed out of the restaurant – heading towards the park near the center of town where she and her friends usually hung out. She just couldn't deal with this right now. She just wanted to be alone and try and figure out what to do next. Did she really want to find her birth mother? The woman had dumped her seventeen years ago – why the Hell would she want to see her now?

Harper wiped the tears from her eyes and started running toward the park. Needing nothing more at that moment than to curl up under a tree and cry her eyes out. She would deal with Masquerade and finding Elaine Winslow tomorrow. *Maybe.*



Luke parked in the lot across from the club and turned towards Kat – causing her to instantly go on the defensive. Her eyes narrowed as she watched him a moment. She knew what was coming and there was just no frigging way!

“Oh, no you don't!” She barked, before he even had the chance to utter a word. “I *am* going in.” She stated stubbornly, her face set in a tight scowl, and watched as his entire body grew rigid.

Oh, *Hell* no! She silently seethed. She was done with Mr. Macho telling her what to do. He shouldn't even be here in the first place, and she'd be *damned* if she was going to let him dictate to her what she did, and when she did it!

“Katrina,” he said, his voice low – but she only wildly shook her head and continued to glare at him.

“Don't even waste your breath, Benji. Your brain needs all the oxygen that it can get.” With that, she opened the door and slid out, giving him a smirk of defiance as she did. She pulled her hair from its ponytail and shook it out, letting the long silken tresses cascade down her back like liquid fire and Luke's breath caught in his throat at the sight.

When Luke made no move to exit the car, Kat shrugged her shoulders and turned toward the bar. It was only a moment later that she heard his door open – then slam shut with a resounding boom - and she knew that he was pissed. Oh, well – she thought with a smile. Screw him! Maybe *now* he'd take that gorgeous ass of his back home where it belonged and she wouldn't have to deal with him anymore.

A second later, his hand gripped her arm, pulling her to a stop. She yanked it free from his grip and scowled at him. He was not about to man-handle her.

“You *really* don't want to fight me on this,” she said, with much more bravado than she actually felt. Jesus, as soon as the man touched her, her entire body began to hum and tingle – and it was a distraction that she didn't need at the moment in the least!

“I think it would be best...” he began, but her finger poking into his chest stopped him.

“I don't give a rat's ass *what* you think is best,” she bit out, emphasizing each word with a poke to his solid, rock hard body. “You are *not* my bodyguard - guard dog...or *mother!* I didn't want you to come in the first place – and I'll be *damned* if I'm going to let you make me sit on the sidelines like some little, helpless piece of fluff!” With that she turned and stormed off toward the bar, the natural sway of her hips causing Luke's body to come on full alert – in more ways than one. He cursed under his breath and stomped off after her – cursing himself; as well as the little spitfire the entire way.

When they entered the club; the blaring strains of rock music assaulted them in ear-shattering waves, and Kat noticed Luke wince. She gave him a grin and leaned in to yell in his ear. “If it's too much for you, Tonto,” she called with a laugh. “You can go and wait in the car! I'll even make sure to crack the windows for you.”

She turned and pushed her way through the crowd towards the bar – only to groan when she noticed three bartenders. Damn! How in the hell was she supposed to know which one to talk to?

Well - two guys and a cute little brunette, she thought with a shrug – this she could handle. She found an empty stool at the end of the bar and

squeezed her way in, giving the burly bartender one of her best smiles. He returned the gesture and leaned on the bar – blatantly eyeing her up and down.

“Hey there, beautiful,” he said, his mouth turning up in a smile that she couldn’t help but notice didn’t make her heart skip a beat like a certain wolf’s did – and she cursed under her breath. “I haven’t had the pleasure of seeing you in here before. What can I *tempt* you with?” He gave her a wink, and Kat inwardly groaned. Oh, Christ – the guy was pathetic. She’d hung *clothes* on better lines than that!

“Tequila,” she replied, trying desperately to keep the smile on her face – but this guy was just too pathetic for his own good, and she was finding herself hard-pressed to keep up the act.

“And a scotch.”

She stiffened at the sound of Luke’s voice in her ear, and suddenly felt the heat of his body against her back.

The bartender glanced at Luke, the smile fading from his lips in an instant, and gave him a nod. “Sure thing.” He turned and busied himself with getting their drinks as Kat elbowed Luke in the stomach, her lips now set in a tight line and her eyes blazing.

“Just what in the hell is wrong with you?” she ground out between clenched teeth.

“Not a damned thing as far as I can tell,” he replied, his breath blowing softly against her cheek, and Kat felt that now familiar shiver run up her spine – and silently damned the mangy cur to the fiery pits of hell.

“Arrogant ass,” she muttered under her breath.

“Not arrogant,” Luke corrected her with a chuckle, and rested his arm on the back of the stool on which she sat, and she instantly stiffened at the contact. “Confident.”

Kat swiveled in the chair slightly so that she was facing him, and her lips turned up into an angelic smile. “Well, I’m confident that *you* are an arrogant ass,” she cooed, then turned back to the bar as the bartender set their drinks down in front of them.

Luke threw a fifty down on the bar with a nod and reached for his glass, downing it in one gulp. Kat glared at him and threw back her Tequila the same way – not about to let this jackass think she couldn't handle herself.

“I'll take another,” she said, smiling as sweetly as possible at the bartender. “Um, I'm sorry handsome, but I didn't catch your name.” Kat swore she felt Luke tense slightly, but chose to ignore it. Screw him! She thought flippantly – if he thought that he was going to take charge of everything she did – he had another thing coming. He wasn't her damn keeper!

“Jim,” he replied, returning her smile with a quick glance at Luke. “What's yours?”

“Katrina,” she purred, and was almost positive that she heard Luke growl. She bit her bottom lip to keep herself from laughing as she threw back her drink - setting her glass down and winking at Jim. “Keep them coming, please.” He nodded and grabbed the bottle.

“Katrina,” Luke whispered; his mouth at the line of her jaw and *again* she shivered. Damn him to hell! “I don't think...”

Kat shrugged him off and glanced at him again, her eyes spitting fire. “Just step the hell off, Benji. I know what I'm doing.”

“That would be a first,” Luke grumbled, and Kat shot him a look that would have brought most men to their knees. But Luke wasn't most men. He just gave her a grin and placed a soft kiss against her neck – his mouth so damn warm.

“Stop that!” She croaked out, and felt him chuckle against her skin – sending a current of electricity straight to her core. “Why don't you go lie in the corner and gnaw on a bone like a good boy?” She ground out.

“I'd much rather gnaw on you,” he whispered in her ear as he took her lobe between his teeth and tugged.

Kat's heart slammed in her chest, and she swallowed – hard. Damn, this man could do things to her body that no other man ever had before. She grabbed her drink and threw it back, hitting Luke's shoulder with the back of her head in the process, and she swore it felt like she hit a brick wall. Sweet mother of *God* - but the man was a solid tower of muscle.

“Easy there, sweetheart,” he laughed, and motioned to Jim for another Scotch. When Kat started to push her glass towards the man and smile sweetly, Luke gently took her wrist and stilled her.

“Slow it down, red. I don’t want to have to carry you out of here.”

“I’m a big girl, Blackwater. I work in a bar for God’s sake!” she replied, as she shook off his hand. “I am perfectly capable of walking out of here under my own...my own... volition.”

As she spoke, Luke noticed that she was starting to slur her words slightly, and his lips turned up in a smile. She might have worked in a bar – but it was more than obvious she didn’t usually *drink* in them. His woman was a light weight – he thought with a chuckle; and at the rate she was going, she’d be dancing and shimmying up on the bar in no time – and as much as the thought of watching her dance around appealed to him – that was something that he would much rather be a private performance. He didn’t relish the thought of any of these yokels’ taking in her considerable assets. In fact, the thought of *any* man other than himself seeing it made him see red. His wolf growled with possessiveness and Luke fought to keep it a bay.

“Come on, Glinda. Dance with me.” He whispered in her ear.

The arm that was around the back of her chair was suddenly around her waist and gently pulling her from her seat in a slow, fluid motion before she could even think of voicing her objections. Luke pulled her against his side and guided her to the dance floor as the strains of an old 80’s ballad filled the bar.

Oh, my ever loving *Lord* – she thought as Luke pulled her into his arms and pressed her against his body – guiding her arms up and around his neck. His hands moved in a smooth, fluid motion down to her waist, then around to slide to the curve of her backside – pulling her even closer against his muscular frame - and she could feel his wonderful heat blanketing her.

My God, she groaned as her breasts pushed up against his steely chest, and her nipples instantly pebbled – she had died and gone to Heaven!

As soon as Luke pulled Kat into his arms - he felt his entire body respond to the feel of her pressed up so intimately against him - so warm and soft – and *his*.

He dipped his head and nuzzled her neck - basking in the sweet scent of her. She smelled of perfect spring lilacs, and a warm summer breeze – and it was beyond intoxicating. He found himself just wanting to drown himself in her.

He felt Kat shiver slightly, and pulled her a little closer as their bodies swayed together in perfect tempo - and Luke found himself fantasizing that they were alone and naked on a bed, moving together as they were now.

Christ, she was amazing; and he was finding it harder and harder to concentrate. Everything about this woman drew him in - her laugh, her scent – her body. All he wanted to do at that moment was to throw her over his shoulder and take her away from here – to feel her wonderful flesh beneath his fingers.

Again his wolf howled; but this time in desire and frustration - and he had to fight to keep from letting it win. He needed to bide his time with her. She was like a skittish colt that would turn and bolt if he pressed her too hard. And he was not about to let that happen.

The song ended and Kat pulled away from him - her eyes sparkling brightly and her cheeks flushed pink. She gave him a nervous smile, before she turned and walked back to her seat without uttering a word - and Luke couldn't help but notice that she walked a bit unsteadily, and grinned – wondering if it was from the Tequila or their dance. Lord knew it had affected *him*.

By the time Luke joined her; she was setting her glass back down on the bar and laughing at something *Jim* had just said. Luke felt an overwhelming possessiveness wash over him as the burly bartender poured her another drink and gave her a wink, brushing his hand against hers as he said something to her that Luke thankfully couldn't hear over the din of music blasting through the club – knowing without a doubt that it would most likely just send him over the edge.

Damn it! Luke was not the sort of man to bide his time and play nice. What he wanted he took – but Kat brought out a whole other side of him that he had never shown before, and it was throwing everything off kilter.

He was fighting an inner battle between what he knew he needed to do and what his entire body, soul and mind desperately *wanted* to do. And at

that particular moment in time it was to grab the bartender by the throat and knock him on his ass.

“So,” Kat was saying as he walked up behind her. “I feel like I’ve seen you before.” She threw back her Tequila and grinned at him, nodding when he held the bottle up to her in question. Or were there two bottles? She questioned herself blearily - blinking her eyes as she tried to clear them.

“I don’t think so, sweetheart,” Jim replied. “I’d sure as *Hell* remember you.”

“Do you know a Tommy Kerns?” she asked, trying hard to focus. “He’s a friend of mine from way, way back - and I swear I remember him talking about this place. Although, I’ve kind of lost touch with him as of late and was trying to hook up with him again.”

“Tom Kerns,” Jim mused, his brows furrowing in concentration. “The name sounds familiar. Hey, Crystal,” he called to the little brunette, and she immediately came hopping over - her mouth set in a wide grin.

“Yeah?” She asked, and her eyes widened when she saw Luke standing behind Kat like a looming force of nature.

“Aren’t you friends with a Tom Kerns?” he asked her.

The brunette nodded emphatically – her eyes never leaving Luke’s impressive frame, and she licked her lips. “Yeah, but he moved away a while ago, and opened up a bookstore in...” she trailed off, trying to remember the name. “In, Chatawa or...Chesnee. That’s it! Chesnee. It’s about an hour from here.”

Kat nodded, not liking the way the little bitch was eyeing Luke up and down at all. She knew the moment that he had stepped up behind her, because her entire body instantly tingled with awareness - so the woman’s attention *had* to be focused on him. And really, Kat thought with a snort - who could blame her? The man was utterly, earth-shatteringly delicious! But that didn’t mean that she had to like it!

“Do you happen to know the name of the shop?” Kat asked, her eyes narrowing slightly as she fought the overpowering urge to snap her fingers in front of the little twits face just to get her attention. It was more than

obvious that she liked what she saw standing behind Kat – and that just pissed her off.

She motioned to Jim to pour her another drink and felt Luke’s hand on her back. Screw you, she silently fumed. If she wanted another shot, she was sure as Hell going to have one – although if truth be told, she was already seeing double and knew that it wasn’t the best of idea’s – but dancing with Luke had thrown everything into a distracting tizzy, and a little liquid memory eraser was just what she needed at the moment.

“I think Kern’s Korner - or something equally as tacky.” The woman said, her gaze *still* on the damn wolf standing so silently behind her. “I’m Crystal, by the way” she murmured, shooting Luke a saucy little grin and batting her eyelashes - and Kat stiffened – fighting the overpowering urge to scratch the girl’s eyes out with everything that she had.

“Luke,” she heard him reply, the deep baritone of his voice washing over her body and instantly warming it.

Good God! She was like a damn cat in heat! The next thing she’d probably do was to start rubbing up and down on his leg. She giggled at the thought – then snorted loudly, and her eyes widened. Oops! She thought with a cringe. She really *had* had enough! Damn! That hit her like a ton of bricks.

“I think my *sister* here has officially been cut off, Jim,” she heard him say, and her eyes widened in horror. *Sister? What. The. Hell?*

Kat watched as the bartender’s expression changed to reflect the same surprise that she was feeling, and he looked at them with a mixture of disgust and something else that Kat couldn’t quite identify – disappointment maybe?

Kat knew what he must be thinking after the way Luke had nuzzled her neck - and held her so damn intimately, as they had danced. Oh, Holy shit! Just what was the damn cur up to *now*?

“Um, yeah...sure thing,” Jim said, clearing his throat – suddenly seeming very uncomfortable.

And the light suddenly went off over Kat’s tipsy head. The damned fool *knew* it would scare the man away from her! Son of a bitch! That really

took some nerve. His damn Alpha ways were just not going to fly with her!

She tried to turn in her seat to shoot him a glance, but the motion caused her already blurry vision to trigger her equilibrium to malfunction, and she nearly slipped to the floor. Oh, jump up my ass – she thought with a scowl.

Luke’s arms were instantly around her and pulling her up against him. He chuckled softly as he held her steady. She was aware of the little brunette – what was her name? Kat silently wondered, glancing at the girl... Chablis? Charmaine? Oh, whatever; who really cared - and she giggled softly. Kat knew that she was staring at them, but so what? Let her!

“Whoops!” Kat laughed, turning her head and looking up into Luke’s face. God, she thought with a groan, the man was just complete sex on a stick. He was the most masculine man that she had *ever* known, and just being near him was like a kick to her stomach.

“Come on,” Luke laughed, turning and practically carrying her toward the door. She heard him tell Jim to keep the change and swore she heard Chablis or whatever, huff out a *‘what a waste’* and she giggled again.

Sucks to be you, sweetheart, she thought with a grin and had the overpowering urge to blow a raspberry at her - but quickly stopped herself. Instead she threw the girl a dirty look - then burst into a fit of laughter when the bottle she had been holding popped in her hands and exploded – drenching the girl in gin. Let’s just see how much you like smelling like a Christmas tree – she giggled.

Luke pulled her along as he made a beeline for the door - his mouth set in a grin. The moment they walked out of the door to the club; Luke swept Kat up into his arms and purposefully walked toward the car.

She instinctively wrapped her arms around him, and nestled her spinning head against his neck - unconsciously taking a long, deep breath of his wonderful scent. She knew that she shouldn’t – but with her head swirling as it was – she just didn’t care. Her inhibitions had flown straight out of the damn window. He just smelled so darn good, and she just wanted to enjoy it - if only for a moment.

Before she could stop herself – her lack of self-control reared its ugly, drunken head. “You smell yummy,” she slurred against his neck, and

proceeded to inhale deeply once again – her eyes sliding closed as his wonderful essence filled her.

She heard Luke’s deep, masculine laugh and furrowed her brows. Was he *laughing* at her? Arrogant ass!

“Fine,” She bristled indignantly. “I was just trying to be nice, anyway. I hate to tell you this Benji, but you kind of smell like wet dog,” She scoffed - then proceeded to squirm in his arms, trying to get out of his embrace. “Put me down – you jackass. I am more than able to walk on my own two feet!”

“Damn it, woman,” Luke bit out -his jaw clenching with frustration. “Would you stop wriggling?”

Kat stilled in his arms, and gave him a smug little smile. “What’s the matter, big boy? Am I too much for you? Am I too heavy for the big, powerful, muscle bound *wolf-boy*?” She asked – and then burst into a fit of giggles.

The sound of her laughter was like a shot of pure adrenaline straight to his groin – although, if he were to be honest, just the feel of her in his arms, and her squirming against him was doing a fine job of that on its own. Her musical, lilting laughter was just an added bonus, and he was finding it harder and harder to walk comfortably. Oh, for Christ’s sake, he cursed under his breath – this woman was going to be the end of him.

He opened the car door and set her inside, leaning over to fasten her seatbelt. As he did - his shoulder brushed against her breast, and Luke tensed slightly when he heard her sigh at the contact. Damn it!

That small sound reverberated through his entire body like a damn bolt of lightning. It was low and husky and utterly sensuous - and it would be so easy to turn, just a little, and lean in...

Luke cleared his throat and snapped the seatbelt into place, cursing himself under his breath for allowing his thoughts to wander. He was stronger than this, damn it! He silently seethed, clenching his jaw. And no matter how this woman broke down his defenses - he swore to himself that he would not mess this up.

When he backed out of the door, he saw that Kat had fallen asleep, a tiny smile on her beautiful, full lips - and again he was struck by her

perfection. She was breathtaking as she sat there, her features soft and relaxed, and he swallowed... hard, shaking his head slightly – wanting nothing more at that moment than to lean in the few inches that separated them - and take them. Ah, *Shit!*

He knew the reason for her excessive drinking was a mixture of her trying to prove to him that she could handle herself - but also that the death of the Bradford's had affected her more than she was willing to admit.

For whatever reason, she was trying with everything that she had to prove to him that she could do this alone. And no matter how much he fought her on it, she was determined to try and push him away – but he was not about to allow that to happen. Whether she wanted to admit it or not, there was something between them. And as irrational as it might be, he *knew* that she was his to protect – to cherish.

He could see the fear in her eyes, and wanted so much to take it away from her – but didn't know how, and that realization just didn't sit right with him. He was a leader for God's sake. Always the one to take control, but now... he shook his head again, wondering when his world had turned upside down - and it was only a moment later that he admitted to himself that it was the moment he had walked into that damn bar and saw this woman standing there – so bravely standing up defiantly to Desmond – trying with everything that she had to protect her friend. He was instantly taken by her strength and her bravery – not to mention her entire essence, and he realized with a slight grin, that at that moment in time – he was lost.

He raised his hand and gently cupped her cheek, his eyes studying her perfect features as she slept. She looked so peaceful; so damn beautiful and he gave himself a mental shake; dropping his hand and stepping back - silently closing the door. She needed rest, and he needed to relax. This damn little witch had him strung tighter than a piano wire about to snap.

Luke got into the SUV and headed toward the small motel that he had spotted earlier in the evening as they had made their way to the club. Maybe a good night's sleep was what they both needed.



Kat was suddenly aware of being lifted in strong, firm arms, and cautiously opened her eyes - her mouth as dry as cotton. Luke had her cradled against his chest as he walked through the door of the motel room - and Kat tensed when he strolled across the room and laid her down on the king sized bed. A deep feeling of dread hit her full on when she realized that it was the *only* bed in the room. Oh, *crap!*

“Luke,” she protested, sitting up and trying to get off of the bed. She felt the room begin to spin and swallowed, trying desperately to regain her senses.

He sat down beside her and pushed her back against the pillows with a gentle touch to her shoulder. “What are you doing?” she squeaked.

“Easy, red,” he murmured. “You need to get some sleep. It’s been a rough day and we’re both tired.” He eyed her cryptically a moment. “Not to mention that *one* of us is more than a little drunk,” he finished with a grin, and quirk of his brow that brought a scowl to Kat’s face. She suddenly felt like an errant child being reprimanded for raiding the cookie jar. And it was not a feeling that she liked in the least.

“I am *not* drunk!” She protested harshly - then groaned when she got a head-rush from raising her voice. She threw her arm across her eyes and moaned. Oh, she was going to pay dearly for this tomorrow, she thought with a grimace. Just what in the Hell had she been trying to prove, anyway? That she was tough? That she could out drink him? Oh, man- she was a complete idiot!

She heard Luke chuckle and unconsciously ground her teeth together. There he goes again, she thought angrily - he’s laughing at me. She took her arm away from her eyes and leaned up on her elbows - giving him her best “if looks could kill” glare.

“I am just so freaking glad that you find my discomfort so damn funny! I just *live* to amuse you, asshole.” She bit out - her eyes blazing, and wanting nothing more at that moment than to throttle the damned fool.

Luke leaned forward and braced his hands on either side of her shoulders, bringing his mouth within a hairsbreadth of hers. “I actually find you completely adorable,” he corrected huskily, his eyes traveling over her face, only to stop and rest on her full lips.

Kat felt her stomach flutter and her heart bounce around in her chest at his nearness – and she bit back the sound of encouragement that wanted to spring from her mouth in the worst way. His warm breath caressed her lips as his spicy scent filled the air. Oh, Hells Bells. The man was just too sexy for his own good - or hers! His eyes lifted from her mouth and he met her gaze - and she saw his expression fill with a heat that turned her bones to jelly.

She waited with anticipation, and just a hint of trepidation as his body moved ever so slowly closer to hers, and a Nano-second later, she felt a current of electricity hit her when his chest brushed against her breasts – causing her nipples to instantly tighten and pucker almost to the point of pain. Oh, dear, *dear* God.

Luke feathered Kat's mouth with his, the contact as soft as a butterfly's wing. He felt her lips part slightly when they made contact, and a soft sigh escaped her as her eyes fluttered closed. His tongue swept out and traced her lips, slowly and thoroughly – as if he were branding each curve to memory.

It took all the willpower that Luke possessed not to just throw her back against the mattress, and take her – to show her his intentions, and it was the hardest thing he had ever done in his life to keep from doing just that.

Instead he turned his head slightly and gently kissed his way down to her neck, trailing his tongue along the path his mouth was taking, and he felt her shiver. He nibbled his way down her collarbone to the soft swell of her breast and Kat arched slightly – silently urging him on, and Luke growled - low and deep in his chest.

His lips teased and toyed with her taut nipple through the t-shirt that she wore, and he realized with a start, that his arms were shaking from the overpowering need to just rip the material from her, and taste her silken flesh. God, how he wanted to taste it!

He could smell her arousal - and in the next instant, when she made a soft mewling sound deep in her throat - Luke came to his senses.

No! He wouldn't take her this way! When he made love to her, he didn't want it to be with her in a drunken haze. He wanted her to know, and to

remember each caress – each touch – and he'd be *damned* if he would take her any other way – no matter how much his body protested.

With a heavy sigh, he leaned back, and away from her – his eyes sweeping up to her hers and holding them. With a smile of regret, he pushed her back against the pillows and kissed her forehead, his lips lingering much longer than he had intended.

“Get some rest, red,” he murmured, and saw the look of confusion cross her face - only to be replaced a moment later with hurt, and what looked to be anger. She closed her eyes and turned her face away from him.

Luke stood, and silently walked into the small bathroom – hoping a nice long, *cold* shower would ease his heated flesh.

Kat lay there in the darkness, listening to the sound of the shower running, and fought back the emotions threatening to burst forward. Just what in the hell had just happened? She silently questioned, biting the inside of her cheek in an attempt to stave off the rush of tears that so wanted to break free.

She knew that it would have been a huge mistake for things to have gone any further between them – but still, the deep aching sense of loss that she felt when Luke had rejected her - hurt like Hell. It tore at something deep inside her with the force of a freaking freight train.

Kat flipped over onto her stomach and buried her face in the pillow with a frustrated groan. God, this just sucked!

The feel of his mouth on hers – on her breast, had been a little slice of Heaven, and caused her to crave so much more. Damn that man! He made her want things she damned well should not be wanting.

She closed her eyes and tried desperately to let sleep take her. She just wanted to fall into that dark abyss and forget about the man in the next room who was taking a piece of her heart with him each moment that they spent together. Trying to ignore the pounding in her head as well as her chest, she finally fell into a fitful sleep.

Luke braced his hands against the wall of the shower and took long, deep breaths as the ice cold water rained down on his overheated body. Christ, he was on fire!

He shook his head and chuckled softly at his behavior. It seemed as if he lost all control where the feisty little witch was concerned – no matter what he tried to tell himself to the contrary.

She had him running around in circles with his tail between his legs, and it was a feeling that he was not in the least comfortable with. He choked out a laugh and turned off the water – stepping from the shower and grabbing a towel. He briskly dried himself and threw on a clean pair of boxers.

When he walked through the doorway and into the room, his eyes instantly went to the bed where the witch in question was curled up on her stomach - her breathing soft and even in slumber, and he said a quiet prayer of thanks that she had finally fallen to sleep.

He wasn't sure that he would be able to stop himself this time if he had to look into those beautiful eyes of hers again. He was a strong man – but even he had his limits. And he was not use to being denied what he wanted. And damn if he didn't want her – with every fiber of his being.

He took a long ragged breath, and reminded himself that he needed to bide his time, and when she realized that he wasn't going anywhere, and that she could trust him – then he could show her just how much she meant to him.

Christ, he thought with a disgusted grunt – when had he become such a *wuss*? His entire body screamed out in frustration, urging him to take what he wanted, but he fought for control. In time.

He silently walked over to the bed, and slid in beside her – feeling himself instantly harden at the feel of her warm, soft curves next to him, and her heady scent as it wrapped around him like an erotic embrace. Holy mother of God, he inwardly groaned, this was pure, unadulterated torture. And he felt that he would surely combust when a moment later, she murmured something unintelligible in her sleep, flipped over, and snuggled up against his side - throwing a delicate arm across his chest.

Luke took a deep, steady breath and wrapped his arm around her – pulling her close, and realized with that damnable tightening in his chest that nearly took the breath from his body, that this felt right. That *this* was where she belonged - held safe and secure within the circle of his arms.

Now, if he could only get the mule-headed witch to realize it – he'd be good.



The first thing that Kat was conscious of as she slowly came awake was the steady pounding in her head - and she winced in pain. The next was the feel of being held against a steely, muscular frame that she knew immediately.

She opened her eyes slowly; basking in the feel of Luke's strong arms wrapped securely around her, and allowed herself a moment to just *feel* how wonderful it was to be there. Dear Lord - he was smooth and hard - and oh, so tempting. She could hear the steady thrum of his heart against her ear and smiled at the wonderful tempo it made. It was steady and sound – strong and soothing. Oh, if she could only have this forever, she thought sadly and mentally shook herself. No, that just wasn't in the cards.

Resigning herself that the thought was just a stupid dream, she slowly pulled herself from his arms and slid from the bed. Hoping a shower would ease the pain she was feeling – in more ways than one.

She quickly grabbed her backpack, which Luke had so graciously left by the dresser and slipped into the bathroom. She groaned when she looked at herself in the mirror. Her hair was a tangled mess and her eyes were blood red. She dug into her pack and pulled out a bottle of aspirin.

Quickly opening the bottle, she tossed a couple of pills into her mouth and poured herself a glass of water from the tap -downing three more glasses quickly after.

She stripped and turned on the shower full blast, waiting until the water had turned near scalding before stepping in and letting it wash the tension from her aching body.

Luke lay in bed; waking the instant that Kat had slipped from his arms, and stared up at the ceiling - trying with everything he had not to picture her standing naked in the shower – her soapy body slick, and smooth – and glistening.

“Shit!” He cursed as he threw back the covers and sprang from the bed. He paced the room like a caged animal, trying to calm his overcharged body.

He tried to distract himself by planning out what their next move should be. They needed to find her sister, and hopefully she hadn’t high-tailed it out of town yet. Deciding that their best move would be to go back to the Bradford’s house so that he could check for her scent, he dressed quickly and plopped down in the chair by the window – waiting for the comely witch.

When Kat walked out of the bathroom, she found Luke sitting by the window, staring out. His mouth set in a tight line. She felt her cheeks heat at the sight of him sitting there, looming like a dark storm cloud, and was again instantly struck by how primal the man was. He was dark and dangerous and utterly gorgeous. She cleared her throat and faced him.

“What do we do now?” she asked, hating how aware of him she was. Even with her head pounding - she felt an overwhelming desire wash over her with just his presence. And it was definitely not what she wanted. She needed to find her sister and get away from Luke as quickly as possible.

Luke turned to her and smiled, his eyes raking over her shapely figure in appreciation. She looked utterly tempting standing there in her tight jeans and tank top, and Luke felt his body respond immediately.

“I want to head back over to the Bradford’s and see if I can pick up your sisters scent,” he said, standing and walking over to her. He stopped not a foot away from her and gave her a smile, his hand reaching up and stroking her cheek. “You look pale,” he murmured. “Guess drinking like a fish doesn’t really agree with you, red.”

Kat slapped his hand away and glared, her chest heaving with indignation. “I am just fine, Tonto,” she snapped – even though the pounding in her head begged to differ. She turned and grabbed her backpack, walking over to the door. “Well?” she questioned, her brow raised. “Let’s get a move on.” With that she stomped out of the door, her eyes slamming shut as the glare of the morning sun hit her full force, and she inwardly groaned. Ugh, that *really* hurt!



When Luke pulled into the Bradford's drive, he drove around to the back of the house before throwing the car into park, and turning to glance at Kat's questioning look.

"We're not going in the house," he informed her, his gaze stoic.

The last thing he wanted was for Kat to have to go back into that house. He was fairly certain that no one had discovered the couple's bodies yet, and he didn't need Kat seeing that. "I want to see if I can pick up Harper's scent back here. Her bedroom window is up there," he said, pointing, and Kat nodded – knowing full well why he didn't want to go in. And for a change, she had no desire to go against him.

With the way that her head was pounding and her stomach churning from her escapades at the club last night - she didn't think she could take going in there. She watched silently as he got out of the car and walked over to the back of the house, below the open bedroom window. She was fascinated by the intense way he studied the area around him, his rock solid body alert - and so damn sexy. He moved with a lithe grace that was absolutely fascinating. It was smooth and sexy and...

Kat groaned inwardly at the path her wayward thoughts were taking her, and looked around – trying to keep her eyes off of the distracting wolf. She thought she saw a flicker of movement by the side of the house and leaned forward slightly to try and get a better look - but there was nothing.

She watched as Luke knelt down to pick up some dirt - bringing it to his nose and sniffing. He stood and walked over to Kat.

"She ran into the woods," he informed her softly, leaning against the SUV. "We aren't very far from town, so I'm hoping she went to a friend. I'm going to follow her scent a bit," he turned and leaned in, bringing his full, perfect mouth close to hers. "Care to take a little stroll through the woods with the *Big Bad Wolf*, red?"

Kat swallowed the grapefruit sized lump that had formed in her throat, and shook her head. The *last* thing she wanted to do was to go traipsing through the woods with this arrogant – albeit gorgeous, ass! Especially with her being hung over and feeling as if she had swallowed saw dust.

“All right then,” he murmured, kissing her lightly on the cheek. “Stay in the car- and I do mean *stay*. I won’t be long. Just call out if you need me,” he finished with a devilishly heart-stopping quirk of his brow, and Kat grimaced.

She studied him as he walked away, all confident and gorgeous – and cursed him to hell as he disappeared through the thick patch of pine trees that bordered the property - her heart jumping to her throat. That man infuriated and calmed her all at the same time – and *how* that was even possible just completely stumped her. He had her mind, heart, body and soul all fighting against the other – and she hated it. It was as if she had no control what-so-ever over her emotions when he was near. And she had never felt so out of control in her life.

Again she saw something flicker from the corner of her eye and turned back toward the house. This time, she was certain that she saw something move. She looked for Luke, but he was nowhere to be seen and she cursed softly – trying to figure out what to do. Screw it! She finally decided. It couldn’t hurt to just check it out - besides, she thought with a grunt, she should - for all intents and purposes, be doing this on her own anyway. What did it matter if he wasn’t here? Who needed the mangy cur anyway?

Kat opened the door and slid out – wincing again as the damn sun hit her full on - not helping her headache in the least – and swore that she would never drink Tequila again. Her mind drifted to the feel of Luke’s strong arms around her as they had danced – the way his body had felt when he had pressed her up against him and kissed her - his mouth at her breast... and she mentally shook herself. Damn it! She needed to purge that man from her thoughts. But even as she tried to convince herself of that fact – she found her eyes instantly flicking to where the stubborn ass had disappeared through the trees, and she found herself longing to be walking along beside him.

She huffed in disgust at her weakness, and turned her attention back to the corner of the house. There it was again, a slight movement - and she hesitantly crept closer. When she reached the front of the structure, she pressed herself against the wall and peered around the corner.

Shit! Kat gasped, when she saw the two men walking around the front of the house - peering into the windows. She knew in an instant that these

were witches from Lexie's coven, and her heartbeat immediately accelerated as adrenaline shot through her system.

As she went to take a step back to go and find Luke - her foot snagged on a rock and she stumbled, inadvertently hissing out a curse as she did.

Their heads turned towards Kat in unison, and she heard the one growl. "That's her."

Kat turned, with the intention of running to where Luke had disappeared through the trees to warn him; but immediately stopped herself – not wanting them to know that he was with her. She had put him in enough danger already, and she didn't need to lead these two assholes straight to him.

So instead, Kat took off running towards the woods at the side of the house – as far from Luke as she could. She crashed through the trees and ran blindly as she heard them cursing and running behind her.

In the next instant, Kat tripped and was painfully tumbling down a hill and rolling through the dirt and debris. She was stopped a moment later when she slammed into a tree, and felt an instant burning in her hip – knocking the breath right out of her.

"Holy *crap!*" She groaned – before pushing herself up and looking to see where the two men were.

They stood at the top of the hill, watching her intently, and Kat breathed a small sigh of relief - until one of the men lifted his palm out in front of him, and Kat saw the white streak of light shoot from it and head directly at her. She dropped to the ground in a flash as the electric current shot past her shoulder and hit the tree that had stopped her fall -burning a silver dollar sized hole in the trunk with an audible pop. Holy shit! Just what in the hell was *that* all about?

Kat quietly chanted a protection spell as she unsteadily got back up onto her feet. In the next instant she heard one of the men scream out in agony. She jerked her head up and watched in stunned silence as he was taken down by a massive, black wolf. Luke.

The other man took off running as soon as Luke appeared and disappeared from sight as she cautiously made her way back up the hill. She

heard the sound of a slamming door and tires screeching away, and cursed. Damn it! He had seen Luke! This was so not good.

When she reached the top, Luke was nowhere in sight, and she looked around in confusion. The witch lay on the ground – his lifeless eyes staring up at the sky, and Kat shivered – even as the urge to kick the asshole in the head swept over her. She shook it off and looked for Luke.

Just where in the Hell was the blasted wolf? She tried to brush the dirt and grime off of her as she began to walk stiffly towards the car. She scanned the area again for any sign of him, and when she found nothing, took off to the back to the house. She stopped short when she found him at the back of the SUV, slipping another one of his form-fitting black tees over his head, and silently wondered why the guy couldn't just dress like a normal human being - and not a damn GQ model. Ugh!

Her eyes widened when he turned to face her, and she saw the look of pure fury written across his features. Oh, boy – the man looked like a volcano about to erupt she thought with a grimace, and swallowed nervously.

“Get in the car,” he growled – and for once, Kat did as he asked without uttering a single word.

Luke bounded around the front of the SUV and slid into the driver's seat – trying desperately to control his anger. He threw the car into gear and tore out of the driveway - his hands gripping the steering wheel so hard that his knuckles were white.

Damn her! He silently seethed, not looking at the woman in question sitting so quietly beside him. The woman defied him at every turn! She could have been *killed* by those scumbags – and that thought terrified the shit out of him. The thought of what they could have done to her caused his blood to boil. And the fact that he hadn't smelled them only made him angrier. If he hadn't come back when he did... Damn it! What in the hell did he have to do? Chain her to him!

He glanced over at her and found her staring out of the window, her perfect mouth set in a frown, and he knew that she was deep in thought. Well good! Hopefully she was thinking about what a complete fool she had

been! He looked back to the road and headed for the motel, a muscle in his jaw twitching dangerously.



Luke slammed the door of the motel room shut with a thunderous crash –his eyes still snapping fire, and in the next instant, had Kat slammed up against it -his hard body pressing up against hers - his hand circling her wrists and yanking them up above her head and holding them there.

His narrowed amber eyes caught and held hers as he desperately tried to reign in his anger. “You listen to me, sweetheart – and you listen to me good,” he growled; his mouth, dangerously close to hers. “The next time you decide to act like a damned fool, and put yourself in harm’s way - I *will not* hesitate to throw you over my knee and paddle that sweet little ass of yours until you are black and blue! Do you understand me?”

Kat glared at him as she tried with everything that she had to buck him off of her – but he didn’t budge an inch – the man was a frigging mountain! And the motion only served to press her breasts harder up against him - and she inwardly cringed when she felt her nipples tighten instantly from the friction and she gulped for air. “Get... the...hell...off... of me!” She ground out; her own eyes sparkling with anger now - and Luke couldn’t help but notice how it turned them from hazel to almost green.

Luke smiled, and pressed himself closer – his muscular thighs caging her in. “Not likely, sweetheart,” he murmured huskily as his body instantly jumped to attention at the feel of her soft curves against him. “Not until you learn how to behave yourself.”

With that, his mouth lowered that fraction of an inch, and took hers - swift, fast and hard; with all of the hunger and desire that he had kept pent up over the past few days. Christ, he thought with a shake; she tasted like Heaven

He groaned as his tongue swept past her lips and met hers - instantly dueling with need - and Luke couldn’t help the slight smile that came to his mouth when he heard her moan softly.

This little hell-cat of his was certainly a passionate one, he thought and suddenly stilled. *This little hell-cat of his? Where in the hell had that come*

from? Damn, but he was thinking and feeling things that he just shouldn't.

If he had discovered one thing in the time that he had spent with Kat – it was that she belonged to no one. She was strong, brave and fiercely independent. But, even as the thought crept through his mind, another – stronger one pushed it away instantly, and all he could think was –we'll just see about that. In time she would realize that they belonged to one another. He didn't want to own her – he just wanted to love...

He shook the thought off for the moment, and pressed himself closer, grinding his now stone hard erection against her stomach, as his mouth worked its magic – staking claim to her warm contours.

Kat knew that she was in deep trouble. The feelings that this man brought out in her were dangerous - and she needed to put a stop to them immediately. But even as the thought crossed her mind, she found herself responding to him in a desperate, primal way. God, he just felt so freaking good! Just a little more...only a little more...

No! Kat silently screamed at herself! She had to stop this. She would only get him killed if he stayed - and if she went ahead and did what she so wanted to do with him – it would be impossible to let him go. She was already finding the thought of leaving him terrifying.

With all of the will power that she possessed - she broke their kiss and turned her head away from his warm, seeking lips. His full, delicious – utterly *tempting* lips!

“What? Is forcing a woman on your repertoire now, wolf?” she pushed out, panting slightly, and cursing the tremble in her voice. Oh geez, Louise – she sounded like a child.

“Is that what it would be?” He asked, his eyes locking with hers, and his voice low and silky. Kat quickly diverted her gaze – not wanting him to see her bold faced lie.

“Yes,” she stammered – refusing to look at him. “I'm telling you, Benji. You need to get it through that thick skull of yours once and for all. We just wouldn't work.”

Luke let go of her wrists, but didn't move away. Instead, he curled his fingers around her chin and he lifted her face to his so that she would look

into his eyes; and the challenge that they held.

“How do you know unless you try,” he murmured - and Kat felt every bit of her resolve dangerously slipping down a steep, slippery slope.

She swallowed the lump forming in her throat and glared at him. “Trust me – we wouldn’t. You’re just too damn egotistical for my tastes.” She tried with everything she had to sound flippant, but realized with a slight cringe that she had failed miserably. What she sounded like was a damned fool!

Luke smiled, and leaned forward, gently taking her bottom lip between his teeth and sucking lightly - and Kat knew beyond a shadow of a doubt, that if he had not been holding her up – her knee’s would have given out on her and she would have landed on the floor a pile of mush.

“Is that a fact,” he whispered - his voice soft and whiskey smooth. “For some strange reason, red – I just don’t buy it.”

“Go to hell, dog-breath.” She snapped – more angry at the fact that he was right - than she was at him. All she wanted to do at the moment was to grab him by the hair and pull his mouth back to hers - to lose herself in the spicy taste of him.

Luke laughed and grabbed her leg - pulling it up around his waist so that his erection touched her at her core, and she gasped – feeling that instant heat coiling in her belly – demanding to be noticed. “You’re not very convincing, red,” he whispered, a moment before his lips took hers once again - and it was Kats undoing.

Kat just couldn’t fight it any longer – she just didn’t have the strength. She wanted this man more than she had *ever* wanted anyone before. And although she wanted much more than just a one night deal - she knew that there could never be more.

Every moment that he spent with her just put his life deeper and deeper in danger – but the feel of him against her as his mouth ravaged hers was just too good to pass up. At least she could have this one night...one night of complete and total bliss - something that she could carry with her forever; and only pray that it would be enough.

With a will of their own – her hands plunged into his hair and pulled him closer as her hips strained against his. She felt, more than heard, the

growl that came from him, and a moment later she was being tossed over his shoulder, walked across the room of the dingy hotel room - and then tossed across the bed – causing her breath to come out of her in a loud whoosh.

Luke looked down at her, his amber eyes glowing with an intense heat - and smiled. And although the smile was cool and predatory, Kat felt her insides melt. She was the prey - and she couldn't have felt better about it. God, how she wanted this!

Without saying a word, he pulled his shirt over his head and threw it across the room – his hands instantly going to the button of his jeans, and removing them as well. When his task was finished, he crawled onto the bed and over to her.

His eyes never leaving hers – held them prisoner in their feral gaze - causing her body to tingle.

“Now, let's just see about getting you out of these filthy things,” he whispered - his voice dangerously low and oh so sexy -and Kat found herself unable to speak. Her mouth felt like she had swallowed an entire bag of cotton balls.

All she could do was watch in wonder and deep appreciation, as his muscles moved and flexed as he painstakingly undid the button of her jeans and slowly glided the zipper down.

She gasped when he laid his warm hand flat on her stomach; underneath the dirty tank top that she wore – the heat from his touch causing butterflies to take flight. *Butterflies?* She thought with a groan – Hell, it felt like she had a whole flock of *Condor's* taking off in there!

After what seemed an eternity, his hand glided slowly up to her ribs, between her breasts, and finally to the neckline of her shirt. In an instant, the tank was ripped down the middle and thrown to the floor.

“Hey, you jackass,” Kat spit out – her temper instantly flaring, “that was the last one of those that I had!”

Luke chuckled, his mouth twisting up in a grin. “Sorry, sweetheart, it just wasn't salvageable,” he informed her softly – his attention going back to the task of slipping off her jeans. He slid the heavy fabric down her legs

– his eyes still holding hers, and the intensity of his gaze was beyond arousing. It was raw and erotic, and Kat felt her belly tremble as heat spread throughout her entire body in a rush.

When he had finally removed them, he tossed them over his shoulder and grabbed the waistband of her panties. With a quick tug -those too, were ripped from her and thrown haphazardly across the room.

Kat leaned up on her elbows and glared at him. “You keep *that* up, *Tonto* - and I won’t *anything* left to wear!”

“Do you hear me complaining?” he replied wickedly, as his eyes scanned her body in a slow, appreciative appraisal - which caused Kat’s skin to instantly come alive. Lowering his head, he softly kissed the inside of her calf. “At least this way, I’d have a better chance of keeping you from going out and getting yourself killed like a damned fool.” He whispered against her skin between his soft, lingering kisses.

Kat was about to tell him to go to Hell - but she was suddenly acutely and *painfully* aware that her voice had left her the moment his lips met her overheated flesh. Her head fell back and she shuddered as his lips made their way up her leg to her thigh - leaving a white-hot trail of sensation in their path, and she realized that her arms were shaking.

Luke nipped at her skin gently, before tracing his tongue along the inside of her thigh and slowly traveling to her core - his mouth cherishing her, as his hands slid up her legs - only to station themselves at her hips – holding her still.

“Oh, God...Luke, please.” Kat whimpered, as his tongue teased her already swollen and throbbing bud – and it was wondrous.

“Hmm?” He hummed against her soft, velvety folds - and Kat swore that she would shoot right up off of the bed, and hurtle straight through the ceiling like a rocket. Good Lord!

“Damn it, wolf!” She cried, curling her fingers in his hair and pulling. Luke hesitantly stopped what he was doing and looked up at her, a grin spreading across his lips. When he saw the need in the fiery redhead’s eyes - his smile only widened.

Kats anger flared at his grin – knowing full well that he knew the effect that he was having on her and was enjoying every blasted minute of it - but at the moment, she couldn't have cared less. She wanted him. And she wanted him *now!* “Get up here,” she commanded, and Luke broke out laughing.

“Damn, red,” he murmured – sliding up her body very slowly - placing soft, hot kisses along the way. He stopped a moment to give her breasts some much needed attention before kissing his way up to her collarbone. “You're not one for pleasantries - are you? Right on to the main event,” he said, stationing himself between her legs as he studied her face.

Although, if truth be told – he wasn't sure that he could hold back himself. He wanted her so desperately that he knew their first time would be fast and hard. There would be plenty of time for tenderness later - he silently promised.

Kat shook her head – wanting to tell him that she needed him – more than she had ever needed anyone before. That it seemed as if she had been waiting for this moment her entire life. That she had envisioned this since the first time she had set eyes on him – but knew that she couldn't. Instead - she just graced him with a saucy little smile and quirked her eyebrow up at him.

“I'm not really one for fun and games - *fido*. If you want to play, go get a ball and we'll play fetch.” She whispered - her voice low and husky.

Luke leaned in, bringing his lips close to hers – close, but not close enough. “Believe me, baby. In time, you will be,” he promised, before lowering his mouth and taking hers.

He kissed her with a heated hunger - his tongue taking possession of hers with the deep pounding need that seemed to be consuming him, and Kat met his passion with the same.

Kat's hands played with his hair as she returned his kiss – wanting nothing more at that moment than to have him inside her. She wriggled beneath him – silently begging him to finish what he had started. Damn, but she needed this man – more than she ever thought possible.

When he finally complied and slowly slid inside her - she felt her heart flutter, and her head get fuzzy. Oh Lord, it was the most magical, erotic

sensation that she had ever experienced, and she felt her breath hitch in her throat as he filled her to the hilt – touching her where no man ever had – and it was unbelievable.

Suddenly she felt this strange light-headedness hit her. It felt as if she were floating in the air on wave after wave of pure bliss. Her eyes widened when she suddenly felt a tingling start at her toes and begin to make its way slowly, torturously up her body. What the *hell*?

“What in the...” she heard Luke moan, as he broke their kiss and looked at her – his intense gaze alight and glowing with passion. “Do you feel that?” he asked – clearly confused; and she nodded slowly. “Christ, woman,” he whispered, shaking his head slightly as his mouth turned up in a smile – and Kat felt her heart clench. “What the hell are you doing to me?” With that, his mouth claimed hers once again as he began to move his hips - driving into her with all the need that he felt - and the tingling in their bodies only increased.

Kat wrapped her long legs around his hips tightly as she moved beneath him - her hands going to his back and pulling him closer as she dug her nails in - and heard a deep, sexy growl rumble in his chest.

“Shit, sweetheart,” Luke gasped, as he drove himself faster and faster into her heat, his heart pounding in his chest like thunder. “You’re killing me here.” He buried his face against her neck and kissed her throat, his lips and breath hot, and Kat moaned, moving her hips with his – feeling things she had never felt before. This was beyond amazing! It was as if every nerve ending in her body had been electrically charged and was alive and buzzing. Sweet Lord! Would she – *could* she survive this?

Luke didn’t know what the hell was happening – all he knew was that he was experiencing feelings that were completely foreign to him. Being buried deep inside this woman was beyond anything he could ever have imagined, and he felt the animal in him threatening to spring forward to stake claim- and he forcefully pushed it back.

His Alpha side wanted nothing more at the moment, than to sink his teeth into her; to mark her and make her his – but he knew that no matter what his feelings, he couldn’t do that - at least not yet. He needed this

extraordinary woman to accept the fact that they were destined for each other. He couldn't take the chance of her running.

Luke felt Kats body tightening against his, and that strange tingling increased; as if a million bees were buzzing underneath his skin. He clenched his teeth together as they reached their climax in an explosion of blinding light and electrical current. Christ, he thought as he spilled his seed into her – just what in the hell was going on here?

Luke rolled over onto his back, pulling her with him, and stared up at the ceiling. Shit, he silently thought to himself – had sex *ever* been so mind-blowing? He felt like he'd been kicked straight in the gut. He didn't know what was going on – but he did know that he wasn't about to let it end. Now, more than ever, he knew that Kat belonged to him, and he was damned sure going to make her realize it too – no matter what it took.

Kat laid her head on Luke's chest and fought back the tears threatening to fall. Damn it! She silently seethed – she *knew* that this was going to be a mistake! How in the hell was she going to leave him now? No matter how much she hated the fact that they could not be together – she knew it was what had to be – and this little slip-up of hers had been a huge mistake. And she had the feeling that it was one that would haunt her for the rest of her life.

All that it had accomplished; besides making her feel things she never could have ever imagined feeling – was to cement herself even more to the frustrating cur. She knew that she was falling in too deep – but seemed unable to stop it, no matter how hard she tried. She was freefalling from unimaginable heights – and she didn't have a net. And when she hit – she was going to hit hard. Her heart was going to shatter into a million pieces, and the whole situation just sucked out loud.

She abruptly sat up and threw her legs over the bed – only to be stopped by Luke's arm sliding around her waist and pulling her back down when she tried to stand. “Just where do you think you're going, sweets?” He asked, sitting up behind her and nuzzling her ear.

“I'm going to take a shower,” she bit out - mad as Hell at herself for letting this happen. It was bad enough that she had been too weak to keep him from coming with her in the first place – but now...

She chewed at her bottom lip – trying to keep her tears at bay. Now the game had changed, and it was a game that she had no chance of winning. She needed to leave him behind, and in doing so – was going to be leaving what was left of her heart with him.

“Mmm,” Luke murmured against her neck, and Kat had to physically stop herself from tilting her head back to give him better access. “That sounds interesting.”

“Not for you, spot,” Kat replied, shakily – her body once again on fire. “I shower alone.”

Luke chuckled against her skin as he pulled her back more firmly against his chest. The arm that was around her waist tightened as his other arm wrapped around her and cupped her breast, causing the peak to harden instantly, and securely keeping her in his embrace as his hot mouth traveled back up her neck to her ear – nipping at it lightly and causing a shudder to run through her. “So much more fun with two,” he whispered.

“Yes - as I’m sure you know from experience.” Kat bit out and tried to pull away again - but he was having none of it. With a growl, he twisted his body so that Kat ended up on her back – firmly beneath him. “Get off of me!” She squealed, hating the way her body cried out for him. It was as if her entire soul was calling out to his – and it was unsettling.

Luke leaned in and kissed the tip of her nose, his mouth turning up in a smile, and Kat could feel her heart clenching in her chest. Sweet Lord, his smile could melt a freaking iceberg!

“Katrina,” he said softly, his gaze holding hers - and she felt her stomach lurch. “What we have between us...”

“We have nothing,” Kat burst out – hoping to make herself believe it - as well as Luke.

Anger crossed Luke’s perfect features and Kat swallowed back the lump forming in her throat. “Don’t you dare try and tell me that you didn’t feel that.” He ground out, his entire body tensing and his eyes snapping with anger.

“Ok, Blackwater, - you stubborn son of a bitch! I’ll admit it.” She took a deep, steadying breath and glared at him. “We just had fan-freaking-tastic

sex! It was the best sex that I have *ever* had. Are you happy now?” She snapped; her mouth set in a tight frown. “Did I stroke your poor fragile little ego enough, dog boy?” Kat was close to scratching his eyes out for making her admit it; but damn it! – It *had* been the best she had ever had - and it was so much more. And she hated that fact - hated it with every fiber of her being. Hated it because it could never go any further; and she wanted it too - so very badly.

Luke’s lips lowered towards hers, and she waited tensely for his kiss – thinking it would be rough and demanding – but her eyes widened a moment later when his lips finally touched hers. His kiss was so soft and gentle that she found it hard to think clearly. He lightly feathered his lips against hers before kissing the side of her mouth – then her jaw.

Oh...no...no...no! *Hell NO!* Kat silently screamed. She could take his stupid, irritating he-man ways – but this tenderness – oh, sweet mother of God - *this* would surely kill her!

“It was more than just that, red,” he murmured against her skin, and she stiffened slightly. “You felt that electricity,” he went on – moving above her and caging her in with his body, “that connection. I don’t know what in the hell it was...but I’ve never felt anything like it before.” He leaned back slightly and caught her eyes with his – and she could see the fire in them - his Alpha shining through. “And I want more.”

“And when you’ve had your fill,” she asked, her voice cracking ever so slightly, and she cursed herself again. God, she really sucked at this. “You’ll let me leave?”

Luke’s body instantly stiffened; his eyes flashing once again with anger. He was off the bed in a flash, his gloriously nude form storming over to the window and staring out. She watched as his muscles tensed – his hands clenching and unclenching at his sides.

“Is that what you really want?” She heard him ask softly, and her breath caught in her throat.

Of course it wasn’t what she wanted – she wanted to scream at him – but it was what she *needed* to do. And - the sooner the better. “Yes,” she whispered, and prayed that he couldn’t hear the lie in her voice.

Luke clenched his jaw and closed his eyes – his entire body strung as tight as a coiled spring about to snap. Shit! That was not the answer he had been hoping for. He knew that she was lying – yet the words still stung.

After what they had shared, he was more certain now than he had *ever* been that she was his. The only problem standing in their way was making *her* realize it! His jaw clenched as he turned around to look at her.

Shit! He silently seethed at the sight of her sitting there, propped up against the headboard – her beautiful body exposed. Her skin - as smooth and perfect as silk, beckoned to him - and he fought the urge to pounce on her and devour every square inch of that glorious satiny flesh with every fiber of his being. Mine! His wolf screamed at him again - and he glared at her.

Kat watched Luke closely; her eyes widening slightly. She knew that he was mad as hell – but it couldn't be avoided. She had broken too many rules as it was already, she thought with a sigh. She needed to find Harper and get all of this mess finished. Perhaps, once that was done... No! She couldn't think that way! Who knew what Lexie's Coven was capable of? And *she* had been the one to kill the stupid bitch – no one else. She had practically *begged* Desmond to let her finish her off. And now *she* was the one who needed to deal with the consequences – not these people that she had grown to care for so much. And it wasn't fair to let Luke get caught in the crosshairs because of her and her freaking messed up life.

“Here's the deal,” Luke said finally - his tone low and dangerous. He slowly walked over toward the bed – as if he were stalking her; and Kat felt her body flush from the mere heat of his gaze. “You're stuck with me until we find your sister.” As he spoke, his eyes traveled over her body very thoroughly, and Kat swallowed hard – wanting nothing more at that moment than to grab the twisted sheets and cover herself - but her stubborn pride wouldn't allow it. She needed him to think that he didn't affect her the way that he did.

“No!” She burst out, knowing that her instructions were that he could not be with her. Who knew how much damage she might have already done? They had *seen* them together – for God's sake! It didn't matter that Luke had been in his wolf form – that bastard that got away *knew* it was a

Were that she was traveling with – and that just wasn't good. "I've told you...I need to find her alone."

What little resolve that Luke had left, snapped with her words. He reached over, and in one smooth, fluid motion - grabbed her by the arm and pulled her off of the bed and slammed her up against his body. Kat gasped at the current that ran through her as their bare flesh made contact.

"You listen to me, *Katrina*." He hissed - his eyes blazing into hers. "I saw what they did to your sisters' family. I can track her – you can't. And as much as I'm sure it pains you to admit it - you need me - and are *not* doing this alone! I absolutely forbid it."

That last statement instantly got Kat's dander up, and she glared right back at him - her eyes spitting fire. "You forbid it?" she ground out. "You listen to me – you puffed up jackass. I can do this on my own! I don't freaking need the big bad wolf to protect me!"

"Well, *that* is just too the fuck bad!" He shot back. "This is how it's going to be. We find your sister, and then you can both go along on your merry way!"

That is - if you still think you want to, he silently added. "And in that time, I promise not to touch you again." He finished, hating himself for making a promise he knew he couldn't keep. It was taking every ounce of strength that he had at the moment not to throw her back down on the bed and take her again...and again.

"You're touching me now," Kat whispered defiantly, her eyes going to the hand circling her upper arm, and Luke dropped it as if he had been burned - and took a step back, his lips turned up into that damn smarmy grin of his and she instantly felt the loss – deep in the bowels of her soul.

"That I was – my mistake. Go and take your shower, red," he said, turning and grabbing his discarded jeans from the floor and slipping into them. Kat watched him with intense interest, loving how the worn material hugged his muscular thighs so enticingly. The man could definitely rock a pair of jeans, she thought with a groan.

When he faced her again and saw her gawking at him – his smile only widened. Before she could stop herself; her eyes traveled to the fly of his jeans – which was still unbuttoned, and she flushed to the roots of her hair. Holy shit! She cursed, trying to swallow the lump that had formed in her throat. He looked like a freaking Calvin Klein ad! Now *that* was just playing dirty.

“Luke, this isn’t finished,” she said, trying desperately to keep her voice steady. “I need to do this alone.”

“Well, sorry about your bad luck, red. That’s just not going to happen - so you might as well stop trying to convince me. You’re beginning to sound like a damn broken record.” With that he scooped up his t-shirt and headed towards the door, pulling it over his head as he walked. He slammed his feet into his boots and glanced back at her. “I’m going to grab us something to eat.”

It wasn’t until he closed the door behind him that Kat let out the breath that she had been holding. Damn it! Why were things just getting more and more complicated? She chewed at her bottom lip as she debated on whether or not she should just grab her stuff and get out while Luke was gone – but after only a moments deliberation she decided against it. He would just track her if she did that, and just be all the more pissed off at her – and at the moment, that was the last thing that she needed. The man looked as if he was about to spontaneously combust as it was.

She plopped down on the edge of the bed and buried her face in her hands. Shit! She had made a total mess of things! Just what in the hell was she going to do now?

Chapter 4

Luke placed his to go order at the small diner across from the motel and pulled his cell phone from the pocket of his jeans – calling Desmond. After what seemed an eternity, the vampire finally answered – sounding completely ticked off at being disturbed - and Luke didn't need to be a genius to figure out what he had to have been doing.

“Lucas,” he said, sounding completely distracted and Luke sighed heavily – knowing that the vamp was surely otherwise occupied with Abby at the moment. Christ, he thought with a shake of his head, and a grin – when *wasn't* he pre-occupied with the beautiful little fey?

Since the two had become mated, it was like freaking honeymoon central at Desmond's estate – even to the point that Desmond's brother Marcus was making himself scarce.

The two were irrevocably in love - and had absolutely no qualms what so ever of letting everyone around them aware of that fact – and, if Luke were to be honest with himself - he was a tad bit envious. What they had, he thought with a slight frown- was what he found himself wanting with Kat.

“Is that Luke?” he heard Abby ask, and his smile instantly reappeared. Desmond was one lucky son of a bitch, he thought with a chuckle. “Hey, Luke!” she called into the phone, and he heard Desmond laugh.

“Did you want to speak to him, sweetness,” Desmond asked her softly, and he could hear the distinct sound of the two of them kissing. Oh, Christ...*really?*

“Listen, Des,” Luke said, hoping to make this quick, so that his friends could get back to enjoying each other. “I just need to know if you came up with anything on Lexie's Coven.”

“Abby, my love - would you be so kind as to run downstairs and grab me a bag of blood?” He heard Desmond ask her affectionately - and knew with a deep, sinking feeling that the reason for the sudden desire for a snack was that he wanted to speak to him in private – and that it wouldn't be good news.

Desmond kept nothing from Abby - and would most likely be the only *manorexic* vampire on the planet if it meant spending time with his mate, instead of feeding – so if he didn't want her to hear their conversation- it was because he most likely didn't want her to worry - even though, ever since they had bonded they could feel the others emotions.

His point was proven valid a moment later when he heard Abby's beautiful, musical laughter and then a loud smack.

“Ow!” Desmond grunted into the phone. “What the *bloody hell*? You hit me!” He bellowed - his tone one of complete shock; and Luke had to grin – even in spite of the feeling of unease that was gnawing at him.

“Oh, quit being such a baby,” he heard Abby laugh. “I know you want to talk to Luke in private. You can't hide it from me, sweetheart – but just know this...I *will* find out eventually. And I only smacked you on the arm – *and...* it was merely a love tap - cripes!” With that, he heard Abby kiss Desmond again, tell him that she loved him - then call into the phone, “Tell Kat I said *Hi* –and that I miss you both horribly, and - please come back safe!”

“I will. Miss you too, Abs,” Luke replied with a grin. God, he adored that woman!

There was silence on the other end of the line, until finally he heard Desmond sigh. “That woman will be the end of me,” he whispered darkly - and Luke burst out laughing.

“Ah, but what a way to go, my friend,” Luke chuckled, and heard his friends deep, rich laughter.

“Indeed it would be. And well worth it.”

“So,” Luke finally asked; not wanting to put off the inevitable any longer. “What did you find?”

“I'm afraid that it's not good.” Desmond replied, his voice growing serious. “Her coven was strictly dark arts. They place no value on life – human or otherwise, and wish only to obtain power. That is how that bitch was able to raise Argramon in the first place. They are known for holding ancient writings with spells that have been strictly forbidden for ages.”

“Shit,” Luke breathed into the phone – not liking this at all. He told Desmond about finding Harper’s parents, and the strange symbols carved into their bodies – then the run-in with the two men at the house.

Desmond was silent for a long while – finally he spoke; his voice low. “Lucas, for reasons I have yet to discover, they are in dire straits to get their hands on Katrina and her sister - for what I believe is more than just retribution for Kat killing the witch. There is something much more involved here - which I am afraid was proven valid by the murder of her sister’s parents. Whatever you do - do not allow Katrina out of your sight. And once you have found her sister; I want you all to return here immediately – where you will be safe. I fear this is much bigger than we had originally thought.”

“Easier said than done, my friend,” Luke sighed. “That woman is as stubborn as the day is long, and just keeps insisting that she needs to do this alone.”

He heard Desmond chuckle softly into the phone. “You, brother; are preaching to the choir,” he said – and Luke couldn’t help but smile.

He knew how quickly Abby could frazzle his friend with her head-strong ways and utter lack of self-preservation – but, he also knew that Desmond wouldn’t have it any other way. He loved Abby with his entire heart and soul and would change absolutely nothing about her. They would each gladly give up their life for the other – and it was mind blowing.

“Lucas,” Desmond said, finally. “Stay with her no matter what – but I beg of you - be on your guard. I fear that some of the people she feels that she can trust - are not worthy of it.”

“I will do my best,” Luke promised, hoping that it was one that he could keep. The waitress smiled and waved, trying to get his attention - and he nodded quickly. “Listen, Des. Our foods up, and I’ve got to get back and make sure that little fireball hasn’t made a run for the border. Thank you... for everything.”

“Take care of yourself, Luke. Call me if you need anything at all - and I will do the same as soon as I find anything more.”

“Will do.” With that, he ended the call and walked over to the counter - and the blushing waitress.



As soon as Luke walked through the door – he immediately searched the room for Kat - a small part of him worried that she had, indeed, taken off on him.

He felt the air rush back into his lungs when he saw her emerge from the bathroom - freshly showered and looking absolutely breath-taking in her tight jeans and t-shirt – her glorious hair pulled up high on her head in a silken ponytail. Christ, she was beyond breath-taking, he thought to himself.

His body tightened when his gaze swept to her lips, remembering how they had tasted beneath his, and he mentally shook himself. If this plan of his was going to work – he needed to keep his desires at bay.

“Hope you’re in the mood for a burger, red” he said, setting the bags down on the small table near the window. Kat just graced him with a smug smile and walked over to the bag and opened it. Grabbing one of the burgers – she sauntered over to a chair on the opposite end of the room, and gracefully sat down – and Luke couldn’t help but wonder if she even had a clue as to how beautiful she actually was.

“The silent treatment just doesn’t become you, sweetheart,” Luke laughed, as he sat down at the table and dove into his food with gusto-trying to keep his thoughts off of her and the smooth, graceful movements of her perfect body. Christ!

“Screw you,” she bit out between bites – glaring at him.

“I believe you already have,” he replied evenly. “And quite thoroughly, I might add – well, that is if memory serves me correctly. Care for a little refresher?”

Kats face blazed red as her eyes – with a will of their own, moved over to the tangled sheets on the bed next to her. Crap! Crap! Crap!

“You’re an asshole,” Kat grumbled, trying desperately to get her pounding heart to slow down, and her stomach to stop fluttering.

“Oh, you don’t even know the half of it, lover.”

“I am *not* your lover!” She yelled before jumping up and storming into the bathroom - unceremoniously slamming the door behind her with a resounding boom.

Luke burst out laughing and continued eating as if nothing had happened. “Oh, baby,” he whispered to himself, “you are so much more.”

Kat stood at the sink and splashed cold water over her face – trying desperately to calm the frantic beating of her heart. Damn that mangy dog! She silently seethed. That man could set her off faster than anyone she had ever known before. She took a deep, calming breath and dried her face. She needed to concentrate on finding Harper, and *not* the arrogant ass sitting in the other room stuffing his face as if he hadn’t a care in the world.

She took another deep breath – trying desperately to calm down. She knew that he was at risk because of her, and she hated herself for it -but she also had to admit that she wouldn’t be able to track Harper without him. She had no idea where to even begin to look for the girl – and Constance’s letter only helped so much.

Kat glared at her reflection in the mirror – her eyes narrowing at the sight of her kiss swollen lips. “God, Winslow,” she groaned. “You *really* suck!”

Summoning up all her resolve, she turned and went back into the bedroom – to face the man who had completely turned her world upside down.

“All right, Blackwater.” She said softly. “You win...for now. You can help me find my sister,” she conceded and glanced at him sitting there, a completely smug smile plastered across that perfectly chiseled face of his. He folded his arms across his massive chest and gave her a wink.

“Glad you’ve finally come to your senses, red,” he purred, and Kat had the overwhelming urge to slap him – then kiss it and make it better. Holy cow, she was pathetic – and she was beginning to think just a little bit insane as well.

She knew deep down in her gut that she shouldn’t be doing this – but things had changed. She was sure that her mother had no idea what they would run into at Harper’s house – she tried to rationalize. Her mother

would probably be thrilled that she had Luke with her now – knowing how well Were’s could track.

Kat grimaced slightly as her mind screamed at her – *Yeah, dumbass! And if that were the case – then why haven’t you called her and told her what happened?*

Kat shook the thought off and tried to give Luke a smile. “The no-touching rule still applies, Benji,” she said, her brow arching slightly.

“Not a problem, *Glinda*,” he replied softly, although she noticed with a little flutter of her heart, that he wouldn’t meet her eyes. She brushed it off – not wanting to entertain any more thoughts at the moment. She was confused enough.

“So, what’s our next move?” She asked.

Luke stood and gathered up the trash from their meal - his movements sleek and fluid, and Kat found herself again, cursing his damned good looks. He was liquid sex - and she just wanted to dive in and drown herself in him. No lifeguard required. Dear Lord!

Luke dropped the bags into the trash can and stretched – his cursed muscles straining and flexing so freaking temptingly that she was practically *drooling* all over herself.

“Well?” she prodded, hoping to distract herself from his glorious form.

“We go find you sister. Haven’t you been listening?”

“I really hate you right now,” she bit out, her eyes narrowing. “You know that, right?”

“Oh, baby,” he whispered, that grin still on his lips and his eyes twinkling devilishly. “I know lots of things.”

Chapter 5

“Listen to me, you dense son of a bitch,” Harper ground out, her hazel eyes flashing dangerously with anger. “I need to know where my *mother* is! Elaine Winslow!” Harper almost choked on the word.

Constance Bradford had been her mother, she thought angrily— not this woman who had decided to just dump her at their doorstep seventeen years ago – but, shit up a pole – she needed to find her! She clutched the note from her mom in her hand tightly, as if it were her only link to the normalcy that her life had once been. To the happiness and comfort that had been home.

Luckily the bartender at *Masquerade* had been helpful – but Harper couldn’t help but worry as to why someone else had been asking about Thomas Kerns the night before, and a shiver ran up her spine. She had hopped the first bus to Chesnee and prayed that she got to him first. Who knew who was looking for her – or what they were capable of? Could they be the ones that had killed her parents?

Hot, angry tears filled her eyes, and she once again thought about the sight of her parents blood soaked bodies. The strange symbols carved into their flesh. Harper shuddered and glared back at the man standing in front of her - his balls held prisoner in the strong grip of her other hand. She was not going to let this bunch of freaks rattle her. Her mom and dad had taught her better than that!

She gave him a sweet little smile when she noticed the beads of sweat breaking out on his forehead and the pained expression on his face. “So, Thomas,” she purred, giving him a slight squeeze through his shorts, and he groaned in pain. “Where can I find Elaine Winslow?”

“Shit,” he moaned, his eyes beginning to water and his face turning red. “Oh, my God! And here I thought your *sister* was a ball buster!”

Harper’s hold on him disappeared as her mouth dropped open. What the fucking hell did he just say? She shook her head and glared up at him, her mouth turning down in a tight frown. “Unless you want me to cut off your

balls right now, and shove them down your slimy throat,” she sneered. “You had better tell me –and tell me fast - just what in the frig you just said?”

“Your sister,” Thomas grimaced, taking a quick step back from her, and placing his hands in front of his crotch protectively. “You can’t tell me that no one ever told you about Kat. I mean, Jesus - you’re looking for your mother for God’s sake!” he said, obviously shocked by her surprise. “Yet, you don’t even know about your *sister*? Come on.”

“Holy freaking shit,” she whispered, and heard Thomas’s huff of indignation.

“Damn. You know, for a little girl – you sure do have a mouth on you!”

In the next instant Thomas screamed out in agony as Harper’s heavy army boot connected with his shin. “What the fuck?” He screamed, and glared at her – wanting nothing more at that moment than to strangle the little twit!

He didn’t need this bullshit! He had left the Coven over a year ago. He was done with all their craziness – and so what if he kept tabs on some of the witches. It wasn’t as if getting paid for information was a crime or anything. At least, he didn’t think it was – or really *care* for that matter. Thomas’s number one priority always had been – and always *would* be Thomas.

“What do you mean, I have a sister?” She practically *growled* at him, and he couldn’t help but notice how mature she looked when she was angry. She resembled Katrina in so many ways – yet was all her own with her dark, gothic style. But the damn temper was sure the same.

“A sister – did I stutter, small fry?” He yelled back at her, rubbing his shin. “Katrina Winslow. Geez - that hurt you little snot!” Sweet Jesus - Thomas thought with a grunt - is it any wonder why I *hate* kids!

Harpers eyes grew huge and she swallowed with difficulty as realization dawned on her like a physical blow. She not only had a *mother* she knew nothing about – but a sister as well! Shit. Up. A. Pole!



Kat tried with everything that she had, not to watch Luke as they drove through the city – but as hard as she tried - her eyes kept drifting over to the gorgeous wolf in question. He was staring straight ahead, his jaw clenched – and she knew that he was tense – but she had no desire at all to ease it. The man was infuriating!

Yes, he was *hella* sexy, and rocked her world with just his touch – but he was also the most hard-headed man that she had ever known. He was stubborn, and arrogant, and tender and...*damn* it! She had to stop this. She was pining over a man that she just couldn't have!

She sighed and looked back out of the window, trying desperately to concentrate on the matters at hand. They were heading for Thomas Kern's bookstore, in the hopes of getting some information on Elaine and hopefully Harper as per Constance's instructions – and she needed to focus.

Kat hadn't seen Thomas in well over a year. Not since he had left the Coven, for reasons unknown - and she found herself excited at the prospect of seeing him again. They had always had a good time together – laughing and talking easily. He had been a friend and confidante... and - he didn't make her body vibrate like a certain wolf did – so she was looking forward to the much needed liquid sex break.

She needed some normalcy after the past few days – and she was sure that Tommy could provide that. She found herself grinning slightly at the thought of seeing him again, and it was a nice change from the foreboding silence that was permeating the car at the moment - and driving her absolutely crazy.

Chancing another quick glance at the irritating wolf sitting beside her, she leaned over and cranked up the radio – filling the silent car with the blaring sounds of a local Rock station. She gave him a sweet smile when his head snapped her way at the sudden onslaught of Bon Jovi – knowing that with his exceptional hearing it would seem ten times as loud to him – and her smile only widened.

She turned her face back towards the road as she began to belt out - '*You give love a bad name*' – her eyes twinkling devilishly. She knew she couldn't carry a tune to save her life; but she found that she really enjoyed

irritating the swoon-worthy ass sitting beside her – and at the moment, she needed a distraction. And getting under his skin just might be the ticket.

All that the silence in the car was accomplishing was to make her think – and she didn't want to do that anymore. Not right now. Too much had happened – and if she just sat there quietly, like a good little girl – she knew her mind would only drift back to the feel of Luke touching her – kissing her... So, instead, she sang even louder; inwardly cringing at the horrible sound of her own voice. Geez - she thought with a grin – she *really* did stink...and bad.

“Dear God.” Luke winced, as he turned down the radio and glared at her. “What in the *Hell* is wrong with you? You sound like a damn cat caught in a blender. Are you having some kind of an attack or something?”

Kat burst out laughing – not caring in the least what he thought. She knew that she was awful; but she was finally enjoying herself a bit - and was not about to let this oaf ruin it for her. “Too hard for you, wolf boy?” she asked innocently, reaching for the radio dial once again. “How about it if I find something a little more your speed - perhaps some Celine Dion or...Wayne Newton, perhaps?”

“No!” Luke barked out - his hand reaching out and grabbing hers to stop her.

As soon as he touched her; that current of awareness shot up his arm, and he swore- went straight to his heart, causing a sudden tightening in his chest. He knew that Kat felt it too by the way that she had stilled and stared at him – her mouth hanging open in surprise, her beautiful eyes wide and startled.

Luke dropped her hand instantly and cleared his throat, glancing back to the road. “You keep that up, and I swear my ears will bleed,” he murmured, trying to ignore the sudden, overwhelming urge to pull the car over and take her right there on the side of the road. And suddenly his jeans became extremely uncomfortable, and he grimaced.

“You only *wish* you had my talent,” Kat threw back, folding her hands in her lap and fidgeting in her seat slightly.

“That’s about as far from talent as I have ever heard, sweetheart.”

“What the hell do you know, anyway?” Kat scoffed at him with a flick of her hand. “You howl at the moon for God’s sake.”

“Well, that may be – but at least I howl *in tune!*” He choked out, that grin twitching at the corners of his mouth and Kat felt her stomach flutter.

“Oh, bite me, Benji.” Kat grumbled under her breath, and Luke snorted with laughter.

“Wouldn’t I just absolutely love to?” He chuckled - his eyes gleaming wickedly and Kat felt her body heat, and her heart rate accelerate to warp speed. Good Lord!



They pulled up to Kern’s Korner bookstore twenty minutes later, and Luke leapt from the SUV and ran around to Kats side to open the door and help her out. When she raised her eyebrow at his extended hand, his mouth settled into a frown as he bowed slightly and took a step back.

“You are certainly taking this no touching rule to heart, red.” He said; no humor in his voice what so ever.

If truth be told - he *needed* to touch her. Christ, it was a deep, gnawing need that seemed to grow with each moment that he spent with her. Being that close to her in the car; and not being able to reach over had practically driven him insane.

Kat jumped down from her seat and smiled up at him. “Rules,” she replied flippantly, and strolled past him into the shop.

“Rules were made to be broken,” he mumbled to himself as he followed her inside, his eyes locked on the curve of her perfect ass.

When Kat walked through the doors of the bookshop, she found Thomas sitting on the edge of his desk, a bag of ice resting between his legs. He jumped up when he saw her, the ice hitting the floor with a thud and his eyes blazing.

“You!” he practically screeched - glaring at her. “What the *Hell* Kat?”

“Hey, Tommy,” she replied, smiling at him warmly.

“Don’t you dare ‘*Hey Tommy*’ me – you little bitch! Would you mind telling me right now just what in the...?” He stopped cold when he saw Luke step up directly behind Kat - his glare alone enough to knock the wind out of him. The man looked thoroughly pissed, and he knew in an instant that he was a Were. And worse yet – he was an Alpha; which meant that the man was dangerous when he or someone he cared about felt threatened – and from the vibes that he was getting – he cared about Kat. A lot. Oh, *Holy* shit – could his day get any worse? That last thing he needed at the moment was to have to deal with a protective Were – not with his nuts throbbing like they were.

Kat looked back at Luke when she noticed Thomas’s uncomfortable gaze, and her smile faded when she saw how angry he was. He was practically shaking with it, and she knew for certain that this was not going to be good. “Easy there, Tonto,” she whispered to him, and Luke’s eyes swept down to hers, and she could see the fury in their amber depths – turning them almost black.

“He has no right to speak to you...” he began, but Kat cut him off.

“It’s okay. He’s a friend, and for some reason, he seems to be just a little ticked off at me right now,” she turned back to Thomas – who was watching the pair warily. “It’s been a long time, Tommy.” She said, as lightly as possible. “What’s got you in such a snit?”

“Your sister was here,” She heard Luke say, and her eyes widened.

“When?” Kat asked, directing her question to Thomas.

“She left about a half hour ago,” Thomas huffed. “Right after she about squeezed my balls completely off - and *then* the little shit has the audacity to kick me in the shin! Obstinate little brat! Just why in the hell people procreate is totally beyond me.”

Kat tried to hold it back; she really did, but she just couldn’t. She burst out laughing – actually doubling over from it. The floodgates had been opened, and all of the tension and worry of the past few days was deliciously rolling out of her. God, she needed this, she thought – wiping the tears from her eyes with the backs of her hands. She had not laughed so hard in, she couldn’t remember how long – but the thought of a seventeen

year old girl holding her friend prisoner – *literally*, by the balls, was freaking hysterical!

“It is *not* funny!” Thomas practically shrieked. “That little twit just about maimed me for life!”

“I’m... I’m sorry...” Kat choked out, trying desperately to regain her composure – but she just couldn’t pull it off. She didn’t know what was wrong with her, but she just couldn’t stop laughing.

She turned and glanced at Luke, who was standing there watching her as if she had lost her mind - and she only laughed all the harder. Oh, this was rich; she thought with a very unladylike snort.

“Katrina,” Luke whispered, and reached out to touch her arm – only to stop a moment later and pull it back - and Kat found herself wishing that he hadn’t. God! All she wanted was to feel his hands on her again.

The thought sobered her up in an instant, and she turned back to her friend – trying to shake off the immense sense of loss that she felt as she did.

“Do you know where she was headed?” Kat asked finally, and Thomas huffed again as he stomped over to her. When he was not a foot from her – she heard Luke’s low growl of warning and he stopped – rolling his eyes dramatically.

“Don’t worry, *He-Man*,” Thomas bit out, glaring at Luke. “I’m not going to hurt her.” He looked back to Kat and gave her small smile. “Really, Katrina. Your own personal guard dog?” he asked. “My, my, love – you sure have moved up in the world.” He gave Luke the once over, then leaned in to whisper conspiratorially in her ear. “Although, I must say, he *is* yummy.”

“The Hell I am!” Luke barked, and Kat bit back the smile threatening to make its presence known, once again. She cleared her throat and looked at Thomas, her expression growing serious.

“What did my sister want?”

“Well, besides my *gonads* on a platter,” Thomas said gruffly, but his tone too – had grown serious. “She’s looking for your mother.” He

informed her with a shake of his head. “But I haven’t seen Elaine in months.”

“Well, that sure as hell beats three years,” Kat replied darkly. “What did you tell her?”

“I didn’t know what to tell her,” he replied, “but she was holding what looked like a letter in the hand that *wasn’t* squeezing the life out of my boys – so I’m guessing someone gave her some information – or she wouldn’t have come looking for me.” He looked at her apologetically. “And she found out about you - from me. I’m sorry, Kat. It just kind of slipped out. I figured that if she was looking for your mom, that she had to have known about you. Jesus, Kat - just what is going on here?”

Kat stiffened slightly when she felt Luke’s heat against her back. He had moved up to stand just behind her – not touching - but Good Lord, he didn’t need to. Just his presence this close to her was enough to send her body into overdrive. She bit back the urge to turn around, jump into his arms – *and then* jump him! Geez –she thought with a scowl, she sure hoped she could muster up some willpower – and fast.

She cleared her throat and tried to ignore the man standing behind her. “There is just too much to explain right now, Tommy,” she answered. “We need to find Harper.”

Thomas glanced at Luke a moment before looking back to Kat – his eyes narrowing. “Are you safe with Mount Olympus here?” he asked, and Kat flinched slightly.

Sure, she was safe – but was Luke? She felt like a complete coward for not just ditching him and doing this alone – and she was seriously beginning to hate herself quite a bit for it. She had never in her entire life been a coward – but this man had broken down her defenses so thoroughly that she didn’t even know which end was up anymore.

“Don’t worry,” Luke growled over her shoulder, and Kat felt a shiver run across her at his deep, husky tone. “I won’t let *anyone* touch her.”

“Well, la di fricking da, Hercules,” Thomas snapped, and Kat bit back another laugh. “But I was talking to Kat – not you.”

“I swear to God - I’ll break your freaking ...” Luke began, but Kat stopped him.

“Would you two just stop with the pissing contest!” She barked, and both men instantly snapped their mouths shut and gaped at her. “We need to find Harper before she disappears again, and I really don’t want to have to stand here with my thumb up my ass while the both of you throw insults and threats at each other like two bullies on a school playground. Just drop the damn testosterone down a notch or two, *boys!*” With that, she turned – walked around Luke, and stormed for the door.

Luke glared at Thomas for a moment in silent warning, before turning and following Kat out of the shop. He spotted her as she stormed down the sidewalk; mumbling softly to herself about how all men were immature assholes - and Luke couldn’t stop the smile that came to his lips. The witch was absolutely adorable as she stomped along talking to herself.

He trotted up to her and grasped her upper arm – pulling her to a stop. “Just where in the hell do you think you’re going *now?*” He asked as she yanked her arm out of his grasp, and Luke silently cursed himself for touching her. “Sorry,” he murmured softly, his eyes gleaming as he raised his hands in a gesture of apology. “I seem to have momentarily forgotten the no touching rule.” Shit, this was just too damn hard! Luke silently raged.

He wanted to do a Hell of a lot more than just touch her - and it was like a physical pull that was gnawing at his insides with a deep, growing ache. Luke clenched his hands into fists and dropped them to his sides, trying desperately to regain some control over his libido – but this woman was making that nearly impossible.

“I’m going to find Harper,” Kat informed him as if he were daft.

“Well, you are going in the wrong direction, sunshine.” He replied with a grin, and turned and started walking in the opposite direction in which she had been heading – whistling softly to himself as he did.

Kat watched as Luke walked off – her eyes locking on his firm, perfect backside as he strolled down the street, as if he hadn’t a care in the world. “Jackass,” she grumbled under her breath - and took off after him.

“I heard that,” he stated, not breaking stride –nor even bothering to throw a glance her way, and she felt the overpowering urge to chuck something at his arrogant, *gorgeous* head! And she swore that if she had had something – she would have.

Luke suddenly came to an abrupt halt, and Kat – not quite paying attention, slammed into his solid back with a loud *oomph!*

“What the *hell*, Benji?”

Luke didn’t say a word; he just grabbed Kat around the waist and pulled her into a nearby alley, his mouth turned down in a frown.

“What?” She breathed, suddenly extremely nervous.

“I smell the witches that were at the Bradford’s,” he whispered. “I want you to stay here, while I go and check it out,” he said, and felt her instantly stiffen.

Knowing that she was about to argue with him, he did the only thing he could think of doing – he kissed her senseless. He crushed his mouth down onto hers and pulled her flush against his steely frame – his tongue taking possession and staking claim with a hot, urgent need. When he felt her relax against him, and moan softly, he turned them and eased her back, so that she was braced against the brick wall of the building as his mouth continued to devour hers.

Hating himself, he broke away from her lips and took a deep, steadying breath. “Stay here,” he commanded huskily, and Kat just stared – unable to form any semblance of a coherent sentence – or thought for that matter. She was operating on pure sensation – and boy was it messing with her brain!

Luke dipped his head and kissed her again before turning and jogging back down the alley, and Kat was again taken by just how breathtaking the man truly was. He was primal, raw sex and she realized with a groan that her knees were shaking uncontrollably and braced her hand on the brick wall behind her to steady herself.

She tried with everything that she had to gather her senses enough to go after him. She’d be damned if she’d let him kiss her into submission *just* so that she would do what he wanted her to do. Screw *that* noise! Damn, stubborn - *arrogant* ass!

With that thought urging her on, she shook her head and started after him – albeit on extremely shaky legs – she realized with a disgusted groan. Damn that man!

She hadn't even made it five steps when Luke was back. He took her by the arm and guided her along with him.

“What’s going on?” Kat questioned - her eyes large and wary.

“We need to get to Harper before they do,” he replied, leading her down the street. Kat was about to mention the no touching rule – but thought better of it. Now was definitely not the time to poke the beast.

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Chapter 6

Luke pulled Katrina along with him as he followed Harper's scent, loving the feel of her silky skin beneath his hand. He headed down the main street of town and finally took a turn and started toward the town's local park.

Harper's scent was getting stronger as they neared, and he knew that the witches had taken the opposite direction. He paused at the entrance, and turned to Kat.

"I believe she's still here," he murmured, giving Kat a gentle smile when he saw the nerves hit her full on.

He knew she was terrified of meeting her sister- but he also knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that she had nothing to worry about. The woman was amazing – and there was no way that Harper wouldn't see that. "No worries, red." He whispered with an encouraging grin. He cupped her chin with his hand and lifted her face so that she would look at him. "Come on, baby - just breathe."

Kat nodded – taking a deep, steadying breath. "No worries." She repeated, hearing the tremor in her voice and wincing slightly. Damn it – she could do this! She looked at him and tried to return his smile. "Just breathe."

Luke wrapped his arms around her and hugged her tightly, wanting so much to take all of her fear and doubt from her - but he knew that he couldn't. She needed to find out for herself that she was worthy. He leaned back and kissed her gently on the forehead, then caught her gaze, his eyes locking with - and holding hers.

"It's going to be fine," he reassured her – his mouth quirking up into a lopsided grin that literally took Kat's breath away. "You can do this."

"All right." She gave him a quick, jerky nod. "Let's do it." She whispered with much more conviction than she actually felt.

Luke dropped a quick kiss on her lips before whispering in her ear. "She'll love you, red. How could she not."

With that, he took hold of her hand and headed toward a large tree house at the edge of the park. Not caring in the least that their no touching rule had been completely blown out of the water.

Harper noticed the couple walking hand in hand toward where she was sitting and instantly went on alert. There was something so familiar about the beautiful woman walking to where she was hidden, that she felt her throat constrict with tears. As they approached, Harper realized with a gasp, that she looked quite a bit like herself – but it couldn't be! Could it?

She stood and braced herself against the wall of the tree house, peeking around through the window to watch them as they walked toward her.

The man was beyond drop dead gorgeous, Harper thought with a nervous smile, but her eyes kept going back to the redhead – it was as if she was being drawn to her - and suddenly Harper realized that her feet were moving, and she was heading toward the trapdoor of the structure. As if in a trance, Harper lifted the door and started climbing cautiously down the ladder.

When she reached the bottom, the couple stood not five feet away from her, and Harper heard the woman gasp as their eyes met.

“Harper.” The woman whispered, her eyes filling with tears, and Harper swallowed hard, trying with everything that she had to be brave.

“Yes.” She croaked out – her knees shaking wildly.

“I...I'm Katrina. I'm your sister.”

Harper took a breath and straightened her back – jutting out her chin slightly. “Yeah, I kind of figured,” she replied, fighting the desire to throw herself into the woman's arms with every ounce of self-control that had.

No matter what she was feeling, this woman was a complete stranger to her. She might be her sister, but she had never even attempted to contact her before now, and with that thought, Harper's anger started to bubble to the surface and she tried with all her might to push it back. Think happy thoughts, she told herself.

Kat watched the play of emotion on Harper's face nervously – not quite sure what she should say. Thankfully Luke helped her out.

“I’m Luke,” He said, letting go of Kats hand and taking a few steps towards the girl who was standing there so defiantly.

He held out his hand as Harper eyed him warily, not sure if she could trust the pair. When Luke graced her with that smile of his, Harper felt her cheeks warm. There was just something about him that made her want to believe that he would help her – that she could trust him.

She swallowed the lump in her throat and took a step closer, putting her tiny hand in his – needing them to think that she wasn’t as scared as she was. “What are you doing here?” She asked, her voice cracking slightly, and she grimaced.

Luke chuckled, his eyes sparkling. “We’ve been looking for you. And I’ve got to tell you, kid – you haven’t been easy to track,” he told her, turning and motioning to Kat to come over.

Kat took a few tentative steps closer as Harper watched her intently, feeling as if she was about to toss up everything that she had ever eaten in her entire life. When she stood beside Luke, he put his hand to the small of her back and urged her forward as he took a few steps behind her to give them some space.

Kat stared, unable to utter a word – her heart pounding in her chest so hard that she feared it would burst. She took a deep, steadying breath and glanced back to Luke over her shoulder. He gave her a gentle smile and a wink – nodding to her that it was all right, and Kat felt a surge of strength at his encouragement.

She turned back to Harper and tried to smile – hoping to put the girl at ease. The poor thing had had so much dumped on her in the last day, that Kat had the overwhelming urge to comfort and protect her. “I didn’t know,” she began softly, her eyes shimmering with tears. “You were...you were kept a secret from me.” Damn it! Kat inwardly chastised herself. She was totally messing this up. “If I had known...I would have come sooner.”

Harper narrowed her eyes, biting at her bottom lip much in the same fashion as Kat did when she was concentrating. “My mom and dad were the best,” she threw out, her chin jutting out in defiance, but Kat could see the emotion in the girl’s expression. “They loved me, and took care of me – but now...” She shook her head slightly, her eyes shining. “You really didn’t

know about me?” She asked, after what to Kat seemed like an eternity, and she shook her head.

“My...*our* mother sent me away before you were born.”

“Why?” Harper asked as a tear slipped free and slid down her cheek - and Kat wanted nothing more at that moment than to take her in her arms and hold her. Instead, she again shook her head sadly.

“I don’t really know. She did everything she could to hide you from me.”

“I have no one now,” Harper whispered, and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

Kat took a step closer to her, her own tears running down her face. “That’s not true, Harper.” She said, trying her best to give her a reassuring smile. “You have me.”

Harper stared at Kat a moment in silence, her hazel eyes sparkling with moisture. “I’m a handful,” she finally croaked out, and Kat couldn’t help but laugh.

“Yes, well; that makes two of us,” Kat replied softly, and decided to take a giant leap of faith. She swallowed back her fear and opened her arms to her sister, praying that she would see the love in her eyes.

Harper hesitated a moment, glancing at Luke standing there silently, before looking back to Kat. Then suddenly she was stepping forward in a rush and throwing herself into her arms.

As soon as their bodies touched there was an explosion of blue light that sent them each flying backwards with a loud pop.

Harper landed firmly on her backside in the sand, and Kat was thrown back, right into Luke’s arms - the force of it, knocking them both to the ground. And Kat had the insane thought that she had *finally* moved the mountain - and all that it had taken was a small sonic boom.

“What in the *Hell* was that?” Harper asked, getting to her feet and brushing off her bottom.

Kat lay there on top of Luke, painfully aware of his strong arms wrapped around her, and tried to calm her beating heart. She felt him twist,

and effortlessly stand up as he pulled her up with him.

“Are you all right?” he asked her, his hands curling over her shoulders, and his eyes boring into hers with concern. Kat nodded slowly, trying hard to figure out just what in the Hell had just happened. She had never experienced anything like it before.

Luke turned to glance at Harper. “How about you, kid?” He asked her, as he led Kat over to where she stood.

“Oh, I am just fine and *freaking* dandy,” she said with a sarcastic smirk. “I always enjoy getting the crap shocked out of me. It totally makes a girl feel alive, ya know? And I am *not* a kid!”

Luke couldn't help but to burst out laughing. The girl was just as much of a smartass as her sister, and he had the strong feeling that they were going to get along brilliantly.

“Do you feel funny?” Kat asked Harper, and Luke's eyes shot back to her. His gaze roaming over her body and face for any signs of injury – and his heart pounding in his chest with panic at the thought of her being hurt in any way.

“Yeah,” he heard Harper respond. “I feel...kind of,” she broke off, trying to find the right words.

“Energized?” Kat offered, and the girl nodded emphatically.

“Yeah! That's it exactly!”

Kat took another step, so that she was standing directly in front of her - and tentatively reached out her hand towards her sister.

“Katrina,” Luke protested softly with a hand on her arm. “Perhaps you shouldn't.”

Kat shook her head, stopping any further protest - and took Harper's hand. There was a slight tingling at the contact, but no shot of electric current or ball of light. It felt almost like a diluted form of the tingles she had felt when she and Luke had made love, and she felt her cheeks grow warm with the memory. She shook off the thought, and pulled Harper into a hug, holding the girl close.

Harper relaxed a moment later when she realized that she wasn't going to be shot through the air again, and her arms lifted to return Kat's embrace. After a few moments, they broke apart – smiling.

Harper looked at Luke who was standing there silently, a look of apprehension marring his perfect features. She eyed him up and down a moment before looking back to Kat. “So, who's Tarzan?” she asked with a grin. “Boyfriend?”

“No!” Kat burst out, her face flushing even redder than it had been. “He's a...well; he's sort of a friend.” She stammered, and then glanced at Luke. “*And, a giant, stubborn pain in the ass.*”

Luke broke out into laughter, and blew her a kiss. “You don't know the half of it,” he replied.

Harper's eyes went between the two, her brows lifting slightly as if she knew something that they didn't, and finally shrugged.

“Whatever,” she said after a long pause. “So, what do we do now?”

Luke walked over to them and grinned. “How about we get you both something to eat, and then settle into a hotel for the night. We have a lot to discuss, and you and your sister need a little time.”

Kat nodded distractedly and looped her arm through Harper's, following Luke back to the car – trying as hard as she could not to stare at his behind as they did.



“You have got to be kidding me,” Luke laughed when, not thirty minutes later, both Kat and Harper ordered pancakes at the little diner that they sat in. “Seriously?”

“What? Pancakes are the perfect food,” Harper informed him, and Kat nodded in agreement.

The two seemed to be slipping into an easy friendship, and Luke knew without a doubt that in time they would become inseparable. There was an instant bond between the two that you would have to be hard-pressed not to see. “So,” Harper asked, interrupting his musings. “What's *your* deal, jungle-boy?”

Luke choked back a laugh and studied her a moment. “Jungle-boy?” He finally asked; his mouth quirking up at the corners.

“Yeah,” she stated, glancing at Kat quickly, then back to Luke – her lips turned up in a saucy little smile that was so much like her sisters. “What’s the deal with the braid? Like, that look went out in what...the 1800’s?”

Luke leaned back in his seat and grinned – thoroughly enjoying himself. “I guess I just never bothered worrying about it much, brat.”

“You should really let me cut it,” she went on, taking a sip of her soda and smiling. “I mean, catch up with the times for God’s sake.” She finished with a crinkling of her nose in distaste.

“So, I take it that you have your cosmetology license?”

Harper huffed - tossing her long hair behind her shoulder. “I know enough to cut *that* mop. It’s not like I’ll make you look *Amish* or anything! Geez.”

Luke burst out laughing, his gorgeous eyes twinkling playfully, and Kat felt a warmth spreading through her. She sat there and silently watched the two – her heart tightening in her chest at their playful banter. God, this all just seemed so natural – so right.

She sighed at the thought of having to call Elaine and end all of this, and a moment later, her brows furrowed as a feeling of unease hit her full force. For some reason she couldn’t fathom; she didn’t want to call her mother. Call it instinct or a gut feeling, but the very idea made her unbelievably uneasy – as if a dark cloud had suddenly passed overhead.

“Katrina, are you all right?” Luke asked; abruptly pulling her from her thoughts. She glanced at him, and noticed the worry clouding his features, and cursed the man for being so perceptive.

“I’m fine,” she replied halfheartedly and thankfully, before he could press the issue, the waitress came over with their food.

She didn’t want to have to explain this feeling of dread that was wrapping itself around her like a cloak. She needed to get him to take her and Harper home, and then decide her next move. If she told him about her fears, he would just argue that much more about staying with them. And she just could not have that. As much as it killed her, she knew that Luke was

not to be a part of her life. That she needed to leave him. And something was telling her - the sooner the better.

Harper dug into her pancakes and grinned impishly at Luke, and Kat couldn't help but smile at the pleasure she seemed to take in teasing him at every given opportunity.

"So, are you a witch too, Jungle-boy?" she asked between bites, and gave him a wink.

Luke took a swig of his coffee and returned her smile. "Not quite," he informed her with a shrug. "I'm a Were."

Harper's eyes widened. "Are you *serious*?" she asked, her mouth dropping open in wonder. "That is like...so *wicked* cool! I mean; I really didn't think that werewolves were real."

"Well, I'm certainly real enough, brat." He chuckled, and glanced at Kat- who in turn, turned beet red at the devilish gleam in his eyes.

Oh, yes – she silently gulped. He sure as *Hell* was real. And yummy and sexy and...

Kat shoved a forkful of food into her mouth and tried to ignore his gaze and what it did to her body temperature. The man was just too damn dangerous.

"And, I'll let you in on a bit of a secret," he said, turning his attention back to the girl. "Two of my best friends happen to be Vampire's – and one of their mates is part Fey."

"Holy crap!" Harper breathed - her eyes sparkling with excitement. "Holy *freaking* crap!"

Luke laughed and took a bite of his burger – his eyes once again straying to Kat. God - he thought with a tightening of his body - she was beautiful, and he had the overpowering urge to lean across the table and kiss her full, sweet lips. Her mouth was set in a thoughtful grin, and it literally took his breath away.

"So, can I like see you as a wolf sometime?" Harper asked, and he mentally shook himself back to reality.

"Perhaps."

“Nice!” Harper laughed. “I always wanted a dog.”

Kat choked on the bite of pancake that she had just stuffed into her mouth and began to cough and sputter - laughing at the look of complete shock on Luke’s face.

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Chapter 7

“Um, is it ok if I take this room,” Harper asked softly as Luke ushered them into the motel room, and Kat felt her face instantly heat. “It’s nothing personal or anything,” she explained nervously. “But I’m just kind of used to having a room to myself, and I’m told that I talk in my sleep and... I hope that’s all right?”

Luke smiled and gave her a wink. “I don’t have a problem with it at all,” he murmured, glancing at Kat and giving her a snarky grin that had the blood rushing through her body in a warming rush. “Is that all good with you, red?” He lifted his brow in challenge, and her body instantly stiffened.

Damn it! Kat silently cursed - the thought of sharing a room once again with the mangy cur was scaring and exciting her all at the same time – throwing her damn mind and body into overdrive. But she would be *damned* if she was going to let the mangy cur know that.

“That’s fine,” she bit out, her heart pounding in her chest and her palms getting clammy. She wiped them on her jeans and headed over to the door that adjoined the two rooms Luke had rented.

She groaned as she walked through the threshold and saw the single king sized bed. Crap! Did the man have a thing for king sized beds or what? She knew that with his large stature a king would be much more comfortable – but... come on! *Really?*

She threw her backpack on a nearby chair and sighed raggedly. When was she going to catch a break? Just what had she done to deserve this torture? She had always tried to be a good person – so why was fate dealing her such a crappy hand at every turn?

Luke strolled through the door, kicked off his boots and plopped down on the bed. Stretching out with his arms behind his head, he studied Kat silently – causing her to grow extremely uncomfortable. She shot him a glare and walked back into Harpers room.

“Is there anything you need?” she asked, trying desperately to forget about the gorgeous man sprawled out so damn seductively on the bed in the next room. He was utter temptation and that was proving to be a problem.

Their no touching rule seemed to have been thrown out the window, and now she was going to have to share a bed with the irritating ass!

“No, I’m good.” Harper said, giving Kat a weary smile. “I think I might just take a shower and call it a night. I’m wiped and I feel just all kinds of disgusting. Sleeping in the park is not my idea of a good time.” She hesitated a moment, watching Kat closely. “Um...when were you planning on calling your mother?” She asked finally - and Kat couldn’t help but notice the look of trepidation that crossed her features.

“Harper,” Kat said, walking over to her and touching her arm. She instantly felt that low hum when they made contact. “Tell me the truth. Do you have a bad feeling about calling Elaine?”

The girl was silent for a long moment, and then finally nodded her head slowly. “I can’t explain it, and I don’t want you to be upset – but it just feels... wrong somehow.”

Kat pulled her over to the bed and sat down, taking her hands in hers. “Harper, listen to me. I’m not what you would call a ‘practicing witch’ really,” she explained softly. “I didn’t go to the celebrations as often as I should have. I had a life that I was content with, and never really had time for any of that.” She sighed and shrugged her shoulders. “My powers are simple at best. I can scry and cast certain fundamental spells – and every so often I can feel a person’s emotions if I touch them and they are strong enough, but...” she shook her head. “The one thing that usually doesn’t fail me is my instincts. And they are telling me not to let Elaine know that we’re together.”

Harper watched her closely a moment before throwing herself into Kat’s arms and hugging her fiercely. “Thank God!” She cried. “I...I can’t explain it either, but it just doesn’t feel right, ya know? Being with you...and Luke – that feels right.”

Kat swallowed the lump that had formed instantly at her words. How could she tell her that she and Harper needed to leave Luke behind? That the only way to keep him safe - was to go off somewhere on their own and leave him behind.

In time, she thought with a deep, overwhelming sadness – she would tell her soon. She would explain everything to her after Luke dropped them

off at her apartment tomorrow.

“Listen, kiddo,” she murmured, brushing the hair off of her face with the tips of her fingers. “We are going to be ok. Got it?” And Harper nodded – her hazel eyes as big as saucers, and Kat knew for all her outer toughness – the girl was scared. She might be seventeen years old, but she was still a confused, lost little girl inside. “I have the same reservations about calling her as you do. It just doesn’t feel right to me either - so between the two of us, I’m pretty sure our guts are right on the money. We’ll figure out where we’ll go tomorrow. Deal?”

“Deal.” Harper agreed and hugged her again. “I’m glad you’re my sister,” she whispered in her ear, and Kat felt her heart swell. She had a sister!

“Me too, kiddo. Now go take your shower and get some rest. You have to be exhausted.”

“I am.”

Kat stood and walked over to the door. Looking back over her shoulder, she threw Harper a wink – then turned back to go and face her biggest problem.

When she walked back into the room, Luke still lay on the bed – but he seemed to have fallen asleep. She stood there silently and watched him a moment - once again taken by the pure, sensual beauty of the man.

She knew that men weren’t usually considered beautiful – but this man could be described no other way. He was masculine, and chiseled and perfect beyond comprehension – and completely out of her reach. If she wanted to keep him safe, she had to let him go – and there was absolutely no changing that.

It wasn’t as if they had anything together anyway, she told herself with a huff - except maybe some animosity and earth-shattering sex – and even though she found herself enjoying every moment that they spent together, she knew that it had to end. To save him she *had* to let him go- she repeated to herself, and walked across the room and into the bathroom – grabbing her backpack along the way. Maybe a nice hot bath would calm her battered heart.

Luke woke the instant that Kat stepped into the room, but kept his eyes closed - hoping to give her a little space. He knew that she was nervous at the prospect of sharing a room with him again, and he wanted her to relax. It had been an emotional day for her and she needed to relieve some of her stress.

When he heard her go into the bathroom and start a bath, he finally opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling - wanting nothing more than to go in there and be the one to help her ease her tension.

He sat up with a groan and rubbed his hands across his eyes. Knowing that she was not more than fifteen feet from him, naked - and wet, had his body doing dangerous things. Damn it to Hell!

“Hey, Jungle-boy,” Harper whispered, opening the door to their room and peeking in. “You wouldn’t happen to have some toothpaste, would you?”

Luke chuckled and walked over to his duffle bag. He rifled through it a moment and pulled out a tube, holding it out to her. “Here you go, brat.”

“Thanks.” She was about to make her exit, when her eyes suddenly lit up. “Hey, you got scissors in there?”

“I believe so, why?” He asked, raising his brow slightly – his eyes narrowing.

“Come with me,” she laughed. “Let’s rock my sister’s world.”



Kat closed her eyes and let the hot water soothe her aching muscles. She thought she heard Luke’s voice, but couldn’t be certain. Shaking it off, she sighed and felt her eyelids growing heavy. Not having the strength to fight it, she let herself drift off – not caring in the least that she was instantly dreaming of amber eyes.

Kat woke with a start a little while later shivering – the bathwater having gone ice cold. She quickly slipped out of the tub and wrapped herself up in a thick towel – trying to stop the tremors assaulting her body.

She ran a brush through her damp hair and threw on her favorite overlarge t-shirt and a pair of panties – thinking now that she wished she

had packed some pajama pants or even a pair of granny panties – and silently cursed her addiction to silk undergarments. She felt slightly over-exposed in the worn shirt that barely skimmed her thighs. Not to mention the deep purple French cut underwear. Oh, well – she thought with a sigh’ no changing it now.

Gathering up her nerve, she left the bathroom and walked into the room – praying with all that she had, that the wolf was still fast asleep.

Luke *was* still sprawled out on the bed when Kat walked in - but her mouth dropped open when she noticed that he was shirtless *and* missing the long braid he usually wore.

His ravens-wing black hair was cut short in a sexy, messy style that only served to enhance his already spectacular looks, and she swallowed hard – feeling her previously chilled body instantly growing warm. Oh, Hell – who was she kidding! It was getting downright *hot* in here. Oh dear God! The man looked beyond amazing - he looked downright edible!

“I take it that you approve?” he asked with that insufferable grin on his face - and Kat couldn’t be sure if he meant his haircut or his lack of a shirt – and in reality she approved of both with uninhibited abandon. It was taking all the willpower that she possessed not to just jump him right then and there!

“Har...Harper did that?” She stammered, her face flushing with heat.

“I have to admit – that little smart-ass has talent.”

“Um...yeah. It looks all right, I guess.” She stammered, feeling that pull towards him that she did whenever he was near. “Every dog needs a good grooming once in a while, I suppose. Did she happen to give you a flea dip too?”

Luke burst out laughing and patted the bed, his mouth turning up in a leer. “Come on, red. Why don’t you lie down and get some rest? It’s been a rough, emotional couple of days. You must be wiped.”

Kat took a deep breath, and walked over to the bed - not about to let this man rattle her any more than he already did. Screw *that* noise! He could look at her all he wanted with that drop-dead gorgeous grin, and intense smoky stare. She wasn’t going to let him know how he affected her. She

straightened her back and walked over to the other side of the bed and slipped in – pulling the covers up over her chest.

“Geez, it’s not even nine o’clock,” she said, shaking her head with a groan. “I can’t believe I’m going to sleep this early.”

Luke flipped onto his side, and rested his head on his hand as his eyes captured and held hers. “There are plenty of things I can think of to pass the time,” he whispered huskily, and Kat’s heart slammed in her chest with a resounding boom. Oh crap – this was *not* good.

“I’m sure you could, Benji,” she replied, her voice barely above a whisper – and suddenly her mouth felt dry - and her tongue exceedingly thick.

Luke leaned over so that he was hovering above her, his mouth whispering across hers with the lightest of touches - and Kat’s damn toes curled. He was so unbelievably warm, and he smelled so good that she felt every bit of her resolve pouring out of her body in a rush - to leave only a deep, aching need that she felt to the very core of her being.

She wanted him more than she wanted air – and her body, mind and soul cried out to him. Begging him to take her – and consequences be damned. She just wanted him so damn bad - if only for this one night.

Tomorrow she and Harper would leave him behind - but she could have this one night, she reasoned. One night of total, uninhibited bliss – with the man she had come to care for more than she was willing to admit.

“Luke,” she murmured against his mouth – not quite certain if it was a protest or a plea, but she didn’t have time to figure it out, because a moment later his mouth took hers with primal demand. His tongue swept past her parted lips and claimed hers as his arm snaked around her waist and pulled her flush against his strong, solid frame. And it felt wondrous. He was the perfect combination of smooth, hot steel – his muscles rippling against her heated flesh. He was strong and demanding, and there was nothing she could do but to respond.

She plunged her hands into his silky hair and pulled his mouth closer to hers, returning his kiss in quiet desperation – and their teeth knocked together in their desire.

She felt him growl deep in his chest when she kicked off the covers and tossed her leg over his – drawing his body closer to hers.

Luke flipped over onto his back, pulling her along with him so that the lengths of their bodies were melded together, and kissed her fully, passionately - and Kat groaned at the feel of his desire pressing firmly against her stomach – demanding that she take notice. And, Lord help her – she noticed. How could she not? He was hot and firm and strong and so very well endowed.

Straddling his thighs, Kat sat up and lifted the t-shirt that she wore over her head, eliciting another deep growl from the man beneath her.

His hands instantly swept up and cupped her breasts, teasing her tender buds into firm, aching peaks - and Kat arched into his strong caress – biting at her bottom lip to keep from screaming out. His touch was like liquid fire that swept over her body in a rush.

Luke sat up and kissed her tenderly between her breasts, as his hands continued to caress her, and Kat could feel that delicious heat coiling through her stomach only to settle at the apex of her thighs with a vengeance.

He turned his head slightly and his mouth captured one of her nipples and suckled - causing a delicious shudder to run up her spine, and she knew that she needed this man – needed him more than she had ever needed anything before.

“Oh, God...Luke,” she panted hoarsely, as she reached down between them to the waistband of his jeans, and tried with shaking hands to free him of the constricting material.

“Easy, sweetheart,” Luke murmured - gently tugging at her bottom lip with his teeth. “Tonight, we take our time. I want to taste and feel every damn part of you.” With that he flipped her over onto her back once again, and gazed down into her eyes – seemingly taking in every aspect of her face as if it were a fine piece of art, and Kat couldn’t help but tremble at the tenderness she saw there.

He kissed her cheek then moved to her jaw and down to her neck. He slowly and thoroughly worked his way down her body until he made his way down to the silk panties that covered her. With a roguish grin that

sucked the air right from her lungs, he slipped the panties off and tossed them to the floor. “And - they are still intact,” he chuckled, before lowering his head and tasting her honeyed sweetness.

Kat arched her back as she dug her heels into the mattress - her breath coming out of her in a sigh. Dear Lord, what this man could do to her!

Luke slid his hand across her stomach as his other hand caressed her thigh a moment before moving to where his mouth worked its magic. He slipped a finger inside her, then another - and Kat felt as if every nerve ending in her body was suddenly alive and humming. His teeth nipped at her sensitive bud and Kat groaned with euphoria. So close! So damn close – and she just knew beyond a doubt that she would never survive this. That this man was definitely going to kill her - leaving her nothing but a pile of ash.

“Please,” she begged, curling her fingers in his hair and chewing on the inside of her cheek. Luke withdrew from her warmth and looked up at her, relishing the passion etched across her perfect features - a part of him swelling with pride that he was the one putting it there. He got off of the bed and heard Kats soft cry of protest - and his mouth turned up in a contented smile. There was nothing sexier than hearing his woman call for him.

Kat watched him through hooded eyes as he shed himself of his jeans, and only a moment later slid back into the bed beside her – pulling her to him and kissing her deeply – taking his time as his hands wandered over her entire body – caressing and teasing her overheated skin.

“You are so damn beautiful,” he whispered against her lips, as his hands slid down her back to cup and knead the perfect curves of her bottom – pulling her against him so that she could feel his desire for her. He was thrumming with need – and knew that he had to be inside her – had to feel her warmth surround him.

He shifted and stationed himself between her thighs as he kissed her tenderly - and finally...finally slid very slowly into her heat – wanting to make this moment last an eternity. She was tight and warm and slick, and it was taking everything he had not to give into his baser instincts and just

thrust into her and let the animal take over – but that wouldn't due. Not with her – not with his Katrina. He planned on enjoying every single moment.

He nibbled at her bottom lip as he sheathed himself to the hilt, and stilled – suddenly aware of that tingle rippling up his spine. “Christ, baby. You feel so damn good.” He rasped out, his eyes sliding closed as he enjoyed the feel of her surrounding him. This was as close to Heaven as he had ever been – and he wanted a thousand lifetimes of it.

“Luke,” she gasped, and he knew that she was feeling the same thing that he was - that hot, intense hum of desire. “Please... Oh, please.”

“Shhh, sweetheart,” he husked, kissing her neck. “I know, baby.” He began to move his hips - slowly and steadily, and Kat wrapped her legs around his waist – digging her feet into his thighs and curling her hips up to meet his in the same steady rhythm - and it was beyond sublime.

“More,” she gasped, and Luke increased his pace – still not wanting to let this end. In all of his life he had never felt a connection to anyone the way he did with this woman, and he knew in that instant that he would do whatever it took to keep her with him. She was his, and he realized in that moment that he loved her with his entire heart and soul. That she was his to love and protect.

He had never cared before if he had been tender – sex to him had always been just a means to an end. But with Kat it was so much more than that. It was all consuming and more important than anything ever had been before – and he needed her to feel that too. He needed her to know that what they shared was special – it was forever. There would never be anyone else.

He moved faster as he felt her body beginning to tighten, and knew that she was close to her release. Staking claim to her mouth once again, he increased his pace, wanting to reach that pinnacle with her - and a moment later he wasn't disappointed. His mouth absorbed her cry as she stiffened and came crashing down around him – her channel tightening up around him as he reached his peak with her - and the tingling in his body slammed through him like an electric shock – almost as if he had stuck his finger into a light socket.

Kats body trembled and shuddered from the powerful orgasm ripping through her like a tidal wave of sensation, and she clenched her hands in his hair, wanting nothing more at the moment than to scream out to him – but painfully aware of her sister sleeping in the next room – so instead, she returned his kiss with desperation, moaning into his mouth as her tongue slid against and sparred with his.

After what seemed an eternity of bliss - Luke rolled onto his back – taking her with him -still buried deliciously inside her as the aftershocks of their climax continued to rock through them.

He kissed the corner of her mouth – working his way to her jaw, and finally her ear, where he tugged at her lobe a moment before softly kissing the area just below it - and Kat once again felt her toes curl. Oh, dear God, the man just knew *all* the right places.

“You are absolutely incredible,” he whispered against her skin, hugging her to him so tightly that she felt the air rush out of her as his heart beat a tempo against hers.

Kat kissed the hollow of his throat and sighed – refusing to follow every instinct in her body to run. No! She internally screamed. She’d be damned if she was going to do that again – not this time. She was going to enjoy this night with him, and carry it with her forever. For one incredible night – he would be all hers – to love and cherish.

“You aren’t too shabby yourself, Benji,” she husked, and Luke felt his heart swell – as well as another part of his anatomy - and he saw her eyes widen in surprise. “You’re kidding, right?” She giggled when she saw his expression darken once again with desire and his eyes begin to glow with that look that she was beginning to know so well.

“Not in the least,” he whispered, leaning in to kiss her cheek - and smiled that damn smile of his.

He pulled her astride him, and sat up - burying his head in her hair. He moved his hips, setting the rhythm and Kat quickly took the lead, raising up on her knees and slamming back down – pulling a groan from his lips as she moved.

Her arms wrapped around him - keeping his face buried snugly against her, as she rocked and swirled her hips against his – their body’s slick with

the perspiration of their lovemaking.

“Katrina,” Luke gasped, clenching his jaw and gritting the words out between his teeth. “That’s it, baby.”

Kats head fell back as she increased her tempo, her fiery hair brushing against the arms that held her so securely, and she found herself once again on the precipice of that erotic release that only he could give. That earth-shattering finale, that shot her to the stars and back in a blinding explosion of colors.

“Luke!” She gasped as that delicious climax once again slammed through her with a vengeance - and she knew that he was right there with her when he stiffened and growled deep in his chest – the sound rumbling through his body like thunder.

They sat there silently; each trying to get their breathing under control, until Luke finally lifted her off of him, and cradled her against his strong chest – kissing the top of her head softly.

“I swear to God - you are going to be the death of me,” he said quietly against her temple, and Kat felt like she had suddenly been slammed in the gut with a forty pound sledge hammer.

That was exactly what she was afraid of - and that bitch called cold hard reality reared her ugly, vengeful head. As long as he was with her - he was in danger.

She closed her eyes and snuggled up against him, needing to feel his warmth, and afraid to say anything. There were just too many emotions running around in her head, and she felt her eyes moisten with tears. This was all just too damn hard.

“Get some rest, red,” Luke breathed against her ear as he settled himself onto the mattress with her still held securely in his embrace – their body’s intertwined.

Kat let her eyes drift closed, as she listened to the steady beating of his heart - allowing the sound to lull her to sleep.

Chapter 8

Luke woke the instant that he picked up the scent of witch in the air. Knowing without a doubt that it was not Katrina's scent, he carefully slid out of the bed, and silently walked across the room to the window. He pulled back the curtain and gazed out into the parking lot - his skin beginning to prickle with a deep growing sense of danger.

He walked over to the door and opened it slowly. Shifting into his wolf form, he padded out into the night – following the scent. The parking lot was deserted as Luke made his way silently through the parked cars - his body on full alert.

A low growl of warning rumbled deep in his chest as he spotted the man making his way towards the rooms where Kat and Harper slept, and he bared his teeth – circling around behind a parked van and watching intently, fury overtaking him. His body trembled with the fierce need to protect, and he inched his way closer as the witch crept along the building, closer to their rooms.

Luke's hackles rose when the overwhelming scent of rotten meat hit him, and he turned his head – his glowing amber eyes sweeping the area. A moment later, another figure emerged from the shadows and joined the witch. Demon! Just what in the Hell was a witch doing with a Demon?

Luke's entire body trembled with rage as he padded over to where the two men stood, talking in whispers.

“They are in the rooms at the end,” the Witch was saying, pointing to where Kat and Harper lay sleeping, and Luke's ears twitched as his body tensed even tighter.

He made his way closer to where the two stood - as silent as death. He was not going to let either one of these bastards anywhere near his woman - or her sister. He would protect them to the death.

He watched the two closely - his mouth set in a snarl as he readied himself to pounce – his urge to kill overwhelming him.

The witch spotted Luke as he leapt into the air and raised his hand - a ball of light shooting from his palm, and hitting Luke square in the side - knocking him to the ground with a painful thud.

Luke struggled to get up – ignoring the blazing pain in his ribs, and leapt at the man once again before he had the chance for a second attack, going straight for the throat – and meeting his mark with deadly precision.

He killed the witch in an instant, and turned toward the Demon - who stood there watching him in surprise – his yellow eyes glowing with shock.

“Son of a bitch!” he hissed, right before Luke struck, knocking the vile creature to the ground and snapping. There was a high pitched shriek a moment before the Demon burst into flame – singeing Luke’s fur slightly as he burst into flame – then disappeared into a pile of ash.

Luke shifted back to his human form, and braced his hands on his knees – trying desperately to fight off the overwhelming urge to pass out. He took a few painful breaths before walking over to the witch and lifting the body – tossing it over his shoulder, even though his body was screaming in protest.

He walked slowly - and a bit unsteadily over to a nearby dumpster and threw the body in, pain slicing through his side with white-hot heat.

Christ, that really hurt, he thought sourly – his face set in a tight grimace as his body protested each movement that he made. Damn it.

“Luke?”

Luke whipped around at the sound of Kat’s terror filled voice, and found her standing not ten feet away – looking so small and fragile in her oversized t-shirt, her eyes wide and filled with panic. Her gaze swept over his frame and a gasp burst from her when she saw the large bruise and burn mark on his ribs.

“Oh, my God! Luke.” She ran over to him and reached out to touch him – but stopped herself short, not wanting to cause him anymore pain.

“I’m fine,” he ground out between clenched teeth and scowled at her darkly. “Get back inside,” he ordered, and Kat met his eyes – that spark of stubbornness flitting across her features in an instant, and he saw her body tense.

“The Hell I will!” She barked, taking a step closer and wrapping her arm around his waist to help support him when she saw him teetering slightly.

As much as Luke hated to admit it – her embrace was a welcome relief. He was close to passing out and wasn’t sure how much longer he could stand on his own – but his main concern at the moment was to get her back safely inside. He followed her on shaky legs as she led him back to their room and into the bathroom.

She closed the lid on the toilet and eased him onto it – and Luke felt the room begin to spin precariously around him.

Taking another ragged breath, he closed his eyes – trying desperately to steady himself. “Damn witch magic,” he grumbled as Kat grabbed a towel and began running it under the faucet. She squeezed the excess water from it, and knelt down in front of him – her brows knit together with concern.

“I...I need to clean this,” she whispered, and looked up into his face – her heart breaking at the pain she saw reflected there. She knew that it was bad.

Luke nodded and gave her a smile - but she couldn’t help but notice how it didn’t reach his eyes, and her fear only increased. With shaking hands, she dabbed the cool cloth against his ribs and cringed when she heard him wince – cussing under his breath.

“I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” he replied softly. “There’s nothing I like better than having a beautiful woman tending to my wounds.” This time when he smiled – it did reach his eyes, and Kat released the breath she hadn’t even realized that she’d been holding. “The only thing that would make it better would be if you were naked too.”

“Luke!” Kat reprimanded, glaring at him. She turned and grabbed a dry towel from the rack behind her, and draped it over his lap - her expression stern. “This is not the time for your games.”

Luke leaned forward slightly and kissed the tip of her nose. “It’s always time for games, sweetheart. Have no doubt about that...*ever*.”

Kat leaned away and pressed the towel back to his ribs with much more force than she had intended and she felt her heart clench in her chest when he gasped. “Sorry,” she murmured, her face flushing.

“No worries, red. It’s just a few bruised ribs. I’ll heal in no time.”

“You need to rest.”

Luke shook his head and started to stand – the towel hitting the floor in the process - leaving Kat kneeling there, eye level with his considerable assets. She shrieked and fell back, landing on her ass with a sound grunt.

Luke burst out laughing; then grabbed his side in pain. “Shit!” He growled. “That stings. Son of a *bitch!*” He took a few shallow breaths, and then grinned at her. “Come on, red,” he said, offering her his hand – which she ignored - not wanting to cause him any more discomfort. She pushed herself up and faced him.

“Come and lay down for a bit,” she suggested, but again he shook his head.

“No time. Those Bastards know we’re here. We need to relocate and *fast*. I’m not taking any chances with yours or Harper’s safety.” He walked through the door with Kat following close at his heels, chewing at her bottom lip. “I need you to do me a favor,” he said, picking up his jeans from the chair.

“What?” She asked, eyeing him suspiciously – not at all comfortable with the wicked gleam that had suddenly come to his eyes. She knew that expression all too well.

“I need you to help me dress.”

Kat’s eyes widened slightly and her mouth fell open - but she quickly recovered and grabbed the jeans from his hand. There was no way in Hell she was going to let this arrogant ass know the effect he consistently had on her – even in the midst of all this crap going on around them. “Brace your hand on my shoulder,” she directed, as she leaned down. “One leg at a time, Tonto.”

“Believe me, sweetheart,” he said with a grimace as he lifted first one leg, then the other. “I know how to do it. Although, I must admit - I never thought I’d see the day when I would be asking you to *dress* me.”

“Ha-ha – you are just a frigging laugh riot,” she ground out, as she carefully slid the material up his legs. Her face suddenly turned scarlet when she reached his groin, and she coughed uneasily. “I...um...do you... do you dress to the left or to the right? I mean, you guys have a preference, don’t you?” She asked; her voice barely above a whisper and Luke choked out a laugh.

Dear God! They knew each other intimately, he thought with a grin – and yet she was completely flustered by the simple task of helping him dress. Women! If he lived to be a thousand, he didn’t think he would ever understand what went on in their heads.

“I can manage the rest, thanks. Unless you would prefer...”

“No!” she barked, and turned to hurry and find his bag. She rifled through it, looking for a shirt. “Don’t you own anything besides black t-shirts?” She grumbled, looking for something with buttons so he wouldn’t have to lift his arms.

“As a matter of fact I do – but I didn’t think to bring any dress shirts along for the ride. So a t-shirt it is. Besides, they’re much easier to get in and out of if I have to shift...or whatever,” he finished with a leer that made Kat’s cheeks heat slightly.

She rolled her eyes as she pulled one from his bag and walked back over to him. “Can you lift your arms?”

Luke did as she asked, and she slipped the shirt over his head – pulling it down his muscular frame. When she finished, she glanced up into his face and saw that oh so familiar heat in his eyes, and gulped. He leaned forward and captured her lips – kissing her so tenderly, that it caused her eyes to burn and sting.

“Thank you,” he whispered against her mouth – and her heart melted. It *actually* freaking melted – right into a puddle of mush in the middle of her chest. Holy cow! “Now go get dressed, sweets.” He shook his head with another laugh. “Damn - that’s another thing I never wanted to *ever* have to say to you.” He gave her a wink, and slowly turned and headed towards Harpers room. “I’ll go wake the brat and tell her to get a move on while you do the same. I want to get the hell out of here – now.”



Twenty minutes later, Luke led them to the car, and cautiously slid in. Kat noticed him flinch as he did, and looked at him with concern filling her eyes. “Do you want me to drive?” She asked, and Luke shook his head.

“I’ll be fine. Would you please stop worrying so much, Glinda?”

“Where are we going to go now?” Harper asked, as she settled herself into the back seat. She had been none too happy at being woken in the middle of the night - but she was being a trouper, and Luke’s admiration of the girl just grew.

She had been through so much in her short life- yet she just kept pushing forward. Luke couldn’t help but notice how much she reminded him of Katrina. She was strong and stubborn and a complete smart-ass. Just like her sister. And he really found himself liking the kid.

“I’m going to find another hotel for the rest of the night.” He said, pulling out of the lot.

“Hopefully not another flea bag,” she huffed, but Luke saw the smile on her face in the rearview mirror as he glanced back at her.

“Maybe worse,” he offered with a wink, and Harper giggled. “Sorry if our accommodations aren’t making the cut, princess – but I believe the Taj Mahal was booked.”

“Oh, please! I slept in a park for God’s sake.” She laughed. “I’m tougher than I look. I guess I can manage one more night among the creepy crawlies.”

“Harper!” Kat admonished, but she too had a smile on her lips – and it felt good. Her worry for Luke was consuming her, and she desperately needed a distraction.

“You think I’m kidding? I saw a roach in the bathroom that you could have put a saddle on and rode in the rodeo!”

Luke burst out laughing, and then winced in pain once again - causing Kat to reach over and touch his arm gently – her brows furrowed. “Please, Luke,” she whispered, her lips turning down in a frown. “Quit being so damn stubborn and just let me drive. You need to rest.”

He glanced her way and gave her that lopsided grin that made her weak in the knees. “No can do, red,” he breathed. “Besides, I’m pulling off soon, and we’ll settle in for the night. The brat needs some sleep...and so do you.” Kat felt her cheeks flush at the sudden heat in his expression, and diverted her gaze. Geez, the man could have her hotter than sin with just a look!



Forty-five minutes later, Luke led them to the room he had rented. This time a suite on the tenth floor of a lovely hotel - and Kat was grateful when the elevator doors opened and they followed him down the hallway.

She watched Luke walk with intense interest, not liking his stiff gait at all. She knew that he was trying to put up a brave front for them – but she also knew that the man had to be in excruciating pain. Damn it! She silently seethed. Werens were supposed to heal quickly, weren’t they? So just what in the hell was wrong? Why was he still wincing when he moved?

Harper grabbed her bag and headed towards one of the rooms. “I’m going to bed,” she informed them tiredly. “This getting jerked in and out of sleep at all hours of the night...sucks ass. I can barely keep my eyes open. Promise to call me if anything exciting happens,” she finished with a chuckle and a shake of her head.

“Goodnight,” they called in unison - then looked at each other, and smiled.

Kat waited until Harper had disappeared into the room before taking Luke by the arm and leading him to what she hoped was the other bedroom. She opened the door and ushered him in ahead of her.

“Okay, let’s get that shirt off, and then I want you to go and lay down on the bed,” she ordered, and Luke stopped dead in his tracks. But only a moment later, he slowly turned to face her - that smarmy grin plastered across his face full force.

“Damn, red. Now, *that* is what I’m talking about!” He chuckled, raising his brow at her.

“Don’t get any ideas, Benji,” she bit out, her temper beginning to flare. “I want to check your ribs. Or... better yet,” she said looking around. “Come into the bathroom.” She ushered him through another doorway that led to a large tiled and marble bathroom, and directed him to lean up against the vanity. She stood in front of him and cautiously grasped the hem of his t-shirt and began to ease it up.

When she chanced a glance at Luke, she found him watching her intently – his pupils dilating almost to the point that his eyes appeared to be black.

“Down, boy. I just need to check your wound. Don’t be getting any ideas in that fool head of yours. Playtime is over.”

“Awe, baby,” Luke whispered, sounding wounded. “It’s always playtime.”

“In your dreams...*Fido*. Wait here. I’m going to call down to the desk and see if they have a first aid kit.” She directed, and went to turn - but Luke’s hand on her arm stopped her.

“I have alcohol and some gauze in my bag,” he informed her.

“Well, why in the Hell didn’t you tell me that *before*?” She snapped. Angry that he would suffer, just to get she and Harper out of danger first – what an ass! “Damn it, wolf. You *are* an ass-monkey! Dear God! When they were passing out brains they must have run out by the time they got to you.” She grumbled as she stormed from the room - and he heard her digging through his overnight bag mumbling to herself the entire time; before returning with the bottle of alcohol and gauze a moment later. “Why’d you bring all of this crap with you anyway?” She bit out, glaring at him – furious that he would suffer because of her. As if she wasn’t feeling guilty enough!

“What can I say,” he shrugged. “I was a boy scout. You know, *be prepared* and all that.”

“This is going to hurt,” she told him, as she grabbed a wash cloth and poured some of the alcohol onto it.

“I wouldn’t expect anything less from you, Glinda,” he replied, grinning.

“You know, Blackwater.” She ground out. “You really, *truly* missed your calling in life. You totally should have been a comedian. You are just a laugh riot. I can barely contain myself.” She pressed the washcloth to the burn and winced when he spit out a string of curses – her anger instantly cooling.

“Son of a *bitch*! Shit!”

“Awe, come on big boy. You can handle a little sting, can’t ya?” She asked, raising her brow at him in challenge – even though her heart was pounding in her chest at the thought of causing him pain.

“Oh, believe me sweetheart,” he murmured, leaning forward slightly so that his mouth brushed against hers, “I can handle a lot more than just a little sting.”

“Good Lord, Benji. What on earth is wrong with you? Are you in heat or something?” She burst out, and Luke chuckled. “I’m trying to help here.”

“Look, red,” Luke breathed against her mouth, and she felt that blasted shiver run up her spine. “I just need to get a little sleep; and I’ll be as good as new. I promise. For some reason, witch’s magic takes a bit longer to bounce back from - and I don’t know what these assholes are packing – but it sure as hell packed a wallop.” With that he tilted his head slightly and deepened their kiss – needing more than anything at that moment to taste her; feel her – to know that she was safe.

His hands reached out and grabbed her by the upper arms - pulling her snugly in between his legs and flush against his chest as his tongue explored and teased hers with slow, deliberate strokes.

He groaned when he felt her relax and lean into him – her hands making their way up his arms, and into his hair - pulling his mouth closer as her tongue toyed with his.

They stood that way for what seemed forever – making out like two high school kids, before Kat finally came to her senses and reluctantly pulled away.

The man needed rest, she thought with a slight groan – and at the rate they were going, that didn’t seem likely. One of them needed to keep their

wits about them – and she was sure as hell certain that it wasn't going to be *Libido Boy!* The man got aroused if the damn wind blew!

“Come on, Benji. Let's get you to bed.”

The smile he gave her sent a shot of electricity straight through her entire body, and she felt her toes curling in her shoes. She took a deep breath and shook her head, trying with everything she had to look stern. “*Not gonna happen, Ace,*” she said, her voice an octave or two lower than was normal – and she cleared her throat nervously. “*You, my friend are going to sleep. You need rest.*”

“You mean, *we* are going to sleep, don't you? You need to get some rest yourself.” He replied, his eyes roaming over her face slowly, only to land on her full, kiss-swollen lips. God damn! He just wanted to hold her and kiss her forever.

“Whatever, Tonto. Just no funny business.”

“Oh, sweetheart. What I have in mind isn't funny in the least.”

Kat rolled her eyes and walked into the bedroom with a grunt. Keeping her back to the doorway of the bathroom - she kicked off her shoes and dropped her jeans – leaving on only her t-shirt and underwear to sleep in.

“A little assistance please,” she heard him whisper from behind her, and jumped when she realized that he stood not even a foot from her. Damn but the man was silent! But, she guessed with a sigh – predators were, weren't they?

She closed her eyes and took a quick steadying breath before plastering a smile on her face and turning to face him – her hands going to the fly of his jeans and deftly opening it before sliding the zipper down.

She heard Luke's sharp intake of breath when her hand accidentally brushed up against him, and she felt him instantly come to life at the contact. Oh, *Hell* and damnation – she silently screamed. Dear God - he was just making this so damn hard.

She shook off the urge to laugh at the irony of that thought, and slipped his jeans down over his tapered hips-and strong, perfect – *muscular* as all

get out – thighs, desperately trying to ignore the proof of his desire as it sprang out of his jeans proudly. Oh, dear - *dear* Lord!

“Lift,” she stammered, feeling her cheeks heat with desire - and she swallowed what felt like a small hamster that had lodged itself in her throat with difficulty.

No! No! And No! She had to stay strong – he needed rest....he needed rest - she inwardly chanted, but her mind screamed at her that he just smelled so damn good. And he just looked so damned tempting standing there – his perfect, muscular body standing there before her in all of its stunning glory.

Her eyes went to the ugly bruise marring his ribs, and she garnered the strength that she so desperately needed. She turned and pulled back the comforter of the bed – then stepped aside so that he could slide in.

Once he did, she covered him and walked over to her bag, reaching in and pulling out her bottle of aspirin. She dumped a few in her hand and went into the bathroom to get a glass of water. “Here,” she said when she returned – and held out the pills and water to him. “This might take the edge off of the pain a bit.”

Luke took the glass and pills from her and swallowed them quickly, glancing up into her eyes as he did. “Thank you again, sweetheart,” he said, setting the glass down on the night table. “Come on,” he urged, pulling back the bedding on the other side of the bed for her. “Come cuddle with me.”

He wanted nothing more at that moment than to do a whole Hell of a lot more with her than just cuddle. But he realized with a tired sigh that his weariness was starting to hit him, and he would just have to settle for holding her instead – although if truth be known, that was pretty fan-freaking-tastic on its own. She fit him like a glove - and he felt complete and whole when she was beside him – as if he had found the piece of him that had been missing his entire life. There was peace and contentment in her arms – and it was nice.

He watched her with interest as she walked slowly around the bed and slid in beside him – and his heart tightened a moment later when she snuggled up against him – her body curling up cautiously against his side

and he knew that it was because she was trying hard not to hurt him – and his love for her only swelled.

He slipped his arm around her and pulled her close, placing a kiss against her temple. “Sweet dreams, beautiful,” he murmured, before letting his eyes slide close and drifting off to sleep. The woman that he was completely and irrevocably in love with held securely against him – her heart beating steadily against his side. And for the first time in Luke’s life – he felt like he was home.

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Chapter 9

Kat snapped awake with a gasp just before dawn - a sheen of sweat on her brow from the nightmare that had seized her in its grip. She squeezed her eyes shut – trying to make the images of Luke - bloodied and dying, disappear from her mind – his body covered in horrible, angry gashes; his blood pooling at his feet.

She bit back the sob that threatened to overtake her, and slowly slid from Luke’s comforting embrace, and silently dashed for the bathroom – a wave of nausea overtaking her.

She closed the door and ran over to the toilet - her stomach clenching with the sudden urge to vomit. She stood there until the sensation passed, then went over to the sink and splashed cold water on her face – taking deep gulps of air into her lungs. The nightmare had shaken her to the core and its nasty tendrils just wouldn’t leave her – and it left her scared and trembling uncontrollably – to the point that her teeth were chattering.

Tears slipped down her cheeks as she realized that she and Harper needed to leave Luke as soon as possible. There was no other way. She knew that her dream was a warning, and she’d be damned if she wouldn’t heed it. She would not let him die! She couldn’t!

She turned on the water and stepped into the shower – not caring; or even feeling if the water was the right temperature. Her entire body was numb – and she just didn’t care.

Kat stepped out of the shower, still in a daze - and jumped when she found Luke standing in the bathroom - a towel held out towards her in his hands.

“Morning beautiful,” he said with a smile as he took a step closer and wrapped her up. He leaned in and kissed her, his lips so warm and gentle that she felt her heart twist painfully in her chest.

“Are you feeling better,” she asked, leaning away from him slightly so that she could look up into his face - yet not quite ready to leave the warmth of his embrace - no matter how selfish it was. Just a few wonderful minutes more – she silently told herself. Just something to take with you.

Luke nodded and took a step back from her – holding his arms out at his sides. “Right as rain,” he replied, and Kat’s eyes scanned his glorious chest only to discover absolute perfection. Not a mark or bruise was visible. She sighed in relief and tried to give him a smile. “What about you, red?” He asked quietly. “Is everything all right? You seem kind of distracted.” His brows furrowed as he studied her intently.

“I’m fine,” she lied, adjusting the towel around her. She noticed Luke’s grin as she tried to secure it over her breasts, and her heart began to race when his hands covered hers and stilled them.

Suddenly the towel fell to the floor as Luke leaned forward and kissed her with a hunger that nearly knocked her to her knees. There was nothing else she could do but to wrap her arms around his neck to keep from falling, and return his powerful embrace. She had fallen completely in love with this man – and in order to save him, she had to leave him – but she needed him – so damn much that it was killing her. She needed him to take the nightmare away. She needed to know that he was safe.

In the next instant he swung her around and lifted her, setting her down on the marble vanity. She wrapped her legs around his waist and pulled him close – needing to have him inside her – to feel that connection - no matter how fleeting it was going to be. Just one last time she wanted to pretend that he was hers.

“Baby,” Luke moaned into her mouth, his hands plunging into her damp hair as he ground himself against her, his body trembling with desire. “Easy, sweetheart, take it slow,” he cautioned.

“Please, Luke,” she begged. “I...I need you.”

Luke felt like his heart would burst from his chest when she uttered those words, and he groaned from the very depths of his soul as he heeded her wishes and carefully slid inside her – surprised at how warm and ready she was.

She hadn’t said the three words that he longed to hear from her lips – but this was a start, and he would take it – for now. But he was damned well sure that this woman would realize that she loved him – and he could only hope that it was half as much as he loved her.

He began to move, slowly at first - but the feel of her heat clamped down around him was tearing him apart, and he began to move faster – needing to feel that wondrous release that only the two of them could achieve. She was his, and whether she was ready to admit it or not – she was his other half - and they belonged together.

Kat could feel the tremors beginning in her belly and pulled Luke closer as her body began to shudder and quake against his – tightening up in the delicious release that only he could give her. He brought her to heights that she never thought possible, and she knew that she loved him more than she ever had or ever *would* love someone.

She felt him stiffen as he rocked into her, his breath coming out in a ragged gasp as he climaxed, and she chewed on her bottom lip to keep from screaming out his name – or worse yet, that she loved him as wave after wave of glorious sensation rippled through her body – leaving her shaken and breathless. She buried her face in his neck as tears sprang to her eyes - her heart breaking at the thought of leaving him. This was just too damn hard.

They held each other in silence as their breathing slowly returned to normal, and finally Kat lifted her head and placed a kiss on his lips – forcing a smile to her face.

“Thanks for the wakeup call, Benji,” she said as lightly as possible - although she couldn’t look him in the eyes. She was much too afraid that he would see her heart reflected in them. “Why don’t you take a nice long shower while I get dressed and wake Harper? Then we can grab a bite to eat and be on our way.”

Luke cupped her chin in his hand and lifted her face, kissing her tenderly. “That sounds like a plan,” he murmured against her mouth. He kissed her again and stepped back to start the shower. “Care to join me?”

Kat shook her head and hopped down from the vanity, noticing that her legs were shaking. She took a calming breath and gave him a wink. “Maybe later, big boy. But, I really want to get a move on, and I’m starving.”

“You know - for some reason, I have an overwhelming taste for pancakes,” he said with a grin. “I won’t be long.” He gave her another kiss and stepped into the stall.

“Take your time. You know how we girls are – it takes us forever to primp.” With that she turned and walked out of the door – closing it behind her.

She leaned against it, and placed her hand over her mouth, trying to stifle the sob that wanted to break free and wanting nothing more at that moment than to rush back to him and tell him everything. “I love you, Lucas Blackwater,” she whispered – her voice barely audible and her eyes shining. With a mental push, she walked across the room and quickly dressed.

“Harper, wake up,” Kat said, nudging her sister on the shoulder. Harper’s eyes popped open and she blearily looked up – trying to focus.

“What?” She grumbled sleepily.

“Come on. We don’t have much time,” Kat urged, pulling the girl from the bed. “We need to get out of here before Luke gets out of the shower.”

“Why? What do you mean?” She asked, grabbing her jeans and slipping them on as Kat gathered the rest of her stuff.

“We have to get out of here. Harper, if we don’t leave now, Luke... he’s going to be...” Kat stopped as her tears choked her. She couldn’t even say the word. It frightened her way too much. “We just need to leave...now. Please, hurry up.”

Harper did as she was asked and followed Kat out of the room and trotted down the hall beside her to the elevators. “How are we going to...” she began, but Kat gave her a guilty smile and held up Luke’s keys. “You can’t be serious?” She breathed in complete shock. “You mean to tell me that not only are we *ditching* him – but we’re stealing his car too? This is all kinds of screwed up! Why do we have to leave him anyway? I really like Luke.”

Kat ushered Harper into the elevator and stepped in behind her, pushing the button for the garage level. “Honey, Luke is in a lot of danger because of me, and if we don’t leave him now, he’s going to be hurt.” She explained – her chest feeling as if there were a lead weight pressing down on it – sucking the air from her lungs. And again, she felt the salty sting of tears. Damn it to Hell, she chastised herself – she really needed to man up and

grow a pair. She was doing this for Luke. She was doing this to keep him alive!

When the elevator doors slid open, Kat ushered Harper out ahead of her and hurried her over to Luke's SUV. She threw their bags into the back seat and jumped in behind the wheel. "Buckle up," she said when Harper got in beside her.

With a deep, shaky breathe - Kat started the car and headed out of the lot, her heart breaking with each mile that passed.

"Where are we heading?" Harper asked, looking at her nervously.

"My apartment. We'll switch cars there and grab some stuff, then... well; I'm just not sure kiddo. I have some money saved up – so we should be ok for a while. And I can always find a job..."

"My parents gave me some money," Harper offered, her face set in a frown. She was silent for a long moment, studying Kat with an expression on her face that was far beyond her seventeen years. She looked so mature and thoughtful. "You love him, don't you?" She said finally, and Kat looked at her - her eyes glistening.

"More than my own life," she whispered, and Harper grabbed her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. "That's why I have to leave him. I have to keep him safe, Harper – and being with me isn't."

Harper nodded her understanding – her heart twisting for her sister.



Luke hummed as he lathered up and washed – feeling as if he was finally making progress with the fiery little redhead. He broke out into a smile as he stepped from the shower – grabbing a towel and quickly drying himself.

That woman tried his patience at every turn with her stubbornness – but he realized with a laugh that he wouldn't have it any other way. She was hard-headed, and a smart ass – and the woman he was determined to spend his life with. He knew without a doubt that she would keep his life interesting – and he was looking forward to every minute of it.

He wrapped the towel around his waist and walked into the bedroom. Grabbing his jeans and slipping them on, he walked over to Harpers room to hurry the girls along. He was damned hungry after his night – and morning, with Kat and wanted to grab breakfast before heading back to Desmond and Abby's.

When he knocked on the door – he was greeted with an eerie silence, and he felt a chill run up his spine. “Kat? Harper?” He called as he opened the door. “Son of a bitch!” He ground out when he found nothing but an empty room. Harpers backpack was gone, and when he turned and stormed back into their bedroom – he found Kat's gone as well - as well as his car keys. “Fuck!” He bellowed as he finished dressing in record time and ran toward the elevators.

Luke paced in front of the hotel, angrily waiting for the rental car to arrive. He grabbed his cell phone and called Desmond - his body as tense as a coiled spring.

“Lucas,” Desmond answered after the first ring. “I was just about to call...”

“Fuck, Des!” He barked, his teeth grinding in fury. “They're gone!”

“What happened?” Desmond asked - his voice very low.

Luke ran his fingers through his hair and continued to pace – his mind going in a million different directions at once. This was definitely not good! Not freaking good at all! And Luke just wanted to punch something.

“They took my damned car when I was in the shower and took off! That's what the hell happened.”

He heard Desmond sigh softly. “Luke, just calm down and think. Where do you think she would go?”

“I don't know.” Luke answered, suddenly sounding broken. “I just don't know.”

There was silence on the other end, and Luke thought that he had lost the connection, but a moment later Desmond spoke. “Lucas” he said softly. “I fear that it is imperative that we find them.”

Something about his friends tone caused Luke to stop in his tracks. “Des, what in the hell is going on? What have you found?” he asked, a knot forming in his stomach.

“Marcus is in New Orleans,” he said softly. “And I am afraid that what little information he has gathered, is not what we had hoped. This is much larger than we first thought.”

“What do you mean - larger?” Luke asked, not sure that he even wanted to know. Not with Kat and Harper gone – and his stomach clenched to the point that he thought he would be sick.

“Alexis’s Coven is much more powerful than we first suspected- and their influence is much stronger than we could have known.” He took a deep breath and sighed into the phone. “They have been gathering alliance with the Demon world for years,” he explained, and Luke cursed viciously – causing a couple that was passing by to gasp and hurry along.

Luke explained to Desmond what had happened at the motel, and his friend listened in silence.

“Marcus has a friend in New Orleans who is a witch - and she warned him of this.” He said finally, and Luke could tell that his friend was deeply troubled. “She informed Marcus that something big is happening in the supernatural world, and that they will do anything within their powers to stop it. All she knew was that the wheels have been put in motion - and that it would change things forever.”

“Shit.”

“I wish I had more – but that was all that she knew. She told Marcus that they had tried to bring her into their fold years ago - because of the powers that she possesses - but she thankfully refused their offer. She said that their magic was much too dark and dangerous. Lucas, I have the feeling that whatever is happening somehow involves us all.”

“Yeah,” Luke said distractedly as he caught sight of the rental agent pulling up. He told Desmond about the ball of light and electrical explosion that blasted Kat and Harper the first time that they had touched, and heard his friend’s sharp intake of breath. This was just getting worse and worse.

He took the keys from the agent and signed the forms that he held out to him with a nod. Slipping behind the wheel, he sighed. "My car just arrived," he informed him. "I'm heading back. I'm going to see if Kat decided to go to her apartment to maybe pick up some stuff before going... shit. God knows where." He truly hoped that his instincts were right, and that she was headed home. All he could get out of the garage attendant was that they had left the hotel and headed south towards the interstate.

"What do you need me to do?" Desmond asked.

"Just keep digging."

"Of course." Desmond responded. "Have no doubt about that."

"Where's Abby?" Luke asked, pulling onto the interstate and bearing down on the gas, weaving in and out of the early morning traffic.

For the first time since their conversation had started - Desmond chuckled softly. "She's out in the garden cutting flowers," he said, his voice filled with affection. "Her Fey side is showing in the fact that she can grow just about anything - and insists on filling the house with the smelly things." Luke grinned slightly, knowing that Desmond adored every little thing that the woman did. "She's worried about you and Kat," he remarked, his tone once again growing serious.

"Well, tell her that we're fine, and that I'll be bringing them home soon." And by God, he swore - he would. He was not about to lose her. He. Was. Not.

"Lucas, I implore you to be careful," Desmond warned softly.

"You know better than anyone just how careful I am," Luke laughed - although it was forced, and Desmond scoffed into the phone a moment later.

"I know better than anyone what a hot-head you can be," he threw back at him.

"Yes, I guess you do. But believe me; I won't do anything to jeopardize Kat or her sister's safety."

"Ah, yes." Desmond replied softly - his tone knowing. "How love does change a man."

"You should know, my friend."

“That I do.”

They said their goodbyes and Luke concentrated on not getting himself killed as he flew through traffic.

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Chapter 10

It was already dark by the time Kat and Harper pulled up in front of her apartment building. Kat jumped from the SUV and grabbed their bags from the back seat, motioning for Harper to follow her. She wanted to grab her stuff and get back on the road as quickly as possible.

They ran up the steps and through the entryway. “Geez, don’t you have any security in this place?” Harper asked as they stepped onto the elevator.

“No need,” Kat replied, pushing the button for the fourth floor. “It’s a small town, and...well... it was home. I’ve never had any problems.” She felt the hot sting of tears as she thought about never again living here. Never again seeing Abby or Desmond or Luke... No! She couldn’t dwell on what she was losing. She had to keep Luke safe.

She dashed down the hallway to the last apartment with Harper close at her heels. Dropping the bags, she dug through her purse for her keys and opened her door with trembling hands. “We have to hurry,” she whispered, “Luke’s not stupid – he’ll figure out that I would come here to grab some things.”

As soon as Kat stepped through the doorway – she knew that something was horribly wrong. The apartment didn’t feel right. It felt dark and foreboding. She lifted her arm and held it out in front of Harper – preventing her from going any further into the room, when she heard a familiar voice.

“Finally,” Elaine Winslow said, walking from the bedroom – and Kat felt as if her world had just come crashing down around her. To say that she felt a strong sense of foreboding was putting it mildly. What she was feeling was utter terror.

“Elaine,” she whispered and pulled Harper up against her side, wrapping her arm around her sister’s shoulders protectively.

Elaine stared at her daughters in silence - her eyes surveying the two women thoroughly. “You didn’t do as I asked,” she finally said, her tone chilling Kat to the bone. “You just had to defy me, didn’t you Katrina? You

always were the head-strong, stubborn child – never doing what you were told to do. Fighting me at every turn.”

Kat glared at her mother as she pushed Harper behind her – closer to the door. “I have no idea what you are talking about,” she bit out – a deep, sudden feeling of dread overtaking her. It was a strong, oppressive feeling that chilled her to the bone – and filled the room with its touch.

“You just couldn’t leave the wolf behind, could you?” She ground out, as two men came walking up behind her from the bedroom - and flanked Elaine on either side. Kat gasped when she recognized the man from the Bradford’s house. Oh, dear God! This just couldn’t be! This *had* to be another nightmare!

“Just what is going on Elaine?” She asked, although she was pretty sure that she already knew the answer to her question.

“What is going on?” She shrieked, her eyes flashing with fury as her mouth twisted into a snarl. “You screwed that wolf – that’s what is going on! And because you just couldn’t follow directions - you quite possibly may have destroyed everything! It’s bad enough that we couldn’t stop that bloodsucker and his meddling Fey bitch!”

Kat took a tentative step back, trying to push Harper closer to the exit, but her mother knew what she was doing and motioned for the two silent goons beside her to stop them. The one that had been at the Bradford’s grabbed Kat’s arm and pulled her roughly into the room – the other grabbing Harper and holding her in what seemed to be a death grip – her arms wrenched roughly behind her back.

“Let go of me, you slimy piece of shit!” Harper bit out – struggling with everything that she had to break free.

He just laughed and shoved her forward - and Kat could see the pain in her sister’s face.

“You were involved with Lexie’s Coven the whole time,” Kat breathed, her eyes going back to her mother as utter shock hit her full on.

Elaine took a step closer to Kat and leaned in – her icy blue eyes boring into daughters. And Kat found herself wondering if her mother had ever cared for her – even just a little.

“Of *course* I was,” she spit at her – and Kat realized with a painful twist of her heart that – no, she hadn’t. “You have no idea what you and your little band of bleeding hearts have started! No idea at all!” She grabbed Kat by the arms – her nails digging painfully into her flesh, and glared at her. “You should have just listened to me! But no – not my Katrina!” She gave her a shake, her voice rising to the point of a scream. “And now, I have to contend with the child!”

Kat looked to Harper who had stopped struggling, and just stood there – her mouth hanging open in shock.

“You leave Harper out of this!” Kat said, her gaze going back to the woman standing in front of her. Was this really happening? Was her mother actually doing this? How could she not have seen what an evil, lying bitch she was? But, it wasn’t like she had been around much – Kat silently answered herself.

“You have no idea at all, do you?” Elaine ground out. “Well, it doesn’t matter right now. There are more important things to contend with at the moment.”

“I’d have to agree with you on that one, *Endora*.” Kat stiffened at the sound of Luke’s voice coming from behind her, and she felt her knee’s begin to shake with the pure terror overtaking her.

No! He couldn’t be here! Please...please no! And in an instant, her nightmare came rushing back to her full force – stealing the breath from her body. And again she was assaulted with visions of Luke bleeding; Luke dying – and a sob wrenched from her throat as she dropped her head in sorrow.

“You!” Elaine shrieked, pointing to the man who held Kat’s heart in his grasp. “You have no idea what you have done!”

Luke assessed the situation in an instant - his eyes scanning the room quickly, only to land on Kat when he heard her cry out. Her head was bowed in defeat and Luke had the overwhelming urge to kill the persons responsible for her pain. His wolf howled – craving the blood of those who would dare touch his mate.

He had smelled witch the moment that he had entered Kat’s building, and his body tensed with fear and raw fury at the thought that he might be

too late. He had never felt such fear before in his entire life.

“Ah, but you *are* too late,” Elaine whispered, as if reading his thoughts - and Kat’s head snapped up as she noticed her mother reach into her pocket and remove a small glass vile. Before Kat could react – Elaine threw the bottle to the floor where it burst open with a foul, vile smelling yellow cloud.

Kat choked as her head began to swim and tip dizzily towards the ensuing darkness. And she tried with everything that she had to fight it as she turned towards where Luke stood – only to find him swaying unsteadily.

“No!” she screamed, and she watched helplessly as he fell to the floor - and a moment later... there was nothing. Only blissful blackness.

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Chapter 11

Kat struggled with her entire being to open her eyes - knowing that she needed to fight the powerful urge to remain in the calming dark. She had to find Luke! She had to find Harper!

She shook her head, and groaned at the sudden pounding in her head that followed the movement. Oh, Holy Christ! What in the hell had happened? Her mother had...shit! Her mother had knocked them out with her damn dark magic!

“Ka...Kat?” She heard Harper murmur – her voice shaking with fear, and Kat forced her eyes open – searching for her sister.

She found Harper sitting against a stone wall, her hands securely shackled behind her back and her tear-stained face showing the pain she was clearly in.

Kat pushed herself up onto her hands and knees and crawled over to the girl. “It’s all right,” she rasped, her throat raw and dry from screaming. “Harper, where...where is Luke?”

Harper shook her head sadly, tears welling up in her eyes and Kat felt her entire body clench with an overpowering fear. Fear that her nightmare had just come true.

“I...I don’t know,” she stammered, shaking her head wildly. “When I woke up, it was just you and me in here.” She choked back a sob and looked at Kat beseechingly. “What do they want with us?” She cried, and Kat wrapped her arms around her, hugging her tightly.

“I’m not sure,” Kat whispered – her fear for Luke emanating through her body like a volcanic eruption – and again her nightmare hit her. No! He wasn’t dead! She silently screamed, her entire body beginning to quake from the force of it.

“Can...can you get these off of my hands?” Harper asked, leaning forward slightly to show Kat her bound wrists. “My shoulders hurt something fierce.”

Kat leaned around and studied the cuffs that held her sister prisoner - realizing with a deep feeling of dread, that there was no way that she would be able to break them.

“I need to find something to try and pick the lock,” she replied, quickly looking around her for anything that might be of help – but her hopes were dashed a moment later when she found nothing. The dank room was completely bare – not even a cot or a blanket in the dark, damp space - and Kat felt her anger swell. “Damn it!” She screamed – her eyes filling with hot, angry tears.

She needed to get them out of here. She needed to find Luke.

Luke groaned as he opened his eyes and searched for any sign of Kat. He struggled against the shackles around his wrists and neck and growled in fury at the uselessness of it. Shit! Silver!

He knew that he couldn't shift because of the silver binding him, and his anger only grew into full-blown rage. He needed to find Katrina – and he needed to find her now!

His body tensed when he caught the scent of witch, and a moment later Elaine walked through the door - her eyes scanning his impressive frame with contempt, and what looked to be lust – and Luke's skin crawled.

“I will admit that my darling daughter does have rather good taste,” She said, as she walked over to him and scanned his body from head to toe. Her eyes met his and she graced him with a smile that made him want to smack her across the face.

He had never been one to hit a woman – but at that moment in time, he would have gladly made an exception for this bitch. He could *smell* the evil radiating off of her like a thick, toxic cloud - and it made his stomach clench in fury at the thought of this being Kat's mother. She deserved so much more than this sorry excuse for a woman.

“Where are Katrina and Harper,” he ground out between clenched teeth, his eyes glowing with his rage. He wanted nothing more at the moment than to rip this woman's throat out. And he swore that if she harmed one hair on their heads – he would do just that.

“They are resting,” she informed him with a haughty grin. She lifted her hand and traced her finger along the line of his jaw, and Luke snarled. “My, my - you are a snappy one, aren’t you? I can see why my daughter is so smitten. You do have that dark, brooding appeal that woman like so much these days - don’t you? Although, I must admit, your type has always held a certain fascination for me as well. I always did love a sexy bad-boy – and I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree –as they say.” She took a step closer and rested her hands on his bare chest – her mouth set in a disgusting smirk.

“Thankfully, Kat is nothing like you,” he ground out, his eyes blazing into hers with pure hatred.

“Oh, I’m afraid you will find that she is more like me than even she is willing to admit. My daughter has never fully realized her full potential as a witch, I’m afraid – but that will change soon enough.” She sighed heavily and took a step back. “I would have loved to convince you to join us, and reap the rewards of being all-powerful – but I realize by the look in your eyes - and the fear that you feel for my head strong daughter - that you are much too far gone. Do you love her?” She whispered, her brows rising quizzically.

“Go to hell,” Luke growled, his lips pulled back in a sneer.

“Oh, you do – don’t you? That just makes this all the more tragic, I’m afraid. Pity, really. I can’t say that I wouldn’t have enjoyed having you share my bed.”

“In your dreams, *Endora*,” Luke seethed, pulling against his restraints - and Elaine burst into laughter.

“We shall see soon enough,” she remarked as she headed for the door. “Luckily the moon will be at its fullest tonight – so we won’t have long to wait.” She glanced back at him and blew him a kiss. “It ends tonight for you wolf,” she informed him softly. “I cannot risk having you running around out in the world. It’s quite sad really, but we must do what needs to be done – mustn’t we?” And with that, she walked through the door, slamming it behind her, and Luke felt an overwhelming sense of doom hit him. Christ!

Chapter 12

“Son of a bitch!” Desmond barked as he slammed his cell phone down onto his desk. He ran his hands through his thick, black hair and sighed tiredly.

“Desmond,” Abby asked, standing in the doorway - her brow creased with worry. “Are you ever going to tell me what has been bothering you?”

“My, love,” he said, standing and walking over to her. He pulled her into his arms and kissed the top of her head. He knew that it was time to tell her everything – but his heart still hesitated. He never wanted her to have to worry – and this was killing him. “I’m afraid we have a problem,” he murmured.

“What kind of problem?” She asked, leaning back slightly and eyeing him suspiciously. She had felt her mate’s unease for the past several days, and although she knew that something was eating away at him – she didn’t know what it was exactly – only that he was worried. And he was not being very forthcoming with any information – which was slowly driving her mad.

She knew that in time, he wouldn’t be able to keep anything from her, but until that time came - his silence was seriously pissing her off. They were mates for God’s sake, and that meant that what affected one – affected the other. They were two souls joined as one, and she was going to make damn sure that he honored that. No matter how much he wanted to shelter her from the world.

He would only tell her that everything was fine when she questioned him, and she knew that he was trying to protect her. Well – she thought with a straightening of her spine – enough of this crap! “Desmond LaGrange, you tell me right now just what is going on.”

“Sweetness,” he said, leading her over to a chair and sitting down. He pulled her down onto his lap and wrapped his arms around her – his blue depths boring into hers. “I’m afraid that Kat and her sister have taken off on Luke – and now he is not answering his cell.”

“What?” She shrieked, her eyes growing wide. “Oh, my God Desmond! Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Luke and I were handling it,” he said, his voice low and apologetic.

Abby stared at him in silence, thoughtfully chewing at her bottom lip - and he knew without a doubt that her mind was working overtime. He felt her anger and confusion and fear – but he also felt her love and understanding.

“I do understand where you two hardheaded jackasses were coming from,” she said finally, caressing his cheek tenderly as her eyes held his with affection. “Not that I’m happy about it in the least. But sweetheart, you can’t protect me from the world.”

Desmond leaned forward and kissed her, his mouth gentle. “I just never, ever want you to feel a moment’s worry,” he whispered against her lips. “You are my life Abby, and I only want you to experience happiness – never any sorrow or fear.”

Abby sighed and kissed him back. “You have made me happier in the past few weeks than I ever thought possible, Desmond – but Kat and Luke are our family - so you must promise me that you will never keep something like this from me again. We are partners - in good and in bad.” She gave him a fiery little smirk. “Besides, I wouldn’t want to have to kick your sorry asses.”

Desmond chuckled deep in his chest and hugged her tightly, burying his face in her hair - stunned at the realization that his love for this woman just grew. He wouldn’t have thought it possible to love her any more than he already did – but by God, he did. This woman’s strength and selflessness was awe-inspiring.

“So, what do we need to do now?” she asked, giving him a gentle smile that couldn’t hide the worry creeping back into her eyes.

“Luke was fairly certain that Katrina would head back to her apartment; so we might as well start there.”

Abby nodded and gave him another quick kiss. “All right then,” she said, reluctantly pulling herself from his embrace, and standing. “I guess we go to Kat’s.”



Kat jumped when she heard the sound of the lock being turned in the door, and watched warily as the door opened and her mother walked in. She pulled the sleeping Harper a little closer to her as Elaine closed the door and walked over to them – her mouth set in a tight line.

“Where is Luke?” She rasped, glaring at the woman, wanting nothing more at that moment than to scratch her eyes out. She didn’t know how long they had been here, but in the time that Kat had been awake, she had heard nothing. Not a single sound – and her fear for Luke had just grown as the silence overwhelmed her.

Kat had made Harper as comfortable as possible – but she knew that the poor girl had to be in pain with her arms so securely bound behind her, and she trembled in fury at her sister’s discomfort. She was supposed to be the big sister – she was supposed to watch out for and take care of her!

Elaine took a step closer and watched Kat, her expression blank – as if she were staring at a stranger.

“Can’t you at least unbind Harper’s wrists?” she asked – her eyes searching her mother’s face for any semblance of emotion – but there was none, and Kat felt her blood run cold. “She’s in pain.”

Elaine seemed to consider this a moment and watched the two of them silently. Harper had woken, and was huddled up against Katrina – her eyes wide and frightened.

“I suppose for now,” she said finally, reaching into her pocket and pulling out a small key. “I guess she can’t do much damage in here.” She tossed the key to Katrina who caught it – wondering just what in the hell she was talking about. Harper was the sweetest girl that Kat had ever met, and she couldn’t imagine her ever being a threat.

She reached around Harper and unlocked the cuffs and the girl let out a rush of air as she cautiously moved her arms.

“Where is Luke?” Kat asked again – glaring at her mother. Hating her for doing this to them.

Elaine burst out into laughter, but there was no humor in it what so ever. It was a bone-chilling sound that caused Kat's entire body to shudder. "I must say Katrina," she laughed. "He is an extremely fine specimen. I can see now why you are so enamored. I wish things could have been different, I really do – but his being alive poses much too great a risk It's a pity really that we couldn't keep him around. I wouldn't have minded having a go at him myself."

Kat felt her entire body rumble with pure, unadulterated terror. Oh God, please...no. Don't let him be dead she prayed - and her nightmare came rushing back to her – knocking the air right out of her lungs. "What did you do to him?" Kat screamed, her tears breaking free and rolling down her face. Harper wrapped her arms around her sister, and held her close as Kat sobbed into her shoulder.

"I'm glad you gave me away, you bitch!" Harper hissed at the woman standing so coldly in front of them. Her face devoid of any emotion what so ever.

"Yes, well." Elaine scoffed with a flick of her hand as if they were discussing the weather. "It was what was needed to be done – although I certainly never expected Constance and Jack to be such a *good* influence on you. You might be a tad bit harder to work with," she mused, eyeing Harper up and down as if she were a side of beef. "But, that is neither here nor there at the moment. We have more important matters to take care of at the moment. But, everything will be resolved tonight." She took a step closer to them a pulled a small pouch from the same pocket that she had retrieved the key to the cuffs.

Harper watched as she took some powder from the leather bag and sprinkled it over them. Harper flinched, pulling the sobbing Kat with her as she backed up away from Elaine – her eyes blazing.

"What do you think you're doing you crazy cow?" She all but growled at her.

"No worries, my dear," Elaine cooed. "Just a little pre-party mojo." She shoved the pouch back into her pocket and turned toward the door. Looking back over her shoulder, she graced her with a sad grin. "The wolf still

lives...for now.” And with that she walked through the door – slamming and locking it behind her.

Harper waited until she was sure that Elaine was gone before pulling away from Kat and looking into her eyes – which were red and swollen. “Did you hear her?” She asked her sister. “She said Luke’s still alive. Kat, we can still get out of this!”

Kat shook her head miserably, her entire body still trembling. “How?” she asked. “There’s no way out of here, and we have no idea where he even is.”

Harper seemed to consider this a moment, then her eyes lit up. “Yes, but they are planning something big tonight – and I’m sure Luke will be there.”

Kat wiped her eyes as she stared at her sister, a part of her terrified that it was already too late.

Chapter 13

Desmond cautiously walked through the door of Katrina's apartment – Abby kept securely behind him. His body was rigid as the smell of witch increased with each step that he took and he cursed himself for allowing his mate to come with him. What the bloody Hell had he been thinking?

“Save it,” Abby whispered into his shoulder, her mouth turning up into a stubborn smile and her eyes narrowing. “I wouldn't have stayed behind no matter how much you would have insisted.”

Desmond sighed, shaking his head in defeat. She was quickly learning to read his every thought and he knew that he would be hard pressed to hide anything from her in the very near future. “I believe they have gone,” he replied, his eyes scanning the room thoroughly. “But I fear they may have them.”

“Who has them?” Abby asked, stepping up beside him and slipping her hand in his.

Desmond turned and pulled her into his arms, his strong solid frame comforting her instantly. “Alexis's Coven,” he whispered. “And I fear...” he paused, sniffing the air as his body went completely still, and Abby could feel the waves of anger rolling off of him. What the *bloody freaking hell*? “I smell Vampire.”

Abby felt the blood drain from her face and her hands turn ice cold. “Vampire? Could Marcus have been here?”

Desmond shook his head and walked further into the room, keeping a secure hold on his mate. “It wasn't Marcus.” He turned and walked towards Katrina's bedroom. “It's faint, but it is definitely Vampire. Whoever it was is long gone. I can also smell Kat, and what I am assuming is her sister... and Luke.”

Abby jumped, when a moment later Desmond's cell phone rang. She watched him nervously as he reached into his pocket and brought it to his ear. “Yes?”

“Des,” Marcus breathed - relief clear in his voice. “Thank God! Please tell me that you’ve heard from Luke.”

“I’m afraid not,” Desmond replied, pulling Abby once again against his chest and wrapping his arm around her. “We’re at Katrina’s apartment now, but there is no sign of them.”

“Shit!” Marcus barked. “That’s not what I wanted to hear.”

“My sentiments exactly,” Desmond sighed, resting his chin on the top of Abby’s head as she burrowed herself against his chest.

“Des, we have another problem.”

“Let me guess,” Desmond replied, a gnawing feeling in his gut telling him that he already knew the answer. “There is a Vampire involved.”

There was long silence, and finally Marcus spoke. “How the hell did you know?” He asked, and Desmond knew that his brother was as shocked as he was.

“I caught the faint scent of Vampire in Katrina’s bedroom – and I don’t believe that she was the type to entertain them willingly.”

“From what I could find, the witches have not only recruited the blasted Demon’s – but this Vampire as well. A very old; very nasty Vampire. I haven’t been able to discover his name, but from what is being said – he fears that a change is coming that will threaten his way of life. He is said to be a vicious killer that takes great enjoyment in killing his victims – so he went to the Witch’s and joined them. Promising them ultimate power and who knows what the hell else – immortality maybe. Unfortunately, the witches that we spoke to aren’t so forthcoming with much information. They don’t trust our kind, and even Brianna couldn’t convince them otherwise.” Marcus sighed heavily into the phone. “Christ, Des. This is just beyond a cluster fuck!”

“I am afraid that I have to agree with you on that one, brother.” Desmond squeezed Abby a little tighter and sighed. “Are you planning on coming back?” He asked finally – suddenly feeling bone weary.

“No, I want to do some more digging. Unless, of course you think you need me there?”

“I feel you will be of more use to us there. You need to find out everything you possibly can.”

“Will do – but Des, please call me if you hear from Luke or Kat,” Marcus urged, and Desmond knew that he was as worried as he and Abby were.

“You know I will.”

Abby looked up into Desmond’s strained face and tried to smile, but her eyes were filled with worry and it broke Desmond’s heart. “Tell Marcus to be safe,” she whispered.

Desmond kissed her gently, and returned her smile – trying to ease her fear. “Abby sends her love, and asks that you keep your sorry ass out of trouble.”

Marcus laughed – but is sounded forced. “Tell her that I will, and that I send my love right back. Talk to you soon Des – and watch *your* sorry ass as well as my sister’s.”

Desmond ended the call and stuffed his cell back into his pocket.

“You don’t think that Luke got them out? Do you?” she asked, trying desperately to fight the panic welling up inside her.

“I just don’t know, sweetness,” Desmond murmured, his mouth set in a tight line of worry. Something just didn’t feel right. It didn’t feel right at all, and he prayed that Marcus would find something that would be of some use.



Marcus hung up the phone and looked at Brianna – shaking his head in frustration. His friend gently grasped his arm and gave him a reassuring smile.

“Don’t worry, Marcus,” she said, softly. “We’ll figure out what these assholes are up to.” She quirked her brow in concentration. “I know that I *have* to be missing something.” Brianna began pacing the room – crossing her arms over her chest as she did.

She was a pretty, petite brunette that Marcus was honored to call his friend. He had met her years ago while in New Orleans when he found her cornered by a pack of wolves that were thirsting for witch blood. He had saved her ass that night, and since then, they had fallen into an easy friendship – always looking out for the other.

Brianna owned *The Nightshade*; a beautiful bed and breakfast on the outskirts of the French Quarter, and always welcomed him with open arms. She had always been there for him and he felt a moment of guilt for bringing her into this mess - but he also knew that she wouldn't have it any other way.

“Bri, I just don't know what else to do,” he husked, completely exasperated. They had been talking to every witch that Brianna knew, and were not getting anywhere. The few that *would* talk to them at all, kept what they divulged to a minimum – not trusting a Vampire. “God, I feel like I need a damn manual on how to make friends and influence people!”

Brianna stopped dead in her tracks and gaped at him, her mouth forming a perfect O. “Oh, Holy shit!” she breathed. “How could I have not thought of him?”

“Who?” Marcus asked, a small inkling of hope springing up in his chest.

“Oh, my *God!* I am such an idiot!” She ran over to where Marcus stood – a look of wonder on his face, and smiled up at him. “Sebastian Deveroux!”

“Who the hell is Sebastian Deveroux?”

“He owns an Alchemy shop,” she explained, growing more and more animated as she spoke, her chocolate brown eyes gleaming with excitement. “The shop is just for the tourists of course - but he has a collection of ancient texts that he has spent years collecting and deciphering.” She broke out into a smile – her face lighting up. “*And* he's a Vampire! Marcus, he studies the old texts that have long been forgotten! He just might be able to help.” She grabbed his hand and headed for the door of the B&B. “He might know what the witches are up to!”

For the first time in days, Marcus felt a seed of hope welling up inside him – and he thanked whatever higher power it was that had brought

Brianna Melbourne into his life. He followed her out of the door and over to his car.

“Do you think he’ll talk to us?” He asked, putting the key into the ignition and starting the engine. Just because the man was a Vampire – didn’t necessarily mean that he would be willing to help. Not all Vampires were prone to drinking bagged blood – some still enjoyed drinking straight from the source, and detested those who did not. Thinking they were not being true to what they were – predators and killers. They enjoyed the old ways – the kill.

Brianna gave him another smile and winked. “I’d put money on it. Contrary to popular belief *-and* what most beings in the paranormal world would want us all to believe - not *all* witches hate Vampires. And I just happened to have dated this particular one.”

A genuine smile crossed Marcus’s strong features and he burst out laughing. “You never cease to amaze me, Witch.”

She gave him a quick nudge on the shoulder. “Hey, what can I say? I’ve had a thing for bloodsuckers ever since a certain drop dead, gorgeous one saved my ass from becoming dog chow!”

“And what a fine ass it is,” Marcus chuckled, giving her a wink – his mood lifting slightly now that they seemed to have some hope.

She told him how to get to the shop, and rested her head against the headrest of the car – praying that they weren’t too late.

When they pulled up in front of the store fifteen minutes later, Marcus threw the car into park and sighed. “Do you think he’s here?” He asked, turning in his seat to look at her –worry etched across his face. The storefront was dark, and the street deserted. He had the feeling that they were running out of time and was desperately trying to reign in his fear.

“Honey, it’s NOLA, the shops stay open all night,” she laughed, and proceeded to jump out of the car, and waited for him to follow. “Besides, if you couldn’t guess - he works at night,” she chuckled, giving him a smug smile.

The shop was dark when they entered - only the flickering of the few candles strewn about the space illuminating the rows of bottles and

paraphernalia that the store carried.

Marcus immediately caught the scent of a mixture of wolf, witch, vampire and human, and glanced around. A moment later, a tall, pale male walked through the door of the backroom and glided towards them.

“Brianna,” he murmured, his pale blue eyes lighting up at the sight of her standing there. He was almost as tall as Marcus, but not even close to Marcus’s linebacker stature. He was lean, yet muscular with an aristocratic air about him. His honey blonde hair hung to his shoulders and framed his sharp, angular face - giving him a somewhat bad boy meets surfer look.

“Hello, Sebastian,” she murmured, walking up to him and giving him a hug.

“I’ve been waiting for you to arrive, my Brianna,” he said fondly, glancing at Marcus over her shoulder and nodding slightly.

“You have?” She asked, taking a step back from him and looking up in surprise.

Sebastian reached out and caressed her cheek, his eyes moving over her face with care. He gave her a gentle smile and looked at Marcus. “And who do we have here?” He inquired.

“Oh, yes. I’m sorry. Sebastian Deveroux, this is Marcus LeGrange,” Brianna offered.

Marcus took a step closer and held out his hand, which Sebastian took. The smile faded just a fraction as he seemed to size him up – then returned in an instant as recognition hit him.

“You are Desmond LeGrange’s brother?” He asked, his blue eyes darkening slightly.

Marcus nodded, knowing that Desmond’s reputation reached far and wide, and that most creatures in the realm knew of him. He and Abby’s father had strived for years to rid the world of the Demon’s inhabiting it – and Desmond had been a force to be reckoned with.

“Wonderful!” he laughed. “Your brother has been talked about and revered in these parts for centuries. The Vampire Demon hunter! How

amazing. He has been the stuff of legends.” He turned back to Brianna and gave her a wink, clearly impressed.

“Sebastian, how did you know we were coming?” Brianna asked softly.

“Please, I fear that I’m being rude. Come in the back, so that we may sit and chat a bit.” He motioned them to the back room and ushered them into his large office.

When they had settled themselves, Sebastian clasped his fingers together and leaned back in his chair – his gaze going from Brianna to Marcus.

“Your brother is mated to a Fey, is he not?” he finally asked, although by the look on his face, and the tone of his voice – it was not necessarily a question.

Marcus nodded, not sure how he could have known. He looked to Brianna who only shook her head and shrugged – at a complete loss.

Sebastian watched the pair closely, a smile coming to his face. “Word gets around,” he offered in answer to their questioning stares and shrugged his shoulders ever so slightly. “A change is coming.” He stated quietly, his brow lifting. “And there are those in our world that wish to put a stop to it.”

“What type of change?” Marcus asked - his body tensing.

“Ah, yes. Well, that is what I have been trying to figure out.” His eyes gleamed. “I have been studying what texts I could get my hands on for centuries, and from what I could find - it has been prophesied that there shall be a pair that will bring together the supernatural beings in order to teach them to live together – and in the process, banishing evil back to hell. Exactly what your brother and the Fey King worked so hard to achieve.” He murmured, a genuine smiling lighting up his face, but a moment later it disappeared. “Now, you can only imagine how the darker forces feel about this.”

“A pair?” Marcus asked and glanced to Brianna, before looking back to the Vampire sitting so casually in front of them. “You mean Des and Abby?”

Sebastian chuckled and waved his hand in front of his face as if swatting away a bug. “No. From what I have discovered, it will be a child

that is half Fey and half Vampire.” He gave another small shrug of his shoulders. “And a child that is half Were – half Witch.”

“What?” Marcus barked, jumping up from the chair, causing it to topple over with a loud crash. “That’s impossible! Vampires can’t father children.”

“No, not usually – but this is something that has been foretold. And whatever higher powers there are at play here – they are in disagreement. A child *will* be born of each of these unions – and these children will grow, fall in love and unify our worlds. They will prove that we mustn’t despise each other. The worlds will begin to converge with the birth of these two wonderful children – changing the way in which we live forever. Can you imagine?” He said, becoming more excited as he spoke. “A bonding of all four of the major, most powerful supernatural beings in existence! It is unprecedented.”

“So, the witches want this stopped?” Marcus asked, incredulous. To even begin to believe that Desmond and Abby could have a child – let alone a child that would bind their worlds, was much too much to even begin to grasp. Could this actually be true? What the bloody *Hell*? Part of him wanted to jump for joy with the thought that his brother would be a father, but another part was terrified now that Luke and Kat were missing.

“And of course the Demons. The evil forces out there desperately wish to keep their power, and if this happens - I’m afraid that would not be the case. They will no longer exist in this world.”

“Shit!” Marcus ground out; the thought of Luke and Kat twisting his insides. “They have my friend and his mate - and her sister.”

Sebastian’s eyebrows shot up in shock. “That may pose a bit of a problem. I am taking it that they are a Were and a Witch?”

Marcus nodded – beginning to pace the room. “Yes,” he replied, running his hands through his thick hair.

“I am afraid that she will be forced to take his life,” he informed them solemnly. “They do not want this union to happen. So she will be forced to destroy what she loves most if it has. And if they have already been...well, *intimate* - their child will, of course - be killed.” He was silent for a long moment, seemingly deep in thought. Finally he ran his hands across his eyes and sighed. “And you said her sister?” He asked, and Marcus nodded,

thinking that Kat could quite possibly already be pregnant brought an overwhelming fear for her to twist his insides in a vice-like grip. “Then she and her sister *must* be the dark and the light.”

“Just what in the bloody *Hell* does that mean?” Marcus growled, silently wondering if they had a snowballs chance in hell of finding them in time. This just seemed to get worse and worse.

“That, I am not entirely certain of. Only that it is said that two sisters would be brought together – one of the darkness and one....well, I am sure you can guess the rest. I am sorry - but that is all that I have been able to discover. The texts that I have been able to get my hands on have been limited and have been extremely difficult to decipher. I have spent centuries trying to figure this all out.”

“Christ,” Marcus snapped. Not knowing what the hell they were supposed to do next.

“They have a Vampire working with them.” Brianna offered, finally finding her voice, and Sebastian gave her a look filled with affection.

“Most likely one of the very old school of our kind,” he replied. “I would assume that it would be safe to say that he is desperate to stop this as well. I am sure he is one of the few of us left that refuses to live by the rules that have been set. He enjoys the killing, the power he holds over humans - and will do everything he can to keep that from ending. A pity really – so uncivilized.” He turned his nose up as if the very idea was repulsive. “Although, I will admit, that I myself enjoy a nip or two right from the vein on occasion – but as you know personally, love. I never kill, and my partner’s always thoroughly enjoy the experience.”

Marcus looked to Brianna who was flushing brightly, and refused to meet his eyes - and it suddenly hit him that they had done more than just casually date. He gave her a grin, and looked back to Sebastian.

“You wouldn’t happen to have any idea who it is, would you?” He asked, and the Vampire shook his head.

“I’m afraid not. I will be more than happy to ask around for you, but I fear that your time is limited.” He glanced at the grandfather clock that stood in the corner and frowned. “There is a full moon tonight and they will want to end this quickly. I’m afraid that if they have your friends, they will

want to finish this immediately. They will not want to wait and take any chances. Their very existence is at stake.”

Marcus felt the overwhelming sense of dread wash over him as he glanced from Brianna, then back to Sebastian. “Holy Hell,” he whispered.

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Chapter 14

Luke pulled again at his restraints - his teeth clenched in fury. “Son of a bitch!” He growled; sweat beading on his forehead from the effort. He knew that it was useless, but he just wouldn’t give up! Not until he had Kat safe in his arms.

His wolf howled in frustration for its mate, and Luke cursed again – yanking on the shackles. He needed to get the hell out of here before these crazies did whatever it was that they were planning to do.

He knew in his gut that whatever was going on - it was big, and it involved everyone he cared about – and he was not about to let any of them be hurt. He would die before he’d let harm come to his family – and there was no way on God’s green earth that he wasn’t going to have a long happy life with his Katrina at his side.

He growled again as he slammed the back of his head against the wall in frustration. The urge to kill rippling through his body with a vengeance.



Harper braced herself against the wall of their prison, and watched as Kat paced relentlessly around the tiny room, her brows furrowed with anger. She had no idea how much time had passed since Elaine’s little visit – or even how long they had been locked up in this hell hole for that matter. But what she did know was that her sister was seriously losing it.

Kat was like a caged animal, and no matter what Harper did – she could not get her to calm down. Kat had searched the small room for anything that could possibly help them, and when she found nothing of use, she had pounded on the door screaming in frustration – her body shaking uncontrollably.

And now – she paced, her eyes darting about the room as if she were about to explode, and Harper knew that she was absolutely terrified of losing Luke – and she had no idea how to help her.

As Harper watched her pace, she suddenly felt an overwhelming anger rushing through her veins. Anger at Kat and at Luke for getting her into this

mess – anger at her parents for leaving her. She squeezed her eyes shut – trying to stave off the rush of emotion.

No! She silently pleaded with herself. She wasn't that person! Her mother had taught her to control her rage long ago, and Harper swallowed the lump forming in her throat as she clenched her jaw. She had to concentrate! She had to push the darkness away.

Kat and Luke had done nothing. They cared for her – protected her. She slowly began to rock back and forth as she concentrated on the sunny meadow her mother had taken her to when she was little. Filled with beautiful flowers, they had laughed and danced and sang songs. *This* was where she needed to be. Where there was happiness and light.

She shook her head and opened her eyes to find Kat standing in front of her – her mouth hanging open in surprise. “What...what’s the matter?” She stammered; terrified of the look on her sisters face.

“How did you do that?” Kat asked, and Harper looked at her in confusion.

“Do what?”

Kat pointed to the corner of the room and Harper gasped when she turned and saw the patch of wildflowers blooming in the space - the same wildflowers that had filled the meadow.

“I...I’m not sure. I was mad, and I started thinking about this meadow by our house that my mom would take me to and...” Harper shook her head, trying to figure out just what in the hell was happening now.

Harper stood and hesitantly walked over to the flowers, reaching out to stroke one of the purple buds. As soon as her fingers touched the delicate petals, they begin to wilt and shrivel, turning black in an instant, and Harper gasped as she jumped back as if she had been burned.

“Shit up a pole,” she breathed and turned to Kat – her eyes wide and frightened. “What’s wrong with me?” She asked, tears welling up in her eyes. “I’ve never done anything like that before.”

“I don’t know,” Kat breathed, as she watched in fascination as the flowers began to die and turn to dust. She looked back to Harper and found the girl near tears, her lips trembling and her face deathly pale.

Kat walked over to her and pulled her into her arms, stroking her hair gently. “Shhh, honey,” she cooed. “There’s nothing to worry about. There is absolutely nothing wrong with you. It’s all right. We’ll figure this out, I promise.”

Harper sniffled and looked up into Kat’s face. “My mom always told me that I had to keep my anger in check,” she explained softly. “But sometimes it just sneaks up on me – and I...I have to go to a place where I was happiest.”

Kat smoothed the hair away from Harper’s face and tried to smile. “We are going to get out of this,” she promised her again. “We are going to find Luke and...” she broke off, her fear choking her.

Dear God –she needed Luke! She needed to know that he was ok. She needed to see him smile.

She needed to feel his heat, smell that scent that was utterly and completely Luke.

The lock being turned in the door caused Kat to be abruptly jerked from her train of thought and she turned – her eyes narrowing as she waited – pushing Harper behind her protectively.

Elaine stepped through the doorway, flanked by the two men that had been with her at the apartment and Katrina glared at her mother as her body began to tremble. She never imagined that she could hate someone as much as she did this woman. She wasn’t her mother! She was an evil bitch that cared about no one but herself.

“My darling daughters,” she murmured as she strolled over to them. “It is time.” She smiled wickedly, her eyes practically glowing with excitement. “Tonight we end all of this nonsense once and for all, and secure our place in this world. Come.” She held out her hand as if Kat and Harper would rush to her in joy, only to furrow her brows a moment later when they didn’t.

Kat had felt a strange humming start in her belly and quickly sweep through her body when her mother beckoned to them, as if invisible hands were at her back – pushing her towards the woman – but she fought it with everything that she had. She would not go anywhere near this woman willingly.

“Interesting,” Elaine mused, tapping her finger against her chin. “It seems that your wills are a bit stronger than I had anticipated.”

Elaine turned to the two men standing so silently near the door and snapped her fingers. “Bring them – we have people waiting.”

In an instant, Kat and Harper were yanked towards the door – their arms held securely behind them as they were led out of their prison. Elaine followed, softly chanting.

As they were being pushed along the dark corridor, Kat searched in vain for any sign of Luke – her heart breaking when there was only an eerie silence. They were shoved up a set of stairs and through a doorway – taking them outside through the storm cellar of a very old farmhouse.

Kat could see a fire blazing off in the distance and heard the distinct sound of voices. What sounded like a *lot* of voices, and her legs began to tremble. She turned to look at Harper who was staring straight ahead with wide, frightened eyes.

Kat knew that this was not good – but with a straightening of her back she decided that she would not go down without a fight. She would do everything and anything within her power to stop whatever these crazies had in mind. She would give up her life to make sure Luke and Harper were safe.

They were led to a clearing where the fire blazed, and Kat noticed at least twenty people in black robes standing around what looked like an altar of sorts. She searched hurriedly for any sign of Luke and felt her hopes dash a moment later when there was none. Where *was* he?

The voices stilled as they approached and a hush fell over the clearing as all sets of eyes turned to watch Kat and her sister – and she could feel the evil radiating off of them. Oh, this was so not good at all!



Luke glared at the door as it opened and two burly men walked in. His mouth pulled back in a snarl as he watched them approach.

“It’s time wolf,” the one ground out as he unlocked the chain from the wall that held Luke’s wrist and handed the length to the other man when

Luke viciously yanked on it. He burst out laughing at the Were's futile attempt. "It's no use," he informed him as he removed the band from around his neck, and then moved to the other side to release that chain as well. "This silver has been charmed as well, so you might as well save your strength." He glanced at the other man and gave him a knowing smirk.

"Where is Katrina," Luke growled as they pulled him along through the doorway.

"No worries, wolf," the man spit out, his eyes gleaming dangerously. "We're taking you to see your lady love right now." Again the man burst into laughter and Luke tried to lunge for him – but he snapped the chain and kept him immobile.

Luke felt his rage welling up inside him as he was dragged along the stone corridor, and swore that he would see these bastards' dead. As soon as he got Kat and Harper out of this, he would kill them all – and enjoy every blasted moment of it. His wolf howled in fury – wanting nothing more in that moment than to get out.



Kat and Harper were shoved through the circle of people and led over to the altar. Black candles flickered and dripped wax onto the makeshift table and Kat's eyes widened when she caught sight of a large silver dagger laying there - just out of reach. She gulped back the fear and glanced around at the Coven.

They stood facing them, their faces obscured by the black hoods of their robes and Kat could feel their excitement – in radiated off of them in waves. She watched as Elaine made her way over and stood in front of them.

Ever the drama Queen, Elaine raised her arms to the group and smiled. "Starting tonight," she called, looking at the group standing in front of her. "Finally, once and for all, we will secure our place in the world. This is only the beginning for us."

There was a murmuring of approvals from the crowd and Kat looked to Harper, who was standing there – her mouth hanging open in fear, as she took in the scene unfolding before her. Her hands were wrenched securely;

and painfully behind her back again, and Kat struggled against the arms holding her - trying to get to her sister.

Elaine walked over to Kat and touched her cheek, causing her to jerk back and glare. She grabbed Kat's hair and pulled her head back – causing her to gasp in surprise. And before Kat could protest, her mother poured a vile of foul tasting liquid down her throat.

Kat choked and gagged, trying desperately to spit out the disgusting liquid, but enough had gone down her throat that she was suddenly very dizzy. She felt the bastard who was holding her let her go and she collapsed to the ground, choking viscerally – feeling a deep burning sensation running through her veins. She vaguely heard Harper gasp and turned her head in her direction, where she saw her sister struggling to get free and get to her – but the man that had held Katrina in his grip walked over and grabbed one of her sister's arms and helped to hold her prisoner- giving her a vicious shake as he did.

Elaine looked down at Kat and smiled, her eyes gleaming. She turned back to the Coven and nodded, and Kat was suddenly aware of them beginning to chant – softly at first but with a growing intensity.

Kat's vision blurred then cleared as her stomach heaved – trying to expel whatever she had consumed, but nothing came out. She struggled to stand, but found that the burning in her veins and the dizziness sweeping over her just wouldn't allow it. Her blood felt like it was on fire, and she tried to take air into her lungs – trying desperately to gain control.

When Kat heard Harper gasp again, she looked up to see a furious Luke being led in chains by two men. He fought, growling viciously as his Amber eyes glowed with his fury and Kat let out a blood-curdling scream – unable to stop the terror coursing through her very soul. She was now living her nightmare.

Luke yanked at the chains and growled, his wolf howling in frustration. When he first heard, then saw Kat – his blood ran cold. She was on the ground, trying to stand as her screams ripped through the night and Luke wanted nothing more at that moment than to kill; to rip, and tear these bastards to pieces.

His blood thirst was all-consuming and he was struggling to keep his wits about him and not let the animal take over. He needed to get them out of this, and blind rage was not the way to do it. Not when he couldn't shift.

He was vaguely aware of the sound of the Coven chanting as he was pulled deeper into the circle – but his eyes were on Katrina. Damn it to hell! The bastards had done something to her.

He growled again, baring his teeth and lunged to the side, trying to get to one of his captures – but the damned silver was weakening him - as well as preventing him from shifting.

Son of a bitch, he seethed – needing more than anything to get to his mate. He chanced a quick glance at Harper who was standing there silently between two men – her face a mask of terror, and Luke growled again. This was his family, God damn it! And he would *not* let them be harmed!



Kat screamed until she realized that she was growing hoarse, and the chanting around her grew louder. There was a small part of her that found the sound strangely calming.

It was melodic and soothing and she suddenly felt her head clearing and she grew quiet – letting the voices embrace her. She could feel her anger - hot and heady, coursing through her body in ripples, and welcomed it. It felt so good.

She looked up at Elaine who stood there silently, watching her intently.

Elaine held her hand out to her, and Kat realized with a start – as if she were watching from outside of her body - that she was taking it and letting her mother help her to her feet.

There was a strange vibration going through her that made Kat feel something she wasn't sure was necessarily a good thing. It was a darkness creeping over her that was stealing the breath from her body as well as the emotions from her soul – and a part of her liked it. She didn't want to feel anymore. She didn't want the pain or the hurt. She liked this numbness – this anger.

“We are ready,” Elaine called over the voices, and the members of the Coven nodded – continuing to chant. “My daughters,” Elaine said, taking Kat by the hand and motioning for Harper to be brought closer. “We finally have the dark and the light - the power to give and take life. But, we must end this threat against all that we have worked so long for.” The chanting grew louder and more orgasmic as Elaine addressed the Coven, and she smiled darkly. “The child my daughter carries is an abomination.” She grit out, looking to Luke. “If this child is allowed to survive, he will bring an end to our world. He will destroy all that we are. We could not stop that damn Vampire and his whore of a Fey from creating their offspring. But she will no longer pose a problem if we end this tonight!” She glared at Luke, who now stood completely motionless, his face registering the shock he was feeling straight to his core. “Let them have their precious daughter. She will never be able to fulfill the prophecy alone.”

Elaine nodded to a hooded figure that stood to her right and the man walked over to stand in front of Luke. She nodded once again and he raised the whip that he held and slashed it across Luke’s chest with a resounding crack that echoed through the night – echoing above the din of the voices.

Luke was in a daze. Elaine’s words stunning him. *The child she carries?* He looked to Kat, who stood there, her face expressionless – her eyes almost black.

He felt the slash of the whip across his chest, and it snapped him out of his stupor. Growling he looked at the man that held the leather strap and his eyes widened when he realized that he smelled Vampire. Christ, now they had Vampire’s in the Coven. Shit! How could this get any worse?

Another slash of the whip and Luke grimaced in pain as the skin of his chest was ripped open – and he felt the blood running down his body in a rush, weakening him even more. They had chosen the Vampire to dole out the punishment, he knew – because of his extraordinary strength, and Luke struggled to see the bastards face – but it was hidden by his robe.

Another strike, then another and Luke felt himself dangerously slipping into unconsciousness and fought it with every ounce of his being. He could not let the blackness win.

Harper struggled against the two men holding her as she screamed for Luke, her heart breaking at the sight of him being tortured. She looked to Kat and felt her anger welling up inside of her. Why wasn't she doing anything? Why was she just standing there?

Kat watched the scene unfolding before her in a sort of haze. There was nothing. No emotion, no feeling - only hate; only the sublime darkness.

"You feel it Katrina, don't you?" Elaine whispered in her ear, her breath hot against her face. "You feel that power rushing through your body, and it feels wonderful - doesn't it?"

Kat nodded distractedly, her eyes on Luke. He had fallen to his knees and was fighting to stay conscious as his blood poured from him - and Kat found the sight strangely entralling.

"This is all his fault," Elaine hissed, her hand squeezing Kat's to the point of pain. "He put that child inside of you! He created that bastard that will take everything from us!"

"Stop it!" Harper screamed, her body beginning to tremble with rage. This couldn't be happening. "Stop filling her head with your crap!"

Elaine turned to her and smiled. "Oh, my naïve darling - you will come to understand and embrace what you are. You are the dark, my dear. You have the power to take life. Think of it! You and Katrina are two halves of a whole. One who may take life, and one who may give it." She looked back to Kat, her eyes blazing with excitement. "But we must ensure that this child that grows inside your sister's belly will not destroy what we are - and in order to do that, the light must take the life of the one she loves most."

Elaine turned and reached for the dagger lying on the altar - holding it as if it were made of glass. She pulled Kat toward where Luke stood and nodded to the Vampire standing there - the whip held tightly in his hands. "It is time for Katrina to finish this once and for all."

He nodded quickly and disappeared into the shadows - disappearing into the night.

Kat stood beside her mother and watched Luke with interest. He was gasping for air as he lifted his head and met her eyes. Eyes that she had...

what? Loved? No, a voice whispered in her head. He had used her. He had...he had...played with her as if she were a toy.

Kat shook her head, trying to clear the fog that was her mind. Hate! She hated this man! He would destroy everything. He would end everything they had...she felt her heart clench tightly in her chest as another thought crept into her mind. No! He cared for her. He had comforted her. He had protected her.

“Katrina,” Elaine cooed - her voice soft and so comforting. “He will destroy you. He will take everything from you and leave you. You, and the bastard child that you carry. Can’t you see it?”

Again Kat nodded at her mother’s melodic voice, and she felt Elaine slip the dagger into her hand. It felt so warm and wonderful, and Kat’s hand trembled with the surge of power that ran up the arm that was holding it.

The chanting was building into a crescendo around them as she lifted the dagger and looked at it. It glinted red in the firelight, and Kat was mesmerized by the light dancing off of the highly polished silver. It made her feel powerful and alive. Didn’t it?

“You must plunge it into his heart,” Elaine urged. “End this now, Katrina. End it!”

Kat’s eyes lifted once again to Luke’s and she saw the pain reflected in them – and something else. Although she couldn’t grasp just what it was. It was something she had felt once – but was now gone - lost in the hatred that was her soul.

“Please, Kat,” she heard Harper beg from behind her. “You can’t do this. You just *can’t!*”

“Katrina,” Luke rasped, his breathing was labored and strained – and Kat felt a strange tingle course through her body. “I love you.” He whispered, his eyes locking with hers.

“Do it!” Elaine hissed. “End this now!”

“Baby... I love you,” Luke gasped; his voice, no more than a hoarse croak. “Just know that; if nothing else. Know that, I...love you.”

Kat raised the knife - her hand shaking. And in the next instant brought the dagger down with everything that she had, meeting its mark with deadly precision. And a blood curdling, pain filled scream filled the air as the chanting abruptly stopped.

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Chapter 15

Stunned silence filled the clearing as Elaine grasped her chest in shock and fell to the ground – and in the next instant, there was total chaos. The Coven scrambled and began running towards them and Katrina watched as Luke fell to the ground as the men holding him lunged for her.

She glared at them, her body humming with a surge of power. Suddenly the two men burst into flame and took off running into the ensuing crowd, catching several of the others on fire as they slammed into them in their terror.

Kat glared at the members of the Coven that were stupid enough to keep coming towards her and they, too burst into flame – their shocked screams cutting through the night air.

Kat turned towards Harper and began walking to where she was being held. The men holding her dropped her sister's arms when they saw her heading their way, and Harper turned quickly and pressed her hands on the ones chest to shove him away. Suddenly a flash of light burst from Harper's palms and the man clutched his chest a moment in pain; before crumpling to the ground with a pain-filled scream, and turning to dust.

The other man took off running and Harper took off after him. "Harper! No!" Kat called, but they had disappeared through the trees and out of sight.

Kat turned, and watched as the remaining few witches screamed and scattered about, disappearing into the brush in different directions – and suddenly the clearing was silent - only the crackling of the fire and burning bodies filling the night.

Kat gasped for air, her body shaking uncontrollably and tears stinging her eyes. She heard the sound of footsteps and turned to find Harper coming through the trees – a look of triumph on her face.

"Way to go all *Carrie* on their asses' sis!" Harper laughed happily as she ran up beside her and gave her a quick hug and nudge on the shoulder – her eyes shining with pride. "You were a *total* badass!"

Kat glanced at her sister, and tried to give her a smile, but the sight of Luke lying on the ground just wouldn't allow it. She tried to move, but it was as if her feet were planted to the ground where she stood. It was her nightmare all over again. Played out in cold, harsh reality, and Kat felt a fear welling up inside her that she had never known before. It shook her to the core. He had said he loved her – and she might have possibly killed him.

Using every bit of strength that she had left, she broke free from Harper, and ran over to where Luke lay; dropping down to the ground beside him, and cradling his head in her lap.

His breathing was almost non-existent, and she felt her heart slam against her chest at the sight of all the blood coming from his gaping wounds. No, Dear God, she cried - please don't take him from me! Please... please, she silently begged. *We need him!*

“Luke,” Kat cried, pressing her lips to his face, and kissing his cheeks. “Please... don't do this to me...to *us!*” She sobbed, pressing a shaking hand to her belly. When she didn't get a response; her sobs came on full force - wracking her body with her pain as if it were a physical force.

Harper came walking over to them – her hands in the back pockets of her jeans. “Just heal him,” she said, looking down at Kat as if she were dense. She held up a key and smiled. “I'll get those shackles off of him while you do your thing.”

Wha...what?” Kat choked out, her tears streaming down her face, and her voice a hoarse whisper that Harper had to strain to hear.

“Geez, sis,” Harper laughed, dropping down beside her and unlocking Luke's wrists. She tossed the silver away and gave her sister a wink. “That's why I took off after that jackass,” she explained, practically beaming with pride. “I knew he'd have this on him.” She tossed the key away and hugged her knees. “Well, go on, heal him already. What are you waiting for?”

Kat shook her head, her face showing her fear. “I...I can't...”

“Didn't you hear *anything* that those nut cases said? Or - were you just too biggity at having to watch your *puppy* here get whipped?” She rolled her eyes at Kat, and smiled, her expression filled with affection. “We are

two halves of a whole. I can *take* life – and *you* can give it. God,” she huffed, shaking her head sadly, “and *you* are the older sister! Man, I tell you. What love does to the mind...I swear. I can tell you right now - I am *never* going to let that happen to me.” She grumbled good-naturedly. “Or is it just the hormones?” She asked with a grin. “Is my soon to be nephew messing around with your head? Making you all kinds of bat-shit crazy?” She laughed then -her hazel eyes – so much like Kats, sparkling happily. “Go on – do it. Heal him.”

Kat looked back down at Luke, and closed her eyes – concentrating with everything that she had. She lifted her trembling hands and ran them along his chest – praying to the God’s in Heaven that this would work. She didn’t know how she had done what she had done, but if she actually *could* give life, now was the time for it to be true. Please, please...let it be true – she silently prayed.

She could feel that tingling starting in her fingertips, as a heat suddenly burst from her chest, and ran down her arms – causing them to vibrate from the sheer force of it, and she let out a startled gasp.

“There you go.” She heard Harper murmur, and opened her eyes to see a deep blue glow coming from beneath her hands. She watched in fascination and hope as Luke’s wounds began to knit together and heal.

“Holy shit,” Kat breathed in awe. Was she actually *doing* that? “Please...oh, please let this be real.” She murmured, out loud this time so that she could be heard.

“Pretty awesome; huh?” Harper asked quietly. “I wish that was my power. I’m not at all sure that I’m going to like being the damn Grim Reaper. I mean, seriously!” She finished; her voice a sullen grunt. “I guess that’s why my mom always wanted me to reign in my damn anger. Who knew?”

Kat looked back to Harper; her mouth set in an understanding frown. “Don’t worry,” she reassured her gently. “We’re a family now, and you will never, ever have to use it. We’ll make certain of that.”

When Luke groaned a moment later, Kat’s eyes shot back down to his face, and she was greeted by those amber depths -that she loved more than life itself, gazing up at her - that iceberg melting grin on his face.

“It’s about damn time you realized that we’re a family. Good God, woman - but you are a slow one.” He stated softly, and Kat felt her heart slam once again against her chest with the force of a sonic boom – knocking the breath right out of her lungs in a whoosh.

In the next instant, she grabbed his face in her hands and kissed him with all the love and relief - and happiness that was coursing through her body - to the very depths of her soul. Washing all the hate and anger from her and leaving only peace.

“I’m so sorry,” she whispered against his lips, her eyes still sparkling with tears. “I’m sorry! Luke, I love you so much! I’m so sorry for everything. I...I don’t know what happened. I was...”

Suddenly Luke’s strong arms were around her, and pulling her down onto his chest as his firm mouth stopped her words cold. He kissed her with all the hunger and need coursing through his body. She was his! His mate - his life...his love. And by God, she had *finally* said the three words that he had longed to hear – and it was about damn time!

“Oh, shit up a pole!” He heard Harper groan, and broke out into a wide smile; reluctantly tearing his mouth from Kats, and looking at the feisty teenager with a raised brow.

“Is there a problem, brat?” He asked with a whole hearted grin, and the girl scowled at him darkly.

“Oh, come on! Do I *really* need to be subjected to this? I am just a kid, you know.” She grumbled, although her eyes began to dance and glitter with humor. “Geez, you two *really* need to get a room!”

Luke burst into laughter. “Those were my thoughts exactly!” With that, he got to his feet and pulled Kat up with him. He wrapped his arms around her once again as she burrowed her face into his chest; and he felt her entire body shudder. “Baby?” He whispered into her hair. “What’s wrong?”

Kat shook her head against his chest, unable to speak. She loved this man so desperately, that the thought of him almost dying at her hand was squeezing the air from her lungs – making it impossible to breathe. She had somehow found the strength within her to stop herself – but there was that small part that had wanted to, and that scared the ever-loving piss out of her.

The only thing that had stopped her was her love for this man – but how could he possibly ever forgive her? She didn't deserve this man.

“Katrina,” Luke murmured, cupping his hand under her chin and lifting her face to meet his.

When she looked up into his eyes – she saw only love there, and her heart skipped a beat. How could he not despise her? Not loathe her for what she had almost done - she wondered; her tears once again springing to her eyes and sliding down her cheeks. She had stood there as they had tortured him. She had almost plunged a damn knife into his heart! He should detest her with every fiber of his being.

She choked back a sob and buried her face against his neck, her entire body shaking now. “Shhh,” Luke cooed, rubbing her back gently, trying desperately to soothe her. “Shhh, baby – it's all right. It's all over, now.” Luke glanced over at Harper, who just shook her head and shrugged – rolling her eyes as she did overdramatically.

“Emotional,” she muttered as she walked away to give them some privacy; shaking her head in bewilderment as she did. If she lived to be a hundred –she didn't think she would ever understand the thinking of some people! Sheesh!

Luke took Kat by the shoulders and leaned back so that he could look at her – and it broke his heart in two to see the pain in her eyes. “Tell me right now, Katrina – just what in the *Hell* is wrong?”

Kat wiped her nose with the back of her hand as she looked up at him, and sniffled. “You have to hate me,” she squeaked out, and Luke's mouth fell open. *What?*

“Why on earth would you ever say that?” he asked, at a total loss.

He loved this woman with his entire heart and soul - and had spent the last few weeks trying desperately to make her realize that she loved him too. And now, they were going to have a baby. Christ, could his life get any better? She was carrying *his* child, and had said that she loved him! That was about as far from hate as you could possibly get.

“Luke, I...I almost *killed* you!” She sobbed, her tears coming full force once again.

Luke pulled her back against his chest and chuckled – the vibration of it rumbling against her cheek. “And I’m sure it won’t be the last time, red,” he joked, and Kat pulled away and batted at his arm.

“It’s not funny, jackass!” She squeaked out; hating him for making her feel better. She didn’t deserve him. How on earth could this man say that he loved her after what she had almost done?

“I think it is.” Harper piped in from across the way. She was sitting on the makeshift altar, her legs swinging carelessly beneath her as she played with the wax dripping from the candles.

“Keep out of this!” Kat and Luke both called in unison- then looked into each other’s eyes, as smiles began to touch their lips.

“Katrina, I love you.” Luke stated simply, his eyes locking with hers. “What happened was not your fault. And if you would just take a moment, and remember correctly,” he said, leaning in closer to her, so that his mouth hovered but a fraction away from hers. “You saved me. You found it within yourself to fight that mojo shit that they plied you with to *save* me, baby. And you did. In more ways than I could possibly count.”

“But...” she began, but his mouth crashing down on hers stopped her. He kissed her hungrily, his hands sliding down to the small of her back and pulling her closer – and she could feel the proof of his words pressing intimately against her hip.

“Again,” Harper called – sounding completely exasperated. “There *is* a child present here! A child that has no desire what so ever, to be introduced to the wonderful world or porn! Especially not by my sister, and soon to be brother! Ugh!” She made a gagging sound as she watched them.

Luke forced himself to break away from Katrina’s mouth and glared at the obstinate little brat – but his lips were twitching with the beginnings of a smile. He adored Harper, he thought; and his grin only widened. She was so much like her sister, and it was going to be damn nice having a little sister

to watch out for, he silently mused – and soon; a son. He shook his head slightly and looked back to Kat, his eyes brimming with happiness. She was giving him the world and he couldn't have loved her more.

“Come on, sweetheart,” he whispered, wrapping his arm around her waist and walking over toward Harper. “Let's go home.”

Kat looked up at him- her eyes shimmering with tears, and silently thanked God for allowing her to find this man. He was everything to her, and there was still a small part of her that wondered why she should be so fortunate.

As they made their way through the clearing and over to the old farmhouse where they had been held captive, Luke's body tensed when he saw headlights pulling up the road and he quickly pushed Kat and Harper behind him - his body instantly going into attack mode – a low growl emitting from his chest in warning.

He watched as a black sedan came to a screeching halt in front of the house and the driver's and passenger side doors flew open and two people came rushing out.

“Holy shit!” Luke laughed when he saw Abby and Desmond come running towards them.

Kat peered around Luke's massive frame and felt the swell of relief hit her as her friend and her mate ran towards them at breakneck speed.

“Oh, thank God!” Abby cried as she threw herself at Luke – who quickly wrapped his arms around her and hugged her fiercely.

To Kat's surprise, Desmond grabbed her gently by the wrist, and pulled her into his embrace, hugging her tightly. “I was afraid we would be too late,” he whispered, leaning back finally and gracing her with a smile.

Abby let go of Luke and grabbed Kat. “We have been worried sick!” She cried, tears rolling down her face as she rocked Kat. Kat watched as Luke and Desmond embraced, and her face broke out into a wide smile. This was her family.

Kat pulled away from Abby and turned to Harper, who had stepped back when the embracing had begun and stood there quietly, anxiously kicking at a stone in the dirt – looking extremely uncomfortable.

“Abby, Desmond,” Kat said, motioning Harper to come over. “This is Harper - my sister.”

Abby immediately grabbed the girl and swallowed her up into her arms, kissing her cheek. “I am so happy to meet you Harper,” she laughed. “This is my mate, Desmond.”

Harper watched as the impressive man walked over to stand behind Abby, wrapping his arm around her waist and extending his other hand out towards her. She took it and gave him a nervous smile - a little intimidated by the man’s impressive stature. He just oozed authority, and she couldn’t help the little shiver that ran up her spine – but when he took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze, and his mouth turned up in a grin – she melted.

“Welcome to the family,” he said softly, and Harper instantly felt at ease.

“Are you the Vampire?” She asked in awe - and Desmond burst out laughing.

“That I am. Would you care to see my fangs?” He asked, chuckling good naturedly.

Harper’s mouth dropped open and she nodded. “Can I?”

Desmond gave her a wink and flashed his fangs, causing the girl to gasp. “Wicked,” she breathed, before turning to look at Abby like she was the luckiest woman in the world – and Abby had to agree. “So, you’re a fairy?” She asked – clearly impressed by the couple.

Abby smiled and took her hand. “Actually, I’m part Fey.” She looked back at Desmond over her shoulder and winked. “They don’t particularly like being called Fairies,” she replied, mimicking Desmond’s words to her when he had first explained to her what she was – and he kissed the top of her head affectionately.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

Abby laughed- the beautiful, lilting sound filling the night, and Harper looked to where Luke and Kat stood, their arms tightly around each other,

their faces pressed together, making out like teenagers, and she rolled her eyes.

“Believe me,” Abby chuckled. “I am far from being offended.” She leaned in closer to Harper and whispered conspiratorially into her ear. “I called them Fairies myself until my husband pointed out that little bit of information. Who knew?”

Desmond turned and looked to Kat and Luke. “What the hell happened?” He asked, and Luke broke free from Kat’s lips and let out a loud groan.

“I think we should probably get the hell home before I even begin to get into it all.” Luke laughed, giving Abby a strange, thoughtful glance before breaking out into a grin. “Some of these assholes took off into the woods, and I’m not sure if they’re still lurking around.” He looked to Desmond and his smile faded. “Des, they had a Vampire with them,” he informed him, and was completely stunned when his friend nodded.

“I know. I caught his scent when we were in Kat’s apartment. I take it that he took off?” He asked, but it was Harper that answered.

“The miserable coward took off after he almost whipped Luke to death,” she bit out, her anger evident and Desmond couldn’t help but smile at the obvious affection the girl had for his friend.

“I see,” Desmond murmured softly, hugging Abby close. “Marcus is in New Orleans seeing what he can dig up. I will ask that he stay and continue his search.”

“Where the hell are we anyway?” Luke asked, glancing around at the unfamiliar surroundings.

“About an hour and a half from the manor,” Desmond replied, taking Abby by the hand and pulling her along with him as he lead them all back towards the car. “I have to tell you my friend. I had a hell of a time tracking you.” Desmond informed them nonchalantly. Then he turned back and looked at Luke, that grin of his touching his lips. “Perhaps I should have you micro chipped, cur.”

“Desmond!” Abby laughed, elbowing him in the stomach. “You are horrible!”

He leaned in and gave her a quick kiss. “And you wouldn’t have it any other way – would you sweetness?” He asked, kissing her once again for good measure.

“Absolutely not,” she replied, and stroked his cheek.

Kat and Luke walked up beside Harper, and Kat wrapped her arm around her sister’s shoulders and gave them a gentle squeeze.

“You are going to just love these two,” she whispered. “And wait until you meet Desmond’s brother Marcus. He’s a doll - a big old teddy bear.”

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Chapter 16

When they finally arrived back at the manor, Abby and Kat ushered the exhausted Harper upstairs to get her settled in as Desmond and Luke went into the study for a much needed drink.

The two men relaxed in a comfortable silence as they sipped brandy and waited for their mates to return. The trip back had been a quiet one with Harper falling asleep almost immediately, curled up in the back seat with Kat and Luke. Kat slept on Luke's lap - his arms wrapped securely around her and his head resting on top of hers. Abby had leaned over and dozed on and off against Desmond's shoulder as he quietly watched the road.

“So,” Desmond said softly, finally breaking the silence in the room, “are you going to tell me just what in the hell happened out there?”

Luke leaned his head back against the cushion of the sofa that he was sitting on, and closed his eyes. There was so much to tell, and he was excited and nervous – and he just wanted to take his mate upstairs and make love to her for the rest of the night and most of the day. He wanted to mark her and truly make her his mate – but he needed to tell his best friends everything first.

He sighed and opened his eyes, looking at Desmond with a grin. “I think it would be best to wait until we are all together.”

Desmond's brows furrowed as he silently studied his friend. Something was definitely up. When he had called Marcus to tell him that everyone was safe, his brother had whooped loudly and congratulated Desmond. Actually *congratulated* him! And just what in the hell for – he had no idea. His brother had acted as if he had performed a miracle – when in essence, hadn't done anything except find their friends and bring them home. It was peculiar, and a bit unsettling. Desmond didn't like not knowing what was going on at all.

He narrowed his eyes at Luke- wanting nothing more at that moment than to choke that shit-eating grin right off of his face.

Luke fought back the urge to burst out laughing with everything that he had as he watched the confusion and irritation play across Desmond's

features. Oh, just wait, my friend – he silently beamed. Christ! They were going to be fathers! Their children were going to change the world. He had his mate safely back with him, and soon – they would have a son.

Luke's smile faded as a bout of nerves hit him like a Mack truck. Holy shit! Their children were going to change the world! What the *Hell* were the powers that be *thinking* when they decided to entrust him with that responsibility? He felt his stomach clench in fear and gulped down the rest of his brandy in one long, painful swallow. Could he do this? Hell, he knew Desmond could. The man was as near to perfect as you could get. He and Abby would be phenomenal parents – but would he?

He got his answer a moment later when Kat and Abby walked into the room, and his eyes met Kat's. She caught and held his gaze, her face lighting up with a smile that stole the breath from his body, and he knew right then and there that they would be fine. He loved this woman more than he ever thought it possible to love someone, and he would love their son just as much.

Kat strolled over to him and plopped down beside him on the couch, snuggling up against his side, and Luke suddenly felt *extremely* constricted in his swiftly tightening jeans. Ah, *hell*.

When Abby had seated herself on her husband's lap - Desmond quirked a brow at Luke; his patience near its end, "Well, wolf?"

Kat and Luke glanced at each other and burst out laughing, which only caused Desmond's already tight features to darken slightly. How they could find humor in the situation was beyond him – he thought with a scowl.

Luke watched Desmond a moment before deciding to let him off of the hook. As much as he enjoyed tormenting the blood-sucker, he was desperate to be alone with Kat. He wrapped his arm around her and pulled her closer, giving his friends an apologetic smile.

"Okay, I'm sorry. I just can't help but enjoy watching your husband squirm, Abs." He gave her a wink. "Christ, where do I even start." He took a deep breath and sighed. "All right, first off is - Kat and her sister are kind of like a power team," he began, looking down into her eyes in admiration. "Katrina has the ability to give life. She can heal – whereas Harper is sort of like..." he trailed off, trying to find the right words.

“In Harper’s own words,” Kat piped in. “She’s the damn Grim Reaper.”

When Desmond and Abby’s mouths fell open, Kat couldn’t help the grin that came to her lips.

“Thankfully, Constance Bradford knew this and raised Harper with the ability to control it. She’s a strong, loving, wonderful girl, as you will find out soon enough - who is fiercely loyal to those she loves.” Kat looked back to Luke and gave him a look that was both excited and a little nervous. He leaned in and kissed her gently.

“The witches wanted to put an end to an event that would change our world,” Luke continued, giving Kat a quick wink. “That event is the birth of two children that will bond together all supernatural beings.”

“What children?” Abby asked, sitting up a bit straighter on Desmond’s lap and watching them intently.

“Well,” Luke murmured, that shit-eating grin returning to his face in an instant. “Yours and Desmond’s... and ours,” he finished, looking back to Kat. He heard Abby’s sharp intake of breath.

“What? You can’t mean...” Abby breathed, and when he turned back to look at her – her face was one of total shock – but it wasn’t even close to the shock registering on his friends face.

Desmond sat there as still as if he were made of stone – his eyes wide and his mouth hanging open in disbelief. Not a sound came from him.

“What’s the matter, daddy,” Luke snorted. “Cat got your tongue?”

“Lucas, are you sure?” Abby asked, afraid to even hope that this could be true. She knew that Vampire’s couldn’t father children, and had been perfectly content with that. But to think that she could actually have Desmond’s child sent a shot of electricity through her entire body. Could they be that blessed? Could this really be true?

“Yes, Abs. I’m sure. Our children will be born, grow up...fall in love, and change the supernatural world as we know it. The blending of our species, for lack of a better term - will bond the supernatural beings. They will show them that we can co-exist in harmony, and evil will be sent straight back to Hell, where it belongs. Your fathers and Des’ dream will finally become a reality.”

Abby placed a hand to her stomach and looked to her mate – who was still sitting there in stunned silence. He still hadn't made a sound or moved a muscle. "Des?"

He seemed to snap out of whatever place he had been, and looked at her - his expression one of complete bewilderment. "Could... could this actually be possible?" He whispered, nearly choking on the words as they passed his lips.

"Oh, it's possible my friend," Luke chuckled. "And I'm fairly sure that it's already happened -considering the way the two of you have been humping like bunnies for the past few weeks."

Kat gasped and chucked him on the chest. "Lucas!" She reprimanded, but he just gave her that grin of his.

Abby blushed to the roots of her hair as she touched Desmond's face. "Des, are you all right with this?"

"You...you should be resting. Shouldn't you?" He breathed out distractedly - then hugged her to him tightly, burying his face in her hair, and inhaled her scent greedily. Not sure that he could even hope that this wasn't a dream.

Abby leaned back and looked into his eyes, seeing the shock and worry in them. "Desmond, I feel wonderful." She leaned forward and kissed the crease in his brow, her fingers brushing against his cheek. "Stop worrying so. I'm only pregnant," she said with a smile that lit up her face. "There will be plenty of time to rest. I need to know if you are okay with this. We never discussed the possibility of ever being able to..." she trailed off, her eyes shimmering with tears – her heart clenching with happiness. This was so much more than she could have ever expected – and there were no words.

Desmond brushed his lips against hers, instantly feeling a rush of emotions wash over him – love, joy, contentment - every blasted good feeling that you could possibly feel - and gave himself a quick, mental shake. "Oh, sweetness; this is just...it's quite overwhelming. I never thought it would be possible..." he broke off, shaking his head in wonder. "I never could have ever hoped... Of *course* I'm all right with this. I'm ecstatic. I just never thought..." Again he shook his head, as if trying to convince himself that this was actually happening.

“Oh, and it’s a girl by the way,” Luke interjected with a laugh. He was thoroughly enjoying watching his friend stumble and stutter. The calm, cool Desmond LeGrange was actually in shock! Full blown – Holy *Shit* shock! Damn, but this was fun!

“A girl,” Abby repeated on a sigh, her smile lighting up her face in a way that took Desmond’s breath away.

“A girl,” he repeated in wonder, and looked to Luke. “And you said that they will grow and fall in love?” He asked, and Luke nodded. “So, we shall truly be family.” It was a simple statement, yet held the force of a hurricane.

“Yeah,” Luke laughed, “seems that the two of you are stuck with me and my wicked, wild ways. Luckily I’ll have my mate to counter balance those pesky, irritating habits of mine.” He glanced back to Kat. “Not that she doesn’t have a few of her own.”

Kat giggled, and buried her face against his neck - causing his already painful erection to swell to dangerous proportions. Groaning softly, he took a deep, cleansing breath and tried to swallow his desire – but it was just no use. He needed his Katrina. His wolf was howling in frustration – wanting to finally take what was his – and he was hard pressed to fight it any longer.

“Listen, I would love to sit and chat all night, but Kat needs some rest, and you two need some alone time as well. I just kind of dropped a pretty big bombshell on the both of you and you need time to digest it all and celebrate. Why don’t we finish this conversation in the morning,” he glanced down into Kat’s eyes and saw them sparkling wickedly as she smiled up at him. “Or better yet, late afternoon. This has been a crazy few days, and we all have a lot to chew on. And even though for the most part, the Coven is gone - we still have a Vampire to worry about.” He shrugged. “Although, I really don’t think he is going to pose much of a problem, but we can’t be reckless either. We have people we love to protect.”

With that Luke stood and swept Kat up in his arms, and carried her towards the door. When he reached the doorway he turned and looked back over his shoulder. “Congrats guys. This is all kind of surreal, huh?” he said with a smile.

“Yes, indeed it is. And congratulations to the both of you as well,” Desmond replied, his arms tightening around Abby.

They said their goodnight's and disappeared up the stairs and headed off to the guestroom. When they were gone, Desmond looked back to Abby. He studied her a moment - awe clearly written across his face. "Our children are going to be remarkable," he murmured, softly stroking her face - his eyes filled with love and tenderness. "I still cannot believe that I should be this fortunate. I thought I was the luckiest man in the world when you stumbled into my life and now this. I just want to do everything right. My love, what can I do? Do you need to rest? You should probably eat. Are you hungry?"

Abby burst out laughing. "Don't you dare try to fatten me up yet, Desmond LeGrange!" she giggled, and wrapped her arms around his neck. She kissed him soundly on the mouth, her eyes sparkling. "Well, let's see. What can you do?" She murmured, her fingers going to her lips. "Hmm... well, you can start off by taking me upstairs and making love to me the rest of the night and well into the morning," she breathed against his mouth, and Desmond groaned as if in pain. "All the while telling me how much you love me - and how happy you are going to be when you are a daddy."

Desmond gazed into her eyes, his own shining brightly. "Oh, Abigail. I love you so much that I could tell you for eternity and it still wouldn't be enough - but I do intend on doing just that. And as for our child," he murmured against her lips as his hand slid to her still flat belly and caressed it lovingly. "She will be loved just as much as her mother. I only hope that she has your eyes and your compassion, and love of life. My, love - you have given me a gift that I never could have ever even imagined, and I am in wonder of you, my darling mate. I love and adore you - and will for eternity. Never doubt that for a moment."

"I love you, Desmond. With all of my heart and soul. Now, how about taking me upstairs?"

"The pleasure is all mine," he said standing - Abby still held securely in his arms, and started walking towards the stairs.

"Oh, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," she giggled.

Chapter 17

Luke whisked Kat through the doorway of the guest room and set her down, sliding her along the length of his body as he did. His eyes locked and held hers as his mouth turned up into a wicked grin.

His hands slid down her back and cupped her backside, pulling her up against the painful bulge in his jeans – and he groaned in sweet agony when she wriggled against him – causing a laugh to burst from her mouth.

“My, my Benji,” she cooed, running her hands up and down the tight muscles of his arms. “You have already most likely knocked me up. What else is there?” He could see the amusement in her face – but also the desire. And his heart knocked around in his chest like a bass drum.

Luke growled and swept her up in his arms once again, carrying her over to the bed. He tossed her gently to the center of it, his eyes practically glowing with heat. His wolf was pacing, waiting to mark its mate once and for all – and Luke intended to heed its demands. This woman would finally be his. “Oh, baby – there’s plenty more, believe me. Besides, we have to make absolutely certain that you are.”

Without saying another word, he pulled her shoes and socks off, and then went to work on the button of her jeans – his expression, dark and intense. Desire snapped and crackled around him in a deep, primal way that had Kat’s breath coming out in quick, jerky bursts.

Luke pulled off her jeans and tossed them across the room, then quickly dispensed with her panties and t-shirt. He stilled then, and just stared down at her – his breathing ragged and his eyes seemingly troubled.

“Luke?” Kat questioned, wondering what was going on in that thick head of his. It was as if he was fighting some inner battle with himself. “What’s the matter?”

Luke shook his head. “Katrina, I...I need...I need so damn desperately to mark you,” he whispered, his eyes sweeping up to catch hers. “I don’t know how gentle I can be. And I have to know that this is what you want. Once I have marked you as mine - its forever. You will be my mate. There will never be anyone else – for either of us,” he rasped unsteadily, a tremor

of fear running up his spine with the inkling of fear that, although she had said that she loved him – that she might not want something so permanent. She was fiercely independent and headstrong, and the thought of spending hundreds of years with him might not be what she truly wanted. He needed to let her know what this meant – to both of them. He had no doubts what so ever...but she might – and that thought scared the ever loving hell out of him.

“Sweetheart, once I mark you; you *will* be mine. You will live as long as I do - perhaps hundreds of years. You will belong to me. And I know without a doubt that I will be ridiculously - and I am quite certain at times - stupidly protective. But I will also cherish and treasure you as my other half. I will never try to control you, or break your spirit.” He took a deep, unsteady breath – his body trembling with need...and fear. “I will only love you. I just need to know that you are one hundred percent certain. That you want to spend eternity with me - because once this is done, red – there is no going back.”

He held his breath and watched as Kat studied him silently, her eyes traveling over his face, and shimmering with tears. Finally, she pushed herself up from the bed and onto her knees in front of him. Laying her hands on his chest - she leaned in and kissed him gently on the lips - and she could feel the tremors racing through his body.

“Lucas Blackwater,” she whispered softly against his mouth. “The hardest thing I have ever had to do; was to leave you behind that day. It nearly killed me. And the most terrifying, was when I saw you lying on the ground in that clearing. I was certain that I had lost you, and I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t...” She sighed and shook her head slightly. “Love isn’t strong enough a word for what I feel for you. You try my patience at every damn turn, and you make me crazy – but you also make me feel protected and safe. I love your smile and your laugh and even your stubborn jackass ways.” She sniffled and swiped at her tears as she watched that smile of his form on his perfect mouth - and she felt as if in that moment - she had the world at her fingertips. “You are my friend, and my lover – and I want nothing more than to be your mate, and to spend the rest of my days proving that to you.”

Luke shivered and pulled her to him - his mouth fusing with hers – and she melted into him as if she were made of jello.

Kat wrapped her arms around his neck and returned his embrace, her tongue stroking against his and causing a shudder to run deliciously up his spine. She pulled away from him and gave him a smirk.

“Now, let’s just see about evening out the playing field a bit.” She whispered.

With that, her hands dropped to the hem of his t-shirt and pulled it up and over his head. She leaned forward and ran her lips down his neck as her hands worked at the fly of his jeans, deftly opening it in an instant. With a tug, she slipped them over his tapered hips and let the proof of his desire spring free.

Luke shrugged off the garment on shaky legs, and prayed that his knees wouldn’t give out on him – but in the next moment, when Kat bent down and took him into her mouth, he was certain that they would.

“Oh, God...baby,” he groaned, the sound nothing more than a tortured breath as his hand plunged into her hair, and his head dropped back. Her mouth toyed and teased as her hand surrounded his steely length, and Luke knew that he wouldn’t last long. He was beyond the point of no return.

With another tortured moan, he lifted her up and pulled her up to look into her face.

“Hey,” she softly protested, her eyes glowing brightly. “I wasn’t finished.”

Luke chuckled and dropped his mouth to hers - kissing her with all the love and promise that he had in him.

“You keep that up, red - and I *will* be.” He pushed her down onto her back and slid his body next to hers – pulling her up against him. His mouth sucked at the pulse of her throat a moment before working his way down her collarbone to the soft swells of her breasts, where his mouth nipped and teased each sensitive peak until she was writhing beneath him and begging him to stop; to take her already.

He slid between her thighs and looked into her eyes. “Baby, when I mark you, it might hurt a bit. I’ll try to make it as fast and painless as I

possibly can.”

Kat lifted a brow and smiled somewhat nervously. “You’re going to bite me, aren’t you?” she asked, and when he nodded – a giggle burst from her lips. “Oh, thank *God!*” She snorted. “I was afraid you were going to *pee* on me or something.”

Luke burst out laughing and hugged her against him – his body shaking with his laughter. “No,” he finally choked out. “I promise not to do that, red.” He was assaulted by another fit of laughter and fell onto his back beside her, trying to get a grip on himself. “Christ, Glinda...you’re killing me here!” He choked out.

Kat leaned over him, and took his face in her hands. Closing the distance between them; she sucked his bottom lip into her mouth as she pressed herself closer.

“Let’s do this already,” she whispered fiercely. “Because, I have got to tell you Benji - if you don’t make love to me, and soon – I just can’t be held responsible for what I might do.” Her voice held a challenge, and as if to prove her point, she wriggled herself against him again - her eyes gleaming devilishly.

In the next instant Luke let out a howl and tossed her back over onto her back, stationing himself between her thighs. He kissed her with a tortured urgency as he ground himself against her – his mouth devouring – yet cherishing hers.

He shifted his body and Kat felt him slide home with a powerful thrust - and a sigh slipped between them. “Mmm, that’s its Fido. Now you are where you need to be.”

Luke began to move his hips - his movements slow and steady at first – but with a growing urgency, and Kat felt for certain that he was definitely trying to kill her. She gripped his behind and dug her nails in – lifting her hips to meet his.

She felt the low rumble of his growl against her chest and lifted her lids to find him staring at her. His gaze wild and untamed - and she felt her heart skip a beat. He increased his pace until she felt that fluttering start in her belly, and gasped from the sheer wonder of it.

Luke pulled his lips back to reveal his now elongated canines - and as they came crashing down together in a wondrous release - she felt him sink his teeth into her shoulder.

There was a moment of pain, followed by the most unbelievable pleasure - and tears sprang to her eyes as she realized that she was finally his. Mind, body, soul and heart. This man was her mate. Suddenly a feeling of rightness settled over her as she felt Luke tenderly lick at her wound, then kiss it gently - murmuring against her skin as he did - that he loved her. And that he would love her until the end of his days - and she smiled - completely content, and happier than she ever thought she could be.

Luke rolled onto his side and pulled her against his chest - kissing her temple tenderly. She snuggled up against him and listened to the pounding of his heart. A heart that was all hers - and she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that it matched hers in perfect tempo. She could feel their bond forming as she lay there, and her smile only widened. There was an unbelievable sense of peace enveloping her, and she sighed.

"I didn't hurt you too much, did I?" he asked softly, his hand drawing circles across her back.

"You didn't hurt me at all," she whispered back.

"I love you so damned much," he husked, his voice filled with emotion as his other hand slid down her body to caress her tummy lightly.

She knew that he was talking to both her and the baby, and she felt tears welling up in her eyes.

"I love you, Lucas. And I will forever."

This man was amazing - she thought with a contented sigh. For every moment that he tried her patience, he made up for it tenfold with his strong, beautiful, loving heart.

He was a force to be reckoned with - yet had shown her what a caring, gentle soul he was - and she knew that their life would never be boring. It would be filled with love and laughter...and quite a bit of heat.

And; as she fell asleep held securely in her mate's embrace - she knew that it was going to be a wonderful, fun, wicked and absolutely *wild* ride. And she was looking forward to every moment of it.



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Please feel free to contact Darlene. She loves hearing from her readers!
Here are her links:

Amazon: <http://t.co/crlnP5fvyH>

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Also: Follow her on Twitter @VampireEmbrace

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Darlene

p.s. - Look for Marcus's story – coming next!

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