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A Beautiful Symmetry

by UppityBitch

Summary

A collection of random AU one-shots featuring Klaroline.

2019 KC Awards

Won:

· Best AU supernatural one-shot: Summer of Salvatore - Chapter 70 (in A Beautiful Symmetry)

· Best one-shot series: A Beautiful Symmetry

Nominated for:

· Best AU human one-shot: Brewery weekend - Chapter 74 (in A Beautiful Symmetry)

· Best smut one-shot: Rocinante Holiday - Chapter 87 (in A Beautiful Symmetry)

· Best comedy one-shot: Shrieky Clean - Chapter 88 (in A Beautiful Symmetry)

Notes

Author’s note: Hey everybody! I decided to start a collection of random Klaroline AU one-shots that I’ll post here. Some will be written from prompts through @klarodrabblequest on Tumblr, and others will be ideas that come to me when I should be thinking about my multi-chapter Klaroline work instead. I hope you enjoy them! This one is AU Klaroline
with human Klaus and siren Caroline. Written for a @klarodrabblequest prompt on Tumblr.
“Of all creatures that breathe and move upon the earth, nothing is bred that is weaker than man.”
— Homer, *The Odyssey*

Klaus impatiently scanned the horizon, hoping to catch a glimpse of the tiny island. As his gray eyes failed to latch onto the mysterious bit of land, he sighed in aggravation. *Ship’s still too far out*, he thought to himself. He knew better than to consult his parchment charts, compass, astrolabe, or other navigation tools — they would prove useless. He already had spent countless hours locked in his cabin with his head buried in his instruments and maps, trying to pinpoint the island’s location. The tiny spec of land was an enigma, one that would disappear from the horizon as quickly as it would appear before his startled eyes. Each time he caught a glimpse, he would feverishly mark its coordinates on whatever stray bit of parchment was handy, but sadly, his calculations eluded him whenever he tried to recreate the pathway and lead his brother’s ship toward the beautiful island. *Toward her.*

He shook his head, removing his gaze from his cabin’s small window. He returned to distracting himself with tallying the latest haul. His brother, Elijah, captained *The Katerina*, the most feared pirate ship on the Mediterranean. They had recently attacked a merchant ship with rich stores of pearls, emeralds, silver, and exotic spices. This precious cargo would sustain *The Katerina’s* crew for years. Already his younger brother, Kol, was mentally spending his share of the treasure on games of chance, liquor and wenches. As he scribbled the latest figures into his ledger, he sighed as he could hear Kol’s light-hearted footsteps as he skipped into the cabin without bothering to knock.

“Brother! Whatever might you be doing locked away with our treasure?” He wiggled his eyebrows and said teasingly, “I do hope it’s something *naughty*. That said, if you intend to thrash about naked with the loot, do wipe off any soiled pieces before we have to carry them again, eh? Good manners and all that.” He threw himself into the wooden chair across from Klaus’ desk, propping his scuffed leather boots next to a precariously stacked column of silver coins.

With an irritated huff, Klaus pushed Kol’s boots a safe distance away from the treasure. “Don’t you have something more useful to be doing? Swabbing a deck? Emptying chamber pots, perhaps,” Klaus asked with a wicked grin. “After all, the captain did demote you during our last voyage.”

Kol’s cheerfulness faded as he ground out, “I’m still first mate! Elijah wouldn’t have known about my deeds had you held your tongue!”

Rolling his eyes, Klaus replied, “*Your companion* had you bound and gagged with the ship’s pulleys! Had we not returned from the port city early, that little tart would have absconded with the lion’s share of our latest haul!”
Kol shrugged his shoulders and mumbled, “Davina’s a saucy minx, but she meant no harm. She’s quite spirited you see, and she happened to misunderstand something she saw in the tavern. You see, I was being a good lad helping out a pretty thing whose corset strings had become hopelessly tangled, and Davina happened by just as I was —”

“Yes, yes, you’re a paragon of virtue,” Klaus interrupted. He added dryly, “I think our brother was more disturbed by the fact that the crew had to cut you out of the rigging and pulley system, thus delaying our passage through the Strait of Messina.”

“He wasn’t the only one, Klaus,” Kol grumbled. “The last few trips through the strait you’ve been as anxious as a cornered wharf rat.” He raised a questioning brow. “What has your knickers in a twist?”

“Nothing,” Klaus said hastily, finally pushing Kol’s feet from his desk and tossing him out of his cabin. Slamming his door shut and throwing the latch, he ran his fingers through his messy blonde curls, unable to prevent himself from returning to the port window once more to stare at the sea. It was an ethereal blue, reminiscent of her beautiful eyes, and his heart gave a funny little tweak in his chest as he recalled the first time he saw her.

They were returning from a successful raid, having hidden their latest capture in the Calabria region. He had retreated to his quarters to sleep for a few hours while the galley sailed through the Strait of Messina. He drifted to sleep almost immediately, which was unusual for him; normally his clever mind made it difficult for his body to relax; he always was pondering the next strategy for the crew and how best to capitalize on their fierce reputation to secure their futures. However, on this auspicious night, a miraculous dream came to him, a beautiful dream of exhilarating light and splendor.

He found himself sitting on top of the crumbling roof of an ancient temple perched on a brilliant green mountain. From his vantage point, he could see the sparkling turquoise sea surrounding the tiny island he found himself inexplicably dreaming of. A soft laugh beside him startled him, and he quickly turned to see a young woman of astonishing beauty sitting beside him.

Her hair tumbled down her shoulders in soft, golden waves that glinted in the manufactured sunlight of his dream. Her piercing blue eyes captured the turbulent seas and hinted at an ancient knowledge that Klaus longed to master. Her delicate ivory skin was encased in simple silk that draped over her small frame, leaving her toned arms bare. Her cheeks became rosy under his blatant perusal. She shyly gazed at him from under her long eyelashes. “Hello. My name is Caroline,” she sweetly said, blushing even more furiously when he clasped her hand in his to lightly brush it with his lips.

“Klaus Mikaelson,” he murmured. “Forgive me, love, but I am awestruck by your loveliness.” He gestured toward the sun merrily casting its rays upon them, adding, “Even in the blinding sunlight, you appear to glow from within.”

At his casual observation, the girl oddly seemed to grimace before schooling her face into its former innocent expression. “You possess a silver tongue with your honeyed words, Klaus,” she giggled. The ocean breeze picked up, swirling her blonde waves around her slight frame.

Klaus tentatively reached out to brush a few errant strands behind her ear. When his calloused fingers touched such impossibly soft skin, the tingling sensation he felt nearly caused him to gasp out loud. Unable to help himself, he caressed her cheek, turning her face toward his so that he could gaze upon her beauty more fully. “You are a vision, Caroline.” His shoulders slumped as an unpleasant thought struck him. “This is naught but a dream, isn’t it, love?”
Caroline smiled sweetly, briefly leaning into his touch. “Perhaps. Do you wish it to be more?” She hesitantly squeezed his hand, her tone one of sorrow. “I get so lonely here, you see. It’s so rare to have visitors and I can tell that you are special.”

His heart leapt at her words and he chose to ignore his sensible side telling him that this dream was merely a product of his exhaustion and inherent loneliness. “A beautiful creature of such rare light and innocence should never feel such despair.”

The tip of her tongue barely moistened her pink lips as she seemed to reach a decision. “I sing sometimes to keep myself entertained. Would you like to hear?”

“Of course, sweetheart,” he hastily agreed, anxious to prologue his dream and spend more time with this enchanting woman.

Caroline’s posture straightened as she tossed back her flowing curtain of hair and her voice poured forth the sweetest, most intoxicating notes he could ever imagine. Each word was a revelation that captured his imagination and nipped at his soul. He felt himself swaying to the haunting tune, completely mesmerized by her powerful voice. She held her hands out to him, reaching across the small space between them and beckoning him to come closer. She ended her melody with a heartrending plea, “You should come find me, so you can stay with me forever.”

Just as Klaus leaned forward to capture her sweet lips with his, he was unceremoniously pulled from his vivid dream by Elijah roughly shaking him awake.

Klaus scowled at the memory. His brother had disturbed his slumber to alert him to the fact that the galley was leaving behind the strait and an unexpected storm was brewing on the horizon. At the time, he believed the dream to be a strange occurrence, a sweet, manufactured memory never to be experienced again. However, weeks later, when their ship returned to the waterway, he was amazed to dream of Caroline once again.

He was walking along a hidden lagoon, his gray eyes filled with wonder at the impossibly tall waterfall that fed the shaded pool. As he stepped closer, he spied a seductive shadow behind the churning wall, and he quickly averted his eyes when a long, creamy leg stepped out from behind it. “Caroline,” he called out, somewhat embarrassed, “I didn’t mean to disturb you.”

“Klaus,” Caroline replied in a joyful tone, “I’m so happy you came back to see me.” She touched his shoulder lightly, and his breath caught in his throat as he saw her damp body barely concealed beneath the clinging fabric of her dress. “I’ve missed you,” she said coyly, gazing at him from underneath her lashes. “I need you here with me. I want you to find me,” she added with a teasing lilt to her voice that hadn’t been apparent during their first meeting.

“I believe I shall always find you, love,” he vowed, his mind slowly catching onto the fact that this fantasy was more than just a dream. He could no longer pass it off as mere coincidence — dreaming of the same impossibly beautiful woman he had never met, but his subconscious could only conjure her presence when the galley sailed a specific area of the strait. There was something more here than what his rational mind could comprehend.

She flashed him a blinding smile, caressing his strong forearms while she sweetly pleaded, “I’m so lonely here. I need you to come be with me.” She captured his bewildered gaze with her soulful stare and parted her petal-soft lips to sing to him once more. Her powerful notes held a plaintive cry that nearly moved him to tears as he longed to touch her. He needed her light, the enigmatic innocence and seduction that she wore as equals upon her ivory skin.

Succumbing to her mysterious pull, he dipped his head to kiss her gently. As her tongue caressed
his, playfully swirling and teasing, he groaned in delight, pulling her wet curves to his trembling body. He allowed himself to become lost in her electric touch and delicious fragrance of honey and wildflowers. He pulled away suddenly, gasping for air. “Apologies, love. I didn’t mean to be so forward,” he stammered.

Confusion colored her lovely face. She murmured, “But I don’t mind, Klaus.”

“But I do. I wish to treat you with the respect you deserve, not give into my baser desires.” He smiled at her, somewhat embarrassed by his admission. “In my world, I am far from a gentleman, sweetheart, but here, in your world, I long to be more — for you.”

The startling blue of her eyes seemed to swirl and fluctuate like the ebb and flow of the tides. “I — I’m not sure what I’m supposed to, um…” she trailed off helplessly. Clearly, she was wrestling with some internal struggle.

Klaus took her hand, smirking at her as he led them toward the sound of the waves crashing along the beach. “Perhaps you could sing for me again,” he asked hopefully.

“No!” Caroline’s eyes widened at his suggestion, and her vehement refusal was peculiar. Her expression softened as she gave him a careful smile. “I mean, my voice wavered toward the end there, and I don’t want to lose it completely. I wish to be perfect for you.”

“You do not have to be perfect, Caroline. You just have to be you,” Klaus reassured her, earning a stunned look from her once more. They spent the rest of his dream wandering along the sand, the warm waves tugging at their ankles. In between the occasional sweet kiss, they talked about everything and yet nothing, lapsing into a comfortable silence of familiarity that typically only old lovers can boast.

He shook himself from his thoughts, and peered hopefully out his window. His persistence was rewarded when he saw the twinkling light of the mysterious land mass in the distance. Like a man possessed, he tore through his desk drawers looking for his journal. When his fingers touched the worn leather cover, he eagerly pulled it to him and rushed to the top deck. He already had filled pages with her extraordinary visage, and now he wished to capture the magical plot of land he believed she called home.

Into his drawings he poured his desire for Caroline along with his frustration at being unable to moor the galley nearby so that he could reach her. He scowled at the sharp rocks that jutted from the sea, surrounding the tiny island on all sides. The jagged stone along with the thick mist formed an impenetrable barrier around the island that prevented Klaus from seeking out Caroline. “I have half a mind to simply jump overboard and swim to her”, he grumbled.

“What’s that, brother? Talking to yourself, are we?” Kol mocked, “What did I tell you about drinking the sea water? Turns a bloke barmy.”

“Not now, Kol,” Klaus grimaced in irritation at being interrupted. “I must perfectly capture that lovely island in the distance.”

Kol squinted at his brother, trying to determine the cause of his vexation. “Why? It’s naught but a bit of sea-roughened rock and scrub brush. You fancy popping a hole in Elijah’s obsession, mate?”

“Of course not. It’s far too treacherous to steer The Katerina nearby. Trust me, I’ve examined the problem extensively,” Klaus muttered. He thumbed through his journal, carefully handling the pages with the familiar lines of Caroline’s face with a deliberately delicate touch.
“Well, well, who’s that saucy little wench,” Kol asked with a grin, grabbing at Klaus’ hand to prevent him from turning the page. It was by far Klaus’ favorite drawing of Caroline; the moment he first saw her perfectly perched atop the crumbling temple roof with the sea to her back and her glorious golden waves tumbling down to her waist. He had captured her innocent, sweet smile along with the contradictory knowing look in her startling blue eyes.

Embarrassed, Klaus snatched away his journal, hiding it from his brother’s view. “That’s Caroline. She’s — she’s someone I occasionally dream about.” He closed his eyes shut when he realized how absurd he sounded. He prepared himself for his brother’s mockery.

Instead, Kol seemed thoughtful and perhaps a touch concerned — rare emotions for the normally mirthful brother to display. He carefully looked at Klaus, as though seeing him clearly for the first time. “And is there a specific stretch of time she appears in these dreams of yours,” he asked mysteriously.

Confused, Klaus opened his eyes in surprise, nodding at his brother. “Yes, my dreams seem to occur when our ship passes through these waters.” His gaze wandered back to the twinkling landscape of Caroline’s mysterious island. “She’s somewhere upon that island; I can feel it. I need to get to her, somehow,” he sighed, his troubled eyes flickering back to the stunning woman he had captured in his journal pages.

Kol’s attention was momentarily diverted by the sudden appearance of a finback whale in the distance. As the rest of the crew abandoned their duties and clamored for a better view of the majestic beast, Klaus completely ignored the spectacle, far too enraptured by his drawing of the mysterious girl. He watched Klaus move away from the crowd that had gathered so that he could gaze at the strange bit of land in the distance by himself. Kol studied the strip of land, a grim look of determination upon his boyish face.

Elijah appeared at his side, noting the unusual change in his younger brother’s demeanor. “What vexes you, brother?”

“Trouble,” Kol responded simply. “And I know how to stop it.”

That night, Klaus anxiously lay in his bed, squeezing his eyes shut and surrendering to the sweet pull of his dream. Caroline was lounging upon a series of elongated stones in a grassy field. She was wrapped in a loose shift with her creamy ivory legs upon display. “Klaus! You’re here!” She seemed to melt into his eager embrace. “I’ve missed you,” she murmured against his curls, the skin at the nape of his neck shivering pleasantly as her breath brushed against it with the softest whisper.

“As I have missed you, sweetheart,” Klaus replied. As he leapt upon the tall rock to settle next to her, he asked, “Where are we?”

“It’s a dry dock. This land was once an ancient harbor,” Caroline revealed, running her hands across the rough-hewn stone.

His eyes widened in wonder as he took in the scenery, trying to imagine what it must have been like long ago when it was a bustling port city. His fingers twitched as he wished fervently for his journal so he could sketch this inspiring piece of history. “I wish I could draw this moment, here with you,” he whispered, placing a gentle kiss at her temple.

“You have an artist’s soul, Klaus,” Caroline sighed, squeezing his hand. “You are meant for far greater things than the life of a pirate. I see you upon your ship’s deck, drawing all manner of creation in both golden sunlight and silver moonlight. You toil away at your tasks, endlessly
seeking to capture each moment of your world, to savor it as thought it was your last.” She shook her head as a melancholy note entered her tone. “I envy you your passion for this life. You are more precious than you know.”

Klaus placed his calloused hand under her delicate chin, tilting her face to his. “You are the treasured one, Caroline. I have traveled the world and never encountered another such as you. I must tell you, you have to know that I —” His confession was cut short when he was ruthlessly pulled from his blissful dream. He sat up in his bed, gasping as his heart thundered in his chest. He looked about his cabin wildly, trying to ascertain what had occurred.

Suddenly, his ears were accosted by the cacophonous sound of a fiddle being played abysmally. He stumbled from his covers, running to his cabin door to hurl it open and demand an answer for his slumber being disturbed, but the handle wouldn’t turn. He twisted the metal and pounded on the solid wooden door with all his might, but it would not give.

“Ah, brother, you’re finally awake,” Kol called out cheerfully. At Klaus’ colorful curses, he chuckled as he continued to strum the strings awkwardly. “You can cease the incessant banging — I’ve tossed half the bloody food stores against your door. Those barrels won’t be budging until morning when it’s safe once more.”

Elijah came on deck, scowling as he pulled on his ragged waistcoat. “Kol, what is the meaning of this?”

“Trust me, Elijah, it’s for the greater good,” Kol sagely intoned as he continued to pluck horrendous notes from his fiddle.

Elijah considered his brother, whose expression seemed caught between mirth at Klaus’ increasing vitriolic language and determination to continue his dreadful playing. “Do you care to elaborate,” he asked tiredly, pinching the bridge of his nose in irritation and wincing at a particularly screeching, off-key note.

“Not especially,” Kol responded. “Just know that it worked for Orpheus, and while I couldn’t scrounge up a lyre, I figure a fiddle’s close enough,” he said with a roguish wink. Elijah decided to leave his brothers to their bizarre spat, and returned to his own quarters to try to block out the appalling noise.

The next day, the crew gave a resounding cheer when Klaus hung Kol over the side of the galley by one ankle until he allowed the infernal fiddle to slip from his fingertips into the sea. Alarmed by Klaus’ behavior and the crew’s enthusiastic support, Elijah promised that he would keep Kol barricaded in his own cabin to ensure everyone would sleep undisturbed. Throughout the day, Klaus could be seen pacing impatiently along the deck, casting furtive looks at the horizon as he seemed fixated on a tiny drop of unremarkable land. Elijah thought to ask him about it on multiple occasions, but the agitation upon his face quelled his curiosity.

Finally, evening was upon them and Klaus flung himself into his bed, eagerly anticipating his rendezvous with Caroline. Kol had rudely interrupted him the night before, but it mattered not for tonight he would tell Caroline of his love for her. Surely, he reasoned, if she felt the same, she could help him determine how they could be together. After all, a creature as otherworldly and powerful as she would undoubtedly hold the answer. He closed his eyes and was immediately drawn into the dream.

It was nightfall, and the moonlight came through the missing pieces of temple roof, bathing everything it touched in a silver glow. He glanced around, taking in the towering columns and crumbling bits marble in wonder.
“I’ve brought you to the temple where we first met,” Caroline explained, walking toward him with a soft smile.

He gestured to the elaborate mosaic that covered the floor, its remarkable beauty still evident despite many sections of the tiny glass pieces missing or damaged. It depicted an intriguing scene of three birdlike creatures perched upon a mountaintop and surveying an acropolis below them. With a tone of hushed reverence, Klaus whispered, “It’s beautiful.” He grasped both of her arms, bringing her closer to him. His smile was sincere with a charming touch of apprehension as he said, “Caroline, these past few times we’ve met, I’ve found myself struck by your beauty and your mystery. I realize now that what I feel for you is more than I’ve ever felt before. I am in love with you.”

Her blue eyes softened as she leaned forward to touch her sweet lips to his, communicating all the passion and fire she felt for him with one simple act. She pulled away as she sensed his growing need for air and brushed aside his blonde curls. “I love you as well, Klaus. These stolen moments we’ve shared have been my happiest.”

He eagerly kissed her again, pulling her into a tight embrace as he inhaled her familiar aroma of honey and wildflowers. Laughing, he cupped her flushed cheeks and gleefully said, “Then let’s have these moments forever. I don’t want to spend my life sailing these infernal waters and waiting for nightfall to see you in a dream. I want you — always.” His gray eyes sought hers, trying to understand the sadness he found there. “Don’t you want that? Tell me what I must do to be with you.”

She curled her hands around his, shaking her head gently. “Klaus, there’s so much you don’t understand,” she began carefully.

“No,” he protested quickly. “I realize that you are more than what you appear. How could I not? The strange manner in which we must meet — it’s obvious that there are secrets yet to be revealed. But I love you and I must know the truth.” The desperation in his voice was heartbreaking as he pled, “Show me your true form. Show me who you really are.”

She pushed away from him, her blonde waves partially obscuring her face. “You don’t know what you ask of me, Klaus.” Her forlorn tone spoke volumes. Her voice quavered as she murmured, “Just know that with you I am my true self.” With great sorrow etched upon her beautiful face, she allowed the moonlight to fill her body, casting an ethereal glow upon her ivory skin. Beautiful white wings appeared at her back, covered in a pearlescent sheen. Deadly-looking claws grew from her hands and she quickly hid them behind the folds of her simple blue shift in shame.

Klaus was startled by her appearance, but also confused. “I — I don’t understand,” he stuttered. “You’re an angel,” he ventured cautiously.

Caroline dropped her head, her voice broken as she softly revealed, “No, Klaus. Not an angel. I am…I am a siren. I was once a mortal woman, born on this island. My sisters and I were happy here, and we were even companions of the goddess Persephone. However, when Persephone chose to be with Hades, her mother, Demeter, was full of rage and cursed us, transforming our bodies into this.”

He backed away from her in horror. “A siren? A creature that lures mortal men from their ships and when they reach the shore, they are devoured!” His voice was full of venom as he roared, “All this time, it was a trick; you felt nothing for me, only looking for your next meal!”

Caroline tearfully reached out to him only to immediately halt her advances when she saw how he cringed from her touch. “No! No longer do I wish you harm, Klaus. At first, I was following my
true nature, but it changed. You changed me.”

He clenched his fists and angrily spat, “You lie! It was all a lie!”

“Please, I want to be with you; now that you know the truth, we can be together,” she said with a hopeful look despite her flowing tears.

His gray eyes glinted as he coldly replied, “But I don’t want to be with you.”

A heavy silence filled the temple as the harsh words lingered in the air. “Very well,” Caroline responded dejectedly. She quickly severed their connection, sending him back from the dream she had given him.

Klaus awoke with a start, clutching at his heart. Why did it ache so? He clenched his jaw as he desperately fought to hold onto his rage at Caroline’s betrayal. She had deceived him, lied about her intentions each time they met. She never loved him. Creatures such as she couldn’t possibly love. He tossed aside the covers and began pacing. When the memory of her tearful face, how shattered his spiteful words had left her, entered his mind, he hit the wall in anger. Everything she had told him was a lie. But how could he be sure?

He recalled their walk along the shoreline. He had told her tales of his family, how he and his brothers had left their home to become pirates, seeking a life of adventure far away from their father’s violent temper. Her delightful laughter had warmed his soul when he revealed how Kol had been so enamored with his latest conquest that he had failed to moor the ship properly and Elijah and a handful of crewman had to swim from the shore to their unmanned vessel before it floated away. However, Caroline had grown quiet when he asked her to tell him of her family.

“There’s not much to tell,” she had shrugged carelessly, keeping her gaze firmly upon the sparkling sea. I lived here with my sisters for a long time, but they — they are no longer with me.” The sadness in her voice had lingerered unpleasantly between them, and he changed the subject as he refused to force her to speak of something that caused her pain.

His gray eyes widened as he considered that sentiment. He didn’t want to cause her pain. Because he had loved her. No, he thought, running his hands through his curls, he loved her still. The pain in his heart and the panic he felt at never seeing her again was all too real and he realized he couldn’t turn his back on what they could have. He flew out of his cabin and onto the deck, letting out a moan of despair when he saw how the ship had passed by the island. Already it had grown smaller as each wave took them further away from his love.

Without thinking, he plunged into the sea, intent upon swimming to her before it was too late. He fought the strong current, and as he raised his head out of the surf, he could just make out her figure as she stood upon the shore. He smiled despite the salty spray burning his eyes — Caroline would understand that he had heeded her call at last.
Chapter Summary

In this installment, we have hybrid king Klaus searching for the mysterious boss who has been poaching his most loyal clients and stealing his territory. His search takes him to an underground fighting ring owned by the mysterious boss. He’s in for a surprise when he finally meets up with this formidable and sexy foe!

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some violence. Also, sexy times ahead!

“It’s the eye of the tiger
It’s the thrill of the fight
Risin’ up to the challenge
Of our rival.”

— Eye of the Tiger by Survivor

Klaus rolled his eyes at his brother Kol’s eager expression. He was slightly baffled as they stood outside a quaint little pastry shop called Sweet Caroline. “You said we were meeting this mysterious new boss that’s come into our town like a thief in the night, stealing our most loyal clients out from under us. Instead, you’ve brought me on an errand to fetch sweets,” he said derisively, eyeing the soft pink girlish letters emblazoned on the storefront.

“Not exactly,” Kol mumbled, opening the door hastily without bothering turn around to see if Klaus was following him. “You see, I couldn’t quite pin down the boss’ name, but my contacts were able to clue me into his connection to this place. He’ll be here tonight, so I’m sure with a bit of coercion, we’ll muscle our way into a meeting. Apparently he runs this operation in addition to blatantly trying to steal some of our business.” He shook his head laughing, “It’s crazy — I’ve been a regular here since they opened a month ago and it never occurred to me that it was connected to this new boss.” He ignored his brother’s bewildered expression and walked confidently to the gleaming white counter where a lovely girl with a sleek dark bob eyed him with deep mistrust.

“Kol Mikaelson,” she said in a clipped tone. Her green eyes slid to Klaus, evaluating him briefly before returning to the flirtatious Original in front of her. “I see you’ve brought your brother to our establishment. I trust you’ve explained the rules?”

Klaus cocked an inquisitive eyebrow, trying to determine when buying sweets had become so
complicated. His gray eyes flicked over the chalkboard menu, noting that nothing seemed out of the ordinary, but his hybrid senses could feel the slight tingle of magic in the air. He was quite certain that Kol’s pretty friend was a witch.

“Not yet,” Kol muttered. “I was getting around to it.” He waved off Klaus’ irritated expression and leaned closer to the girl. “Bonnie, I was actually hoping to run into the delightful Davina this evening. Can you be a dear and summon her?”

“That’s not happening,” Bonnie’s sharp voice cracked like a whip in the empty pasty shop. “I don’t know what you did, but she asked the boss to put her on the other entrance for the time being. Said she didn’t want to see you.”

“The other entrance,” Klaus interrupted, glancing around the tiny shop suspiciously, unable to detect another access point.

“Yes, it’s an entrance for our out-of-town guests,” Bonnie said with a secret smile, clearly enjoying a private joke. She held out her palm to Kol and demanded, “Keys.”

Without hesitation, Kol handed over his car keys, slightly pouting that the witch he’d taken a liking to was still angry over a tiny misunderstanding involving tequila shots, a simpering bartender and an ill-timed wardrobe malfunction. As Bonnie began chanting over the keys, making them glow with a slight green tinge, Kol glanced back at his brother to explain, “She’s temporarily placing our car on a separate plane of existence so we don’t arouse suspicion. Too many cars in that little parking lot would be a bit noticeable.”

Bonnie returned the keys to Kol and addressed both brothers after Kol slid his credit card to her. “Right. Rules are simple — no fighting with the other guests, place your bets with the ghouls at the stations — any side action and the boss will know about it. And touch our employees at your peril — their bite is almost as bad as the boss.” She glanced at the door that Klaus had assumed led to the kitchen, and chanted a few more words under her breath. “Enjoy your night, gentleman.”

Kol excitedly tugged Klaus toward the steel door, which Klaus soon discovered did not take them into a kitchen. “What the bloody hell is this,” Klaus asked in exasperation. “Out-of-town guests? A bakery that is obviously anything but, and hiding cars on separate bloody planes of existence?”

“Right, well, the other entrance is for guests that use portals to travel to our world. You know, not everyone comes from the same dimension, brother. Try not to be so closed-minded,” Kol said cheekily. At his brother’s murderous expression, he hastily explained, “This mysterious boss runs a fighting ring here. The bakery is a cover. Easiest way to break the law is in plain sight — you taught me that. Apparently this new boss operates under the same principle.”

They take a sleek steel elevator that suddenly appeared in front of them down far too many floors to count until they arrived in a cavernous room with an enormous arena filled to the brim with shouting spectators. Kol lead him to a roped-off, elevated section near the front. “My connections in the witch community afforded me some leverage, so I used that to secure prime seating.”

As they settled into their seats, Klaus focused on the match in front of them. A tall, enigmatic redhead was furiously attacking a lithe, dark-haired beauty who returned every punch with equal force. Huffing in annoyance, Klaus turned to Kol and said disdainfully, “You brought me to this place to view foxy boxing?”

His younger brother burst out laughing. “Not quite, brother. Although not to discount the bevy of beauties who grace this ring, this place is considerably more than that.” Suddenly, dark veins crawled across the redhead’s pale complexion and she unsheathed her long fangs, burying them
into the exposed throat of her opponent in a startling display of violence. “The boss apparently calls these matches *Fang Fights*,” Kol continued, seemingly entranced by the blood being spilled before them. “The boss’ girls are absolutely breathtaking as well as brutal. Usually they go on until someone gets killed, but all of the boss’ girls are supernatural, so it’s rarely permanent.”

The excitement of the crowd seemed to energize the two vampires and their lean, muscular limbs became a blur of movement as they used their enhanced speed and strength to try to win the match. The brunette delivered a powerful uppercut and once her opponent was temporarily dazed, she leapt gracefully into the air with a perfectly executed roundhouse kick that slapped the furious redhead to the mat. In a surprise move, the redhead’s arm reached out and gripped her rival’s bare foot, soundly breaking the ankle with a sickening crack as the girl bellowed in rage. The brunette hooked the knee of her uninjured leg around the redhead’s slender neck and with a quick snap of her toned thighs, delivered a broken neck, thus winning the fight. The loudspeakers announced, “Katerina defeats Aurora!” The brunette climbed to her feet, holding her broken ankle aloft as she waved to the adoring, noisy crowd with a triumphant smile.

“Hardcore,” Kol commented, the awe apparent in his voice as he watched Katerina bend over and easily hoist her temporarily dead opponent onto her shoulder and carry her out of the ring.

Klaus was inclined to agree with his brother’s assessment and he turned to ask how he managed to learn about such an intriguing place when his phone rang. He immediately recognized the number as belonging to one of their most prominent clients, so he hastily flashed to an empty corridor near the back to answer. “Jean-Luc, what a pleasant surprise,” he intoned with a slight hint of impatience. “I assume you’ve called to renegotiate the ridiculous terms you presented? After all, no other organization can offer a higher return on your merchandise,” he continued with a touch of arrogance.

His eyes flashed golden as he cut off the speaker with, “What do you mean the new boss offers a 30% cut?” He shook his head in aggravation, “At 30% there’d be no profit, no motivation for my organization to make the deal.” His gray eyes nearly bulged out of his head as he gnashed his teeth angrily. “No, I can’t offer free transport in addition to your ludicrous 30%! How in the hell would the new boss have access to those sorts of connections?! Bollocks, no one has a network that massive; the boss is a lying bloody bastard and you’re a flaming imbecile to believe his drivel!” He threw his phone at the red brick in front of him, feeling a small sense of satisfaction as it shattered into tiny shards of metal, plastic and circuitry. He fought the urge to unleash his wolf and indulge in a violent feeding frenzy to calm his rage at the Lafitte family, loyal clients for centuries, and now unexpectedly choosing to funnel their merchandise through this mediocre upstart.

“Bad day,” a musical voice commented wryly behind him.

Klaus whirled around to find a stunning blonde dressed casually in dark jeans and a navy tank top clutching a gym bag and studying him with obvious interest. “A minor disagreement between colleagues, sweetheart. Nothing I can’t handle,” he reassured her in a low voice dripping with innuendo. From her slow heartbeat, he surmised she was a vampire. He gestured toward her black bag and added, “I just had the pleasure of watching your coworkers fight brilliantly. Will you be sparring later tonight?”

Her blue eyes widened momentarily before she lowered her long lashes and said coyly, “I never pass up a chance to perform.”

Klaus stepped confidently into her space, casually tracing his finger down her well-toned arm. “I bet you’re quite the valuable asset. Tell me love, does your boss realize what a lucky bastard he is?”
She laughed softly as she watched his finger boldly draw small circles across her ivory skin. “Yeah, the boss is quite something. You’d be amazed.”

“Doubtful,” Klaus scoffed. “He’s a wanker and I intend to dismantle his rubbish organization piece by piece.”

Her red lips curled into a grin. “Really? Well, I must say, Klaus Mikaelson, it seems the boss was right about rumors of your arrogance,” she said with a sly wink.

Klaus’ dimples flashed as he looked down at the beautiful blonde in front of him. “Ah, so the old bastard’s been telling tales, has he? Well, he’s right to be worried.” He cocked his head to the side, taking in the gentle swell of her breasts and murmured, “I don’t believe I caught your name, love.”

She giggled playfully and murmured with a twinkle in her bright blue eyes, “Stay for my performance; they’ll announce my name then.” She looked at her silver wristwatch and frowned slightly. “Unfortunately, I’m due on stage in the next 30 minutes, so I should probably get changed.”

Before she could move past him, Klaus gently tugged on her arm and seductively drawled, “Perhaps I could interest you in a warm up, love?” His eyes darkened as he took in her long legs encased in the tight denim. “Wouldn’t want you to get a pesky muscle cramp.”

Her lovely face remained impassive as she studied him, considering his brash offer. She finally smirked, curling a cool hand around one of his wrists as she led him toward a large dressing room at the end of the corridor. He was disappointed to see there was no nameplate on the door or personal effects inside to give him any hints regarding her identity, but as soon as the door shut, those thoughts flew out of his mind the moment she threw her bag to the ground and attacked his lips with a ferocious growl.

The wolf within him instantly responded to her dominate display, the gold flashing in his eyes as he easily wrapped her thighs around his waist, sliding his palms along her ass. She maintained a strong grip with one forearm flung behind his neck as she worked her free hand between their grinding bodies and quickly unzipped her jeans.

With a groan, Klaus watched her clever fingers slip past her pink thong, stroking her heat in dizzying circles meant to edge her closer to release. He easily balanced her writhing body against the door with one arm while unbuckling his belt and lowering his gray trousers in one swift motion. The intoxicating smell of her arousal toyed with his hybrid nature, making him ache to have her spread upon his sheets as a delectable feast. Soon, he thought to himself as he planted furious, open-mouthed kisses along the side of her neck, delighting in her moans of pleasure.

She removed her fingers, dipping them past her puckered red lips as she savored her slick desire. He tugged one of her fingers from her mouth with his teeth, wrapping his tongue around the salty-sweet essence and growling in pleasure. With a calculated tear of his claws, he shredded the denim that blocked his access and buried his throbbing cock in her dripping center.

Her muscles clenched tightly around his thrusts, and she yanked her finger free from his mouth so that she could grip his neck, forcefully biting her sharp fangs into his carotid. As the rich iron permeated the air, he felt his own fangs drop and he dug them into the soft skin of her shoulder, eagerly lapping at her tangy life force.

Klaus could feel himself nearing his release, ending each smooth stroke by grinding his pelvis into hers, eagerly anticipating her lovely skin flushed and trembling as she orgasmed. With a gasping breath, she shuddered against his tense body, squeezing his cock in the most delightful manner as
she ripped his orgasm out of him, leaving him a shaking husk as he fought to regain his bearings.

With an easy grin, she unwrapped her delectable curves from around him, swiftly kissing him on the mouth as he tucked himself back into his trousers. He caught her wrist as she pulled away, turning her palm over to gently kiss the smooth flesh as he stared into her eyes. “I expect we shall continue this later, sweetheart,” he smirked at her, opening the door to the dressing room as she gave him a cheeky little wave.

His mind swirled with lusty thoughts of his mystery blonde, and he eagerly anticipated they would finish their tryst once her match was over. His body burned with the numerous ways he intended to ravish her, and he couldn’t wait to bring her back to his mansion and dazzle her with its luxury. He doubted her work for this pathetic boss allowed her to indulge her senses with the finer things, and he would easily enthrall her with his extravagant world.

Unable to hide the satisfied smirk upon his handsome face, he found Kol attempting to chat up a pretty brunette that seemed to be Katerina’s twin. She was sweaty and bruised as she climbed out of the ring, and clearly had no interest in his brother.

“Come on, Elena, you and Katerina haven’t lived until you’ve experience my ‘toad in the hole’.” Kol wiggled his eyebrows comically as she scrunched up her face in disgust.

“I will skin your slimy toad the second it hops my way,” she growled, shoving past him in irritation. Tossing her long hair behind her, she yelled, “And I’m telling Davina about your toad proposition!”

Laughing as the blood drained from his brother’s face at the threat, he clapped him on his back and said jovially, “Tough luck, brother. Perhaps next time you’ll get lucky.”

Kol eyed Klaus suspiciously. “And what, pray tell, has you in such a good mood? Did you eat some of the staff? They frown on that here, you know — boss’ rules.”

“No, but it’s entirely possible that could be on the menu later,” Klaus boasted. “I met the most brazen little minx and tonight I plan on…”

His cocky speech was cut short when the colored lights dimmed and a bright spotlight illuminated the center of the stage where his mystery blonde vixen suddenly appeared, wearing a sexy halter dress that matched the bold red of her lips. The loudspeaker boomed as it announced to the cheering crowd, “Welcome to Fang Fights, brought to you by the boss, Caroline Forbes!”

Her blue eyes twinkled in delight as she steadily met Klaus’ shocked gaze, tossing him a saucy wink.
Another Day, Another (Sand) Dollar

Chapter Summary

This is a drabble request from @takeachancecaroline for her donation to Save Klaroline Magazine. Her prompt: I love human AU with stuff like in love with best friend's brother/brother's best friend/best friend.

“My soul is full of longing for the secret of the sea, and the heart of the great ocean sends a thrilling pulse through me.”
— The Secret of the Sea by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

“Are you out of your mind? How could you just hire someone without asking me, Stefan?!” Caroline’s blue eyes blazed as she glared at her older brother, who was doing his best to dig a hole through the white oak floor with the toe of his sneaker. “We run this bed and breakfast together and have equal say in business decisions,” she added, pointing her finger at him and scowling.

Caroline and her brother had continued running the quaint bed and breakfast together after their mother had passed away last year. The Forbes’ Key West-style home had been built by their grandfather in the 1940s and their mother had turned it into a bed and breakfast to make ends meet after their father left them years ago. With peaceful Tunde Beach just steps from the porch, the Forbes Bed and Breakfast was very popular with tourists.

“Care, it’s not like that. Look, he decided to move back here and he heard that our last handyman quit. Plus, he knows this house inside and out,” Stefan patiently explained, picking up the wicker basket of fresh linens Caroline had thrown to the floor in aggravation.

She opened her mouth to speak, but her retort was cut off as her gaze became calculating. Taking a breath, she asked unsteadily, “Who, uh, who are you talking about?”

Stefan’s hazel eyes gleamed and a knowing smile graced his face. “Klaus Mikaelson. You remember Klaus, don’t you,” he asked in that teasing, sing-song voice that only an annoying older brother can possess.

All of the air seemed to flee from the living room as Caroline’s heart started to race. The sunlight pouring in through the windows seemed to suddenly raise the temperature in the room a good ten degrees. Klaus Mikaelson, her brother’s best friend since grade school who had moved away at 21 when she had been 16 and hopelessly in love with him. When she looked back on it, she was fairly certain she’d been in love with him ever since she overheard him tell Stefan that he should let her come with them when they went fishing by the barrier islands in their tiny sailboat. At the time, she’d been a 10-year-old tomboy with her blonde hair tied up in pigtails, always underfoot and begging Stefan to let her hang out with him and his friends.

The five-year age gap between the siblings had meant that she idolized her older brother and as Klaus always had treated her like an equal, she viewed him as a hero that easily developed into a
massive, inconvenient crush. Fortunately, she’d been an unusually realistic child and understood that her feelings for Klaus would never amount to anything; besides the fact that the age gap at the time had seemed insurmountable, she also was his best friend’s annoying little sister, and he would never be able to see past that. With that knowledge she had moved forward with her life, continuing to be friendly with Klaus whenever he came around the house, but also trying to distance herself to avoid unnecessary heartbreak.

Not that it had worked. Regardless of how many school organizations she joined and friends she made and silly boys she flirted with, she couldn’t quite banish from her mind Klaus’ expressive gray eyes and adorable dimples. When he had moved back to England to help take care of his father, she had cried for days. She thought she’d been careful at concealing her feelings from Stefan, but based on his maddening expression and teasing tone, he seemed to think he knew quite a bit about her feelings.

Squaring her shoulders and clearing her throat, Caroline tried to regain her dignity. “You can wipe that ridiculous grin off of your face, Stefan. I was just surprised to hear you mention his name, that’s all. Of course I don’t mind that you hired him to help out around here. I’m sure he’ll be fine.”

Stefan nodded, chuckling lightly. “I’m grinning because my baby sister still blushes that same adorable shade of red whenever I happen to mention Klaus.”

Scoffing, she grabbed the wicker basket out of Stefan’s hands and replied, “I most certainly do not! And anyway, we’re all adults now and I can assure you that whatever crush I might have had back then is a distant memory now.”

Before the siblings could continue their argument, the doorbell rang. Rolling her eyes at Stefan, she hauled the basket more firmly onto her hip and opened the door. She was unprepared for the absolutely breathtaking vision that Klaus made as he smiled down at her, even more handsome than she remembered. She took in the casual jeans and white t-shirt and nearly swooned at the sight of his signature collection of necklaces.

“Hello, Caroline,” he said warmly, his sexy accent taking her breath away just like it did all those years ago.

Before she could stutter a response, she managed to drop her basket on her foot, sending carefully folded linens flying. “Um, Klaus, hi,” she managed utter, blushing furiously as she crouched on the floor, hastily throwing the wayward linens back into the basket. “Welcome back,” she added breathlessly as he helpfully stooped down to scoop up the rest of the linens.

“Thank you, love. I hope I’m not intruding, but Stefan mentioned that you needed someone to repair some of the shutters and with hurricane season nearly upon us, I thought you’d like me to get started right away,” he explained, gray eyes appraising her as he helped her back to her feet.

“I uh…yes, shutters would be…that would be perfectly fine,” Caroline said eagerly, mentally chiding herself for getting worked up over a simple white t-shirt. *That stretched beautifully across an ridiculously toned chest and muscular arms.*

As Klaus walked back outside to start working, Stefan grinned at Caroline. “Yeah, definitely a *distant memory*, Care.”

Caroline rolled her eyes, choosing to salvage whatever remained of her dignity and trudged upstairs to put away the linens. Throughout the day, she found it nearly impossible to concentrate on her
tasks. When she was supposed to be updating their spreadsheets with that month’s business expenses, she found herself glancing out the windows for quick, shameful ogling of Klaus working. Even worse, when she wasn’t spying on Klaus, her eyes kept getting drawn to a framed photo collage she kept on her desk. The frame housed a variety of photos of her and Stefan with their mother and friends, but if she was honest with herself, those photos acted as sneaky camouflage to mask the one photo she took such pleasure in displaying.

As a teenager, she had relentlessly gazed at that seemingly innocent photo tucked near one corner, trying to discern any hidden meaning the camera had unexpectedly captured. It was the night of her junior prom, and she and her date were standing in the hallway, impatient for her mother to take the photo so they could head out. In the background, Klaus and Stefan stood on the stairs, home from college for the weekend and Stefan was making goofy faces at her and her date. But Klaus’ face… Something had been captured in that brief moment; there was a steel glint in his gray eyes as he appeared to be glaring at her clueless date. Over the years, depending on her mood, she would decide that his displeasure was one of concern, because he was protective of his best friend’s little sister. But then there were other times that she could swear that he looked…jealous.

No, that’s a ridiculous road for you to go down now. You are a grown woman; act like it! Unable to stand it any longer, Caroline finally marched out to the back porch with a tray of mango-mint iced teas. She was not going to hide in her house like a shy teenager. They were all adults now; Klaus had been a friend once; she was determined to make him one again.

Klaus put down his hammer, smiling as she handed him a glass. “Thank you, sweetheart,” he said, running his fingers through his sweaty curls and sitting in one of the cedar Adirondack chairs. “I wanted to tell you how much I appreciate you and Stefan hiring me,” he said with a thoughtful look in his gray eyes. “When my father passed away earlier this year, I must admit I was a bit at loose ends. I had dropped out of school to take care of him as you know, but the idea of returning now doesn’t really appeal to me until I have a better idea of what I want to do.” He patted her hand, and added, “When Stefan told me you needed help, I didn’t hesitate to get on a plane. After all, what better place to figure out my life than where I lived my happiest moments?”

Caroline felt her heart stutter at Klaus’ touch, her skin oddly on fire from such a simple gesture. It was absolutely criminal that someone could smell that delicious after sweating half the day in the humid Florida weather. She couldn’t quite decipher the look in his eyes as he leaned closer to her during his confession. “I’m glad you’re here, Klaus. We’ve missed you,” she said, wincing at the wistfulness in her tone.

“And I’ve missed you,” he replied, studying her face carefully. “Caroline, when I left here, you were this tiny ball of sunshine, lighting up every room with your smile,” he began, somewhat hesitantly.

She giggled, taking a sip of her tea. “Ha! You knew me as Stefan’s obnoxious little sister, always following you boys around on your adventures.”

He smiled at the memories, his dimples cutting into his handsome face. He pointed toward the tiny sliver of white sand in the distance. “Remember how we’d take you fishing along the barrier islands? And you’d get bored so we’d tell you ghost stories?”

Caroline gasped, playfully hitting his arm, resisting the urge to dig her fingers into his smooth, toned flesh. “Yes! And you guys scared the crap out of me when you told me the legend of Papa Tunde’s blade!” Tunde Beach was named after Papa Tunde, supposedly a Haitian bokor, a voodoo sorcerer, who in a rage when his lover left him had cursed the land so that no one would ever find love. He had anchored his dark curse with a blade, and legend said that the curse would be broken
if someone found his blade.

Klaus laughed, his gray eyes twinkling with mirth as he took in her indignant expression. “You were always so much fun to tease, sweetheart. You were like one of those sandpipers that would nip at your heels if you walked too close to them on the beach. Utterly terrifying,” he smirked.

She rolled her eyes, toying with the rim of her glass. Her fingers seemed to move of their own volition to the center of the bistro table between them. They traced the edges of the sand dollar inlay.

Noting her distraction, Klaus asked curiously, “Why do you have a broken sand dollar decorating your table?”

She sighed, favoring him with a sad smile. “When my dad left, I was just a kid and didn’t understand what happened — I thought my parents had this perfect marriage and were meant to be together. I was walking along the beach the night he left us and I stumbled across this broken sand dollar.” She continued tracing the gleaming white ridges, a faraway look in her eyes. “It was perfectly broken and I thought of what beautiful symmetry it would be if it ever reunited with its other half. That maybe someone had the missing piece and would somehow find me and be my love, my missing piece.”

Klaus seemed startled by her speech, and he appeared unnaturally shy as he said, “Caroline, there’s something I wanted to —”

His words were interrupted when Stefan came barreling out of the house, looking at his phone in irritation. “Care, the Gilbert woman just texted that she needs to move her reservation again.”

“Again?! Seriously, this is the third time, Stefan,” Caroline huffing angrily.

Stefan nodded in agreement. “She’s clearly a flake, and can’t seem to make up her mind. If she can’t even decide on a simple vacation date, it makes you wonder how she manages important decisions.”

“I’m guessing poorly,” Caroline muttered. She smiled apologetically at Klaus as she rose to her feet. “I should probably take care of this, Klaus. Maybe we can talk later,” she asked, inwardly chiding herself for sounding so pathetically hopeful.

Klaus favored her with a smirk, standing up as well. “I’d like that, sweetheart.”

The rest of her day was spent reorganizing her room chart to accommodate flighty guests like the Gilbert woman. Before she knew it, it was dark outside. Her stomach growled in protest, and she realized she hadn’t eaten anything since breakfast. Heading downstairs, she noticed Stefan carrying plates heaping with his mouthwatering lemon chicken and asiago tortellini. He glanced up at her footsteps, smiling. “Hey there, I was just coming to get you. I thought I’d make dinner and apologize for earlier.”

Following her brother out to the back porch, she eagerly dug into her food. “There’s no need to apologize, Stefan. I’m totally fine with Klaus being here. You were helping out a friend and I respect that. Besides, did you see the amazing job he did on our shutters?”

Stefan topped off her chardonnay, shaking his head slightly. “No, I wanted to apologize for teasing you earlier about Klaus. I know you liked him when we were kids and I shouldn’t have given you such a hard time today.”

Her blue eyes widened in alarm. “Oh God, you knew? Did he?!” She gripped her fork tightly,
already making plans of how to avoid being around the house whenever Klaus was there to save herself the embarrassment. She could just bury herself in work. Yes, that was a solid plan…except her work was *at* her house…where Klaus the sexy handyman would be every day, all day. Crap.

“No, he has no idea, Care,” Stefan replied with a chuckle. “But that might be because he’s been too distracted asking me all sorts of pointed questions about *you*.”

She gasped, “Seriously? Like what kind of questions?” Her heart was racing, but her mind kept telling her to slow down and not read too much into this revelation.

He dragged a bite of chicken through the tangy lemon-oregano glaze. “Oh, you know,” he teased in a casual tone, “If you were seeing someone, what sorts of things you might like to do on a date, if I was going to murder him in his sleep if he’d been harboring a crush on my baby sister for years…you know, the usual.”

Caroline couldn’t help the silly little squeal that escaped her lips as she jumped out of her seat to hug her brother. He hugged her back, laughing at her enthusiasm. “Okay, that’s all the matchmaking I can stomach. I have it on good authority that Klaus is stopping by the house later, so you might want to take that walk now to clear your head.”

She patted his shoulder affectionately. “You know me so well.” She practically skipped down the porch steps, letting her bare feet sink into the warm white sand. She waved at Stefan and headed toward the shore where the small waves glowed in the starlight as they gently lapped at the water’s edge. Her simple lilac sundress whipped around her knees in the soft breeze, and she briefly considered heading back to the house for a shawl when she saw a figure crouched down, digging in the wet sand. When she saw the unruly curls, she was helpless to stop her lips from curving into a joyful smile.

“Hey,” she said, trying to stifle a giggle when Klaus slightly jumped at her unexpected arrival. He remained kneeling, his jean-clad knees cutting sharp divots in the sand. He smiled softly up at her with his dimples on display. “Caroline,” he mumbled, somewhat hesitant as he momentarily paused his digging. “I was hoping to surprise you.”

“Surprise me how” she wondered, tilting her head to the side. She gestured to the metal bucket that sat beside him. “What are you doing?”

Klaus lowered his gray eyes, as though embarrassed, and nodded toward the bucket that contained a handful of broken shells. “I was looking for a *perfectly broken* sand dollar.” He shrugged and ventured a quick glance at her stunned expression. “Someone told me that it would have beautiful symmetry if it ever found its other half.”

Caroline gulped, her heart beating wildly. She was proud of the way she managed to keep her voice from shaking as she knelt down beside him in the wet sand. “Well then, let me help you look.”

Their eyes met, and he leaned into her, nearly knocking over the bucket in his eagerness to be closer to her. “Really,” he asked, his voice barely above a whisper.

Caroline nodded, moving both hands behind his head to toy with his curls. “I figure that’s easier than searching for Tunde’s blade,” she giggled, pulling him in for a kiss.
Cash Cow

Chapter Summary

This is AU Klaroline with hybrid Klaus and witch Caroline. Written for a @klarodrabblequest prompt: Cowboys AU on Tumblr. Because apparently when I think “cowboys”, it turns into cattle-rustling witches. :)

Chapter Notes

Warning: Contains smut.

*Desperado, why don’t you come to your senses?*
You’ve been out riding fences for so long now.
Oh, you’re a hard one,
But I know that you’ve got your reasons.
These things that are pleasing you will hurt you somehow.

“Desperado” — Linda Ronstadt

“Just a little more…easy there…” Caroline muttered to herself, tongue stuck between her teeth as she concentrated on the razor-sharp barbed wire in front of her. She narrowed her blue eyes, trying to see the individual wire coils in the darkness. She had told Katherine that pulling a job on a new moon was trouble, not only from a practical perspective, but also from a witchcraft one. Finally she could “feel” the tensile strength of the metal and managed to neatly sever the wire with her magic.

She leapt back hastily in case the recoil of the newly strung barbed wire flew her way, but fortunately Katherine’s protection barrier was still in effect.

Caroline blew a sweaty blonde curl off of her forehead, inwardly groaning as she realized that taking care of the fence was barely step one in their plan. Quietly clearing her throat, she mimicked the call of a fan-tailed warbler, the trademark signal she and Katherine used to communicate during their nighttime raids. She remained crouched down in the pasture, counting the seconds until Katherine responded. With a quiet sigh of relief, she heard the answering call that gave the all-clear. Katherine and their horses were hidden at the bottom of the hill off the main trail so she could keep watch. If trouble came their way, she’d be able to give Caroline the time she needed to escape.

Making her way toward the cattle, she slowly approached them, wary but confident. She’d been raised around Longhorns all her life, and while these powerful animals could indeed be aggressive, the trick was to approach them in a calm manner without appearing weak. She scouted out the imposing beasts, trying to ascertain the best targets. They had learned the hard way not to take the ones with distinctive markings as the cattle barons would be more likely to remember those as their property. It made for awkward encounters at county auctions if the bidders realized they were buying their own stolen property.
She counted out 20 head of cattle, not wanting to be greedy, despite the fact that she and Katherine only targeted the richest of cattle barons. The fastest way to get caught was to be greedy and stupid and she and Katherine were neither of those things. She smoothly approached the first steer, staying within his line of sight so he wouldn’t spook. She could go a long time without being kicked again. And the time before that. Okay, and then that other time, but that was completely Katherine’s fault. Seriously, don’t try to determine if an animal is a bull while your partner is painstakingly altering the brand on its flank. Besides, bulls are ridiculously easy to spot — no wonder they all walk bowlegged. If she was carrying the equivalent of two feed sacks down there, she’d walk funny too.

Caroline quietly murmured the incantation to cast the glamour over the animal’s brand. Her fingers traced the oddly-shaped brand she found in the steer’s rust-colored hide. She and Katherine had been working this cluster of counties for years now and she’d never run across this peculiar “F” brand. She watched as her magic wove itself through the mark, bathing it in cleansing white light before transforming into the familiar triangle symbol she and Katherine used to “brand” their unorthodox acquisitions.

Katherine’s impatient warbler call indicated she was running behind schedule, so Caroline quickly repeated the process on the remaining cattle she had selected. Standing at the flank of the last animal, she couldn’t help but feel a shiver of dread as she watched the last traces of the unusual brand disappear under her glamour spell. Instinct was telling her it was a symbol that she should know and perhaps even fear.

An amused voice broke her concentration, startling her. “It’s the Viking rune fehu. It means wealth and cattle. A bit on the nose, but we aren’t known for our subtlety.” A devilishly handsome man appeared on the other side of the steer, gazing at her curiously. He angled his head to get a better view of her work. He cocked an inquisitive eyebrow and carried on in his delicious accent, “The fire symbol. Signifying cleansing and renewal. You practice an ancient form of witchcraft for one so young, sweetheart.”

Caroline’s heart beat a rapid tattoo in her chest. How had this man managed to evade her carefully honed senses and catch her unawares? She narrowed her eyes as she recalled his cocky ramblings. His aura was incredibly powerful, but also disturbingly lifeless. Vampire. And his arrogant speech about Vikings could mean he was one of the Old Ones Miss Sheila always had warned them about. Well, shit. She was just caught red-handed cattle rustling from an Original.

“Nothing to say, sweetheart,” the beautiful stranger teased her, “That fire swirling in your lovely blue eyes tells me you recognize what I am as well as my place at the top of the supernatural hierarchy.” Innocent dimples flashed as he introduced himself, “You may call me Klaus.”

The way his calculating smirk cut across his face seemed to jar Caroline from her initial shock. She grew up on stories about the Originals and she realized her initial error in assuming the man was a vampire. Klaus was a hybrid, which made him possibly the most dangerous being on the planet. And likely the most arrogant. She could handle arrogance. She snorted disdainfully. “Alright, Dimples, you caught me. Temporarily. Enjoy your little victory. Trust me, it’ll be short-lived.”

Klaus threw back his head laughing, nearly knocking off his cowboy hat. “What spirit you possess, little witch. Do tell me what you think gives you the right to steal my property?” A low, sexy growl came on the heels of his question as he regarded her with obvious interest. “Or, more importantly, your name?”

Caroline scoffed, “Look Dimples, I only take from those that can spare it, and right now someone else needs what you can clearly spare. I’ll keep my name and my secrets if it’s all the same to you.
Besides, I’m obviously not the only one with something to hide.” She grinned, her blue eyes twinkling as she appraised the mysterious creature before her. “That accent sticks out like a sore thumb around these parts and I haven’t heard any chatter about your family in nearby towns. Your movements are far too stiff in those suspiciously new clothes, so I’m guessing you aren’t used to wearing such simple fabrics. Probably not for centuries if you’re as old as I think you are.” She nodded in satisfaction as she saw his strong jaw tighten at her assumptions. “You’re hiding out from somebody or something. You wouldn’t be all the way out here in the panhandle otherwise.”

His tone betrayed his growing anger at how her words had unsettled him. “Careful, sweetheart. You should mind that sharp tongue of yours. Out here all alone, you and your partner are at my mercy.”

“Since I don’t see my partner in your clutches, I’m calling your bluff, Dimples,” Caroline retorted, carefully flicking her eyes around the far corners of the pasture to determine her best escape route.

“It’s only a matter of time,” Klaus said smoothly. “My brother Elijah is on her trail as we speak.”

Hysterical giggles erupted unexpectedly from Caroline. She could see Klaus’ eyebrows knit together in confusion, spurring on her laughter. “I’m sorry — but you sent Elijah after my partner? That stuffed shirt has no idea what he’s dealing with. My partner specializes in a distinct disarming technique.”

His gray eyes flashed gold in the night, and he sped in front of her, gripping her shoulders tightly. “If she’s harmed my brother, I’ll have your head, witch!”

Alarmed by his violent outburst, she stiffened in his steel hold, but her anger at being manhandled caused her to switch to her trusty defense mechanism — sarcasm. “That pompous windbag will survive. Untangle your spurs, Dimples. He’ll just be a bit less clothed than when he started his merry chase. She has found over the years that few assailants continue to give chase if she spells away their clothing.”

Klaus released her quickly, clearing his throat uncomfortably. “My brother will be…nude when he returns here?”

“Yup,” she agreed smugly. “Hopefully my partner won’t judge him too harshly. Poor bastard — it’s a bit nippy out tonight.”

Before Klaus could respond, they were interrupted by thundering hooves. A stunning blonde appeared astride a beautiful red roan Appaloosa, holding the reins of an equally gorgeous dappled gray. “Klaus! Is it Mikael?” Her haughty tone did little to hide her underlying fear. Her gaze sharpened and she pointed her delicate chin in Caroline’s direction. “Who’s this simple tart skulking about?”

Klaus seemed to pick up on Caroline’s ire and lazily called out, “Calm yourself, sister. I was well on my way to finding out when you rudely interrupted.”

Caroline scoffed. “Please. You’re no closer to learning more about me than you were when you found me. Give it up, Dimples.”

“Charming,” Rebekah said dryly, peering down at Caroline. “You are outnumbered little witch by two Originals, no less. If you tried to run, our mounts would easily overtake you without us exerting our superior strength.”

“Good grief, is arrogance an inherited trait or did one possess enough to infect the rest of you,”
Caroline wondered aloud. She studied the horses thoughtfully. While Appaloosas were magnificent examples of horseflesh, they were no match for the Quarter Horses Katherine had waiting on her. Their horses couldn’t be outmatched in maneuverability and speed — something a real cattle baron would know. These snooty Originals sacrificed substance for style and Caroline couldn’t wait to show them up.

Klaus misread the calculating look on her face and silkily murmured, “Appaloosas are majestic creatures blessed with not only beauty but also nearly endless stamina. Would you care for a demonstration, love?”

Caroline rolled her eyes, commiserating with the affronted look on Rebekah’s face. “Perhaps another time, Dimples,” she said airily. Wiggling her fingers in his direction in a mocking wave, she concentrated her energies on the 20 head of cattle she had rebranded with her glamour spell and managed to teleport them along with herself to the bottom of the hill where Katherine was pacing furiously.

“Damn it, Buttercup!” Katherine’s anger failed to mask her panic when she got a good luck at Caroline. She raced to Caroline’s side the moment she appeared with the cattle, quickly examining her for injuries. “You know that spell should only be used for moving smaller weight short distances. Not 20 head of cattle and one scrawny witch!”

“No choice, Kitty,” Caroline panted, trying to catch her breath. “It was an emergency. Turns out we accidentally stole from the Originals. Klaus and Rebekah are nipping at my heels. They sent Elijah after you.”

Katherine’s grim mouth twisted up into a sly smile. “Yes, he was such a handsome little prairie dog. Bit sniffany for my tastes…until I made his clothes disappear.” Her warm brown eyes sparkled at the memory. “He yelped like a rabbit caught in a snare. Ran off in embarrassment. Dunno why — from the peek I got, he was hung like a —”

“Kitty! Can we focus, please? Two angry Originals will come barreling down this hill any moment,” Caroline said through gritted teeth.

Katherine shrugged her shoulders, winking at Caroline. “What? It kinda reminded me of that time you got kicked when I was leaning over to check if you caught a bull…” She trailed off at her friend’s annoyed expression. “Sorry. Will they be on foot?”

Caroline shook her head, still wheezing from the toll the spell had taken on her. “No. They’re on Appaloosas,” she explained, her tone a bit lighter as she recalled the two Originals’ misplaced confidence in their mounts.

“Ha! Take away the supernatural stuff and they’re just pampered city folk playing cowboy.” She rubbed her hands together, preparing the spell, but stopped short when she noticed Caroline was still bent over trying to catch her breath. “I don’t have enough juice to teleport the cattle and us back to the church.” She yanked Caroline’s chin toward her so she could judge her reaction properly. “Can you ride?”

Caroline waived off her friend’s concern. “I’ll be fine. Hurry up; I can hear hoofbeats.”

Taking a deep breath, Katherine closed her eyes in concentration, and suddenly the rust-colored Longhorns shimmered out of sight. When her knees threatened to buckle under her, Caroline managed to get a second wind and catch her friend before she fell.

“Good job, Kitty,” she said happily, nervousness bleeding into her voice as the hoofbeats kept
getting closer. “Now, that the hard part’s over, all we need to do is outrun two Originals in a horserace. Easy, right?”

Katherine coughed, grinning. She let Caroline help her back onto her cracked leather saddle, taking care not to graze her horse’s hide with a spur. Caroline moved away when she saw Katherine grip the saddle horn confidently. “Let’s go, Buttercup.”

Caroline quickly hooked her boot into the stirrup of her mount, easily settling into the saddle and gripping the reins. As Katherine took off in a powerful gallop, Caroline looked over her shoulder to see Klaus and Rebekah cresting the top of the hill. The self-satisfied smirk on his criminally attractive face irritated her to no end. She flashed him a mischievous smile that caused his brow to furrow in confusion. She quickly turned around in her saddle, leaned forward and commanded her horse to run with a practiced gesture. Let these Originals see what a Quarter Horse can do. From the shouts of surprise that echoed through the valley, it was evident that she and Katherine had startled them with their quick getaway.

Chuckling to herself, she pushed her mount harder, wanting to put a safe distance between her and the Originals. The magnificent chestnut barely broke a sweat as it tore through the valley, kicking up dust from the dry prairie landscape. She easily maneuvered it through a small canyon opening hidden by a clump of juniper trees. She inhaled the warm, sweet scent and immediately felt at peace. She made a mental note to stop back by to collect more branches for tea. It would help them heal faster after those pesky teleportation spells.

She sighed in aggravation. How could they have missed the fact that the newest cattle barons were the Originals? Talk about embarrassing. Miss Sheila would have some choice words for them once they returned from the auction. They normally scouted out marks better than that, but the rumors of the high-quality herd had been too hard to resist. Plus, it had been a long time since they’d tangled with vampires; they’d assumed the nearest nest was in Lubbock County. Everyone knew that vampires tended to gravitate toward the bigger settlements. They knew better than to venture into that territory ever again. Stupid Salvatore. She should’ve shot them on sight when she first saw them. Her instincts said they were nothing but trouble, and boy had she been right.

She and Katherine had still been green at cattle rustling when they stole a small herd from the Salvatore brothers. Sensing they were vampires, she and Katherine had turned tail and ran, only Katherine managed to end up with a noose around her neck, nearly the victim of vigilantes the Salvatores had instigated. Caroline tried not to think about the dark measures she’d had to take to rescue her friend. She did what she had to and didn’t regret it because she knew Katherine would repay her in kind if it came down to it. Still, some memories were better left buried.

Caroline breathed a sigh of relief when the familiar abandoned stone church came into view. It had functioned as their hideout when they were pulling a job, and had served as their sanctuary when they needed an escape. To the untrained eye, it appeared to be missing a roof and was overgrown with honeysuckle and creeper vines. However, they had transformed the inside into a sturdy, almost cozy hideaway with a fire pit and two featherbeds with pillows. She put her chestnut in the makeshift shed they’d built and added more grain to the trough for both horses. Glancing at the cattle pen to make sure the protection spell was in place around their newly acquired herd, she headed inside the church to join Katherine for some much-needed rest before their early start tomorrow.

Two days later, they arrived at the cattle auction. After driving their herd into the pens, they found the yard manager, who recognized them as frequent sellers, and pulled their wooden sign bearing
the Forbes’ name and brand. Their sign was added to the growing stack of sellers and the girls looked at each other in silent communication before nodding once and heading off in opposite directions. Katherine followed the yard manager, touching his wrist with her delicate fingers and allowing her long brunette curls to brush against his shoulder just so. As he looked into her warm brown eyes with a shy smile, he barely noticed that she appeared to be mumbling something under her breath.

Caroline smiled as she looked away from her friend. It always was such a pleasure to watch Katherine work. She made her way toward the clerk’s station, putting on her best smile. Her boots echoed on the wooden plank floor and the clerk seemed flustered as he greeted her. She clutched in her sweaty palm the tiny burlap bag of braided thistle coated in sumac boiled over a sage-smoke fire. As she spoke with the clueless man, she only was forced to squeeze the charm bag twice to get her way. A much more relaxed smile graced her lovely face as she headed toward the corrals to watch the auction begin.

A trouser leg hooked over the corrals, pulling with it a smug hybrid who settled down beside Caroline. From their vantage point at the top of the corrals, they could survey the entire yard, and Caroline tensed for a moment as she scanned the crowd looking for Katherine to signal her to the potential threat that had appeared. Ignoring the smoldering Original beside her, her blue eyes frantically searched until they finally landed on her friend, who seemed perfectly at ease standing suspiciously close to a dark-haired man that was most likely Elijah. The lines of her body were relaxed and she was batting her eyelashes up at him in her signature flirtatious manner, so Caroline breathed a sigh of relief. She knew Katherine would signal her if things got out of hand.

“You care for her,” Klaus commented beside her. “Your eyes were frightened at first when you realized my brother and I were here, but you calmed after you read your friend’s body language. You’ve known her a long time,” he concluded.

“All our lives,” Caroline admitted, squinting at him in the bright sun. He had forgone the hat today, and his dirty blonde locks curled at the ends with just a hint of sweat in the Texas heat. Trying to figure out his angle, she allowed a bit of truth to color her speech. “We grew up on neighboring cattle ranches until we were twelve.”

He raised an eyebrow, surprised by her willingness to speak to him without her signature animosity. “What changed when you were twelve?”

“Comanche raid. Our families died and a neighbor took us in. She cared for us and taught us everything she could.” Caroline winced inwardly as she realized her matter-of-fact tone dipped into something more fragile and raw when she spoke of Miss Sheila’s kindness.

Klaus’ gray eyes held a hint of unexpected softness as he replied, “She taught you both witchcraft. She must be the one you spoke of when you told me that there was someone who needed the money more than I.”

She scowled, angry at herself for revealing so much to him, but his surprisingly gentle tone and the understanding she spotted in his intense gaze somehow made her feel safe to let down her guard. “It takes a lot of money to keep a homestead going. The drought’s plagued us for too many years for her farm to turn a profit. So we found another way to help her survive.”

Before she could ask Klaus whether he intended to try to take back his property from them, she noticed that the auction had begun. She proudly watched as the wooden sign bearing the Forbes name and branding mark was displayed and the bidders were gathered around the pen that contained their Longhorns. Well, technically the Originals’ Longhorns.
Klaus leaned toward her and whispered in her ear conspiratorially, “Forgive me if I’m mistaken, sweetheart, but weren’t you and your friend the last sellers to arrive? Curious how your lot would be featured first,” he drawled in his delicious accent.

Caroline laughed. “It’s almost as peculiar as how the 4% commission will be mysteriously waived. Magic has its benefits, Dimples.”

“Oh yes, your magic. Tell me love, why did you waste time altering our brand with your magic during your raid the other night? It would have been more prudent for you to safely abscond with my property and use your glamour spell later.” His gray eyes twinkled merrily as he added, “Of course, it did allow me to encounter an unexpectedly lovely cattle rustler.”

She shrugged her shoulders casually. “If you alter the brand on their property and get caught, sometimes you can convince the owner that the cattle escaped from your ranch and you are just there to collect them. Kitty managed to talk this gullible rancher, Matt, into helping her round up ‘our’ lost cattle. He even offered to help us drive the ones we cherry-picked from his herd back toward our safe house.” She tipped him an impish wink. “He was concerned about the safety of two helpless women riding across the dark prairie.”

Klaus threw back his head in laughter. “I pity the man that mistakes you and your friend as helpless.” He quiets as the auction draws their attention once more, where it appeared that Elijah had made a startling high bid on the entire herd in the Forbes’ lot. At her incredulous expression, he smirked and explained, “I instructed my brother to spare no expense buying from the Forbes women since I heard they always seem to have the best cattle.”

Caroline didn’t know what came over her. One moment she was readying a sarcastic jab at Klaus, and the next she had grabbed him by his damp curls and thrust her tongue into his mouth, kissing him until they were both breathless.

He pulled away from her, panting slightly as he searched her blue eyes, looking for some unknown sign. Whatever her body revealed to him remained a mystery to her, but he seemed pleased with its answer. He looped his arms around her waist and flashed them both off of the top of the corrals. They appeared at the door to the small clerk’s station, where the clueless man was temporarily frightened by their sudden presence before Klaus easily compelled him to close up early, the slight edge to his accented voice the only clue to his impatience.

Caroline sauntered into the small shack, spinning around to grab Klaus by his shoulders and push him into the rocking chair made out of old wooden barrels. She reveled in his heated gaze as she pulled off her boots and flicked open her belt, allowing the old 45 in its leather holster to hit the floor with a heavy thud. His breathing became labored as he watched her small fingers tease each button out of its hole until her dust-covered trousers puddled at her feet.

Just as she started toward him with a devilish smile, his husky voice commanded, “With your boots on, love. And don’t forget the spurs.”

Ivory skin flushing at the erotic images his demand conjured, she faced away from him, slowly bending at the waist to tug back on the worn leather boots. He grumbled under his breath at her teasing display, but his gray eyes darkened with lust as her spurs jangled. Her blue eyes lit up as she tugged her leather belt free from her holster and gun, snapping the thick rawhide between her hands. “You strike me as the competitive type. I bet you’re still angry I beat you in our little horserace. Have you been practicing ever since I got away?”

Klaus nodded slowly, his eyes gleaming. His dark trousers were suddenly several sizes too tight, and Caroline felt her blood boil at the sight of his pent-up desire. Cocking her head to the side, she
licked her lips as she wrapped her belt around his wrists, holding them above his head. She grinned as she sank into his welcoming lap. “Show me how you ride, Dimples.”

With one hand, she slid her fingers to the buttons at his trembling crotch, quickly pulling them open to wrap her hand around his straining girth. Pumping him a few times, she relished in the helpless groans he made. She parted her thighs, easily slipping his leaking tip inside her core. She tightened her legs around him, crossing her boots behind the chair.

With a sigh of satisfaction, Klaus leveraged the crude rocking motion of the chair to allow his iron flesh to move deeper than Caroline expected, as her strangled moan attested. They moved in perfect harmony with an audible pop of the chair as it creaked against the wooden planks of the floor. His talented hips swiveled into her with powerful thrusts, making her cry out in pleasure.

He moved his head forward, fangs unsheathed as he dipped a sharpened point into the laces of her white work shirt, easily slicing through the rough cotton ends. As her breasts tumbled free, he licked a wet, sensual stripe across each one, pausing to suck her pink nipples until they were hard, nearly painful little points. As he felt her warm wet core clamp down on his cock, he watched her blue eyes glaze over as her orgasm left her a trembling mess.

Her pulsing center triggered his own finish and he pumped his hips eagerly until he was spent. With a rumble deep in his chest, he used his hybrid strength to easily break the leather belt around his wrists, tossing her legs to his shoulders as he brought her dripping folds to his greedy mouth. Gold flashed in his lusty gaze as he nipped and sucked as though possessed with an unquenchable thirst.

Caroline tightened her legs around Klaus, the sharp metal of her spurs slicing shallow cuts into his shoulders, causing blood to well sluggishly and stain his woolen shirt. The scent of his blood and the sweet sounds of her breathy moans caused another wave of ecstasy to overtake him, and he came with a grunt, liberally marking her back.

With a lazy grin, she watched the hybrid move helplessly beneath her, and she eased her bare legs from his shoulders, spreading them wide as she resettled on his soaked lap. Swiping a palm across her lower back, she brought her sticky fingertips to her tongue.

After a few delicate licks, she observed his hooded gaze and said, “Now, let me show you how I ride, Dimples.”
A Simple Kind of Man

Chapter Summary

Caroline is a well-known archaeologist specializing in Norse settlements and believes she has made a career-defining discovery at a dig site in Norway. Klaus, a mysterious local, is about to teach her that the world is a far more mysterious place than she could ever imagine.

Chapter Notes

This started out as a short story, but it evolved into a multi-chap work by the same name that you can read on here as well.

If you’re interested, I also feature the Goddess Hel and Norse mythology in my Klaroline multi-chap work, Divine Intervention. I’d love to read your feedback on this work as well if you have time to review. Thanks!

“And be a simple kind of man. 
Be something you love and understand.”

— Lynyrd Skynyrd

“Tell me, herdsman, sitting on the hill, 
And watching all the ways, 
How may I win a word with the maid 
Past the hounds of Gymir here?”

"Art thou doomed to die or already dead, 
Thou horseman that ridest hither? 
Barred from speech shalt thou ever be 
With Gymir's daughter good.”

— Poetic Edda

The reassuring scrape of the dental pick was the only noise Caroline could hear as she crouched down on the hardened clay floor of the tomb. She could barely contain her excitement and she reminded herself to use a delicate touch as she removed the dirt from around the iron ax head that
was partially embedded in the ground. Grumbling to herself, she felt like an overexcited freshman intern on her first dig site rather than a seasoned archaeologist and tenured professor. As she admired the sweeping inlays of silver and gold along the ax blade, she realized that her excitement was warranted — normally Viking axes were viewed as simple tools, crafted either for battle or farming, but the sumptuous decorations of this object signified that it was owned by a Viking warrior who had amassed great wealth and respect amongst his clan.

The ninth-century Viking tomb was carved into the Haukeli mountains, a find that was completely unheard of as normally the Vikings built mounds to honor their dead. When Caroline completed her findings, she would undoubtedly add to her already sterling reputation in academia as the foremost expert on Norse settlements. A noise at the tomb’s narrow opening startled her, and she glanced up in irritation at being interrupted by one of her student interns until she saw who it was and immediately fought to hide the rosy blush that crept up her neck.

“My apologies for startling you,” Klaus Mikaelson murmured as he stepped into the tomb. He seemed to notice her embarrassment and politely averted his eyes to gaze unnecessarily at the markings on the wall while Caroline composed herself. He was a local farmer who had appeared on the first day at the dig site to volunteer with excavations. At first, Caroline had been skeptical, and waved off his offer of assistance as she had an entire group of college students that would be in the way most of the time despite their best intentions, and she had no need to take on additional babysitting duties. However, he had surprised her with his vast knowledge of Norse settlements, a hobby of his, and he had grown up in the Norwegian mountain village below, so his grasp of local history and its natural landmarks had proven useful on more than one occasion.

She remembered how she had stammered through her consent to allow him to volunteer for the duration of the dig, taking in his ridiculously perfect visage of chiseled jaw, broad shoulders, and piercing, ice-blue eyes. Not to mention that delicious accent as he clipped off certain English words. His lips had twitched as though he was trying to hide a teasing smile, but he managed to maintain a respectful, professional demeanor throughout this first month at the dig site. She shook her head slightly, trying to settle the butterflies in her stomach and focus on the task at hand. “You didn’t startle me, I was just admiring this latest find,” she explained, letting out an adorable victory squeal as she managed to free the ax head from the ground.

Klaus chuckled at her obvious enthusiasm, and held out the tray of artifacts he had brought her. “Shall I add your new trophy to the items Jeremy needs to catalog?”

Caroline frowned slightly as she quickly counted the considerable number of items on the tray. “Seriously? That kid still hasn’t photographed what Vicky’s group uncovered from the north quadrant last week?” She clenched her fists as she added in exasperation, “He’s wasting his scholarship getting stoned in the woods instead of learning something useful!”

He gave her an indulgent smile, putting down the wooden tray and settling on the floor near her. “The boy is what, 18? 19?” At her non-committal shrug, he chuckled, “He laments the drudgery of this work. He’s fortunate not to have lived in the old days.”

She giggled trying to picture her slacker student trying to survive in Viking society. “Depending upon the clan, he would have been counted as a man between the ages of 10 and 16 winters. He would have been expected to work and contribute to the betterment of the village.”

Klaus snorted derisively. “I pity the mentor he would have been apprenticed under. I suspect teaching him trades in farming, navigation, building, or warfare would be quite the challenge.”

Caroline nudged him playfully with her elbow, “If he had been fortunate enough to apprentice with the local smithy, he probably would have become a skilled bong maker.”
They laughed together at the absurd image their words conjured. Caroline averted her gaze when she realized she had been staring far too long into his beautiful blue eyes. The light from the afternoon sun had filtered into the tomb’s opening, glinting off of the circular silver amulet he wore around his neck. When she had admired the intricate design, he had told her it had been in his family for ages. She noticed he would touch it from time to time, a faraway look on his face. She could sense great sorrow in his past, but she didn’t want to pry, so she kept her observations to herself. She hoped that he would open up to her in his own time.

“What about you,” he asked, interrupting her thoughts. “I could see you doing more than running a Viking household. Your fierceness would have been greatly rewarded in a clan,” he said with a twinkle in his eyes.

She scoffed, tucking stray blonde strands back into her messy bun. “The life expectancy was 20 years. I doubt I would have done anything particularly remarkable in such a short time span.”

He shook his head in disagreement. “Your strength and forceful will would have been noticed and nurtured by the elders. They would have taught you to wield a sword and then you would have been off exploring, having marvelous adventures discovering new territories for your clan to conquer.”

The certainty in his voice that he could know her so well after only a month together touched her. “How do you think you would have fared in that world? I see you as a celebrated warrior,” she said confidently, trying to avoid staring too long at the way his muscles were perfectly outlined against the simple cotton fabric of his gray pullover.

Klaus’ blue eyes became hard as he said in a clipped tone, “That life would not be for me. I enjoy a simple, quiet life and would have done as I do now — farm the land.”

Caroline felt guilty for bringing up a subject she knew was sensitive for him. A couple of weeks ago, she had asked about his family and she learned that they were soldiers that had been lost in battle years ago. She asked if he had taken part in his family’s military tradition, and he had explained hesitantly that he had begun his life in that manner, but found violence distasteful. He chose a different way to live, embracing the peaceful, simple life of a farmer. She blushed when she recalled how she had embarrassed herself by telling him: You are far too fascinating to be considered simple.

She realized she was in danger of being caught staring at Klaus once again, so she hastily changed the subject with, “What are your thoughts on this tomb? Why was this Viking warrior singled out to be laid to rest in a manner that defied their burial customs?”

He shrugged, lowering his eyes to the floor. “Norsemen were not prone to overt demonstrations of their affections. Perhaps this was their way of honoring his life?” He lightly traced the packed clay floor with one finger. “After all, the dead just want to be remembered.”

“I like that sentiment,” Caroline said with a warm smile. “I suppose that’s all any of us can hope for in the end — to leave this world knowing that others will keep our memories alive.” She dusted off her knees and stood up, reaching for the tray at Klaus’ feet and adding the intricately decorated ax head. “Come on — you can watch me yell at Jeremy for being lazy. Who knows? If we stand close enough, we may get a contact high.”

Klaus chuckled as he shyly pulled a stray leaf out of her messy bun. “Let’s not carry all of the contents out of the tomb today,” he teased.

Laughing, she quickly patted her head to see if anything else would fall out to embarrass her in
front of the inconveniently sexy farmer. As they headed outside, she pointed her chin behind them and said determinedly, “Tomorrow I want to reexamine the south wall. There was something about those carvings that I feel needs to be studied further. I keep thinking I’m missing something, but when I first looked at them, I was so excited to read about the heroic sagas of this unknown warrior, I think I may have overlooked other details. It’s entirely possible that we’ll find some clue as to where he’s buried within the tomb. I don’t want to bring the students in to break up the floor and blindly dig until absolutely necessary though.”

He was quiet as he pondered her words. The look he finally gave her was thoughtful. “In that case, would you care to join me this evening at the lake? It might be nice to step away from your work briefly. Maybe you’ll gain insight with a bit of peace.”

She nodded eagerly, her heart leaping in her chest at his suggestion in that captivating accent of his. The lake he spoke of was a beautiful slice of heaven tucked away in the mountains. It was only a short walk from the dig site, and Klaus had been taking her there off and on since they met. At first, she convinced herself it was part of her job to familiarize herself with the local land formations, but as she realized how much she enjoyed his company, she tried to rationalize that it was important to solidify partnerships with the local community since the university had funded their dig for several years. But the last couple of visits had felt decidedly more date-like and she couldn’t help but feel as though tonight’s meeting held special meaning for him as well.

That evening, Caroline closed her eyes as she savored the sweet honey taste of the mead Klaus had brought to the lake. “This is delicious — is it Suttungs Mjød?”

Klaus wrinkled his nose in distaste. “You can buy that anywhere. This is from my private stores.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. “I didn’t know you made your own mead; color me impressed.” She took another sip, finding the splash of spicy ginger delightful. She stretched her legs out on the large, flat rock they had claimed as their own whenever they spent time here. Lake Válað was just steps away, a beautiful, isolated stretch of dark water. Fog curled along the top, adding to its mysterious appearance. Its name meant “destiny” in Old Norse.

Klaus gave her a teasing smile as he drank from his ceramic mug. “Would you like me to impress you further, Caroline?”

She giggled, feeling the warmth of the mead soaking into her body. The alcohol was a welcome barrier against the cool Norwegian air. She had bundled up for their outing, but still felt the bite of the cold when she took a breath. “I don’t know if your ego would survive any further praise,” she said wryly.

“The spirit can survive all manner of things — if it has the strength,” he said softly. Flicking his blue gaze to the water, he suddenly asked, “What do you know of the Norse goddess Hel?”

Caroline rested on her elbows, shrugging her shoulders slightly. “She was the daughter of Loki, ruler of the underworld and guardian of the graves. Why do you ask?”

He set down his mug, gesturing to the lake. “The myths say that Lake Válað was formed by Hel’s tears when she lost her only love, the god Fenrir. One of her gifts was that of foresight, and the Vikings believed that drinking from these waters before battle would bestow visions upon them to help defeat their enemies.”

Her eyes widened as she felt her fingers itch to find an ink pen and her field journal to scribble down Klaus’ words. He had been a wealth of local legends, and she had compiled enough information that she could publish several journal articles when she returned to the university once
the dig had run its course. She wondered if he would be interested in co-authoring; his rich voice enhanced his storytelling, and she found herself spellbound by his words. “Have you ever drank from the lake,” she asked, hating how breathless she sounded as she noted how closely he had leaned into her during his story.

“That’s between me and the lake,” Klaus told her with a wistful smile.

Caroline’s sarcastic reply was interrupted when she noticed movement near the spruce trees on the other side of the lake. A flock of wild reindeer had gathered near the water’s edge. She held her breath, not wanting to make a sound and startle the majestic creatures. Their gray and white coats glinted silver in the starlight, and they seemed unconcerned by the two awestruck figures staring at them. They disappeared back into the forest with barely a rustle of leaves under their hooves after they drank their fill. “What a remarkable place,” Caroline said in a hushed whisper. “I don’t know that I’ve ever been to a place that has this feeling of peace and…” she trailed off, searching for the right words.

“Magic,” Klaus offered with a grin full of mirth. “Legend also says that this lake is a gateway to the underworld. The living can wade in the water carrying something that belonged to a deceased loved one and they will find the Goddess Hel. If they bravely face her, she may be convinced to release the loved one from the underworld so that they may live again.”

“I envy people that can inspire that level of devotion,” she sighed sadly. “I can’t even inspire my students to properly catalog artifacts.” She took another sip of the warm mead, embarrassed that her voice sounded so vulnerable.

His gaze sharped as he studied her features with rapt attention. “So then you are not promised to another?”

She frowned slightly, toying with the chipped mug. “No, I don’t have…there isn’t anyone,” she said quietly.

He took both of her hands in his, pulling her toward him. “Then the men in your life are utter fools. You are a fascinating creature whose beauty and intelligence are a stunning sight to behold.” He dipped his head down shyly, unable to look at her as he continued his confession. “Forgive my boldness, but I never thought I’d find one such as you, and I cannot bear the thought of you believing yourself unworthy of devotion.”

“Do you mean that,” Caroline asked breathlessly, scarcely believing that this amazing, gorgeous man would be interested in her.

His head snapped up at her uncertain tone and his blue eyes darkened as he surged forward to kiss her with a sweet passion that left her a giddy mess. She tangled her fingers in his dirty blonde curls, tugging on the short strands at the nape of his neck as she sought his mouth for a more generous kiss. They reclined together against the cold rock, emitting small sighs as they gave into the tension that had been building from almost the moment they met. There seemed to be an unspoken agreement between them not to take things to far, and their careful exploration of each other’s bodies didn’t stray past gentle touches and deep kisses.

Sighing contentedly against his chest, she huffed, “It’s getting late, and as much as I would like to continue this, we should probably head back. We have an early day tomorrow.” She gave him a quick peck and asked hesitantly, “But perhaps we could come back tomorrow night?”

The sadness that crept into his eyes was unexpected. “I hope so,” he replied softly.
The next morning, Caroline was pleased to see her excavators working in the north quadrant, carefully passing the buckets of dirt to the group of interns that were screening the sediment for small artifact pieces. She nodded in approval as she saw Jeremy finally photographing and cataloging the group of artifacts that had been collected in the past week. When she reached the opening of the tomb, her heart gave a little flutter as she found Klaus standing in the middle of the south wall, waiting patiently for her to arrive.

“Hi,” she said, hating how small her voice sounded as she waited expectantly to see how Klaus would behave after those surprising kisses last night. Years ago, when she had been a starry-eyed student intern, she had allowed herself to get caught up in the romance of being far away from home and latched onto someone who had shown interest, only later to be brushed aside and harshly informed that she was meant to be a distraction and nothing more. She tossed and turned most of last night, hoping that this time it was real and that Klaus truly cared for her.

“Good morning Caroline,” he said, greeting her warmly. He noticed the awkwardness of her stance and the way she couldn’t quite meet his eyes. “Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” He stepped in front of her, clasping her hand in his as he gently brushed her knuckles with his thumb. “Is this regret I see? Was I was too forward last night?”

The uncertainty in his tone made her melt and she was finally able to look at him. “No, not at all,” she began hesitantly. “It’s just...I wasn’t sure if what you said last night would be true today. I didn’t want to assume…” she trailed off in embarrassment.

Klaus’s lips were pressed into a grim line as though angry on her behalf of how she had been treated in the past. “Those previous suitors were unworthy of you, Caroline. Put aside your fears. I know what I feel for you, and it will be as true today as it was last night.” He leaned in slowly, his piercing blue eyes studying her face carefully, as though wordlessly asking permission. At her slight nod, he pressed a soft kiss to her lips as though sealing in his beautiful words.

When they broke free, pressing their foreheads together and panting slightly, Caroline beamed at him. “You’re a terrible distraction, you know.”

“Then permit me to acquit myself,” he said, backing away with a small bow. “I found some unusual markings that I can’t quite decipher. Perhaps you are familiar with them?” He gestured toward the middle of the wall, where long lines had been deeply scored into the rock.

Caroline pulled out a small paintbrush, carefully swiping away sediment that had settled into the curious etchings. Peering closely at the markings, she muttered, “They don’t appear to represent any of the 16 characters found in the Younger Futhark alphabet, most common in Scandinavian runestones.” She consulted her field notebook and huffed impatiently when she found nothing useful.

Amused by the cute noises of aggravation she was making, Klaus took her hand and moved her several feet away from the carvings. At her questioning look, he said, “I sometimes find it helpful to step back and examine the entire problem at hand rather than poke at a small piece of it,” he explained helpfully.

Forehead wrinkled in concentration, she did as he suggested and as her eyes swept across the entire expanse of runic carvings, her entire face lit up with excitement. “Pieces!” She bounced on her toes, gleefully kissing Klaus on the cheek as she continued enthusiastically, “That’s it! Klaus, you’re a genius!” She pulled him back toward the unusual markings, waving her hands wildly and pointing. “These scored etchings aren’t runes; they’re acting as camouflage to hide a door to an inner tomb!”
She pulled out a small chisel and carefully tapped at the seam of the hidden door. She let out a small squeal when the metal edge tripped an invisible latch that pushed the wall open several feet. Coughing at the dust that the small room released, she grabbed both of Klaus’ hands, dancing around in a silly circle as she practically vibrated with excitement. “Do you know what this means? We just found the hidden resting place of the Viking warrior!” Unable to control herself, she pulled his handsome face to hers, kissing him soundly.

“You did it, sweetheart,” Klaus said in a proud whisper as he broke their kiss.

“We did it,” Caroline corrected. “And when the dig is over, I want you to return to the university with me to help curate the objects we find and co-author journal articles,” she said in a rush, biting her lip hopefully as she waited for his response.

A curious sadness invaded Klaus’ blue gaze once again before he blinked it away and smiled down at her. “It is my honor to be by your side, Caroline.” He nodded toward the newly open door. “Fulfill your destiny. I will be with you.”

Caroline crossed the threshold into the hidden room with Klaus behind her. She marveled at the artifacts she saw, amazingly preserved thanks to the Haukeli mountains experiencing such little humidity. It was clearly the tomb of a celebrated warrior, the beautifully carved knives, swords and axes were piled near the massive stone bier where a skeleton lay. She was flushed with excitement upon seeing such a site — the ceremonial stone bier was unheard of in a Viking burial. In addition, a bronze mask had been placed on the skeleton still partially shrouded in remnants of leather. This was an unprecedented find as funeral masks had never been a part of Viking death rituals until now.

As she stood over the body, she gasped at what she saw. The bronze mask was exquisitely carved, capturing the perfectly chiseled jawline, piercing eyes and curls that she immediately recognized. The cold air of the tomb seemed to seep into her soul as she shivered, casting her fearful eyes toward the threshold where Klaus should be standing, favoring her with that gentle smile of his. It was empty.

Tears welling, she took in the warrior before her, a sob escaping her as she saw the silver amulet resting upon his chest, the cord he would have worn it on disintegrated long ago. With trembling fingers, she traced the raised edges of the elaborate carvings, somehow finding comfort in the familiar pattern she had stared at for the past month. She clasped the small circle in her palm, hastily wiping away her tears. She straightened her spine and squared her shoulders before she marched out of the tomb. She had to be sure.

She found Jeremy still photographing artifacts outside and said urgently, “Can you tell me where Klaus went to?” She was proud of the way she kept her voice from shaking as she said his name.

Jeremy looked at her in confusion, scratching his brown locks. “Um, Klaus? Who’s that?”

“A local farmer that’s been helping out around here,” she explained in a clipped tone, trying to keep her overwhelming sorrow at bay.

“But we haven’t had any locals volunteer, remember? That’s why the university extended our funding because we told them it would take us longer than we thought to fully excavate the area,” Jeremy explained carefully, his eyes widening in surprise at the immense sadness he saw on his professor’s face.

Caroline quickly schooled her features into something akin to indifference as she thanked her student and quietly walked away. Her mind was swirling with thoughts of Klaus as her heart was
breaking. She wasn’t even sure *what* she was mourning, only that the ache she felt was *real* even if nothing else was.

Before she realized what she was doing, she found herself standing on top of their rock, overlooking Lake Válað. Old Norse for *destiny*. Her tears had returned as she gazed upon the dark water. Klaus had said that *the dead just want to be remembered*. Was that true? Did Klaus only wish to be remembered? The sharp wind whipped her blonde waves around her face as she thought of his story last night. Perhaps he told her about the gateway to the underworld to give her a choice.

Caroline clutched the silver amulet in her sweaty palm, staring fiercely at the water. She didn’t feel particularly brave at the thought of seeking out a Norse goddess, but she was willing to try.
Chapter Summary

This is a sequel to Chapter 2 in this series, so we’re heading back to the underground fighting ring that Caroline runs in addition to her other activities of questionable legality. This time, Kol has been kidnapped…mostly because he’s a dumbass. Will Klaus be able to put aside his pride and ask Caroline for help?

Chapter Notes

Warning: A smidge of smut.

"He can have heart, he can hit harder and he can be stronger, but there's no fighter smarter than me."
— Floyd Mayweather Jr.

"Sure the fight was fixed. I fixed it with a right hand."
— George Foreman

“How dare they challenge me! This insult will not stand!” Klaus continued raving as he paced the entire length of his office, dirty blonde curls in disarray from the number of times he’d run his frustrated fingers through them. “I will find them, tear off their skin and set them on fire along with the rest of this miserable city!”

His older brother Elijah regarded him with a frown as he heaved a great sigh of disapproval. “Niklaus, now is not the time to blindly engage in your patented brand of impulsiveness.” He rested one ankle over his knee, plucking at the precise crease of his charcoal trousers. “We must approach this situation rationally, armed with all of the facts at our disposal.” He cleared his throat, waiting for Klaus to pause in his erratic pacing before he continued. “We know that our brother Kol appears to have been forcibly removed from his penthouse on Napoleon Avenue early this morning. Unfortunately, the building’s security cameras did not indicate any untoward activity that could be of use.”

“Which makes no bloody sense, Elijah! The stained glass bordering his front door had been
completely smashed apart; not to mention the blood and bits of flesh clinging to the shards that our witches confirmed belong to Kol! How could the security cameras facing his front door reveal nothing,” Klaus raged, picking up his crystal tumbler and hurling it across the room where it exploded against his mahogany bookcase.

“Niklaus,” Elijah began hesitantly, “Perhaps it is time for us to consider… alternative resources at our disposal.”

“Absolutely not, Elijah,” Klaus snarled, his eyes bleeding gold at the mere suggestion of running to his rival, Caroline Forbes, for help. Their first encounter months ago was a constant source of embarrassment to him, as he had attended Fang Fights, the wildly popular underground supernatural fights, to confront the mysterious and elusive boss who had been stealing business from the Mikaelsons and rapidly building an enviable empire. He had been captivated by a stunning blonde who easily seduced him, leaving him gasping and nearly giddy at the possibility of a future illicit encounter.

He had been blindsided to learn that this ethereal creature was actually the new boss that he had come to loathe. Klaus gnashed his teeth whenever he thought of the loyal Mikaelson clients that kept abandoning his family’s business for the seemingly impossible profit margins and massive network connections Caroline offered. He hadn’t seen her since that night, despite the longing he felt whenever he thought of how she had sighed against his mouth and how her fierce blue gaze had pierced him, sending a jolt through his body from which he still hadn’t fully recovered. No, the best course of action was to keep his distance and try to reclaim his clients from Caroline by any means necessary. *He refused to watch his empire crumble because of an ill-advised infatuation.*

“Niklaus, if I may, now is not the time to allow your personal feelings about Miss Forbes cloud your judgement. Our brother is in danger and we have yet to uncover why he was taken,” Elijah huffed, smoothing his tie while casting a disparaging look at Klaus.

A sardonic voice broke their tense silence. “I think we can safely assume that Kol was taken because he’s a dumbass manwhore who spectacularly fails at life,” Caroline stated in a teasing tone as she strutted into their office. Her long blonde curls danced around her smooth ivory shoulders, beautifully exposed by her vibrant magenta dress. She took advantage of the brothers’ momentary speechless state at her unexpected arrival and wandered over to the antique sideboard to pour a drink. She studied the marble inlay and intricately carved wolf heads and dryly remarked, “So it is true — money *can* buy everything except taste.”

Klaus refused to dwell on the fact that his nemesis possessed the most spectacular, sexiest pair of legs he had ever encountered. The way that Caroline slightly leaned against the sideboard, casually crossing one ankle over the other, allowing the short hem of her dress to flash a tiny bit of creamy inner thigh did not affect him in the slightest. He was perspiring because the New Orleans morning sun was streaming through his enormous bay windows. It had *nothing* to do with him noticing how her beautiful breasts were clearly unbound, her nipples poking stubbornly at the thin material of her dress.

He curled his lips into an impressive sneer and bit out, “A maxim you illustrate beautifully in that scarf you’re wearing, sweetheart.”

“Niklaus,” Elijah admonished, clearly horrified by his brother’s appalling manners.

Caroline held up a carefully manicured palm. “It’s fine, Elijah. Klaus is clearly still licking his wounds from the fact that much of *my* money used to be *his* money.” She bit her lip playfully and nodded in his direction, “Although I’m surprised you haven’t taken the reins away from Klaus. I’ve only been in New Orleans a few months and have managed to unravel *much* of the Mikaelson
empire just by offering a fresh perspective and top-notch business solutions.” She shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly. “After all, just because a business is shady, doesn’t mean it shouldn’t still be run like a business.”

Klaus snorted derisively. “You think running underground fighting matches offers you insight into a centuries-old empire?”

Caroline’s blue eyes flashed in anger. “You know damn well that Fang Fights is just one of my many revenue streams. Or did you think that some other mysterious boss was undercutting your offer to the Salvatores?” At Klaus’ jaw tightening, she added, “And did you honestly think the Lockwoods’ merchandise was still tangled in red tape at the port?”

Elijah raised an eyebrow, his tone unmistakably impressed. “That was you, Miss Forbes? Your reach is quite vast if you were able to coerce the officials into releasing the Lockwoods’ shipments.”

Her lovely face flushed briefly as she basked in the elder Original’s praise. “Building a strong network is key; a businesswoman is only as good as the people who work for her.” She sipped her drink before adding in a more serious tone, “That’s what brought me here. I wanted to offer my resources to help you find Kol.”

Klaus scoffed, waving his hand dismissively at her offer. “What could you possibly know that would be of any use? Your presence here has barely registered in the supernatural community. You have yet to secure your place, to make your mark.”

She frowned at his condescension. She crossed her arms stubbornly, offended that the hybrid was trying to intimidate her. “Your family has felt my presence and you know it; otherwise, why would you and Kol have sought out the mysterious new boss at Fang Fights? The Originals wouldn’t waste their time on a confrontation unless they perceived a threat.” Her pink lips curved into a mocking smile as she added, “Causing the Mikaelsons to worry about their centuries-old empire? I’d say I’ve made my mark.”

Elijah cleared his throat, trying to soothe the tension in the room. “Miss Forbes, if I may, since you obviously view us as your rivals, why would you be willing to help us find Kol?”

She sighed, her blue eyes softening slightly as she turned her attention away from Klaus to address Elijah’s question. “Because it’s bad for business. You Originals are a volatile lot, and the supernatural community should know by now that if you mess with one, you risk the wrath of all. It would mean an ugly war and choosing sides and a thousand other realities that would interrupt the way I do business.” Her tone darkened as she declared, “And that is unacceptable to me.”

“Even if I foolishly trusted your intentions, love, you couldn’t possibly know anything that would be of use to us. The resources you boast of are nothing compared to our own. We have hordes of witches and a hybrid army at our disposal — trust me, whatever information you think you possess, we already know,” Klaus said smugly, crossing the room to the sideboard where she stood to pour a new drink.

Caroline uncrossed her arms and placed them on her hips, moving closer to invade Klaus’ space as she argued, “Kol has the emotional maturity of a teenage boy — he’s stupidly impulsive and reckless which is how he gets into these situations.” She cocked her head to the side, studying Klaus as she disdainfully added, “I bet I can venture a guess about who he learned that asshat behavior from.” She allowed the tips of her fangs to play with her bottom pink lip, clearly enjoying how Klaus’ gray eyes flashed at her insult. “Any number of his idiotic life choices could be responsible for him being kidnapped.”
Klaus took a measured sip of his bourbon, averting his eyes from the undeniably delectable sight of Caroline’s fangs toying with her luscious lips. She was teasing him, deliberately trying to unsettle him so that he would be blinded by whatever her true intentions were. “And what, pray tell, has your far-reaching network informed you of my brother’s reckless activities that you think I don’t already know?”

Elijah sighed in annoyance, “Niklaus, please, we do not need to revisit every instance of Kol’s unseemly behavior. It’s more pressing that we narrow down the most likely culprits.” He addressed Caroline less sharply, “We appreciate any insight you can offer, Miss Forbes.”

Caroline flashed the brothers a wicked smile as she said in a saccharine tone, “Of course. Listing all of Kol’s jackass fuckups could take a while and I have several pressing meetings on my calendar today. Here are his current top three with the highest retaliation plausibility: (1) Kol makes it a habit to sleep around with a lot of powerful men’s women, in particular you’ll want to look at the mayor since he is a wendigo and they are prone to irrational possessiveness; (2) Kol’s been running a side bet gambling ring at Fang Fights and my ghouls are onto him; and (3) Kol’s been selling panpipes claiming they’re from an archaeological dig in Crete but in reality they’re popsicle sticks with a cheesy glamour spell and the satyrs are furious.”

The Originals’ stunned silence followed Caroline’s impressive speech and she casually leaned against the sideboard once more, cutely wiggling her toes in stilettos that were a shade too high for a daytime meeting, but clearly had been worn to unbalance a certain surly hybrid opponent.

Elijah broke the silence with his flustered response, “I see. So then, I can assume that at the gala a few months when I was reminiscing about my journey to the West in the 1840s where I encountered the remnants of the Donner party and my criticism of their survivalist behavior is what offended the mayor so deeply?”

Caroline giggled at his obvious discomfort. “You weren’t particularly pro-cannibalism in your statements. Not that you have to be to get business done in a city run by a wendigo, but it helps if you at least recognize that for some, cannibalism isn’t a choice so much as it an instinct.”

Klaus tore his gaze away from studying the brightly painted toenails that gleamed in the morning sunlight. He told himself he had zero interest in dipping them in his glass and sucking the aged bourbon off of them one by one. He tried to refocus on the issue at hand and groaned suddenly as a thought occurred to him. “Bollocks, is that how you easily obtained that permit for your ostentatious underground fight club and we keep getting blocked by a rubbish city ordinance to change the paint color on our driveway gate?”

“That and Kol keeps banging the mayor’s favorite mistress,” Caroline said cheekily. “Running a business in this town is about what you know almost as much as who you know.”

Klaus closed his eyes in frustration at her playful tone. “Elijah, please consult with our witches and see if they have anything new to report.” His dismissive tone was not lost on Elijah, who raised a questioning eyebrow before seeing the resolve on the hybrid’s face. With a curt nod, he left the office, closing the door behind him.

Caroline stretched languidly, re-crossing her toned legs as she set down her crystal tumbler. “I’m starting to think you arranged Kol’s kidnapping just to get me alone,” she teased with a flutter of her long lashes.

“You use people nearly as much as I do, sweetheart,” Klaus commented with an edge to his voice. “You came here far too easily and are far too eager to share information. What game are you playing?”
She bristled at his accusation. “I resent that. I’m a businesswoman. Why are the same tactics I employ that men in our line of work use held under more scrutiny? Supernatural or not, being a girl can suck ass.” She threw back the rest of her drink, swallowing harshly. “Name one example of how you think I use people.”

He smirked, enjoying that he had clearly ruffled his sexy rival. “How about your ghouls? You employ ghouls to run your gambling operation because everyone knows of their aptitude with money.”

Caroline scoffed, her blue eyes glinting. “That’s racist and ridiculous — it’s like assuming all vampires can fight. Like you’re turned into a vampire and suddenly you’re magically imbued with martial arts skills.” She took a calming breath as she continued, “I am willing to put aside our differences and use my resources and extensive alliances to help your family. I can be a valuable friend, Klaus. For example, if it turns out that the ghouls have taken Kol for his side action at Fang Fights, I can talk them down. I have the right leverage and you know it.”

Klaus shook his head dismissively. “Your delusions of grandeur are becoming tedious, love.”

Caroline sighed loudly, shrugging her shoulders. “Very well. You can’t say I didn’t try.” She allowed her bright blue gaze to wander down the length of Klaus’ muscular body. “I’d hate for this trip to be a complete waste of my time. Care for another warm up,” she asked, teasingly referencing his cheesy pick-up line during their first encounter.

He was the most powerful being on the planet with centuries to hone his control. He would not succumb to her feminine wiles. He wasn’t remotely interested in reacquainting himself with the marvelous taste of those plump pink lips. Her obvious interest did not make him uncomfortably warm. Before he could begin mentally listing the ways in which he was not attracted to Caroline, he impulsively grabbed her bare shoulders, yanking her to his body and planting a punishing kiss upon those pouty lips.

She languidly moved against him, rubbing her lovely curves against his hard body. She snaked her tongue into his mouth, stroking and sliding with a determination that was electrifying.

Klaus grabbed the short hem of her dress, roughly pulling it up to her waist and groaning when he realized she was completely bare. “Naughty girl, paying a visit without your knickers,” he playfully admonished, cupping her moist mound while breathing in her intoxicating scent of honey and vanilla mixed with desire. He easily slid a finger into her slick channel, slowly stroking her.

She reached down to spread her folds for him, rocking her hips into his hand as he added another finger.

He broke their kiss to watch her clever fingers tease her opening, licking his lips as he noticed how her desire dripped into his hand. He let out a helpless grunt when he felt her start to clench around his digits, increasing his strokes.

Bucking wildly against both of their hands, she called out his name as she shuddered, her walls squeezing him tightly.

As Caroline lazily licked the column of his throat, she nipped playfully at his skin, noting with pleasure how he twitched under her ministrations. Her husky voice bathed him in a lusty fog, making him impossibly hard. “Are you sure you don’t need my help finding Kol?”

His gray eyes appraised her with a steely glint. “Of course not. I am quite capable of handling it myself.”
With a sly smile, she traced the edges of his straining bulge and cooed, “How unfortunate. Color me disappointed.” She pushed away from him suddenly, smoothing down her rumpled dress and opening the door.

“Sweetheart,” Klaus groaned, unable to stop the whine that entered his voice as he looked helplessly down at his aching, clothed cock.

Caroline giggled at his distress. “Enjoy handling things yourself, Klaus.” With a saucy toss of her gleaming blonde curls, she strutted out the door.

After taking some much-needed private time, the disgruntled hybrid continued to ineffectively place threatening calls to his contacts, aggravated that the blonde minx had wrecked him so thoroughly that he couldn’t properly concentrate on finding Kol.

Finally, Elijah returned with something useful. “Niklaus, one of our witches discovered that Kol has been kidnapped by the ghouls.” He rubbed the bridge of his nose in aggravation. “It seems that Miss Forbes was correct that his side betting has angered that faction.”

Without another word, the Originals flashed out of the office and flung open the front door, ready to race to Caroline’s Fang Fights to rescue Kol. Much to their surprise, they found their younger brother bound and gagged on their doorstep with a silly pink bow on top of his head.

A note was pinned to his wrinkled shirt that read, “You’re welcome. P.S. Let me know if you ever get tired of handling things yourself.”
Part 2 — A Simple Kind of Man

Chapter Summary

This chapter is a continuation of Chapter 5 in this series in which Caroline is an archaeologist who has discovered that Klaus, the simple farmer who volunteered at her dig site in Norway, is the furthest thing from simple. Now that she knows the truth, what’s her next move?

Chapter Notes

This started out as a short story, but it evolved into a multi-chap work by the same name that you can read on here as well.

“Heroes go the way to Hel,
And heaven is rent in twain.”

— The Prose Edda

The things I do for a decent date, Caroline thought, shaking her head as she clutched the circular silver object in her hand and continued wading in the frigid waters of Lake Válað. She ran her thumb over the raised edges of the elaborately carved piece, the familiar design grounding her in this moment of uncertainty. And possible insanity. To distract herself from the numbing cold of the lake, she ran through her list of facts and factish-like observations she had made.

She was a somewhat famous archaeologist who specialized in Norse settlements. She had been in Norway for a month, excavating the tomb of a Viking warrior, an extraordinary find not only because of the unusual location of the tomb carved into a mountainside, but also the manner in which he had been buried that could potentially challenge much of academia’s understanding of Viking culture. Those were concrete facts that her scientific, overly analytical mind could take comfort in knowing.

Her blue eyes narrowed as she moved on to the less-substantiated aspects of her situation. A local farmer, Klaus, had appeared the day her team began its excavations, a charming, devilishly handsome stranger whose knowledge of Norse settlements appeared to rival her own at times, Caroline had grudgingly admitted to herself on more than one occasion. She had allowed him to stay, grateful to the lone local volunteer as his stories about the region had been fascinating and added to her understanding of the culture and its people.

They spent every day together, sifting through clay, brushing away the ravages of time upon the priceless artifacts they discovered. She learned about his family, whom he had lost long ago in
military combat, something he himself had embraced before he realized that a simple, farmer’s life was his heart’s desire. She memorized the way his lips and tongue curved around the words as he spoke English, finding it alarmingly sensual as his accent left her uncomfortably warm. His adorable dimples would flash whenever he seemed embarrassed. The soft fire in his beautiful blue eyes when he looked at her. The way his kisses left her breathless. These were things she knew.

But what if she was wrong?

Caroline’s world ended the moment she opened the hidden room in the Viking warrior’s tomb. She just didn’t realize it at the time. She had eagerly rushed inside, her curious eyes taking in the stunning sights of elaborately decorated weaponry and other beautifully preserved artifacts that she couldn’t wait to touch and catalog and share with the rest of the world. When she saw the skeleton laid out in the most unusual manner upon a ceremonial stone bier and wearing a bronze funeral mask, she was awestruck. She recognized the importance of this find and how it could monumentally alter academia’s perceptions of Nose settlements.

It all came crashing down when she caught a glimpse of the artist’s skillful rendering of the Viking warrior’s face carved into the elaborate death mask. Every curve of his striking features had been captures in exquisite, heartbreaking detail. She had stubbornly refused to believe what this meant and had looked for Klaus, desperately hoping to see him at the doorway where she left him, gazing at her once more. The emptiness that had greeted her hurt worse than any heartbreak she had endured. She took the remnants of the all-to-familiar silver amulet and had raced out of the tomb, anxious to interact with another person, hoping they could ease her fears and to prove that she wasn’t crazy.

When she had asked her student intern, Jeremy, about Klaus, the confusion on his face as he explained that he had never heard of Klaus and that there had been no local volunteers since the dig began, had left her cold and shaking with questions she was terrified to ask. Was he ever real? Did she imagine every look, every touch, every perfect moment? The local legends he had told her and the wisdom he shared was not knowledge that she had possessed before meeting him. That was the truth she had clung to as she raced to the lake that had been their haven.

Which is why she found herself neck-deep in murky water that chilled her to the bone, clutching a silver amulet and hoping for a miracle. She was a woman of science, a reasonable woman caught in an unreasonable situation. Klaus had told her that the lore claimed that Lake Válað, whose name meant “destiny” in Old Norse, had been formed by the goddess Hel’s tears over her lost love, Fenrir. Possessing the gift of foresight, Viking warriors would drink deeply from the lake in hopes that the goddess would grant them visions of how to defeat their enemies.

Caroline recalled how Klaus’ velvet tone had faltered when he spoke of the myth that the lake was actually a gateway to the underworld that the living could take if they possessed an object that belonged to a deceased loved one. Supposedly if they bravely faced Hel she may be convinced to release the departed soul so that they would live once more.

I have lost my damn mind, Caroline thought as she fought another intense shiver, hugging her body as she endured the cold water. She considered herself to be an educated, logical woman, and while she immersed herself in Norse legends, she never once paused to consider if any of it could be real. Because it was ridiculous to think that it could be. Except now she was nearly fully submerged in a bitingly cold lake in Norway clutching a silver amulet that belonged to a Viking warrior who may possibly have returned from the dead as a ghost to fall in love with her and hinted at how she might be able to bring him back from the land of the dead. Boys were so much trouble.

Sighing loudly, she yanked the metal object out of the water, holding it up in the sunlight and
rubbing the scored edge with a finger to see if she could see any writing that might indicate what she should do next. Klaus hadn’t spoken of any incantation to mutter or specific place to stand when he told her the legend. His vague instructions to wade into the lake holding an object from a loved one didn’t seem to be activating any mystical portal to the Viking underworld. She was determined not to give up though — she needed to prove to herself that he had been real. That what they had was real.

Deciding that she should explore the tomb further to see if there were any references to the lake or the goddess Hel, she started slowly walking toward the shoreline with a heavy heart. She was a scientist, and while this experiment had been a failure, with additional research, surely she could figure it out. Before she could take another step, she felt a curious pulling sensation from deep within, as though the water had sunk into her bones and was calling her home. Suddenly, she was yanked into the center of the lake by a powerful invisible force, and as the cold water rushed over her terrified face, she struggled in vain to reach the surface once more.

A vortex opened below her and she was pushed forcefully through the opening until she plummeted to an inexplicable stretch of dry land. Coughing and sputtering, the lungful of lake water she swallowed burned her throat. As she remained on her hands and knees trying to catch her breath, she happened to gaze up and was shocked to see Lake Válað far above her head, its mysterious dark waters smooth as glass once more. She was in a cavern far below the lake; that much she could ascertain. It worked. She didn’t fully understand the science behind it, but she pushed her rational mind to quickly grasp the concept that she would need to skillfully navigate the delicate line between what she knew and what she felt. It was the only way she could save herself and possibly Klaus as well.

Caroline shakily rose to her feet, glad that she had left on her canvas sneakers even though they had weighed her down in the lake. She noticed that the ground was littered with jagged rocks and disturbing bits of a hard, white substance that she was fairly certain was human bone. She took a hesitant step, the water squelching in her shoes as she moved. She winced at the noise she was making — this seemed like the kind of place where it would be beneficial to make as little noise as possible. She pushed back her wet hair, the blonde strands wanting to stick to her cheeks and neck as she looked more closely at her surroundings.

There was a slight chill to the air, similar to the Norwegian countryside she had lived in this past month, but whereas the Haukeli mountains and its valley below held a simplistic beauty of stunning jewel tones only found in nature, what she gazed upon now was desolate, colorless and the air itself seemed to hold its breath in dread. Okay, she thought, this is still not the worst date I’ve ever been on.

She tried to recall everything she knew about the Norse underworld. Texts agreed that there were three primary places where the dead were sent: Valhöll, Old Norse for “the hall of the fallen”, Fólkvangrand, which meant “the field of warriors”, and Helheimr, or “the home of the goddess Hel”. She had no way of knowing which part of the underworld she had been sent to, but assumed that if the legend Klaus had told her was accurate, she was likely to find the goddess Hel sooner or later. Not that I have any idea what to do once I meet her, she thought warily. Grad school should really do a better job of preparing you for these typical real-life career situations.

Before she could take another uncertain step, the ground trembled, causing the scattered bone shards to dance at her feet. Suddenly, an enormous iron gate emerged from the earth, the heavy piers on either side had been carved with identical images of Jormundgandr, the serpentine descendant of the god Loki, and the goddess Hel’s half-brother. She craned her neck to see the top of the gate, the historian in her wanting to memorize every detail possible. Caroline was alarmed to see the mass of writhing black snakes entwined throughout the ironwork. She kept her distance as
she recalled that the lore said these snakes were not only venomous, but also that their poison fell like acid upon the earth.

Caroline was trying to recall how the legends revealed one could gain entrance when without warning, the massive double gate opened wide in an absurdly welcoming gesture. She carefully stepped forward, her sodden sneakers still squeaking. She could hear a sinister cackling that made her blood freeze despite the furious pounding of her heart.

*What a tremendous amount of trouble for a pair of dimples*, she thought as she finished crossing the threshold, tightly clutching Klaus’ silver amulet.
Chapter Summary

This chapter is a continuation of Chapters 5 and 7 in this series in which Caroline is an archaeologist who has discovered that Klaus is… complicated. Now, she’s attempting to outwit an ancient Norse goddess. Seems like a lot of trouble for a date…

Chapter Notes

This started out as a short story, but it evolved into a multi-chap work by the same name that you can read on here as well.

" ’Tis time to tell, on turf as I lie, felled by the sword, what fate was ours: unlike our lot in life hath been, to Hel fare I while whole thou livest.”

— Hildibrand’s Death Song

Nothing. That was what greeted Caroline as she crossed the threshold of the massive iron gate. She looked around frantically, searching for the owner of the sinister cackling she had heard on the other side of the gate. The hissing of the venomous black snakes dangling from the metal spokes heightened her apprehension.

A cold caress against her cheek startled her, and the invisible hand insistently trailed its fingers through her tangled wet tresses, nearly petting her. She whirled around and gave an inarticulate yelp of surprise at the creature before her.

A fearsome study in opposites greeted Caroline. The unearthly being’s appearance was neatly split in two halves: a captivating blonde woman of ethereal beauty versus a withered demon with burning eyes. The creature radiated power as it twisted its lips into a wicked smile. “Caroline Forbes, have you journeyed here to swear an oath to me?”

Caroline inhaled sharply, trying to get her bearings. She felt the weight of Klaus’ amulet in her sweaty palm and she took comfort from it. She summoned what paltry knowledge she possessed regarding the goddess Hel. Unfortunately, Norse mythology had little to say about the daughter of Loki who ruled the underworld and was appointed guardian of the graves. She bowed her head slightly and answered, “No, goddess Hel, I will not swear an oath.” She had read stories about oath-swearing to the gods. Nothing good ever came from it — the gods tended to be malicious tricksters and could harbor grudges.

The goddess’ grin was alarming. “No? Someone has taught you well, child.” Her demonic half pointed a sharp claw at Caroline’s sweaty fist that held Klaus’ token. “You seek to secure my
blessing. To convince me to relinquish my hold on one of the departed.”

She held her head high as her blue eyes registered their irritation at Hel’s mocking tone. “Yes. I claim Klaus as mine.”

“How can you be so sure, sweet one,” the powerful creature silkily asked. “After all, weren’t you sure about Matt all those years ago?” At Caroline’s stunned expression, Hel’s eyes glittered in triumph. “You were quite enamored with him when you were barely a slip of a girl, weren’t you? He was your mentor and you allowed yourself to be carried away by the thrill of being far away from home and capturing the interest of such a distinguished scholar.”

Caroline closed her eyes in embarrassment as she was overwhelmed by the onslaught of unwelcome memories from her past.

During her freshman year in college, she had taken several of Matt’s classes and found herself drawn to the charming young professor who was considered a giant in his field despite the fact that he was barely 30. She had volunteered for every extra credit project he offered his students in the hopes that she could learn more from him and even tried to model her course selection so that it would help her mirror his career path one day. He was her idol and she painstakingly read every book he’d written and attended every lecture he gave, desperate to soak up all the knowledge she could so that she too could excel in her field.

Then the summer before her sophomore year, Matt recommended her for an internship overseas on a dig he was heading. She could hardly believe her good fortune — two whole months of working side by side with her mentor; it was a dream come true. She had been self-aware enough to realize that she had developed an inconvenient crush on Matt, and was horrified that he might suspect. She went out of her way to keep their interactions professional so that he would respect her as a student and perhaps view her as a future colleague one day.

However, to her amazement, Matt’s trademark easy-going manner turned into something else entirely as they spent every day together, and she found herself questioning whether her feelings were truly one-sided. Soon, Matt approached her, confessing that he had tried to ignore his feelings but that she was far too pretty and smart to ignore and he had to take the chance or else they might miss out on something spectacular.

Caroline ignored her instincts and had foolishly allowed herself to become swept away by Matt’s charm and lovely words. After an amazing summer together, she was coldly cast aside by Matt when they were packing up their equipment at the dig site and he gave her an eloquent, yet insulting speech that was painfully obvious that he had given it many times before. She had been a pleasant distraction and nothing more.

“Poor child, what a painful memory,” the goddess slyly remarked. “So eager to try your pitiful luck again?”

Caroline’s blue eyes flashed as her anger at the goddess’ mocking tone temporarily pulled her from her fright at being in the presence of such a dangerous being. “Seriously? I didn’t get sucked all the way down here for passive-aggressive mom judgement. I already have a terrifying mother, thanks.” At Hel’s comically raised eyebrow, Caroline shrugged and added, “What? Forbes women are
scary."

Hel surged forward, her eyes set aflame at Caroline’s impertinent tone. She grasped Caroline’s delicate chin in her demon claws and hissed, “How do you know Klaus is different? What makes him worthy of your affections?”

Caroline ignored the frantic beating of her heart as she gazed fearfully at the terrifying goddess. She swallowed painfully, trying not to move and cause the sharp claws to dig further into her flesh. “Because he’s the only one who ever told me I was worth something.” She recalled last night at the lake when Klaus had confessed his feelings. *Forgive my boldness, but I never thought I’d find one such as you, and I cannot bear the thought of you believing yourself unworthy of devotion. He had been so earnest and steadfast; something no one had ever given her before, and she was determined not to let her chance at happiness pass her by. She squared her shoulders and steadily met Hel’s fiery gaze. “He believed that I was worthy. And I intend to prove him right. Because he’s worthy too.”

The immortal seemed taken aback by Caroline’s confession, and her death grip lessoned to that of an unsettling caress. “What a curious creature you are, little girl.” She nodded to herself as she released her hold on Caroline, the long golden curls of her human half sprang to life, swirling around her waist. “Let us begin,” the finality of her tone set off warning bells for Caroline who looked at her in surprise.


“The judgement of Klaus of course,” Hel said with an imperious air. “Well, your judgement of Klaus. You, dear child, are the one who will decide if he is deserving of a second life in your world,” she continued in a matter-of-fact tone.

Caroline’s thoughts raced as she contemplated the goddess’ words. She crossed her arms in front of her and inquired carefully, “Why do this? Why give any soul a second chance? You’re the ruler of the underworld and guardian of the graves. You’re obscenely powerful. You’re like a tenured professor with unlimited grant funding.”

A small smile toyed at the edges of Hel’s lips. “Some souls are born with luck; others must wait for divine intervention,” she replied enigmatically. She raised a desiccated foot, its scaly appearance and prominent black veins a sharp contrast to the other half of her body where a young woman’s bare foot wiggled its toes as though impishly showing off the surprising pink nail polish. With a thundering crash that rattled the barren ground to the horizon and back, a fissure cut a jagged swath before them.

Caroline watched in disbelief as a pale, muscular arm clawed out of the open earth, pulling with it a familiar head of messy dark blonde curls. She ran toward him, laughing hysterically through her tears as she helped to pull him up to stand beside her. “Klaus,” she breathlessly gasped, hugging him to her in a desperate attempt to prove he was really there with her in that horrible place.

He cradled the back of her head, tangling his fingers in her soggy blonde strands as he tenderly said, “Sweetheart, I didn’t allow myself to hope…”

The rest of his impassioned speech was brutally cut short with a flick of Hel’s wrist. “Enough. You’re here to judge him, not be swayed by his pretty words, child.” Klaus glared at the goddess, but was rendered speechless by her power. With a jerk of her chin, Klaus was forced against the iron gate where the black snakes easily bound him in place.

“No,” Caroline called out, gesturing wildly at the venom that dripped from the writhing snakes’
fangs onto Klaus’ pale skin. “You’re hurting him!”

Hel declared in an oddly wistful tone, “He’s already dead. There are more lasting ways to inflict pain on a lost soul.”

His icy stare chilled Caroline, and she found herself wondering what horrors he had endured all these years in the underworld. She was determined to save him. Squaring her shoulders, she tried to keep her voice steady as she faced the demon before her. “You said you wanted me to judge him. Let’s get started.”

The goddess’ delighted grin was sickening to behold. “How lovely. What I offer you now is a gift, Caroline. The opportunity to get to know who Klaus truly is. You’ve known him for such a brief interval. I invite you to experience a defining moment in Klaus’ life. To see firsthand the choices he made that shaped who he became.”

Caroline couldn’t help but glance over her shoulder at Klaus. He was struggling against his supernatural bonds, but it was useless. The snakes continued to taunt them both with their demented hissing. *Was he trying to stop her from going through with her quest to rescue him? What had he done that made him think he was unworthy? Did she even have the right to pry into his secrets?*

Her thoughts were racing as she considered Hel’s words. It was in her nature to question the world around her. She wouldn’t be satisfied until she knew the truth of the man she had grown to care for in such a brief amount of time. She hated that circumstances had forced her to make this choice, but she didn’t see another way to save him. She just hoped that Klaus would understand. “Fine,” she huffed, “What do I have to do?”

Hel produced a goblet fashioned out of copper and with a simple twirl of the fingers from her human hand, water from Lake Válað, high overhead, came oozing down into the cup, as though it were a thick, gelatinous matter rather than frigid water. She thrust the goblet into Caroline’s hands and commanded, “Drink of this and you’ll see a vision of the man Klaus was.”

Hesitantly, Caroline felt the unnaturally warm metal under her trembling fingers. She ventured another look at Klaus and was devastated to see the sorrow etched across his face. He clearly knew exactly what vision Hel was about to show her and was already certain she would refuse him. *What could frighten him like this?* She tried to give him an encouraging smile, but instead, her face felt frozen and she couldn’t find the strength to comfort him in this terrible, broken place.

Caroline contemplated the churning, dark mass in her hands. “I’m suddenly having flashbacks to the trashcan punch at Zeta parties,” she muttered. “I learned my lesson the hard way and will not be eating the fruit,” she told the goddess defiantly as she gulped down the disgusting liquid in one harsh swallow.
Chapter 9 - Part 3: Sly of the Tiger

Chapter Summary

This chapter is a continuation of Caroline and Klaus battling each other with their shady business empires (see Chapters 2 and 6.)

Chapter Notes

Warning: Smutty fun!

“We are not interested in the possibilities of defeat; they do not exist.”

— Queen Victoria

“You unbelievably shady, business-stealing, smug asshat!” Caroline’s indignant screeches echoed down the hall, interrupting Klaus’ board meeting before she reached the closed doors of the conference room. She threw open the double doors, the forcefulness of her entrance causing the heavy maple panels to bounce off of the adjoining walls, punching holes in the sheetrock.

Klaus quickly schooled his features into his signature smirk, trying not to react to the stunning vision before him. She was a whirling dervish of blonde curls and venom. Oh for fuck’s sake, was that gray leather vest absolutely necessary? She had casually knotted it at the side, and he was absolutely not dwelling on the fact that one good tug would send her delicious breasts tumbling out to say hello. He shoved his hands in his pockets, hoping no one would notice how they had instinctively curved as though fondling invisible breasts. “Ah, Caroline, you seem vexed, love. How can I be of service?”

“As if you don’t know damn well why I’m vexed, you dimpled weasel,” she snarled, slamming her manicured palms onto the smoky glass of the conference table, the mirrored surface shuddering underneath her dark red nails.

Uncomfortable throat clearing reminded the pair that they had an audience. “Niklaus,” began Elijah in a voice laced with disapproval, “we would find it amenable that whatever misdeeds you insist upon perpetrating be handled outside of regular business hours.”

Kol gleefully elbowed the unimpressed Original in the side of his impeccably tailored Armani. “Nonsense, brother! You know how much Nik enjoys perpetrating with Miss Deeds here whenever she’s amenable.” He took in the scowl on Klaus’ face and grinned, adding in a voice dripping with faux innocence, “What was it you called her again? The ‘saucy kickboxing minx equipped with brains and brawn in equal measure to kick your ass in and out of the boardroom’, was it?”
Face flushing in embarrassment, Klaus growled out, “Sod off,” while he pretended not to notice how Caroline’s temporary ire had cooled somewhat to surprised amusement when she registered Kol’s words. *Bollocks.* The last thing he needed was his sworn enemy finding out he may have talked about her once. Or twice. But definitely no more than three or four times. A day. *And dreamed about her almost constantly since their passionate interlude when she came storming into his home to offer to rescue his idiot baby brother.* Which was completely wrong. Because they were enemies. And he had an empire to run. Well, an empire he could barely keep out of her very grabby hands.

“Is that right, Klaus,” she asked with a cheeky smile, crossing her arms in front of her and gazing up at him through dark lashes.

“Oh yes, darling. Bit of hero worship if you ask me, ever since you helped me out of that spot of bad luck,” Kol enthusiastically explained. He tipped a saucy wink at her and Klaus willed himself not to react with the absurd jealousy he felt. “You’re more of a ghoul-whispering do-gooder willing to hypnotize dodgy loan sharks for a bloke down on his luck,” he added with a tone of sincerity that was completely out of character for the jovial Original.

“And don’t you forget it,” Caroline responded with a steel edge to her voice. She leaned forward slightly, her blue eyes sparking with a hint of anger as she stared down at Kol, “I saved your ass that day, baby Original. My ghouls were *moments* away from slathering hot sauce on one of your drumsticks and chowing down. But I stepped in and vouched for you. Don’t *ever* let me catch you stealing from me and mine again or next time I won’t be so gracious.”

Kol managed to keep the impish grin from sliding off of his face while Caroline threatened him. “Speaking of your ghouls, darling, why on earth do they smell like that?”

Confusion colored Klaus’ voice as he answered in exasperation, “Ghouls are hideous creatures that stink like death probably because they eat dead flesh. Everyone knows that.”

“Yeah, *normal* ghouls do, but Caroline’s ghouls all smell like vanilla and cinnamon. Bloody hell, when they kidnapped me, at first I thought the Keebler Elves were on a meth bender.”

All three men stared incredulously at Caroline who shrugged. “What? Ghouls are supernaturally gifted to make as much money as they want, so I had to figure out an alternative payment system they’d agree to. And Bonnie makes the best cinnamon-cardamom snickerdoodles this side of the Mississippi.”

“As fascinating as this detour has been, Miss Forbes, you have interrupted an important—” Elijah’s pompous speech was cut off by Caroline’s ferocious snarl. Later, he would deny that the tiniest little ‘Eeep’ noise had escaped his lips in the face of her demonic blonde fury.

“I came down here to tell your bastard brother that I know what he did and he’s not going to get away with it!” She whirled around to scowl at Klaus, who was doing his best not to look as though his mind had wandered while she was speaking about paying her ghoul minions in snickerdoodles. He absolutely had not imagined whether she helped Bonnie in the bakery wearing a pink and white ruffled apron. *And oh, look at that, there was the slightest dusting of sugar upon her nose with the three merry little freckles on the left side. Perhaps he could lean over and lick off that tiny bit right there…*  

Klaus realized the room had grown uncomfortably quiet and his gray eyes widened in alarm as he noticed he was leaning a bit too closely to the left side of Caroline’s face while she was yelling at him. On the plus side, considering her wary and somewhat alarmed gaze, she didn’t appear to realize that he had been daydreaming about licking phantom sugar off of her perfect nose. *Perfect.*
Just bloody perfect. Adopting his most condescending tone, he said, “Well, sweetheart, I’m assuming the reason behind this impromptu visit isn’t because of the new stringent health codes the city mysteriously began enforcing on all bakeries.”

“No,” she scoffed. “Although I’m meeting with the mayor next week to discuss my counterproposal to your transparent, bullshit codes. Or did you forget that he and I have a weekly martini power lunch?” She rolled her eyes and growled, “I’m talking about the fact that you had the old port inspector fired and installed someone new! One who is suspiciously loyal to the Mikaelsons to the point that all of your shipments seem to easily glide through customs while my clients’ merchandise keeps getting shoved to the back of the line!”

Klaus favored her with his signature smirk, relishing in the smallest victory he could gain over his fiery blonde. “I’m amazed you heard the news, love. The official announcement won’t be made for another few weeks.”

“Please. The second you promoted Lucien, that pathetic vampire was tripping over his feet to race to my ringside and brag all about his new ‘powerful’ position to Aurora.” She shook her head, sighing. “Dumbass thought his tiny bit of ‘authority’ was his ticket to getting my fighter all hot and bothered.” She snorted derisively, “It was like watching a bunny flirt with a rattlesnake.”

“I can assure you, Miss Forbes, that all of the proper legal channels were followed with regards to Lucien’s appointment to port inspector,” Elijah said dismissively, glaring at Kol when he snickered obnoxiously.

Caroline favored the oldest Original with a malicious grin. She answered sweetly, “In that case, I can assure you that your construction foreman followed all of the proper legal channels when he brought your architect’s plans to the attention of city hall and revealed that you decided to cut corners on the new Vieux Carré townhouses by making the balconies eight feet and 11 inches above the sidewalks instead of the city code-enforced nine feet.” She giggled at the rapid eye-twitch the Original was suddenly sporting. “Well, actually he’s my construction foreman, but no need to thank me for generously letting you borrow him.”

“Bloody hell,” Elijah exclaimed, alarming them all with his outburst. He rose to his feet in a huff, frowning at Caroline. “Well met, Miss Forbes. If you’ll excuse me, it seems I have business to attend to downtown.” A smug smile tugged at the corners of his mouth as he added, “You may have won this round, but don’t be so sure of your victory just yet.” He nodded in Kol’s direction and said firmly, “You shall accompany me, brother. I find that I am in need of your shameless womanizing ways if we are to make headway with the permit clerk. As I recall, young April seemed quite smitten with you.”

Elijah practically dragged a protesting Kol out of the boardroom, whose whining echoed down the hallway, “Come on, Elijah! I’ll admit April is a tasty little thing, but I can’t be expected to flirt with every dull bird that represents an obstacle to your business ventures!”

Caroline gave a soft chuckle as she closed the heavy doors. “Your brothers are in for a surprise.”

“How so,” Klaus asked curiously, trying to ignore how warm it suddenly was in his conference room now that they were alone.

“April is the mayor’s goddaughter,” she gleefully explained.

“Bollocks,” he groaned rubbing the side of his face with his hand.

With a wry smile, she walked toward the large glass table and said, “At least when Kol gets
kidnapped you’ll have a good lead. You may not even need my help this time.”

He shook his head in irritation. “I didn’t need your help last time. Elijah and I had it under control.” He couldn’t seem to wrench his gaze away from the blonde temptress who surprised him by suddenly climbing onto the smoky glass top. “What are you doing?”

She seductively crawled on all fours to the center of the table, rising to her knees to address him properly. “I came here to deliver my complaint; now I wish to conclude our business properly.” Her voice grew husky as she slid her hands up her shapely thighs encased in tight leggings and paused when she reached the sash at the side of her vest, pulling on it experimentally with a devilish gleam in her eyes.

He swallowed harshly, his eyes darkening with lust as they followed her fingers toying with the knot that seemed to be the only barrier between him and her magnificent breasts. No. He was not doing this again. She was his nemesis and he would not pant after her like an inexperienced schoolboy. Her breasts could not possibly be as spectacular as he recalled.

One swift yank on the sash and the butter-soft leather parted, revealing ivory globes that carried just the barest hint of color, like a peach touched by an early frost. Damn it. He sped onto the table while simultaneously removing his suit jacket in his haste to get to her. She grabbed his navy pinstriped tie and pulled his head to hers for a fierce kiss that contained all of her glorious, passionate fury.

He clutched at her back, wadding the leather in a ball with his fists until he finally pulled her arms free of the vest. He shivered as he felt the hard points of her nipples poking through his dress shirt, and he enjoyed the satisfied little hum she made as she ground her nipples against his muscular chest.

She fumbled with his belt, impatiently ripping it from his belt loops and pulling a low growl from him in response. She eagerly opened his dark trousers, palming his ass with both hands as he flexed his cheeks against the sweet sting of her sharp red nails.

His stormy gray eyes bled yellow as his wolf rose to the surface. “I want your fire, love. Fill me with your fury as I take you with mine,” he commanded. He pushed her back onto the cool glass, unzipping her stiletto boots and peeling off the houndstooth-patterned leggings.

She propped one slim calf onto his shoulder, panting as she demanded, “You know where to find it. Chase it with your tongue.”

“My pleasure,” he smirked, dipping down his curly head to feast upon her dripping center. He moaned against that first sugar-and-spice taste of her desire, flattening his tongue against her soaked flesh. He took long, languid licks as the muscles in her delectable thighs began to twitch. He wound her up by teasing her skin with his blunt teeth, delicately nibbling on her folds as he sucked them into his warm mouth.

Klaus was so caught up in his exploration that Caroline managed to catch him by surprise once more as she used her considerable vampire strength to flip them over so that his seductive blonde demon was suddenly straddling him. Her lovely face gazed down at him, a deliciously naughty smile pulling him under her spell. She reached down between them, grasping his slick tip with her index and thumbnails, pinching his sensitive flesh until it ached. He locked his strong jaw, stubbornly refusing to cry out in ecstasy and pain in equal measure.

Caroline’s sexy pout nearly broke him, but he held on, needing her to crave him as he craved her. The flexing of his sculpted abdominals caught her attention, and she sighed as she released his tip.
to fondle his defined ridges, worshipping them with her hands.

She rose above him just enough to snap her hips into his, easily burying his iron length into her welcoming center. He went to work with a rumbling growl, forcefully thrusting up as she ground down with heavenly precision.

They set a hard, driving pace that had them gasping for breath they didn’t need, drops of sweat sliding down their tense bodies. She spread her thighs wide, pressing down on her sweet little button just right to send her careening over the edge with a scream. Klaus couldn’t help but follow as her muscles clamped down, drawing his orgasm out of him until he was completely spent.

The pair lay fused together as their glistening bodies slowly cooled off. In a surprisingly gentle gesture, Caroline placed a soft butterfly kiss on the corner of his mouth before she rolled off of him to begin dressing.

As she was zipping up her tall boots, he lazily stretched on his conference table, sitting up on his side to admire her nubile, slightly rumpled form. “So I take it you’re no longer angry, love?”

She flashed him a wide smile, her sharp fangs dipping down to playfully bite on her plump lower lip. “Oh no, I’m still absolutely furious. But I’m a world-class multitasker.” A noise came from the fuchsia clutch Caroline had thrown to the side when she first made her grand entrance in the boardroom. Flipping her blonde curls behind her, she bent down to retrieve her phone from inside, the familiar notes of Muddy Waters’ “Mean Disposition” flooding the room. With one lacquered nail she swiped at the screen, a tiny hum of approval escaping her lips.

“Good news, sweetheart?”

She nodded while retying the front of her vest. “It looks like I found a workaround to my little problem at the port.”

Smirking, Klaus replied, “Do tell.”

Caroline grinned as she pushed open the conference doors. “I just bought the port.”
Chapter Summary

In this one-shot, Klaus and Caroline see something so disturbing they immediately feel compelled to investigate it further to find out how something so bizarre could be real. What they discover is definitely far too strange to be fiction…

Chapter Notes

Somewhat TVD canon-compliant with some well-known quotes thrown in for comedic effect. Established Klaroline takes place after graduation except Caroline was a clever girl who got the hell out of Mystic Falls and she and Klaus went to New Orleans to run their empire because of…reasons. No insulting baby plot or poorly hidden Australian accent to muddle good story structure or bully the Klaroline fandom.

Chapter 10: Think Outside the Pun

Author’s note: This is some of the silliest nonsense I’ve ever written. And yes, I’m taking into consideration the time I turn Elijah into a tiny wooden doll. And when I turned Matt into a sad goth Nine-Inch-Nails-spouting wannabe Klaus. And the bison poop. So.much.bison.poop. Good grief, Rituals and Romance is even more weird than I recall. :)

In this one-shot, Klaus and Caroline see something so disturbing they immediately feel compelled to investigate it further to find out how something so bizarre could be real. What they discover is definitely far too strange to be fiction…

Somewhat TVD canon-compliant with some well-known quotes thrown in for comedic effect. Established Klaroline takes place after graduation except Caroline was a clever girl who got the hell out of Mystic Falls and she and Klaus went to New Orleans to run their empire because of…reasons. No insulting baby plot or poorly hidden Australian accent to muddle good story structure or bully the Klaroline fandom.

Also, I started a new Klaroline multi-chap called Cursed Obsession. Would love to get your thoughts!
And thanks for all of your comments, follows and faves! I appreciate all of the attention you guys have been giving my work lately!

“You earn your reputation by the things you do every day.”

— Dave Thomas, Founder, Wendy’s

“I — I don’t understand,” Caroline said in a hushed whisper, as though raising her voice would cause it all to somehow be more real. Surely what she just witnessed was a trick of her exhausted mind; after all, she had been managing Klaus’ day-to-day schedules for months now in addition to her own expanding non-profit work around New Orleans. She glanced at Klaus who seemed to be choking on his rage, unable to emit more than low growling noises from deep in his chest.

“No way. No way does this happen and we not know about it. Your creepy hybrid minions are lurking everywhere like TMZ but with less bloodlust! Someone would have warned us,” Caroline continued, waving her arms dramatically in the air.

Finally, Klaus unclenched his fists where his claws had drawn blood. Through gritted teeth and black veins he seethed, “When I find the perpetrators of this…abomination I’ll…” He was chagrined that he could not properly articulate a justifiable punishment to the horrors he had just witnessed.

Caroline clicked the remote, using their DVR to access the commercial once more. It seemed to be an advertisement for a fast food chain in Baton Rouge, but it also was...something else entirely. In tense silence, she and Klaus subjected themselves to the nightmare once more.

The commercial opened to dramatic background music as drops of blood pooled until they formed a rose. A voice over of a teenage girl sorrowfully proclaimed, “Dear diary, I’m not a believer. People are born, they grow old and then they die. That’s the world we live in, but how can I deny what’s right in front of me? I have fallen under the spell of Diary of the Vampires. I cannot help it, for my hunger is too great, and this restaurant satisfies me like no other.”

A lovely brunette girl appeared in a fog-filled cemetery, looking longingly into the distance where a neon sign of giant fangs biting into a burger appeared. Caroline hurriedly looked at Klaus to check to see if he was witnessing the same bizarre scene and she could just make out that he was silently mouthing the words ‘Diary of the Vampires’ over and over as though befuddled by the phrase.

The over-the-top, telenovela-style music swelled as two men in leather jackets despite the summer heat approached the girl and she swooned helplessly. “I cannot possibly choose between the murderer who is clinically depressed with severe addiction and codependency issues or the sociopathic murderer with crippling mommy issues and perpetual crazy eyes. Both are charming and possess the appropriate ratio of attractiveness to hair gel, so it’s impossible to decide!”
Caroline blinked rapidly, trying to ascertain whether she was imagining the poofiness of the one boy’s ‘hero hair’ becoming more pronounced as the music grew bolder.

The two pretty boys turned to the camera, grinning with mouths impossibly full of fangs and lisped enthusiastically, “But what’s easy to decide is to head on over to Diary of the Vampires and try our new special, white oak taters! We broil stuffed sweet potato skins on white oak planks to seal in that just-staked goodness!” Klaus blanched at that, giving an involuntary shudder.

The girl happily kissed both boys on the cheek and added excitedly, “And don’t forget about our Thirsty Thursdays with two-for-one drink specials!” Arm in arm, the trio skipped off merrily to the restaurant’s glowing neon sign in the distance, and the fast food chain’s apparent theme song began:

Vampire fangs on a pretty face, white oak taters just scarf ‘em down
A hybrid on the prowl and spicy rye bread for you now, makes the world go ‘round
Ain’t nothing in the world like a ribeye wrap
Makes me fill my tummy and save me money

“Was that…Did they seriously just turn The Big Bopper’s ‘Chantilly Lace’ into a theme song for a restaurant,” Caroline asked incredulously.

“That’s the part that offends you, love,” Klaus asked hoarsely. “Not the part where they seem to be patterning their marketing strategy suspiciously similar to the insipid Doppelganger’s life?”

Caroline rolled her eyes at him. “It’s all just…ugh! I can’t even…and did you see the thing with that guy’s hair getting bigger?”

Klaus nodded, a disturbed look on his face. “I think it’s possible that poor lad’s hair was a clumsy metaphor for arousal.” He rubbed the back of his neck uncomfortably. “I’m not entirely sure I can look Stefan in the eye after this.”

“Yes, well, disturbing imagery aside, let’s get to work figuring out who to blame for this mess,” Caroline replied. Perking up slightly, she added, “At least we weren’t mentioned. It seems whoever’s behind this doesn’t know about us.

Of course, Caroline spoke too soon.

Days later, Klaus’ considerable connections yielded favorable results and he learned that Elena’s diary, with all of its tedious scribblings, had fallen into the hands of a marketing firm that decided to exploit what they read and turned it into a wildly successful (and wildly tacky) restaurant franchise. The chain had begun in the Midwest and had started making its way south. Curiosity got the better of Klaus and Caroline, and they found themselves driving to Baton Rouge to see the tasteless circus for themselves. At the very least, they figured it would provide enough fodder to
tease the Salvatores and Elena for decades.

*And then the smug pair found out that karma could be a bitch.*

The restaurant seemed to be a prefab nightmare that blended the Gilbert home in the front and expanded toward the back into the larger Salvatore mansion. Caroline even spied half-empty bourbon bottles scattered throughout and she couldn’t shake the feeling that one or both brooding Salvatores would pop out of the carefully manufactured shadows to whine about Elena. She and Klaus were seated at the bar near a replica of the Salvatores’ gaudy fireplace where every important event in their lives back then seemed to be required to transpire in front of.

Klaus surveyed the area, the smug grin on his face quickly dissipating when he spied several waiters wearing cheap wigs with bright blonde curls in tight spirals. In a choked voice, he murmured, “Bloody hell! I do not go about sporting an albino poodle on top of my skull!” At Caroline’s mirthful expression, he uncertainly started flattening down his hair.

“If it makes you feel any better, I spied some pompous Elijah wigs and several heads of hero hair,” Caroline said brightly, trying to be helpful. She rolled her eyes when she saw waitresses pass under the archway to the Gilbert living room, two wearing Katherine’s signature brunette curls and one wearing blonde waves that looked uncomfortably familiar.

A waiter approached them, wearing a dark Henley and an assortment of necklaces. Klaus pinched the bridge of his nose, trying to decide if this was worse than being served by one of the numerous blokes in tailored suits and perfectly coiffed wigs that were more reminiscent of an Elvis impersonator than his stuffy older brother.

The teenager scratched at his polyester wig of tight blonde curls and with a clumsy flourish, handed them both menus. He spoke with a garbled lisp around his too-large plastic fangs, “Welcome to Diary of the Vampires. Can I start you off with some bloody good Bonnie Alexanders?”

Caroline realized her mouth was open and quickly shut it with a snap. She sent the boy an overly bright smile and chirped, “We’ll need a minute to…um…decide. Thanks!”

Their waiter nodded and said, “Cool. Love your ‘Caroline’, by the way.” He raised an eyebrow at Klaus and said encouragingly, “Dude, maybe you should try Stefan next time? Or maybe Matt? Matt’s always a good choice for newbies.” He wandered off, blissfully unaware of how tightly Caroline was clinging to the enraged hybrid’s hands to keep him from going on a rampage in the middle of the restaurant.

“So let’s look at the menu, hmm,” she asked hurriedly, trying unsuccessfully to distract Klaus. Her blue eyes quickly scanned the menu and an involuntary giggle escaped her as she read aloud, “Doppelganger’s Delight — A cocktail made with equal parts rum and vodka because why should a girl have to choose?”

“How droll,” Klaus responded dryly. “Although I seem to be torn between ‘wandering wereburger with cheese’ or the ‘Silas-bury steak’.”

Her sarcastic response was drowned out by the loudspeaker announcing that the Stelena clog dancers would be performing during happy hour. The couple looked at each other in amazement, barely having time to digest that unsettling news when they overheard an eager patron exclaim, “Aww! I thought tonight was the Klaroline interpretive dancing! I heard the ‘lamp-through-the chest’ followed by obligatory love confession is incredibly powerful and moving!”
Klaus’ eyes nearly bulged out of their sockets at this, and he noticed Caroline emitted a huffing noise that seemed to be a cross between a snort of derision and uncomfortable throat clearing. He hoped that she wouldn’t find a reason to glance over her shoulder where a framed parchment of a familiar-looking figure and a horse was prominently displayed.

“Oh my god,” she said in a low whisper, pointing over his shoulder.

Feeling his stomach turn, he hazarded a peek and was accosted by an entire wall filled with handwritten quotations. You’re perfect. Which is so beyond annoying, I can’t even look at you. Let’s get you a drink. I’ll tell you all about being the bad guy. Good evening, Katerina. Thank you for having the good sense to be frightened. I don’t deserve you, but my brother does. God, I wish you don’t have to forget this. He’s your first love. I intend to be your last. However long it takes. They just went on and on, staring back at them cheekily. They both quickly snapped their heads away, desperately searching for something else to distract them.

And then another commercial came on the big screen over the bar. Dramatic music began playing like the previous commercial they watched, but this time, two blonde figures took center stage in the middle of what appeared to be a forest. Caroline’s horrified, urgent No!, was overshadowed by the epic scale of the music. Klaus’ eyebrows were raised so high they nearly met his hairline as he watched in utter disbelief.

Onscreen, the man knelt before the woman, hugging her to his body as he proclaimed in a Monty Python-esque accent, “Love, you’re beautiful, you’re strong, you’re full of light. I enjoy you. Love, your light has captured my darkness and set it aflame. Love, it’s like a fire-roasted sire-loin at Diary of the Vampires.”

The couple began to kiss passionately, and just as clothes began ripping for dramatic effect, the young woman pulled away and swooned, “Seriously, you’re an insanely complicated immortal creature but seriously we’re both immortal creatures. But seriously I’m incredibly deep and maybe we can be incredibly deep and complicated immortal creatures together.”

Caroline stared blankly at Klaus, mouthing ‘seriously’ to which Klaus grimly responded by uttering ‘love’ with whatever remained of his rapidly diminishing dignity. They watched as the couple resumed their sloppy kissing, inexplicably banging into far too many trees considering they were supposedly immortal creatures that one would assume were blessed with above-average athleticism.

The girl swoons and vows, “Seriously, being with you is almost as powerful as Diary of the Vampires’ new vervain veggie medley! Seriously, it will sear your taste buds with flavor!” With that final declaration, the commercial mercifully ended.

Klaus and Caroline sat in stunned silence while they mulled over what they witnessed. Before they could properly articulate their feelings beyond a simple, ‘Wow,’ they were accosted by a middle-aged woman wearing a sheriff’s uniform and a store manager name tag.

“There you are!” She critically looked both of them over, adding, “At least you showed up on your first day in the right uniforms. Let’s get you started with your Klaroline training. There’s an orientation video you’ll need to watch first.”

Caroline glanced over at Klaus and grinned. “Well, we certainly wouldn’t want to miss that!”
Chapter Summary

This AU is set in Ireland in the late 1800s. Klaus has yet to break his hybrid curse and is being pursued by Mikael. Klaus seeks sanctuary in an unlikely place where he stumbles upon a mystery and potentially meets someone whose cursed existence rivals his own.

“I am so intensely conscious of my misfortune and my misery is so overwhelming that I am powerless to resist it and am being turned into stone, devoid of all knowledge or feeling.”
— Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *Don Quixote*

*How did he find me so quickly,* Klaus frantically thought as he raced through the dark woods as silently as possible. The thick branches snagged on his clothes, tearing at the fabric and scratching at his skin, but he pushed his tired body on, knowing that if he stopped, he was as good as dead. Heart pounding furiously, he loathed the taste of his own fear. He had always been afraid. He had caught wind that Mikael and his followers had landed in Ireland weeks ago, but Dublin was far enough away that he had stayed hidden in Galway with Elijah and Rebekah, believing that Mikael would scour the east coast of the island and then move on, perhaps believing his children had fled to England once more.

He never dreamed that the vicious hunter would cut a bloody swath through the middle of the country, marching through to the west coast where the siblings had foolishly believed they had found a safe haven. He had already sent Elijah and Rebekah ahead on their swiftest horses, promising to meet them at the harbor in Galway at dawn. They planned to compel passage to America and hopefully escape Mikael.

The violent thunderstorm had fortunately washed out the main road, which meant that Mikael’s carriage was likely mired down in the muck or perhaps even washed away. Of course, he likely would just continue his chase on foot, but Klaus believed he had a considerable head start to find a place to hide out for a few hours. He halted as he came to a clearing in the woods, the clouds and heavy downpour obliterating any moonlight, but he was able to discern the outline of a rundown cathedral in a small cemetery.

He hesitated momentarily — while he had carefully honed his reputation for centuries as a bloodthirsty, cruel vampire, there were some lines that even he was hesitant to cross. If he sought sanctuary in the cathedral, its inhabitants may come to harm if Mikael believed they had thwarted his pursuit. Sighing, he realized that he was too exhausted to continue searching the countryside for another option. He carefully stepped out into the open, his long cloak flapping in the wind and smacking wetly against his soaked breeches. As he silently walked through the cemetery, he noticed it was filled with weathered markers, clearly victims of the potato famine decades ago that had decimated the population.

Soon he found himself standing under the carved stone archway of the cathedral. The artist within
him couldn’t help but admire the intricate Celtic designs that had been lovingly etched into the sandstone. He heard a curious scraping noise overhead, almost as though mossy stones were grating against one another. On high alert, he quickly stepped out from underneath the archway and studied the top of the tower.

Lightening flashed, giving him a momentary view of a large creature perched near the center, its hideous features twisted and demonic. He was instantly alarmed and felt the dark veins and sharp fangs emerge as his body perceived a threat. When the lightening flashed a second time, he registered that the terrifying monster was actually a statue. Bloody idiot. He shook his head, stepping back underneath the archway to push his dripping curls out of his face.

Just as he was getting ready to knock, the heavy oak door creaked open. A middle-aged man with a kind face greeted him, ushering him in despite the lateness of the hour. “Goodness, look at the state o’ ye,” he exclaimed in a concerned voice. He gestured to a worn bench and bid Klaus to sit down. He hurried down a small hallway and returned with a coarse woolen blanket that he handed to the drenched stranger.

Klaus kept steady eye contact with the man as he carefully mopped his soaked clothes. He didn’t trust the man’s intentions, and he was suspicious that a human would be so welcoming to a stranger in the middle of the night. For all he knew, the man could have been compelled by Mikael and the vindictive Original could be waiting to ambush him.

As though sensing Klaus’ dark thoughts, the man gave him a warm smile and reached out his hand to shake. “Name’s Matthew Donovan.” A sad note entered his voice as he added, “Or Matty as my sister used to call me.”

While Klaus believed the man was being genuine as he shook his hand heartily, he maintained an edge to his voice as he said, “I’ll keep my name if it’s all the same to you, Matthew.”

Matthew nodded wisely and said, “Not surprising, lad. Ye have the look o’ a man who’s always in the field when luck is on the road.”

Chuckling, Klaus said, “I hope I didn’t wake you…father,” he ventured tentatively as he noticed the dark colors of the man’s clothes and assumed he was a member of the clergy.

Shaking his head Matthew explained, “I’m just the caretaker. I can go wake the priest if ye in need o’ confession,” his helpful tone half-asked as he took in the mild anxiety that Klaus was projecting despite his attempts to remain calm.

“Nothing I could say will ever truly absolve me, I’m afraid,” Klaus said almost wistfully, a small smile upon his face.

The man clapped Klaus on the back companionably and said, “Then ye in need o’ rest. Follow me.” He led Klaus down the same hallway he had disappeared earlier, and opened another door to a small room with meager furnishings. Pointing to the narrow bed in one corner he said, “It’s not much, but maybe yer troubles will seem less so on the morrow.”

Klaus stepped into the room, immediately taken by a worn bit of parchment that was crudely framed on one wall. A young woman of extraordinary beauty stared at him from the charcoal sketch, leaving the vampire breathless. A curtain of long, curly hair framed her angelic face, and her eyes shone with a fiery determination that captivated him. “Who is that remarkable creature,” he asked in a tone filled with reverence.

Matthew’s green eyes filled with sadness as he said, “Caroline, my sister.” He stretched out a hand
and with trembling fingers, he touched the dusty wooden frame.

“What happened to her,” Klaus asked, needing to know the meaning behind the kind man’s obvious sorrow.

His eyes darkened with anger as he spat, “Alaric, a shipping merchant, came to our village in search of a wife. He spied Caroline at market and was enraptured by her beauty. But Caroline was fiercely independent and refused his crude advances when she realized he saw her as nothing more than a pretty trinket to collect.” He shook his head sadly. “He became enraged by her rejection and sought out a Cailleach, a Celtic witch, to curse Caroline. He swore that she had a heart o’ stone that the rest o’ the world would see.” He shook his head, adding woefully, “My sister was taken from me by an evil man.”

Struck by the man’s heartbreak, Klaus asked quietly, “There is nothing to be done then?”

“She is lost to me,” Matthew sighed heavily, turning his back to leave Klaus with his swirling emotions.

Klaus gazed at Caroline’s lovely visage, unable to tear his eyes away from her enigmatic smile. She was a creature so full of light and life that it was unthinkable that a petty, insignificant mortal man had taken her from this world. He vowed to find out more about this Alaric and seek revenge on behalf of the beautiful girl and her kind brother that had selflessly offered him sanctuary.

A furious pounding echoed throughout the cathedral, jarring Klaus from his musings and reminding him of his purpose here. Mikael had found him. Terrified, Klaus flashed from the room, finding Matthew had barricaded the heavy oak door with an iron bar. The human turned to him with a raised brow and commented sardonically, “I take it yer trouble has found us?”

Klaus was taken aback by the mortal man’s oddly calm demeanor. He had spent centuries as a powerful, immortal creature and even he was fearful of the dark presence outside. How was it possible that this human seemed unconcerned for his safety?

Matthew noted Klaus’ confusion and gave his shoulder a comforting pat. “Have no fear, lad. We are safe here. Evil cannot cross the threshold,” he swore.

Klaus shook his head, pitying the man for his misplaced faith. How could he begin to describe the evils he had committed over the centuries? Surely if such a barrier existed that prevented the wretched devils of this world from entering the cathedral, he himself would have been denied entry. He straightened his spine, refusing to cower inside the cathedral. Mikael would breach the door at any moment. Snarling through his fangs, and ignoring Matthew’s startled cry, he tossed away the iron bar and threw open the door, ready to face the man he once thought was his father. But who was always my enemy, he thought.

“Finally ready to face me, boy,” Mikael taunted him. Two burly vampires stood off to the side, part of the retinue of loyal followers that Mikael traveled with. They smugly faced down Klaus, clearly believing their leader would best him in battle.

Heart pounding, Klaus clenched his fists as he replied, “All these centuries you’ve chased me, seeking vengeance against the man who killed your wife. Tell me, Mikael, will my death change the fact that she was unfaithful? Will erasing me erase her lying heart?” His lips curled into a knowing smirk as he cruelly continued, “Or are you truly angry because I killed her before you had the chance?”

Mikael’s angry bellow echoed through the cemetery outside the cathedral as he lunged for Klaus.
The two men grappled angrily while Mikael’s men rushed forward, eager to help their leader. Klaus managed to knock Mikael to his knees with one well-placed punch, but then the other two vampires were upon him, surprising him with their strength. Clearly Mikael had witches on his side. Klaus struggled, growling at Mikael’s look of triumph. “Afraid to take me on by yourself, coward?”

Enraged, Mikael reached into his cloak and pulled out an intricately carved stake. Realizing it was made of white oak, Klaus struggled harder against the men, managing to knock one off of him. Before Mikael could use his weapon, a high-pitched screech startled the group. Mikael’s men let out terrified screams as they looked up at the night sky. They immediately flashed away, abandoning their leader to his fate.

Confused, Klaus searched for the cause of the vampires’ terror, only to be knocked to the side by Matthew, who had foolishly run to his aid. “Why didn’t ye listen to me, lad? I told ye we were safe inside,” he huffed, out of breath from running.

A pitiful wail tore the air, and it took Klaus a moment to realize that the pathetic noise came from the vampire he had feared for so long. What could possibly have terrified the mighty hunter so? Just as he stepped around Matthew to see what was happening, the cathedral’s enormous stained glass window shattered as Mikael’s body was hurled against it with such force, it nearly rendered the powerful vampire unconscious. Before Klaus could react, massive, razor-sharp claws dragged Mikael back out into the storm through the colorful glass shards.

Matthew let out a curse, yelling, “Blimey, what did I say last time? Protecting means not breaking the bleedin’ church yer supposed to be protecting!” He saw Klaus’ incredulous expression and said confidently, “I told ye we were safe.” He pointed through the heavy rain to the dark figure attacking Mikael and said confidently, “She’ll protect us.”

Klaus shook his head in disbelief as he watched the battle taking place in the violent storm. Lightening flashed jaggedly across the sky, momentarily illuminating the warring figures. He cocked his head to the side, gray eyes widening as he was struck by a ridiculous thought. Impossible.

The beast appeared to be a gargoyle, her hide utterly confounding as it was clearly made of stone yet somehow flexing and moving about with ease as it pummeled Mikael to and fro in the cathedral’s graveyard. Giant wings flapped in the brisk winds, shearing off bits of the gravestone markers they brushed against during the struggle. Curved talons gripped Mikael by his throat, effortlessly holding him aloft as he choked out the word, “Abomination.” The creature turned toward Matthew and regarded him with a regal silence, as though waiting for his judgement.

Matthew heaved a heavy sigh. Turning to Klaus he said, “We keep to ourselves and stay out o’ vampire affairs.” He shrugged and added, “O’ course, can’t help it if they bring troubles to our doorstep.” He grinned at Klaus’ shocked expression. “What say ye, lad? Shall we put an end to this mess?”

Klaus could barely formulate thoughts, much less words. The discovery of a mythical beast and the revelation that a simple caretaker knew of vampires had him flummoxed. Unfortunately, before he could move, Mikael surprised them all by throwing his weight against the great stone beast, the surprise attack briefly breaking its hold. Without hesitation, Mikael flashed away into the night, clearly terrified of what he had seen.

With a terrible screech, the gargoyle stomped her cloven hooves, clearly vexed that the prey escaped. She shifted her heavy wings in aggravation, snorting angrily. Unperturbed by the monster’s outrage, Matthew waved his hand carelessly and said, “Quit yer grousing!”
Curiosity got the better of Klaus as he warily watched the beast stride toward them. “Why did she allow me to cross the threshold? You know of vampires, so surely you know my evils could easily rival that of his.”

Matthew grew serious as he regarded the gargoyle who seemed to be gazing at the sky, a curious intelligence sitting behind those cold, piercing eyes. “Curses are tricky blighters. The evil that man put upon her may have turned her to stone, but not her heart. Never her heart. She always had a way of seeing through ye, and tonight, she saw someone in need.”

Gazing at her in awe, Klaus said in a strangled voice, “She saved me.” Before he could properly convey his gratitude, the creature arched her back, spreading her massive wings and leaping into the air, flying wide, lazy arcs around the cathedral before settling on her perch on top of the tower.

“Sunrise will be upon us before long,” Matthew explained when he spied Klaus’ questioning look.

Nodding in understanding, Klaus followed Matthew back into the cathedral where he helped the man pick up the pieces of the shattered window. By the time the men finished, the first rays of sunlight were peeking over the horizon.

Unable to help himself, Klaus walked outside to the front of the cathedral and craned his neck, searching the top of the tower. There sat the menacing gargoyle, a quiet power emanating from her now vacant expression as the sun turned her into a statue once more. An immense sadness gripped his heart, the likes of which he had never felt before.

The caretaker joined him, shaking his hand and wishing him well on his journey. “May the road rise up to meet ye, lad.”

Klaus’ eyes never left her, searching for the girl she once was inside the beast she had become. Making up his mind, he turned to Matthew and said, “I have this brother who is quite fond of witches...”
Chapter Summary

In this one-shot, Klaus and Caroline’s relationship is unconventional, to say the least. When a complication arises, Caroline will have to decide how much real she likes in her reality.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Delightful smut! Also, slight Camel shade (because I’ve been watching Drag Race and the delicious, feisty shadiness has seeped into my soul and I want to spread it around. :)

“One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them.”
— Aldous Huxley, Brave New World

“What unspeakable evil are you about to make speakable,” Caroline asked as she noticed Bonnie bent over a circuit board in their lab, soldering an errant wire back into place.

“Oh, you know me,” Bonnie said with a grin that lit up her green eyes, “Just tinkering.”

“That’s what has me worried,” Caroline muttered. Watching her friend with a critical eye she advised, “Make sure you’re applying enough heat. If you end up with a cold solder joint, the circuit might not work properly.”

Bonnie rolled her eyes, an annoying habit she’d picked up from being around Caroline. “Really, tell me more about the process that I taught you once upon a time in our advanced electrical engineering course.”

Caroline sighed contentedly as she stretched out on the green plaid blanket. She turned her head to the side to stare at the impossibly attractive, dimpled specimen lying beside her. His dirty blonde curls had been carelessly tousled by her fingers earlier and the devilish, knowing smirk he wore brought an instant blush to her cheeks.
“You seem deep in thought, love. Tell me, what’s flitting about that extraordinary brain of yours,” he whispered, a touch of awe coloring his delicious accent.

A lazy smile graced her lovely face and she replied, “I’m just thinking of how happy I am, in this moment, here with you, Klaus.”

His gray eyes widened in surprise, and he said huskily, “I don’t think I truly started living until I met you, Caroline.” He seemed to sense that his confession had overwhelmed her and he smoothly slid his hand around her waist, pulling her body closer to his. “Now, why don’t you show me more about this sky of yours, love,” he murmured against her blonde waves.

She turned her head to stare up at the dark blanket of stars. Squinting slightly, she quickly found the North Star. Pointing overhead, she explained, “That’s Polaris, the North Star.” Different civilizations used it to navigate for centuries.”

“My people called it lode-star, and we used it to help guide our ships during raids and exploration,” Klaus responded.

Moving her finger, she outlined the seven bright stars in the familiar shape of the Big Dipper. “There’s Ursa Major.”

Nodding to himself, he added, “We called it the Great Wagon.” He began tracing sensual circles along her bicep, trailing his fingers to her shoulders where he began rubbing her skin in earnest, kneading her flesh until she let out a helpless little sigh.

She leaned the last few inches to touch his rosy lips to hers, loving how he started out his kisses slow and gentle before becoming more aggressive when he recognized her growing need. She mapped out the muscles of his chest as they flexed under her palms. She helped him take off his dark pullover, anxious to touch him more fully.

He lifted the hem of her floral skirt, cursing softly when he saw she was bare underneath. “You never fail to surprise me, sweetheart,” he muttered against her skin as he began raining down hungry kisses onto her newly exposed flesh.

“It’s your reward for coming stargazing with me,” Caroline said breathlessly.

“Perhaps your reward for coming should be…coming,” Klaus teased, licking between her thighs as she eagerly parted them to welcome the warmth of his tongue. Soon, she let out a strangled cry as he plunged into her aching core, applying just the right amount of pressure with his mouth.

Klaus!” Her shriek seemed to spur him on as he quickly lowered his jeans to replace his talented tongue with his throbbing cock. As he began to smoothly piston in and out of her dripping core, she tightened her legs around his waist, drawing him closer to her, as though trying to fuse their beings.

The moment he reached down to tweak her clit between his thumb and forefinger made her shatter around him, drawing out his own satisfying release. He curled protectively around her as they caught their breath on the blanket, reveling in the peaceful calm that always followed their passion.

Just as Caroline felt her eyelids flutter and she was about to succumb to sleep, an incessant, loud shrieking reached her ears, shattering their bliss. Sighing heavily, she sat up and pressed the silver cuff on her wrist to end the simulation. She noted with a twinge of regret how the romantic, starry sky faded from her view, taking Klaus with it as she was left once again in a sterile white room. She stood, grumpily opening the door to see Bonnie had replaced several panels on the mainframe while she had been in the simulation room.
“Took your sweet time,” Bonnie commented dryly, taking in her flushed appearance. “You know we have several appointments tonight.”

“You’re such a cockblock, Bennet,” Caroline grumbled, snatching her iPad to call up the scheduled bookings for the night. Raising a critical eyebrow at her friend, she added, “You know, you’d be a lot more fun to be around if you’d book some me time for yourself. In fact, at the beginning, you were even more of a frequent flier than I was. I still don’t get your self-imposed celibacy.”

Bonnie quickly busied herself at the mainframe, furiously typing at the keyboard. “I don’t know what you’re talking about, Caroline,” she mumbled quietly.

Caroline huffed in exasperation, pulling her blonde waves back into a messy bun and went to work accessing the correct data files to meet their clients’ preferences that evening. She and Bonnie owned Build-A-Boyfriend Workshop, the world’s only cutting-edge, simulated dating experience. During grad school, they had perfected their theories on electromechanical transfer relations, molecular diffusion and AI, and then created their business model as a tongue-in-cheek perversion of the Build-A-Bear Workshop franchise.

They had been astounded at the unprecedented demand for their product. What they offered was the chance for individuals to create their perfect date, their perfect mate, etc., at whatever level of commitment they desired. The simulations they offered the public were nearly impossible to discern from reality, and left their clients immensely satisfied if their hordes of repeat business and referrals was anything to judge by.

Staring at the data on her screen, she saw that one of their most “frequent flier” clients, Katherine, had booked a full evening in one of their simulation rooms. As per usual, she requested the very first program she had created and had yet to stray from it. Apparently, Elijah knew how to push all the right buttons in the brunette’s uptight, corporate lawyer exterior.

First-timers to their business were offered a variety of basic models to choose from — obvious choices like tall, dark and handsome; bad boy; and shy, nerdy naughty boy were still their most popular. Next, the client would select a personality program like docile, aggressive, funny, witty, etc. IQ levels, interests and hobbies were added based on client preferences. Accessories like dimples, tattoos, glasses, etc. were add-on features that many of their clients were happy to pay a bit extra to have. The final piece to arrange was the scenario — regency-era ballroom and a duel between jealous suitors, an ex’s wedding and a fake date that leads to something real, one-night stand hook-up that begins (and often ends) in a bar, sailing around the world for a tenth anniversary, etc. They boasted that no two simulations were alike and that their clients were only limited by their own creativity.

When she and Bonnie first opened their business, it was difficult for her not to be inwardly judgmental and callous about the dazed, blissfully happy expressions that graced their clients’ faces after they exited a simulation room. She had thought them ridiculous, silly imbeciles for clearly being unable to separate the chemical rush of endorphins from true feelings of love and happiness. They couldn’t separate the real from the simulated reality they had purchased.

But now Caroline found herself facing a similar predicament. She had created Klaus several months ago and found herself wanting, needing to stay in her simulations longer and longer to be near him. She worried about what that said about her as a person that she could become so attached to her own construct. She recalled how possessive she had become over Klaus, to the point that she finally had to remove the Klaus basic model from their client selections as she couldn’t stomach the thought of anyone else getting to experience the sheer joy she felt when she was near him. Klaus was hers.
Although, the one other client who had selected the Klaus model had made him so utterly unrecognizable that it was laughable how he could even be associated with her Klaus. This model had been over-engineered to the point that after the clueless, dishwater-dull blonde had finished making her selections, the program had been a weeping, bland, ignorant bore of a construct that no one in their right mind could relate to or feel anything for other than pity.

Caroline finished loading Katherine’s Elijah program and set to work updating the Finn basic model. It had been glitching the last few times on their clients, apparently calling them Sage, for some odd reason. She turned toward Bonnie and asked, “Have you updated the memory architectures in our database?” She frowned when she noticed that her friend seemed lost in thought. Snapping her fingers impatiently, she finally caught her attention.

She repeated the question and saw that Bonnie wrinkled her forehead in concentration before answering, “Why does it need updating?”

“Because of the recent Finn construct glitches, remember? I think if we update the memory architectures, information retrieval will go more smoothly for the programmed simulations,” Caroline explained, noticing how Bonnie’s green eyes kept darting to the corridor that held the simulation rooms.

“What’s wrong,” she asked, placing a comforting hand on her friend’s shoulder.

Bonnie seemed to shake herself out of her gloom and responded with an overly bright smile that didn’t quite meet her tired eyes. “It’s nothing; don’t worry about it.” She playfully shoved Caroline adding, “Besides, you know as well as I do that I’m way better at updating the mainframe than you. Since Katherine’s all tucked in for the night with Elijah, why don’t you go find Klaus for a bit? Our next appointment isn’t for another hour or so.”

Giggling as she felt the telltale schoolgirl blush creep to her cheeks, Caroline practically skipped over to her iPad and accessed one of her favorite go-to scenarios with Klaus. As she headed toward the corridor, she looked back at Bonnie and with her blue eyes twinkling she said, “By the way, in my last simulation, the Viking navigation data you added to Klaus’ program was incredibly hot, but I’m a little creeped out that you were tinkering with my sexy-times fantasy.”

Unfortunately, Caroline was in such a rush to get to her simulation that she failed to hear Bonnie’s startled protest of, “But I haven’t messed with your program.”

Caroline opened the door to one of the simulation rooms and immediately found herself standing on top of Natural Bridge, the geologic formation found in Virginia that she and Bonnie once went hiking to back when they were in grad school. She smiled in contentment as she felt Klaus standing behind her, pulling her close to his body and wrapping his toned arms around her. She gazed out across the impressive, lush green landscape, inwardly congratulating herself on designing the simulation to appear as it had hundreds of years ago before the ravages of civilization had left its scars.

“This seems to be one of your favorite places, love,” Klaus murmured as he kissed the top of her head.

Caroline sighed happily. “It is; Bonnie and I were in the middle of writing our thesis projects and had hit a roadblock. So, we traveled here thinking that going all Walden and getting back to nature would spark a solution to our problem.”

Klaus chuckled, his breath softly brushing against the back of her neck where he had pushed her blonde waves to the side. “And did it solve your conundrum?”
“Yes,” she said eagerly, trying not to shiver from the sensual way he placed sweet kisses along her sensitive skin. “In fact, when we were at the bottom of the gorge staring up at the limestone land bridge, we had this idea about bridging the gap of statics and dynamics of electromechanical systems having static equilibrium and electromechanical flows which naturally got us thinking about field coupling with thermal and…” she trailed off uncertainly, embarrassed by how high-pitched her voice had gotten in her excitement to explain her passion.

As though sensing her self-doubt, Klaus spun her around to face him, his gray eyes darkening as he commanded, “Never be afraid to share your passions with me, sweetheart. Your intelligence is astounding and I am fascinated by how your mind works.”

Caroline hated how his earnest statement left her suddenly so emotional. She had never encountered a man who wasn’t intimidated or bored by her work, and she had longed to find someone who embraced who she was so that she didn’t feel the need to hide her opinions and ideas. She had drawn the line at dumbing down her intellect, which is why she had remained alone all these years. And why the Klaus construct she programmed had worked so well at alleviating her loneliness. She knew that the beautiful words he spoke that shattered her soul were nothing more than what she had designed him to say, but she found herself falling for him all the same.

Klaus tilted her chin so that he could meet her hesitant gaze. In a ragged voice he swore, “I owe you more than you can fathom, my Caroline. What you have done for me and mine is a boon that I can never properly repay.” His dimpled grin came out to play as he teased her with, “I want you to get to know me. I dare you.”

In the back of her mind, Caroline registered that Klaus’ speech was odd; she had never programmed those precise phrases and momentarily started pondering if the construct was starting to glitch like Finn’s. However, her thoughts were pushed aside as Klaus’ gray eyes darkened with lust and he captured her lips in a punishing kiss that wiped her mind clean of everything but his magnetic pull.

She toyed with his curls, pulling him closer to her as his tongue plundered her mouth, pulling embarrassingly loud moans from her. She nibbled on his lip, expecting him to reciprocate, but she was startled at the low growl that rumbled from his chest and the peculiar way his eyes flashed golden. Which was definitely not part of her program. Nor was the way he latched onto her ivory neck and bit deeply into the side, groaning in ecstasy as her blood flooded his mouth.

Caroline screamed, her terrified cries echoing throughout the simulated gorge, and she wildly punched at Klaus’ curly head until he released her, panting and shuddering. His eyes returned to their normal stormy gray and he brought a shaking hand to his mouth still dripping with her blood. Alarmed he said, “Caroline, I’m so sorry, sweetheart…”

When he took an uncertain step toward her, her adrenaline kicked in and she quickly pressed the silver cuff on her wrist to end the simulation.

Just before Klaus faded from her sight, she swore he looked nearly as fearful as she as well as oddly remorseful when he cried out, “Wait! I didn’t mean to —”

Caroline ignored the tears that rolled down her cheeks as she opened the door and ran out of the simulation room to their lab. “Bonnie! Something…something happened and I don’t know what… or even how to begin to explain…” she rambled breathlessly when she finally stood before her friend trying to catch her breath.

Bonnie grabbed her shoulders, trying to get her to calm down. She gasped and pointed at Caroline's neck. “What is that?”
Caroline carefully touched the side of her neck and held out her bloody fingertips to Bonnie in disbelief. “Klaus…bit me. How in the hell does a simulation cause you physical harm, Bonnie,” she screeched.

“Oh God,” Bonnie moaned, clapping both hands to her mouth. She collapsed back into her office chair, looking up at Caroline in fear. “This is all my fault. I should have said something when it happened, but I just thought I was going crazy like my mom and grandma, so I pushed it out of my mind so I wouldn’t have to think about it,” she blurted out. “I didn’t want to know,” she added bitterly.

Caroline sat across from her friend, dumbfounded. She used the sleeve of her peach sweater to wipe away the remaining blood from the torn flesh of Klaus’ bite mark. Fortunately, her impossible, why-isn’t-it-imaginary wound had stopped bleeding. “I don’t understand,” she said carefully, trying to keep her voice even as she willed her body to stop trembling.

“So a couple of weeks after we opened the shop, I was in the simulation room with Kol, the construct I had created. Everything was normal like always until suddenly it wasn’t.” Bonnie took a shaky breath, unable to meet Caroline’s bewildered blue gaze. “He — he knew things that I hadn’t programmed him to know, Caroline. And suddenly he bit me, and I managed to pull it together and end the simulation, but I didn’t know what to think!” She shook her head miserably. “I was so worried that I had hallucinated the whole thing and that I was going crazy like my relatives that I just deleted his construct and didn’t say anything.”

She suddenly clasped Caroline’s hands and said tearfully, “I’m so sorry I didn’t tell you, that my stupidity put you in danger!” She rubbed her forehead in distress. “Had I known, I would have pulled the plug on everything.”

Caroline tried to process what Bonnie had told her, her thoughts whirling in confusion. In as calm a tone as she could manage she asked, “Okay, but what do we know, Bonnie? I mean, the constructs were functioning the way they had been programmed. So what changed?” She glanced around their lab curiously, as though the answer would suddenly present itself.

Bonnie shrugged, frowning as she tried to remember any detail that might be relevant. “Right after we first opened, we had to install the simulation upgrades,” she said carefully. “Nothing weird happened though, right?”

Caroline shrugged. “Nothing weird, but you did manage to slice open your hand pretty badly when we rerouted some of the equipment in the simulation rooms.” She rubbed her open palm as though trying to touch some part of Bonnie’s phantom wound. “Remember? I thought we’d need to go get you stitches, but you were stubborn and it finally stopped bleeding on its own.”

“Blood,” Bonnie whispered in a low, frightened voice. She clenched her fists, wildly looking around until her green gaze landed on the lab floor, her beautiful caramel complexion suddenly drained of color. “Oh shit. Quartz floors.” She seemed hesitant to want to step on the flecked natural stone now that it had caught her attention.

“What about them,” Caroline asked, unnerved by her friend’s odd behavior.

Bonnie groaned, rubbing her forehead once more. “In gem lore, quartz was believed to possess mystical properties to channel power.”

“Gem lore? Channel power?” Caroline stared at Bonnie incredulously. “What the hell, Bonnie?”

Sighing, Bonnie explained, “So, if you believed the crazy ramblings of my mom and grandma, the
Bennet bloodline possesses an ancestral heritage of powerful witches.”

“Witches,” Caroline said in disbelief. “So you thought your family was crazy but instead they are…witches?”

“I don’t know, maybe? I mean, I’d love to just close my eyes and keep pretending weird shit isn’t happening, but the real bites we received in our fake realities lends itself to thinking outside the box,” Bonnie said.

“Okay,” Caroline nodded slowly, standing up to pace erratically in their lab. “So maybe we need to accept, in this situation at least, that science can’t explain everything.” She ran her fingers distractedly through her waves, tugging on the ends. “What do we know about magic? Or at least the magic that’s applicable to this situation?”

Bonnie turned to one of the monitors and quickly accessed the equipment schematics for the simulation rooms. With a shaky finger, she pointed to circular outlines on the floors. “When we rerouted the cables, we managed to create sacred circles.”

“Seriously? That’s a thing? Sacred circles aren’t just Hollywood-fabricated bullshit?” Caroline counted off what they knew so far. “So, it turns out you may be part of a powerful line of witches. Then, you accidentally bled all over our floors which might be constructed out of a material that channels power. And we inadvertently created sacred witchy circles when we rerouted our equipment.” Sighing in exasperation, she asked, “Anything else?”

Bonnie mumbled, “I may have accidentally dropped my sandwich on one of the simulation floors and the bread may have been baked with sage and blessing seeds.”

“After you threw a monumental bitch fit when I was eating pizza in one of the simulation rooms? You said the equipment was too sensitive and that we couldn’t run the risk of spilling food on…” She scrunched her eyes shut, breathing heavily through her nose. “Never mind. This is a pick-your-battles situation. Now, what’s the problem with sage and blessing seeds being spilled?”

“In some spells, supposedly sage is used to unlock hell dimensions and blessing seeds have summoning properties,” Bonnie clarified.

Continuing to pace, Caroline gestured wildly, speculating, “So it’s possible that our constructs were possessed or even replaced by actual sentient beings? Maybe something from a hell dimension?” She scoffed, “That’s impossible — we would have noticed that we were interacting with demons.”

“But would we really? Think about it — did we even choose these Viking names for the basic models? I know I didn’t come up with Kol; did you?” Bonnie shook her head as her green eyes widened in realization. “Plus, I definitely didn’t program your Klaus construct to talk about Viking navigation.”

“Klaus —” Caroline began, and then stopped abruptly as she suddenly recalled something important. She had named the basic model Kyle, and then when she began interacting with him, he told her his name was Klaus. At the time, she had foolishly assumed that Bonnie was being a control freak and had renamed all of the basic models, but if this crazy theory was true, then neither of them had named the programs — because they already had names.

“Caroline, we have to terminate the simulations. We’ve raised dangerous creatures, messing with things we don’t understand,” Bonnie said urgently.

Her heart began to pound at what Bonnie was suggesting. She realized how panicked she was at
the thought of never seeing Klaus again before she could understand who and what he was, regardless of how much he frightened her before. Flashing Bonnie a weak smile, she said hoarsely. “Okay, but before we do anything hasty, I think we need a caffeine fix and maybe dive into deep research mode.”

“Agreed. I’ll just run next door and grab us some mochas and then we’ll figure this out together,” Bonnie promised, grabbing her purse and heading out the door, clearly relieved to be putting some distance between herself and the lab that had become so unsettling.

The second Bonnie exited, Caroline sprang into action, locking the front door and changing the electronic access code. She found herself in front of a simulation room, hastily accessing the Klaus construct.

She decided to follow through with Klaus’ dare to get to know him…for science, of course.
This is a continuation of Chapter 11 in which Klaus, while on the run from Mikael, seeks sanctuary and meets Caroline, a poor soul trapped by an unusual curse. Will Klaus be able to convince his brother to help?

“Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of a heart.”
— W.B. Yeats

Klaus sat on the stone ledge of the cathedral’s tower, glaring at the sun as it seemed to take its time setting. During these past few months since he first sought sanctuary at the rundown cathedral in Galway, he had grown to detest the sun. Its great yellow orb seemed to mock him with its inherent cheerfulness, demonstrating how helpless he was against its power. For while daylight touched the land, she remained a statue.

When he was granted shelter, he encountered Matthew, the kindly caretaker, who had revealed that his sister, Caroline, had been cursed by a Cailleach, a Celtic witch, because she had spurned a suitor. The witch had twisted Caroline’s ethereal beauty, reshaping her form into the demonic, terrifying visage of a gargoyle. The poor girl had been cursed by the spiteful suitor, Alaric, believing that her heart would turn ugly and cold as stone. However, the strength of Caroline’s heart could not be diminished, and she found purpose in her cursed existence by protecting the cathedral and all who were in need.

Klaus had been astonished to learn that she apparently believed him to be worthy of her protection as she saved him from Mikael’s white oak stake. Unfortunately, Mikael had fled before the beast could destroy him, but Klaus’ gratitude toward her was such that he felt compelled to linger at the cathedral, to repay his debt. And perhaps soon it would be.

He had gotten word to his younger brother, Kol, who was infamous for his knowledge of witchcraft and dark magics. Unfortunately, Kol was traveling from Ceylon, which is how Klaus found himself remaining nearby these past few months. But is that truly the only reason he stayed? Klaus admitted that when he first saw the charcoal drawing of Caroline in Matthew’s room, he was stunned by her radiance. Long, curly hair surrounded her lovely face, but it was her eyes that drew him — fierce, practically feral as they stared out in obvious defiance of the world around her.

But it was her monster that he inexplicably set out to comfort. For a dark creature who’d marked centuries of depravity and bloodthirsty violence, he could not fathom why he felt the need to soothe a cursed soul. He recalled the night after Caroline had saved him from Mikael. He had spent the day arguing with his other siblings, Elijah and Rebekah, at the docks. They were unnerved that Mikael had been so close, but relieved by Klaus’ assurances that what the hunter had tangled with had forced him to retreat for the moment. He was sure that eventually Mikael would find some way to circumvent the monster that had bested him, which was another reason why he felt the need to help Caroline and her brother. He had sent Elijah and Rebekah on a steamer ship to America.
with the promise that he and Kol would join them once the curse had been broken and Klaus’ debt had been repaid.

Even then, he had hated how his heart seemed to clench at the prospect of leaving Caroline. When he returned to the cathedral, he could hear Matthew’s even breathing that signaled he was sleeping. His gray eyes flicked to the tower, and he saw the slight movement of wingtips and heard the faint grating of stone. Curiosity got the better of him and he found himself scaling the side of the wall before easily flipping himself over the stone turret.

He was puzzled to find the rooftop perches oddly empty, as he knew Caroline preferred to position herself where she could watch over the valley. A scraping noise to his left drew his attention, and he could see a partial outline of her powerful form in the shadows as she hid from him. “Why do you remain in the dark, love,” he asked. “Surely you do not fear me? But if you do, I promise I mean you no harm,” he teased.

Her derisive snort delighted him. They both knew that her mammoth beast could tear him apart — after all, he had witnessed her battle with Mikael, awestruck by her prowess. The tapping of her cloven hooves made him realize that she was uncertain and perhaps even self-conscious of her appearance.

Klaus took a careful step toward the dark corner where she partially hid herself from his view and softly told her, “You shouldn’t feel the need to hide from me, sweetheart. Your monster is a part of you, just as mine is a part of me.” He morphed into his vampiric face, allowing his curved fangs and black veins to appear. When no further movement was detected, he nodded in acceptance and said, “Very well. You don’t have to come out of the shadows; it’s your choice. I came up here looking for some company, but I suppose the moon will have to suffice.” He returned to the ledge and swung his feet casually as he sat under the dark sky and looked up at the stars.

Before too long, his stubborn companion finally took cautious steps toward him, her wings dragging slightly along the rooftop. The beast crouched down on a perch beside him, resettling her wings. When he ventured a glance, he was surprised to see her gazing down at her claws with something akin to sorrow reflected in her piercing eyes. She flexed the curved talons, their razor-sharp points twitching. She seemed strangely uncomfortable by their heft, or perhaps by the violence they represented. She rubbed the tops in a soothing gesture, as though trying to erase her memories of what she had done with them.

Feeling the need to distract Caroline from her pain, he began telling her tales of banshees that he knew in Ireland. He gleefully told her all about their fiery red eyes, snow white hair and terrifying shrieks. He boasted that he knew how banshees only haunt the oldest of Irish bloodlines, appearing when someone is about to die and delivering an ear-splitting wail. He was in the middle of rattling off a long list of Irish surnames when he heard her impatient huff.

Raising an eyebrow, he looked at Caroline and suddenly felt himself grow warm under her unimpressed stare. He thought back to the last fifteen minutes of his speech and realized what a pompous prat he must have sounded like, trying to impress a girl by reciting her own heritage to her. She was Irish born and raised; she probably knew the legends better than he. Stuttering out a string of nonsense, he awkwardly rubbed the back of his neck, trying to think of something clever to say.

“You cannot speak, but you understand what we say,” he asked, mentally berating himself for turning into a blithering idiot in her presence. At her slight nod, he added, “Right, well, it’s a good thing I derive such pleasure from the sound of my own voice, then. Although, you should count yourself fortunate my brother Elijah isn’t here. He’s not nearly as delightful of company as I.”
At her amused snort, he found himself chuckling as well, and it was in this moment of frankness that they found themselves starting to open up to life’s endless possibilities.

Klaus smiled to himself at the memory. From that night on, he found himself returning to the cathedral’s tower at dusk to wait for Caroline to awaken. He began to let down his guard, telling her stories from his childhood, sharing pieces of his humanity that he had thought were long dead.

Just as the sun dipped below the horizon, he heard the familiar scrape of stone upon stone as Caroline came alive. He couldn’t hide the ridiculous grin that spread across his handsome face as he eagerly greeted her. “Kol has been spotted at the docks, sweetheart. He should arrive soon.”

She reached out to him with one set of claws, clumsily trying to pat his shoulder in solidarity, but the power behind her claws nearly forced him to his knees. Grumbling at the almost amused expression her fanged mouth seemed to portray, he added, “I should probably head inside and make sure Matthew is ready for my brother’s arrival. Kol is an acquired taste.”

Matthew was pacing in front of the large stained glass window when Klaus entered. His green eyes looked momentarily startled by his arrival, but then they clouded with worry. “How is she,” he asked shakily.

“She’s fine. Understandably anxious, so I let her think she was stronger than me to calm her nerves,” he replied with a smirk.

The man’s nervous chuckle broke the tension. “Keep telling yerself that, lad. That time ye challenged her to a footrace and she beat ye by more’n’ land of three cows is a memory I won’t soon forget.” He frowned slightly adding, “I’d go up there meself but ye calm her down better these days. She always seems to want to cut me visits short since ye’ve come around. If this was normal-like, I’d be warning ye away from me sister.”

Klaus cleared his throat uncomfortably. “Matthew, I can assure you that my intentions with Caroline...what I mean to say is that she’s an extraordinary soul and...I mean to say that what I feel for...” he trailed off uncertainly, inwardly cursing himself for becoming so flustered in front of this mere human.

The truth was he didn’t know how to feel about the bizarre situation he found himself in. The unusual bond he had formed with the gargoyle was unprecedented, and though she had been unable to utter a word during their time together, he still found himself oddly familiar with her moods and feelings. He was so focused on restoring Caroline, he hadn’t given himself a chance to ponder what it would mean to leave her once her curse was broken.

Except that wasn’t entirely true. He knew exactly how he felt about leaving her. Every time he thought about it, he felt an enormous pit inside, as though there was a gaping hole that threatened to expunge every brief, beautiful moment he’d experienced with her.

Matthew seemed to take pity upon him and quickly changed the subject. “Now yer brother — I get the sense he’s trouble? That his mouth oft’ breaks his nose?”
Klaus laughed, thinking of his wild, foolish little brother whose penchant for mischief had often made him the target of numerous supernatural and human factions over the centuries. Fortunately, his knowledge of magic and countless alliances with witches saved him from even the nastiest of predicaments his troublesome ways often created. “Kol is a cheeky bastard, but he can be trusted. I give you my word that if Caroline’s curse can be broken, Kol is our best chance of finding it.”

“Why big brother, your little speech has warmed my cold, dead heart,” a wry voice interrupted. Kol stood outside the threshold of the cathedral, the slight night breeze ruffling his thick brown hair. A devilish grin spread across his face as he asked, “I see the cathedral is letting in all sorts of evil creatures these days, so I assume it’s safe for me to enter then?” The moment he tried to take a step into the cathedral is when a high-pitched screech pierced the air, rattling the stained glass and startling the normally wisecracking Original.

Not wasting time, Matthew sprang into action, quickly running outside yelling, “Remember what I told ye about the bleedin’ window!”

Klaus flashed out into the cemetery as well, just in time to see the gargoyle hurl Kol from the front of the cathedral, standing protectively in front of the carved stone archway. She started to advance toward Kol, who was now wearing his vampire face and hissing. Klaus moved in front of her shouting, “Wait! All is well! This is my brother, Kol, and he’s here to help you. In fact, he’s delighted to offer his assistance.” He ventured a backward glance at his brother and said through gritted teeth, “Aren’t you, Kol?”

Brushing off his grass-stained breeches, Kol muttered, “Well now, after that warm Irish welcome, it’s making me question my motivation. Perhaps my compassionate nature to help the less fortunate is more fleeting than what Klaus would have you believe.”

Matthew stood beside Caroline, his green eyes flashing angrily. “Then maybe ye best be off. We don’t need yer help, vampire.”

Kol laughed heartily at the indignant human, his vampiric features fusing back into his boyishly handsome face. “Well, look at that! Klaus, you didn’t send word that you found both a gargoyle AND a leprechaun!”

The creature immediately snarled, gnashing its fangs as it took another step toward the mischievous immortal. Klaus found himself echoing her growl of aggravation. “Kol, you aren’t helping matters. Now control yourself.”

His brother’s authoritative voice only spurred his musings further as he joked, “Now that I’ve gotten a good look at your lady fair, it appears you have a bit of a Beauty and the Beast story unfolding, dear brother. Or perhaps it’s more beast on beast activities, hmmm?”

At Kol’s tasteless jokes, Klaus barely stopped Matthew from leaping onto the troublemaking vampire in an attempt to pummel him soundly for speaking ill of his sister. Klaus held the furious man back with one arm while he managed to throw a punch that landed squarely on the bridge of Kol’s nose, causing a satisfying crunch to echo throughout the cemetery as his nose broke.

“Klaus! I was only joking, mate,” Kol complained, smearing the blood that poured profusely down his face as he tried to reset the bone with his fingers. He held up both hands in a surrendering gesture as he said, “All right, all right! I see now emotions are running a bit high with this crowd. Klaus is right to send for me though; I believe I have already tracked down the first bit we need to break the curse.”

He waited until the bones in his face knitted back together before continuing his explanation. “All
Curses must be performed with the aid of a curse tablet to keep the magic whole and alive over the years. They can be anything from parchment, stone, wooden blocks or even pottery shards. The witch needs a surface to etch the victim’s name, the outcome of the curse and the incantation used. Then, the tablet must be buried in a place of death to retain its power, such as battlefields, executions or graves."

Kol winked at the gargoyle who seemed lost in thought and added, “I called in a few favors and discovered that the Cailleach who cursed Caroline typically frequents the site of the Battle of Aughrim to bury her curse tablets. I have a witch prowling the grounds as we speak, performing spells to help us narrow down the location.” He gestured toward Klaus and said impatiently, “Well, come on then, not a moment to spare. We’ve curses to break, and your lovely maiden seems a touch impatient.”

When he saw that Matthew and Caroline were following him and his brother out of the cathedral’s cemetery, he stopped them, shaking his head. “Unfortunately, we cannot afford for the entire group to go on this merry quest. The gargoyle and the leprechaun need to stay here.”

Immediately suspicious, Klaus cocked his head, studying his brother. “And why is that, little brother?”

Making an irritated noise, Kol waved his hands wildly in the air as he clarified, “Because of the unsavory characters prowling about near the docks and within the surrounding villages! We’re Originals, or have you forgotten what that means? The supernatural world hears barely a hint of our existence over the centuries and now the heartless, brutal bastard Klaus has chosen to immerse himself in the troubles of a pair of insignificant humans. Curiosity has drawn out many, and most will not hesitate to try to turn what they know into a profitable exchange with our enemies.”

Klaus’ gray eyes widened and he pondered Kol’s words. He turned to Caroline and Matthew and sighed dejectedly. “For once, my brother is right. It will be far easier for the two of us to slip onto the battlefield and remove the curse tablet than all of us. Stay here and wait for our return.”

Caroline twitched the edges of her wings, inadvertently shearing off the tops of several tall grave markers. She glared at Kol with her piercing eyes, the beastly gaze failing to mask the intelligence found there. She stomped the soft ground with her cloven hooves, glancing over at her brother. Matthew inexplicably seemed to follow her train of thought and crossed his arms in front of his chest. In a distrustful tone he asked, “Ye said there were several bits to breaking her curse. What’s the rest of it then?”

Kol shrugged and resumed walking out of the cemetery. “Your leprechaun is mightily mistrustful, brother.” Calling over his shoulder he said carelessly, “We dig up the curse tablet, bring it back to you, break the tablet in front of the gargoyle, and that should break the curse.”

Shaking his head at his brother’s too-casual tone, Klaus turned to Caroline and Matthew and said in a reassuring manner, “We’ll return as soon as we can. If the tablet is there, I’ll find it.”

Muttering under his breath as he flashed away after Kol he said, “You had best be right about this, brother.”
Part 4 - Sly of the Tiger

Chapter Summary

Previous chapters set in this world are: Chapters 2, 6, and 9. In this installment, Caroline is once again furious with sneaky hybrid Klaus’ shady business dealings. Sparks fly when they “workout” a compromise…

Chapter Notes

Warning: Smutty times to be had!

“Blood, sweat, and respect. The first two you give, last one you earn.”

— The Rock

The steady smack as Caroline’s fist made contact with her opponent again and again drew Klaus like a magnet. He was careful to remain undetected as he easily scaled the red brick walls with his hybrid claws and silently landed on one of the steel beams high above the arena where Caroline’s wildly successful Fang Fights were held. Positioning himself directly above Caroline and her sparring partner, he had an enviable view of his sometime-lover-but-more-often-rival as her sweat-slicked body worked out her latest frustrations. He trained his supernatural hearing toward their conversation and smirked at what he heard.

“I mean it, Kat! This time that self-entitled, hybrid asshat has gone too far!” Her indignant yells echoed throughout the cavernous room as she landed a particularly vicious kick to her brunette opponent’s torso, making her curls fly from her face as she reeled from the strength of Caroline’s blow.

“You say that every time he gets you worked up,” Kat countered, swearing as she failed to land an uppercut underneath that stubborn chin of Caroline’s.

Klaus’ dimples deepened as he picked up on the emphasis of Kat’s words. Worked up. He knew he wasn’t the only one affected by their little trysts. Caroline liked to run hot and cold with him, staying coolly detached once their explosive encounters had run their course, but he was onto her. His long game was working and he just needed to keep insinuating himself into her life. His latest attempt seemed to be working, judging by Caroline’s ire. He admired the long, lean lines of her body as her muscles flowed underneath the sexy little workout number she was wearing.
“Seriously?! Even you have to admit that what that dimpled weasel is attempting now has crossed a line,” Caroline growled, dodging another of Kat’s fierce jabs. “Klaus Mikaelson Presents Were-Wrestling Wars is quite possibly the most desperate, self-indulgent, pathetic bit of advertising I’ve ever encountered!”

“So he’s trying to start his own underground fighting ring — who cares? It’s not like he’s got your connections to pull something like that off. He can’t even get the right permits thanks to your deal with the mayor. Plus, the fact that Kol, the idiot boy wonder, keeps screwing his way into more trouble than his brothers can rescue him from,” Kat said confidently, smiling wickedly when she successfully landed a jab to her boss’ left cheek.

Klaus grimaced at her words, silently recalling this last bout of trouble that Kol had caused in which he had been caught with two water nymphs, the mayor’s barely-legal goddaughter, April, and a scandalous amount of cherry Jell-O in a hot tub. Kol’s cheeky grin as he explained to his brothers that he was making *Jacuzzi Jell-O salad* had Klaus torn between irritation and mirth, especially when he saw how Elijah’s eye twirled ferociously as he tried to diplomatically arrange for the water nymphs to take down the resulting *Cooking with Kol* video from their social media sites.

“Exactly,” Caroline yelled in exasperation, her right cross getting sloppy. “Spoiled hybrid can’t play on my level, so why is he even bothering? This whole thing is just his clumsy, immature schoolboy way to get my attention!”

He felt his cheeks flush at her harsh words, embarrassed that she saw through his carefully planned schemes. He thought he had been so clever with his underhanded business dealings that occasionally *intertwined* with her own in ways that would somewhat hinder her own operations until she was forced to seek him out. A small smile touched his lips as he admitted to himself that this latest business venture was considerably less subtle than his others.

Kat’s sly response caught his attention. “Except you *enjoy* his clumsy attention. Why else would you go out of your way so many times to help him? Last night, for example…”

Caroline rolled her eyes and sharply dug her knee into Kat’s back before easily flipping her. “That was *nothing*,” she insisted in a high-pitched tone.

Last night? Klaus eagerly leaned forward on the steel beam, anxious to hear more. In his haste, he nearly lost his grip on the bar and almost fell the 100 feet or so to where the women were sparring. Shaking his head at his confounding clumsiness whenever he was in close proximity to his blonde vixen, he redistributed his weight to get more comfortable on his perch.

“It was *something*,” Kat insisted, sweeping her right leg in a wide arc and nearly knocking Caroline off of her feet. “Davina, Elena and I traipsed across that disgusting swamp to the Sabine River to confront that clan of dryads who’d started selling white oak lumber to New Orleans builders to subtly surround the Originals with the one weapon that could kill them.”

“It’s bad for business when one misguided, dumbass supernatural group targets the Originals,” Caroline protested with a huff, delivering a roundhouse kick that Kat swiftly dodged.

“It’s bad for business when one misguided, dumbass supernatural group targets the Originals,” Caroline protested with a huff, delivering a roundhouse kick that Kat swiftly dodged.

“Sure,” Kat said dryly. “That’s why you and Bonnie burned down their *entire* woods, salted the earth so nothing would *ever* grow there again, and then hung their skulls like lanterns in the weeping willows that surrounded what was once their domain. That’s completely rational just *business* logic.”

Klaus was absolutely stunned by what he had heard. Caroline had clearly gone out of her way to
protect him and his family. And, from the way her friend spoke, it sounded like this was a regular occurrence. He had to know more. Without another thought, he silently pushed off of the railing high above the arena and landed gracefully between the two startled women. Smirking at their stunned expressions, he ran a hand through his dirty blonde curls and said, “Forgive the intrusion, but I must admit I myself am rather keen to hear more about this peculiar just business logic of Caroline’s.”

Caroline hastily straightened her spine, her hands twitching as though she wanted to quickly pat down her sweaty blonde strands. She glared at Klaus and said, “Oh look Kat, Vince McMahon has graced us with his presence.”

He bristled at her mockery and retorted, “Envy is such a petty look on you, love. This new sporting event will be the epitome of tasteful elegance.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Caroline responded wryly, “Yes, Were-Wrestling Wars just oozes dignity. As I’m sure your wrestlers will embody the epitome of tasteful elegance prancing around in their neon speedos, tights and masks.” She flashed him an impish grin as she asked, “Tell me, will they all wear capes, or will you reserve that honor for yourself?”

Kat snorted, adding “Maybe his stage name will be The Hybrid.”

“Oh, Hybridmania,” Caroline responded with a giggle that led to a gleeful high-five between the two women.

Reddening from the women’s teasing, Klaus bit out, “Many prominent werewolf families are eager to participate. In fact, the Lockwoods have pledged some of their best fighters for the opening matches.”

Caroline crossed her arms in irritation. “Oh really? And what’s Tyler’s stage name — The Incredible Disappointment? Or maybe Wolfy Washout?”

Klaus felt himself become immediately incensed at the implication that Caroline spoke from personal experience about the boy. He didn’t care that he was being impulsively irrational; Caroline was his. He planned to give her a thorough demonstration of this fact. Stepping forward, his voice dangerously low, he growled, “The boy’s name is irrelevant considering the limited amount of time he has left now.”

Kat burst out laughing as she observed his obvious jealousy. “Don’t be ridiculous. Some of the girls like to kiss and tell — especially when there’s so little to tell. Calm your pants, hybrid. Boss Lady may have you by the short and curlies, but you better believe you’re the only one getting a front row seat to her clambake.”

“Katerina!” Caroline’s indignant shout echoed throughout the arena as she emphasized her fighter’s full name to illustrate her aggravation. She pointed toward the exit, favoring Kat with her fiercest glare. “Out!”

Laughing at Caroline’s crimson cheeks, she held up her hands in surrender. Leaping off of the raised stage, she bent to grab her gym bag, pausing momentarily to rifle through the zippered pocket until she found what she was looking for. With a triumphant smile, she tossed something white at Caroline, saying, “By the way, there’s part of your cut. Elena stuffed the rest in the vault.” With a saucy flip of her brunette curls, she flashed out of the arena, leaving behind a seething blonde vampire and a smug hybrid.

Klaus smirked, ducking his head almost shyly as he moved closer into Caroline’s space. “What a
wealth of knowledge your friend is, sweetheart.”

“Don’t read too much into it, Klaus. Kat’s a notorious liar.” She started toying with the necklace that Kat had thrown to her, nibbling on her lower lip.

Upon closer inspection, Klaus realized that it was a long strand of pearls. He asked curiously, “What did she mean by your cut?”

Shrugging, she was trying and failing to keep her tone disinterested as she explained, “When my girls and I were taking care of things last night on the river —”

Klaus quickly cut her off with a cocky interjection of, “When you and your underlings rushed to protect me and my family.”

Rolling her eyes, she continued moodily, “We took care of business and I realized we were near the Old Spanish Trail where the pirate Jean Lafitte supposedly hid a large cache of treasure. A quick summoning spell and an educated guess about a gum tree grove and we are suddenly going to have an even more spectacular business quarter than before,” she said boastfully, rolling the milk-white beads between her thumb and forefinger.

He saw through her careful ploy of downplaying what she had done for him and his family. He picked up her hand that held the pearls and delicately kissed her knuckles. “Thank you, Caroline,” he mumbled against her ivory skin in the humblest tone he could manage.

Her calculating blue gaze studied him as she said quietly, “You’re welcome.” Before he could respond, she reached up with both hands to pull his face to hers, kissing him with a ferocious passion that was pure Caroline. She quickly fist ed her small hands into his dark Henley, yanking it over his head in one fluid move. With a sexy little growl, she pushed at his sculpted abs, making him fall to the padded stage floor with a muted thud.

His gray eyes darkened with lust as she flashed on top of him, straddling his shins as she went to work on his jeans in an almost feverish frenzy to reach his skin. The coolness of her touch inexplicably inflamed his hybrid skin even further, stoking his need for her. She tugged at his unzipped jeans, pulling them off with a flourish before oddly resettling upon his shins. That was not where he needed her pert little cheeks to be resting. Growling in frustration, he said roughly, “Sweetheart, I’ll need you to be a bit closer.”

Caroline flashed him a seductive grin. She ran both palms up his legs, stopping a few teasing inches below his aching pelvis. “Shhh, be a good boy and you’ll get a treat. Be a bad boy and only I will get a treat,” she cooed in a feathery voice that rendered him helpless under her ministrations. He nodded eagerly, unable to help the way that his erection sprang to attention as her fingers firmly kneaded his thighs.

Taking his silence as an open invitation, she leaned forward, producing the long strand of pearls that Kat had given her, clacking the beads between her nimble fingers as she maintained her determined blue stare. She trailed the necklace along his twitching thighs, halting at the base of his erection. Without a word, she engulfed him with her red lips, causing him to give a strangled shout at the suddenness of her seductive attack. As quickly as she took him into her warm, wet mouth, she released him, causing him to emit a helpless little cry.

She licked her lips as though savoring his taste and then surprised him even more when she wrapped the strand of pearls around his thick cock. She held them in place with both hands, sliding the hard little orbs up and down his shaft in a torturously slow pattern that had rendered him speechless. He had never had his sensitive flesh encased in such a manner and he groaned at the
erotic sight before him. The only sound that could be heard above their panting bodies was the sensual noise of the clinking pearls as they rubbed against each other upon his member.

Klaus could feel the tension coiling within, and he furiously tried to hold off his release, wanting to prologue this sweet ecstasy as long as possible. As though sensing his turmoil, Caroline tightened the beads near his tip, allowing them to pinch and pull in a pleasurable pain that made the black veins crawl under his eyes and his hybrid fangs appear.

“That’s it, just a little more,” Caroline encouraged in a voice tinged with excitement. One final tug of her hands brought forth his orgasm, spurring over her hands and the pearls as she furiously stroked him through his release. When his flesh stopped shivering, she carefully unwound the necklace, straightening her toned body as she favored him with a delicious little wink. Making sure he was watching, she wrapped her long tongue around some of the soaked beads, rolling them around in her mouth as she moaned in pleasure.

The sexy picture his blonde vixen presented was too much to handle, and with a snarl, he had her flipped onto her stomach as he loomed over her. He easily tore off her printed leggings and grabbed the wet necklace that had been tossed to the side. “I do believe it’s your turn for a treat, love,” he rumbled.

He delighted in how her round cheeks seemed to tremble in anticipation of what he had planned. He leaned closer, whispering in her ear, “Now be a good girl and spread for me.” At her eager compliance, he smirked and reached under her sweat-slicked body to cup her mound with one hand. He could feel his cock coming back to life, and he took shallow breaths to stave off his own desires for a bit longer. When he failed to explore her further with his fingers, she let out an impatient whine and began circling her hips in an obvious bid to spur his actions.

He wrapped the strand of pearls around his other palm and startled her with a series of smacks against her backside that made her squeal. “Naughty girl, trying to toy with me,” he rasped, “When you know very well that it’s my turn to play.” At his forceful tone, she stopped wiggling her hips and he took shallow breaths to stave off his own desires for a bit longer. When he failed to explore her further with his fingers, she let out an impatient whine and began circling her hips in an obvious bid to spur his actions.

She collapsed beside each other on the stage, panting and sweating as they caught their breath. Under the brilliant colored lights, he admired the glow of her ivory flesh and caught her own lustful gaze as she drank in his body.

Tentatively, Klaus ventured, “About Were-Wrestling Wars…”

“What about it,” Caroline asked sharply, clearly gearing up to finish their argument.
“I have yet to secure a venue for my sporting event side project and the mayor’s office seemed shockingly resistant to granting my business permit. Perhaps you know of a venue that would be willing to host my events once or twice a week,” he asked with a knowing smirk.

She rolled on top of him, planting an elbow on either side of his damp curls. Leaning dangerously close to his lips, she demanded, “Twenty grand per event — up front. I also want 20% of the action and another 10% goes to my ghouls.”

He cocked an eyebrow and answered in an amused tone, “You seem to have already given this some thought, sweetheart.”

With a cheeky grin, Caroline answered, “I may have already had my marketing team work up a few promotional logos for merchandising.” In a more serious voice she said, “Of course, I expect an exclusive contract with several non-negotiable terms.”

Klaus favored her with a seductive smile, suddenly flipping them over so that he loomed over her once more. He trailed teasing kisses down the column of her ivory throat as he growled, “I think we can come to a favorable arrangement, love.”
In this installment, the mighty hybrid Klaus is on a mission to intimidate the silly young witch Caroline, who has transformed his mischievous brother Kol into an animal. What a pity he never learned the valuable lesson about making “ass”umptions.

“I think you have all drunk of Circe’s cup.”

— The Comedy of Errors, William Shakespeare

“No, I don’t want to pet the pygmy goats! You turned my brother into a bloody pig; change him back right now!” Klaus’ anger radiated off of his tense body in waves as he glared down at the petite blonde who had the audacity to send him a flirtatious grin. Under decidedly less-stressful circumstances, he could admit to himself that he would be intrigued by the beautiful woman before him, who fearlessly met his gaze with piercing blue eyes.

When his troublesome younger brother Kol failed to return home in more than a week, Klaus had sought out a useful local coven that was loyal to the Originals to perform a locator spell. What they found had puzzled them; apparently their magic tracked Kol’s essence to a small petting zoo on the outskirts of town, but the curious bit they uncovered was that his brother’s core being had been transformed into that of a barnyard pig. The coven’s elder had cautioned the volatile hybrid from confronting the proprietor until they learned more; apparently the unusual power they felt emanating from there made them wary.

Naturally, Klaus had scoffed at their warnings; he was the most powerful creature in the world; he could easily subdue an upstart witch who dared to tangle with the Originals. He had immediately flashed to the small petting zoo with the memorable name of Circe’s Creatures. He demanded to speak with the owner, which is how he found himself yelling at a breathtaking blonde who seemed oddly unfazed by the gold that angrily bled into his eyes as he bellowed.

She stepped out of the small paddock enclosure, shutting the white wooden gate behind her as she dusted off her hands. Flashing him a confident smile, she held out her hand for him to shake. “You must be Klaus. You can call me Caroline.” She unabashedly looked him over, letting her twinkling baby blues linger as she took in his muscular chest and broad shoulders. “Your volatile reputation precedes you, but I had not been informed of the agreeable package your surly nature was wrapped in.”

Klaus felt himself grow uncomfortably warm under her blatant perusal, and realized he was still gripping her hand rather than shaking it. He quickly let go, needing to reassert his dominance. “I don’t know who you think you are, love, but waging war against the Originals is a grave mistake.”

Caroline rolled her eyes, sighing. “I told you — I’m Caroline. Seriously, evil villain masterminds such as yourself should be able to menace and listen for pertinent contextual clues at the same time. Can’t you multitask?” She began walking away from him, heading downhill toward the barn painted a cheerful red. She tossed back her long blonde braid and called over her shoulder, “What
are you waiting for? I thought you came to visit your brother?”

Growling, he hastened his pace to keep up with her as they made their way along the winding gravel path. “I am not here to visit my brother, sweetheart; I’m here to force you to release him from your preposterous spell,” he said in a tone that fell short of conveying his anger and instead came across as a petulant schoolboy.

“Force,” she asked with a tinkling laugh, “Is this ham-fisted method how you approach all of your negotiations?” She winked at him before her attention was captured by a group of children in the apple orchard playing in a pile of brightly colored leaves. With a hum of satisfaction, she added, “Autumn is my favorite season. After all these years, it’s still such a marvel to live somewhere with seasons. You somehow forget that in some places the weather can transform the land in predictable intervals.”

Intrigued despite his vexation, Klaus asked, “So you’re a recent transplant to our town then. Where did you live before?”

Amused, Caroline answered, “Recent is a relative term for me. But I’ve spent some time on an island. As I’m sure you know, when you’re in a land that calls to your blood, time loses its meaning.”

Klaus found himself charmed by her pretty words as he too understood the feeling of peaceful calm that washes over one when they exist in a place they belong. He studied her lovely profile as she walked beside him, delighting in the way her pale pink tank top had come partially unlaced, placing the gentle swell of her breasts on display. He inwardly scoffed when he noticed the edge of a black-ringed symbol tattooed over her heart.

It likely was the traditional Celtic knot, the triquetra, that impressionable young witches all seemed to embrace and tattoo upon their bodies until they had bled all meaning from the symbol. He had seduced many a foolish witch under the guise of offering them power and knowledge so that they could excel in their craft. Caroline would clearly be no different. According to his allies’ claims of her unusual power, she could prove a useful resource once he coaxed her to his side.

Making up his mind, he smoothly grabbed her hand, sliding his thumb over her pulse point as he turned over her palm. He took advantage of her wide-eyed surprise and tugged her close to him, bringing her soft palm to his lips as he placed a gentle kiss upon it. “We seem to have gotten off on the wrong foot, love. Please forgive my rude ways.” He allowed his accent to deepen, rolling around the syllables as though savoring them as they touched his tongue. “It is my fondest wish that we can reach a peaceful accord, Caroline. Surely there’s something I possess that you need. You’ll find that I can be a very generous man when the mood strikes.”

Caroline chuckled softly as his boldness. “There’s nothing I like more than a generous man, Klaus. So often I find your gender to be boorish, selfish louts. They see the world through a narrow lens, assuming everything and everyone is for the taking.”

“Then the men you have met are utter fools,” he swore vehemently. “You are a stunning creature and are deserving of respect. Of my respect.” He threaded his fingers through hers, adding, “I would like to offer my vast stores of resources to your disposal. I sense that you are serious about your craft and eager to learn more. Allow me to guide you, love. With my extensive allies in the magical community, you could grow into an extraordinarily powerful being.”

She pulled him down the path, smiling enigmatically. “I am a seeker of knowledge. How generous of you to become so invested in my education.”
He grinned, sensing his victory. This young witch had easily fallen for his charms and soon Kol would be restored. He eagerly anticipated their liaison, and suspected that her youthful exuberance and passion would keep calling him back to her bed. This would prove to be his most favorable alliance yet.

She paused by another fenced enclosure where a little girl was feeding a small white goat. She bent down to give the animal a gentle tap upon his furry head. Smiling indulgently as the girl ran off to join the other children still playing in the growing leaf piles, Caroline jerked her chin in the goat’s direction. “That’s one of mine. His pride was wounded after I rejected his clumsy advances using what he called his patented “eye thing”. He chased after me in the dark, and when he menaced with his black veins and vampire fangs, I thought it only fitting to turn him into this.”

“A goat,” he questioned, not understanding the merriment he saw in her blue eyes.

“That particular breed is a Carpathian goat,” she said with a youthful giggle that lit up her whole face.

Klaus chuckled lightly. “How droll.” He glanced around the small farm, taking note of the clucking chickens and the donkeys, Shetland ponies and calves grazing nearby, and asked curiously, “And how many of these creatures were also once unfortunate men who deserved your wrath?”

“All of them,” Caroline said with a shrug. “Well, the ducks and geese swimming on the pond in the distance are actually rude telemarketers and unscrupulous life insurance agents.” She thought for a minute, then added, “Also, only five of the rabbits and two of the lambs are dim-witted frat boys who assumed no was merely the opening kickoff to a hookup.”

He grinned at the ferocity he heard in her voice. “Aren’t you a vicious little thing, sweetheart.” He leaned in close, allowing his breath to gust over the base of her neck where her thick plait began. “Just imagine the power that could be at your fingertips if you accepted my bargain. There’s so much I could share with you, pet.” At her inquiring eyebrow, he explained, “For instance, I’m intimately familiar with Tamsin Blight’s work, and have in my possession several of her grimoires that would be at your disposal.” He grinned smugly as her eyes sparkled in wonder.

“Really? The 19th-century healer from Cornwall? But that was so long ago; you really do know what speaks to a girl’s heart,” Caroline remarked sweetly.

He smirked, flashing his dimples at her as he rumbled, “You’d be amazed at what a powerful, ancient being can teach you.”

“Indeed,” she chuckled, grasping his hand and leading him inside the barn. A litter of pink and white pigs oinked cheerfully when they entered their enclosure.

Klaus tried to ascertain from their mannerisms which one might be his brother, but Kol apparently was already too much of a pig to begin with. “Out of curiosity, what did Kol do to earn your ire, love?”

She snorted derisively, and said, “He had the audacity to grab my breasts in the middle of a crowded pub and swore he lost his eyesight in Australia while wrestling crocodiles.” She wrinkled her nose in the direction of one of the pigs. “I decided against turning him into a crocodile as they’re far grouchier to transport than your everyday pig. Instead, I settled on making him an Australian Yorkshire.”

Klaus knew he should still be furious at the silly witch for harming his brother, but he couldn’t
help his grin when he watched how Kol seemed to take particular delight in wallowing about on his back in a large mud hole. “So sweetheart, I trust we’ve reached an accord,” he asked, casually tucking a few blonde strands that had escaped back into her elaborate braid.

A sly smile broke out across Caroline’s face as she nodded once before waving her hand in the pig’s direction. “You know,” she remarked softly, “a traveler once came to my island and we had a slight disagreement over my treatment of his companions. He was exceedingly clever, which I enjoyed.” She slanted her fiery blue gaze at Klaus, adding, “You possess a similar honeyed manner.”

He couldn’t decide whether her odd tone was complimentary, so he remained silent, fixing his stare upon his brother who suddenly returned to his original state and comically crouched on all fours in the cool mud.

Panicked, Kol jumped to his feet and shouted at Klaus, “Nik! You don’t know who you’re dealing with!”

Alarmed by his brother’s outburst, Klaus grasped Caroline’s shoulders, pulling her close to him as he felt his claws and fangs release at the threat of danger.

Her lovely face remained impassive despite his obvious rage, and she coolly declared, “I’ve granted your brother his freedom; it appears I’ve found an even more arrogant man to add to my collection.” Clenching her fist, she gave him a small, secretive smile and added, “We’ll revisit your predicament in a while — to see if you learned anything about making assumptions.”

Confusion touched his handsome face as he tried to make sense of her words. In their struggle, the edge of her top dipped low, fully exposing her tattoo. His eyes widened as he realized it was not the symbol of a silly little witch with no understanding of her craft. The four interlocking circles…it was the mark of Circe. All this time, he had thought her a foolish young upstart, but instead, she was a powerful Greek goddess. Suddenly, it all made sense.

Caroline was Circe.

Too late, Klaus realized his predicament as he felt his body transforming, ears growing tall and pointed, hands and feet melting into small hooves, molding him into something new. A loud, braying noise emitted from his throat as he felt his skin roughen into a bristled hide.

His arrogant words came back to him: You’d be amazed at what a powerful, ancient being can teach you.
Chapter Summary

This is a continuation of Chapters 11 and 13 in which Klaus, while on the run from Mikael, seeks sanctuary and meets Caroline, a poor soul trapped by an unusual curse. He has vowed to break her curse by enlisting the help of his wild, irresponsible brother Kol — how could this plan possibly fail?

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some violence.

“Yet each man kills the thing he loves
By each let this be heard
Some do it with a bitter look
Some with a flattering word
The coward does it with a kiss
The brave man with a sword.”
— Oscar Wilde, The Ballad of Reading Gaol

Klaus and Kol arrived in the small, picturesque village of Aughrim, the site of one of the most violent battles ever recorded on Irish soil, with approximately 7,000 killed in 1691. It was considered a major European war for its time, but looking out across the gentle slopes of a vast meadow, one would never be the wiser to the area’s turbulent past. In the starlight, Klaus could see the shape of a woman making her way toward them.

In a flirtatious tone, Kol introduced the strawberry blonde with a quick peck on her cheek. “Jenna! It’s been ages, darling! Klaus, this is one of my favorite witches, whose given name is Jennyfer, but secretly enjoys it when I call her Jenna.”

The witch favored Klaus with an enigmatic smile and asked, “Is this the beastly brother I’ve heard so much about?”

Klaus opened his mouth to argue, but Kol quickly said, “Yes, this is the one.”

Cackling unexpectedly, Jenna clasped her hands together, her eyes turning black as she said in a gravelly voice, “Then we have what we need. What he requires of us.”

Klaus sensed the shift of magic in the air, but before he could move, he was struck powerless by an invisible weight that kept him rooted where he stood. “What’s the meaning of this? What have you done, brother,” he growled at Kol.
Kol’s normally airy tone was unusually serious as he said, “What have I done? What about what you have done? You threaten your family with daggers at the merest hint of betrayal. We are your prisoners and fear you nearly as much as our father.” Eyes blazing, he stepped closer to Klaus and in a deadly whisper he vowed, “No more. I’ve seen the error of my ways and have aligned myself with Mikael. He has promised not to punish our family for protecting you and siding with you all these centuries. We will be free. We just have to give him you.”

The pain in Klaus’ heart made him look down at his chest to see if he had been wounded. There was no blade to be found, but the pain of betrayal by his blood was too much to bear. “You are nothing but a foolish little boy, Kol. Mikael’s word is meaningless. He will destroy us all!”

At Kol’s indifferent expression, Klaus turned his attention to the witch. If he could sway her or at least break her concentration, he should be able to escape his bonds. “And what of you, witch? What has Mikael promised you?”

Jenna smiled wickedly, stepping closer to the struggling Original without fear. “Power. He has promised me immeasurable power.”

Klaus laughed bitterly. “I have power. Align yourself with me and I can arrange a meeting with some of my most devoted followers of the black arts. They can grant you what you seek.” He thought he saw the briefest of hesitation in her black gaze, and he pressed his position with, “You don’t understand what you’ve stumbled upon. The curse I’m trying to break is for an innocent. She does not deserve the wretched fate that has befallen her.”

At Klaus’ words, Jenna’s face grew twisted and a hint of her true age seeped out. She coldly declared, “That girl is far from innocent. Alaric had been my faithful lover until he happened to wander into the marketplace where he saw her. He was instantly enthralled and immediately began his pursuit of the silly mortal. When he came to me after her rejection, he begged me to curse her. It was my pleasure to oblige him, of course. He eagerly agreed to add his blood the spell to strengthen the curse. I may have failed to inform him that the amount of blood I needed was more than he could spare, but perhaps in the afterlife, he can still appreciate how she will suffer for an eternity for taking him from me!”

This revelation stunned Klaus. He had come face-to-face with the demonic witch who had caused Caroline and her brother such pain. He had vowed to seek vengeance against the dark creature who had performed the curse, and now he would have the opportunity. He continued to struggle against her magic, searching for weak points he could exploit. He felt the dark veins crawl across his face as his fangs unsheathed at his anger. “Selfish, vile creature, I will carry your soul to hell for what you’ve done to her!”

Kol and Jenna’s amused laughter was cut short when they heard the steady thrum of galloping hooves. Mikael had arrived. Sitting regally upon an Irish Draught Horse, his imperious gaze fell upon Klaus, who remained rooted to the ground by Jenna’s spell. “Thought you got rid of me, boy? You don’t have your pathetic pet beside you now,” he said venomously.

“We delivered him as promised,” Kol called out, somewhat uncertainly, “Now grant me my freedom from this wretched family.”

“In due time,” Mikael reassured him in a tone filled with condescension. “Once this abomination is naught but ash, you and the rest of your traitorous siblings shall be free to embrace whatever worthless pursuits you seek to waste your immortal lives upon.”

“What of the power that was promised unto me,” Jenna said bravely, stepping closer to Mikael as he dismounted.
“Patience, witch,” the hunter growled at her impertinence, “You’ll soon receive your reward.” He advanced toward Klaus, pulling from beneath his heavy cloak the intricately carved white oak stake.

Klaus refused to show fear to the man that had terrorized him all of his life. He straightened his spine and lifted his head as much as his invisible bonds would allow. “You had to chain me with a witch’s power to beat me.” His lips curled into a sneer. “The mighty hunter is nothing more than a coward.”

Mikael’s angry bellow pierced the night and he backhanded Klaus in a blur of Original strength and speed, the ground at his feet becoming wet with blood as he continued the vicious assault with his fists.

An unearthly screech tore through the dark valley, causing Kol and Jenna to shout and Mikael to stay his hands and wildly look about the blanket of stars in terror. The gargoyle landed with a heavy thud in front of the hunter, its stone hide glowing in the starlight. With a fearful whinny, the gray horse galloped off just as the creature’s curved talons shot out to grip Mikael’s throat, effectively choking off his pitiful screams. Her powerful muscles rippled as she effortlessly raised the hunter into the air. She brought him closer toward her snarling, demonic face. A cold, calculating intelligence sat behind her gaze as she calmly turned toward Klaus and regarded him silently.

Klaus couldn’t recall a time when he had ever seen a more beautiful vision than Caroline’s majestic creature swooping down from the sky. He realized that he could move again; clearly whatever spell Jenna had cast was now broken. He stretched languidly, flashing a cruel smile before stooping down to grasp the white oak stake that had tumbled from Mikael’s fingers during the attack. Noticing the commotion in his peripheral vision, he reached out to snap Kol’s neck before he could cowardly flash away.

Jenna attempted to edge away unscathed during the battle, but Klaus quickly blocked her escape. “Where are your manners, witch? It’s rude to leave a party without a proper farewell.”

The Cailleach’s dark eyes widened in fear as she waved her arms ineffectively in Klaus’ direction. “I — I don’t understand! Why is my power drained?”

He mockingly said, “Mikael trusts no one but himself. He is known for binding his allies’ powers should they fail in their tasks or consider betraying him. He has other witches who cast these counter spells to ensure his survival. Obviously, you didn’t fail in your task as you did trap me, but I’d wager that you intended to abandon him to his grisly fate once you spied the gargoyle.”

Jenna was speechless as she nervously flicked her dark gaze between the creature and Klaus, clearly trying to calculate her best chance at survival. Before she could open her mouth in an attempt to negotiate her freedom, Klaus moved too quickly for her to detect, easily thrusting his claws into her chest cavity. At her helpless gurgles, he clenched his fist around her withered heart, leaning into her as he solemnly vowed, “For Caroline.” With a squelching noise, he ripped out her heart, his claws curled around its worthless meat as he threw it to the ground beside them.

Caroline gnashed her fangs, letting out a screech as she watched the witch who had cursed her to this terrible fate crumple to the ground. She raised her cold gaze to Klaus, watching him carefully as she continued to hold Mikael in her powerful grip. She cocked her head to the side as though trying to read the numerous emotions that flitted across his face as he contemplated his enemy.

Klaus silently nodded to her, but his cold gray eyes never left Mikael’s horrified face. He wanted to remember this moment. Understanding seemed to wash over the beast as she turned her attention
back to the hunter who continued his useless struggled against her incredible strength. Releasing a savage screech that settled into Klaus’ heart like a victory cry, she sliced her thick talons viciously through Mikael’s neck, effortlessly decapitating him.

Klaus was startled to feel a few tears fall as he watched the head roll before settling next to the body. When the skin failed to desiccate, he did not hesitate to flash to the torso and drive the white oak stake deeply into the rib cage, piercing the heart and causing flames to engulf Mikael’s remains.

Caroline seemed to hesitate, as though conflicted about something. Finally growling lowly to herself, she stalked toward Klaus and reached out her gore-streaked talon to lightly tap his shoulder. Her “light tap” nearly pushed him to the ground, but he had grown used to her strength and managed to lock his knees in place to prevent falling. Together, they stood silently before the fire, watching as it reduced Klaus’ greatest nightmare into harmless ashes.

A loud cracking noise interrupted the oddly peaceful moment as Kol’s body began to heal itself from his broken neck. Klaus immediately flashed over to him, hauling him to his feet with both fists grabbing his cloak. Dark veins crawled under his eyes and his sharp fangs unsheathed in his anger as he bellowed, “How dare you betray me! I always knew you were shiftless, but I never thought of you as a coward until today!”

Kol’s normally warm brown eyes were cold as he spitefully spat, “It’s not cowardly to want to survive. I saw an end to this wretched existence of constantly running and I took it.”

“You want it all to end, dear brother? Allow me to help you with that, just as I did with Mikael,” Klaus threatened menacingly.

His brother chuckled darkly. “Your only weapon against me has burned to ash with Mikael’s pitiful remains. You have no teeth in this fight, brother.” At Kol’s venomous words, Caroline growled, twitching her wings in irritation as she glared at him. Kol visibly paled, but he continued to taunt Klaus with, “I suppose you could ask your pet to take my life, like a coward.”

Seething with rage, Klaus pulled out a sharp dagger to hold to Kol’s throat and hissed, “I will end your life when I see fit, blood traitor. However, you are foolish to forget that I still have your dagger and will put you down unless you tell me where the tablet is buried that contains Caroline’s curse.”

Kol shook his head, his eyes barely glancing to the weapon. “It matters not what I say, Klaus. I tell you, and you dagger me. I refuse, and you dagger me. By remaining silent, I can prolong your misery, knowing that I’ve kept you from breaking the curse of your lady fair.”

At the gargoyle’s enraged shriek, Kol merely laughed. “And you’ll never discover it. Between the dim-witted leprechaun and your lovely maiden whose head is literally filled with rocks, you should mark the curse tablet as lost forever, dear brother.” As Klaus roared at his words, Kol continued his cruel laughter before adding, “Even I have to admit, the Celtic witch’s humor is a sight to behold.” He froze suddenly, and a curious fear flashed through his eyes.

Caroline stiffened as well, stomping the ground with her cloven hooves as though deep in thought. She favored Klaus with an inscrutable look before she gave him a short nod. She abruptly leapt high into the air, unfurling her impressive wings and flying away into the night.

Klaus was momentarily confused until he thought back to Kol’s words about the witch’s humor and his earlier information regarding the likely burial locations of curse tablets. His eyes darkened with rage as he yelled, “Your witch had to bury it in a place of death to retain its power. She
maliciously buried it in the cathedral’s cemetery, didn’t she? So that all these decades that Caroline and her brother suffered, they would never realize that the key to breaking her curse was merely steps away.”

At Kol’s sputtering denials, Klaus stabbed him through the heart with the dagger, desiccating him. Picking up his brother’s corpse, he flashed back to the cathedral’s cemetery, his heart pounding in anticipation as he formed an idea about where to look for the curse tablet.

Upon his arrival, he was unsurprised to see the beast already had torn huge swaths of earth throughout the cemetery. He noted that even in her desperate state to find the tablet, she was careful not to disturb the coffins as she quickly swept past each row of gravestones.

Matthew had come running from the back of the cathedral, gripping a splintered shovel. He stopped in front of Klaus and cocked an eyebrow when he saw the way Kol’s desiccated body was dumped unceremoniously at his feet. “Vampires’ family squabbles get settled with a bit more finality than regular folk,” he observed, nudging Kol’s grayed cheek with the tip of his shovel.

“My brother is only temporarily dead.” At Matthew’s questioning look, Klaus explained, “I’ve desiccated him for now. I am deciding on how permanent his condition should be.”

Matthew wisely chose not to comment and instead jerked his head toward the whirling dervish that was Caroline as she continued clawing at the graveyard. “I take it the curse tablet is buried here?”

“Yes,” Klaus said urgently, “It was implied that the witch buried her curse tablet here. Apparently the Cailleach was actually Alaric’s lover before he met Caroline. Her name was Jennyfer or Jenna. She apparently bled the bloody bastard dry to use his life force in the curse. I assume this is the only cemetery for miles — if Alaric is buried here, the witch likely buried the curse tablet in his grave.”

The caretaker’s green eyes widened as he processed Klaus’ words. “It was said that that evil man had run afoul o’ a bandit’s blade.” He seemed to sense the seething anger that Klaus was experiencing as he thought of how Caroline had dwelled for decades within the same place where that vile human’s rotting body lay. “It tore me heart he was granted peace here. I wanted that wretch far away from me sister, even in death.”

Klaus could hear the anger in Matthew’s voice. “How could you allow it,” he asked, needing to understand.

“I planned to pull his worthless corpse from the ground meself and hurl it from the tallest cliff I could find, but Caroline stopped me. She was still getting used to her strength and managed to land so hard next to the grave that the stone marker split in half. Her eyes told me that any evil I did would do nothing to erase that bastard’s own.”

Klaus struggled to comprehend Caroline’s unfathomable capacity for forgiveness. “Your sister is a remarkable woman,” he said in awe.

“And best ye not forget it, lad,” Matthew warned with an edge to his voice as he whirled around with his shovel, pointing its tip in the far corner of the cemetery. “He’s over there.” In a loud voice, he called out to Caroline, “Quit tearin’ up me grounds! We think it’s buried with that devil man!”

With a high-pitched screech, the gargoyle leapt across several rows of graves until she reached the edge of the cemetery. She paused, quietly staring at the split marker with her piercing gaze. Just as Klaus flashed beside her, she reached out a sharp talon, tentatively grazing the damaged stone as though reflecting upon the memory Matthew had shared. Klaus kneeled beside the tombstone,
carefully resting his hand over her claws. She snorted gently before moving to the foot of the grave to begin digging with her powerful arms.

Klaus helped her excavate the moist earth, its sickeningly sweet, decayed smell permeated the night air. Matthew soon joined them with his shovel, wheezing and grumbling good naturedly about monsters forgetting that not every bloke could run without getting winded. The scrape of Caroline’s talons signaled that she had reached Alaric’s coffin. She gingerly lifted the lid, her gaze unreadable as she quietly stared at the rotted corpse. She reached inside, removing a small object before shutting the lid with surprising care.

Despite Klaus and Matthew’s exasperated shouts to break the object, she stubbornly ignored them and instead patiently began sweeping the earth from the disturbed grave back into its hole. The men grudgingly helped her, and soon the despicable soul’s resting place was refilled once more.

The beast held out its talons to show them a broken pottery shard, no larger than a human hand. It was streaked with odd rust-colored stains until Klaus realized it was likely bathed in Alaric’s blood. There was a bit of golden rope braided and wound around the curse tablet. The witch had used a piece of Caroline’s hair. Revolted, Klaus opened his mouth to urge her to destroy the object once and for all, but Matthew stepped forward instead, to place a comforting hand upon one of the gargoyle’s folded wings.

As though drawing courage from her brother’s presence, she clenched her fist tightly around the pottery shard until it turned into nothing more than dust as her human hair fell softly to the earth. The heavy night air seemed to ripple around the creature, and suddenly the demonic shape twisted and seemed to melt before their eyes, leaving a stunningly beautiful woman in its wake.

Large green eyes blinked rapidly at Matthew as she said in a sweet voice, slightly raspy from disuse, “Matty?”

The caretaker cursed softly, sweeping her into his arms as he spun her around, laughing and crying hysterically. “Caroline!” He set her down, grasping both of her hands as he shook his head in disbelief. “Blimey, ye look exactly the same as when ye was cursed at 17!”

Caroline giggled, playfully brushing at his thinning hair. “And yet wee baby brother seems to have aged up a bit.” They hugged and their joy seemed to light up the cemetery as they laughed heartily.

Klaus shifted awkwardly on his feet, feeling like an intruder upon the siblings’ joyful reunion. The noise drew their attention and Caroline’s eyes lit up as she studied the Original. “Klaus,” she said in delight, blushing prettily as she stepped out of her brother’s embrace to move toward him. “Caroline,” he replied softly.

Snorting derisively, Matthew rolled his eyes at the pair and said, “Go on then, don’t mind me. Me sister’s made a bleedin’ mess o’ the grounds and someone should tend to it.” He took her ivory hand and kissed it gently. He nodded toward Klaus and said solemnly, “Thank ye for restoring me sister. Ye’ve done a kindness that won’t be forgotten.”

Nodding absently, Klaus couldn’t tear his gaze away from the angelic vision before him to acknowledge Matthew’s retreating figure. He found himself inexplicably at a loss for words, despite months of planning what he would say once her curse was broken. How could he possibly begin to convey what he was feeling? He clumsily blurted out the first thought that came to him: “Would you care to watch the sunrise with me?”
Caroline’s blush deepened as she favored him with a brilliant smile that pierced his heart. She gently took his hands and pulled him toward the cathedral’s tower. “I know the perfect place.”
Chapter Summary

This latest adventure is set in Colonial America, where a brave, stubborn Caroline refuses to blindly conform to her village’s religious beliefs and makes it her mission to rescue an innocent man accused of witchcraft. Of course, the dimples and charming smile had nothing to do with her selfless act...

“Eye of newt, and toe of frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder’s fork, and blind-worm’s sting,
Lizard’s leg, and owlet’s wing,—
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.
Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.”
— *Macbeth*, William Shakespeare

Caroline carefully gathered the rough sack from under her small bed, wincing as the toe of her cracked leather shoe caught on the worn knot of her oak-paneled floor, causing a loud creak to echo throughout her bedroom and no doubt reach the ears of her sleeping father. She bit her lip, crouching in the darkness as she listened carefully for the telltale sounds of her father awakening. She allowed precious minutes to pass by, knowing that each moment she was in her home was one less she could spend to help the latest poor soul to run afoul of her village’s leaders and their foolish but deadly obsession with persecuting those accused of witchcraft.

Steeling her nerves, she stood up silently, breathing a sigh of relief when her house remained still in the cold night air. She was dressed to face the chill of the late autumn evening, but tightened the strings on her wool cape nonetheless as she mentally calculated the list of items she held in the sack to aid her in this night’s dangerous task. Satisfied she hadn’t forgotten anything, she nodded to herself as she quietly opened her bedroom door, pleased that she had remembered to grease the rusted hinges with goose fat to help dampen the noise as she made her escape.

Heart pounding, she finally slipped out of her house undetected and kept to the long shadows far away from the torchlights of the guard posts near the four corners of the village. As she edged past the market square, she couldn’t help but glance at the sight of the imposing whipping post that was purposely erected in the center of the village. Her lips curled in disdain as she thought back to this morning when she watched poor Niklaus Mikaelson, the village’s apothecary, tied down and beaten with a whip after he was accused of being a demon who practiced witchcraft on his neighbors. Even now, she shuddered as she recalled the darkness she spied upon Governor Mikaelson’s face as he watched the pale skin of his son’s back split open again and again by the braided leather until the ground was stained red with blood.

The governor had moved with his son to the New Haven Colony several years ago, right
after the death of his wife. He had ordered the meetinghouse to be converted into a home for them, as he declared it to be the largest and finest structure the village had to offer a man of his station. Few people argued as they could see his power in every confident tilt of his head, every curt word and, of course, his letters of introduction from respected leaders of the surrounding colonies.

It was Mikael’s eyes that had frightened Caroline upon seeing him for the first time at the church where the village now held their meetings. They were nearly black, but it was more than that — they were empty, devoid of all humanity, except perhaps rage. On more than one occasion, she had witnessed him spew vitriol and even strike his servants and his son indiscriminately. Under the close scrutiny of the public eye, she hadn’t dared to speak out, lest she draw attention to herself. With too many prying eyes upon her as it was, she was powerless before them. But, creeping about in the shadows, she found her power at last, and would not hesitate to help those in need.

Caroline quickly darted down the muddy pathway toward the jail, pausing to crouch behind the small smokehouse to wait for the watchmen to change shifts. She remembered how Niklaus had intrigued her from the start, with his dark blonde curls and merry blue eyes, but it was the way he would smile shyly at her, revealing innocent dimples, that made her blush prettily and look away quickly lest her father catch her acting unseemly.

She watched with quiet interest the past few years as he had grown into a handsome, learned man, and when he opened his shop, she suddenly felt the need to seek out his remedies for various twinges she and her father seemed to be plagued with. He likely thought she and her father were nearly at death’s door, considering the frequency with which she would visit, but he always aided her with whatever herbal concoctions he created, a welcome smile upon his handsome face.

Caroline sighed quietly as she ventured a peek from around the small shed. Matthew was slumbering, and she entertained the reckless notion of taking advantage of the situation and attempting to rescue Niklaus now, but she knew that Jeremiah would be along shortly to start his shift as a guard. As she inhaled the night air tinged with old smoke, she was reminded of the upcoming harvest celebration, and how the village would gather to celebrate nature’s bounty and begin the arduous task of preparing to smoke meats for winter. She looked forward to these occasions because it was a rare opportunity to interact with Niklaus outside of his shop without being accused of unseemly behavior.

A normally reserved man, he always kept his gaze respectful, but the small smiles she occasionally caught would cause her heart to flutter. The past planting season, he had taken to seeking her out in the market square where she would sell her needlepoint, and would spend his time carefully perusing her wares while engaging in polite conversation. At first, she had thought that he might pursue her, but she quickly quelled that foolish thought when she recalled his elevated station as the governor’s son and her own dismal status now that her family’s reputation was in tatters ever since her mother...

Enough of that. Caroline angrily shook her head, willing away her tears. Allowing those terrible memories to invade her thoughts during this mission would cause nothing but heartache and distraction. Squaring her shoulders, she ventured another glimpse at the front of the jail and tensed when she noticed Jeremiah join Matthew. Several agonizing moments later, Matthew finally left, and beetle-headed Jeremiah’s face broke into a lazy smile at the sound of light footsteps behind him. Matthew’s flirtatious sister, Victoria, stepped out of the shadows, giggling as she pulled Jeremiah toward the other side of the building.

Caroline rolled her eyes, vexed that a guard could be so easily swayed from his post. It certainly made her question the safety of her village, but for now, she should be thankful for small favors. Covertly sliding out from her hiding place, she soundlessly moved to the heavy wooden
outer door, carefully easing the iron latch to the side. From the tasteless grunting coming from the other side of the jail, she was confident that Jeremiah would be occupied a bit longer.

The dirt floor muffled her movements as she swiftly made her way into the moldy cell where Niklaus sat, his curly head bowed in defeat. Startled at her whispered greeting, he looked up immediately, his blue eyes appearing to stare right through her in the dim light of the torches. Breathing a sigh of relief that the village council hadn’t begun cruelly torturing out his confession, she quickly crossed the length of his cell to crouch by his side.

“Mistress Forbes,” Klaus croaked in a small voice tinged with awe.

The rustling of his manacles clanged about the cramped room, causing her to wince. “Shh. All is well, Master Mikaelson.” At his stunned expression, she favored him with a soft smile, adding, “But since I am here to rescue thee, perhaps we should dispense with the formalities and call each other by our Christian names?”

“Caroline,” he said in a hoarse whisper, drawing out her name slowly as though savoring the taste of the syllables. “What are — how did thee —” he stuttered uncertainly, clearly confused by her unexpected appearance.

“Thou needed my help,” she answered gently, touching the cold iron that encircled his wrists and had rubbed the pale skin nearly raw. The barbaric metal caused her fingers to tremble as the flood of unwelcome memories overcame her.

The sour earth of the jail cell assaulted her nostrils, making her retch. At 13, Caroline was able to squeeze her slender body through the loose rocks lining the foundation. She raced to her mother’s side, barely recognizing the broken woman in soiled rags and skin covered in lacerations and open sores. Elizabeth Forbes, along with her dear friend, Abigail Bennet, and Abigail’s daughter, Bonnie, had been accused of witchcraft.

The women had been dragged from their homes by the village elders along with Reverend Atticus Shane and Johnathan Gilbert leading the charge as they hurled foolhardy accusations against the women from claiming to see them transform into geese to blaming them for unleashing a sweating sickness upon the Gilbert family.

Caroline had tried to be brave as she wielded the heavy tool she had stolen from the blacksmith to break the chains of her mother and the other prisoners. Elizabeth stubbornly refused to be released first, demanding that Caroline instead see to Bonnie’s chains. Only a year older than Caroline, the poor girl’s cracked and bleeding lips trembled as she mumbled her thanks. Once Bonnie was free, Caroline raced back to her mother, but the guards’ voices suddenly appeared right outside the door. Alarmed, Abigail hissed to the girls to flee, realizing that both were thin enough to slip through the loose rocks in the flooring along the edge.

Always a willful child, Caroline shook her head furiously, silent tears running down her cheeks as she embraced her mother for the last time. “My brave, beautiful girl. Pray carry all my love with thee. Forever,” Elizabeth whispered in her ear, before shoving her away, the fierceness in her eyes burning with an almost feral quality as she watched Caroline and Bonnie make their escape.

“Are thou well,” Klaus’ worried tone jarred her from her dark thoughts.

“I — yes. My apologies,” she said, shaking her blonde head as her hood fell back to her shoulders. She tugged gently at his calloused hands, helping him to stand. “We must leave while we can.”
Klaus nodded in agreement, clearly disbelieving his good fortune. “I bid thee remove my chains with haste,” he entreated, his brow furrowed in worry.

Caroline quickly shook her head, leading him toward the small door she had pried open by a carefully placed tap upon the hinges using a stolen hammer and chisel. “We cannot tarry any longer. Please trust me with this knowledge, Niklaus — once we hath ensured thy freedom, thy bonds shall be released.”

He tilted his curly head in her direction curiously, the dim light catching the streaks of dirt upon his face. While he noted the faltering in her voice that was clearly troubled by disturbing memories, his only reply was, “I trust thee, Caroline.”

Despite the dreadful circumstances, she felt her cheeks turn scarlet. She quickly moved her dark cloak’s hood back over her head, hoping he didn’t see her pleasure at his faith in her. She rifled through her sack to withdraw a rough blanket, throwing it over his thin linen shirt to help protect him from the bite of the autumn air. He gave her a grateful smile before lowering his lashes shyly.

They quietly crept down the short hall of the jail, barely breathing as they silently made their way toward his freedom. Pausing briefly at a particularly unchaste groan, the pair did their best to avoid glancing at each other as they patiently waited to ensure the couple outside continued to be distracted.

Finally, Caroline led Klaus out of the jail, melting into the safety of the shadows. They huddled near the edge of the woods, waiting for the figure in the closest guard post to turn his head before they darted into the thick underbrush for cover. They made their way slowly in the dark, carefully weaving through clusters of oak and hickory trees. A heavy silence sat between the two as they traveled, following no obvious trail except the one that Caroline had mapped out in her mind with the confidence of one who had made this troubling journey far too many times during her young life.

Niklaus’ fears seemed to lessen the further away they were from the village, and he asked curiously, “Thou do not fear that I am a demon as our kinsmen hath accused?”

She scoffed, ducking under a gnarled branch that was blocking the way. “Thou must think me feeble-minded to believe the foolish nonsense our neighbors hath cried. That thine eyes turn yellow as thou work thy evil will upon the village. ‘Tis no witchcraft. No bedevilment.” She angrily shook her head, adding, “True demons are found in the dark hearts of men like thy father and the village elders he has led astray.”

Niklaus’ smile was sad as he jogged to her side once more, his chains jingling at his bound wrists as he tugged on the edges of the dark blanket at his shoulders. “I did not put stock in the foul rumors that plagued thy family’s name. But thy noble actions hath shown me that thou performed this act of mercy before.”

Caroline sighed heavily, pausing in her brisk pace to stare up at the sky, what little she could see of it through the dense cover of twisted branches. Her hood fell back once more, revealing the faraway look in her weary gaze. She wondered if her mother and Abigail were among the stars now, their light sending her the strength she found to carry on. “Yes. Mere months before thou arrived, several women were accused of witchcraft and brought before our village elders to confess their sins and repent. My mother, her dear friend, Abigail, and a girl not much older than me, refused to admit to such blasphemous falsehoods. They were selfless, simple healers, and nothing more!”
They carried on in silence a bit longer, the weight of Caroline’s bitterness coloring the space between them. She found herself at ease in his presence, wishing their lives had afforded them more moments together. “I tried to save them all, but alas, I could only help Abigail’s daughter.” She took a shaky breath, trying to steel her nerves once more. “My mother and Abigail were hanged the next day. My father and I were denied her remains; we were forbidden from granting her a proper burial.”

He bowed his head, troubled blue eyes downcast as he murmured, “Thy loss is great; thou hast my deepest sympathies. But what thou hast wrought in the wake of such tragedy — I am quite amazed.” He gasped as though a thought suddenly struck him. “Clever maiden, thou were the reason Mistress Claire mysteriously escaped from her cell a year ago and Mistress Pierce this past spring!”

She warmed under his praise, unused to such flattery. “Fortune favored me upon those nights. Master Saltzman hath grown fond of his drink and slumbered through my rescue and Master Lockwood’s gluttony with the rancid quail meat caused him to frequent the necessary house, which aided in the other rescue.” She smiled tremulously. “I — I do what I must to save as many as I can...for my mother. To make up for my failings with her.”

His firm rebuttal startled the nesting crow nearby. Its rebuking caw pierced the night air. “No! Thou are blameless in this madness, Caroline. The evil that men do, it shall not touch one such as thee.”

Her meek smile was her only response as they continued on their way through the thick underbrush. Sometime later, she declared in a low voice, “Nor is the evil that men do upon thee, Niklaus. Thou shall not suffer the noose as long as I can help it. No one shall.”

He chuckled, “This fire within thee is a sight to behold. I must admit, thou willful nature captured my interest, but I searched for glimpses of that fire when thou tarried in my shop. I wish thee had allowed this spark to light thy way more often.”

Caroline inwardly winced, realizing that the handsome man before her had seen through her simple ruse time and again when she falsely sought him out for remedies. “I did not wish to behave improperly. I merely wanted —” she abruptly stopped speaking, mortified at her boldness.

He seemed to understand that she had revealed more of herself than she meant to, and glanced away, kindly asking, “What is my fate on this night? Where are thou leading me?”

Caroline gestured to a narrow passageway outlined with several boulders. “We hath almost reached the docks. I hath secured thee passage on a ship headed to France. I fear thou shall need to speak falsehoods onboard; I’ve implied that thou are a part of the fur trading expedition that journeyed down the St. Lawrence.”

He laughed softly, clearly stunned by her ingenuity. “However did thou manage such a feat? Perhaps it is thee who dabbles in the black arts,” he teased with twinkling blue eyes.

She scoffed, cheeks rosy under his blatant perusal. “My mother ‘twas a healer who counted many traders amongst her allies. I hath quietly strengthened those ties where I can to aid in my missions.” She wagged her finger mockingly at him. “Keep spinning such nonsensical stories of witchcraft and I shall fear thee touched in the head, Niklaus.” She stopped walking when she sensed the salt in the air had become more pronounced. A well-worn trail was merely steps away, winding out of the dense trees and downhill toward the docks.

She set down the heavy burlap sack she had been carrying and began rooting through it to
find the blacksmith’s hammer and chisel once more. When she straightened to face him, she explained, “While I do not possess coin to spare, I did gather a supply of smoked venison and apples. ‘Tis meager at best, but my friends onboard hath kindly agreed to share what they can.” She motioned for her companion to place his wrists against the rough bark of a wide hickory trunk.

Niklaus raised his arms, shocking her with his bold caress of her soft cheek. “The kindness thou hast shown upon this night shall not be forgotten, dear Caroline. I shall find a way to properly honor thy selfless deed.”

Nearly blushing to her roots, she placed his wrists as far apart as she could upon the trunk as she swung the hammer with surprising precision. The sharp edge of the iron chisel wedged itself between the links of the old metal cuffs, twisting under the pressure she applied until his bonds were severed.

His hoarse victory cry filled her with joy as she bent at the base of the hickory to collect the mangled bits of chain. Her intent was to bury them off in the woods away from her trail to avoid her precious escape route from being discovered. She noticed an odd etching around the bonds, almost like a design. *What a peculiar object to display one’s craftsmanship,* she thought to herself.

As she straightened once more, she gripped the mouth of the burlap sack to hand to Niklaus, but it fell from her grasp at what suddenly stood before her.

Niklaus peered down at her inquisitively, his blue eyes suddenly bleeding gold in the night. Even more disturbing, his innocent dimples now framed a cunning grin with sharp fangs. Immediately sensing her terror, he tried to calm her with his velvet voice. “All is well, dear Caroline. Thou hast nothing to fear from me, brave little bird.”

He gestured to the useless bits of iron at their feet, running long fingers tipped with claws along the raw skin of his wrists until it healed before her startled eyes. “Thou freed me from those cursed chains that sought to bind my power. I am whole once more,” he said fondly, winding a stray blonde lock that had escaped from her hairpins around a pointed claw.

Caroline struggled to keep from shaking as she stared at the creature before her. She couldn’t understand how the handsome man she once knew had become this terrifying beast, and she was distraught to find that she her infatuation with Niklaus was inexplicably strengthened by this revelation of his true form. She was intrigued despite his evil visage, and she was filled with questions she felt shameful for thinking. “Niklaus, what on earth...how can thou be...this,” she squeaked helplessly, her emotions a jumbled mess.

“Thou would be amazed at what walks this earth, little bird,” he hummed, a playful glint in his golden gaze. “Oh, the wonders I shall show thee — one day.” He grasped her hand, turning over her bare palm to his hungry stare. Suddenly, a small bronze coin appeared there, nestled between her cold fingers. With a delicate claw, he traced the time-roughened ridges of a peculiar symbol — a circle topped by what appeared to be a horizontal crescent moon.

Caroline gasped at the appearance of the object in her hand, her alarm quelled by the wonder of his power. “I thought magic ‘twas but a fool’s tale. Never in all of creation would I hath thought to see such a marvelous thing,” she confessed breathlessly.

“This is my talisman, dear Caroline. If ever thou are in need, merely call my name while grasping it, and I shall be summoned,” he said in a serious tone as he closed her trembling fingers around the ancient coin. He released her hand, bending to pick up the fallen sack at their feet. Casually swinging it over one shoulder, he added, “One day, when thou hath finished thy quest to save everyone around thee, thou shall summon me.”
She found herself oddly charmed by his flirtation. “How can thou be so certain? I possess quite the willful nature, after all,” she teased.

Tipping her a devilish wink, he replied, “Because I can be a valuable friend to possess; especially to such a willful creature who insists upon leading a reckless, albeit selfless life.”

With a soft kiss to her knuckles, Niklaus whispered, “Fare the well, dear Caroline,” and disappeared without a trace, leaving behind a stunned Caroline who found herself considering the endless possibilities to be had in such a mysterious world.
More than One Way to Paint a Cat

Chapter Summary

This story came from a prompt by anonymous: “Can you write a drabble where Klaus paints Caroline’s naked body?”

Somehow, this evolved into an AU human Playboy-esque empire that features Klaroline. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

Warning: Delightful smut!

“Art can never exist without naked beauty displayed.”
— William Blake

“Of all the bizarre things I expected to see in this place, this is certainly not one of them,” a crisp British accent teased, causing Caroline to sigh and mark her place in her massive textbook with her pink highlighter. She crossed her bare legs and resettled her naked body in the comfortable suede makeup chair at the vanity before regarding the intrusive voice with a raised eyebrow.

“Define bizarre. It’s the Pretty Kitty Mansion — you’d have to put in some effort to come across as bizarre in this place,” she retorted, not bothering to mask the edge in her tone. She was used to going on the defensive about her job; so many people, most of them hypocrites, were quite fond of telling her how awful she was to be exploiting herself. However, Caroline was a pragmatist, and when she started college years ago, she realized that the most lucrative way to support herself until she finished her degree was to pose nude for Pretty Kitty Magazine.

She hadn’t expected much at first — appearing in a handful of pictorials had allowed her to pay for several semesters and even start a small savings account. What she hadn’t anticipated was how popular she would become with readers. Long blonde curls, wide blue eyes and a petite, curvy body was an all-American, girl-next-door look that apparently readers couldn’t get enough of. It wasn’t until the Pretty Kitty Enterprises mogul himself, Alaric Saltzman, had contacted her to become a Pretty Kitty girl that she realized the extent of her accidental success.

She had been upfront with him from the start — her education came first. She also put in her contract that she was strictly a print-and-appearances model only. She had no interest in the myriad of other businesses the adult industry had to offer. She had goals and plans and none of
them involved becoming a household name in the adult entertainment industry. Working on the fringes gave her the funds she needed to finish school and hopefully open her own vet clinic one day.

Today was one of her obligatory appearance days at the Pretty Kitty Mansion. They were hosting a huge football party for the typical mixture of Hollywood types and executives and Alaric expected his top Pretty Kitty girls to attend the party wearing a cropped jersey and tiny boy shorts that artists would paint onto their bodies. She had been skeptical at first that it would look like anything other than naked girls running around in Jackson Pollock’s wet dream, but the test run they did the other day had surprised her with how real the paint had looked. It actually seemed as though the girls were wearing skimpy outfits rather than merely carefully applied paint. The textures, the shadows and contours with the airbrush had been breathtaking. She had been looking forward to getting painted again just to see the artist operate, but apparently the artist they’d saddled her with today was going to be a judgmental jackass.

“Well, to answer your question, I expected more of a raging orgy or at least a feisty pillow fight,” the man stated, dimples bracketing his smirk which under normal circumstances she would consider charming.

Caroline snorted. “Right, well, sorry to disappoint, but the orgies and pillow fights apparently take place when I’m not around. I’m a bit busy these days and I suspect those activities would be a huge time suck.” She narrowed her blue eyes at the attractive man before her, trying not to openly stare at the hard planes of his chest as he moved or the way his beautifully sculpted cheekbones accentuated his impossibly handsome face. “You must be my artist today. I’m Caroline.” She held out her hand to shake and tried not to roll her eyes when he kissed her knuckles instead.

“Enchanted to meet you, Caroline. I’m Klaus.” He cocked his head toward the textbook in her lap and asked, “I’m curious, love, is Understanding Zoonotic Diseases typical reading material for a Pretty Kitty girl?”

“It is when the Pretty Kitty girl is in her second-to-last year of vet school and has no plans to still be posing nude when she’s an AARP member,” Caroline retorted, tapping her nails impatiently against the slick cover of the textbook.

Klaus’ gray eyes widened in surprise. “Color me impressed, love. Forgive me for assuming you were merely perpetuating the college girl myth that the Pretty Kitty brand cultivates.”

She snorted, rolling her eyes as she set the book back on the counter. “Yeah, Alaric was thrilled when he found out I was actually in college pursuing a degree that I could discuss with guests when it’s warranted. Apparently, Pretty Kitty readers believe that all intelligent, sexy coeds love nothing more than posing nude while harboring a burning desire to date them.”

She laughed when she thought of the lengths some of the other Pretty Kitty girls would go to just to play up that fantasy for readers. “Some of the girls stalk university websites and memorize course descriptions and degree requirements before appearances, just to sell the myth that all Pretty Kitty girls are in college. In the time they spend to learn enough about college to lie about it, they could actually have a degree.”

Klaus gave a short laugh. “I wondered about that. Earlier, I was painting this dull blonde who was spouting some nonsense about psychology and Freud that sounded a bit off.”

She smiled knowingly. “You had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Wiki. Well, her name’s Cami, but she spends all of her time online researching psychology in a Herculean effort to obtain some
semblance of a personality. I keep telling her that Wikipedia isn’t a legitimate site for authentic research, but she just babbles at me about my mommy/daddy issues until I get bored and leave.”

He shook his curly head laughing, motioning for Caroline to stand on top of the platform to begin the intricate painting process. “Tell me, sweetheart, what led you to veterinary medicine? Was it a love of kitties,” he asked with a cheeky grin, garnering a well-deserved eye roll from Caroline.

Huffing, she said, “Actually I decided large animal medicine was the way to go; seeing as how I have such extensive experience interacting with jackasses and other moronic barnyard inhabitants with this job.”

“You are a delight, Caroline,” he said in an amused tone. His brow furrowed for a moment as he regarded her naked body and asked, “Now then, did you properly hydrate today? Have you eaten? Don’t want you fainting on me, love. Also, did you remember to avoid any lotions or oils for the past couple of days? I want to make sure we have good coverage.”

“Yes, yes and yes,” she answered with a smile. “Alaric drilled your instructions into our heads during our pre-party meeting earlier this week. In between encouraging us to learn something about football to help sell the Pretty Kitty girl fantasy, of course,” she wryly added.

Klaus paused from repositioning her body to ask confusedly, “There’s a Pretty Kitty girl football fantasy?”

Caroline shook her head, sighing dramatically. “Oh yes, haven’t you heard? Apparently in addition to all Pretty Kitty girls being sexy coeds, we’re also obsessed with football.” She wrinkled her nose, adding, “And for some reason, there’s this weird component where guys like to hear about how we either have several older brothers from which we learned about football or we were Daddys’ girls and our fathers taught us all about the game. It’s rather disturbing, to say the least.”

Appalled, Klaus began loading his airbrush with the base coat of body paint. “Where on earth did you get that disconcerting idea from?”

“Extensive market research. I’m sure it comes as no surprise, but Alaric has a top-notch marketing team at his disposal and they apparently have some fairly impressive scientific data to back up their claims, no matter how ridiculous they sound.” She rolled her eyes and continued with, “Besides, I’ve seen their theories in action. Works like a charm every single time. If you’re attending the kickoff party this evening, you’ll get a front row seat to how easy it is for a Pretty Kitty girl to take a guy’s vulnerable ego for a ride.”

He murmured in his delicious British accent, “I wouldn’t miss it, sweetheart.” The soft hum of the airbrush compressor began as he sprayed a narrow swath of black across the tops of her hips. He jerked his chin toward the stack of index cards near her textbook. “Being such an apt pupil, I assume you took Alaric’s suggestion to heart. Would you care to dazzle me with your vast knowledge of American football?”

She closed her eyes briefly as she enjoyed the pleasant sensation of the cool mist against her soft flesh. “Let’s see…the Patriots have yet to throw an interception on any of their 216 passes this season. Also, Seattle’s offense has an extremely porous offensive line and is a giant mess. Unfortunately, the Saints don’t possess the kind of defense needed to take advantage though.”

Klaus laughed, a slow, easy laugh that made Caroline fight a blush that wanted to erupt across her ivory cheeks. “Impressive, love. Although I must admit I do not follow American sports, so I’m at a bit of a disadvantage. I suspect it’s more than enough to convince the average guest at
the Pretty Kitty Mansion.” He added a layer of antique gold to the edges of his design, dipping a tiny paintbrush in water before carefully removing hints of overspray from her smooth skin.

The warmth of his calloused fingers against her toned belly made her shiver slightly. Concerned, he asked, “Is the temperature ok for you? I know it can get a bit chilly standing still for so long during the process. I could send for some tea or coffee if you like.”

Caroline smiled at his question. During her career, she had worked with a variety of makeup and bodypaint artists, but rarely did they treat her as more than a blank canvas or saw her body as anything more than an object. It was nice to be treated like a person for once. “I’m fine, thanks. And yes, the sports jargon the girls memorize usually is enough to leverage whatever advantage they’re after. In fact, they usually just borrow my index cards to review before an appearance. Although sometimes their ambition is puzzling to me.”

“I assume you’re referring to Alaric’s infamous stable of girlfriends that live with him in the Pretty Kitty Mansion,” Klaus asked, slowly moving the airbrush nozzle across her full breasts with another application of black paint.

She grinned, trying to stay still on the pedestal. “Yes, being one of Alaric’s girlfriends is apparently a so-called prize a lot of these girls are after. I try not to judge, but they could have so much more going for them if they just applied themselves. You know, Alaric approached me not long after I started posing to see if I wanted to join his stable of Pretty Kitty girlfriends.” She snorted, explaining, “I declined, and told him that it was a clowder of girlfriends, since they’re kitties.”

He laughed, applying a fine dusting of antique gold along the band of her cropped jersey design. “How droll. Tell me, do you think he’ll end up marrying any of his girlfriends?”

She blew a strand of blonde hair out of her face, hoping that her sloppy bun of curls wasn’t about to fall and smudge Klaus’ work. “Who knows. A lot of these girls are looking for some guy to save them. Alaric has six divorces behind him, but he’s 56, so he’s got plenty of time to rack up a few more if he wants.” she said with a cheeky grin.

Klaus picked up a wide-tipped paintbrush to begin the slow process of adding thin stripes to his work. With a lazy smile that made his gray eyes twinkle, he asked, “And what about you, love? Do you need saving?”

Caroline scoffed, “Please. I do my own saving.” She glanced down at her body, admiring Klaus’ incredible work. “I don’t feel any shame with my job. It’s just naked people. Once you get past the initial social construct of guilt that inexplicably surrounds nudity, it feels almost normal.”

Klaus favored her with a slow once-over glance that lingered a bit too long to be completely professional. However, she was again struck by the thought that she felt completely at ease around him and that his interest did not make her feel objectified. If anything, she felt powerful under the intensity of his gaze, and wished fervently she could take the time to immediately explore this electric connection she felt between them. Unfortunately, her contractual obligations demanded her attendance at the kickoff party, but she felt a small thrill of excitement at the prospect of what might happen afterward...

“You have nothing to be ashamed about, sweetheart,” Klaus replied, jarring her from her daydream before it could become too heated. He carefully drew his paintbrush down the center of her chest, creating the illusion of movement with white numbers emblazoned upon the cropped jersey motif.
“I use a variety of mediums to express my art, but bodypainting is a personal favorite,” he revealed, carefully edging the curve of a numeral with the flat of his bristles. “It’s a four-dimensional experience in that it moves through time and space with the graceful flow of a dancer. A stunning partnership between artist and model in which we work together to breathe life into the creation.” His reverent tone took her by surprise as he regarded her with a serious, if somewhat heated gaze. “Thank you for sharing my art, Caroline.”

She nodded mutely, unable to form words after his passionate speech. Once the bodypainting was finished, Klaus left her to the hair and makeup team, promising to seek her out at the party.

Several hours later, Caroline and the rest of the Pretty Kitty girls were making the rounds at the kickoff party, strategically positioning themselves with various groups of guests to achieve what Alaric called “maximum kitty coverage”. No guest was left alone for too long, and there always seemed to be an eager Pretty Kitty girl nearby to offer a flirty smile.

Alaric was at the center of the party, lounging upon an enormous red leather sectional with several of his “stable” paying court to the Pretty Kitty mogul. They simpered, feeding him hors d’oeuvres and fetching him tumblers of scotch or the occasional cigar. Caroline managed to keep from rolling her eyes, shifting her gaze toward the beautiful artwork Klaus and his staff had created with the Pretty Kitty girls’ shapely bodies.

She spied cropped jersey and tiny boy shorts with Patriots, Seahawks, and Chargers logos and another group on the other side of the cavernous room was sporting Broncos, Bills and Saints uniforms. Wearing the gorgeous bodypaint designs was actually a nice change of pace from the usual Pretty Kitty ensemble of whiskers, cat ear headband, tail and sexy lingerie. She didn’t mind the furry tail too much, but the bell around her neck was irritating as shit after a couple of hours of jingling with even the smallest of movements.

A tap upon Caroline’s shoulder caused her to turn and she managed to avoid taking an immediate step back when her nostrils were overwhelmed by the reek of far too much Creed Aventus. The musk blended with a hint of patchouli jarred her senses, and she tried to keep her eyes from watering too badly as she smiled brightly at the guest before her.

Heartthrob Jeremy Gilbert flashed her a cocky grin, clearly still reveling in his supernatural TV series’ renewal despite a stunning lack of support from viewers. The show was more famous for its confounding ability to alienate its audience, but Caroline’s theory was that the showrunner had made some sort of Faustian bargain to ensure its continued, baffling success. Hollywood was built on Faustian bargains, Caroline surmised, and a quick glance around the room seemed to prove her theory.

Jeremy leered at her, clearly trying to find her nipples underneath the carefully applied layers of body paint. He finally seemed to give up his ‘Where’s Waldo’ tit search, and slurred, “Hey there, Pretty Kitty. What’s a pretty kitty like you doin’ over here with a guy like me?”

She chuckled and said teasingly, “Obviously waiting for you to tell me all about your birthday party last weekend.” She read the headlines online just like everyone else, and knew all about Jeremy’s 21st birthday bash that had gotten completely out of control at one of Hollywood’s infamous underground clubs, Hunter’s Mark. Jeremy and half of his entourage had gotten arrested and the mug shots had been online almost instantly.
His booming laugh echoed throughout the party, almost drowning out the various flat
screens on the walls. “Oh yeah, it was off the hook, yo! We had us some fine bitches and a hella
 ton of shots before five-oh came down on us hard, dawg!”

“How utterly charming,” interjected a dry British voice that Caroline would recognize
anywhere. Klaus stood next to the sloppily drunk actor, not bothering to hide his distaste.

Next to their awkward group, Caroline overheard Vicki, a fellow Pretty Kitty, robotically
spout off the lines she had rehearsed from Caroline’s index cards: “The Patriots haven’t thrown
any interceptions this season, which is really impressive if you think about it,” the brunet said
with such wide-eyed enthusiasm that it managed to capture Jeremy’s attention.

“Patriots! Yo, that’s my team,” he crowed, slinging a muscular arm around Vicki’s red- and
navy-painted shoulders as he nearly dropped his drink in his eagerness. Vicki eyed him with
interest, obviously recognizing the celebrity, and she silently looked at Caroline to see if she was
interrupting anything Caroline wanted to finish.

Caroline gave a slight shake of her head, signaling Vicki that she should feel free to
“poach” away, and with a wicked grin, Vicki casually whisked Jeremy away to a more private area.
That was one of the reasons why Caroline felt at ease with this job — she had expected a certain
amount of cattiness between the Pretty Kitty girls as though they would view everything as a
twisted competition, but that was mostly avoided among the more seasoned girls.

There was an unexpected amount of mutual respect and protectiveness in the group of
Pretty Kitty headliners, and they had developed a series of subtle signals to use for various
situations such as bailing out a fellow Pretty Kitty if a guest got too grabby and a bouncer wasn’t
handy, and of course, backing off if someone was genuinely interested in one of the guests.

“You look amazing, love,” Klaus murmured, snagging them both a glass of champagne
from one of the waiters circulating drink trays. “It’s understandable that even that brainless git
would be enamored by your beauty.”

Caroline snorted, taking a sip of her champagne. “Please. All that kid’s after is trolling for
his first future divorce.”

Klaus laughed, shaking his head as he took in the over-the-top buffet towers, NFL logo ice
sculptures, and painted ladies of extraordinary beauty flitting in and out of groups of famous faces.
“Are you sure you’ll be able to give this up when you finish your degree? There’s a certain
intoxicating energy that could be very seductive to some.”

“Without question,” Caroline said decisively. “This is a means to an end. I’ve formed
friendships here and I’ll take some great memories with me, but none of this is really me.” She
flicked her blue eyes to a television and was ecstatic to see enough time had passed that no one
would mind if she disappeared from the party a bit early. She licked her lips, mouth suddenly dry.
“Would you be interested in seeing the real me?” She cocked her blonde head, letting her curly
mane tease the sides of her neck. “Maybe we could make another memory,” she asked coyly.

He visibly swallowed, trying to mask the surprise on his face at her unexpected
forwardness. “It would be my pleasure, sweetheart.” He allowed his gaze to sweep over her
exquisitely painted form until she became uncomfortably warm. “Perhaps we could start with
sliding you out of my creation,” he asked, holding out an elbow for her to grasp.

She was charmed by his old-fashioned manners and reminded herself to walk at a normal
pace in her ridiculous sneaker-inspired high heels that Alaric had specially commissioned for the
Pretty Kitty girls to wear at sports-themed events.

They went upstairs to the studio and Caroline settled back into the same suede makeup chair where she was first introduced to Klaus. Making herself comfortable, she crossed her legs and asked, “Will the paint removal take very long? I was hoping we could make our escape soon,” she finished with a teasing lilt.

Klaus moved in front of the vanity and set down a large ceramic bowl with water and two hand towels. With a grin, he answered, “A bit eager, are we? A little soap and water should do the trick, but in my professional opinion, a hot shower is probably best. A nice, long shower,” he rumbled, gripping the edge of the marble counter as he stared down at her, gauging her reaction to his blatant invitation.

Smiling coyly from under her thick lashes, she uncrossed her legs slowly, propping the pointed toe of her high heel upon his jeans-clad knee. “Well, then. Who am I to argue with a professional?”

The tip of his red tongue touched the middle of his upper lip as he bent over to unlace her shoe, easing it off of her foot before gently caressing the aching skin. She let out a small groan of relief as he repeated the blissful treatment with her other foot as well. Catching the gleam in his eye, she grabbed both of his outstretched hands as he pulled her out of the chair, allowing him to lead her to a private spa oasis complete with an enormous shower whose walls mirrored the carved rock of the downstairs grotto.

Klaus lovingly caressed her face, whispering with reverence, “What you do is extraordinary, love. You are extraordinary. You bare more than just your skin. You share a piece of your beautiful soul with the world.” He gently kissed her lips, pulling away slightly when he felt her hands curl around his.

She sighed sweetly against his lips. “Thank you. It means a lot, that you search for more than what’s just on the surface.” She nibbled on his lower lip playfully, eliciting a low growl from him as he felt her small hands unbuckle his belt, squeezing the prominent bulge she found. One hand flattened against the small of her back, pressing her firmly to his firm body as his other hand began fumbling with his zipper.

Growing impatient, she gripped the edges of his casual navy shirt, ripping it over his curly head and tossing it carelessly behind them as she began to grind against his erection. He stepped out of his shoes, shedding the rest of his clothes quickly as he yanked her into the shower.

Caroline flicked on the multiple shower heads, savoring the steady water pressure that started massaging their bodies with delightfully warm water. Small rivers of black, white and antique gold dripped down her curves and Klaus brushed his long artist’s fingers down her supple skin. He rubbed tiny circles, gently brushing away the remnants of his handiwork as she sighed contentedly, completely under his spell.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him down into a heated kiss that fanned the growing flames between them. He moaned into the kiss, digging his fingers into her hips as he unexpectedly spun her around to face the rock wall. Pressing the muscular planes of his chest against her back, he hoarsely whispered, “I want to mark you, sweetheart. I need to. Will you let me?”

Caroline quickly nodded, letting out a breathless gasp as she felt him part her thighs just enough to nestle his throbbing cock at the juncture of her sex, allowing her thighs to cradle his slickened tip. He began smoothly thrusting, grunting, “Squeeze those delicious thighs for me, love.
I want to feel you get me off.” He rested his forehead against her neck, panting, “Just like that, nice and tight.”

She felt a thrill of excitement at Klaus’ foreplay, loving his adventurous side and need to mark her thoroughly. She squeezed her thigh muscles, savoring the feel of his thickness as it moved just under her folds, teasing the sensitive flesh. He stiffened against her, cursing as he reached his peak. His sticky essence spilled down her thighs, painting them liberally.

He turned her to face him, dropping to his knees to place butterfly kisses at her navel, causing her belly to flutter pleasantly. Easing her thighs apart, he ran his strong hands appreciatively up and down her legs, delighting in the feel of his mark upon her delectable body. “I want to taste you, love. Every dripping, aroused layer.” He placed his index fingers at her entrance, experimentally parting the quivering folds as the water from one of the shower heads rained down pleasurably.

She grasped his soaked curls, pulling his head toward her and gasped at the first touch of his sinful tongue. Every nerve in her body came alive under the feel of his demanding mouth, and she ground her pelvis onto his impatient lips. Her startled cry at the first feel of his nipping teeth nearly sent her careening over the edge, and she tightened her grip on his blonde locks. “I want you,” she panted brokenly. “Inside. Now!”

His answering grin was wicked as he paused briefly to rake his gray, lusty gaze over her soaked, trembling form. “As the lady commands,” he growled, suddenly plunging his tongue deeply within her core, swirling and teasing her aching passage.

She bucked her hips fiercely, feeling her orgasm build until she had no choice but to fall over the edge into ecstasy, calling out his name as she rode out each pleasurable wave. As she came down from her high, she noticed his smug face as he took his time licking his swollen lips. “Not exactly what I meant,” she chastised, breathing heavily.

Klaus slowly rose to his feet, reaching down to fist his hardening cock as he gazed at her unabashedly. She was mesmerized by each stroke, delighting in how he shivered under her hungry stare. The thick head peaked out from his palm, beads of desire gathering once more. “Tell me what you meant, love,” he taunted in his delicious accent, pausing to squeeze his tip just so, emitting a sexy little growl.

Caroline cupped her wet breasts, squeezing her hardened nipples as she watched him increase his strokes. She tugged at the aching tips, the sweet, painful rush causing her to moan. “I want your cock. I need it,” she crooned, widening her thighs as she continued to toy with her slick flesh.

He groaned at the tempting sight of her, and quickly pushed her back against the wall, yanking one toned thigh around his waist as he guided his heated tip into her welcoming passage. He dipped his head down to deliver a fiery kiss, savoring the taste of her upon his tongue.

Caroline tightened her grip with her leg, pulling him closer to her as she followed the smooth rhythm he set with his hips. He groaned against her neck at the feel of her, so warm and pliant against him, and she cried out as he delicately nibbled along her collarbone. She could feel herself building toward another explosive release and met each powerful thrust eagerly chasing her high.

“Almost there, sweetheart,” Klaus whispered hoarsely, reaching down to rub her swollen clit as he bucked against her. “You just need a little more,” he declared, increasing the pressure of his talented fingers just right before she felt her body began to spasm once again. As her release
washed over her, he let go as well, groaning into her mouth as he pulled her in for another kiss that left her breathless and trembling.

As they held onto each other underneath the warm spray, he gazed down at her fondly. “You are a revelation when you come, sweetheart.” He grazed one of her sensitive nipples lightly, his reverent gaze never leaving her lovely face. “But I’ve been a bit remiss in my professional capacity. I spy a few places where my artwork still clings.”

Caroline curled her lips into a teasing smile. “Well, you did recommend a long shower. Perhaps we should try again...”
The Red Light Special

Chapter Summary

In this AU Klaroline installment, human! Klaus is a photographer with the lofty ambition of capturing the enigmatic beauty to be found in Storyville’s most famous brothel. Along the way, he may learn that not all mysteries should be unraveled...

Chapter Notes

Warning: Because a New Orleans story demands some smut. Especially a Storyville New Orleans story. :)

“The next time you try to seduce anyone, don't do it with talk, with words. Women know more about words than men ever will. And they know how little they can ever possibly mean.”
— William Faulkner

Sweat rolled down Klaus’ temples, causing the close-cropped ends of his dirty blonde hair to curl as he hurried down North Basin Street. He was in the heart of Storyville, the famous red light district of New Orleans. Gambling houses and brothels dotted the streets and raucous jazz music poured out of practically every open window. Groups of men and women danced and laughed, flirting and drinking while lounging on wide porches and underneath hanging lanterns. The area certainly lived up to its bawdy reputation for an endless party as he smiled appreciatively at the loud celebrations happening all around him.

His hands shook slightly as he consulted his blue book, a published listing to guide tourists through the best places to go in Storyville for nearly any vice one could imagine. Considered the ‘sporting man’s’ friend, the discrete resource confirmed for Klaus what he had long-heard whispered in the city: For the most sensual debauchery, The Red Lotus was the place to go.

Ran by Caroline Forbes, one of the most famous madams in Storyville, it was a bawdy house that boasted enigmatic women of ethereal beauty who catered to a variety of tastes and appetites. Caroline had built a formidable reputation as being fiercely protective of her girls, and while she encouraged a good time among her guests, she also demanded that everyone play by her rules and above all, respect her workers.

Klaus fiddled with the cracked leather strap of his camera case, worried that Miss
Forbes would deny his request to photograph her girls. He had made a name for himself as a commercial photographer in the city, selling his photos of the shipyards, landmarks and industrial machinery, but he yearned for more. He wanted his photography to mean something. He needed it to matter. He wanted to show humanity at its most raw, to somehow expose the innate beauty that resides there, and bring it out for the world to see.

He hesitantly climbed the wide stone steps of the imposing mansion before him, taking in the magnificent marble columns and the exquisitely carved mahogany door. He squinted at the design near the top of the archway, deciding the graceful curves were describing a simple lotus flower. The door suddenly swung open, revealing a tall, lean man with dark hair slicked back who eyed him critically. “Do you have an appointment, mate?”

Clearing his throat, Klaus answered awkwardly, “Actually, I was hoping to see Miss Forbes if it’s not too much trouble.”

Crossing his arms protectively in front of his chest, the man replied, “Miss Forbes doesn’t take appointments, mate. But I’m sure any of her girls would be more than happy to spend some time with you.” He made a sweeping gesture, stepping aside to invite him across the threshold. “Why don’t you step into the parlor and we can make arrangements?”

Klaus smoothed out the wrinkles on his linen suit jacket, readjusting his camera strap as he followed the man inside. The parlor was richly decorated in sumptuous fabrics of deep jewel tones and sparkling crystal chandeliers that twinkled merrily. He noticed a gentleman sprawled across an emerald green chaise, his clothes rumpled and slightly askew. He was pale and glassy-eyed, but wore a relaxed smile of contentment. It was the signature state of all patrons to The Red Lotus, or so the whispers on the streets went; those who ventured here experienced the height of ecstasy, but near-exhaustion was the apparent price.

Klaus addressed the dark-haired stranger once more. “Actually, I was hoping for permission to see all of Miss Forbes’ girls today, once I’ve seen Miss Forbes, that is.”

The stranger raised an eyebrow, whistling low. “My, my that’s some stamina you’re boasting there, mate.”

As Klaus sputtered, trying to explain his true purpose, a melodic voice called out, “Enzo, that’s no way to speak to our guest. From the delicious accent, he’s clearly come along way; who are we to deny him coming further?” Both men turned toward the grand staircase, watching in admiration as a stunning blonde lightly caressed the polished mahogany bannister as she descended the steps. She was dressed in a blood red gown that dipped a bit too low to be considered modest, and a delicate choker of rubies and diamonds rested at her slender throat.

Klaus quickly removed his soft felt homburg, his breath caught in his throat as she came to a stop before him, holding out her small hand for him to kiss. The man called Enzo muttered under his breath and said gruffly, “Gorgeous, this gentleman made an odd request and I don’t like the looks of him.”

Her ruby lips curved into a knowing grin. “Welcome to The Red Lotus, kind sir, where we specialize in odd requests. My name is Caroline Forbes, proprietor of this fine establishment.”

Forcing himself to breathe evenly, he quickly grazed his lips across her knuckles and replied, “Miss Forbes, what a delight to meet you. I am Klaus Mikaelson, a local photographer, and I have a business proposition for you.”

She winked at him, her long lashes sweeping prettily across her soft skin. “I’ve been
known to indulge in a good proposition upon occasion, and please call me Caroline.” She turned toward Enzo and pointed to the man who was nearly passed out on the chaise. “Enzo, it appears that Annabelle and Victoria were a bit more vigorous with Jeremiah than anticipated. Do be a dear and send for a carriage to take him home.” Grumbling under his breath about weak-willed wankers, Enzo slung a companionable arm around Jeremiah’s shoulders and moved him out of the room.

Caroline gracefully stepped across the gleaming pine floors and lead Klaus to a cozy alcove that appeared to be a study. Sweeping the long train of her gown behind her, she carefully perched on top of an English leather wingback chair. She gestured for Klaus to sit in the other across from her near a tall, ornately carved bookcase. “So, Mr. Mikaelson, about this fascinating proposition of yours,” she teased, resting one hand gently in her lap while the other withdrew an onyx-decorated fan and slowly waved it flirtatiously.

“Please, call me Klaus,” he said, finding himself inexplicably growing more relaxed the longer he remained in Caroline’s presence. He flashed her his most charming smile, using his dimples to great effect if her slightly widened blue gaze was anything to judge by. “Caroline, I have forged a reputation in this city as a photographer of local landmarks, ships and the like, but I find myself craving more.”

Before he could continue, a sharp knock at the paneled door interrupted, and an attractive brunette stepped inside the study, demurely setting down an elegant silver tray holding two crystal goblets and a bottle of wine on the marble-inlaid table between them. Looking expectantly at Caroline, she asked, “Will there be anything else? Any special instructions I should convey to the girls?” Her dark gaze seemed to linger a bit too long upon Klaus, who shifted uncomfortably in his chair.

Seeming to mark the girl’s slightly indecorous gaze, Caroline set down her fan and spoke with an edge to her voice, “Thank you, Elena. Privacy for me and my guest would be most appreciated.” With a small curtsy, Elena nodded, a small smile upon her face as she held Caroline’s unreadable stare before exiting the room.

Caroline poured generous servings of rich red wine into the goblets, handing one to Klaus and delicately clinking their glasses together. “I hope you enjoy Bordeaux — it’s from a marvelous year, although not quite as good as the 1899 vintage.” At Klaus’ nod, they quietly sipped, Caroline adding with a teasing smile, “Now, please tell me more of these cravings you have, dear Klaus.”

Chuckling at her boldness, Klaus explained, “Photography is an art form. A successful partnership between an artist and his subject. I must admit I find myself fascinated by the successful society you have carved out of perceived social taboos and I want to learn more. I want the world to experience that unique energy you bring by having you and your girls pose for me.” He took another sip of the heady wine, adding, “Please do not mistake me — it is not my goal to sexualize or exploit with my photography. Instead, I want to expose you and your girls’ humanity, to have the observer fully realize your individuality and inner strength.”

Caroline smiled lazily. “Exposing our humanity. What an admirable goal.” She seemed to be considering something, turning her attention to a large painting upon one wall. The gilt frame housed a lovely nude woman with long red hair and a large serpent wrapped strategically around her body.

“I say, what a stunning reproduction of John Collier’s Lilith,” Klaus commented, his voice full of admiration. “He exhibited more than 100 paintings at the Royal Academy, and the Southport Atkinson Art Gallery is the home of this exquisite piece.”
“Is it,” she asked, delicately sipping her wine. “I had no idea you were so well-educated. Tell, me have you studied John’s, I mean Mr. Collier’s work extensively?”

He excitedly set down his glass, moving closer to gaze upon the painting. “Not as well as I would like, but Lilith is a one of my favorites of his work. Folklore always has fascinated me, and the story of Lilith is quite compelling. The idea of a woman refusing to be submissive to the role for which she was created, her defiance and strength are legendary. The manner in which she was punished, demonized in mythology and how supposedly all demonic creatures originated with her, demands our empathy as humans.” He resisted the urge to reach out and touch the painting, and turned his curly head to regard the beautiful woman behind him. “Don’t you agree,” he asked earnestly.

Caroline took another drink from her goblet, her blue eyes regarding him with warmth. “Of course I agree. One cannot possibly be in my position without admiring and empathizing with a woman who fell from grace because she refused to play by restrictions a cruel and indifferent society had placed upon her.”

She chuckled, adding cheerfully, “Of course, if mythology is to be believed, one good jab with an iron weapon could save one from the nefarious clutches of Lilith’s demonic spawn.” She gazed fondly at the lovely face of the red-haired maiden and added, “My girls and I consider Lilith a sort of patron saint, if you will.”

Klaus nodded in understanding, his gray eyes alight as an idea struck him. “Is that why you call this house The Red Lotus and have the lotus carved upon your front door?” At Caroline’s surprised expression, he continued, “In mythology, Lilith is associated with the lotus. A symbol representing extraordinary beauty that grows in the darkest of places. A call to humanity to examine our darkness and bring it into the light.”

“Well-said, my dear Klaus,” Caroline smoothly proclaimed, standing gracefully. “I heartily support your artistic vision and you may photograph me and my girls at your leisure. However, I have one requirement.” At Klaus’ questioning brow, she impishly winked, “I demand you do me the honor of photographing me first.”

Klaus gave her a short bow, his dimples flashing as he replied in a low voice, “As the lady commands.” He reached down to gather his heavy camera case once more, following Caroline as she led him back into the parlor where a jazz band had started to set up. The first plaintive notes flowed out of the trumpet and trombone with the clarinet embellishing the melody. The rollicking sounds filled Klaus with a renewed sense of energy, and he found himself eagerly anticipating the additional time he was about to spend alone with Caroline.

An alluring woman with brunette curls piled on top of her head stopped them, and at first, he mistook her for Elena, but the wicked smirk she wore gave him pause and he decided that this must be her twin. His gray eyes widened in alarm as he realized she had a large diamondback rattlesnake draped about her shoulders, cooing at it sweetly. She paused to give Klaus a quick onceover. “Oh my, I heard you had company, Caroline, but I had no idea the package was this appealing.”

“Yes, and I’ve claimed this package, Katherine,” Caroline said sweetly, a hint of iron to her voice that caused Katherine to lower her gaze to the floor respectfully at the madam’s pointed words. “Later on, he’ll be along to photograph the girls.” Lowering her voice, she nodded to the rattlesnake and commanded, “Kindly take Elena and convey my wishes to everyone.”

“Very well,” Katherine readily agreed. She slyly winked at Caroline and added, “I have plenty to keep me occupied...such as poor Mr. Donovan. He pines for me, you know. But I suspect
he’ll have pleasant *dreams* for the next few nights.”

Caroline sighed in exasperation and warned, “But have a care that it’s not *too* many nights, Katherine.”

Nodding, Katherine sauntered away, still stroking her pet snake. Klaus, who had watched the peculiar exchange with the air of a hapless tourist thrust headfirst into a culture he did not understand, asked in confusion, “Katherine named the rattlesnake after her twin, Elena?”

Smirking, Caroline motioned with one index finder, beckoning him to follow her up the grand staircase. She breezily answered, “Dear Klaus, you didn’t come all this way to inquire about my girls’ eccentricities.” She tossed back her long blonde curls gathered at her crown with several ruby-encrusted hair combs. “Permit me to show you what you *did* come for.”

He trailed helplessly up the stairs after her, his heart speeding up as he watched how her slim hips seemed to undulate underneath the tight red silk of her gown. At the top of the staircase, she led him down a long hallway, pausing at the end to throw open heavy wooden doors that enclosed a large bedroom with light pouring from bay windows. He sat his camera case on the canopied bed in the center of the room, assembling the tripod with shaking fingers and mentally chastising himself for behaving like an inexperienced schoolboy.

She looked at him expectantly, as though awaiting his instructions. Clearing his throat, he pointed toward the cushioned window seat and said, “Perhaps you could lounge at the window. I’d like you to be as comfortable as possible.” His brow furrowed as he added worriedly, “We can stop if at any time you feel uncomfortable, sweetheart.”

Caroline smiled brightly at his term of endearment and relaxed on top of the window seat, allowing her boot-clad feet to dangle over the polished pine floors as she turned her blue gaze upon him once more. “Is this to your liking?”

“Very much so,” he answered hoarsely, neck reddening as he realized what he said. “I mean...” He sighed, muttering, “You know exactly what I mean. You’re too beautiful not to be used to compliments.”

She licked her red lips slightly, pausing to consider her words. “Yes, but rarely is there any sincerity behind those compliments. Your words mean *more*, my dear Klaus.”

He gripped the pebble-grained leather covering of his camera, holding his breath as he prayed he adequately captured the oddly confident yet wistful expression that graced this enchantress’ beautiful face. He inwardly bemoaned the fact that she was the most exquisite creature he had ever encountered and he could never hope to be worthy of such an extraordinary woman.

Something seemed to awaken within Caroline and she startled, shooting out of her relaxed pose to stride purposefully toward him while he was still framing the next shot. “You aren’t the first to tell me these things, you know.” She whispered huskily as she curled her hands around his wrists, “But you may be the first man to *mean* them. And that makes you extraordinary.”

He briefly wondered if he had spoken his thoughts aloud, but was quickly distracted by the press of her sweet lips upon his, a surprisingly gentle kiss given her past boldness. It felt as though she was testing his willingness and didn’t want to assume his consent. When he lost his head and responded eagerly to her, opening his mouth to caress her tongue with his own, she slid her hands from his wrists to his shoulders, gripping the lapels of his jacket to shrug it off.
He pulled away slightly to carefully brush his fingers across the black lace trim that caressed the tops of her silk-covered breasts. “I didn’t want to assume that what you said downstairs about claiming me meant...” he trailed off hesitantly, his gray gaze burning brightly as he regarded her with reverence.

Caroline pressed a finger to his lips that were swollen from their feverish kisses. “Shhh. Cast aside your doubts and just feel. We will discuss my claim another time.”

Klaus felt himself sink into her musical voice, allowing the soothing vibrations to guide him to what he desired. He had never felt so free before, and he suddenly was imbued with a confidence that surprised him. “From the moment I saw you on that staircase and you teased me with your brashness, I wanted you;” he confessed, staring deeply into her blue eyes that had grown dark with want. He trailed kisses down the column of her throat, the sparkling rubies and diamonds of her choker winking at him in the sunlight. He let out a small growl as he added possessively, “I claim you, Caroline.”

A flicker of amusement crossed her lovely features as she asked, “Is that so?” She buried her nails in his curls and commanded, “Then show me.”

With a sly grin, he deftly popped open the buttons of her dress, bunching the red silk of her gown in his fists until he could easily toss it to the pine floor. His breath caught in his throat as he studied the blonde goddess before him, clad in a sinful black lace and red satin corset.

She raised one shapely leg, rubbing his calf seductively. Stealing his hand, she slid two of his fingers underneath her lacey garter, encouraging him to pluck at the delicate fabric until it snapped delightfully against her ivory skin.

At her hum of approval, he eagerly caught on, using the tiny bit of fabric to deliver pleasure with a sliver of pain. He grasped her shoulders, spinning her around forcefully so that he could pull apart the strings of her corset, anxious to expose more of her creamy skin. She bent slightly at the waist to unclip her stockings and remove her garters, but with a possessive snarl, he pulled her hips against the hard lines of his body and ordered, “Leave them be, love. I want you clad in nothing save these.”

A note of approval entered her husky voice as she responded with, “Tell me more of what pleases you.” She wiggled her ass against his crotch, outlining his obvious erection with enthusiasm.

He picked her up by the waist, taking pleasure in the surprised squeal he pulled from her. He quickly deposited her in front of the window seat and whispered roughly in her ear, “Bend over, sweetheart. I want everyone on the street below to watch me stake my claim.” The dominating words that easily tumbled from his lips felt foreign to him, but they also felt right. Being with Caroline had awoken a beast within him and he eagerly embraced this newfound sense freedom.

He felt her shiver in anticipation below him, and he smoothed his palms across the ivory globes of her ass, reveling in how she exposed herself to him. He reached underneath to cup her mound possessively, drawing a small moan from her. She encouraged his exploration by parting her thighs even more, welcoming his burning touch. He brushed his fingertips along the edges of her folds, gasping when he felt the moisture gathered there. He could feel her desire for him and the pleasure that illicit knowledge gave him sent a jolt throughout his body.

“Try me,” Caroline whispered urgently. “Feel my need for you.”
Losing his head at her husky command, he inserted two fingers into her warmth, groaning at how tightly she clung to him. He stroked her walls, feeling her quiver at his touch, and he clumsily unbuttoned his linen trousers to grasp his aching cock.

Her blue eyes seemed to burn a hole through the window as he caught her reflection. She watched him with obvious interest as he twisted his palm over his throbbing erection, while his other hand continued to pump his fingers within her. She invited him with her heated stare, the way she tilted her body just so against his. He quickly replaced his fingers with his eager cock, filling her to the hilt as she gasped out his name.

He dug his fingers into her shapely hips, pulling her up and down his length. He moaned as he felt her walls bear down upon him, and he knew he wouldn’t last long with the sensual picture she made as she panted underneath him. He gazed longingly at the miles of creamy skin before him, and an overwhelming urge to strike it, to mark it as his own came over him.

“Perhaps you should chastise me for my forwardness,” she gasped out, licking her red lips as his thrusts became harder. “Take me as you desire,” she implored.

He wondered again briefly if he had spoken his sensual wish aloud, but soon became enraptured with the beauty writhing beneath him. He began to lightly smack her bouncing cheeks, contrasting his touch with that of the punishing force of his thrusts. One of her ruby hair combs tumbled from her long blonde curls, clattering to the floor. Her moans of appreciation as her body began to contract around his pulled his desire from him and he felt every aching spasm as it was siphoned from his body. He wrapped one hand around his cock, withdrawing enough to rub his essence along her crevice, marking her with his scent.

As Klaus came down from his high, he watched Caroline turn over and perch upon the edge of the window seat, regarding him with a knowing smile. He was having a difficult time catching his breath and worried that she would think him a weak chap with questionable stamina. She ran her hands down her thighs, stroking her silk stockings and fondling the black lace of her garters as he watched hungrily. She surprised him when she roughly spread her legs, planting her boot-clad feet as widely apart as she could. “I hunger for more, dear Klaus.” Her confession tumbled so sweetly from those seductive red lips, he didn’t question her need. Cocking her blonde head to the side, she asked, “Don’t you?”

He gratefully sank to his knees before her, secretly relieved that he no longer needed to stand. His limbs, while sated from their delightful romp, felt oddly heavy. As he placed his mouth upon her dripping center, his senses were overwhelmed by the heady scent of their mixed arousal. He lapped at her sensitive skin like a man possessed, wanting to bathe in the evidence of their combined desire. She sighed in approval, enticing him to taste every drop of the feast before him.

Just as her thighs began to shake once more, Klaus could feel himself growing inexplicably drowsy. He took one last plaintive lick before he collapsed to the floor, utterly spent. He struggled to form an apology, but found he was having a difficult time keeping his eyes open.

Unconcerned, Caroline stood over him, her blue eyes glowing in an unnatural manner that led Klaus to believe his exhausted mind was playing tricks upon him. She bent over to easily pick him up, displaying a stunning feat of strength as she carried him to the carved mahogany bed. She gently lay him in the center, kneeling over him as she brushed his sweaty blonde curls from his forehead. “Sleep for now, my dear Klaus. We’ll have much to discuss when you wake.”

Klaus felt the delicate caress of her lips upon his and he mumbled somewhat incoherently, “Lovely bed.” He felt the room spin as he glimpsed one of the tall wooden bedposts swimming in his blurred vision. “Thought it would be ornate wrought iron, like White Oak House
down the way.”

An amused chuckle escaped Caroline’s lips as she replied in a casual tone, “Oh, I’m not one for iron. It spoils my appetite,” she explained, favoring him with an enigmatic smile.
Part 5 — Sly of the Tiger

Chapter Summary

For this latest chapter, I received a lot of requests to revisit this universe I’ve created in this series, so we’re returning to the world of supernatural Klaroline with rival business empires (see Chapters 2, 6, 9, and 14 in this series for a refresher.) Caroline has landed in a bit of trouble and an unlikely group of rescuers has assembled to demand Klaus do something about it. I hope you enjoy this latest installment; I’d love to hear from you!

Chapter Notes

Warning: Going to get a bit violent in this one.

“A dame that knows the ropes isn't likely to get tied up.”
— Mae West

“Stole sunshine!” This angry declaration was followed by long, scaly fingers slamming on top of the smoky glass of Klaus’ conference table, making it vibrate.

Klaus considered the dozen or so ghouls that had unexpectedly barged into his meeting with Elijah. They were a fearsome lot with their rotted, gray skin and rows of sharp teeth that they kept gnashing in anger. Several had broken off into smaller groups to speak in guttural tones of obvious agitation and they kept glancing over their skeletal shoulders to glare vehemently at both Originals.

Elijah cleared his throat unnecessarily, trying to call to order the chaos that had erupted in the boardroom. He caught several pairs of black eyes glittering with malice and increased the volume of his voice while speaking slowly, stretching out the vowels and consonants of each word in a parody of his normal speech patterns. “Why have you come here? What do you want from us?”

“Bollocks, Elijah! Do you honestly think that speaking louder and slower is somehow going to magically imbue these ghouls with the ability to speak English,” Klaus asked his brother impatiently. He raised a questioning eyebrow as a thought suddenly struck him. “Come to think of it, why can’t we understand them? We both speak ghoulæse fluently.”

Elijah glanced warily at the ghoul nearest to them, who kept baring his teeth menacingly. He replied, “Ghouls have multiple dialects, and this is unfortunately one we cannot understand. If I’m not mistaken, these ghouls appear to be a part of the Mesopotamian clan, the oldest known
faction.” He sighed, rubbing his forehead as he added, “That likely means their dialect originated with Akkadian, Babylonian or Sumerian languages — none of which we speak.”

Another ghoul joined the first still standing at the conference table in between the two Originals and banged his scaly fists upon the mirrored surface until it nearly cracked under the force of his furious movements. “Stole sunshine,” he bellowed, echoing the other ghoul’s baffling sentiment.

A group near the back of the large meeting room had been gesticulating wildly as they spoke in low, angry grunts in their native tongue. They turned their rotted gray heads toward the confused Originals and amended their brethren’s statement, bellowing, “Our sunshine! Stole our sunshine!”

Klaus pinched the bridge of his nose, weighing the political consequences of slaughtering the lot of them versus the irritation he would experience in the aftermath when Elijah would inevitably feel the need to lecture him about poor impulse control.

Before he could decide, the double doors banged open once more, sending the heavy maple panels crashing into the sheetrock. Kol came bouncing into the boardroom, merrily shouting, “Sorry I’m late, brothers! You know how it goes — so many bead-adorned tasty things, so little time to convince them you’re an official bead inspector/professional parade enthusiast!” Their younger brother came to a sudden halt when he observed the conference room full of ghouls and he let out an unearthly screech that sounded like a cat whose tail had been stepped on.

Several of the ghouls stopped furiously ranting in their native tongue to smile widely at Kol, displaying unsettling rows of sharp teeth, which they began clicking enthusiastically, as though savoring his fear. A few wiggled their long fingers at him in a cheeky little wave that caused the boisterous Original to gulp loudly.

“Bloody hell!” Kol exclaimed somewhat fearfully as he carefully made his way beside his brothers, “What the devil do you think you’re playing at, meeting with Caroline’s ghouls?”

Klaus snapped to attention and snarled at his brother, “These are Caroline’s ghouls? How do you know that?”

Kol shrugged, trying to appear nonchalant as he settled into a chair beside his brothers, refusing to look directly at the creepy ghouls. “Well, first of all, I still vividly recall being kidnapped by these little grave-munchers from that tiny misunderstanding with the side-betting nonsense at Caroline’s Fang Fights. Secondly, ghouls should stink like death and decay, but this lot smells like they bathed in vanilla and cinnamon before crashing your meeting. Plus, I remember when they grabbed me, I thought they were Keebler Elves on a meth bender.”

Elijah nodded as he added, “Miss Forbes once told us that she compensates her ghouls with cinnamon-cardamom snickerdoodles.”

Klaus immediately stood up in agitation, realizing belatedly what the ghouls’ broken English ravings meant. Our sunshine. His sunshine. He bellowed at the ghouls, “You’re here because something’s happened to Caroline?! Where is she?!”

The large group of ghouls nodded enthusiastically at Klaus’ angry words, waving scaly fists in the air as they snarled, “Stole sunshine! Stole our sunshine!”

Before the brothers could uselessly question the ghouls further, Bonnie suddenly raced into the
room, breathing harshly. “I told you guys...wait...for me,” she gasped, wheezing as she hunched over to catch her breath. Once she was more steady, she straightened her shoulders and began confidently speaking to the assembled ghouls in their native language, appearing to be simultaneously chastising them and soothing their rage.

The ghouls swarmed her eagerly, and at first, Klaus thought that their movements signaled violent intentions, and he started toward the group to stop them from harming Caroline’s friend, when he realized that their actions were actually an enthusiastic greeting. They waved and smiled at her, still displaying alarming rows of sharp teeth, but their black eyes seemed more lively somehow, and while not necessarily filled with warmth, they did seem pleased with her arrival.

Smiling indulgently at the ghouls, the green-eyed girl reached out and patted the tops of their rotting heads, giggling when they began preening under her attention. Several of them called out to her in halting English, “Boo! Our Boo!”

Elijah cleared his throat uncertainly, clearly uncomfortable with the ghouls’ oddly friendly behavior. “Forgive my surprise, Miss Bennet, but you speak their ancient language quite well for one so young. Also, they refer to you as ‘Boo’? However did this come about?"

Bonnie shrugged and answered, “Once Caroline learned their language, she taught it to all of us. She’s big on respecting the heritage of all—” One of the ghouls interrupted her, tugging on the sleeve of her purple tunic and impatiently peppering her with questions in his native language. Running her fingers through her shiny bob, she said in irritation, “No! No cookies! No cookies until we go get Caroline!”

The ghouls’ disappointed faces would have been more humorous if it hadn’t been for all of the rotted skin. Several of them heaved heavy sighs while others returned to looking surly and threw glares at the brothers as though it was somehow their fault for the sudden void of cookies in their lives.

Klaus angrily banged his fist on the glass table until it finally cracked. “Enough! Where’s Caroline?!”

Klaus’ outburst rallied the ghouls who raised their scaly fists in the air once more to yell, “Sunshine! Stole our sunshine!”

Kol tentatively inched behind Elijah who had somehow managed to remain calmly sitting at the table during the boardroom’s chaos. “Stop arsing about, Nik,” he urgently stage-whispered, “Don’t rile up the little grave-munchers.”

Bonnie’s green eyes flashed dangerously as she snarled at Kol, “Don’t ever call them that in my presence again.”

Several of the ghouls noted her harsh tone and stood protectively in front of Bonnie while hissing at Kol, “Sweet meat!” Their unsettling black eyes glittered as they clicked their teeth at him, clearly enjoying the way the Original paled under their harsh glares.

Gritting his teeth, Klaus asked again, “What happened to Caroline?”

Sighing, Bonnie replied, “Damon Salvatore happened to Caroline. She never returned from her meeting with that greasy jackass. They’re in the process of expanding a joint venture for daylight microchips and Damon’s been whining about his cut again.”

“Miss Forbes is behind that ingenious technology that allows vampires to be implanted with
microchips imbued with the daylight ring spell? Impressive,” Elijah commented with a raised brow.

Irritated, Klaus waved off his brother’s statement and in a demanding tone asked, “How can you be sure that Damon is responsible for Caroline’s disappearance? She’s a powerful woman with many enemies.” Despite his concern for Caroline’s whereabouts, the pride in his voice at her accomplishments was apparent.

The witch favored the angry hybrid with an unimpressed look. “Caroline maintains extensive background files on all of her associates, from their enemies to their enemies’ enemies. She also has mathematically plotted the likelihood of betrayal and potential revenge scenarios that each of her associates may pursue. Trust me, according to Caroline’s calculations, Damon has kidnapped her.”

“Salvatore,” Klaus growled, “I will tear him limb from limb! He will rue the day he dared to take what is mine!”

His war cry spurred on another round of “Sunshine! Stole our sunshine!” from the ghouls, who began stomping their feet impatiently, the graveyard dirt trapped between their long toes scattering across the polished travertine.

Elijah, attempting to divert the group’s attention in a productive manner, straightened his pinstripe tie as he stood from the ruined conference table. “Very well. Miss Bennet, we will need access to Caroline’s file on Damon Salvatore. We will assemble our witches and they should be able to conjure her location.”

Rolling her eyes at Elijah’s imperious tone, Bonnie said, “No need. Caroline already predicted where Damon would take her. He’s not particularly imaginative, and there’s this property over in Bywater that he and his idiot brother have been passing back and forth for decades. Now follow me and let’s go rescue Caroline,” she commanded, not bothering to look over her shoulder as she exited the boardroom, her army of ghouls in tow who chattered excitedly now that the rescue mission was underway.

Once they arrived at Milton Reid Road, the Originals looked confusedly at the rundown RV park that Bonnie and the ghouls had led them to. Spying the rotted wood deck perched precariously atop a swampy stream, Klaus asked in disbelief, “This is the property the Salvatores have been arguing over?”

Chiming in, Kol said, “It’s a curiously bland bit of uselessness, isn’t it,” he asked, pointing to a cabin’s sunken roof with torn shingles near the property’s edge.

Bonnie shrugged. “I don’t get it either. They fight each other tooth and nail over this boring stretch of property, each feverishly claiming ownership. At first, it was amusing to watch, but now it’s become a bit predictable and sad.” Grinning, she gestured toward the rundown cabin. “Caroline should be in there.”

Without another word, Klaus flashed inside the dilapidated cabin, the rest of the rescue party racing after him. He found Caroline slamming a razor-sharp stiletto into the exposed throat of a beefy vampire who was writhing in pain on the cracked concrete floor while gripping what appeared to be a broken leg.

From the doorway, Bonnie wryly said, “This is why we can’t have nice things,” nodding at the gore-streaked heels of the mangled Valentinos on Caroline’s feet.
Klaus rushed forward, hugging Caroline to his body, squeezing her tightly against him as though trying to reassure himself that she was real. “Love, are you alright,” he implored, breaking away to begin hurriedly patting down her body to check for injuries.

Caroline smiled, quickly pecking him on both dimples as she nodded. “I’m always alright.” She glanced down in distaste at her ruined studded footwear. “The shoes, not so much.” She winked at Bonnie and said, “Elena’s going to be insufferable when she finds out all those extra yoga classes she forced me to take with her actually paid off. I was hanging upside down and it was embarrassingly easy to contort my arms and legs to use the metal studs on my heels to saw through the ropes.”

A groan from the crumpled body near Klaus and Caroline interrupted them, and just as the vampire was coming to, Klaus reached down and brutally ripped out his heart, tossing it several feet away from the corpse.

Blue eyes twinkling in amusement, Caroline asked him, “Do you feel better now?”

“Yes,” the hybrid grudgingly admitted, hugging her tightly once more.

Elijah walked near the back of the cabin where he noted two other desiccated vampires with their hearts messily removed. arching an eyebrow, his tone was impressed as he said, “It appears our rescue was unwarranted, Miss Forbes. Well done.”

Squeezing Klaus’ hand, she whispered in his ear, “Nonsense, I’m always happy for an assist.”

Kol loudly protested, “Can you hold off on the rescue sex until after we’ve left the premises? Besides, your minion army is anxious to see you,” he added, eyes darting warily toward the dozen or so fiendish ghouls who raced into the cabin and surrounded Caroline, rudely pushing Klaus out of the way. The hybrid growled lowly in displeasure, but his protests were largely ignored as the ghouls’ unsettling squeals of happiness echoed in the small cabin. Caroline beamed brightly at them all, squeezing their scaly hands and patting the tops of their rotted gray heads, giggling when three eagerly swooped in to hug her. “I promise I’m ok,” she said gently, adding additional words in their guttural native language, causing the ghouls to grin even more broadly with their sharp teeth.

Several of the ghouls crooned, “Sunshine! Brought Boo and your Ass-Weasel!” They happily pointed at Bonnie and Klaus, while hopping joyously around Caroline, basking under her attention.

Kol began giggling hysterically as the surly hybrid scowled. “Ass-Weasel?! That’s classic, Nik!”

Frowning slightly, Caroline spoke lowly to the ghouls in an admonishing tone, while some crossed their arms stubbornly and muttered “Ass-Weasel” under their breath as they shot Klaus covert glares when Caroline’s head was turned.

With an embarrassed smile, Caroline tucked a few flyaway blonde strands behind one ear with her blood-smeared fingers and said to Klaus, “Sorry about that. They might have overheard me complaining about you a few times, back when we didn’t really know each other that well. Or you know, last week when you went behind my back and tried to convince my marketing team that I had signed off on your logo alterations to Friday’s Were-Wrestling Wars. Apparently, ‘Ass-Weasel’ is easier for them to say than ‘asshat or dimpled weasel’.”

Grumbling, Klaus glanced around the room, noted the dead vampire captors once more and felt an odd thrill of pride got through him as he viewed his lover’s handiwork. He asked curiously, “Where’s Salvatore, then? Was the bastard too lazy to do his own dirty work?”
Rolling her eyes, Caroline answered, “He stayed long enough to watch his cronies string me up, then flashed out of here to go set up a paper-thin alibi in a pathetic attempt at plausible deniability for when someone found my corpse.” She ground her still-dripping black stiletto into one of the open eyes of the desiccated vampire closest to her. “Amateur,” she spat disdainfully.

At the sickening pop under Caroline’s determined heel, Bonnie woozily said, “Hey! Some of us are still human and get freaked out by your icky torture porn fetish!”

Perking up considerably, Kol stepped toward Caroline and leered, “Darling, why didn’t you say so? You’ve been sporting with the wrong brother all this time!” He quickly backed off at Klaus’ possessive growl, though, and muttered some hasty excuse about being late for a previous engagement and then flashed away, with Elijah following more sedately behind him.

Fists clenched, Klaus seethed, “Salvatore left you to die? He hasn’t begun to understand the meaning of death. But rest assured, when I find him, he will learn.” He clasped her face with both of his hands, staring deeply into her eyes as he swore, “I vow to you, he will never hurt you again.”

At first, Caroline seemed to bristle under Klaus’ implication that she needed his protection, but then her expression cleared and she curled her bloody hands over Klaus’ and said, “Thank you. But don’t worry — he won’t get far.” Her ghouls suddenly flashed disturbing smiles, chattering once more in their native tongue.

With an enigmatic smile, she asked, “Would you mind taking me to my office? There’s something I need to pick up.”

As she walked past Bonnie, the witch said solemnly, “It will be ready by the time you arrive.”

“Good,” Caroline replied with a nod, leading a confused Klaus past her ghouls and through the open door.

Soon, Klaus realized that Caroline’s bravado back in the rundown cabin had been an act. She clearly hadn’t been comfortable showing weakness in front of the group. However, once she was alone with Klaus, she seemed to let down her guard somewhat. It was disquieting to the hybrid to see her vulnerability, but he also felt a surge of happiness at the realization that he had earned her trust. She had been unusually quiet on the way to her pastry shop, Sweet Caroline, which served as a clever smokescreen for her real business, the underground supernatural fight club called Fang Fights. Obviously concerned, Klaus tried to initiate a discussion with her several times, only to receive one-word answers or too-tight smiles that were almost painful to behold. He understood that she was retreating into herself, and he needed to tread carefully and make her feel safe once more.

They took her private elevator decorated with antique mirrors down to the cavernous fighting arena. He tried not to let his thoughts wander to the multiple pleasurable occasions they’d shared in that elevator. Interrupting his sensual memories, she huffed in aggravation and said, “By the way, don’t think I’ve forgotten about that shady stunt you tried to pull with the logo changes. Rest assured, we will be addressing that when I am feeling more...myself.”

He felt his lips curl into a relieved grin. “Of course, sweetheart. Perhaps that would be an appropriate time to discuss how you managed to amend our sporting events contract to 25% of the proceeds going to you and 15% going to your ghouls. As I recall, those weren’t quite the terms we negotiated.”

She shook her head, lips twitching into an almost-smile. As they exited the elevator, they passed by a tall, stunning redhead who called out to Caroline, “Your package just arrived. I set it on your
Caroline nodded and replied, “Thank you, Aurora. That will be all.” She led Klaus down the hall to her office and once the door was shut, he felt the need to reassure her once more.

“Damon Salvatore will never touch you again, sweetheart,” he promised, his steel gray gaze tinged with angry gold. “I personally will hunt him to the ends of the earth if need be.”

She smiled faintly, walking over to her ornately carved Victorian desk, where a pretty pink and cream box sat, the logo from her bakery emblazoned across one side in girlish letters. “You haven’t invited me to join your hunt, Klaus,” she said, her blood-flecked finger lightly skimming the large pink bow perched on top of the box.

He shifted uncomfortably, running his fingers through his messy blonde curls as he noted the slight edge to her voice. It was an old battle between them — while he recognized her power, he still feared for her safety and the possessive wolf within him couldn’t let go of the notion that she needed his protection. Caroline didn’t appreciate being made to feel weak, and today, that loathsome Salvatore had tried to do just that. Klaus likely hadn’t helped matters by loudly discussing his plans to go after the pathetic vampire alone, as though Caroline was helpless. “I would be honored if you and I could hunt Salvatore together, love. I didn’t mean to imply otherwise,” he amended.

She nodded dismissively, still staring at the pastry box upon her desk. “Today, someone tried to take away my power. But I took it back.” She slowly pulled apart the pink bow that held the lid in place. In a casual voice, she explained, “I’ve been in this business long enough to have learned a few things. Bonnie likely told you about some of my safeguards I’ve put in place over the years. For instance, when I attend a business meeting, but fail to check in with the proper password after a specific timeframe, certain security measures are activated.”

She finally looked up from the pastry box to ensnare him with her piercing blue gaze. It held her familiar warmth, and he felt the tension slowly leave his body. His Caroline would be fine. He returned her smile, pleased to see that she seemed to be coming back to herself. He already started making plans for how they could begin their hunt for the worthless Salvatore. She was a glorious, passionate creature and he couldn’t wait to see her ruthlessness firsthand. He watched with interest as she flipped open the lid and a wicked grin spread across her lovely face. “What are you looking at, sweetheart?”

“Damon Salvatore’s heart.”
A Ghost of a Chance

Chapter Summary

In this installment, Human! Klaus is leading a paranormal investigation team to explore the famed Forbes’ estate, one of the most haunted houses in the Midwest, much to the chagrin of its feisty, skeptical blonde owner.

The Dalton Gang was a real band of outlaws in Oklahoma and surrounding territories before it reached statehood. I tweaked historical facts to suit this story, and I encourage you to research them and other famous Oklahoma outlaws like Belle Starr. They mark a fascinating moment in our history.

“A bullet to the brain would be a welcome distraction. Caroline sighed heavily, listening to her mother summarize yet again all the ways in which her only child had disappointed her over the years and if she would do this one simple task for her, it wouldn’t make up for her selfish abandonment, but it would be a small start. Scoffing, Caroline interrupted her mother’s long-winded rant. “Simple task?! Seriously? You want me to fly 1900 miles to a house in the middle of nowhere we haven’t lived in since I was an infant because some ghostbusters need a babysitter?”

“Don’t be so dramatic, Caroline; it’s only 1876 miles,” her mother responded in a clipped tone.

Caroline pinched the bridge of her nose as she could feel her blood pressure rising. Her father’s ancestral home, the Forbes estate, was located in the small town of Pawhuska, Oklahoma, and had developed quite the reputation as supposedly one of the most haunted houses in the Midwest. Her father had died of a heart attack right after she was born, and her mother moved them back to Texas to be near her family. Neither of them had returned to the house, but had employed several caretakers over the years to manage the property.

Her mother showed little interest in being a mother over the years, and Caroline had been mostly raised by a combination of overbearing, terrifyingly conservative relatives and her own spiteful stubbornness. As soon as Caroline graduated, she fled the state to pursue her education and never looked back. She had settled into a nice career in what was known as the ‘Silicon Forest’ and called her mother every few months as though it were her penance for her success.
Her mother mindlessly flitted from various society luncheons and charity balls in between excessive shopping trips. As a member of one of the elite oil families, she apparently felt she needed to do her part to keep up appearances. She was fond of reminding Caroline that she had no choice considering how shameful it was that her only daughter was still unmarried and part of the workforce as though she had no other options.

Apparently, a crew of paranormal investigators had contacted her mother seeking permission to explore the estate and film a cheesy, exploitative documentary complete with testimonials. They had sufficiently catered to her enormous ego and she had signed a contract agreeing to act as their tour guide at the estate. Unfortunately, her mother had been in a car wreck this week and managed to break her ankle (Caroline suspected this occurred after one of her mimosa-soaked society brunches), and she had no interest in being seen on camera in crutches. Which is how Caroline found herself in this bizarre situation in which her mother called her out of the blue to ask for a favor while somehow managing to effortlessly work in multiple insults about her life choices. She could hear her mother regroup to start another psychological assault, and finally exhausted, she sighed loudly. “Fine! I’ll do it. Feel free to go back to luring tasty children into your gingerbread house.” This was going to be such a colossal waste of time.

Two plane changes, a missed connecting flight, and one flat tire on the rental car, and finally she was pulling into the gravel driveway of her ancestral home. There was a large white van with its cargo doors open, cables and bulky camera equipment spilling out haphazardly. The sign emblazoned on its side declared “Original Investigations”, but no further details indicated the unusual nature of their business. Noting the noises coming from inside the house, it was clear that the caretaker had been available to let them in.

She could hear several pairs of feet moving around inside as she hesitantly climbed the front stone steps, a pit in her stomach as she crossed the threshold with trepidation. Angry at herself for momentarily giving into the nonsense that dogged her family’s property, she squared her shoulders as she scanned the parlor for the crew of predictably geeky ghostbusters she was supposed to be babysitting. Seriously, only the saddest kind of grown man living in his mother’s basement playing video games nonstop would be drawn to this line of work, she thought spitefully as she cast an appreciative eye over the gleaming cherry floors in the parlor.

She turned the corner to see a grand staircase and tried to register her surprise at the well-muscled back beautifully displayed in a tight black t-shirt that was arching with the grace of a skilled dancer as its owner attempted to hang some sort of recording equipment from the exposed beams. Fascinated by the delicate sheen of sweat lightly coating his dirty blonde curls, she inwardly sighed as she realized there was no possible way that the face would match that incredible body.

He descended the ladder and turned, revealing intense gray eyes, a strong jawline and an effortless confidence that was spellbinding to behold. Realizing she was gaping at the stranger, she quickly tried to regroup and think of something intelligent to say, but instead blurted out, “There’s no way you’re real. You’re the stripper version of a ghostbuster.” She slammed her eyes shut, wincing at her signature awkward outspokenness.

He chuckled in amusement, causing her to peek at him from underneath her lashes and was instantly dazzled by a pair of dimples that settled into a smirk announcing a special brand of trouble that she had to remind herself she did not have time for. He grasped her hand in a firm handshake, and she did her best to ignore the surge of electricity that traveled up her arm and down her spine at the warmth of his touch. “Klaus Mikaelson, cofounder of Original Investigations. You must be Caroline.”
“Hello,” she answered, hating the unnatural high pitch of her voice as she blushed under his perusal. That charming accent of his was completely unexpected. And completely unfair. She thought she detected a flicker of interest in the heat of his gaze, and she congratulated herself on carefully selecting a cream peasant blouse whose scoop neckline teased at her fabulous cleavage. Not that she was interested in these ghostbuster imitators and their nonsense — she just wanted to look nice on camera. Right. That sounded completely convincing. She watched in confusion as Klaus called her name and seemed to be asking her a question. Shaking her head, she said, “I’m sorry, what was that?”

“Good form, Nik, already boring the poor girl to tears,” came a cheerful voice from behind them. An attractive man with a mischievous smile greeted her, taking it upon himself to grab her hand and kiss her knuckles, clearly in a bid to rile up Klaus. “Kol Mikaelson, CEO, founder, ruler, and emperor of Original Investigations, at your service.”

Groaning, Klaus corrected him. “This is my younger brother Kol, cofounder of Original Investigations and our camera tech in addition to being a phenomenal disappointment.”

She grinned at the brothers’ light-hearted rivalry as they scowled at each other good-naturedly. “Nice to meet you both.” She looked awkwardly around the room, noticing the beautifully designed plaster corbels that graced the archway over the stairs. She only had seen pictures of the outside of the estate before and couldn’t help but be touched by the beautiful craftsmanship of the home her ancestors had commissioned. “So what happens next? I’m sure from your own likely terrifying interactions with my mother, it will amaze you to learn that she was rather thin on the details concerning my role in all of this.”

Klaus’ gray eyes lit up in amusement at her wry statement and he replied, “Well, I wouldn’t call our interactions with Mrs. Forbes terrifying, but they were rather memorable, love.”

Kol snorted. “Darling, she was a bloody nightmare! She demanded that any time she was on camera we were expected to use a diffusion filter to ‘soften her unmentionables’. She got rather shirty with me when I told her we had no interest in filming her knickers.”

Caroline bit the side of her cheek, but couldn’t help the peals of laughter that burst forth. “I’m impressed she admitted she had wrinkles. You’re lucky to have survived her wrath.”

Shifting uncomfortably, Klaus answered, “It was at that point I realized my grievous error in allowing Kol to handle media relations and I assured Mrs. Forbes that while we could accommodate her request during testimonials, the majority of our film would be shot using night vision. If you require any special lighting or filters, sweetheart, we’ll do our best to accommodate your request.”

Bouncing on his toes, Kol was clearly anxious to say something. Before Caroline could reassure Klaus that she was quite proud of her ‘unmentionables’, Kol asked excitedly, “So what’s it like being part of the absolutely barmy Forbes legacy? Is it true what they say about your great-great-grandfather?!”

Caroline sighed inwardly. She knew that agreeing to perform this ridiculous errand would mean having to revisit the house’s history, but it wasn’t something she talked about often; mainly because it was such a morbid topic and she didn’t have detailed knowledge of the events.

In the 1860s, her great-great-grandfather, John Forbes, had commissioned the stately Victorian home to be built. Apparently, in his youth, he had struck up a friendship with the Dalton brothers, who went on to become outlaws, founding the Dalton Gang with a handful of other career criminals. The brothers clearly remembered John as the stories say they started hiding the loot from
their train robberies on his estate. The townspeople heard rumors about the Dalton Gang’s hidden treasure and one night confronted John in his home. Supposedly, the greedy mob hung him from the rafters in the parlor when he refused to tell them the location of the treasure. To this day, the typical rumors of hauntings and curses are attached to this house, adding to the mystery.

“Do I believe that my great-great-grandfather haunts the property and murders trespassers because he thinks they’re after the Dalton Gang’s treasure? Of course not. I believe that supernatural occurrences are just things that science hasn’t explained yet.” She hurriedly added in a softer tone, “I don’t mean to disparage your work, and if you believe in that stuff, you’re certainly welcome to your opinion. It’s just that it’s my family we’re talking about and it’s a little jarring to be back here after so long.”

Klaus nodded, his tone understanding. “Of course, love. My brother didn’t mean to be insensitive,” he said, emphasizing the last word as he glared at Kol. “I’m surprised you agreed to do this since you’re a skeptic.”

Shrugging, she replied, “It’s hard not to cave under the force of my mother’s iron will. I figure if I do this, I can then return to my normal routine where I actively ignore her for the sake of my sanity.”

Obviously impatient, Kol pressed, “But there’s the whole mess with your own father and then most recently that teenage boy. How can you possibly dismiss all of that when supernatural evidence is right in front of you?”

“Kol! What have I told you about aggravating our clients?!” An irritated voice shouted from upstairs, and a dark-haired girl poked her head over the carved railing. “Get up here and finish helping me set up the equipment in the bedrooms!”

Grumbling under his breath, Kol stomped upstairs, leaving them behind. Klaus shook his head. “I apologize on behalf of my brother. That was Davina Claire, our equipment tech and data analyst. She keeps him in line better than I can.” He sighed, adding, “We’re just very committed to finding out the truth and it’s easy for us to forget the emotions that can be tied to the places we investigate.”

She gave him a small smile, helping him carry the ladder out of the room. “It’s fine. I knew I’d be expected to talk about this stuff. I have to warn you though, I’m afraid I don’t know very much about the house’s history.”

“Maybe we could start with what you do know about your father’s death and take it from there,” Klaus gently prodded, motioning for her to sit on a small chair covered in a faded paisley fabric. At her nod, he picked up a video camera and began filming her.

Taking a deep breath, Caroline began, “My father inherited this house from his aunt who had used it primarily as a vacation home when she missed the charm of small-town life. Obviously after the scandal and rumors that surrounded the Forbes name with the death of my great-great-grandfather, John, the house was abandoned for generations before restored by my great aunt. My parents moved in right after I was born, and to my knowledge, there was no unusual activity or any of the other occurrences that have been reported off and on over the years.”

She bowed her head, not wanting to see pity in Klaus’ eyes as she told the rest. “I was maybe a month old when my father died in the basement of the house. Distraught, my mother had no interest in continuing to live here, so she moved us to Texas to be near her family.” She shrugged, resting her palms on the knees of her light-wash denim, unsure of herself. “That’s really all there is to it, I’m afraid. No mysteries or rumors to speak of with that.”
He set the video camera off to the side, turning it off before he asked, “But what about the shovel that was found? The officers on the scene reported that he was clutching a shovel.”

She scoffed. “It didn’t seem relevant to mention. He was likely just doing renovations. As you can see, my great-aunt’s design aesthetic is a bit cloying and dowdy, so I’m sure he and my mother were in the process of redecorating since they had recently moved in.” She waved her hand carelessly, adding, “You can’t possibly believe that a shovel is somehow linked to the outlaws’ hidden treasure or that my father’s death was caused by the ghost of John Forbes.”

Without comment, he raised a critical eyebrow, grasping the camera once again and turning it back on. “What can you tell me about the incident a decade ago?”

Refraining from rolling her eyes, Caroline answered, “There was no mystery with that and had nothing to do with this house or my family. A group of teenagers broke in one night and had a party. The authorities told us that a 16-year-old boy was strangled by one of the party goers. The kid admitted to it. Case closed.”

Klaus’ deep, accented voice challenged her statements. “You’re leaving out suspicious details like the fact that the boy also was killed in the basement and the fact that while he bore the typical ligature marks of a noose, the murder weapon was never found.”

“They obviously didn’t need the murder weapon considering the murderer confessed,” she argued, crossing her arms in front of her chest in exasperation.

“Except there are rumors that the boy was railroaded into confessing and his original testimony was that he blacked out in the basement with the victim and couldn’t remember what happened,” he smugly retorted, clearly enjoying the angry flush that was creeping up her neck.

Releasing an irritated growl, Caroline said, “Of course he would claim memory loss! That way, he could avoid a harsher sentence if he was found unstable. Seriously, it’s like you’ve never watched CSI Miami reruns.” Grinning, she slyly added, “But you do get bonus points for the use of ‘ligature’.”

“All right, love,” he chuckled, “I’ll let you have that one for now.” He consulted his touchpad and said, “Is there anything you can tell me about your great-great-grandfather? Something that perhaps can’t be found in the research of the Forbes estate?”

Caroline inwardly groaning at how effortlessly Klaus had disarmed her with his laughter and crafty banter. Mulling over his question, her blue eyes lit up as she thought of something that he probably wouldn’t know from his research. “Well, the family stories say that John Forbes was always whistling this one tune, an old parlor song. Supposedly, he whistled the melody when he was courting his wife and just never stopped.” She frowned, “I can’t remember the name of it now though. Maybe I could figure it out later and you could add it to your video.”

“What a great idea, love,” Klaus said encouragingly. He noted the time and stood up, stretching slightly which briefly revealed a narrow strip of smooth, toned stomach. Caroline quickly averted her eyes before he caught her gawking at him once more. “Shall we get started exploring the mansion? I’d like to do a quick run-through while we still have the natural light.”

They wandered down the long hallway and into the formal dining area, darkly stained wood paneling giving the room a severe but regal quality. Caroline ran her hand along the scalloped edges of one of the dozen chairs at the enormous table. While Klaus was filming the room, she asked curiously, “How did you and your brother get started with all of this?”
Klaus turned the camera off and gave her his full attention, his gray eyes blazing with an intensity that she found mesmerizing. “It was a combination of curiosity and the desire for unattainable knowledge mixed with the grief over the loss of our youngest brother, Henrik.”

At her commiserating sounds, he continued gruffly, “He was 12 when he died of leukemia. After that, we kept noticing objects around our mother’s house seemed to move when our heads were turned or would just go missing altogether. We also thought we could still feel his presence at times, so we started searching for answers and then our company was founded.”

Caroline squeezed his hand, unsure of what to say. “How awful to lose a sibling so young. I didn’t mean to pry,” she said hesitantly.

Flashing her a small smile, he shook his head. “It’s fine, sweetheart. I wanted to tell you. I didn’t want you to think that we were some kind of rubbish occult group. We don’t go in for séances or Ouija boards or any of that nonsense. We use scientific approaches with our investigations and I know it may seem odd to some, it’s a growing field of study that we feel really passionate about.”

Cocking his head to the side, he asked, “I suspect you have a very rational, logical job that fits neatly into your black-and-white, orderly world?”

Bristling slightly as she detected a hint of amusement in his tone, she said defensively, “I’m a software developer in Portland. It might not be as adventurous as being a ghostbuster, but I did lead the team that recently corrected the iCloud restore problem.”

He blinked, impressed. “I recently recorded spine-chilling screeches in a cemetery in Nebraska.”

“Really? So you finally have definitive proof of the supernatural,” she asked skeptically.

Rubbing the back of his neck in embarrassment, he replied, “Not exactly. But I did accidentally learn not to get in the way of a feral cat in heat.”

Giggling, Caroline led him toward the butler’s pantry, where he resumed filming. “So tell me more about your encounters — the ones without cats. What kind of presences have you felt?”

“Places can have long memories. It is said that spirits can be harmless or malevolent. They can make you feel uncomfortable, affecting you physically and mentally depending upon the spirit. Our team of investigators never just assumes a place is haunted because of rumors or its history. We try to approach the situation from a place of science and logic, and try to eliminate other more likely possibilities first. For example, a homeowner sought us out claiming his residence was haunted because of excessive cold drafts and scratching noises in the attic. After a thorough examination, we discovered hidden AC vents and several bats that had become trapped in the attic when the siding had been replaced. We try to keep an open mind, but we also don’t immediately become hysterical at the first sign of paranormal activity.”

They opened the French doors to a narrow kitchen with a maple sideboard complete with lace doilies and a collection of iron tea kettles. “You didn’t answer my question, Klaus. What about your experiences with real ghosts?”

Klaus sighed in resignation. “We’ve gathered proof over the years of the paranormal, but unfortunately it’s nothing you would consider definitive. Our equipment has measured inexplicable cold spots, miscellaneous light orbs, wispy, nondescript shapes, but nothing you would deem believable — like possession.”
“Ghost possession,” she asked, intrigued despite her skepticism. “I thought that was just something Hollywood made up.”

He paused briefly to check a small electronic device with a meter. “There have been accounts of ghosts possessing the living for ages. While we’ve never managed to capture anything of the sort on film, eyewitness accounts are staggering. Supposedly, when one is possessed it’s similar to being drugged or you have moments where you lose time and black out, unable to recall anything.”

Shivering at the unsettling portrait his words painted, she actually was relieved when Kol and Davina interrupted them. “Bloody hell, Nik! Davina and I have managed to finish wiring the whole place and you’re still prattling on like a sodding schoolboy.” His brown eyes twinkled mischievously at his brother’s obvious irritation. “Surely you can do your job and close the deal with the lovely Caroline, eh?”

Snarling, Klaus pointed to the door where Davina was standing, unable to hide her teasing grin. “Out. Now. Go make yourselves useful while Caroline and I finish a final sweep of the downstairs and basement.”

“Have a delightful time sweeping, dear brother,” Kol offered with a saucy leer, exiting the room in haste when he heard Klaus’ aggravated growl.

Turning to Caroline, he rubbed a hand over his face, his curls slightly rumpled from his fingers. “It appears that I will be spending the majority of our time together apologizing on Kol’s behalf.”

“It’s fine, Klaus. His crudeness is somewhat charming and I suspect that high school me would have been all over that.” She paused when she saw his dimples come out to play, bracketing a knowing smirk. “Not that I’m into that any longer. These days I like a bit more restraint and subtlety,” she finished hurriedly, blushing when she realized how desperate that confession sounded.

At the top of the stairs that led down to the basement, he placed a hand against the wall by her head, leaning into her ever so slightly. “I must confess that subtlety isn’t a Mikaelson trait, I’m afraid. Or restraint for that matter. Perhaps there are other qualities that might tempt you to overlook these glaring defects, love?”

She swallowed, noting their close proximity and the way his lips seemed to curve into a neat little bow just begging to be unraveled. “You’re totally playing into my ghostbusters fantasy, aren’t you? How did you know I had the biggest crush on Bill Murray in those movies?”

He laughed gently, his gray eyes regarding her with warmth and the hint of something akin to desire. “Lucky guess. You know, the Pacific Northwest is quite the hotbed of paranormal activity these days. Perhaps I could have the team focus some of its investigations in that area soon?”

“It seems like the only logical conclusion. I would hate for you to miss out on something amazing,” she said a bit breathlessly.

“Agreed,” he replied, before leaning down to capture her lips in a soft kiss that seemed to heat her from the inside out.

Unfortunately, before they could continue, Kol interrupted them with a loud shout. “Oy! Nik, get a move on before the sun sets; we agreed to do some outside shots too!”
Pinching the bridge of his nose, Klaus stepped away from Caroline, favoring her with an exasperated look. Together, they walked down the stairs, pausing at the closed door to the basement. Hesitating, Caroline bit her lip, warily staring at the heavy paneled door. “I — I thought I could handle it; seeing where my father died and all, but I don’t think I can go in there,” Caroline said quietly.

“It’s fine, love,” Klaus said gently, tilting her chin to look into her tearful blue eyes. “I’ll just go in and get some video and then we’ll head back upstairs together, all right?”

Nodding silently, Caroline watched as Klaus opened the door to the basement and then shut it behind him before she could see inside. She appreciated his sensitivity and reflected on how thoughtful he’d been so far. This experience was definitely not what she’d imagined it would be and was excited to see where it was heading. While she knew she didn’t have the time for anything too serious at the moment, perhaps they could take it slow and who knew where they’d end up. *It could be a new beginning.*

Speaking of new beginnings, it was time to think about doing something productive with this property. It was ludicrous to think that this lovely home was just sitting here empty when it could be rented out to a large family. Just because she didn’t have happy memories of this place didn’t mean that it would be the same experience for others. She made a note to contact her family’s property manager once she returned home.

The basement door opened swiftly, jarring her from her thoughts. Klaus stepped out of the room, oddly surprised to see her standing there. “Everything go okay in there,” she asked.

“Better than I could have expected,” he replied, stiffly walking with her up the staircase. To fill the silence between them, he began to whistle, the soothing melody washing over her as they climbed the stairs.

“What a pretty tune,” Caroline commented as they reached the top of the stairs.

“Thank you. I’ve always enjoyed it,” he answered with a wide grin.
Chapter Summary

In this sequel to Chapter 12, Caroline learns how Klaus and his brothers were banished into a hell dimension and is faced with a moral decision pitting her friendship against her heart, with unexpected results.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Bring on the smut!

“Reality, however utopian, is something from which people feel the need of taking pretty frequent holidays.”

— Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*

**Three months ago.**

_The wall of tortured souls was Klaus’ prison. Poison-tipped daggers pierced his body, holding his desiccated limbs in place. Demonic whispers in his head promised that eventually his broken body would be tossed into the pit, a terrifying dark chasm where only the most wretched beings were punished. He had marked more than a thousand years on earth as an immortal hybrid, both vampire and werewolf, and he and his brothers, Finn, Kol and Elijah, wrought centuries of death and destruction upon the land. As punishment for violating the natural order, their mother, Esther, used her powerful witchcraft to banish them to this hell dimension of blazing flame and infinite despair. The searing fire that scalded his tattered skin and the agonizing bites of the demonic creatures that ripped into his flesh formed the past few years he spent in this horrific dimension._

_Klaus fought against his captors with every ounce of supernatural force he could muster, but he was rendered powerless in this endless cycle of torture and lost all hope of escaping. Without warning, a deep fissure appeared within the jagged rocks that composed the wall of tortured souls. Flexing his weakened limbs, he was stunned to feel a raw surge of energy invigorate his broken spirit and he was able to free himself from his invisible bonds._

_Before he could begin the arduous task of searching for his brothers, a swirling vortex opened at his back, enveloping him in a blinding white light that pulled him out of his prison._
Klaus anxiously paced the length of the void, a curious blank space he had determined over time had been created by a stunning combination of Caroline’s brilliance and complicated circuitry. Just now, he had lost control with Caroline; his bloodlust had taken over and he savagely attacked the woman he had grown to care for these past few months. He snarled in anger as he realized that the terrified look upon her beautiful face meant that he would never see her again.

With a heavy heart, he recalled the day he met her, when the mysterious portal had opened and whisked him away from the hell dimension and pulled him into this artificial world she had created.

He was standing in a white room, devoid of objects or sound. The walls were bathed in soft light, and as he reached out his hands to tentatively touch the blank surfaces, he was astounded to see that all of the flesh that had been burned off by flames or torn away by his demonic captors had regenerated the instant he was delivered from his torment. He felt an aching thirst as he realized that he hadn’t drank blood during those several years that were stolen from him in that dark place.

Klaus tensed, his hybrid senses alerting him to another presence. He planned to drink his fill and somehow find a way to escape from this peculiar place and free his brothers as well. He swiftly turned around to be confronted by the brightest, most inquisitive pair of blue eyes he had ever seen.

She studied him critically, a bold frankness about her that both galled and intrigued him. She nodded as though satisfied, and introduced herself in a confident, no-nonsense voice. “I’m Caroline. You must be Kyle.” Walking around him in a small circle, she added with a bit of a catch to her voice, “Your stunning form is rendered even more perfectly than I thought I programmed.” Brushing a curl behind her ear she mused, “The neural network is such a beautiful expression of biologically-inspired programming.”

Amused at the blush that crept up her ivory neck, he grasped her hand and unexpectedly kissed the soft skin of her palm, savoring her sweet fragrance reminiscent of warm honey with a touch of vanilla. “Actually sweetheart, my name is Klaus.” He pulled her close, the flutter of her heart as her pulse began to race making it difficult for him to stifle his predatory urges. He refused to allow his fangs to drop until he knew more about the intriguing creature before him.

Caroline frowned, consulting an iPad that she voice-activated to appear in her hand. “Alright, I’ll call you Klaus, then. I’m concerned that your construct is deviating from my program code. I suppose it’s possible that the programming languages I spliced with your AI software are missing a specific syntax or isn’t using memory efficiently. I’ll have to look into that after I stop this beta test simulation.”

As Klaus watched the beautiful blonde mutter to herself about complex scientific and mathematical concepts that he didn’t fully understand, he observed that she was under the impression that he was some sort of computer simulation that she had created. She didn’t realize that he was real.

Klaus sighed, running his fingers through his curls in frustration. From that day forward, he had sought to learn everything he could about his unusual situation and the amazing woman that was unknowingly responsible for his salvation. Now that she had an inkling of the truth, he desperately needed to explain himself, to somehow earn back her trust and her heart.

He stiffened when he suddenly smelled the honey and vanilla that clung to her lovely skin. She appeared before him, nervously biting her pale pink lips. “So. You’re real.” With a self-
deprecating laugh she added, “Not something I concocted because I was sad and lonely.”

“Yes, I’m very real, love,” he began haltingly, hating the uncertainty in his voice. “And I sincerely apologize for not controlling my hunger. I often forget myself with you and it challenges my restraint.”

Caroline’s blue eyes eyed him critically, reminding him of their first meeting. “Your hunger, right. So what are you? And am I safe for the moment or are you fixating on me like I’m a bag of Doritos? Speaking of which, if you’ve been you since we met three months ago, how have you been eating?”

Klaus bit back an indulgent smile as he noted the typical nervous way she blurted out her questions in one breath. “I’m a thousand-year-old hybrid, part werewolf and part vampire. Yes, you are safe with me and I vow to never hurt you again, Caroline,” he finished with a serious tone. At her disbelieving scoff, he explained, “And I’ve been feeding at the start of some of your clients’ appointments. I figured out a way to maneuver my way through your simulations fairly easily.”

Caroline’s horrified expression perplexed him. “Oh my god! My clients’ appointments. I know I took your construct out of public rotation fairly quickly for...um...reasons, but there were multiple appointments that you were tagged to...um...complete.” Her cheeks grew rosy, and she rambled, “Well, shit on a Skolem function —I’m a cyber pimp! Or is it cyber madam? Or maybe pimpette? Wait, is that sexist? Is there a gender-neutral term I should be using instead?!”

He couldn’t stop the delighted chuckles that burst forth at her charmingly frantic words. “Sweetheart, I can assure you they were quick meals and nothing more. I was able to bid a hasty retreat and allow the true simulated chap to take over.” His gray eyes darkened as he took in her inviting form, still clad in the tight peach sweater he had enjoyed earlier. “You were the only one I endeavored to complete,” he finished with a sexy rumble.

“Seriously, Klaus?!” She groaned, pinching the bridge of her nose as the color on her cheeks darkened at his blatant innuendo. “Can we please focus? So you’re an immortal creature. According to my friend, Bonnie, we may have accidentally released you and some others like you from a hell dimension. Is she right?”

Nodding solemnly, he answered, “Yes. You somehow created a portal into the hell dimension where me and my brothers were held prisoner these past few years.” Raising a question eyebrow, he added, “However, I must admit I’ve never heard of scientists, even exceptionally brilliant ones such as yourself, possessing the ability to achieve this tremendous feat. Although I don’t know why I’m surprised — you’re obviously an extraordinary creature, love.”

Caroline seemed delighted by his compliment, but she tried to quickly school her features into a more neutral expression. “Well, it turns out that apparently, science only can take you so far. Bonnie seems to be part of a powerful line of witches, the Bennet bloodline.” Furrowing her brow, she asked in a concerned voice, “This hell dimension — was it...I mean, is it actually hell?”

The steel returned to his eyes and he gave an involuntary shudder, for a creature as powerful as he did not freely admit a capacity for terror and pain. In a quiet voice, he offered, “I cannot be certain that what my brothers and I experienced was hell as the mortal realm would know it to be, but I can attest that the horrors we endured have convinced me that if ever a place deserved that title, it would be that forsaken realm.”

Without warning, he surged forward, grasping Caroline’s balled-up fists in his hands, placing a gentle kiss to each one that made her breath hitch. “You saved me, Caroline. I have nothing to offer that can ever hope to equal the service you have rendered me, but I place myself
forever in your debt. I am yours, sweetheart.” He was taken aback by his humble tone, but he knew in his heart the truth of his words.

“Klaus,” her trembling voice barely above a whisper, “this is just all so overwhelming. I’ll admit that I felt drawn to you and chided myself for having such intense feelings for what I believed to be my own creations, and now that I know you’re real, I don’t know what to think.”

Still holding her hands, he raised them to his neck, resting them there as he dipped his head down to touch their foreheads. Gazing deeply into her blue eyes filled with such uncertainty that it tore at his heart, he pleaded, “Then don’t. Just feel instead, sweetheart.” Without waiting for a reply, he sought out her lips, the warmth of her infusing him with an inexplicable feeling of peace that he had never experienced in his mortal life.

Whatever doubts plagued Caroline, she seemed to melt into this stolen moment with Klaus, pulling him down onto her willing lips with an eagerness that caused him to growl. She quickly tugged at his dark trousers, pausing briefly to allow him to kick off his boots before sliding down the zipper with a small huff of annoyance when it proved a difficult task to master with one hand.

He pulled back, removing his black henley with a smirk as she eagerly explored his toned abs with her small hands. He bit back a moan of satisfaction when she finally finished sliding down his zipper, palming his stiff length, tracing the sensitive dips and ridges with her fingers. He knew he wouldn’t last under her fiery touch, so he quickly swatted away her hands and set about the marvelous task of removing that delightfully tight peach sweater from her delectable body.

Naked, he sank to his knees before her, licking his lips at the arousing sight she made standing in nothing but her white pleated skirt and simple cotton bra. “Klaus,” she whispered breathlessly, the heat from her damp core calling out to him with the sweetest of siren songs. He trailed his fingers teasingly up her thighs, taking the hemline of her skirt up those last few inches until her pale blue panties were exposed. He ran the tip of his tongue experimentally over the fabric covering her core, savoring the dew that he found there.

At her helpless cry, he quickly pushed the cotton to one side and curled his tongue into her slick passage. The heady taste of her uniquely sweet-spicy flavor ensnared his senses, spurring him on to explore every inch of her welcoming core. He pulled back slightly as he felt her begin to tremble, and he swirled the tip of his tongue against her clit, increasing the pressure until she nearly broke before retreating to the softest of touches as she finally reached her explosive release.

She called out his name, rendered practically boneless as she slid into his waiting arms. He laid her onto the floor of the unusual space, the whiteness that surrounded them casting a glow upon Caroline and illuminating her like a goddess. He removed the rest of her clothes, his wolf demanding that he touch every inch of her golden form. When he felt his eyes bleed the familiar feral yellow of his monster, he was pleased to see that she didn’t shrink from the truth of him. Instead, the sight seemed to energize her and she quickly hooked her smooth legs around his waist, pulling him on top of her.

“Little minx,” he rasped, his hard cock eagerly slapping against her thighs as he sought out her dripping opening. She moaned at the thickness of him, pressing against his rigid body with a desperate urgency as she sought to capture more of his flesh within her. He rolled his hips, sinking into her with a groan, delighting in the exquisite feel of her writhing form.

At her urging, he sped up his strokes, setting a punishing pace that had her begging in hoarse shouts. He could feel his desire building and reached down to toy with her sensitive little button, pinching it until she tightened around him once more, the waves of her orgasm sending him spiraling into a shuddering explosion that left them both sweaty but sated.
Klaus rested beside Caroline, threading his fingers through hers as she turned onto her side to regard him with a serious expression. “There’s something I have to tell you, Klaus. I came here to see you because I needed to know...I actually don’t know what exactly, but I needed to see you because when Bonnie saw your bite mark, it convinced her that we needed to terminate the simulations because you and your brothers are dangerous creatures.” She bowed her head, and with a voice full of regret, she confessed, “Bonnie apparently already terminated Kol’s construct.”

He could sense her trepidation while waiting for his anger, and he surprised her by kissing their joined fingers. “Sweetheart, we’re not simulations. We’re flesh and bone and immortal souls that cannot simply be removed from this world by flipping a switch. Your friend didn’t harm my brother. Once you and Bonnie saved us from the hell dimension, my brothers and I have been free to roam your simulations as we please. We’ve seen each other quite frequently these past few months, mostly trying to determine a way to be released into this world once more.”

Caroline shook her head and replied, “Bonnie would never help to release you into our world. Kol bit her. You bit me. How can we be sure that you and your brothers won’t harm others?”

He sat up, voice soft but with an edge of desperation as he vowed, “I’m sorry that I frightened you. I swear that no further harm will come to you. I even swear to control my brothers and curb their appetites. It’s possible for us to feed without killing.” He saw her wavering resolve and he kissed her open palms. “Please just give us this chance to be free again.”

She bit her lip, her thoughts clearly racing as she began to get dressed once more. Klaus reached for the pocket of his dark trousers, withdrawing a small oval locket. At the curiosity he saw in her blue eyes, he explained, “Before my mother banished us to the hell dimension, I ripped this from her neck.”

He flicked open the clasp to reveal a few crumbled, jagged leaves. “Nettle leaves are used to remove or block curses. You mentioned that Bonnie is of the Bennet bloodline, and I’ve had experience with her ancestors, so I’m familiar with their brand of spells. Most likely Bonnie will decide that she needs to tap into her ancestral magic to banish me and my brothers back to the hell dimension.”

Without waiting for an answer, Klaus shoved the leaves into her palm, folding her fingers over the dried mass and said, “If you add these into Bonnie’s banishment ritual instead of the Scotch broom leaves she’ll undoubtedly use, it should be enough to free me and my brothers and release us into this world once more.”

“Klaus, I don’t know what to say,” she answered weakly. “It’s just so much to process and how I feel about you and us and all of this...” she trailed off helplessly. Before he could respond, she knelt before him, grasping his strong jaw and kissing him fiercely. She pulled back with a shaky breath and quickly pressed the silver cuff on her wrist to pull herself out of the simulation once more.

Caroline’s head was spinning with everything she had learned about Klaus. What she felt for him was confusing, exciting, terrifying — everything she always hoped for whenever she daydreamed of finding the one. Of course, never in her wildest dreams had she considered the possibility that the one would turn out to be a monster. But was he completely a monster? It hardly seemed fair to paint all monsters with the same rigid brush of morality. She was pondering the possibilities of whether monsters could be redeemed when she was startled by impatient banging on the glass door out front.
She had completely forgotten about Bonnie going next door. Shit. Not to mention the fact that she had impulsively changed the security code combination on the door in an irrational bout of panic at the thought that when Bonnie returned, she would want to terminate the simulations. To terminate Klaus. She remembered she still had the nettle leaves bunched up in her fist and quickly pushed them underneath the mouse pad by her keyboard. She jogged out into the lobby, finding an angry Bonnie clutching two large to-go cups from the coffee shop next door.

Avoiding her friend’s questioning green stare, she ducked her blonde head as she quickly released the electronic lock and opened the door. “What the hell, Caroline?!” She thrust one of the coffees into Caroline’s hands as she shoved her way past the reception area, stomping toward the lab in the back. Tossing back her black hair she asked, “Do I even want to know what you were thinking locking me out of our business?”

Caroline rubbed her forehead as she followed in her friend’s frustrated wake. “Bonnie, I just needed...a moment to myself, okay? I’m sorry.”

Bonnie whirled to face her, her green eyes wide with the hint of fear. “Well, are you done having your moment? Because I just had the most insanity-driven phone call of my life with my mother and had we not just stumbled into this whole magical mess of raising demonic beings and creating hell dimension portals and accidentally awakening my power, I would be ready to commit her!”

Caroline set down her cup, moving to place a comforting hand on Bonnie’s shoulder. “What did she say?”

The girl snorted. “She said we’re fucked. From what she told me, merely terminating the simulation construct and taking apart the mainframe isn’t enough to banish the demonic creatures we accidentally released into our computer program. Apparently, we need to reseal the portal we raised in the hell dimension.”

Caroline could feel her pulse quicken as she considered Bonnie’s words. From the terror in her voice, she knew that her friend had already condemned Klaus and his brothers. Her heart ached when she realized that she would never see Klaus again.

Too distracted to notice Caroline’s hesitation, Bonnie continued her explanation. “Fortunately, my mother gave me detailed instructions for a banishment spell Bennet witches used ages ago that should work perfectly. I was out gathering all of the ingredients which is why I was gone so long, in case you were wondering,” she said reproachfully, raising a critical eyebrow.

Caroline lowered her head. “Sorry. I wasn’t paying attention after you left; I just needed to think about things.” A thought struck her and she asked, “What are we telling our clients? There’s still some appointments booked for tonight and Katherine is down the hall in one of the simulation rooms. What do you want to do about that?”

Bonnie shook her head, agitated. “We’ll deal with the fallout after we’ve sealed the portal and saved everyone.” Her fingers clenched the small brown sack as she said urgently, “Now my mother was very clear that we must follow her instructions perfectly. it would be dangerous to make even the slightest alteration to this spell, like substituting ingredients, which is why I had to go to two different herbalist shops before I found Scotch broom leaves. Apparently, any changes could have dire consequences, like alternate universe consequences.”

Caroline’s blue eyes widened in shock at this revelation. She weakly retorted, “So you’re telling me that there’s a possibility that in some alternate universe there’s a version of me running around that decided to be an English major?”
Bonnie gave her a tight-lipped smile. “According to the most prevalent alternate dimensional theories, it’s a free-for-all and anyone’s guess as to how things could be different. No one really knows and I have no interest in finding out,” she said firmly.

Caroline pushed up the sleeves of her peach sweater, noting how one sleeve was stiff with her blood from when she used it to staunch her bite mark. Her neck still ached from where Klaus’ fangs had dug into her skin, and she wondered if it would scar. *When she looked at it in the coming years, would she regret her choice?* She couldn’t help but notice that everything Bonnie had said so far about the spell had come true. She tried not to let herself think about whether that meant the other things he told her was the truth as well.

Her friend interrupted her conflicted thoughts. “I’m heading to the simulation room where I originally sliced open my hand by accident. We should perform the spell there, so I’ll go get everything set up. I need you to activate the updated memory architectures in our database but don’t invoke the special syntax codes.”

Nodding faintly, Caroline turned her attention to her keyboard, accessing the correct files and pulling them up one by one. She hesitated at her desk before finally reaching underneath the mouse pad to grasp the nettle leaves in her sweaty hand. Heart hammering away, she headed down the corridor toward the simulation rooms.

Bonnie had positioned four white candles in the corners of the sparse room, chanting over them one by one as she tossed polished onyx stones into a shallow copper bowl. They twanged against the metal, causing Caroline to jump slightly. When she noticed that Caroline had entered the room, she handed her the copper bowl, motioning for her to hold it aloft. Bonnie unexpectedly produced a silver-edged knife and sliced through her own palm with a pained grunt, allowing her blood to drip onto the stones. Caroline let out a small squeak, unprepared for the spell’s violent display.

Her friend’s face was grave as she instructed Caroline, “Move to the center of the room with the bowl and when I tell you, toss these Scotch broom leaves into the bowl and hold it over your head.” She gave her the copper bowl and a handful of pale yellow-green leaves. Swallowing harshly, Caroline marched to where Bonnie had indicated, watching her friend lean over each of the four candles to drip her blood into the flames.

Bonnie continued her chanting with more confidence now, only pausing to check her notes once. Green eyes blazing, she turned to Caroline and demanded, “Now, Caroline!”

Caroline took a shuddering breath, feeling her hands shake at what she was about to do. Her sweaty fist hovered over the copper bowl as she made her decision. Flexing her fingers, she released the nettle leaves Klaus had given her on top of the bowl’s ingredients. She squeezed her eyes shut, feeling a traitorous tear fall.

When she opened her eyes, she was stunned to find herself alone in an empty white room that she instantly recognized as the initial simulation program they used for beta testing new constructs. She looked around the room, trying to determine where Bonnie had gone. Her body felt odd — she was experiencing a deep-rooted hunger for something she couldn’t immediately identify and an inexplicable rush of power seemed to flow through her.

Her senses tingled, alerting her to another presence. She whirled around and was instantly confronted by a familiar pair of steel gray eyes. Klaus stood before her, eyeing her with his familiar
intensity, but something was off. Klaus was different. He nodded at her and said briskly, “You must be Charlotte. I’m Klaus.”

He proceeded to walk around her in a circle, studying her intently, and the longer he stared at her, the easier it was for Caroline to hear how his heartbeat increased and she could actually smell his arousal. Clearing his throat, he stammered slightly as he added, “You’re even more ravishing than my program algorithm demonstrated. A perfect rendering of code.” There was a note of awe that crept into his voice as he ran his fingers nervously through his dirty blonde curls. “The neural network is nothing short of inspiring. The perfect marriage of biology and programming.”

Caroline eyed Klaus carefully, all of the pieces suddenly falling into place. She grinned mischievously at the tell-tale blush that warmed his cheeks as she noted her obvious interest. His pulse quickened and the heady aroma of his blood called out to her as she controlled a surprising urge to unsheathe a set of fangs.

A knowing smirk spread across her lovely face as she said, “Actually sweetheart, my name is Caroline.”
Chapter Summary

In this brief installment, Caroline’s ghouls are back by popular demand! This chapter will feature some lost scenes in Chapters 6 and 20 told from the ghouls’ perspective. It gets a bit silly. A lot silly, actually. Enjoy!

“The scholar does not consider gold and jade to be precious treasures, but loyalty and good faith.”
— Confucius

Excerpt from Chapter 20 (told from the ghouls’ point-of-view)

Ishkur the Fiendish vowed to make war on the useless Originals before him if they didn’t hurry up and realize that Sunshine had been stolen. His black eyes glittered as he watched Zahgurim bang her scaly fist yet again on the glass table in frustration. “Sunshine’s Ass-Weasel is a tragically ignorant piece of squirrel carcass,” he said with a long-suffering sigh.

Endukugga of Uruk nodded his rotted gray head in agreement as he stared at the Originals, adding, “They’re all such hideously deformed creatures. Praise cookies — our Sunshine is such a kind soul to love her Ass-Weasel despite his wretched ugliness.” Some of the smaller groups nearby nodded enthusiastically at that, feeling immensely proud of their Sunshine’s selfless ways.

Stuffy Tie-Man began moving his lips in an exaggerated manner while stressing each syllable of his boring word-talk. Several of the assembled ghouls grumbled that they planned to wear his pinstripe tie around their foreheads while they slowly ate him. Zahgurim and the others explained yet again to Ass-Weasel and Stuffy Tie-Man that Sunshine had been stolen, but alas, it was to no avail.

Sweet Meat suddenly came bumbling into the room, causing everyone to stop their raving and grin. He was such a delightful little puppy and several waved at him, clicking their teeth enthusiastically. Such a shame Sunshine spoiled their fun and wouldn’t let them keep him. But maybe if they were really good and promised to feed and water him every day... Sweet Meat let out a garbled noise like a cat coughing up a hairball and then hid behind Sunshine’s Ass-Weasel and Stuffy Tie-Man. Endukugga of Uruk attempted to engage in a brief game of peek-a-boo with Sweet
Meat, but he was rudely ignored.

Sweat Meat’s silly word-talk was surprisingly useful and the assembled ghouls realized that Ass-Weasel finally understood that Sunshine had been stolen. It didn’t stop him from asking pointless questions, though, and they could tell that Zahgurim was moments away from nibbling off his dimples to get him to focus on the urgent problem at hand.

Praise cookies — Boo finally arrived, and everyone gathered around her eagerly. She always smelled like cookies and there was the exciting possibility that she might have brought some with her. She always was so generous to share her cookies with them. Their Boo was the patron saint of cookies and the goddess of cookies and the president of cookies. However, her stern word-talk told them they were being denied cookies.

Several of the ghouls glared at Ass-Weasel, Stuffy Tie-Man and Sweet Meat as it was obvious they were responsible for this devastating cookie shortage. How dare they stand in the way of their cookie dreams! And they still hadn’t gone to rescue Sunshine, either! Originals had to be the most useless supernatural creatures in the world. Except for sirens. Sirens, as everyone knew, were the epitome of inflated, pointless word-talk and inevitable disappointment.

Boo’s word-talk turned angry and they realized Sweet Meat was threatening their Boo in some way. Quickly, Barashakushu the Bloodthirsty, Ishkur the Fiendish, Endukugga of Uruk, and Earl stood protectively in front of their Boo, hissing at Sweet Meat to remind their puppy of his place. “Bad puppy,” Barashakushu the Bloodthirsty growled, wagging her finger at the naughty Original.

Praise cookies — Boo valiantly took control of the meeting with her brilliant word-talk, and the ghouls breathed a sigh of relief that finally the plan to rescue their Sunshine was making significant progress. Ishkur the Fiendish looked around the room, counting on his long fingers and toes and seemed to be coming up short in his calculations. Finally, he turned to Earl and asked in confusion, “Why are we missing Sheshkala? Where is he?”

Earl scratched his rotted gray head, grumbling in irritation, “Sheshkala is running late because he is still worshipping upon the altar of the Girls of Gilmore at the holy Flix of Net and cannot be disturbed.” Several ghouls nodded solemnly at this revelation, their sorrow great as they knew Sheshkala would be inconsolable when he realized the extent of Rory’s tragically underdeveloped, out-of-character treatment.

Boo captured their attention and started herding the ghouls out of the room. Praise cookies! They were finally off to rescue Sunshine! They raised their fists in the air, bellowing a victorious war cry as they chattered excitedly about how they would shower their Sunshine in hugs and kisses and couldn’t wait to see if she had eaten Greasy Ratpire who stole her. Maybe she would share? Or, even better, maybe she would have cookies!

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Excerpt from Chapter 6 (told from the ghouls’ point-of-view)

Everyone knows that werewolf toes are a mild, tender meat and therefore are far too
delicate for the harsh, smoky texture of cayenne pepper. The proper spices to soften the gamey flavor of such a delicate meat must be thyme with a hint of dill. Zahgurim rolled her eyes when she noticed Ishkur the Fiendish liberally adding the spicy red powder to the red snapper and werewolf toe bouillabaisse.

She opened her mouth to complain and/or bite off one of his long, scaly fingers holding the spice bottle in protest, but was distracted by Barashakushu the Bloodthirsty, Sheshkala, and Earl bringing in Sweet Meat, tightly bound and gagged with his brown eyes full of anger with a healthy dose of fear. They placed him on top of the kitchen table and Zahgurim hissed at him, “Do you know why you’re here, Sweet Meat? Did you think we wouldn’t find out about your side-betting ring at Fang Fights?”

Sweet Meat seemed confused as it became clear he didn’t speak the ghouls’ language. He struggled ineffectively against his bonds, underestimating the depth of their magic.

Barashakushu the Bloodthirsty sighed in irritation. “Why can’t we eat this one? It would be so much easier.”

Earl shrugged his skeletal shoulders while rooting around in the refrigerator for a Dr. Pepper. “Because Sunshine claimed Ass-Weasel and his family. Therefore, we are bound by our honor code not to harm them — within reason,” he added as an afterthought, gulping down his drink in one massive swallow and then attempting to belch out much of the ghouliese alphabet to the rest of his clan’s amusement.

Sheshkala leaned over to scratch behind Sweet Meat’s ears with his long fingers. “So instead we’ll keep him as a puppy. Praise cookies — you know we’ve always wanted one.” The group murmured in agreement, rubbing their scaly hands together excitedly as Sweet Meat’s brown eyes widened comically at their disquieting gesture.

As Sheshkala began stroking Sweet Meat’s sweaty brown locks, Ishkur the Fiendish said knowledgably, “I’ve been doing some research and I think we may need to get a crate to help train him.”

Zahgurim tilted her rotted gray head, thinking hard. “We have a dungeon. Does that count?”

“Meh, close enough,” Ishkur the Fiendish nodded, black eyes glittering. As he resumed stirring the bouillabaisse he added, “I also read that we’ll need to practice responsible behavior modification, like using a squirt bottle or pointing at him and saying ‘no’ in an authoritative voice whenever he’s naughty.”

Thin lips pulled back from her sharp teeth in a horrific grin, Zahgurim informed the group, “After listening to Sunshine’s girls, I know what Sweet Meat’s biggest behavior issue will be.” She pointed a long, scaly finger at Sweet Meat, almost brushing the tip of his nose as he nearly went cross-eyed trying to follow the movement. “No! Bad puppy! No humping,” she said in a guttural, authoritative voice. The ghouls all clapped her on the back, trading high-fives as they found her tone on-point for appropriate puppy behavior modification.

They had just finished agreeing that she should be Sweet Meat’s head trainer, when Sunshine interrupted them. From her stern word-talk and impatient tapping of her heels, it appeared that they may have to give back their new puppy.

However, maybe she brought them cookies.
Chapter Summary

In this AU, Klaus is seeking a rare ingredient that will help him break his hybrid curse. He’s convinced he’s found the perfect clueless human to unknowingly help him on his search. Of course, it turns out his pretty little human isn’t quite so clueless...among other things...

Chapter Notes

Warning: A smidge of smut!

“There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one ever comes to warm himself at it, and the passersby see only a wisp of smoke.” — Vincent Van Gogh

‘Volcanologists do it when it’s only logical’ was emblazoned across the faded navy t-shirt Caroline was wearing. She tucked some sweaty strands back into her twin braids distractedly as she pulled up the latest geologic map of Kenya’s Mount Kulal. Too focused on measuring the distribution of rocks surrounding the volcano, she failed to hear the door to the research cabin open.

“Charming shirt, love,” a seductive British accent called out, startling her from her research. An impossibly attractive man with dirty blonde curls and a troublemaker’s smirk regarded her with an intensity that by all accounts should have made her uncomfortable rather than inconveniently aroused. His gray eyes traced over the curves of her shirt once more and cheekily added, “You’ve demonstrated my clearly hasty assumption of what a Trekkie fan would look like.”

Her blue eyes flashed at his teasing tone and she replied bluntly, “Asinine assumptions are an excellent way to identify asshats so the rest of us can avoid you.” She looked him over, refusing to react to the unexpected dimples he flashed as his smirk deepened. “I’m Caroline, but you probably already knew that considering we’re perched on the side of an extinct volcano in northern Kenya and the nearest town is more than 30 miles away. So, either you’re looking for me or you’re hopelessly lost.”

She took in the multiple necklaces and curls that were far too perfect to be achieved without a precise amount of gel and exacting fingers and amended her statement with, “Actually, you look like you’re on your way to a rock concert. Men really are stubborn creatures when it comes to asking for directions, aren’t you?”

Something dark flashed in his eyes as his deep laughter filled the small cabin. “You’re a little spitfire, aren’t you sweetheart?”
“You have no idea,” she muttered, crossing her arms in front of her. “So, who are you?”

The handsome stranger smiled and said in his seductive accent, “Klaus Mikaelson, on special assignment from the Volcanic and Magmatic Studies Group.” In one fluid movement, he managed to remove her hand from the keyboard to lightly graze her knuckles with his soft lips.

She barely managed to keep her mouth from flopping open unattractively at his unexpected gesture, but then bristled at the amusement dancing in his eyes. “What special assignment from VMSG? No one from WOVO has contacted me about this,” she said in a suspicious tone.

As though sensing she was gearing up for a battle, Klaus casually folded his lean frame into an empty chair near the computer monitors and answered lightly, “Professor Atticus Shane contacted my group personally to gain our insight into your latest findings. He felt that pooling our resources would yield more favorable results.” He jerked his chin toward her keyboard and added, “Feel free to contact him if you don’t believe me, love.”

Blue eyes full of fire, Caroline didn’t bother hiding her aggravation as she gracelessly pounded out a terse email to send to her absent-minded supervisor. She had worked for the World Organization of Volcano Observatories (WOVO) for years, happily relocating to various volcanic sites around the world as dictated by Professor Shane. While it wasn’t unusual that he had forgotten to tell her about Klaus, something still felt off.

She received a brief email reply almost immediately, apologizing for not informing her of the change in plans and urging her to collaborate harmoniously with Klaus so that it may benefit both organizations. Her feeling of unease lingered as she glanced over the short response from Professor Shane. Normally, he was overly loquacious, unable to keep from turning every email response into a mini-lecture over whatever area of research he was pursuing at the time. Carefully studying a somewhat tense Klaus, she shrugged and said, “Okay. Looks like this checks out. Where do you want to start?”

Relaxing at her words, he flashed her a grin and answered, “The VMSG noticed the unusual heat signatures your recent satellite images revealed. Let’s start there.”

Nodding, Caroline accessed the latest thermal images and explained, “As you can see, the ancient conduit is still mostly intact. The unusual heat signatures I’ve uncovered may be the first sparks of life this volcano has seen for more than a million years.” Her face lit up in excitement as she added, “In fact, there are fossils embedded in hardened volcanic ash found near the basin that are from the early-to-late Pliocene. If true volcanic activity is uncovered in this extinct cone now, it would be unprecedented!”

Chuckling at her infectious enthusiasm, Klaus dragged his chair next to hers and pointed to the top of the image. “Actually love, my group is most curious about the odd heat signatures found on the surface. What can you tell me about those?”

Caroline stiffened, straightening her spine as she noticed how close he was leaning toward her. She ignored the intoxicating aroma of leather and the hint of musk he seemed to radiate. In her experience, scientists tended to smell like sweaty research grant desperation and stale Funyuns. “You mean the random scattering of red and gold orbs on the caldera?” She eyed him skeptically, adding, “Surely you’re aware that Mount Kulal is covered by lush vegetation after millions of years of dormancy? The circular depression the caldera has made at the top has been covered over, first with ash and lava and then, over time, with sediment and vegetation.” A teasing smile tugged at the corners of her lips as she asked, “Are you telling me that the VMSG flew you all the way out here to study images that could be anything from hikers to butterflies?”
“No,” he practically growled in aggravation, his accent becoming more pronounced as he seemed oddly accusatory. “In all of the time you’ve spent on this bloody mountain, you haven’t noticed those peculiar heat signatures that appear with some frequency? They practically dance upon the wind as though they have wings.” He cocked his head to the side, studying her carefully. “How has this ongoing unusual occurrence escaped your notice?”

Caroline could feel her hair-trigger temper getting the best of her as she leapt to her feet. “Seriously?! How dare you come into my territory and try to tell me how to do my job?! I’ll have you know I’m damn good at what I do, otherwise WOVO would never have allowed me to be stationed all the way out here by myself!”

His gray eyes became cold steel the louder she became and his jaw twitched before he opened his mouth to obviously defend his bullshit assumptions, which only served to enrage Caroline further. “And unless it’s escaped your notice, Klaus, we’re volcanologists, which means we’re meant to study the internal structure of volcanoes along with the sediment they expel. We don’t tie up our bare-bones research grants that we have to shamelessly beg for each fiscal year on futile flights of fancy just because we get an itch to go chase butterflies in the sunshine!”

She jammed her gold glitter-chipped fingernail at the thermal images and screeched, “And a stoner college freshman who flunked earth science can tell you that unusual occurrence is clearly sunlight reflecting off of the metal GPS sensors I installed to measure thermal anomalies, you insufferable asshat!”

While she stood there, catching her breath after her tirade, Klaus considered her, as though carefully weighing his words. A variety of emotions flitted across his handsome face — surprise, then anger, before finally settling on something akin to respect tinged with amusement. He relaxed into the creaking office chair, allowing his well-sculpted arms to loosely drape along the arm rests. He seemed to wait ages in the tension-filled silence, stoking the sizzling energy between them. Finally seeming to settle on his response, he licked his lips invitingly and inquired, “Futile flights of fancy?”

At her confused expression, he chuckled. “Say that melodious phrase five times fast and I’ll declare you the most eloquent volcanologist I’ve ever met, love.” Eyeing her toned legs exposed in threadbare old gym shorts, he couldn’t help but add, “You’re already the most stunning.”

Huffing in exasperation, she asked incredulously, “That’s what you got out of that? I can tell you right now you aren’t like any volcanologist I’ve ever met. Where did you study?”

Klaus seemed stricken by her question, but his brow smoothed out as he answered, “Undergraduate studies in geophysics at Columbia with master’s and Ph.D. degrees in geological sciences with a minor in geochemistry completed at Stanford. Satisfied?”

She made an impressed noise despite herself, and reluctantly returned to her chair. “I did state schools for undergrad. Had to work my way up to Stanford for the environmental geosciences grad school program.” She tried to subtly wipe away the trail of sweat that had gathered near her temple during her brief flare of anger. “You must be really smart or really rich to have landed such an auspicious start in our field,” she said bluntly.

“I’m a bit of both,” he chuckled, gray eyes dancing with mirth. “Tell me, sweetheart, in your eyes, which crime is the most offensive?”

Snorting, she said, “In my experience, ‘really rich’. There’s this subpar Van Wilder-wannabe fratboy who clearly got his job at WOVO because of his family’s obscene wealth. He met me at one Geological Society conference and then managed to weasel his way onto my project and
now he’s my main contact with headquarters.” She rolled her eyes, adding, “Tyler keeps making these creepy jokes about how we should simultaneously perform chemistry analysis on all those hard surface samples.”

Dimples flashing, Klaus snickered, “How charming. And I imagine you always have a witty retort, love?”

Caroline rolled her eyes, surprised that he already knew her so well. “I keep threatening to tell the rest of the department that his instrument puts the ‘micro’ in ‘microprobe’, but he keeps misconstruing that as my interest in his instrument.” A thought just struck her and she added, “Come to think of it, you two actually have the same background. Same degrees at the same schools and everything. Huh, what are the odds?”

“Indeed,” he muttered, clearing his throat unnecessarily. “So, getting back to your images,” he said, swiftly changing the subject, “Can you pull up your data files that chart the anomalies you found?”

Nodding, she accessed the organization’s shared drive and added the graphs she had painstakingly plotted for the past year. “Note the elevated heat signatures. Now, I’m obviously not suggesting that volatile heat in hydrothermal fluids would still be present in an extinct volcano, but it is fascinating to theorize about their origins.”

She turned her blonde head, noting how Klaus was staring intensely at her chart, carefully studying the entries for each month. Clearly still suspicious of the mysterious stranger, she continued her explanation. “Of course, as you know, the preferred method for analyzing hydrothermal fluids is through the Foo Fight RS instrument, but I’ve experimented extensively with the Twenty One Pilots diagram protocols.” Watching him out of the corner of her eye, her tone was light as she asked, “Has that been your experience in the field as well?”

“Of course,” he agreed amicably, “It appears my findings have been similar to yours.”

Biting her lip to hold in her laughter, she was suddenly distracted by the familiar sound of a rumbling engine outside. With a happy grin, she hopped out of her chair and out of the cabin, eagerly greeting an immensely rusted off-road vehicle. Two men dressed in brightly colored shukas climbed out to greet her, each holding a large woven basket filled to the brim with a variety of crops including green beans, mangoes and onions. Centered on top of each basket was a beautiful bouquet of calla lilies in brilliant shades of gold, red and orange. They set the baskets down at Caroline’s feet, then backed away, waiting for her to speak.

Caroline smiled gently, her palms gracing the tops of each overflowing basket and then spoke rapidly in their native tongue, her voice melodious and confident. The men seemed pleased with her statements and responded quickly, their dark eyes darting to Klaus uncertainly. Caroline noted their distraction and looked over her shoulder at Klaus who stood off to the side, his face closed off and calculating. She contemplated the attractive stranger, and seemed to reach a decision. “Some of the Samburu tribe are having a feast tonight. You want to join them?”

Surprise flickered across his face. “You speak their language quite well. How long have you lived here?”

She shrugged her shoulders disinterestedly. “Awhile. I always make it a point to get along with the locals and a couple of them were generous enough to teach me the Maa language.” She cocked an eyebrow, adding, “Something tells me that you usually come prepared too. Let me guess — you made it a point to try to learn Swahili before you came over here, but didn’t bother learning regional dialects?”
“Something like that. Although my stay here is temporary, so it didn’t seem prudent to my goals,” he answered stiffly, clearly vexed at being at a disadvantage.

“Ah, yes, your goals,” she intoned mockingly. “Tell me, Klaus, will hanging out with the locals conflict with these goals of yours?”

“Not in the least,” Klaus smoothly replied. “I would be delighted to join you.” He offered his hand, leading her toward the battered vehicle that was missing its doors, and helping her climb into the back before joining her. “I must say, I’m impressed to see how well you have assimilated here. Tribesmen in this region are not typically known for welcoming outsiders.”

Frowning slightly, Caroline asked, “You mean the baskets? They were just being neighborly. We came to an understanding awhile back and everyone has adopted a kind of ‘live and let live’ attitude. Plus, their feasts are pretty delicious — especially to someone who’s been living mostly off instant soup and sandwiches.”

The decrepit engine turned over with a cough and a sputter before it finally started up properly, and with a lurch, they started driving back down the mountain. As they took a sharp corner, the vehicle came precariously close to a rocky ledge, the lush green valley below was a stunningly beautiful view but also a reminder of their immense height. Caroline’s blue eyes widened as she stared down at the emerald green forest floor far below and Klaus squeezed her hand, playfully asking, “Someone in your line of work cannot afford to be afraid of heights, sweetheart.”

She laughed softly, patting his jean-clad knee mockingly. “Heights are a weakness of mine. You definitely have me figured out.” If she took note of his strange use of “your” rather than “our” when referring to their profession, she didn’t comment, instead choosing to watch the seemingly endless forest of lush greens and rich browns pass by. She breathed in the wonderfully familiar scents of soil and leaves, the pleasant, earthy smell bringing a smile to her face.

“Enjoying the fresh air? I wasn’t going to say anything, but your research cabin was a bit stuffy. I wouldn’t have pegged you for a smoker, love.” His gray eyes twinkled as he watched her sunny smile dissolve into a scowl.

“Stupid interns were here not that long ago and managed to stink up the place with their cheap cigars. It’s almost impossible to completely get rid of the smell of smoke — trust me, I’ve tried,” she huffed in annoyance.

In an obvious bid to change the subject, she leaned forward and tapped one of the men on their shoulders, chattering away in their native language. She seemed satisfied with his response and turned to Klaus, assessing him carefully. “It’s a special occasion tonight, so they’re roasting a cow. They’re also making a traditional drink of fermented milk and blood. Something tells me you aren’t the squeamish type, but I thought I’d warn you so you didn’t freak out and offend them.”

Surprise flashed in his gray eyes as his lips curled into a knowing grin. “The blood won’t bother me, sweetheart. I must confess, you have taken me by surprise. You’re comfortable drinking blood?”

Caroline shifted awkwardly in the torn canvas-covered seat. “Comfortable? No. Blood isn’t really my thing, but these people have been good to me, and I want to be neighborly. Besides, I didn’t get into this line of work to just sit behind a computer all day. I want an adventure,” she declared in a determined voice.

The sun dipped below the horizon just as they reached the base of the mountain. A large
bonfire greeted them, the remains of a butchered cow off to the side as the delicious, tangy aromas of roasted meat permeated the air. A group of women called out to Caroline, their dozens of beaded necklaces clinking as they continued their intricate dance around the fire. She surprised Klaus again by taking his hand, weaving through the groups of men jumping and dancing, their long braids painted with red ochre gleaming in the firelight. They came to a stop in front of a large, flat stone piled high with sticks of charred chunks of meat. Taking two, Caroline handed one to Klaus and tore into her own with gusto, the juicy morsels melting on her tongue.

Two women with shaved heads, signifying their status as village elders, handed Caroline and Klaus small wooden bowls filled with a pungent liquid before bowing their heads solemnly. Caroline thanked them and touched the brim of her bowl with Klaus’ before cheekily telling him, “Drink up!”

While Klaus seemed to take his time imbibing, the fermented milk and blood drink was devoured hastily in one gulp by Caroline, as though she wanted to get it over with quickly. She set down the bowl and returned to her meat, wiping her chin hastily when she could feel the succulent juices starting to drip. She blushed when she noted his attention and said, “At least the beef is good, right?”

Something primal heated his gaze as he boldly swiped at a stray smear of beef fat on her cheek and then shamelessly sucked on his finger as he rumbled, “Delicious. A feast for all the senses, love.”

She could feel her body heating in response, and she lowered her gaze to finish eating in silence. They sat down on crude benches fashioned out of shipping pallets, watching the laughing, clapping natives as they feasted and danced in the firelight. Before long, several women dressed in simple shifts of golds and reds danced over to Caroline, rapidly speaking and gesturing toward the fire. Nodding, Caroline stood and explained to Klaus, “They like me to join some of their dances when I’m here.”

Intrigued, Klaus watched as the villagers gave loud whooping cries and raised their hands to the night sky as Caroline joined their group of spirited dancers. While her bright blonde hair had all but come loose from her messy twin braids and she was dressed in wrinkled, threadbare clothes, she still shone as brightly as any star in the sky. Her bubbling laughter was infectious as she shook her hips and clapped her hands, the rhythm of the dance being kept by everyone’s loud stomping. The dust that was kicked up into the air seemed to swirl like mist around the group, curling about ankles and calves in an almost erotic display.

Heat from the fire seemed to fuel the dancers’ energy and their bodies trembled and shook in a frenzy of passionate, joyful movement. Before long, Caroline felt hands insistently pull her hips backward into a lean, hard body, and she was seized by an electric current that traveled down her spine.

His husky voice growled in her ear, “You play a dangerous game, love. How long do you plan to tease me?”

Pushing sweaty strands away from her slick skin, she twirled suddenly, sliding into his arms so that their noses were nearly touching. “I’m a bit too old for games, Klaus, and something tells me you are too.” She threaded slim fingers through his belt loops and entreated breathlessly, “No more teasing.”

“Agreed,” he said, moving his head down to her neck, smelling her glistening skin.

Taking his hand once more, she coyly said, “It’s a nice night for a walk.” Turning briefly to
the villagers, she merrily waved and called out her thanks, prompting them to bow their heads as she passed them.

Caroline led him back into the dense forest covering the mountainside, the noises of the animals more pronounced without the loud rumbling of an engine to drown them out. Screeching bats and twittering sparrows and cranes swooped overhead, while baboons and Vervet monkeys cackled and wailed, their chatter echoing throughout the woods. She was surprisingly sure-footed in the dark as she smoothly navigated them around large boulders and giant trees with low-hanging moss and vines.

Klaus pulled her to him suddenly, startling her as he cupped her chin, punishing her lips with an aggressive kiss that left her breathless. She responded eagerly, plunging her fingers into dirty blonde curls and pulling him to her with a surprising forcefulness. Grunting unintelligible words, he reached down and picked her up in one fluid gesture, laying her down on top of a wide fig tree root.

Her fingers drifted to the stretchy fabric of her shorts, slipping them down her legs as he hungrily watched. He placed his hands on her knees, easing them apart as he knelt before her. “You smell divine,” he rumbled, appreciating her signature fragrance of honey now mixed with the bonfire’s smoke that clung to her delectable skin. He ran his nose down the length of her calf, breathing in the intoxicating aroma of her need for him.

“Taste me,” Caroline demanded with a whine at the back of her throat, reaching down to pluck at the strings of her thong, suddenly finding it an irritating hindrance.

His gray eyes darkened as they followed the movement of her fingers, and he swiftly yanked at the seams until they snapped, leaving her completely open for his greedy stare. He licked his lips as he watched her dip her index fingers into her folds, slowly spreading herself with a cunning smile upon her sweet lips.

Klaus was helpless against her blatant invitation and dipped down to place the flat of his tongue against her dewy skin. Groaning at that first delicious taste, he surged ahead, swirling and plunging along her folds and aching core, causing her thighs to clench and buck against him.

Caroline curled her arms behind her head, clutching the smooth bark of the root as she tossed her tangled blonde hair from side to side, unable to bite back the moans of pleasure that tore from her throat at his skillful tongue.

Just before she shattered, he cruelly pulled back with a smirk, noting her distress. “I want to feel you come, sweetheart,” he confessed, making quick work of his dark shirt and jeans. Soon, he stood over her, proudly fisting his erection and groaning softly. His fingers slipped over his thickness, teasing the ridges just so with a few drops of his imminent release.

Caroline’s blue eyes were alight with desire as she felt her tongue trace the contours of her lips. “Yes,” she panted, pulling up her faded t-shirt and cupping her bare breasts with both hands. “I need you in me,” she added, pinching one nipple until it was painfully hard despite the night air being heavy with humidity.

His expression became predatory as he molded her legs around his waist, entering her swiftly with a sigh of contentment. He felt her tighten around him, calling out his name in delight as he increased the power of his thrusting hips. He leaned over her to palm her bouncing breasts, savoring her soft flesh that carried an intense warmth that sank into his bones. Her thick nails scored down his back and he grit his teeth, groaning at the exquisite feel of her.
Soon, she was clenching around him, her orgasm leaving her a relaxed puddle of sweat-soaked skin and tangled blonde waves. With a few more strokes, he chased his own release, collapsing against her soft body with a pleasurable sigh. As she ran her fingers through his sweaty curls, she blinked in surprise when he looked at her with gray eyes tinged in bright gold. “Aha! Knew it,” she said with relish, chest still heaving to catch her breath.

Klaus carefully sat up, brow raised as he asked, “Knew what, exactly?”

She leaned over the thick tree root until she found her ragged shorts, sliding them back on as she smoothed down her t-shirt. “Well, at first, I thought you were one of those sexy were-jackal men, but they usually don’t put as much effort into the seduction game as you seemed to be doing, plus they tend to slobber more,” she explained, trying to find where her mud-streaked canvas shoe had fallen. Tossing back her hair, she added, “You were obviously supernatural, but you’re clearly after more than just a good time.”

“Hybrid,” he said gruffly, pulling on his jeans and shirt as he explained, “Well, currently a vampire, but my werewolf half was locked away by a curse I’m trying to break.” Eyeing her curiously, he asked, “How did you know I was supernatural? I’ve studied you extensively and there’s no indication that you’ve ever encountered my world.”

Caroline crossed her hands in front of her chest stubbornly. “Seriously creepy, Klaus. Also, it wasn’t that difficult to figure out you barely knew how to spell ‘volcanologist’, much less what they do. The Foo Fighters and Twenty One Pilots are bands, not research methods, you smug asshat!”

Somewhat embarrassed, Klaus said gruffly, “I may have been a bit hasty when I compelled that insufferable Tyler for information about you and your research. It was a bit tedious listening to his prattle.” He cocked his head to the side, a playful smirk gracing his lips. “That lecherous creature had reverse-engineered your laptop’s web camera so that it remained on constantly without your notice.” At her noise of outrage, he said soothingly, “I compelled him to erase all of his files and to never to even consider invading your privacy in such a despicable manner ever again.”

“And what else,” she said dryly, noting the way his gray eyes slid off to the side guiltily.

Sighing in annoyance, he confessed, “I may have also compelled him to punch himself in the face every time he had a lustful thought about you, sweetheart.”

Caroline couldn’t help the giggles that erupted from her throat, and soon she was doubled over the tree root laughing. Klaus found himself joining her laughter as he resettled beside her on the tree root. As her laughter died, she studied him carefully before she said, “You mentioned you’re trying to break a curse that locked away your werewolf side. That’s why you’re here, isn’t it?” Biting her lip, she said guardedly, “What do you want from me?”

He noted the concern in her tone and he gently took her hands in his, staring into her eyes as he said in a serious tone, “Nothing that will cause you harm, I promise, love.” He released her hands and stood up once more, pacing a few steps as he said, “It makes things easier, you already knowing about the supernatural. Do you know of phoenixes?”

Spine straightening, Caroline planted her hands on her knees, gazing up at him in a curiously defiant manner as she nodded. “Yes. What do you want with one?”

He raised his eyebrows at her oddly defensive tone. “All I need is a single feather as one of the ritual ingredients that will break my curse. I have no interest in harming such a magnificent
creature, I assure you.”

Blue eyes narrowing, she said, “One feather. That’s it? You won’t try to kill it or cage it?”

Sensing her reluctance, Klaus knelt before her, grasping her hands once more. “I swear I will not harm it, love. All I need is a single feather.”

Caroline bit back a small smile as she replied, “I said _try_, Klaus. Phoenixes are incredibly powerful, cunning creatures.”

“You know where one is then,” he said excitedly, pulling her to her feet. “Will you help me?”

“Of course I know where one is. You obviously figured out that fire and ash are their life force; therefore, phoenixes are attracted to volcanoes and make their homes near them.” Seeming to reach a decision, she unexpectedly leapt onto his back and said cheerfully, “I’ll show you one, but it’s at the top of Mount Kulal. Why don’t you flash us up there?”

Grasping her legs around his waist, he said curiously, “Near your cabin?”

“Yup. Convenient, huh?”

He raced up the side of the volcano, reaching the summit near the tiny research cabin. He looked around excitedly, as though expecting the phoenix to materialize before him.

Caroline hopped off of his back and walked confidently toward the middle of the grassy, sunken surface of the caldera. He watched in confusion as she stripped off her old t-shirt and shorts once more, kicking off her shoes. Soon, she stood before him, her beautiful nude form inviting and practically glowing in the starlight. Before he could ask any questions, an immense fire bloomed from her belly, licking at her breasts before it raced over her entire form, engulfing her in brilliant red, orange and golden flames.

As the fire burned away, a magnificent bird of prey was revealed, its powerful talons the size of Klaus’ head and its gleaming feathers a breathtaking explosion of rich reds and golds that mimicked the fire from whence it came. Standing nearly twice as tall as Klaus, its glowing golden eyes peered at him, as though judging his worth.

Klaus was clearly awestruck as he watched the magical creature spread its massive wings, sending ripples throughout its plumage. His fingers twitched for his paintbrush as though he knew he would spend years trying to capture this moment.

As suddenly as the incredible creature appeared, fire raged across its form once more, leaving behind the bare form of the ivory girl. She clutched between her fingers a long, blood-red feather, and she handed it to him with an impish wink.

“I can never hope to repay you, love,” he whispered somewhat hoarsely, obviously reeling from her stunning revelation.

Her blue eyes flared golden briefly as she linked her arms around his neck, drawing him closer. “Well, first, you should learn that I enjoy my orgasms in multiples.”

“And second,” he asked with a seductive smirk, brushing blonde strands away from her lovely face.

“There are approximately 1500 volcanoes in the world and I’ve only seen 841 of them.”
Cocking her head to the side, she asked, “How about showing me the other 659 once this curse nonsense is settled?”

“I think we can reach an accord,” Klaus agreed amicably, pulling her in for a kiss.
Part 7 — Sly of the Tiger

Chapter Summary

We’re back in the rival Klaroline business empires world of New Orleans. (Chapters 2, 6, 9, 14, 20, and 23 in this series for a refresher.) This time, the last Original you would ever suspect has gotten into a bit of a bind. Good thing Caroline knows a guy...Also, Caroline’s ghouls are back by popular demand — they appear in the main chapter and I also created a mini chapter at the end with a scene told from their perspective.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some slight smut on its way!

“There is but an inch of difference between the cushioned chamber and the padded cell.”
— G.K. Chesterton

The list of charges Caroline’s contact at the New Orleans police department quietly emailed her was staggering. They ranged from petty misdemeanors to criminal with just a hint of federal charges thrown into the mix. She was baffled that one individual, even a careless dumbass Original, could have managed to rack up this many charges during the course of one evening. But this was the reality — his stubborn Original ass had been arrested and was currently sitting in a jail downtown. Caroline bit her lips painted a vivid red, but was helpless to stop the hysterical giggles that burst forth. Soon, she was holding her sides as she shook with laughter at his predicament. Served him right, she thought vindictively.

At Caroline’s unexpected outburst, some of her ghouls glanced up from the large sectional couch in the lounge of her underground supernatural fight club, Fang Fights. A group of them were catching up on the latest episodes of Sesame Street that she had kindly recorded for them. Mildly concerned by her behavior, they inquired if she was feeling well and she briefly explained the bizarre situation, much to their delight. Several even clutched their small, round bellies as they giggled their quirky, high-pitched giggles, black eyes glittering with mischief.

Soon, however, the activity on the flat screen drew their attention once more, and the expressions on their gray, rotting faces grew serious as multiple ghouls bent their heads back to their iPads, long, scaly fingers typing away furiously. Two of the ghouls shook their fists angrily at the television, clicking their teeth and growling.

Before Caroline could ask what was wrong, she heard the elevator ding from the lobby, signaling that her hot hybrid date had arrived. With a wide grin stretching across her lovely face, she straightened the small train of her sapphire evening gown and adjusted the one-shouldered ruffle before confidently walking to the lobby.
Klaus stepped off of the elevator just as she arrived, dressed impeccably in Tom Ford. Dimples flashing innocently, he handed her a single pink orchid, her favorite flower. “You are stunning, love,” he declared, kissing her cheek softly.

She straightened his silk tie, unable to control how her body immediately responded to the way his incredible body fit in his designer tuxedo. “You have a mirror; you know how you look,” she said with a wink, her blue eyes twinkling.

He threaded an arm around her slim waist, pulling her close so she could feel the hard lines of his body. Running his nose along her cascading blonde curls, he rumbled, “You forget that I can smell your arousal, sweetheart. The sooner we arrive at this tedious venue, the sooner I can properly express my appreciation for your ensemble.” Gold flashed briefly in his gray eyes as he growled, “Or shall I say, my appreciation for what you forgot to wear under your ensemble.”

She shivered at his seductive words, but tried to remain focused on the unexpected wrinkle in their plans. Tonight was the annual Mayor’s Masked Ball, an elegant event that drew celebrities, politicians and public officials; it was the perfect setting for her and Klaus to network and continue to grow their business empires. It was being held at the historic Hotel Monteleone on Royal Street, and she had been looking forward to it for months.

Unfortunately, they would now be delayed by this unwelcome distraction. She opened her mouth, carefully crafting the right words to preemptively keep Klaus calm as she told him the news. Toying with the pink petals of her orchid, she said, “About that — there’s been a slight change in plans, but I assure you, it’s nothing we can’t handle.”

Before she could elaborate, the elevator doors opened once more, and Kol came rushing out, his brown eyes alight with mischief. “Did you hear?! Elijah’s gotten himself arrested,” he practically crowed, his boyish face splitting into a wide grin.

Caroline squeezed her eyes shut, resisting the urge to rescind her orders and allow her ghousls to adopt Kol as their puppy after all. She hastily tried to explain to Klaus, “It’s not as bad as it sounds.”

Practically bouncing on his toes in excitement, he countered, “Really?! Because I heard that the police are sending the mystery liquid Elijah drank during the voodoo ritual to a lab for tests.” Kol elbowed Klaus, who was rubbing his temple with his eyes shut in aggravation. He mockingly continued with, “It’s apparently illegal to ingest blood, urine or fecal matter within city limits; did you lot know that? Although outside of town, you can nosh on all the poo you like if you’re feeling peckish.”

“What?!” Klaus finally asked, directing his question at Caroline instead of his troublemaker brother. “How did this happen? And to Elijah of all people?”

She patted his arm consolingly. “I’m sure Elijah didn’t ingest feces. Well, relatively sure. As you know, most voodoo rituals involve blood. Urine is one of those hit-or-miss ingredients that any good practitioner knows doesn’t guarantee favorable results.” At Klaus’ deepening frown, she added, “It appears to be a simple case of Elijah being in the wrong place at the wrong time. He’s been secretly dating a voodoo priestess and she convinced him to take part in one of her rituals tonight.”

Both of the Originals’ eyes grew wide at this revelation. Kol sputtered, “Elijah has been shagging a sexy voodoo vixen? How do I not know this?” He crossed his arms in front of his chest, clearly affronted at being denied this useful bit of leverage against his normally straight-laced brother.
Klaus interrupted Caroline before she could answer, fists clenched as he raged, “So this priestess forced him to perform a ritual? What is she after? Is it his power? His immortality? What alliances has she made? This attack against our family will not go unanswered!”

Caroline rolled her eyes at Klaus’ typical reaction. “He was uncomfortable telling you about his relationship because he knew he’d face ridicule from Kol and the Spanish Inquisition from you. The only reason I know about it is because Bonnie and Davina are in Gia’s book club and they do more gossiping and drinking than actual book discussions.”

“This Gia is clearly after something from our family. She’s insinuated herself into my brother’s life to steal something,” Klaus growled, his black veins crawling under his eyes.

Sighing at the hybrid’s unnecessary dramatics, she explained, “Gia’s harmless. She really likes your brother and happened to mention to Bonnie and Davina a couple of weeks ago that she was going to surprise him with this ritual to um, enhance their time together. It’s completely safe, but since they got caught by the police, I assume that Gia’s still a bit inexperienced with her craft.”

Kol giggled, rubbing his hands together fiendishly as he gleefully said, “Do you hear that, Nik?! Elijah needs voodoo Viagra to get it up these days!” He quickly took out his phone, cackling, “This is going up on my Twitter right now.”

Klaus growled in aggravation, knocking the phone out of Kol’s hand with such force that it shattered against the steel elevator doors. “Enough!” He turned to Caroline, somewhat more calm as he asked through gritted teeth, “How can you be sure that Elijah’s little pet isn’t preparing to betray our family?”

Caroline’s blue eyes softened as she caught the undertone of worry in his voice. “I know Bonnie told you that I keep extensive files on my enemies. I also keep tabs on the people I care about. Your family is important to you; therefore, it’s important to me. Gia wouldn’t betray Elijah because I won’t allow it,” she vowed darkly, the serious tone of her voice surprising both Originals.

The angry gold faded in Klaus’ gaze as he regarded Caroline silently. Whatever passed between them was an intense moment that needed no words to convey their emotions. Seemingly satisfied with what he saw in Caroline’s earnest face, he asked, “Despite the fact that this girl is inept at magic, I’m puzzled as to how Elijah was overpowered by the police and taken into custody. Do you know what happened?”

She cleared her throat and corrected him quietly with, “Actually, the snakes weren’t draped over his suit. They were just draped on...him. Well, there was some sort of sacred graveyard mud and Spanish moss smeared onto his skin, but the snakes were on top of that.”

Both brothers looked at Caroline with their mouths flopped open. “Elijah was caught performing a voodoo sex ritual, naked, smeared in mud and covered in snakes,” Klaus asked faintly.

Kol shook his head in bemusement. “Was he high,” he asked jokingly.
Klaus snorted in derision, but Caroline said hesitantly, “Well, maybe. A little.” Sighing at the Originals’ incredulous expressions, she offered, “Gia’s brother-in-law is a wood sprite and he grows these medicinal mushrooms that are a special strain for supernatural creatures.”

“What,” Klaus asked in disbelief, glaring at his younger brother who immediately dissolved into high-pitched giggles. “Are you sure Elijah ingested these mushrooms?”

Caroline shrugged, a small smile tugging at the corners of her red lips. “Fairly certain. Supposedly, when the police arrived, he grabbed two of their badges and tried to wear them like stripper pasties over his nipples. And then he started singing the theme song from the Dukes of Hazzard.” She let out a small chuckle as she added, “He came with them quite willingly after they reassured him that he could meet Boss Hogg.”

Wiping away tears of mirth, Kol begged, “Please tell me Elijah’s performance was caught on the police’s dashboard camera!”

Klaus sighed, pinching the bridge of his nose in aggravation. “We can find out when we get to the station. I’ll make a call to the group of detectives in our pocket. They should be able to smooth things out eventually.” He looked over at Caroline, smugly adding, “It pays to know the right people, doesn’t it?”

She smiled enigmatically, and said, “While you’re doing that, I’ll go get our masks for the ball and my clutch.” She walked back toward the lounge in a whisper of silk, but the eager footsteps of the most irritating Original were right behind her. He obviously was anxious to glean more embarrassing details about Elijah’s arrest.

“So, Caroline, I heard that Elijah was riding a donkey through Jackson Square at some point tonight; is that true,” Kol’s teasingly questioned, walking into the lounge after her.

Rolling her eyes, she answered, “Of course not. Don’t be ridiculous.” Raising an eyebrow, she coyly added, “It was a goat.”

They both began laughing, unable to control the absurd images that flooded their minds of the normally uptight Original. Suddenly, a pink collar studded with large rhinestones appeared around Kol’s neck. As soon as he felt the leather underneath his chin, he cursed. “Bollocks! Why does this keep happening!?”

Confused, Caroline helped him unbuckle the collar and said, “I’m almost afraid to ask. I’m not sure I need more information on your vast number of fetishes, Kol.”

Scoffing, he flung the collar away and said in irritation. “Every so often, some blasted collar will appear around my neck. I can’t figure out what’s triggering it. I swear I haven’t pissed off any of the tasty little witches I’ve bedded...lately.”

A noise from the sectional caught her attention and she turned to see several of her ghouls poking their heads over the back of the couch to watch them intently. When they noticed Kol, they waved at him, clicking their teeth and calling out, “Sweet Meat!”

Understanding dawned in Caroline’s blue eyes and she bit her lip to keep from laughing at Kol’s predicament. “They think...never mind; I’ll talk to them,” she promised Kol, not wanting to explain to the Original that they were convinced he was their new puppy.

The Original cocked his head, somewhat baffled by the way the ghouls kept wiggling their long, scaly fingers at him. “The little buggers seem a shade friendlier than before,” he mused,
cautiously walking closer to them. When one of them patted an empty cushion on the couch, Kol gamely sat down, much to the delight of the ghouls. “Hey, I think they’re starting to like me,” he declared happily. One of the ghouls handed him a few M&M’s, patting him on top of his head and crooning in soft, guttural tones.

Caroline bit her tongue to keep from laughing, and in a strangled voice, she told Kol, “Come on, let’s go pick up Elijah at the station.” She grabbed the jeweled masks for the ball on their way out, pausing to fondly pat several of her ghouls on their rotting heads. They met an impatient Klaus at the limo parked outside. Kol, noticing the heated glances between Klaus and Caroline, snorted and said, “Not interested in seeing Nik’s naughty bits, so I’ll take the Jag and meet you there.”

Smirking at his brother’s hasty retreat, Klaus opened the door to the back of the elegant white limo, helping Caroline onto the ivory leather bench before settling beside her. Dimples bracketing his wicked smile, he seductively said, “Now that I’ve put the wheels in motion to secure Elijah’s freedom, perhaps I could take care of your release, sweetheart?”

Caroline laughed softly, her blonde curls dancing. “You’ve been nursing that one since Kol revealed Elijah had been arrested, haven’t you?”

He licked his lips, gray eyes flashing in delight at her teasing. “Perhaps.” He placed his palms on the cushioned leather on either side of her hips, effectively boxing her in. As he leaned in for a kiss, she stopped him with one metallic Giuseppe Zanotti placed on his right hipbone, angling the spiked heel strategically close to his hardening cock. Glancing down at the somewhat menacing silver heel, he raised a questioning eyebrow at her. “Something on your mind, love?”

Forehead creasing, she huffed, “Yes. Two things, actually. One: I found out today the crew you hired to distribute my solar panels to low-income families has been skimming off the top and some of my merchandise has been ‘falling off the truck’ a bit too often for my liking. Fix it. Or I will.” As her tone grew mildly threatening, she inwardly smiled with pleasure when she noticed his growing erection clearly responding to her dominant tone.

Klaus toyed with the elaborate wing appliqué of her silver stiletto. “And your second order of business?”

Caroline’s red lips curved into a sinful smile. “Make me come without moving a single bobby pin out of place or smearing my makeup.” She winked, goading him playfully with, “Are you up to the challenge, Klaus?”

With a sexy growl, Klaus pushed her upright against the bench seat, settling on the floor between her spread legs. He slowly raised the silken hem of her gown, allowing it to pool around her shapely legs. At her insistent whine, he placed a finger to his teasing lips in a shushing gesture. “Patience, love. I’ve instructed our driver to take the scenic route to the station. We have a bit of time still.” He surprised her by immediately taking his finger and resting it against her clit, gently rocking the tip along the slightly raised flesh.

“Right there,” she panted breathlessly, fighting the urge to rotate her hips and nudge his finger inside where she needed it the most. She knew how much he enjoyed taking his time with her, and the dirty promises she read in his heated gaze were too tempting to ignore.

Klaus ducked his head, his breath ghosting across her trembling flesh. With careful, feather-light strokes, he rubbed his finger across her sensitive little button, delighting in the moans he pulled from her. Soon, he ran the edge of his tongue across her slit, groaning at her tangy taste.
Her nails dug into the soft leather, easily splitting it open with an audible pop. She leaned her head back, her nerves on fire as his wicked tongue swirled within her. She felt the familiar tightening in her belly, and she knew she couldn’t hold on much longer.

Completely attuned to her body, Klaus quickly slipped in his finger, easily adding another as her creamy center eagerly welcomed him. He increased the power of his strokes, rubbing her trembling walls and whispering sensual words as he encouraged her release.

Caroline lifted her hips, following his seductive rhythm and groaning as he picked up the pace, anxious to chase her orgasm to completion. He used his other hand to almost painfully pinch her swollen clit, the fiery vibrations flowing through her body until they reached a feverish pitch, bringing her to completion.

She panted against the ivory leather, lazily watching Klaus as he resettled beside her on the seat. Intent upon wiping that smug smirk off his handsome face, she leaned over and wrapped her tongue around his fingers, causing the steel in his eyes to flicker briefly to gold. With a naughty grin, she boldly rested her hand on his thigh, rubbing him through his black dress pants. Soon, she reached across his lap with her other hand, sliding down his zipper to free his erection.

As his breath quickened, she lightly trailed her fingers across his rigid length, making tiny circles across his heated flesh. As she delicately swiped across the tip, she was pleased to feel a few drops of his desire that had gathered while he was bringing her pleasure.

Gritting his teeth, Klaus leaned his head back, closing his eyes as he twitched delightfully under her clever fingers. “Please,” he bit out, emitting a small groan as her fingers firmly wrapped themselves around his length.

With slow, confident strokes, Caroline set to work, wanting to give him a taste of what she had planned for them later. She paused briefly as she reached his wide head, squeezing just enough to make him squirm underneath her as he gave himself over to her every whim. She continued pumping, loving how eagerly his body responded to her touch. Soon, she increased her pace, stroking him faster and faster until he gasped out in warning, “I’m coming, love,” as he opened his eyes to reveal a wild, dangerous gold.

With a dirty smile, she soothed, “Don’t worry. I’ve yet to miss a single drop.” She quickly bent her head over his lap, her blonde curls brushing his thighs as she took his throbbing cock in her mouth. She lightly sucked along his damp flesh, pulling him close as he bucked his hips, spilling his release onto her waiting tongue.

Immensely pleased with themselves, they leaned back into the soft leather seat, silently making sensual promises to each other to finish their interlude more thoroughly once the evening’s events were finished.

When they arrived at the police station, they found Kol cheerfully interrogating Elijah on the steps. “Tell me, brother, this voodoo Viagra — how long does it last? Any nasty side effects? Zombie willy, for instance?”

With a scowl, Elijah continued trying to pat down the unkempt bird’s nest that used to be his impeccably styled mane. Clearly, the effects of his supernatural acid trip had worn off. “Your tedious questions underscore your dim-wittedness, Kol,” he intoned wearily. He noticed Klaus and Caroline’s arrival and nodded tersely.

Clearing his throat, Klaus attempted to tuck in his teasing smile. “Elijah, surprised to see you out so quickly. Obviously, the detectives we bought were well worth the price, hmmm?”
Looking decidedly uncomfortable, Elijah answered, “Yes, well, tragically, their authority has its limits as I was required to endure the indignity of a mugshot.”

Over Klaus and Kol’s delighted laughter, Caroline reasoned, “Maybe it’s because Elijah’s a good ol’ boy never meanin’ no harm?” Elijah’s chagrined expression was too much for the group, who all burst into hysterical laughter at the stuffy Original’s expense.

Unexpectedly, the police chief appeared, anxiously fidgeting as he stood in front of Caroline. “Miss Forbes,” he said somewhat nervously, quickly bowing his close-cropped blonde head. “Please accept my sincerest apologies for this misunderstanding.”

Caroline favored him with a brilliant smile, her tone magnanimous as she said, “Of course, Chief Donovan. I trust the governor’s call helped clear up any remaining questions concerning tonight’s events?”

“Yes, ma’am,” he said hurriedly. “Again, I apologize and hope this unfortunate incident can be put behind us.” At Caroline’s slight nod, relief flooded the police chief’s face and he quickly walked back into the station.

She turned to find the three Originals staring at her in amazement. Shrugging her shoulders, she nonchalantly explained, “The governor is in a bowling league with my ghouls.” Winking slyly, she added, “He also really likes cookies.”

Talking over Kol’s awestruck words of ‘that was bloody brilliant’ and ‘powerful little vixens are so bloody hot’, Elijah awkwardly attempted to thank Caroline for her assistance in securing his release. She waved off his gratitude and wished both him and Kol a pleasant evening as she tugged her speechless hybrid back toward the limo.

Finally regaining his voice once inside the limo, Klaus turned to her and asked with a knowing smirk, “With such influential connections, couldn’t you have prevented Elijah’s mugshot?”

Blue eyes twinkling mischievously, Caroline impishly declared, “Of course. I don’t know about you, but I think I’ve found my photo for this year’s Christmas cards.”

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**Excerpt from this chapter (told from the ghouls’ point-of-view)**

Black eyes narrowed suspiciously, the ghouls carefully studied their enemy. They tracked the insidious footage he released on a regular basis, trying to find a pattern to his mad ravings. His hate-fueled propaganda filled them with disgust and they knew it was up to them to keep a close eye on his nefarious activities. They had tried all manner of pinpointing his location without success. Their enemy was a wily, dangerous creature and it was clear he would stop at nothing to get what he wanted.

Ishkur the Fiendish gnashed his sharp teeth in anger as he watched the beast on television grab more and more cookies into his hairy blue fists, mindlessly devouring them. He growled at his fellow ghouls, “We cannot allow this cookie terrorist to gain more followers. At the alarming rate he devours the cookies, it will severely deplete global supplies and could lead to a devastating cookie shortage.”

Nodding her rotted gray head in sympathy, Zahgurim said, “Praise cookies. We cannot
allow this *Cookie Monster* to amass an army.” Typing notes on an iPad with her long, scaly fingers, she added grimly, “We must continue to track his movements and monitor his broadcasts from the Street of Sesame.”

Earl pointed a claw at the blue monster’s visage, commenting in disgust, “He has crazy eyes. How can the other residents of the Street of Sesame not realize the immense danger they are in from this cookie dictator?”

Grunts of agreement were heard as several of the ghouls attempted to follow the peculiar numerical sequencing signal he was communicating to his followers via cookie counting.

“Furthermore, his coded messages are clearly designed to ignite the masses. This ‘C is for cookie’ rhetoric he continuously spouts demonstrates his pro-cookie agenda and desire to destroy global cookie resources,” Ishkur the Fiendish added, shaking his small fist at the television.

Sunshine’s hysterical laughter distracted the ghouls from their cookie terrorist monitoring, and they craned their long, spindly necks to see what had happened. “Sunshine, are you well,” Barashakushu the Bloodthirsty asked, the guttural nuances of the clan’s language underscoring her concern.

Sunshine smiled at them, making them feel warm and happy, like they were eating cookies. Her sweet word-talk flowed over them, explaining a hilarious story about Stuffy Tie-Man breaking human laws involving riding a goat while wearing sacred ritual mud and draped in snakes. Silly Original, it’s always a good practice to inquire with local authorities regarding the culturally acceptable number of snakes one may wear in public.

Sunshine briefly left them to greet her Ass-Weasel, but then they sensed the presence of Sweet Meat, and they gave him a collar. Praise cookies, it just wouldn’t do for their puppy to be walking around without his collar. What if he got lost? Endukugga of Uruk made a note to research microchipping as a precaution.

Sunshine returned to the lounge with Sweet Meat behind her, and the ghouls were pleased to see that he responded to their simple commands. Once he sat down where Endukugga of Uruk pointed, he was given a treat like the puppy training website suggested.

Earl patted the top of Sweet Meat’s head while grunting, “Are we sure we should be giving Sweet Meat chocolate? I thought the website said not to.”

Endukugga of Uruk shrugged his shoulders as he finished feeding Sweet Meat the M&M’s. “I guess we’ll find out. Besides, it’s important to use positive reinforcement. Especially during our puppy’s developmental years.”
In this chapter, Klaus is a ruthless human king who is at war with a mysterious kingdom that’s rumored to be full of supernatural creatures, which he knows to be utter nonsense. He defeats an intriguing blonde warrior during battle and throws her into his dungeon in a misguided attempt to coax her into joining his army...and possibly his bed.

“How did I escape? With difficulty. How did I plan this moment? With pleasure.”
— Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

The sun’s harsh rays glinted off the metallic helmet of Klaus’ fierce opponent. He noted with interest the dried blood that clung to the row of sharp spikes jutting down the middle of the warrior’s headpiece. Clearly, this was an exemplary soldier in the army of his enemy. Klaus felt his heart roaring in his chest as he could almost taste his inevitable victory. Out here in the midst of battle, with blades singing the sweet sounds of violence, was where he belonged. As ruler of the Kingdom of the Golden Dagger, he could have forfeited his place on the battlefield, and instead remained sequestered in the safety of his castle with Elijah, his most trusted advisor, and the rest of his court, but he was a ruthless king and intended to flaunt his superior strength and put his enemy in their place once and for all.

The nimble warrior swung a curved sword in a narrow arc that nearly sliced off a few of Klaus’ dirty blonde curls, but as a trained fighter, he managed to duck just in time while delivering an answering blow to the enemy’s elaborate iron breastplate. The satisfying clang of a well-placed blow to the intricate design on the armor fueled his ego and renewed his energy. As sweat ran down the hard planes of his handsome face, he sneered at his opponent, a warrior of the Crimson Kingdom, and delighted at the soldier’s answering snarl, although all he could see from the fierce helmet was rage-filled blue eyes. There was something in that ferocious gaze that spoke to him, and he suspected that long after he had slain his opponent, he would remember the exact cerulean blue of that piercing stare.

His enemy was slight of stature, but carried their toned body with the confidence of a well-seasoned soldier who had survived the ravages of war time and time again, and slaked their thirst upon the defeated cries of their conqueror. It was almost a pity to cross blades on opposing sides with this magnificent warrior. In another time, Klaus felt confident that he could have used such enviable skills to help lead his armies on the battlefield.

The Crimson Kingdom always had been a mysterious place to his people, a land rumored to be full of magic and immortal beasts who supposedly drank the blood of the innocent. Its citizens were secretive and odd, always keeping to themselves and never wanting to interact with neighboring kingdoms such as Klaus’. Intrigued by the mystique of the Crimson Kingdom, Klaus had authorized his soldiers to kidnap two of its residents and bring them to his dungeon for
questioning.

Only a few days had passed since then, and he had yet to see any evidence of immortality or beastlike behavior from this Matt and April whom he had kidnapped. They were clearly as human as his own people and knew nothing of interest to him. It was just as he suspected — the supernatural did not exist. A fact that his mother, Esther, never would have accepted if she was still alive. Esther, also known to his people as the Mad Queen, had been plagued by crippling delusions for years which led to her attempting to kill her children on numerous occasions, convinced that they were evil creatures. Her reign over the Kingdom of the Golden Dagger had been fraught with conflict and scandalous rumors, from her nonsensical belief that she was a powerful witch to the even more ludicrous tale that she had mated with a troll and that Klaus was his son.

The warrior of the Crimson Kingdom planted the toe of their gray leather boot on the damp clover in the meadow and in a blindingly fast move, swept the other leg around, cleanly knocking Klaus’ sword from his grasp. He spat out a myriad of curses, hell-bent on retrieving the sacred sword of his ancestors, and quickly rolled until he safely landed near the buried bronze hilt. Before he could wrench his sword from the damp earth, he was stunned by a gloved fist appearing out of nowhere and driving forcefully underneath his jaw, making him see stars.

The triumph he saw in his opponent’s blazing eyes antagonized him, and he used the rage that coursed through his body to force himself to his feet. He saw on the horizon how the banners of his kingdom fluttered in the light breeze, majestic gold and ivory emblazoned with a slim dagger. The sounds of the surrounding battle gave him strength and he glimpsed out of the corner of his eye that his men were proudly holding the line on the battlefield. He remained confident that he would protect his land and his people from the Crimson Kingdom invaders.

Even now, he scoffed at the notion that this neighboring kingdom would show such weakness in starting a war with his people over the kidnapping of two insignificant peasants. Clearly, the Crimson Kingdom’s ruler was a pitiful excuse for a king and Klaus had decided to set his sights on claiming their land and its people for his own. The king of the Crimson Kingdom was said to be a vicious, cold and calculating man, but given the immediacy with which he had sent his invading army to Klaus’ kingdom over such a petty matter, indicated his obvious madness and inability to properly lead a nation.

Klaus yanked his sword from the earth quickly, the heavy bronze grip reassured him of his prowess as a warrior and he slashed the point perilously close to his opponent’s neck, confident of his victory when the soldier surged forward, fearlessly moving with Klaus’ blade in a beautiful silver dance of metal as the warrior brought the curved blade around, surprising Klaus when a narrow swath of his pale skin was sliced from his forearm.

Hissing as his blood dripped onto the battlefield, Klaus let out a vicious war cry, momentarily stunning his opponent which gave him the precious seconds needed to knock their own sword out of their hand and force them to their knees. He smashed the flat of his blade against the ominous spiked helmet of his opponent, effectively knocking it from their head and causing the warrior to collapse onto the blood-stained battlefield.

With the invigorating echoes of the battle surrounding him, he swung his mighty sword overhead, muscles tensing as he prepared to deliver the killing blow and take his rightful victory over this worthy warrior of the Crimson Kingdom. However, his gray eyes registered disbelief as he dumbly stared down at the golden woman before him. The sun’s rays highlighted her blonde hair that had been pinned beneath her fierce helmet, whose curved metal arches had cruelly hidden her stunning beauty from the world.
That this angelic being had been such a powerful force against him was a revelation to the king and he was in awe of her magnificence. He immediately knelt before her unconscious body, quickly binding her wrists and ankles with sturdy leather straps and hauling her over his shoulder. He noted with cool confidence that his army had easily beaten back the Crimson Kingdom invaders, who seemed to have immediately retreated beyond the hills. With his glorious victory nearly secured, Klaus absconded with his precious war prize back to his castle.

The dungeon was cool and damp with the smells of decayed moss, unwashed bodies and the slightest taste of fear, mingling together to hang heavily in the air. Klaus came down the long, winding staircase, his heavy footfalls echoing against the rough-hewn stone. He could feel the blonde warrior’s fiery gaze upon him as he sauntered down the narrow passageway to her prison. He felt the weight of his ancestors’ sword within its leather sheath, and he enjoyed the way her eyes wandered curiously to the masterfully forged bronze hilt.

“See something you like, love,” he asked with a knowing smirk, his dimples flashing innocently as he came to a stop mere inches from the iron bars of her jail.

She scoffed, rolling her blue eyes. “Hardly. Just trying to determine how such an inferior weapon managed to narrowly best mine.” She cocked her blonde head, adding wryly, “Speaking of which, where is my blade? It offends me that it may bear smudges of my enemies’ fingers rather than their blood.”

Klaus let out a delighted laugh, his interest in the intriguing woman growing. His forearm ached where she had sliced into the flesh during their battle, but if anything, it made him more determined to know her. “I’ve no further interest in marking you as my enemy, sweetheart. What is your name?”

“I am Caroline,” she answered confidently, and as she saw his mouth open to introduce himself, she held up her hand to stop him. “You are Klaus, ruler of this kingdom.”

He grinned with pleasure. “Splendid, I see my reputation precedes me. It was unclear on the battlefield if you knew or if it was mere luck you chose to face me.”

She let out a short laugh, her tone mocking. “Of course I know you, Klaus of the Golden Dagger Kingdom. And I need no luck on the battlefield — I make my own.”

He stood a bit straighter at her laughter, his anger simmering just below the surface. “Have a care, sweetheart. I am king of this realm. In fact, they call me Klaus the Ruthless.”

Caroline snorted, her body shaking with laughter. “Actually, they call you Klaus, the Troll King, behind your back, as you well know.”

“That is a filthy lie told by insignificant peasants! There are no trolls or other supernatural beings or magic! There is only the human world and I shall rule it all, starting with your precious Crimson Kingdom,” he seethed, stepping closer to the iron bars in an effort to make her submit, to bend her to his will.

“You think you could rule my homeland better than the king,” she asked lightly, her tone mocking. She shook her head, her golden curls tumbling around her shoulders now that she had removed all of the pins.

Klaus found himself mesmerized by the soft movement of her locks, but quickly tried to
reassert his dominance. With a smirk, he answered, “Of course, love. After all, the rumors of your pitiful king have reached my ears. Apparently, he spends his days attempting to stave off a civil war between your people, all because of a pair of brothers in his court who fell in love with a simpering maiden. A king who chooses to intervene in a ridiculous love triangle rather than lead his people is a pathetic excuse for a ruler.”

Caroline wrapped her gloved fingers around the iron bars of her prison at his taunting, growling as she ineffectively pushed against the cool metal. “How dare you challenge the worth of my people’s king. He possesses the best possible trait a ruler can have — a heart. He genuinely cares about his people which is why we’re here to take back what was stolen. You had no right to imprison what is ours.”

He favored her with a smug grin, delighting at her indignant tirade. “About that — I must question the wisdom of a king who deems it necessary to wage war on his neighbors simply over two missing peasants.”

“Every life matters to my king,” she swore, her blue eyes burning as she stared at him unflinchingly.

Raising a surprised brow, he countered, “Truth be told, love, I had considered releasing Matt and April after a bit, but now, I think I may place your king in a cell next to theirs.”

Her blonde curls swirled around her like a golden halo as she shook her head. Frowning at his words, she asked curiously, “What did you hope to achieve in taking them? What did you gain?”

He clasped his hands behind his back, leaning in closer to his captive. “I wished to prove to my people that rumors of the supernatural in the Crimson Kingdom were falsehoods. Your people are no more immortal than we. There is no magic, no monsters. Just humans.”

Caroline shrugged, her heavy breastplate shifting slightly as she acknowledged, “Deep down, we’re all human. Despite how some refuse to behave like it.”

Klaus enjoyed the glare she threw at him, hoping that he would have more occasions to see that fire within her burning so brightly. “Let’s not quarrel, sweetheart. I’ve actually brought you here to discuss your future in my kingdom. You’re obviously a skilled warrior in your homeland, and there is a place for you in my army.”

She loosened her grip on the iron bars, regarding him skeptically. Her tone was flat as she inquired, “And your bed?”

He smirked, allowing his gray eyes to roam across the delicious lines of her toned body. “One step at a time, sweetheart.”

Caroline gave him a cunning smile. “Don’t waste your time. I won’t be in here much longer.”

Puzzled, Klaus started to ask what she meant when he heard the alarming noises of splintering wood and crashing stone. “What was that sound?”

“Triumph,” she answered sweetly.

He whirled around, taking a few steps toward the entrance to the staircase but was taken by surprise when a man seemingly appeared out of nowhere, standing beside Caroline’s prison. The dark-haired stranger bowed low, and with a mischievous grin addressed Caroline cheekily, “It’s
unbecoming to play with your food, my king.”

Caroline sighed. “I suppose you’re right, dear Enzo.” Then, before Klaus’ baffled gaze, she effortlessly bent the iron bars until she could slip through them. Brushing off her gloved hands, she regarded Klaus with amusement when she saw how he had drawn his sword at Enzo. “None of that, please,” she told him briskly, swatting his prized possession out of his hand as Enzo whisked him back inside the cell previously occupied by Caroline. Dumbfounded, Klaus watched as she easily bent back the iron bars to prevent his escape.

Gray eyes calculating, Klaus said, “He called you king.”

Enzo chuckled, and Caroline dismissed him with a gesture, commanding, “Go find wherever Klaus has placed Matt and April.” Once he flashed away at that same disturbing speed, she turned to Klaus, a hand on her hip as she explained impatiently, “Of course he called me king. I am the king, you asshat. In my kingdom, titles are bestowed based upon ability, not something as trivial as gender.”

She cocked her head to the side, studying him curiously. “You saw fit to threaten what is mine, so now I will take it back as well as claim what was once yours.” Her tone grew playful as she repeated his earlier words. “You’re obviously a skilled warrior. Perhaps there is a place for you in my army.”

Klaus seemed to come back to himself as he took in this odd turn of events. He was clearly angry at her words, but also intrigued by the mysterious warrior king. With a smirk, he asked, “And what of your bed, sweetheart?”

“One step at a time,” Caroline chuckled, startling him as black veins crawled underneath her eyes and sharp fangs framed her sly smile.
Double Entendre

Chapter Summary

This is an incentive drabble for @wintersquares for donating to the Klaroline Gives Back 2017 campaign. Thank you for supporting our fundraiser for the ACLU!

@wintersquares prompt: A spell gone wrong and now Caroline has to deal with two Klauses. Smut or no smut. Writer's choice.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Bring on the smut!

“Too much of a good thing can be wonderful!” - Mae West

The hole wasn’t that big. Caroline eyed it critically, backing up a few steps to make sure it wasn’t a trick of the light. Squinting at it, she flicked on the stainless table lamp with a sculpted orchid base to see if proper lighting was the issue. Nope — the hole was still there and it was the size of her rear. Well, the right butt cheek, anyway.

This is what happens when you play truth or dare with Kol, she thought grimly, grinding her teeth when she realized Kol was still braying like a deranged donkey, standing beside her and nearly doubled over laughing.

The day had started out innocently enough — Klaus was going to be out for a few hours hunting down the latest perceived threat to their bizarre little group of friends and family that had somehow become quite close over the years, mainly due to Caroline’s stubborn insistence that family meals happen every Sunday at noon regardless of petty squabbles, slightly more serious daggerings, or whatever other villain-of-the-week nonsense occurred. Klaus had insisted Kol stay behind to be her guard dog, which she had not appreciated, but she usually enjoyed his laidback company, so she decided to let it go. After all, picking her battles was one of the first time-saving lessons she learned after she and Klaus moved in together.

Kol had a wicked gleam in his eye when he suggested they play truth or dare, but she never backed down from a challenge, so she agreed to play. When Kol had dared her to perform the most complicated cheer routine she could remember, she may have gotten a bit carried away trying to show off, and used too much vampire strength in an impressive series of backflips that ended in a pike-out. Or, at least, that was what was supposed to happen before her foot slid across the marble surface of the coffee table, causing her to slam her right ass cheek into the wall at full supernatural speed in the middle of her toe touch. Oops.
“Shit,” she mumbled, mildly panicked, “I need to fix that before Klaus gets home.”

“Whatsoever for, darling,” Kol asked, merriment dancing in his brown eyes when he added knowingly, “You could set the curls of his nethers on fire and he’d smirk and ask where you’d like to go for dinner.”

Rolling her eyes, she explained, “I know, but it’s just...I may have thrown a tiny fit a couple of weeks ago when he broke the Murano glass chandelier in the dining room.”

Impressed, he asked, “Why on earth would he do that? You and Rebekah spent two weeks in Italy waiting for the bloody thing to be designed. Nik was a positively miserable bloke while you were gone.”

“Ugh. He threw a werewolf at it,” she said in irritation, crossing her arms in front of her with a sigh. “Dumbass werewolf wouldn’t sign Elijah’s treaty and the next thing you know, his oily unibrow is plowing through hand-crafted glass and steel. It was a huge mess and I made Klaus clean it up while I lectured about his poor impulse control and made him sleep in the guest room all weekend.” She stomped her foot, pointing at the hole in the wall while Kol dissolved into giggles. “This looks like I have poor impulse control! Which I definitely don’t!”

Eyeing the broken plaster critically, he said, “Well, it’s not like you have time to patch it properly since Nik will be home any minute. Besides, that wolfy sniffer of his would smell the chemicals.”

“I know,” she groaned, raking her fingers through her messy blonde waves. “I just need to cover it up with something for now, and then deal with it later when there’s more time...” she trailed off, thinking of what might be a temporary solution. Suddenly, her blue eyes lit up and she said excitedly, “I’ve got it! It’s perfect too — I saw it just the other day in your family’s old mansion. It was just collecting dust in the attic, so I brought it here and put it in a closet while I decided where it would go.” She flashed away before Kol could ask more questions, returning just as quickly with an ornate silver and iron mirror, its delicate square frame glittering with an almost impish sparkle in the sunlight.

Caroline quickly hung the mirror over the damaged area, making a hum of delight when she realized how perfect it looked. She was so wrapped up in admiring the exquisitely wrought double faces of silver and iron, she failed to notice Kol edging away from the living room, a curious grin on his face. “Actually darling, I happen to be quite familiar with that particular piece. I was absolutely riveted by the movie, She Done Him Wrong, so I had it fashioned as a gift to Mae West in the hopes that she would agree to an adventurous three-way romp, but Nik, the cranky bastard, daggered me before I got the chance to give it to her.”

Before Caroline could comment, Klaus arrived, greeting Caroline with a quick kiss, asking, “So what have you lot been up to today?”

“Not much,” she said, hastily adding, “Kol was helping me hang this antique mirror I found at your family’s old mansion. Isn’t it beautiful?”

Clearly noting her anxious tone, Klaus cocked a questioning eyebrow, but wandered over to the mirror to study it more closely. “The craftsmanship is stunning,” he agreed. He noted the double faces and commented curiously, “The frame is depicting Janus, the Roman god of two faces.”

Kol took a large step toward the front door, cheerfully calling out, “Why yes, brother, I do believe it is. Have fun you two!” He flashed away, leaving them both wondering what had caused
the trouble-making Mikaelson to bid such a hasty retreat.

Klaus eyed the mirror critically, his reflection confused as he reached out to gingerly caress the delicate frame. The glass began to crack, the pieces fluttering with the airiness of feathers as they settled in a shimmering pile at Klaus’ feet. Understanding dawned in his gray eyes as he watched the jagged mirror pieces inexplicably swirl together like a viscous fluid, churning until a white light burst forth and suddenly a figure stepped through, startling Caroline, but causing Klaus to heave an aggrivated sigh.

Caroline blinked rapidly in disbelief. Standing next to Klaus was...Klaus. She flashed over to her Klaus, yanking him back beside her as she stared at mirror Klaus suspiciously. “What the hell? Kol knew this was going to happen, didn’t he,” she seethed.

“It would appear so,” Klaus said, pinching the bridge of his nose. “That mirror was Kol’s, and given the design featured the Roman god, Janus, a symbol of duality, it would appear that he had the mirror enchanted to do this. For what purpose, I’m not sure.”

Caroline wrinkled her nose a bit as she recalled Kol’s earlier words. “Apparently, the mirror was supposed to be a gift to con Mae West into having a threesome with him and...herself.”

“ Indeed,” Klaus commented, perking up a bit when he noticed the faint blush creeping along Caroline’s neck as she flicked her eyes between him and mirror Klaus in a decidedly unsubtle manner. “Would that be something that tickles your fancy, love?” His voice had turned into a low, sexy growl, causing mirror Klaus to smirk and move closer to them.

She stumbled over her words, blushing more furiously when she noticed the heated desire she found in both men as they stared at her. “Is it safe,” she asked uncertainly. “I mean, is he you or something...else?”

Klaus gently folded her into his arms, slowly turning her to face mirror Klaus, who was watching her with great interest. “The mirror captured my reflection and manifested itself into a shadow of my desires. I crave you; therefore, so does it. It will not harm you — I will not allow it.”

Emboldened by his reassuring words, Caroline nodded, her blue eyes eagerly trailing over mirror Klaus as he shrugged out of his gray henley, his muscular arms reaching out to cup her face tenderly. He tipped her face upward until she was at the perfect angle for a punishing kiss, his soft lips lingering on hers as he savored her taste.

With a possessive rumble, Klaus quickly unbuttoned her red shorts, sliding them down her long legs, his fingers trailing deliciously along her inner thighs. When she shifted her thighs, trying to create more of that delicious friction, he rewarded her with a light smack across her ass, causing her to gasp in delight.

Mirror Klaus sank to his knees before her, looking up at her with gray eyes ringed with gold as he growled, “I like these,” tracing the red stripes of her thong. As she shivered under his covetous gaze, he dipped a finger underneath, barely grazing her slick folds.

Behind her, Klaus began cupping her breasts underneath her black blouse, shamelessly admiring her cleavage as it rose in the scoop neckline. He circled her hardened nipples teasingly, finally pinching them until she ached. She called out his name, causing both men to rumble lowly in their chests.

“Please,” Caroline panted, staring down at mirror Klaus as he began slowly working his finger inside her, “make me come.” She threw both of her arms behind Klaus’ neck as he continued
to play with her breasts. “I need it,” she confessed breathlessly.

“As you command, love,” Klaus told her, nodding down at mirror Klaus who looked elated at the task before him. Klaus molded her ivory globes in his hands, aggressively clutching at her skin, leaving reddened marks that faded far too fast for her liking.

Mirror Klaus parted her thighs eagerly, sliding down her thong just enough to expose her dripping center. He picked up the pace of his strokes, adding two more fingers and stretching her as she groaned.

Her thighs started to tremble, and she could feel the tell-tale coiling within her belly as she reached her orgasm. Klaus quickly fell to his knees behind her, taking her by surprise as he plunged his tongue into her center, then licking along her crevice.

Not to be outdone, mirror Klaus leaned forward, his lips sucking at her wet folds, then sliding his tongue along her core as she gasped. She loved the feel of both men’s tongues as they traced sinful paths along her quivering flesh, their fingers digging into her thighs to hold her steady as they continued their eager explorations. Soon, she found her release, rocking to and fro against them until she was spent. Smiling lazily, she stretched languidly, giggling when she saw both men’s eyes flare golden at the sight of her arching her back.

Mirror Klaus sat on top of the coffee table, the prominent bulge in his dark denim drawing her hungry gaze. “Would you like me to take care of that,” she asked, her voice hitching at how quickly he parted his thighs for her with a knowing grin.

Caroline swayed her hips, the sides of her thong sliding a bit lower down her thighs. She bent over, planting her hands on the cool marble surface on either side of mirror Klaus’ hips. Flicking her blue eyes up at him, she coyly asked, “I’ve been dying to know if you and Klaus are identical everywhere. Show me, please?”

With a grunt, mirror Klaus hastily unzipped his jeans, pulling out his hard cock and stroking it under her heated perusal.

Klaus distracted her with a firm smack on her ass, soothing the ivory flesh with his warm touch. “What about me, love? Can you take care of me as well?” His rough voice betrayed his own urges, the exquisite need he felt for her.

With a toss of her blonde waves, she glanced over her shoulder at him, and with a flirtatious wink remarked, “There’s only one way to find out.”

Growling possessively, Klaus ripped open his jeans, fisting his cock before bringing the leaking tip to her moist center. Caroline wiggled her hips, urging him to take her, but she soon became distracted by mirror Klaus tugging on her golden locks, pulling her sweet lips down onto his waiting cock. He swelled within her mouth, twitching as she ran her tongue along the sides.

Just as she had begun to suck, Klaus ripped off her blouse, then gripped her soft hips, digging in his fingers as he pushed himself into her aching core, causing her to moan against mirror Klaus’ stiff length. He set a punishing rhythm, his dick pumping furiously into her as she whined below him, contracting her muscles to create a pleasurable friction.

Mirror Klaus hissed at the feel of her taking more of him into her mouth, pumping his hips as she worked him over with teeth and tongue. When she ran the points of her fangs along his leaking tip, he came undone, spilling into her with a hoarse cry.
She could feel Klaus getting close, his thrusts behind her becoming shallower as he growled against her ivory skin. With a sexy little smirk that showed off his dimples, mirror Klaus leaned back against the coffee table, pulling Caroline on top of him as Klaus continued to piston in and out of her dripping core.

The feel of the men’s sweat-slicked skin rubbing against each other in time to Klaus’ thrusts had Caroline on the edge of another powerful release. As mirror Klaus pulled her in for a ferocious kiss, she felt Klaus stiffen against her, cursing loudly as he spent himself, triggering her own ecstatic finish.

The three remained in a satisfied tangle upon the marble surface, panting as they tried to catch their breath. Chuckling, Caroline glanced over at Klaus, playfully running her fingers through his sweaty dirty blonde curls. “I feel like there’s a joke in here somewhere but I can’t quite reach it. Something along the lines of ‘we’ve just invented a ménage à awe’?”

Klaus laughed, pulling her in for a quick kiss while mirror Klaus stroked her back in companionable silence. He nipped at her bottom lip and with an impish smirk he revealed, “I was thinking we just redefined the meaning of double entendre.”
This is the Klaroline Valentine’s Gift Exchange 2017 written for the always lovely melsbels/goldcaught. I really hope you like it! In this AU human!Klaroline, our favorite duo happens to meet at a farmer’s market in a quirky Gulf Coast town. Surely the sparks they ignite will overcome that hilariously awkward first encounter...

Warning: Tiny bit of smut because Valentine’s Day practically requires it. :)

“Wilbur didn't want food, he wanted love.”
― E. B. White, Charlotte's Web

There is such a thing as too much butt cheek before 9:00 am. Especially when it was stuffed in a lime green thong and walking unabashedly down the sidewalk on Bougainvillea Avenue. Caroline Forbes shook her head, an indulgent smile on her lovely face as she stacked woven baskets for her customers to use at her produce stand. She’d been a resident of the sleepy little beachside community of Mystic Port, Florida, for several years now, but its quirky, charming residents still delighted her on a daily basis.

She had vacationed down here just once, eager to escape the high-pressure world of academia, and practically overnight made the decision to leave behind her tedious life and embrace something far more carefree. This tiny, laid-back community full of hippies and those who were secretly hippies at heart, talented artists, and other lovable strays had welcomed her with open arms and she couldn’t imagine finding any other place that made her feel like she was on a permanent vacation. In her previous world, Caroline’s gardening hobby had been limited to meager flower pots on her balcony in her city high-rise, but out here, she had blossomed into Mystic Port’s resident farmer, and supplied several of the local restaurants with her homegrown produce.

She noticed that one of the local bands, the oddly named Sirens...Meh, was setting up down the street under a large, colorful umbrella. A bluesy-alternative rock sister act, they usually played at the small town’s venues, delighting the audience with self-penned songs like, “Lookin’ for Plots in All the Wrong Places” and “Continuity (You’re Never Gonna Get It)”. They also relished playing the standards like “Sympathy for the Devil” and “Shout at the Devil”, which always got the crowd fired up. Caroline waved to them cheerfully, wishing them luck as they set an old rusty bell upside down on the sidewalk to serve as their tip jar.
As she adjusted the miniature chalkboard sign beside the Roma tomatoes, she heard a crisp British accent inquire, “The Bountiful Ceres? A bit on the nose, don’t you think, sweetheart?”

She straightened, swiping at her sweaty temple to regard an uncommonly attractive man with dirty blonde curls and a smug smirk. From his accent, she assumed he was a ‘snowbird’, a foreign tourist who came to Florida during the winter to enjoy a sunburn in January. Not that she could fault them for that — she still felt giddy at the thought of her shoe closet being stuffed with nothing but year-round flips flops ranging from casual to dressy depending upon the occasion. Realizing that the beautiful stranger had no intention of moving onto the next booth until she responded, she answered lightly, “That’s a hasty assumption. It’s entirely possible I named my farm after the dwarf planet in the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter rather than the Roman goddess of agriculture.”

Raising an impressed eyebrow, he said, “I wouldn’t think astronomy would be common knowledge in a quaint farmer’s market.” He fiddled with the curved stem of one of her yellow-green cubanelle peppers in a manner that she almost considered erotic except he was being a condescending asshat.

She answered somewhat stiffly, “You’d be amazed at the backgrounds of some of our little town’s transplants. There’s physicists, chemical engineers, former ambassadors, mothers, fathers, friends, lovers, and everything in between, all content to bask in the quaintness.”

He unexpectedly flashed a set of innocent dimples at her curt statement, and held out his hand to shake hers. “I’m Klaus. And where do you fit in with that eclectic mix of professions, sweetheart,” he asked curiously, his gray eyes studying her intently.

She warmed under his casual perusal, and did her best not to self-consciously try to tuck frizzy blonde curls back into her messy knot. “Caroline. Former teacher, current farmer.”

“Caroline,” he nodded, rolling the syllables around on his tongue, bathing them in that delicious accent of his. They were momentarily distracted by several brown pelicans that swooped low at the dock across the way, their delicate squeaks as they greeted each other adding to the steady hum of the farmer’s market. Continuing his interrogation, Klaus asked, “What did you teach and where?”

She frowned slightly, trying to determine if he was being overly friendly or actually flirting with her. She always was so bad at this. “Science. At a university.” She also was hesitant to give out further details unless pressed; otherwise, she was concerned it would sound uncomfortably like bragging.

As though sensing her discomfort, Klaus leaned forward across her booth, the simple navy t-shirt stretching seductively across the hard planes of his chest. “Horticulture, I assume? Which university?”

Rolling her blue eyes, she replied. “Astrophysics. At Columbia.” A small, petty part of her thoroughly enjoyed the way surprise flitted across his handsome face and his expression turned somewhat sheepish. Anxious to move along this awkward meeting so she could return to her normal routine, she pointed out her multi-level display of berries and asked, “So what can I get you today? I’m running a special on blueberries, strawberries and blackberries — $3 per pint or a half-flat for $10.”

Klaus chuckled, the melodious sound somehow conveying both amusement and slight annoyance. “Anxious to be rid of me, sweetheart? And here I was hoping you could tell me what surely must be a fascinating story of how you ended up here.”
She huffed, folding her arms across her chest, trying to be mindful of the enormous sweat stains that had likely started appearing on her pink tank top. “I’m not that fascinating. *Especially* in this town.” She jerked her chin at the space over Klaus’ shoulder, and he turned just in time to see a broad-shouldered gentleman with dark hair strutting about the farmer’s market wearing nothing but a lime green thong and a giant smile.

Watching as the man waved to the various vendors and called out flirty greetings of “Hey, gorgeous!” to women young and old alike, Klaus seemed flummoxed for the moment. Turning back to Caroline he said, “I’m a bit surprised your town council allows that level of nudity in public. This isn’t Miami.”

Caroline shrugged, enjoying Klaus’ obvious discomfort. “It’s Mystic Port. We focus on *actual* concerns rather than something as harmless as a little bare skin. Besides,” she added with a secret grin, “that’s Enzo, our town’s mayor.”

“Well, I was going to argue your point about what you consider fascinating, but between that overly confident lad there and then that peculiar brunette near the sea shell wind chimes booth, perhaps I should defer to your more experienced judgement,” he joked, trying and failing at not blatantly staring when the odd woman began to lick her hand and then groom her arms and neck, much like a cat.

Caroline airily explained, “That’s just Katherine, who unsurprisingly insists we call her *Kat*. One of the psychics here told her that she was a reincarnated Himalayan and that her muscle memory would retain certain aspects of her past life.” At his stunned expression, she added somewhat defensively, “So she’s a bit out there, but she’s a good person and a *very* attentive, loving pet owner, so she’s more than ok in my books.”

“Let me guess — she has an inordinate number of cats,” he asked faintly.

“More of a dog person, really. She has two absolutely gorgeous golden retrievers that have a weekly advice column in our local newspaper. Well, Kat ghostwrites the column for them, but she swears she infuses their personality in the writing,” Caroline cheerfully told him, thoroughly enjoying the way his eyebrows nearly grazed his hairline with each unusual revelation.

Before Klaus could question her further about the town’s quirky residents, they were interrupted by a statuesque blonde who said in a clipped tone of exasperation, “There you are, Nik! I swear this odd little chap keeps following me about offering to give me an exclusive tour of this bizarre village. I’m sure you’ve noticed him; he’s practically naked and keeps calling me ‘gorgeous’.” Her fierce green eyes flashed as she finished her impassioned speech, flicking over to Caroline briefly. Putting a hand on her hip she snorted, adding, “Although you’ve clearly been too busy flirting with the locals to notice.”

“That’s Enzo,” Caroline helpfully explained, irritated that she immediately wanted to know how Klaus knew the beautiful blonde. Objectively, she could admit they made a stunning couple, with striking features and a commanding presence. They probably had beautiful blonde babies in a predictably rigid, perfect little white-picket-fence world. *Ugh. Seriously, snap out of it.* "You should consider taking him up on his offer; he knows more about our town than anyone and is a hoot to talk to.” She tried not to feel relief at the way the mystery woman kept covertly scanning the crowd, obviously hoping to run into Enzo again.

Klaus tugged on the blonde’s ponytail, giving her an impish smile as he told Caroline, “Caroline, this is my sister, Rebekah. Rebekah, this lovely creature is Caroline, who was regaling me with tales about this intriguing town.”
“Charmed,” Rebekah, drawled, taking in Caroline’s sweaty appearance and dirt-streaked capri jeans with a critical brow. “Tell me, Caroline, does your city not have any HOAs? I’ve been quite surprised by the flamboyantly painted homes in the area. There was one house, such a shame really, because it would have been such a lovely Key West-style cottage if not for the appalling purple it’s painted.”

Klaus nodded in agreement, asking Caroline, “Surely you know the one we mean, love? It’s down the road, perched on the corner. There’s a giant cluster of sunflowers that nearly swallows the mailbox.”

Caroline’s blue eyes strayed to the soothing sight of the sailboats peacefully floating on the sparkling blue-green Gulf. She needed to get a handle on her temper that was threatening to crush the judgmental, uptight fish and chips platters standing before her. “Yup. It’s my house. Perhaps appalling is relative. Like manners.”

She felt a grim sort of satisfaction in the way the rude siblings paled at her revelation. Rebekah offered her a pained smile and said quietly, “Right. Well, that’s incredibly awkward. Um, sorry?” She nodded once in Caroline’s direction and bid a hasty retreat, muttering under her breath to her brother, “Good luck recovering from that one, Nik.”

Klaus immediately cleared his throat, opening and then shutting his mouth as he clearly strained to think of something to say to alleviate the uncomfortable tension. Caroline busied herself with a few customers that appeared, flashing them brilliant smiles and asking after their families. She had just finished handing off the last bag of colorful bell peppers to her remaining customer when Klaus mumbled, “Sorry about that.” He rubbed the back of his neck, refusing to make eye contact with her. “This part usually goes better for me.”

Caroline flashed an evil grin, dryly asking, “Let me guess — your dimples always work to smooth over your insults? They must put in a lot of overtime.”

Reddening slightly, Klaus laughed, and then attempted to change the topic when he observed, “You seem to be doing brisk business at the market today. Is there a special event happening?”

Still amused by his obvious embarrassment, she decided to quiet trying to shuffle him away from her booth. “Business is usually pretty steady, plus I’m the supplier for a couple of the restaurants here.”

His gray eyes lit up at her words and he asked excitedly, “Really? In that case, you would know the best places to eat around here then. What do you recommend?”

As an enthusiastic foodie, she was pleased to see that Klaus seemed to be one as well. “If you’re in the mood for Italian, the Salvatores feature their family’s old recipes and have the best marinara sauce I’ve tasted since leaving New York. It’s one block south, called Lily’s Trattoria. Or, across the street from them is Lockwood Grill. They serve this Oklahoma-style barbecue with a savory-sweet sauce that I still can’t figure out how to duplicate. They also usually win all the barbecue championships in the area.”

Klaus seemed to soak up every bit of local food knowledge she was willing to share. With a slight hitch to his voice he asked, “Both options sound delicious. Do you have any other places you’d like to tell me about?”

She finished reorganizing the cucumbers that had been scattered during the last wave of customers, and answered with a frown, “Actually, it’s a shame you weren’t vacationing here a
couple of months ago. There was this tiny little cafe that had been in the Gilbert family for generations. It was the oldest business in Mystic Port and it’s where all of our town parades would end. We’d all gather there and have their specialty, key lime pie fritters.” Her mouth watered as she recalled their menu. “Actually, their food was the perfect example of home-style Florida cooking from fresh grouper sandwiches, sweet potato fries, cracked-pepper shrimp and buttered grits...” she trailed off dreamily as she recalled the heavenly aromas that would waft from their open windows during the day.

He seemed to hang on her every word and she shook her head sadly as she lamented, “It’s a damn shame what happened when Elena and Jeremy’s parents died and they had to sell off the property. Everyone around here felt bad for them, but by the time we all found out about their debt, it was too late for us to do anything about it — some investors already had snapped up the property.”

Caroline had no idea her storytelling was this captivating, but the way his gray eyes widened with every detail and his hushed voice as he asked, “And then what happened?” convinced her that maybe she should have been a writer after all. Everyone had at least one novel in them, she figured.

“Well,” she began in a sour tone, “these investors came in and tore down the original structure because Enzo couldn’t get the historical society to declare it a landmark because it was one year too young to meet the requirements for a historical site. And then, the investors sent in this conceited asshat who came into town, met with the original cafe’s staff, and fired all of them on the spot!” She clenched her fists, angrily starting to put away some of the zucchini, yellow squash and green beans as she realized the market hours were nearing the end.

Klaus frowned, holding out a woven basket to hold the array of vegetables she’d gathered. “He fired all of them,” he asked, clearly trying to work out the finer points of her story.

“You bet. Everyone. We had a blowout party to give them a proper sendoff the other night down at Donovan’s Tavern.” She gritted her teeth as she thought about it some more. “Ugh! The rumor is that these investors are planning to turn the restaurant into a fine dining experience on the water, but this is so not the place for that. In a town whose motto is ‘Keep Mystic Port weird,’ you can bet that no one is going to be that interested in foie gras and escargot. Plus, we’re hours away from large cities and airports, so the only tourists that come here are those that want a relaxed, casual vacation.”

Caroline laughed, pushing back a few sweaty blonde curls from her casual knot at the base of her neck. “Seriously, the new owners did not do their homework if they thought pretentious, over-priced and likely way overrated food was the way to fit in with us.”

Klaus added the last armload of bell peppers to the basket on one of her tables, and then straightened, offering her a tight smile. “Well, it seems I could have used your advice two months ago, sweetheart.” As she froze in place, horror dawning in her bright blue eyes, he added somewhat awkwardly, “I’m Niklaus Mikaleson, former CFO and apparently utter failure as a new restaurateur.”

Caroline took a careful step back, moving a wooden display a few inches with her hip. “Oh! Um...” she began, obviously flustered. She was trying to gauge Klaus’ mood, but his expression was impassive, leaving her with little insight as to how to fix her inadvertent insults. “So...that was uncalled-for. What I said, I mean. I obviously don’t know you or what actual plans you have for the place, and it’s certainly none of my business how you decide to run your restaurant,” she hurriedly said, nervously moving one of the baskets overflowing with green beans back and forth a
few inches between them.

As a handful of green beans toppled out onto her wooden table, Klaus seemed to come out of his strange stupor and, shaking himself slightly, managed to say hurriedly, “So I should be going then. Lovely to meet you, Caroline.” He walked away, getting lost in the tourists who were flocking to various booths that ran specials on their unsold wares near the end of the day.

Caroline smacked her forehead, groaning in embarrassment. Stupid. Why was she so bad at this? At least he and his sister managed to unknowingly insult her first, but seriously, how had she missed the way he seemed invested in what she had to say about the local eateries? She blamed those damned dimples. They were far too distracting. Shaking her head, she started plotting the best way to try to make amends. Maybe a fruit basket?

That evening, she was heading down to the beach for a relaxing walk when she happened to see Klaus’ familiar form underneath an antique streetlamp. She felt her heart start to race and she couldn’t help but look down at herself, pleased that she’d showered and changed into a pretty teal sundress that accented her eyes. If attractive British men were going to start being a regular part of the town’s landscape, she was going to have to go shopping and replace some of her more threadbare beach-walking attire.

“Hi,” she said, somewhat shyly, still unsure of how to handle the awkwardness of their initial meeting.

“Caroline,” Klaus replied, his gray eyes seeming to come alive when he noticed her. The way his eyes lingered hungrily on her sun-kissed legs sent a thrill of anticipation through her. “I was hoping I might run into you tonight. My sister made plans, so I’m on my own for the evening.”

Surprise colored her voice as she asked, “Really? You guys just arrived. What plans did she make?”

With a smirk, he answered, “She apparently decided to take your advice and has allowed Enzo to give her a rather dubious-sounding tour of the town.” He peeked at her from underneath his thick lashes. “Perhaps I could trouble you for a tour as well,” he asked, his hopeful tone making her melt.

She impulsively grabbed his hand, firmly leading him to an old brick building near the water’s edge. “Come on,” she said, excitement twinkling in her gaze as she explained, “I want to show you one of the first things I did when I moved here.” As they came to the glass doors, he raised a questioning eyebrow when he saw it was the township’s city hall. Noticing his expression, she pushed open the unlocked doors and led him toward a set of stairs along one side, telling him, “Enzo and the city council don’t see the point in locking the doors in this building because they say they have nothing to hide. They want everyone to feel like the building belongs to all of us, and they encourage us to come and go as we please.”

When they arrived at the top of the stairs, she led him through a doorway that opened onto the roof where an elaborate garden flourished. The soothing sounds of the Gulf reached their ears, the waves gently lapping at the shore now that most of the boats had docked for the evening. Klaus took in the lush foliage of pygmy date palms, fragrant honeysuckle, and golden hurricane lilies, before his senses became overwhelmed and he stopped registering the amazing splendor before him. “This is breathtaking, love. You created all of this,” he asked in a hushed tone, the admiration in his voice boosting her ego.

“Well, it was my idea but most of the town helped me put it together.” She tugged on his hand, leading him toward a stone ledge overlooking the Gulf. “This is my favorite part,” she
explained, pointing to a series of clay pots all stacked off-center and strategically spilling water into each other. “One of the best sculptors in town, Bonnie, took my fountain design and built this by herself. I’m constantly amazed at the talent that you can find here, all in one place,” she mused, kicking off her flip flops and motioning for him to stretch out beside her on the wide chaise lounge.

He smoothly folded his long frame beside hers, his simple black button-down had the sleeves rolled up, exposing his powerful-looking forearms that made her itch to touch them just to make sure they were real. He tugged self-consciously on a few necklaces that were poking out of his unbuttoned collar. “I’d like to apologize for what Rebekah and I said to you earlier. I realized after we awkwardly ended our discussion today that I was so flustered I never properly apologized.”

She rolled onto her side to study him more carefully. The soft light of the stars overhead bathed him in a silver glow that made him seem almost ethereal. Her indulgent smile and the soft press of her warm palm against the firm lines of his chest seemed to awaken something within him, and his breath hitched ever so slightly. “I appreciate the sentiment, but let’s not forget I showed my teeth too. I ran my mouth about people and things that I’m passionate about, but I still shouldn’t have been so judgmental about someone trying to start a business here. I know what that’s like, starting over in a new place, and it wasn’t my intention to make you feel unwelcome here.” She gave him a shy smile. “Usually when I put my foot in my mouth, I make a fruit basket to go with my apology.”

He laughed softly, informing her, “I just buy Rebekah shoes.”

They shared a secret smile, but the intensity of his gaze was becoming difficult to ignore, so she resorted to her patented rambling. “When I came here, I felt this urge to transform a piece of this town, to make it mine. This garden was how I first staked a claim on the land. Tending what I planted here — that’s how I proved my commitment to this place and the people. I’m sure you’ll find your own path to that as well.”

Klaus curled his hand over hers, holding it over his chest. “Would you tell me how you came to be here? I find myself quite curious about this town’s lovely protector.”

She rolled her eyes, but couldn’t help the way her skin practically hummed with anticipation as she slid a few inches closer to him, their bodies curving toward each other ever so slightly. “Sometimes life gives you exactly what you want and it’s nothing that you need.”

The slight breeze tangled her blonde waves, and she brushed a few strands from her cheek, blushing a bit when she saw how Klaus’ fingers twitched as though he had to stop himself from touching her. “I was in a high-stress environment as a professor with an ever-expanding course load to teach and I was expected to perform ongoing research and publish regularly. Plus, the Board of Regents kept pressuring me to compromise curriculum and grading standards whenever students with certain influential familial connections attended.”

Klaus made a noise of disgust, his fingers lightly grazing her bare shoulder. “So much for academic integrity. I’d like to think that my siblings and I made our way through university upon the strength of our applications and personal achievements, but I can’t ignore the doors that seemed to open just a bit more easily under the weight of our surname.” He frowned, adding, “Especially in my younger brother’s case. Every time I popped by for a visit, Kol’s flat reeked of pot and I’m quite sure when he graduated they likely needed to fumigate the place. Or possibly just burn it down and rebuild from scratch.”

Chuckling, they relaxed against each other, and Caroline enjoyed the way that she seemed to fit so perfectly in his arms. With her head now resting on his shoulder, she looked up at the night
sky and said excitedly, “We picked a perfect night to do this. There’s Taurus!” She traced the pattern with the tip of her finger, adding, “See? There’s his horns in that large v-pattern. This is the 17th largest out of the 88 constellations. Catalogued by Ptolemy in the second century, it carried great importance to ancient cultures because it was positioned in the path the sun travels each year, allowing them to mark the spring equinox and their planting seasons.”

He squeezed her hand, smiling at her enthusiasm. “I’ve never given much thought to the stars before; I always thought the constellations rarely looked like what they supposedly depicted. Perhaps with your expertise you can change my mind.”

She shivered at the implication that he expected them to spend more time together in the future. “I’d be happy to teach you. I miss the research sometimes, but at least the stars followed me down here,” she said with a wink. Resettling against his chest, she asked, “What about you? How did you end up here?”

Klaus heaved a heavy sigh, and his handsome face darkened momentarily. “I was CFO of my family’s corporation, pledging my loyalty for years until I came across some underhanded dealings my father had perpetuated. While they weren’t necessarily illegal activities, they perched upon that invisible line that represents morality and had been crafted with such calculation that it was obvious that the intent had been malicious. I grew uncomfortable with the direction the business was taking and one day, I walked out of my office and didn’t look back.”

He ran a soothing hand down Caroline’s back, her skin tingling in the wake of his powerful touch. “I’d always enjoyed food and had the good fortune to have made connections with those who could help me get started in the restaurant business. Frankly, the idea of remaining in the city where my father lived didn’t appeal to me, but neither did the idea of starting over in another one just like it. I started researching restaurants for sale in small towns along the East Coast, and now here I am.”

“That must have been difficult, leaving behind so much of your family and your old life,” Caroline commented, propping herself up on one hand to look at him. She was mesmerized by the starlight that rested on his high cheekbones, and she realized that she had never connected with anyone so quickly before, and it was both exciting and terrifying. To distract herself from her racing thoughts, she asked curiously, “Is there anything you would have done differently after you made the decision to change your life?”

His self-deprecating laugh flooded the small spaces between them, sinking into their skin and warming them with its hopeful tune. “Well, I would have kept my obnoxious snobbery a secret a bit longer around you if I could. Or, at least tried to be a charming wanker as I insulted your town.” After her delighted giggles died down, he added in a more serious tone, “My assistant, Lucien. His actions are something I would have changed and I fully intend to rectify that situation tomorrow. He had told me that the workers all quit. It appears he has a lot of explaining to do.”

Her blue eyes sparkled as she smiled at him warmly. “Making amends with the cafe’s employees would go a long way to making things right with the town,” she said approvingly. “Although if Lucien wants to stick around, it might be awhile before people warm up to him. He’s become a bit notorious,” she added, attempting to stifle her laughter when she thought back to the day Lucien had strolled into the vegan smoothie shop, bragging about his supposed power.

Word had spread rapidly about Lucien firing the cafe staff, so when he began his shameless and downright creepy stalker-flirting with Aurora, the shopkeeper, his fate was sealed. The fiery redhead had sweet-talked the clueless nitwit into having a prune-fig-pistachio soy milk smoothie, and the potent natural laxatives worked overtime on his apparently delicate system. He was
walking bowlegged to his rental car at a speedy-but-squishy pace, and Enzo managed to get some hilariously gross pictures that he spitefully published in the town’s newspaper.

Klaus murmured lowly, “I think Lucien has decided to remain in the city instead. In fact, when I suggested he fly back down here and oversee the transport of restaurant equipment, he quickly declined, stating that he had plenty of last-minute details to wrap up instead.” He frowned slightly. “It was quite peculiar, honestly. But Lucien’s always been a bit of an odd duck.”

She stifled her giggles, her voice somewhat strangled as she said, “Yes, that is strange.” She bit her lip, noticing the way Klaus was looking at her. The intensity of his gray gaze made her uncomfortably warm, and whatever he seemed to be search for within her he must have found, because suddenly he leaned forward to close the miniscule gap between them and kissed her softly.

Caroline responded with enthusiasm, sinking her fingers into his curls as he pulled her under the comforting weight of his strong body. She rubbed her bare foot along his calf, the canvas of his trousers making a low, pleasant purr. He groaned into her mouth, increasing the pressure of his lips as he caressed the side of her face. She could taste the salt of the evening air upon his lips and she nibbled impishly on his bottom lip.

Releasing a sexy growl, Klaus plunged a hand into her messy blonde waves, angling her mouth for a perfect, soulful kiss. His other hand wandered to the slim strap on one shoulder, delicately sliding it down her sun-kissed skin. At her shuddering breath, he bent his head to rain down kisses along her neck, sliding his tongue along her clavicle.

Her hand tangled in the curious collection of leather and metal necklaces he wore, tugging at them gently until her lips could reach his skin. She liked the soft moan that he emitted as she sucked gently, feeling his pulse quicken at her teasing touch. She sank into the warmth of his hands and let out a pleasurable sigh when he lightly grazed her nipple until it was a stiff peak under the thin cotton of her dress.

She boldly thrust her breast into Klaus’ eager palm, inciting another delicious moan from him and he pulled down the stretchy fabric of her sundress, exposing her soft mounds to his greedy gaze. His lustful stare captured hers, and he whispered reverently, “You’re stunning, love.” He ducked his head down to wrap his tongue around her nipple, sucking gently as he learned the secrets of her body.

Holding onto his dirty blonde curls and pushing his mouth more firmly against her breasts, she groaned at the way he tasted her flesh, his lips and tongue and the tiniest nip of teeth driving her wild. When she started softly rocking her hips underneath him, he unlatched his mouth, his eyes dark and savage in the starlight. With a wicked smirk, he moved down her body, the muscles in his forearms flexing as he took his time to slowly back away until he was on his knees before her.

The first feel of Klaus’ fingers brushing the short hem of Caroline’s sundress made her thighs shake, and his murmur of approval as he slowly inched the teal cotton up her toned legs had her panting with desire. Soon, he exposed her simple nude thong, the dampness he felt having nothing to do with the heavy humidity of the evening air. His fingertips traced a sexy pattern upon her trembling mound.

“Please,” she said breathlessly, the need in her voice apparent as she shuddered at the feel of his fingers toying with one smooth edge. As she began to beg in earnest, he indulged her with one firm swipe of his finger, growling at her slickness. He quickly moved aside her thong, dipping a finger into her wetness, curling it just so until she groaned. Adding another finger, he slid into her, creating a marvelous rhythm that had her bucking her hips against his hand, chasing that
shimmering release that was so close to the surface. His thumb pressed down against her clit, triggering her cry of relief as she found her ecstasy in this secret moment.

With both of them still panting, she surprised him by slipping out from underneath his tense body, quickly settling on her knees beside him. Blue eyes alive with mischief, she purred, “I think it’s time I returned the favor. After all, it’s only polite.”

She liked how his lust-blown eyes followed her movements greedily, and when she started to slip the top of her dress back over her unbound breasts, he stopped her. “Let me look at them.”

Already feeling the familiar stirrings of her arousal building again, she nodded, bending down to run her hands over the bulge in his trousers. The way his erection practically leapt into her touch sent a bolt of electricity down her spine. Impatient to stroke his sensitive skin, she quickly unbuttoned his pants, diving into his boxers to release his hardened cock. That first strangled groan that left his lips was the sweetest sound she had ever heard. She gave him a knowing smile as she wrapped her fingers around his length, moving them teasingly across the tight flesh.

Klaus bucked his hips into her hand, following the erotic pace she set, anxious for his release. She took her time with him, allowing her fingertips to dance across his tip, the tiny drops of his desire allowing her to easily glide her palm over his cock. His thrusts became more shallow as the tension built, and he moaned her name as he spilled in her hand.

Seductively licking her fingers, Caroline settled back against Klaus’ chest, a tiny surprised squeak escaping her lips as he playfully pinched her ass. They lay against each other in comfortable silence, breathing in the salty air of the Gulf and listening to the surf gently rolling in.

“Well, I suppose that’s one way to settle our differences,” he panted, a light chuckle escaping his lips.

Squinting over at him, she wryly asked, “But, a pair of shoes is still negotiable, right?”

Klaus answered with a grin, “Maybe if you throw in a fruit basket, love.”
The Blonde Witch Project

Chapter Summary

This story was written for the Klaroline Infinity Finale Week Event. Caroline is a New Orleans witch who runs a magic shop that caters to a very select clientele. It’s a case of the “customer is always an asshat” when a smug hybrid stops by to purchase spell ingredients.

All your life you've never seen a woman taken by the wind
Would you stay if she promised to you heaven?
Will you ever win?
— Fleetwood Mac, “Rhiannon”

It turns out that dried troll livers, no matter how shriveled, will still leak acid when you drop them. Caroline groaned as she watched a handful of the rust-colored, wrinkled organs tumble off the quartz counter and fall to the floor with a series of stomach-churning splats and an audible hiss. With a muttered charm, she summoned the wet-dry vacuum from the back of the shop. While she ordered the mess to be cleaned, she stretched, hearing several angry clicks along her lower back. She really should have asked Enzo for help unloading those massive tubs of melanoma remover, but he had been really excited to leave the shop early and go on his first official date with Bonnie, so Caroline hadn’t wanted to detain him.

As a witch in New Orleans, Caroline had gotten fed up with inferior occult shops who catered to tourists and constantly had the more exotic spell ingredients on back order, so she finally opened her own shop several decades ago. By design, she operated in the shadows, upon hushed whispers and knowing winks her business flourished. The entrance to her magic shop was cleverly hidden inside what appeared to be a broken down old crypt near the back of St. Louis Cemetery No. 1. She cheekily called her shop Grave Matters and despite the unconventional location, her reputation for discretion and possessing the most comprehensive selection of spell ingredients in the world ensured her success.

The chorus to Donovan’s “Season of the Witch” alerted her to a client in the store’s lobby. She headed down the corridor, enjoying the pleasant hum of magic in the air from the spacious design she had created with the help of her talented coven. As she stepped inside the lobby to find Klaus Mikaelson, she mentally congratulated herself for having the forethought to put up a protection barrier that activated the moment a client stepped across the threshold. While she’d never met the Original before, the volatile hybrid’s reputation preceded him. She could feel power emanating from his aura, and if he didn’t agree to her shop’s rules, she suspected her refusal to do business with him would be somewhat problematic.

“Welcome, Klaus Mikaelson. I’m Caroline,” she said, inwardly wincing at the breathlessness of her voice as she took in his unexpectedly appealing package. Good grief, nothing that dangerous should ever look that good. She was so distracted, she nearly crossed the magical
barrier and had to quickly jerk her foot back.

Klaus took in her rigid posture and hasty movements and a playful smirk slid across his handsome face. “You’ve heard of me, excellent. Am I to assume that this protection barrier is meant for me and my somewhat prickly reputation then?”

She rolled her eyes and scoffed, “Please. I cater to a rather exclusive clientele. You’re hardly the most dangerous creature to wander in here. All of my clients are expected to agree to my rules before we can do business. Once you agree, the barrier is lifted — but not the security enchantments.”

“I’m afraid I’m not much for rules, love. But I can assure you, if you make an exception, I’m definitely worth your while,” he smoothly said, momentarily forgetting the barrier as he attempted to reach out to play with one of her wayward blonde curls. The zap of her protection spell singed his fingertips, causing him to emit a growl that seemed to be more embarrassment than pain.

Barely managing to contain her giggles, Caroline said wryly, “Yeah, no. My shop, my rules. Rule number one: You have to relinquish your supernatural powers while you are inside the store. Rule number two: You have to sign your name so that I can divine your true intentions with the spell ingredients you wish to purchase from me.” She watched with a bored expression as Klaus’ face contorted in the standard series of emotions many of her clients went through upon hearing her rules: disbelief, outrage, stubborn refusal, pompous asshat, etc.

“Are you out of your bloody mind,” he seethed, black veins appearing underneath his eyes that now glowed with a hint of furious gold.

Caroline crossed her arms in front of her, glaring at her rude client. “Your choice, Klaus. But make up your mind soon, please. I have a cauldron full of mustard brambles and fairy wings that requires counter-clockwise stirring precisely every 52 minutes. So, tick tock.”

Seeming to weigh his clearly deep-rooted paranoia against his obvious desire for rare spell ingredients, Klaus finally grumbled petulantly, “Bloody hell, fine.”

Rubbing her hands together, she whispered the incantation that stripped the hybrid’s powers, leaving him immortal, but without his superior strength, speed or fangs. A pearlescent ball of light floated in front of Caroline before vanishing in a wisp of white smoke. “Once our business is concluded, I’ll fetch your powers from my vault and restore them,” Caroline promised.

Klaus eyed her warily, seeming to feel vulnerable and uncomfortable in his own skin. A scrap of parchment and a silver fountain pen appeared before his startled gray eyes, and he regarded the objects suspiciously before he hurriedly signed his name with a growl.

With a flick of her wrist, the parchment shot into her palm, and as she traced the strong, commanding curvatures of his signature, the letters burned red. Satisfied, she nodded to herself, removing the invisible protection barrier with an impatient wave. “Follow me,” she told him, turning on her heel and leading him down the corridor to one of the main workrooms. Good grief, did he always smell this good? She detected hints of spice and orange along with the gritty-but-seductive earthy fragrance that all wolves seemed to carry. The normal iron smell that flavored a vampire’s aura was barely perceptible on him. Interesting. She briefly wondered if all hybrids smelled this way, but put quickly that thought away as she knew better than to go looking for trouble. And delicious-smelling Klaus and his hybrids were definitely trouble.

She gestured to one of the tall swivel chairs along one side of a long concrete countertop.
As Klaus settled into the chair, she headed around the other side of the counter near a wall of seemingly endless wooden shelves.

“So, you’re here to buy ingredients for a locator spell for one of the doppelgangers, Katerina Petrova, as she has stolen the cure from Silas,” Caroline said briskly, trying to recall if Enzo had finished cataloguing the latest shipment of arnica.

Making an impressed noise, Klaus cocked an eyebrow, asking, “You learned all those details from merely touching my signature?”

Her blue eyes twinkling merrily, she answered, “Well, that and your brother, Kol, plays mahjong with my friends at the retirement community over on Magazine Street every Tuesday.” She giggled as she confessed to the surprised hybrid, “Ida Mae, Myrtle and Lisette are a rowdy bunch, so Kol fits in quite nicely.”

Klaus studied her carefully. “You have friends in a retirement community, yet you appear to be quite young. How long have you been practicing your craft, sweetheart?”

She let out a surprised laugh, lightly smacking his hand. “Shame on you! You know better than to ask a lady her age!”

Amused, he seemed to drink in her soft ivory skin and gleaming curls, his gray eyes darkening slightly as he said, “My apologies. I do prefer a woman with a few secrets.”

She refused to shiver at the sexy drawl of his words. Trying to steer the conversation away from what she considered a dangerous flirtation, she said, “Speaking of secrets, did you know about your brother’s slightly alarming *Golden Girls* fetish? He can turn almost any conversation into something he saw on an episode. He also keeps insisting he’s the Blanche of my group even though he’s clearly Rose.” She smiled brightly, only barely resisting the urge to hum a few bars of the *Golden Girls* theme song. She added, “Not that I blame him — everyone wants to be Blanche. But I’ve made my peace with forever being the Dorothy of any group.”

Klaus chuckled, his shoulders relaxing as he clearly started to feel more comfortable with Caroline despite the temporary loss of his powers. “I always found Dorothy’s brashness quite attractive,” he flirted, tipping her a saucy wink.

Caroline snorted. “Kol was right — you are so a Sophia.”

Sitting up a bit straighter, Klaus asked curiously, “What else has Kol told you about me?”

Tucking a curl behind her ear, she grinned. “Well, he did tell us about the first time you milked a goat and how milk flew everywhere and soaked your trousers. And then the whole village called you *brusi míg*, which means *urinating he-goat.*”

Flushing slightly, Klaus said defensively, “That wasn’t me! It was Finn!”

At her skeptical expression, he muttered, “Perhaps it was Elijah then.” Flustered, he tugged on the leather cords around his neck, the various charms jingling slightly.

“Of course it was,” she said, smoothly changing the subject as she gestured toward the rows of shelves behind her. “Now, about this locator spell. I have some experience with several variations, so let me pull ingredients that have the highest success rate and we’ll go from there.”

She saw the way his eyes widened in surprise as he took in the labels of some of the more unusual glass jars on the shelves behind her — *angst of 90s grunge music, optimism of millennials,*
“It’s such a shame saber-toothed tigers are extinct; they must have been magnificent beasts,” Klaus commented, the apparent awe in his voice making him seem younger somehow.

His boy-like wonder touched something within Caroline, but she stubbornly ignored the butterflies that she felt. She smiled secretly and replied, “Yes...extinct. That’s what happened. They definitely did not wander into an interdimensional wormhole a newbie warlock accidentally left open.”

She tucked away a grin at his bewildered face and climbed up a wooden ladder next to the shelves to grab the rest of the locator spell ingredients. She came back down with an armload full of wiry sasquatch hair, two jars of consecrated earth from Stonehenge, and mulled wine found in a clay jar in a cave beside the Dead Sea. She carefully wrapped the objects, muttering a spell to ensure they would all fit securely within the purple satchel.

She had just opened a container of arnica to dice when Klaus interrupted her. “Wouldn’t red clover be a better match than arnica in a locator spell, sweetheart? It has inherent properties of luck and is known to pierce protection spells.”

Caroline rolled her eyes. Why did everyone assume they could do her job better than her just because they had a passing familiarity with Harry Potter books? In a light tone with just a hint of bite, she explained, “Red clover is the favorite plant of the fae. It’s used to gain their sight and give you visions of the fae realm. So, unless you’re chasing Tinkerbell, leave the ingredient gathering to the professionals, hmmm?”

Klaus’ gray eyes flashed at her words, but they were far from threatening. If anything, he seemed more intrigued than ever by Caroline and leaned closer to her as she began dicing the arnica. The bright yellow petals gave the appearance that she was chopping bits of sunshine. He asked, “Then tell me why arnica is the superior ingredient for my locator spell?”

The corners of her pink lips lifted as she heard the earnestness in his voice. He seemed the type to enjoy a good chase, but she liked how he appeared to be willing to put in a bit of effort first. She hadn’t decided yet if she’d play along fully — after all, she had other obligations and reasons for wanting to avoid him after this encounter, but she couldn’t help but wonder about the possibilities... Shaking her head slightly, she favored him with a smile as she explained, “Arnica was strewn along the midsummer wheat fields to prevent the grain’s restorative properties from escaping. It is said the goddess Freya infused the herb with her power. It’s basically magical LoJack.”

Seemingly impressed by her knowledge, he allowed her to continue working in peace, occasionally catching her eye and giving her a flirtatious smile full of promise. After he paid for his ingredients, she walked him back to the lobby. She also restored his supernatural powers as promised, leaning in to give him a brief hug and a gentle kiss on his dimpled cheek. She allowed herself a few blissful moments to breathe in his intoxicating aroma, enjoying the way he rumbled lowly in his chest as she pressed against his muscular body. As she pulled away, he looked at herquestioningly. She grinned and said, “It’s for luck with your locator spell. I hope you find what you seek.”

“I may have unexpectedly found something I didn’t know I was missing, love,” he said
with a saucy wink, making her feel hot and cold all at once as she tried to calm her rapidly beating heart.

Caroline smiled and said cheekily, “Well, it’s not going anywhere.”

He leaned closer, their noses almost touching as he whispered hoarsely, “Good.” Before she could speak, he flashed out of the shop, leaving her to ponder the often unexpectedly messy ways of the world.

Taking a breath, she pulled out her phone, pressing the familiar icon of an old contact. When her call was answered, she advised, “Everything went smoothly. I convinced him to substitute arnica instead of red clover in the locator spell — he’ll never find you.” She dug in her pocket, pulling out one of the leather necklaces she swiped from Klaus when she was giving him a hug. “I also obtained something that should give your protection spell a boost. No need to thank me, Katerina. After all, what are friends for?”
This story was written for the Klaroline Infinity Finale Week Event. In this installment, I created an AU human Klaroline fusion with Damages. Specifically, Timothy Olyphant’s character from season 2 of Damages inspired this idea. For this chapter, Caroline is a trauma survivor who finds unexpected comfort in someone she sees as a kindred spirit.

Warning: Violent. Dark.

“God hath given you one face, and you make yourself another.”
— William Shakespeare, Hamlet

The heavy silver ring split her lip open, and Caroline tasted the bitter iron of her blood as her head snapped back. His dark eyes glittered with malice at her small grunt of pain, but from the way his pale fists clenched, he was furious at her refusal to give voice to her pain. The next blow landed squarely upon her right cheekbone, grinding into her soft skin as though he branded her. Later, when she finally had the courage to look in the mirror, she would note with disgust how the outline of the gaudy Salvatore family crest had been punched into her cheek. It would take weeks before her skin would replenish itself to erase his mark. It would take far longer for her to replenish her soul.

One month later.

Caroline nervously watched the group of strangers sitting in a circle. They all were looking expectantly at her and she closed her eyes, taking a few deep breaths to calm herself. You can do this. You can do anything. You’re Caroline Forbes. After her attack and its cruel aftermath, she realized the terror and anger she felt wouldn’t go away on their own. Her friend, Bonnie, had recommended this support group for trauma survivors and she decided the best way to start healing was to jump right in.

Taking a shaky breath, she opened her eyes and said, “My name is Caroline and I’m a survivor. I moved here recently and decided to check out a club one night. A hot guy named
Damon approached me and after a couple of drinks, he charmed me into going back to his place. As soon as I crossed the threshold, it turned...bad. He showed me his true face, and he became this monster who hit me and insisted on calling me this other girl’s name...Ellen, I think.”

She shuddered as she remembered the wild gleam in his dark eyes when he handed her a long, brunette wig and told her to put it on. “He wanted me to dance for him, so I did, and I realized that he had taken me to a basement with this creepy collection of fantasy swords mounted on the walls. I maneuvered my way over to a short dagger and managed to rip it off of the wall. He was furious and ran toward me, but I cut his forearm before he grabbed me again. Then, I hit him with the back of my head and when he fell to his knees, I rammed the dagger’s blunt-metal hilt into his temple, knocking him unconscious.”

If she closed her eyes, she would still be able to smell the musty odor of the old books Damon had stacked in his basement. To this day, she still couldn’t walk into a library or a bookstore without retching. “I immediately got in my car and drove to the police station where I told an officer what happened.” She recalled the immense relief she had felt when she had collapsed into the policeman’s arms, shakily giving her statement. She had no way of knowing that the real horror was about to begin.

“They took my statement and pictures of the injuries on my face and reassured me that he wouldn’t get away with it.” She laughed bitterly. “I was new in town and ignorant to the power Damon’s surname would carry. His family lawyers either intimidated or paid off whomever they needed to disregard my attack. No charges were ever filed.” She took a small sip of her oolong tea, its lukewarm temperature alerting her to the fact that she had talked longer than she had intended. She was surprised to realize she felt slightly better after speaking to the group. *Maybe this support group was just what she needed.*

An intriguing pair of gray eyes caught her attention, and she couldn’t help but notice the owner was an attractive man with innocent-looking dimples. He occasionally caught her eye before looking away, but she noticed that his gaze did not stray too far from hers for very long. He was new to the group like she was, and during the meeting, she learned that his name was Klaus and he was learning to cope with years of physical abuse that he suffered as a child at the hands of his father. When the meeting ended, he cast a furtive look her way, and for a moment, her heart sped up, and she was worried that he would try to flirt with her, which she was not remotely ready to handle, but instead, he nodded respectfully in her direction before heading toward the parking lot. She was left with an odd sensation in her chest, and later on, when she was back home, she was startled to realize it was disappointment.

*Two months later.*

*A hesitant kiss on her cheek. The slight scratchy feel of his stubble. His comforting smell of cedar with a hint of lemon. A careful thumb graze across her knuckles. Brief smiles that were slowly beginning to unfurl into something resembling genuine emotion.*

Caroline had been attending her trauma survivors support group meeting every week, and while slowly putting herself back together, she had inadvertently gotten to know Klaus, first during the meetings and then they had started meeting for tea at a nearby shop a couple of times a week. He seemed as wounded as she, and she found his cautious nature reassuring. Neither were in a rush, but it was clear the chemistry between them could be the start of something wonderful. Caroline realized she could still feel hope and it was just a beautiful as she remembered.

She stirred just a touch of honey into her vanilla lemongrass tea, glancing up at the
familiar, soft gray gaze. “Group tells us it gets easier, right? That you somehow let go of the fear and anger?”

“I suppose, sweetheart,” Klaus said, shrugging as he took a sip of his black currant tea. “For me, the anger hasn’t gone anywhere, so instead I use it.”

Curious, she asked, “For what?”

“To survive,” he said softly, not meeting her eyes as though he was afraid of the judgement he would see there.

She tentatively reached out, placing her hand on top of his. She gently told him, “I know what you mean. Sometimes I think all my fear and anger will just sit here inside me, until I absorb it, until it becomes a part of me. I worry that it will turn me into a monster. Into something like him.”

The simple weight of her hand seemed to give him the courage to speak, as though he had been holding his words back until this moment. “That would never happen. The light that surrounds you is too pure. Trust me, I know monsters, and you will never be like him, sweetheart.”

Caroline felt her cheeks warm at his sweet words, and she was charmed by his shy smile topped off by dimples.

They lapsed into a silence that had grown more comfortable over time, occasionally broken by a whispered conversation that started off casual, but slowly evolved into something more.

Three months later.

He still tasted of black tea with a hint of spice. The way his body moved above her, within her left her breathless. His familiar smell of cedar with a hint of lemon would cling to her sheets for days and she found herself lingering there, infusing her bare skin with his scent. The soft scratch of his stubble as he rubbed his cheek against hers and the way he stared deeply into her eyes as their bodies joined made her ache. Those first hesitant kisses and careful hand grazes had slowly bled into an explosive, deep-rooted emotional connection that left her aching for more. She never thought she would be desired like this. That someone could want her this much.

Caroline rolled to her side, their noses almost brushing as she lovingly caressed his dimpled cheek. “Thank you,” she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion.

“For what,” Klaus asked in a hushed tone.

“For being you. And letting me be me,” she responded, lightly kissing the tip of his nose.

Something flashed in his eyes, darkening them as he vowed, “For you, this will always be me.”

She bit her lip, finding courage in the safety of the small space between them to tell him what her recovery had taught her. “You want to know how I survive each day? Damon no longer exists for me. When I start to think of him, I just will him away.” She smiled at him, and its brightness refused to be dimmed by a lingering bitter tinge. “Maybe one day the universe will finally take the hint.”

Klaus wordlessly pulled her into his strong arms, wrapping his reassuring warmth around her as she drifted off to sleep. He seemed to count every breath she took, as though measuring them
in the silence of the dark room. He carefully slid his body from under hers, staring at her beauty in reverence. He leaned over to softly kiss her cheek, an indulgent smile appearing on his handsome face. He allowed his fingertips to carefully brush down the column of her throat, seemingly reassured by the strong pulse he discovered. He silently got dressed and then left her apartment, intending to return before she awoke.

The black limo was waiting for him at the curb, its engine purring ominously. The shy smile and soft lines of his handsome face became a cold, bladed grin and harsh planes. He moved with the easy grace of a deadly predator, a feral gleam in his steel gray eyes. He slid inside, directly across the figure who lounged casually along the leather seat.

Damon Salvatore announced in a bored tone, “You’re late. Also, I told you not to contact me until you finished the job.” His dark eyes swept over Klaus, adding, “Do you recall why I hired you all those months ago, right?”

Klaus nodded curtly, not bothering to speak.

His silence clearly unnerved his companion, who suddenly spoke rapidly with a high-pitched tone that belied his nervousness. “I hired you right after that bitch tried to have me locked up. She dragged my family name through the mud!”

Klaus sat there silently, taking in every uncomfortable twitch of Damon’s, as though biding his time. He cocked his curly blonde head to the side and replied. “But it’s mostly because she fought back, isn’t it?”

Damon answered petulantly, “They aren’t supposed to fight back.” Leaning forward slightly, he hissed, “Caroline Forbes is supposed to suffer. Your job is to gain her trust and seduce her. Then, you reveal that it was all an act; that I hired you to crush her spirit and then when she is completely devastated, you kill her.”

“I am aware of the terms of my contract,” Klaus said lazily, settling more comfortably against the bench seat as he stared unflinchingly at Damon. “However, I have decided to alter certain provisions of our agreement. I have gained Caroline’s trust and discovered that I have grown a taste for it. For her.”

Before Damon could protest, Klaus surged forward unexpectedly, producing a serrated blade from beneath his shirt sleeve and pushing it deep within the tissue and thick tendons of Damon’s throat, choking off his screams. The muscles in his forearms relaxed as he felt the struggle leave the worthless man’s body.

As the malicious glint faded from Damon’s dark eyes, Klaus whispered hoarsely, “The universe is finally taking the hint.”
Give the Devil His Dewar’s

Chapter Summary

This story was written for the Klaroline Infinity Finale Week Event. This chapter is set during the opening to season 3 when Klaus and Stefan are hunting werewolves to make hybrids. While hunting a wayward wolf, they come across an intriguing blonde who happens to have business in the area...

Chapter Notes

Warning: Delicious smut!

Standin’ at the crossroad
I tried to flag a ride
Didn’t nobody seem to know me
everybody pass me by
Mmm, the sun goin’ down, boy
dark gon’ catch me here
— Robert Johnson, “Cross Road Blues”

The frosty bottle of Coors in the hopeful man’s hand was refused with a small jerk of her delicate chin and a slight flicker of irritation underneath those thick black lashes. Her sweet, melodic voice didn’t bother to hide the cruel sting of rejection when she told her would-be pursuer, “I’m waiting on someone.”

Klaus watched the young man’s thin shoulders sag as he began the lonely trek back to his table tucked away in a dusty corner of this smoky Tennessee bar. Klaus inhaled a lungful of the stale air of this rather dank watering hole, Southern Comfort, and besides the scents of tobacco, spilled beer and human sweat, he had yet to smell the earthy, somewhat bitter aroma of the wayward werewolf, Ray Sutton, he had been tracking for months now.

His gray eyes continued to study the stunning blonde beauty perched on a wobbly stool
near the end of the bar. When he and Stefan had first walked through the door, he had immediately noticed her, and while he barked orders at Stefan to compel the small group of patrons, he found himself captivated by her mere presence and continued to silently monitor her throughout the evening. Periodically, some brave chap would approach her, either with the bribery of a drink or an awkwardly mumbled line, only to be rejected without the slightest bit of interest revealed in that frosty blue gaze. He found himself inordinately irritated as each hopeful suitor would try his luck, and felt an odd sense of relief when none of them were successful in their pursuit.

Earlier, he had waited with baited breath, listening in on her heartbeat as Stefan had compelled her like the other patrons, wondering if she was something more. He desperately needed a rational explanation for the perplexing pull he felt toward the lovely creature. While he had been disappointed that the enigmatic blonde was human, it somehow didn’t detract from her alluring presence. Content to allow Stefan to continue monitoring the door for Ray, Klaus decided to make his move. He sauntered over to the bar, admiring the way her ripped denim jeans fit her luscious curves. He leaned over the scarred wooden surface of the bar, capturing the grizzled bartender’s attention as he ordered two scotches.

The old man nodded knowingly, glancing at the blonde down the way and muttered, “Good luck with that one, buddy.”

Smirking, Klaus picked up the glass tumblers and said confidently, “I like my odds.” He stalked across the dirty floor covered in footprints of red dust and littered with peanut shells to where she casually sat at the end of the bar, and without a word, he slid one of the tumblers toward her.

Without glancing in his direction, the mysterious woman downed the rest of the golden liquor already in her hand before casually studying the drink Klaus brought her. When she turned her lovely face to appraise him, he was caught again by the power in her blue gaze. Putting on his most charming smile, he flash ed his dimples while cheekily asking, “Tell me love, are you still waiting for someone?”

With a throaty chuckle, she answered, “Yes.”

Klaus hated how he had to make the effort to keep his face from falling at the single word she spoke. This mere human shouldn’t have this much power over him. While in the middle of attempting to reassert his dignity, she surprised him by grinning wickedly and kicking out the chipped barstool beside her, adding, “But it’ll keep.”

He carefully controlled his expression, not wanting to appear too eager as he sat down beside her. Clinking the rims of their tumblers together, he commented, “I asked for Macallan, but apparently, it’s a bit too posh for this establishment. Enlighten me, sweetheart — is that why you chose to drink that utter swill instead?”

She raised a critical eyebrow and wryly said, “Condescending asshats are drawn to Macallan despite the fact that it is tragically overpriced, single-malt nonsense and I have no interest in drinking something that thinks it’s better than me simply because it took a bath in some sherry oak barrels.” She juggled her glass in his direction, the ice cubes merrily clinking as she added, “Dewar’s is a sublime scotch whisky with notes of berries, vanilla and honey so stop turning your nose up at it just because it’s blended from several single malts.”

“My apologies,” Klaus replied, delighted to have gotten a rise out of the lovely creature before him. “and you may call me Klaus. I go by condescending asshat for formal occasions,” he teased.
She took a long sip of her scotch, clearly savoring the flavors that he had mocked. He tried not to show how mesmerized he was by the slow, sensual movement of her lips and the muscles in her throat as she swallowed her drink. “Caroline,” she nodded, tapping the rim of her glass with an index finger encased in a thin, silver ring forged into the shape of a snake.

“Unusual ring — you like serpents,” he asked, noting that the fine etchings described possibly a python or boa.

“Upon occasion,” she replied in an amused tone. She eyed his cluster of necklaces and boldly reached out to touch the cross dangling from the antique rosary he wore. “And you appear to have faith,” she commented in her melodic voice, stroking the object thoughtfully as she seemed to be searching for something within his steel gaze.

“I have faith in a multitude of things, sweetheart,” Klaus answered, liking her casual disregard for personal space as she leaned toward him with almost feral blue eyes.

She tilted her head, blonde waves softly brushing her cheek. “Faith in the divine has always surprised me. How is it possible to believe in something without tangible proof?”

His smile was indulgent as he settled more comfortably on the barstool. “So you’re a skeptic, then?”

Caroline laughed, the surprising sound momentarily capturing the interest of those around them who paused to favor her with admiring glances before returning to their own mundane conversations. “I’m a lot of things. Labels are messy.”

Klaus understood her words more than her human sentiments could ever grasp. He was an Original vampire and yet also a wolf. As a hybrid, he was alone in the world and he despised that label. His travels to seek out other werewolves, to amass his hybrid army, was as much about building a resistance against the threat of Mikael as it was about finally being with others like him. As yet another mournful, classic country song played in the background, he eyed her faded Metallica t-shirt and said, “I’m surprised you would be in this bar, given your taste in music.”

Her red lips curved into a smile and her fingertips lightly brushed along the jagged edges of the band’s silver logo. “I do enjoy ‘Judas Kiss’. ‘In the heart of evil man, plant the seeds of my own plan. The strong and powerful will fall. Find a piece of me in all.’”

While not overly familiar with the rock band, he did recall the song she quoted. Laying on his most seductive accent, he replied, “I must admit, the lyrics are infectious. ‘Sell your soul to me, I will set you free. Pacify your demons.’”

She leaned in closer, whispering in his ear, “I seriously doubt demons could ever be pacified.”

He inhaled her fragrance, the scotch warming her scent pleasantly as he took in her vanilla and honey essence. “Indeed. I suspect demons are quite the cantankerous lot,” he playfully agreed.

She shrugged her shoulders. “Truth be told, I’m actually quite partial to the blues. There’s something about the sorrowful growling of one’s soul that gets me every time. It practically calls to me,” she confided, a secret smile perched upon her delicate lips.

Klaus was momentarily surprised by her hidden depths. It was unusual to find an appreciation for blues music in one so young. Seizing the opportunity, he told her, “In that case, I have discovered a quaint little blues club a couple of towns over. After I conclude my business
matter, would you care to join me?”

Her blue eyes sparkled with amusement, and she swirled the amber-colored scotch lazily in her glass. “What a tempting offer. Unfortunately, I also have business to attend to.” The tip of her pink tongue touched the center of her top lip, enticing him with its wicked promise. “But I would very much like a raincheck, and I can assure you, I always collect,” she added, her husky voice teasing him in the most delicious manner.

Trying not to show the disappointment in his face, Klaus stood, searching for the right words to make a graceful exit, when Caroline stunned him by grabbing his hand before he could leave. She downed the rest of her scotch, her blue eyes darkening as she gazed up at him lustfully. “My business will keep for the moment. Will yours?”

Allowing his piercing gray stare to roam over her enticing form, he growled out, “Without question,” and quickly hauled her to her feet, pulling her in for a deep kiss that left them both breathless. With a mischievous grin, she tugged on his hand, maneuvering them between scattered tables and the small crowd of people until they arrived at the bathroom.

She leapt into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist as he stumbled backward into the dimly lit space. With a groan that was nearly a snarl, he pushed her up against the door, kissing her with a ferocity that made his wolf howl in delight. She clawed through his curls, tugging on the ends as she deepened their kiss.

With one hand, he held her against the wooden door carved with initials, numbers and crude phrases, using his other to toy with the frayed edges of the holes in her jeans.

Wriggling against him delightfully, she gasped out, “You’re very strong.”

“You have no idea,” he purred, a thrill of anticipation running through him when he realized that several of the holes along her shapely thighs would aid his explorations quite nicely. Smelling her arousal, he brushed a finger against the ragged hole closest to her center, humming his approval at the way her breath hitched. He added the slightest pressure with his finger, pulling aside the flimsy fuchsia lace of her panties to dip his finger inside. Her warmth enveloped him, making him growl as he stroked her slowly.

Caroline clutched at his white henley, groaning as she rocked against his hand. She angled her head, raining down punishing kisses along his neck, licking his ivory skin. Soon, her fingers brushed against the bulge in his dark trousers and he hissed, fumbling with his zipper as he struggled to free his aching cock. The sound of ripping denim drew his attention and his gray eyes darkened as he watched her tear one of the holes along her crotch until it would easily fit him.

Wasting no time, he pushed his cock in, stretching her as they both sighed at the exhilarating feeling. She tightened her legs around his waist, pulling him further inside with each jerk of her hips. He growled against her lips, gripping her ass as he held her against the door, bucking into her with furious strokes.

“Fuck, right there,” Caroline cooed, running her hands underneath his henley as she lightly scratched at his flexing muscles.

At her sexy muttering, Klaus could feel the beast inside wanting to come out and play. He felt his fangs start to unsheathe as he kissed along her collarbone, and just before he pierced her soft flesh, he realized with a pang that he was reluctant to treat her like another hastily devoured meal. This impressively sexy, confident woman called to him in a way he couldn’t explain, and he didn’t wish to feed in that way. The sweet siren song of her blood sang to him, but he found himself
wanting her to want him to feed from her. To know who he was and to accept him. Impossible. A human could never...

Growling in frustration at this inconvenient need to claim the human as his, he deepened his thrusts, wanting to thoroughly embed himself into her memory. He wanted to forge that connection between them so that when they saw each other again, she would remember that fire between them and crave it once more. She stiffened against him, her blue eyes glittering with lust, and he seductively asked, “Ready to come for me, love?”

Caroline nodded breathlessly, choking out, “Yes, Klaus!” She hooked her arms around his neck, pushing her unbound breasts against his chest, the hardened buds rubbing against him pleasurably. Her core gripped him tightly as she started to spasm, the scintillating smell of her orgasm driving him mad with desire as he spilled inside of her. They clung together for a moment, panting and exchanging slow kisses as their sweat-slicked bodies cooled back down.

She unwound her legs from his waist, adjusting her rumpled clothes while Klaus zipped his trousers. Exchanging naughty smiles as they exited the bathroom, the peculiar red dust tracked onto the flooring caught Klaus’ eye once more.

While he was trying to recall where he had seen it before, Caroline rolled her eyes. “Pretty sure that’s red brick powder. Amateurs,” she sniffed disdainfully.

Before Klaus could ask what she meant, he was distracted by Stefan, who clearly could smell the lingering traces of the beautiful woman’s arousal and had blocked her pathway, his black veins on display. “You didn’t feed from her,” he scoffed, cocking his head to stare at the smooth lines of her pale throat. “Shame. She smells delicious.”

With a snarl, Klaus shoved Stefan several feet away, inwardly relieved that his compulsion from earlier would keep Caroline from being frightened by their displays. Her pulse had not sped up from Stefan’s threatening words and monstrous appearance, so clearly the compulsion held. He stood protectively in front of Caroline and commanded Stefan, “Back off, mate. Caroline is not to be harmed. I have claimed her.”

Laughing in that smoky, seductive voice of hers, the blonde said, “Such a gentleman. But I prefer to do the claiming.”

Klaus’s grin was smug as he enjoyed the sassy blonde’s fruitless attempts at dominance, but then he noticed their new arrival. The wayward werewolf, Ray, stood at the bar, painfully thin with thick facial hair that gave him a haggard appearance. Klaus flashed in front of him before Ray could register the obvious danger he was in. “Ray Sutton,” He said mockingly, “so good of you to join us. I have a business proposition for you.”

The young man eyed Klaus warily and spat, “You’re the Original that’s been hunting me. I won’t tell you where my pack is. And if you think you scare me, you’ve got another thing coming, asshole. I’ve got bigger problems than you right now.”

Stefan chuckled darkly. “You’re an idiot. What could be scarier than a psychotic Original after you and your pack?”

Klaus enjoyed the smell of fear radiating off of Ray, and he wrenched one wiry arm behind Ray’s back, whispering in his ear, “I have all manner of delightful torture in mind for you, werewolf. You’ll break. They always break.” He realized that Ray had stiffened, but it was not at his viselike grip — something else had caught the werewolf’s attention. He studied Ray, surprised to see the sudden terror etched upon his face as his body went rigid.
Caroline’s soft laughter filled the bar. “You cannot possibly be surprised to see me, Ray,” she stated, walking toward the werewolf with slow, deliberate steps. “You foolishly tried to make a barrier of red brick powder at the threshold to keep me out. Silly wolf — barriers only work if the line remains unbroken. Do you realize how many barflies have trampled across your pointless red dust this evening?”

Ray began to sweat under Caroline’s intense perusal, but tried to put on a brave front. “I have more than just brick powder to protect me!” With his free hand, he clutched at the tiny leather bag dangling from a black cord around his neck, shaking it in Caroline’s direction in a manner that Klaus assumed was meant to be threatening if not for the way the werewolf’s hand trembled.

Realizing that the werewolf seemed rooted to the dingy bar floor, Klaus released his arm, stepping back to regard the blonde suspiciously. “And what might you be, love, that our friend Ray believes a puny satchel around his neck will save him, hmm?”

Caroline crossed her arms in front of her chest in irritation. “It’s a gris-gris bag. Meant to ward off my kind. Although considering I’ve known where he’s been all these years, it’s clearly shit.” She peered at the werewolf, cocking an eyebrow as she mocked, “Hope you kept the receipt.”

“Your kind? But I compelled you earlier. You were human,” Stefan protested in confusion, clearly intrigued by the puzzle Caroline presented.

She rolled her eyes, walking over to Ray and snatching away the fake amulet in annoyance. “I’m a loa, a voodoo spirit. I’m from the spirit realm, not the mortal plane, so I can appear as I choose.” She curled the frayed leather cord around one long fingernail as she continued, “And Ray here made a deal with me and it’s time for me to collect his payment.”

Ray shook his head fiercely, but couldn’t quite meet her eyes. “That was years ago. I’m different now,” he muttered. “It’s not fair.”

Fascinated, Klaus pushed Ray to the side, confident that Stefan would keep him from wandering off. He leaned closer to Caroline, breathing in her familiar scent of vanilla and honey laced with scotch. His wolf whined in delight as he caught the intoxicating odor of their combined arousal still clinging to her skin. While he had never come across demonic spirits before, he had heard tales of their fierce natures and incredible power. Recalling the almost feral quality of Caroline’s gaze, he understood now why he had been drawn to this incredible creature. Curious to learn more, he asked, “What kind of deal did our friend make with you, sweetheart?”

She flashed Klaus a wicked grin, allowing her gaze to linger until he could feel his skin burning for her touch once more. “Five years ago, Ray hit a hitchhiker with his truck and drove off like a coward, leaving him to die. Interestingly enough, when he summoned me at the crossroads, rather than ask me to restore the poor mortal, he instead asked me to take away the pain that comes with the werewolf curse.”

Her eyes suddenly glowed a searing red as she venomously glared at the terrified werewolf standing beside Stefan. “You see, Ray knew he had triggered his curse, and he wanted that power that the wolf could bring him — but he was too weak to endure the pain.” She allowed her blazing eyes to return to blue, but the ferocity of her gaze lingered. “I took away Ray’s pain for five years and now it’s time to take his soul to the underworld.”

Stefan spoke up, talking over the werewolf who had started to softly beg Caroline for a reprieve. “But I thought the deals you make last ten years.”
She snorted. “Do I look like Crowley? *Supernatural* is just a TV show, dumbass.” She winked at Klaus. “This is the best minion you could find? He disappoints on so many levels.”

“Indeed,” Klaus agreed, enjoying the scowl that spread across Stefan’s face. While Caroline had been reminiscing about her deal with Ray, he had been considering his options. He had spent months tracking down this werewolf so he could start the experiment to turn Ray’s pack into his first hybrids and he refused to be denied his prize. However, he was far too intrigued to battle her for the werewolf; perhaps they could reach an accord that would benefit them both. “I can’t help but notice that our business interests are the same, sweetheart. May I be so bold as to ask if there is a time limit on collecting Ray’s soul?”

Grinning, Caroline reached over to pat the top of Ray’s sweaty head, ruffling his oily brown hair for good measure. “I suppose I could fudge the numbers a bit...with the right motivation.” Biting her bottom red lip, she asked, “What did you have in mind?”

Klaus could feel his blood warm at the seductive promise of her voice. Smirking, he said, “Tell me, love, would you care to watch an experiment?”
Chapter Summary

This is the sequel that you guys have been requesting to Chapter 21 in this series. Sorry for the delay! Human! Klaus was leading a paranormal investigation team to explore the famed Forbes’ haunted estate. What happens when estate owner and stubborn skeptic Caroline notices something a bit ‘para’ about Klaus’ ‘normal’ behavior?

“No, the menace of the supernatural is that it attacks where modern minds are weakest, where we have abandoned our protective armor of superstition and have no substitute defense.”
— Shirley Jackson, The Haunting of Hill House

This might be a world record for getting dumped. Except we never went out. But there were implications. A brief, electric kiss on the lips is implied social contract. Fairly certain that’s in the Constitution.

Caroline couldn’t hide her confusion as she climbed the basement stairs with Klaus. She had thought they were on the same page about getting together soon and she had started tentatively making plans in her head about when he would travel to Portland to see her. She had tried to start several conversations with him, mentioning favorite local hangouts she wanted to show him, and casually asking about his timeframe for traveling, but she was met with either brief, one-word mutterings or a few notes of that tune he kept whistling. She was at a loss to explain his odd behavior, especially considering that he had seemed interested in her earlier. What happened? She normally was able to avoid alienating the guy until the second date.

Kol and Davina came into view, holding small rectangular instruments that made odd clicking noises whenever they swept them around the parlor. Grinning mischievously, Kol exclaimed, “Finally! Did you and the lovely Caroline wrap up your investigation?” Wiggling his eyebrows suggestively, he added, “Tell me, Nik, was it in-depth?”

Flushing, Caroline immediately looked down at the gleaming cherry floors, muttering under her breath while she waited for Klaus to berate his brother in their usual fashion. When a cold silence greeted her ears, she glanced at him and was hurt to see the impassive, almost vacant expression upon his handsome face.

His voice, oddly devoid of his accent, seemed especially cutting as he didn’t bother looking at her when he flatly answered, “I can assure you nothing untoward occurred between us. My good sir, simply because a young lady dresses like a slattern doesn’t give you leave to behave in such an ungentlemanly manner.”
Blue eyes wide, Caroline said indignantly, “What the hell, Klaus?” She peeked down at her cream peasant blouse and inched the scoop neckline up slightly, but only because the parlor had gotten a bit drafty, she reasoned.

Davina raised a judgmental eyebrow at the exchange, mumbling to Kol, “Christ. Your brother isn’t usually this hopeless at women. Maybe the Oklahoma humidity is getting to him?”

With extreme effort, Kol finally tore his gaze away from Caroline’s fabulous cleavage, frowning at Klaus. “I realize you’re a bit rusty, mate, but most ladies aren’t fans of name-calling.” He paused briefly, adding helpfully, “Well, except in cases where you have a special arrangement with a funny bird who goes in for a bit of slap and tickle before you get down to business, but that usually costs a lad a bit extra.”

At Klaus’ confused expression, Caroline bit out, “Whatever. Do you need me for anything else or can I trust you’ll lock up and give my property manager the keys when you’re done?” She noticed that the sun was almost below the horizon and with a pang of regret, thought about the lonely drive back to the airport. She hated that she’d spend the whole time thinking of the dimpled British bastard and how he had inexplicably run so hot and cold with her during their brief encounter.

Davina stopped her from leaving, her long, dark hair whipping around her as she ordered around everyone in a no-nonsense voice. “Caroline, don’t go yet. Why don’t you come with me and we’ll go upstairs to finish setting up while Kol discusses camera angle concerns and data gathering with his brother.” With an edge in her tone, she glared at Klaus and commanded, “That should give Klaus enough time to pull his head out of his ass.”

Ignoring the group, Klaus turned and began walking out of the parlor, his heavy footsteps echoing on the wooden planks. Kol called after him in irritation, “Oy! Why are you so keen to head back to the basement, Nik? If you found that old git’s treasure, we expect you to share with the rest of us!”

Caroline found it odd how Klaus’ entire body went rigid at Kol’s playful words. She was just getting ready to ask if he’d shoved the treasure up his amazingly toned ass (which would somewhat explain his asshat behavior), when he turned to face the group. His normally beautiful, expressive gray eyes had completely disappeared and he stared at them menacingly with terrifying white orbs. Her heart thudded in her chest when he snarled in a scratchy, unearthly voice, “What do you know of my treasure, boy?!”

Gulping, Kol backed up a step, standing protectively in front of Davina as he tried to draw Klaus’ attention away from Caroline, who was standing the closest to him. “Now mate, whatever is going on here, let’s all calm down.”

With an almost feral roar, Klaus pushed past Caroline and charged toward his brother. Fortunately, his movements seemed oddly out of sync with his body, and Kol and Davina were able to sidestep the furious man. Just before they could meet Caroline at the front door, Klaus leapt in front of the cowering group, effectively cutting off their escape route.

Barely holding back a scream as she looked at the stark white eyes and wrathful, ugly lines that had embedded themselves into Klaus’ face, Caroline’s instincts kicked in. She decisively commanded Kol and Davina, “Follow me!” Then, she quickly ducked underneath Klaus’ outstretched arms, racing toward the grand staircase. From the series of footsteps behind her, she realized that they were keeping up, and she took small comfort knowing that she was not alone in facing whatever was going on.
She gasped for breath as she hopped past the last two stairs and was relieved to see that the master bedroom was at the top of the landing just as she remembered from her mother’s ramblings. She flew into the musty room, Kol and Davina at her heels. They quickly slammed the heavy maple door, trembling with fear as they heard Klaus’ angry bellows. “What the hell is going on,” Caroline shrieked, her hands shaking.

Kol let the back of his head hit the door with a thud, his sweaty chestnut strands sticking out at odd angles. “That,” he panted, glancing at both women, “would be definitive proof of paranormal activity.” He sighed in exasperation when he noticed Davina’s empty hands. “And I bet we didn’t get any of it on camera. Do you even have your camera on you?”

Davina angrily glanced down at her tight black tank top emblazoned with the Original Investigations company logo and her skinny jeans, viciously answering, “Where the hell would I put a camera?”

Kol’s brown eyes lingered on her cleavage, but he managed to bite his tongue and instead turned to Caroline to ask, “Why in blazes did you have us run up here? You’ve gone mad if you think we can subdue an angry spirit with a few dusty doilies.”

“There’s no way Klaus was letting us run out the front door so I had to improvise,” Caroline yelled. “My mother has been droning on and on about renovating this place and her latest fixation has been on the fireplace in the master bedroom.” She gestured toward the opposite wall that boasted an enormous, hand-carved white marble mantle and hearth. “More specifically, she says finds the cast iron fireplace tools ‘common’ and has had lengthy conversations with the property manager about suitable replacements.”

She looked somewhat sheepish as she added, “I may have caught an episode or two of Supernatural and recalled that iron repels ghosts. Or, maybe there’s a perfectly rational explanation like Klaus having a psychotic break; in which case, I bet a couple of whacks to his skull will still do the trick.”

Davina looked at her incredulously, asking faintly, “You gambled all of our lives on an TV show? A CW TV show?”

“Let’s not be hasty, little bird,” Kol said soothingly, “Those scruffy devils didn’t get it all wrong.” he admitted, flipping open the pouch in his leather tool belt to pull out a small carton of table salt.

“Seriouslly?! In between you shipping Destiel, you picked up some ghostbusting lessons?” Caroline rolled her eyes as she walked across the room and pulled out the tools from the ornate cast iron stand. The reassuring weight of the fireplace poker, shovel and tongs seemed to ground her, giving her strength.

Kol frowned as he took the poker from her. “No need to get shirty.”

Davina took the tongs, eyeing the sharp, curved ends warily as she mumbled, “He’s actually a closet Sastiel shipper.”

Brown eyes widening, he whipped his head around to glare at Davina. “Is nothing sacred, little bird? Besides, I never said I shipped them, I just said it was nice when they set aside their differences and worked together to save Dean,” he finished defensively.

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Caroline tried to get the two to focus. “So, are we really saying that your brother has been possessed by the ghost of my great-great-grandfather?”
Kol shrugged, “Did anyone else with unfinished business die here violently?” At Caroline’s headshake, he said grimly, “Okay then, that’s John Forbes out there.”

They suddenly heard the heavy footsteps outside the bedroom door, accompanied by the creepy, somewhat familiar tune that Klaus had been whistling earlier. The sickly-sweet notes seemed to slide over their trembling bodies, chilling them where they stood.

“Oh God,” Davina urgently whispered, “I think that’s ‘Beautiful Dreamer’. I had to sing that in my school’s talent show when I was a kid. I didn’t think it was possible for that song to get any creepier.”

Caroline gripped the iron shovel tightly in her sweaty palms. She answered faintly, “I think that’s the song John would whistle for my great-great-grandmother, Rosalie, while they were courting.”

“Was she a psychopath too,” Davina screeched as Klaus began pounding on the locked door with both fists.

Ignoring the girl, Caroline whispered to Kol, “Do you know how to exorcise a ghost? We need a plan now.”

He thought for a minute, and then shook the container of salt in her face. “Clearly John Forbes’ unfinished business is linked to the treasure. The spirit will have no choice but to move on to the afterlife once we locate the treasure.” At Caroline’s skeptical expression, he explained, “Think about it! Your father died in the basement with a shovel. That teenager that died here a decade ago was found in the basement. The ghost kept trying to direct Klaus’ body back to the basement and he only became enraged after I mentioned the treasure.”

“I doubt Klaus is going to willingly walk into a ring of salt,” Davina said, clicking her iron tongs impatiently, “It could get messy.”

Caroline felt her stomach drop at the thought of hurting Klaus. Surely between the three of them, they could avoid causing too much harm? Adjusting the weight of the iron shovel in her hand, she tried to block out the haunting, undeniably terrifying whistling that continued outside of the door. She whispered to her companions, “If we quickly open the door, it will take him by surprise. Kol should stand in his line of sight so he’ll rush toward him. Davina and I will come in from the sides and knock him out.”

Kol looked at her in amazement and whispered, “Your plan is to use me as bait? Bloody hell woman, when my brother’s himself again, he’s probably going to ask you to marry him.”

Hating the slight flutter that Kol’s teasing words caused, she squared her shoulders, lightly stepping toward the door with Davina. Once they were all in position, Caroline quickly unlocked the door, throwing it open and barely withholding a scream as Klaus barged in. As predicted, he immediately went after his brother, throttling him with a disturbing about of strength that lifted his feet off of the ground a couple of inches. The white orbs were somehow filled with mindless rage and his lips were pulled back into a fierce snarl. Kol accidentally dropped the fire poker, the heavy iron falling to the cherry floor with a resounding thud.

Caroline and Davina quickly ran to Kol’s aid, each taking a side as they swung their weapons at Klaus. Unfortunately, because their strokes were timid in their efforts not to hurt him, Klaus let go of Kol long enough to easily toss Davina several feet. Terrified by the cruelty she saw reflected in that dead gaze, Caroline brought down the blunt end of her iron shovel on the back of his curly head, knocking him down. He seemed somewhat dazed as he struggled to get back up,
but she brought down the weapon several more times until he was completely knocked out.

She stood over Klaus’ body, relieved to see that he was still breathing. Shovel in hand, she glanced over at Kol and Davina and commented wryly, “Still not the worst date I’ve been on.”

Kol and Davina exchanged questioning glances, but quickly got to work helping her move Klaus toward the edge of the four-poster bed. They added the ring of salt on the floor and secured his limp arms around one of the intricately carved maple posts with several plastic zip ties they normally used for storing equipment cables.

Studying his handiwork with the restraints, Kol said cheekily, “It’s just like how most of my dates end.”

Davina scoffed, “Please. The one time I tried to get you to wear the furry pink handcuffs, you started sweating like crazy and mumbling something about carpal tunnel.”

“Can we focus here? Can the ghost jump bodies and possess one of us? Is that a thing,” Caroline asked in a tone full of concern. “What if one of us is possessed right now? How would we know?”

“Well, I’d assume if one of us was possessed by your great-great-grandfather, there would probably be some signs like an urge to snort Viagra.” He turned around to face Davina and asked, “Little bird, you once dated my oldest brother, Finn, who’s practically an AARP member, can you tell us what it’s like to have an old codger inside you?”

By the fierce glint in Davina’s dark eyes, Caroline was fairly certain a fight was brewing that they did not have time for. She hastily asked, “So this salt ring — even if Klaus wakes up, the ghost can’t cross the barrier, right?”

“Right,” Kol answered. “Salt binds the spirit and the possessed body cannot move without it burning them. So, let’s go find the treasure and finish this.”

The trio hurried out of the room, weapons still in hand as they headed toward the basement. Caroline paused at the threshold, biting her lip nervously. She steeled herself for finally seeing the room where her father died. So much had happened in such a short time that she hadn’t fully processed the fact that there was likely more to her father’s death than just a mere heart attack. She grimaced as she realized that her great-great-grandfather probably killed him in his mad search for the Dalton brothers’ treasure. Full of trepidation, she walked into the basement, watching curiously as Kol quickly poured a thin line of salt across the threshold.

“Just in case,” he said grimly.

She had questioned how long they would need to search to find the hidden treasure, but the ghost had made it surprisingly obvious. The wooden planks from the floor had been crudely ripped open near one wall, and they all raced to see what was inside. Davina gleefully shouted as she kneeled down and reached into the exposed space, pulling out multiple bags, the dusty gold coins tumbling carelessly out of the rough canvas sacks. They all cautiously touched the coins, amazed at the wealth they had uncovered. Their excitement was short-lived, however, when an inhuman growl at the open doorway startled them.

White eyes glaring, Klaus’ menacing frame crowded the doorway. “That treasure is mine,” he snarled threateningly.

“It’s okay,” Kol said, eyeing the salt line carefully. “The ghost is bound by the salt barrier
and can’t cross the threshold.”

“Really? Then explain how he escaped from the one upstairs,” Davina shrieked, tightly gripping the iron tongs in her hands.

Kol thought for a moment, and happened to look down at his sneakers, shutting his eyes in irritation when he realized his laces had come untied. “I must have accidentally broken the salt ring when we were tying him up. Damn it, the spirit is stronger than I thought — he tore through the plastic zip ties.”

Caroline took a deep breath, trying to make sense of everything. “Okay, so he escaped, but we found the treasure. Shouldn’t that take care of his unfinished business? Why is the ghost still possessing him?”

Davina’s voice was unnaturally quiet as she replied, “Maybe because the treasure wasn’t John Forbes’ only unfinished business.”

Curious, Caroline looked at the girl and was immediately nervous when she saw how the blood seemed to have drained from her face as she stared down at the exposed hole in the floor. “What else is down there,” she asked uncertainly, her stomach in knots. Together with Kol, they started prying off additional floorboards, gasping when they saw what Davina had caught a glimpse of.

Klaus howled, “No!” The anguish tore through his body as he collapsed to his knees, helplessly watching the trio from the threshold.

A shriveled corpse dressed in the decayed remnants of what was once a lacy Victorian dress greeted them. “What the hell,” Caroline gasped, unable to tear her eyes away from the horrifying image. She unwillingly kept cataloguing new details, such as the silver locket wrapped around the throat, or the few strands of long blonde hair that stubbornly clung to the skull.

“Rosalie,” Klaus called out hoarsely, unable to raise his head as he stared at his hands in despair.

“No,” Caroline said, stubbornly shaking her head. “My great-great-grandmother didn’t die in Oklahoma. The hot summers made her ill and she went back to the East Coast to live with relatives.”

“I spread that falsehood. I discovered that cursed locket and she confessed Emmett Dalton had given it to her and she was running away with him. I strangled her with it and then hid her body with the treasure,” Klaus explained, finally lifting his head, the ghostly white orbs disappearing into Klaus’ familiar steel gaze. Suddenly, his entire body shook as a wisp of smoke rose, floating in the air briefly before finally evaporating.

With a start, Klaus leapt to his feet, looking at the group with wild eyes. “Is it over? Are you all okay?”

Caroline was relieved to hear his familiar accent had returned, but Kol said suspiciously, “We’re fine. Are you, Nik? Why don’t you prove it by crossing that salt barrier?”

They all seemed to hold their breath as Klaus stepped over the line, all relaxing as they realized they were safe. Klaus immediately took Caroline in his arms, hugging her tightly as he kissed her blonde curls. “I would never have forgiven myself if I had hurt you, sweetheart,” he shakily confessed.
Caroline allowed herself to melt in his comforting embrace. She breathed in his spicy cologne and knew she had never felt more at peace. She looked up at him and answered, “Um, sorry about whacking you over the head with the fireplace shovel,” she said awkwardly.

He snorted, “Unfortunately, I suspect that won’t be the last time you get the urge to do that.”

Interrupting the couple’s playful banter, a scowling Kol grumbled, “Bloody hell, after all that, we still didn’t capture a bit of it on camera.”

Shaking her head, Davina grabbed Kol’s hand and said, “Let’s just be grateful we all made it through in one piece.” Together, they exited the basement to head upstairs and call the police.

Realizing they were alone once more, Klaus flashed Caroline a mischievous smirk and said, “I swear our second date will at least include dinner, love.”

She chuckled, reaching up to kiss him soundly on the lips. As she pulled away she said, “You sure know how to show a girl a good time.” She started to follow Klaus as he left the basement, but instead her curiosity got the better of her and she knelt beside the hole in the floor once more.

At Klaus’ raised eyebrow she explained, “I just want to see what all the fuss is about,” and then carefully reached down to remove the silver locket. Seemingly fascinated by the morbid artifact, her fingers lightly traced the delicate lines. Shaking her head, she kept the locket clutched it in her hand as she stood back up to face Klaus.

He stood on the other side of the doorway, watching her curiously. “Aren’t you ready to get out of here, sweetheart?”

Caroline studied him, taking her time answering until she noticed the way his heavy boot had brushed against the salt line. She suddenly flashed him a brilliant smile as she accepted his hand to cross the threshold. “Yes. It feels like I’ve been stuck in this basement for ages.”
Chapter Summary

I recently asked on my tumblr for suggestions on which of my stories needed a sequel next and I received a lot of requests for this sequel to Chapter 15 in this series. In this chapter, the mighty hybrid Klaus suffered a minor setback when he made some “ass’umptions about Caroline. Will Kol be the unlikely hero needed to convince the immortal Greek sorceress to reverse her spell?

“Ah, how shameless — the way these mortals blame the gods. From us alone they say come all their miseries, yes, but they themselves with their own reckless ways compound their pains beyond their proper share.”

— Homer, *The Odyssey*

Regardless of how sweet the victory of self-indulgent gloating can be, it fails to mask the stench of manure. The sour expression on Caroline’s face reflected that sentiment as she watched Kol grumbling under his breath while he mucked out the dappled gray pony’s stall. She rubbed the animal’s nose affectionately, causing the bitter Original to snort. “Don’t get too comfortable with that mangy beast — pretty sure it tried to bite my arm off the other day when you made me clean his hooves.”

“Don’t be ridiculous. Those are just little love bites. Stefan is perfectly harmless — now. In fact, given his penchant for tedious self-reflection about his addiction and codependency issues that he clearly has no interest in changing, I would say I did him a favor.”

“Yeah, you’re a giver,” he muttered, stomping the soles of his rubber boots as he scooped dirty straw with a long pitchfork. He groaned when one of his boot heels made an unpleasant squelching sound as he stepped in the center of a pile of manure. “Bollocks! Horses are filthy, disgusting beasts.”

Caroline chuckled, flicking the end of her elaborate blonde plait behind one shoulder. “You’re certainly judgmental for a creature that spent almost every waking hour frolicking in the mud hole.”

Piling more soiled straw into the wheelbarrow, Kol huffed, “Not my fault, Circe! You’re the one who turned me into a bloody pig!”

She giggled, lightly tangling her fingers in the long white mane of the pony at her side. “I told you to call me Caroline. After all, I feel like we’ve grown closer this past month, Kol. After your brother, Klaus, came to visit, he was quite insistent that I restore you. His appalling manners
convinced me he needed a little *upgrade* instead.” She smiled wickedly at the memory of the furious hybrid who had stormed into her petting zoo and demanded that she change his brother back. His rage made him all the more appealing, but his arrogance was rather off-putting. Honestly, Klaus was already mostly jackass anyway; she barely had to work any magic to complete his transformation into a donkey.

Kol emitted a few stray oinks, causing him to flush with embarrassment. “Damn it, when is this supposed to wear off?!”

She arched an eyebrow, studying him closely. “Perhaps when you stop thinking like a pig. Admit it — how many jokes about donkey shows did you just think of?”

He wiped some of the sweat off of his forehead and answered petulantly, “Two.” At her disbelieving snort, he threw his hands in the air and admitted, “Fine! Five! But technically just three because the fourth joke is really a two-parter.” At Stefan’s sharp whinny, he scowled, noticing the steaming pile of manure he just deposited. “How much longer am I to be your bloody stable boy until you agree to fix Nik?”

She shrugged, the neckline of her blue and white crochet tank top dipping a fraction to reveal the edge of her tattoo, the four interlocking circles of the mark of Circe. “You could always tell Elijah about your troubles. From what you’ve mentioned, he sounds like he would be familiar with cleaning up after his brothers’ messes.”

He tugged off his leather work gloves in aggravation. “Please. That judgmental wanker enjoys wagging his finger and reminding us of our failures. And believe me, that stuffy bastard has a long memory.” He leaned on the handle of his metal pitchfork, whispering conspiratorially, “He still brings up that spot of trouble with those overenthusiastic revolutionaries. I’ll admit I was getting right pissed with King George III and innocently may have dared him. In my defense, I had no idea those plucky colonists would be so sensitive about taxes.”

Caroline gave a dry chuckle, “It’s like the time I tried to warn Sophocles that radical, free-thinking philosophers and a rigid, superstitious society mix about as well as a hemlock smoothie.” At Kol’s surprised laughter, she smiled, coming to a decision. “I will consider releasing Klaus from his punishment early if you can procure two bushels of Oymyakon Snowdrop petals.”

He was so surprised he lost his grip on the pitchfork, the metal pinging as it hit the warped planks of the barn floor. “Blimey, woman, you are sending me to quite possibly the most ball-freezingest place in Russia to brave the caves of the Likhoradka? Those grimy, hairy creatures have these pustules that ooze and they’re right misers when it comes to those flowers. I’ll be kissing their greasy arses, and in some cases literally, for weeks just to get even a quarter of the amount you need.”

With one final affectionate pat between Stefan’s dark gray-tipped ears, she favored Kol with an unimpressed look and added, “And before you leave on your trip, please rebraid Stefan’s mane and tail. But watch out for his love bites — he seems very particular about his mane.”

Crossing his arms in front of his chest, he grumbled, “Fine.”

With an impish smile, Caroline walked out of the barn, calling back to Kol, “That’ll do, pig. That’ll do.”
Later that afternoon, Caroline was grinding dried mint leaves when she was rudely interrupted by her newest employee, Davina. The vibrant young woman had fire and energy but possessed a surprisingly gentle touch when it came to caring for the animals at Circe’s Creatures. Right now, that passionate fire was directed at Caroline: “What the hell, C? Kol just told me you’re forcing him to go all the way to Russia for Oymyakon Snowdrop petals!”

She stomped her foot on the stone floor, her dark hair flying around her head like an angry halo. “I know I just catalogued a whole shipment for you just last week.” Her eyes searched the greenhouse furiously, finally resting along the back wall which was completely full of containers of the dried petals. “Ah ha! Knew it! I’m texting Kol right now to tell him not to waste his time. I can’t believe you were seriously going to make him spend a couple of months freezing his ass off with those oozing Russian cave creatures!”

Nodding to herself, Caroline set down the quartz mortar and pestle, eyeing Davina carefully. “You started working here two weeks ago and met Kol on your first day, correct?”

“Yeah, why,” the girl said defensively, balling up her fists.

Caroline cocked an eyebrow and said in a bored tone, “Let me guess — he accidentally ran into you and a bright yellow daffodil fell out of his pocket and when you asked him about it, he stammered and finally admitted that he picked it for the prettiest girl in all the land that had captured his poor, foolish soul and he’d be a bloody fool to let you get away.”

Davina scoffed and said in a voice full of indignation, “That’s not exactly how it happened. Besides, he confessed to me just the other day that he’s ready to fully commit to me and that he’s never done anything like this before. He took me to his favorite pub over on White Oak Lane and he made me this out of our straws.” She reached in the front pocket of her jeans and slammed down an elaborately knotted black plastic rune onto the worn work table. Her voice went up an octave as she explained, “It’s a kenaz, the Viking rune for eternity. He said that our connection had transformed him and he felt alive for the first time in centuries.”

Caroline took a moment to examine the rune, seeming to reach a decision. She stretched one arm across the wide work table, plucking the lid off of a red and black clay jar. She rooted around for a moment, pulling out several knotted black plastic runes and carefully set them in a row in front of the confused girl. Pointing at each one, she revealed, “Kol gave that one to my receptionist, Vicky, about three weeks ago. That one, he gave to my friend, Bonnie, yesterday.”

Her voice barely above a strangled whisper, Davina asked, “And the third one?”

She wryly answered, “He tried to give me that one in a bar the first time we met. He had the audacity to grab my breasts and swore he was blind.” Blue eyes darkening slightly, she divulged, “I turned him into a pig.” With a careless shrug, she added, “How you choose to handle your man trouble is up to you.”

Without another word, Davina immediately whipped out her phone and furiously began typing. At Caroline’s curious expression, she explained with a wicked smile, “I’m texting Kol that you’ve demanded three times the amount you originally told him.”

After Davina left to undoubtedly plot other nefarious schemes because of Kol’s incorrigible wandering eye, Caroline strolled out to the small paddock in the shade of an apple orchard. She tended to wander there near the end of each day, although she would be loath to admit the real
reason why. As she leaned against the white fence, her pink lips curved into a small grin as she watched Klaus covertly observe a group of children playing among the fluttering autumn leaves underneath the trees. He flicked his pointed ears inquisitively as their high-pitched giggles floated on the gentle breeze.

When she had first transformed Klaus into a donkey, he had been predictably angry, lashing out at the petting zoo workers who came near him by kicking and biting. However, after a week or so, he seemed to have turned his anger inward and instead kept to himself, stubbornly refusing to come out of his stall. Caroline had seen this as a challenge, and had taken to calling him Eeyore for the amusement of seeing his large eyes narrow in what would have been threatening if not for the intermittent braying, and then he would huff in annoyance, stomping his small hooves.

While she had begun purposely seeking him out just to irritate him, soon, however, her intentions shifted. Her fascination began in small ways, in which she would tell him about her day just to see his still very Klaus-like reactions, from jerking his head in irritation or snorting derisively. After a while, she found herself telling him stories of her time on the island of Aeaea and her adventures with a ship full of hopelessly lost Greeks who were too stubborn to ask for directions. Despite his growing frustration with her, it was clear Klaus’ curiosity had gotten the better of him, and he would listen to her stories intently, his pointed ears twitching.

She occasionally even spoke to him about her family, how her sea nymph mother instilled within her a deep connection with the ocean and had taught her how to make the waves dance. Her voice would grow harsh when she mentioned her father, though, and the terrible burden of never meeting the sun god’s impossible expectations. Klaus would flick his tail at the marked change in her tone, and then would surprise her by affectionately butting his head against her hip.

The children’s sing-song voices interrupted Caroline’s wistful thoughts, and she frowned when she noted the teasing lilt of their tone. As she quietly observed the small group, it appeared that they were making fun of one small girl for not being able to run as fast, and they scampered off, leaving the child by herself. A few sniffles escaped, followed by a clumsy kick into a particularly tall pile of colorful leaves. Flurries of crimson, copper, and gold filtered through the air as the girl stormed off, stubbornly swiping at her reddened cheeks.

Caroline’s blue eyes widened in surprise when Klaus let out a soft grunt, capturing the child’s attention. She hesitantly moved toward the paddock, softly crooning to him. Normally Klaus avoided the children and kept to the shadows. Since the petting zoo was overflowing with a variety of animals, none of the guests seemed to mind. She watched in amazement as Klaus’ eyes seemed to soften as he studied the girl’s trembling fingers. He slowly pushed his nose through the rails of the white fence and patiently waited for her to feel safe enough to pet him.

A gasp left Caroline’s lips as she saw how Klaus had disarmed the little girl, whose tears seemed to have stopped as she patted his nose. A tremulous smile could be seen on the child’s face as she whispered softly to him and he seemed to answer her with gentle grunts. When she walked away, it was with a skip in her step and a familiar youthful exuberance that always brought a smile to Caroline’s face.

Klaus flicked his coarse tail, signaling that he finally noticed Caroline’s presence. He casually moved toward her in what he clearly tried to model after a swagger but with his tiny hooves was actually more of a steady clop. An amused noise escaped her as she greeted him with, “Hello, Eeyore.”

He jerked his head, letting out a huff of irritation, but continued until he was standing in front of her. Even as a transformed farm animal, he had inexplicably maintained his powerful aura,
that magnetic presence that seemed to both invite and intimidate.

Caroline considered him, finally releasing a soft sigh. “I saw you just now.” She nodded in the direction in which the little girl had disappeared. “You offered comfort. Not something you freely give.”

His tail twitched, but otherwise he stared at her in the same inscrutable way of his, as though he could flay open her soul with just the heat of his gaze and lay all her secrets bare. Caroline rolled her eyes, groaning in aggravation. She leaned over the wooden railing, deftly plucking a single coarse hair from Klaus’ short mane. Muttering a complex enchantment, she wrapped the rough strand around her index finger until she felt the familiar tug of magic flood her ancient body.

A startled braying noise echoed throughout the deserted barnyard, growing deeper as it roughened into a man’s snarling voice. His bristled hide seemed to melt, rapidly being replaced by miles of smooth, pale skin. He crouched down in the sweet-smelling clover, long ears shrinking as they rounded. His long nose was drawn inward, his small hooves broadening and being replaced by human flesh. He remained in a huddled position on the ground, muscles trembling underneath his sweat-slicked skin. When he finally felt like himself once more, he slowly stood, unconcerned with his nudity as he faced her with an unreadable expression upon his handsome face.

“Welcome back, Eeyore,” Caroline greeted him dryly.

Anger flickered in that steel gaze, but his tone was almost teasing as he answered, “Considering the heated glances you gave me in my other form love, I’m starting to believe you have a bit of a cartoon fetish.”

“Nonsense,” she said airily. “If I was going to sexualize my love for Winnie the Pooh characters, it would always be Tigger. Just imagine the stamina.” At her words, she noticed the way his hips gave an involuntary twitch and she could barely contain a giggle as she realized his body wanted to flick his phantom donkey tail.

He easily leapt over the white fence to land next to her, leaning in dangerously close as he rumbled, “I’m not one to shy away from a challenge. After all, enemies have the potential for explosive bedfellows.”

Caroline gazed up at him, amused by his seduction laced with the hint of intimidation. “You consider us enemies still?” She trailed her fingertips across his firm chest, delighting in the way his body began to respond to the warmth of her touch. “I would say we’re well on our way to a deeper connection.”

His snort of derision comically morphed into a loud braying noise which he quickly tried to cover up with a strangled cough. Once his voice returned to normal, he said, “You’ve gone mad if you think I’d ever trust you.”

Caroline let out a throaty laugh and before Klaus could react, she grabbed his face and pulled his lips down to hers. She kissed him as though she was claiming him, marking him thoroughly with her talented tongue as she explored his mouth. He gave a moan of surprise, tightening his hold as he deepened their kiss. She broke away suddenly, giving him a flirtatious smile. “Who said anything about trust? Connections can be forged in infinite ways, Klaus. We’ll talk again after you’ve had a chance to consider all the possibilities.” At his baffled expression, she tipped him a saucy wink, leaving him to ponder her intriguing words.
Later that evening, Caroline was walking down the street clutching takeout from her favorite Lebanese restaurant. The smell of succulent lamb shawarma marinating in caramelized onions, garlic and parsley flooded her senses and almost distracted her from the couple loudly arguing up ahead. Keeping to the shadows, she observed a stern-looking gentleman with exceptionally coiffed hair lecturing a stunning brunette. “How could you be so callous, Katerina? Your blatant disregard for human life is baffling. Do you ever think of those poor souls’ families and the devastation you have wrought?”

The woman was clearly stung by his sharp words, but she held her head high as she answered, “You’re an Original, Elijah. My body count pales in comparison to yours. Stop being such a filthy hypocrite.”

Caroline smiled a secret smile when she realized this was Klaus and Kol’s elder brother who considered himself their moral compass/babysitter. His strong jaw tightened and he scoffed at his companion in a condescending tone, “I cannot continue to suffer such disappointment where you are concerned, Katerina. What I need in my life is someone whose goodness is such that it cannot be measured. In fact, it’s almost as though it doesn’t exist. And this person will embody all of my unattainably high standards in a way that is only visible to me.” He flashed away with a flourish, leaving behind the furious woman who began an impressive stretch of cursing in Bulgarian.

Caroline approached her with a knowing smile and declared, “Pardon me, but I couldn’t help but overhear. You know, I find man trouble to be a relatively easy fix.” Her blue eyes were alight with mischief as she asked, “Tell me dear, how do you feel about weasels?”
Romances with Wolves

Chapter Summary

In this human!Klaroline story, Caroline has developed an inconvenient crush on her ridiculously attractive coworker at the wolf sanctuary. Throw in missed signals and then mixed signals, a snarky best friend and a mischievous little brother and it’s enough to make anyone howl.

“A gentleman is simply a patient wolf.”

— Lana Turner

The wolf’s gray-tipped ears immediately twitched as Caroline Forbes stepped into view. Suddenly, the animal leapt through the air with the ferocity and grace of a powerful predator, hurling its massive body against the petite woman’s. She quickly crouched, planting her feet wide so that she could take the brunt of the hit without falling on her backside. As the wolf began enthusiastically licking her cheek, she giggled, telling it softly, “And good morning to you, too, Loki,” giving the alpha male an affectionate rub behind his ears.

An amused chuckle startled her, and she felt her body instantly warm as the familiar voice flowed over her, his seductive British accent making her heart flutter. “So this is why Loki wasn’t with the rest of his pack this morning; he was far too busy wooing a pretty blonde.” Klaus Mikaelson stood outside of the large enclosure, smirking down at her. She had started working with him at the Moonstone Wolf Sanctuary a month ago and still couldn’t seem to control the way her body instinctively reacted to his presence. It didn’t help the fact that even though he had implied he was in a relationship, he was still a friendly, if somewhat flirty fixture in her professional life.

Klaus was the animal care supervisor at the sanctuary, overseeing the feeding and health of the wolves, which meant that he worked closely with Caroline, the newly hired vet. From the moment she met him, it was obvious how much he cared for the animals, from the way he looked at his charges with respect and even reverence, to his compassion for when one of them became sick or injured. Caroline had grown up around large dogs and always had been drawn to the graceful beauty of wolves, so to find a kindred spirit in her coworker had been both a blessing and a curse.

It was no secret that Klaus was quite possibly the most beautiful specimen of a man she had ever encountered, but add in the fact that he seemed to share her passion for taking care of wolves, and he was irresistible. No one in her life had ever really understood the passion she felt for her work, and the fact that she now got to interact with wolves on a daily basis, a goal she’d had since she was a child, was a dream come true. Except she had developed a completely inconvenient (not to mention inappropriate) crush on her coworker.

She still recalled how she had been trying to slyly get to know Klaus those first couple of
weeks, asking about his family and hobbies, and she felt like she was making great progress. She had just started working up the nerve to ask him out when he had gotten this enormous grin on his handsome face. And started talking about this guy named Stefan. “We’ve been through a lot together. I can’t imagine what my life would be like without him,” he had confessed, the fondness in his voice sending stabbing pains through her heart. So, he was clearly taken. And she had no business lusting after someone else’s boyfriend.

She had managed to force out the brightest smile imaginable and told him with the utmost cheer, “That’s fantastic you found each other.” She would have given anything in that moment to have been able to enthusiastically extoll the virtues of her own boyfriend to show Klaus that she wasn’t a sad, lonely loser who threw herself into her work so she didn’t have to think about how alone she was, but there was no boyfriend (mostly for all of the reasons she just listed), so instead she started telling him all about Enzo.

Enzo had been her best friend in high school and college, and they had been there for each other through some rough times. He had helped her cope when her mother died of cancer and she had supported him as he figured out his sexuality — no easy feat in the narrow-minded, small town where they grew up. The kinship they shared was something she wouldn’t trade for the world, but she sometimes worried that she would never connect with anyone else the way that she had with him. She had been so caught up in telling Klaus the amusing story of their high school graduation and how she had to wear stripper pasties and a thong in the school’s colors underneath her graduation gown because she lost a bet with Enzo, that she hadn’t noticed the way Klaus’ strong jaw had tightened and something dark had flashed in his gray eyes.

She did notice that for a few days afterward, Klaus had been a bit distant, but she had been somewhat relieved because she had been trying to figure out how to “de-crush” so that she could learn how to be just friends with Klaus. Fortunately, they had finally gotten over the awkwardness between them and had returned to their teasing banter and made a wonderful team at the sanctuary.

Snapping fingers grabbed her attention, forcing her out of her reminiscing. “Earth to Caroline. Did you hear me, love,” Klaus asked, his grin widening as he watched Loki sweetly nuzzle her neck.

“Sorry,” she answered with a blush, “I’m just not with it today, I guess.” She allowed him to help her up, brushing the dust from her jeans as she reached for her large medical bag, flicking open the two metal latches to rifle through the top drawer.

“I suppose Enzo kept you up last night,” Klaus offered, an odd tightness to his voice.

Caroline wondered if he was coming down with something. She made a mental note to suggest he take some vitamin C since Hel, one of their timber wolves, was due to have her litter possibly later that week and Caroline had no interest in one of their flaky interns assisting her during delivery. “Come to think of it, he did come back home with this icky zombie apocalypse game and I swear between the noise and the disturbing imagery, it was tough to get a good night’s sleep. One of these days, his PlayStation is going to overheat from all the hours he spends on that thing,” she said fondly.

She and Enzo shared a townhouse, the only way she could balance her massive student loan debt from vet school and still have a gorgeous view of scenic White Oak Park. Enzo was still working on his Ph.D. in engineering, so he was thankful for the extra stability her half of the rent offered.

“He spends his free time playing videogames instead of doing things with you,” Klaus asked, a wrinkle appearing on his forehead as he frowned.
Caroline shrugged, pulling out her stethoscope to listen to Loki’s lungs. “His schedule is packed between his dissertation and his teaching assistant responsibilities, so I guess when he gets home, he just wants to relax.” She was relieved to hear that the beautiful gray wolf’s lungs were clear. Whatever respiratory issues she had discovered a few days ago appeared to be clearing up nicely with the special cocktail of antibiotics she’d administered. “We did go see the new King Kong movie last weekend. Enzo has a thing for giant apes.”

Klaus muttered under his breath, something that sounded suspiciously like, “No surprise there,” but otherwise, seemed content to watch her examine the wolf.

“What about you and Stefan? Do you guys have big plans for this weekend” she asked, trying to keep the edge out of her voice as she said Stefan’s name. She realized that it was completely irrational the way she hated the feel of those pretentious-sounding syllables in her mouth. At her age, she really should be able to rise above this kind of petty bullshit. Stefan. What a stupid name.

Klaus seemed somewhat uncomfortable as he helped keep the large wolf steady while Caroline finished her exam. “Actually, Stefan and I are throwing a party Saturday night and wanted to invite you and Enzo if you weren’t busy.”

She froze, fingers clutching unnecessarily at the wolf’s thick coat. Did she really want to spend her Saturday night watching the gorgeous man beside her rub it in her face that he was passionately in love with someone else? She inwardly scolded herself for being such a terrible, selfish friend. Klaus was her partner and a wonderful, caring man, and she should want to be closer friends with him. Maybe the best way to get rid of this inconvenient crush on Klaus was to swallow her pride and meet his boyfriend. Surely once she saw how blissfully happy Klaus and Stefan were, she could move on with her life? Or, if that failed, at least she could drag Enzo along and they could get hammered until it didn’t hurt so much to see someone else make Klaus smile.

Caroline gave Klaus her best former beauty queen fake smile as she chirped cheerfully, “That sounds absolutely wonderful — we’ll be there!”

“That sounds like a completely avoidable disaster, gorgeous,” Enzo quipped from above her on their comfy leather couch, leaning over to squint at her as she sprawled out on their floor.

She rubbed both hands over her face, pausing to massage her temples that had started to throb as she began to panic at the prospect of being in such close proximity to Klaus and his partner while drinking. What if she made a complete ass out of herself? Her filter was known to malfunction when she reached a certain level of inebriation and the last thing she wanted to do was make Klaus uncomfortable by accidentally blurting out her feelings for him when it was obvious he was in a happy, committed relationship.

She groaned, “What the fuck is wrong with me, Enzo? The second I found out he was taken, not to mention gay, my feelings should have shifted to something more akin to a friendship/sibling-type situation, like how I feel about you.”

“Feelings can’t be controlled like a faucet, dumbass,” he pointed out helpfully. “Also, you know better than to make labeling assumptions. Sure, Klaus might be gay, or he might be bisexual, or maybe he’s figured out that the world is his delicious, all-you-can-eat buffet just like I did,” he added, furiously wiggling his eyebrows.
Caroline could hear the slight hint of reproach in her best friend’s voice, and she sat up, squeezing his hand as she replied quietly. “You’re right. I’m sorry.” She sighed, tugging on the frayed hem of her worn jeans. “I’m so pathetic I actually have this detailed fantasy in my head of how Klaus and Stefan will breakup. How awful is that? I’m a terrible, awful person, Enzo.”

Enzo flopped onto the carpet beside her, pulling her into his arms and giving her a reassuring hug. “You’re only awful if you don’t tell me all the spicy details in this fantasy you’ve cooked up. Does it involve an evil doppelganger? Maybe some ancient, supernatural creature burdened with a surprising abundance of mommy/daddy issues? Tell me, what level of primetime soapy goodness have you sunk to?”

Caroline chuckled. “Nothing too drastic. Just maybe Klaus realizing that he and I have all this inexplicable chemistry and maybe he doesn’t feel that way about Stefan anymore.” At Enzo’s derisive snort, she crossed her arms, adding defensively, “I mean, if he’s into women. My fine china is magical, but even I’m not such an asshole I think it could change someone’s sexuality.”

Enzo petted her messy blonde curls playfully. “I’m so disappointed in your lack of imagination. Where’s the drama? A boring, amicable breakup, really? At least have the decency to give me some Ru Paul-level shade about Stefan. Come on, anyone named Stefan probably spends hours shaping his hair, so maybe Klaus inadvertently uses all of his sculpting wax and it just escalates from there until Klaus realizes he’s been in love with you all along.”

Caroline couldn’t stop the giggles that burst out of her, elbowing Enzo in the ribs as they collapsed into a heap on the floor. At least she could count on Enzo to keep her laughing during what would probably be the most awkward party of her life.

Her heart thudded in her chest as they rang the doorbell to a beautifully restored Colonial home in the stylish Gilbert Acres neighborhood. She could do this. It’s no big deal. She’s happy for Klaus and Stefan. Really. The door painted a bold red swung open to reveal a smiling man with soulful brown eyes who looked like he could brood attractively at a moment’s notice.

Clearly eyeing the painstakingly styled chestnut hair, Enzo whispered in Caroline’s ear, “I’ve got this, gorgeous. I’ll scope out their bathroom and steal all of his haircare products. They’ll be over by sunrise.”

She narrowly managed to avoid choking on her tongue as she quickly said, “Hi! I’m Caroline and this is Enzo. You must be Stefan?”

His brown eyes lit up at her introductions and said with a laugh, “You’ve heard of me, huh? Don’t believe anything Klaus has told you — believe me, he’s actually more of a troublemaker than I am.”

As Stefan led them into the kitchen to get drinks, she couldn’t help but critically squint at the back of his carefully coiffed head. Stefan had stupid hair to go with his stupid name. Damn it. You’re happy for Klaus, remember? Klaus was leaning against the ivory and silver granite island, his gray eyes lighting up when he saw Caroline. He handed her a glass of her favorite shiraz, and she tried not to swoon that he had remembered her ramblings the other day about it. “Welcome, sweetheart,” he said with a smile.

She breathed in his intoxicating aromas of cedar and leather with just the hint of citrus. She was proud of the way her smile didn’t falter as Stefan playfully elbowed Klaus, favoring him with
a teasing grin. He leaned over to a tall, attractive blonde standing beside them and in a sly tone said, “Rebekah, this is Caroline and Enzo. You remember Klaus mentioning them once or twice, right?”

Her light blue eyes raked over them both and her red lips curved into a knowing smile. “Right. Once or twice. I’m Rebekah, Nik’s sister.” Her gaze inexplicably lingered on the way Enzo had slung his arm companionably around Caroline’s shoulders before throwing Klaus an unreadable glance.

Caroline didn’t have time to contemplate what that awkwardness was about because they were suddenly interrupted by heavy footsteps thudding on the hardwood floors and a loud voice declaring, “Sorry I’m late; got a bit tangled up with a saucy little thing with a deliciously wicked tongue. Have I missed our gormless brother making an ass out of himself in front of —” The playful voice stopped abruptly as the attractive man with mischievous dark eyes rounded the corner to find everyone staring at him.

Through gritted teeth, Klaus jerked his chin toward the man and said, “This is my brother, Kol. Kol, this is Caroline and Enzo.”

With a delighted grin, Kol lunged forward, unexpectedly grabbing Caroline’s hand and soundly kissing her knuckles before sneakily planting more kisses up her arm. “I’ve heard a great deal about you, sweet Caroline. Nik’s stories do not do you justice, however.”

Enzo protectively pulled Caroline’s arm away from Kol and said with a bit of an edge to his voice, “Yeah, gorgeous doesn’t get manhandled on my watch, mate.”

Klaus’ face turned sour at that, while Kol’s smile became even wider. “You have cozy little pet names for each other? That’s bloody fantastic! Tell me, sweet Caroline, what do you call Enzo?”

Before Caroline could think of something to say to ease the peculiar tension in the kitchen, a loud crash followed by cheering from the living room interrupted them and someone called out, “Klaus! Stefan! Marcel decided to whip when he should have nae nae-ed and that vase Stefan found at auction last month got in the way. Where’s your broom?”

Stefan mockingly glared at Klaus and said accusingly, “You paid Marcel to break my vase, didn’t you?”

Klaus clapped him on the back, chuckling as he answered, “Just think of all the other things I may have paid Marcel to break,” while following him into the living room to take care of the mess.

Caroline quickly drained the rest of her glass as she watched Klaus and Stefan walk away, playfully pushing each other until they were in the other room. Enzo refilled her glass nearly to the brim, worry etched across his features.

Rebekah and Kol watched their exchange curiously, but other than brief, unreadable glances at each other, chose not to comment. Caroline couldn’t stand the silence any longer and nervously asked, “So, how long have Klaus and Stefan known each other?”

“For ages,” Rebekah answered, topping off her glass. “Nik met Stefan in college and just seemed to fall into a friendship right away. It’s weird too because Nik was always so private and kept to himself. Stefan really seemed to open him up.”
Caroline choked on the large gulp of shiraz she was drinking. She did not need to hear all the intimate details of how compatible Klaus and his lover were. “That’s wonderful,” she said in a high-pitched voice that didn’t sound like it belonged to her. “It’s not easy finding someone to connect with,” she added, trying to decide if drinking an entire bottle of wine by herself would be considered rude.

“Don’t be fooled, sweet Caroline, Nik has had some difficulty connecting as of late,” Kol stage-whispered, tipping her a roguish wink.

Rebekah snorted, taking a sip of her wine. “Don’t be a wanker. That’s Nik’s business,” she warned her brother, nodding her head at Caroline and Enzo as she wandered out of the kitchen.

Enzo squeezed Caroline’s shoulder, telling Kol amicably, “I’m sure whatever spat those two had can be worked out.”

“Spat,” Kol asked in confusion, pouring the rest of the shiraz in his goblet and taking a sip.

“You know, between Klaus and Stefan? Relationships are hard, but the way Klaus talks about Stefan, it’s so obvious that he really cares about him,” Caroline supplied helpfully, hating the way her heart had started feel the first fluttering of hope at the implication that Klaus was having relationship troubles.

Kol sputtered, somehow managing to spit his mouthful of wine back into his glass. Coughing loudly, he took a moment to compose himself while his dark eyes had become oddly calculating. “Right. Relationship. Like what Nik and Stefan have,” he said slowly. “Because they’re dating...like you and Enzo, right,” he added cautiously, as though testing out the words.

“Me and gorgeous,” Enzo barked out with a laugh. “Are you daft? Gorgeous is my best friend. We’d never screw up what we have by turning it into a relationship.” He grinned as he confessed wickedly, “Besides, I don’t do relationships.”

Caroline rolled her eyes. “You certainly do the relations part.”

Enzo clinked their goblets together, teasing, “We need to work on you getting some relations action, gorgeous. It’s been awhile.”

Kol wiggled his eyebrows jokingly as he watched the friends’ exchange. “Perhaps I can offer my services. I’d love to relate to you, sweet Caroline. Could we also bring along your scandalous friend here?”

Caroline huffed, noticing how intrigued Enzo had become by Kol’s antics. “Pass,” she said flatly. With a sly smile, she lightly pushed Enzo toward Kol, telling them, “But by all means, you two go enjoy relating.”

The boys grinned at each other, walking out of the kitchen with similar swaggers. Rolling her eyes, she opened a hearty burgundy and wandered out onto the back terrace, admiring the lovely rose garden. She wondered if it was Klaus or Stefan who had a green thumb and made a mental note to ask the next time she saw one of them.

“I was wondering where you had gotten off to,” Klaus’ accented voice called out from behind her. He sat on the chaise beside her, his gray eyes casually sweeping over her form.

“It’s beautiful out here,” she ventured, taking a sip of her wine.

“Indeed,” he agreed, his gaze not drifting from her face.
She nervously glanced at the colorful roses, the delightful scents drifting over on the gentle evening breeze. “So, is gardening your passion or Stefan’s,” she asked, keeping her eyes on the bold crimson, fuchsia and orange petals that decorated the lawn.

“Definitely Stefan’s,” Klaus answered with a laugh. “He insists on importing these seeds that supposedly mimic the Juliet rose, whatever that is,” he explained fondly. Seeming to notice her fixation with the roses, he commented in a hopeful tone, “If you enjoy roses, maybe you would like to come with me to see the gardens downtown? Stefan swears he’s never seen such variety.”

She shrugged, taking another drink as she thought of all the ways it would hurt to go out with Klaus but not really be on a date with him. Maybe one day she could get to the point where she could platonically go out with him, but not yet. “Work keeps us pretty busy, so let me get back to you,” she answered, wincing at the slight regret she heard in her tone.

Klaus’ expression was closed off as he muttered, “Right. Of course.”

Deciding that he must be upset about whatever ongoing spat he was having with Stefan that Kol had mentioned, she took that as her cue to leave. “I’m going to find a bathroom,” she explained awkwardly, hastily exiting the stone terrace. She noticed a small line of people waiting outside of the downstairs bathroom, and decided to head back into the kitchen to top off her glass before getting in line. Perhaps if she surrounded herself with other people, she’d stop feeling sorry for herself?

Not paying attention to the noise around her, she pushed open the swinging paneled door to the kitchen and was horrified to see Rebekah and Stefan kissing furiously. Stefan had the gorgeous blonde pressed up against the double oven along one wall and she seemed to be gripping the top handle for balance while wrapping her long legs around his waist. They were far too wrapped up in each other to hear the small, indignant squeak that escaped Caroline while she stood there in disbelief.

Her body on autopilot, she carefully backed out of the kitchen and headed toward the terrace. Her thoughts were racing as she replayed the scene she had just witnessed. Stefan was cheating on Klaus! And with Klaus’ sister of all people! What a horrible, awful person! She should have known that anyone who spent that much time on his hair couldn’t be trusted. And Rebekah? What could she have been thinking?! She wondered how long this had been going on right underneath Klaus’ nose.

When she reached the stone terrace again, she saw that it was empty. She quietly slipped outside, relieved to be alone so she could decide what to do. Should she tell Klaus? She wasn’t sure if she could handle the heartbreak that would be on his handsome face. She decided that she should find Enzo and discuss it with him because not only was he an excellent secret-keeper, he also always gave her the best advice. He would understand her dilemma and be able to guide her to a solution her conscience could live with. Just as she started to head back inside, she was startled by Klaus appearing behind her.

She nervously tucked a few stray blonde curls behind her ear as she told him, “Hey, I was actually um, just getting ready to find Enzo.”

His gray eyes darkened at Enzo’s name. “I just found Enzo,” he growled.

Caroline took in the tenseness of his frame, not understanding his ire. Her blue eyes widened as a panicked thought came to her. In a small voice, she asked, “You saw them together, didn’t you?”
Her voice seemed to spark something within Klaus and he gently touched her cheek. “I did, and I’m so sorry, sweetheart.”

She was slightly confused by his apology. She assumed that the shock was taking over and he wasn’t thinking clearly. She hugged him tight, breathing in his familiar scent as she offered him the only comfort she could think of. “I’m sorry you had to see that, Klaus. I know how much he means to you.”

Scoffing, he said, “Kol’s gone mad if he thinks being my brother will stop me from beating him senseless.” He kissed the top of her head and said reassuringly, “They won’t get away with what they did to you, love. I promise.”

Kol? What did Klaus’ brother have to do with anything? Confused, she pulled away from him slightly, glancing up at his pale face in the starlight as she corrected him gently, “I meant about Stefan and Rebekah. That’s what we’re talking about, right?”

“Did you not know they were dating,” Klaus asked in a puzzled tone. “They’ve been off and on for years, but recently got back together.”

She stiffened against him at this unexpected news. Before she could form a coherent thought among her chaotic emotions, Klaus spoke again, his voice heavy with concern. “Sweetheart, I don’t know how to tell you this, but I just caught Enzo with...Kol.” Seeing the pity sweep across his face was too much for her and she suddenly burst into hysterical giggles as everything finally fell into place.

Quirking his eyebrows, Klaus looked down at her, studying her as she laughed. When she had somewhat quieted down, he commented in embarrassment, “I take it you’re not dating Enzo and madly in love with him?”

Caroline snorted, shaking her head at the utter ridiculousness of the situation. “No more than you’re madly in love with Stefan, apparently.” Gray eyes wide, he looked flabbergasted, clearly trying to recall when she would have inferred he was with Stefan.

Sighing in amusement at his obvious frustration, she said lightly, “Little dating tip — you can flirt more effectively with a girl if you’re not constantly talking about how close you are with another guy. Or, at least make it a point to mention that you’re single.”

Klaus laughed, leaning in close as he whispered, “I’m afraid I’m now taken, sweetheart,” and kissed her long and deep, pressing her body to his in a way that told her he wouldn’t be letting go any time soon.
Building a Facade

Chapter Summary

In this one-shot, Original vampire Klaus has returned to Mystic Falls to retrieve the moonstone he conveniently hid in a dilapidated old mansion. Who knew a heated encounter with a feisty building conservationist would turn into such an inconvenience?

“A house can have integrity, just like a person,' said Roark, 'and just as seldom.’”
— Ayn Rand, The Fountainhead

All he wanted was the moonstone — that’s how it began.

But not how it would end.

Klaus considered himself a creature of patience. He had waited more than a thousand years to break his curse and become a powerful hybrid, and he was confident that he could wait another thousand if necessary to achieve this lofty goal. However, in the next few moments, if he couldn’t find the seam he had carefully hidden in this antique plaster, he was going to use his considerable Original vampire strength to punch through the ornate ceiling medallion until it revealed the moonstone.

He growled in frustration as he perched precariously upon the two-story scaffold, directly underneath the enormous decorative ceiling medallion. He had designed this mansion and commissioned its construction back in 1900, and carefully sculpted the medallion in the grand foyer to cunningly hide the moonstone, one of the key pieces to be used during the ritual to break his curse. He hadn’t returned to Mystic Falls since then to avoid raising suspicion. However, now that the doppelganger had been found, almost all of the pieces were in place to perform the ritual and free his wolf.

He wiped away beads of sweat that had started to form as he carefully ran his fingers across the expertly crafted swirls that fanned out in nearly perfect geometric symmetry. He was so intent
upon his exploration that he was startled by an indignant shriek from below. “What the hell do you think you’re doing up there?”

Angry that a mere human had caused him to nearly topple off of the scaffolding, he felt his monstrous face emerge, black veins clawing their way to the surface of his pale skin as his fangs unsheathed. He snarled threateningly at the woman below, expecting her to scream in terror. Instead, he was met with a most curious sight.

A stunning blonde woman of ethereal beauty stood with her hands on her hips, craning her neck to glare up at him. However, from the way she was squinting, it appeared that she couldn’t quite see his vampiric visage. “Did you just hiss at me,” she asked incredulously, “like a cranky, spoiled housecat?” As he opened his mouth to speak, she cut him off by holding up one hand. “Never mind. Who the hell are you and what makes you think you have the authority to manhandle this historic property?”

Flabbergasted by the brazen woman, Klaus found himself charmed as he heard her muttering under her breath, “When I figure out where I put my glasses, I’ll glare at you properly, you presumptuous asshat.”

Allowing his vampire features to retreat, he chuckled, calling out, “I’ve been compared to many things over the years, but housecat is a first, I must admit.” He reminded himself to move at a slower, more human pace as he unfolded his long, lean frame from the scaffolding and made his way down the wobbly metal ladder. He was delighted to see how her bright blue eyes flickered briefly with interest as she tried to subtly admire him, and the unmistakable blush that tinted her ivory skin made him feel unexpectedly pleased that he had caught her interest.

He took her by surprise as he kissed her knuckles, breathing in her sweet fragrance of honey and vanilla. “And I’m Klaus Mikaelson, owner of this property, which I assume affords me some measure of authority, love.”

Her blue eyes narrowed unexpectedly, studying him carefully. In a clipped tone that belied her mistrust, she told him, “And since I’m Caroline Forbes, Director of Heritage Assets, I oversee the restoration of the Niklaus Mikaelson mansion here in Mystic Falls, and I know for a fact that this historic property has been in a trust for decades without an individual owner.” She stubbornly crossed her arms in front of her chest, telling him flatly, “So, you want to try that again?”

Rather than be irritated by the audacity of this human, Klaus found himself enchanted by her boldness. He smirked, his dimples flashing as he explained, “I can assure you that I really am Klaus Mikaelson, owner of this estate. I went through the proper channels and notified the appropriate authorities prior to my arrival.” When Caroline scoffed at this, he couldn’t help needling her just a bit when he said, “Perhaps your authority only reaches so far, sweetheart, considering no one thought it prudent to inform you?”

Grumbling to herself, she whipped out her phone, tapping a contact while glaring at him from underneath her dark lashes. He couldn’t help but be amused by the flames of her gaze, wondering what it would take to turn that exasperating energy into something with more...heat.

Holding the phone up to her ear, she tersely said, “Mayor Lockwood, it’s Caroline. I found a frustratingly obnoxious intruder at the Mikaelson estate claiming to be the owner.” She listened for a moment to the mayor’s reply, her blue eyes flashing dangerously as she answered through gritted teeth, “Seriously? I’m the director of this town’s historical building restorations! Next time I better be your first call when an owner of one of my projects shows up!” She abruptly disconnected the call and flung her phone back into her purse, scowling.
“Quite brave of you to yell at the mayor like that, love,” Klaus ventured, a hint of admiration in his accented voice.

Caroline snorted, “She keeps me around because I’m not afraid to tell truth to power. You should see the sycophants she packed in her office. It’s a wonder anything ever gets done around here.” She shrugged, adding, “Also, she keeps irrationally hoping I’ll take back her dimwitted son after I caught him cheating on me last year.”

She stomped her foot in aggravation, the slim heel of her pearlescent sandal scraping against the maple hardwood. Her lovely face took on a comically horrified expression as she immediately fell to her hands and knees to study the scuff mark more closely. As she tentatively rubbed at the mark, she breathed a sigh of relief. “Oh, thank god. We can buff that out. You have no idea how difficult it is to source reclaimed maple from the early 1900s that exactly matches this patina of wear.”

Klaus shook his head, trying to rid his overactive imagination of the alluring image of Caroline on all fours under much more favorable circumstances. Finally regaining control, he knelt down on the floor beside her, his voice carrying a note of admiration as he asked, “You seem to be inordinately invested in this property, sweetheart.”

Her blue eyes lit up with excitement as she answered, “The Mikaelson estate is more than just a property. It was designed by Niklaus Mikaleson, one of the most talented and forward-thinking architects of the late Victorian era! His innovative designs are reminiscent of Carolean Architecture, quite possibly the best specimens in North America,” she finished, practically swooning.

He felt himself grow uncomfortably warm at her unwitting praise. It had been folly to emerge from the shadows for a decade or two during the Victorian age and design structures under his actual name, but he had been feeling the weight of his years and melancholy had slipped in. *He had wanted to be remembered.*

Caroline interrupted his thoughts with, “You’re ‘Klaus’; so you’re named after Niklaus? He must have been your great-great-grandfather or something, right?”

“Or something,” he mumbled, awkwardly scratching the back of his neck. He flicked his gray eyes around the room and commented, “Your restoration team has done a lovely job on the pediments over the windows. I can see the finely etched details of the tympanum from down here.”

She arched an eyebrow, making an impressed noise. “You have an interest in historic design?”

He smirked, “You could say I’m a fan of architecture.”

Her enthusiasm was infectious as she told him excitedly, “I’ve read everything I could find about Niklaus’ work, and I’ve studied his buildings extensively. I’m fairly certain that he based the design of this mansion on Belton House near Grantham, Lincolnshire, England.”

His eyes widened at her admission. To his knowledge, no one else had ever made that connection between the estates in England and Mystic Falls. Belton House had been built in the late 1680s, and his family had sought refuge there while on the run from Mikael. It was one of the few times he could remember that they had all been together in one place for an extended period of time. However, he had ensured that not so much as a whisper connected the Mikaleson name to that estate, so he was curious how Caroline discovered the association. “While I have passing familiarity with Belton House, love, I’m not sure I see the similarities.”
She rolled her eyes, scooting closer to him on the dusty maple floor. She gestured toward the ceiling medallion high above their heads. “You obviously don’t know your great-great-grandfather’s work as well as you think. He clearly derived inspiration from the Belton House ceilings and you can see similarities in the fanned edges and curves of the plaster medallion here.” As her finger traced invisible patterns in the air, her voice took on a note of awe as she added, “The artistry found within such geometric precision is simply amazing.”

Klaus was elated by her unexpected praise, and felt his heart give a funny little leap as he confessed almost shyly, “It’s my favorite aspect of the house as well.” Unable to help himself, he told her, “I happen to know a bit about the history of Belton House. The lawyer who built it supposedly took in a group of wayward siblings for a few months. Some stories say that one of the brothers thought himself a bit of a prankster and dressed a barkeep in luxurious fabrics and stuffed him in a stolen gilded carriage, spreading rumors throughout the village that King William III had come for a visit. To this day, the rumor persists that the king stayed at Belton House, but the stories I’ve heard say that it was actually a cross-eyed barkeep named Cuthbert.”

Caroline giggled, nudging him playfully with her elbow. “You made that up! Belton House was part of my thesis project on historic preservation, and in all my hours of research I never came across that story.”

“Well then, you clearly are the expert, sweetheart,” he said with a smirk, leaning forward to add in a seductive whisper, “who am I to argue with such sound logic?”

She shook herself, as though suddenly noticing how close they had become. Clearing her throat, she moved back slightly, hastily changing the subject with, “So if you’re named after your famous architect relative and you said you’re a ‘fan of architecture’, do you ever wonder if you look anything like Niklaus?”

Klaus nearly swallowed his tongue as he made a slight choking noise. He carefully arranged his face in a neutral expression, commenting lightly, “To my knowledge, there are no pictures of my elusive relative. I always heard he was a notorious recluse.”

She nodded, a small sigh escaping her as she said, “Artistic geniuses usually are.” She didn’t seem to notice the stunned expression on his face, as she appeared to be thinking hard about something. She abruptly asked, “Would you like to go get some coffee?” She tucked a few blonde curls behind her ear as she continued somewhat embarrassedly, “I’d love to hear your thoughts on the revival of Carolean Architecture in the South if you have time.”

Klaus felt his heart flutter in that unmistakable way that Caroline seemed to inspire. He gave her a dimpled grin as he reassured her, “I have plenty of time, love.”

He was an immortal creature, he reasoned. *The moonstone would still be there tomorrow.*

Tomorrow found him inexplicably standing at the front door of the mansion, an enormous sunflower in his hand as he shuffled his feat awkwardly on the stone steps. He was more than a thousand years old. *And his palms were sweating.*

When Caroline opened the door, her brilliant smile put the sun to shame and he bashfully gave her the flower, smirking when she accidentally smeared a trail of mustard-yellow pollen across one cheek. He carefully brushed it away, delighting in the slight tremble of her skin at his touch. He was startled when she grabbed his hand and pulled him inside, practically dragging him down the oak-paneled corridor and into the parlor.

“You’re just in time,” she squealed with excitement, nearly bouncing on her toes as she
pointed to the enormous fireplace in the corner. “I just finished detailing the carved hearth with boiled linseed oil and gum turpentine! Doesn’t it look amazing?!”

He gazed fondly at the familiar piece, recalling the tremendous amount of time it took to painstakingly sculpt the detailed forest with the majestic wolf standing guard. “Magnificent. You did an outstanding job restoring the carvings to their former glory,” he told her, the admiration evident in his voice.

Blushing under his compliment, Caroline looked at the wolf fondly. “Records indicate Niklaus carved the hearth himself. Your ancestor was such a rare talent,” she praised. Sighing, she added, “He’s a beautiful creature, but he just looks so forlorn.”

He blinked in surprise at her observation. “I never thought of it that way; perhaps he’s simply dispassionately surveying his kingdom with stoicism?”

She scoffed, “Please. None of the wolves I’ve met could ever be called ‘dispassionate’. Noticing the incredulous look on his face, she giggled, clearly joking.

“You’ve clearly been consort ing with the wrong wolves, sweetheart,” he said with a cheeky smile, causing her to blush once more.

“Then you’ll just have to introduce me to the right ones,” she retorted, leaving the parlor to answer her phone.

As Klaus followed, his gaze wandered to the grand foyer, where he knew his moonstone lay hidden just beneath the ceiling medallion. Hearing Caroline’s melodious voice calling his name, he shrugged his shoulders, and instead headed back to answer her.

There was always tomorrow. *He had plenty of time.*

Except as the innumerable opportunities kept presenting themselves to reclaim his moonstone, he couldn’t seem to take advantage of them. Every time he considered compelling Caroline and taking the moonstone, or waiting until after she and her restoration team left for the day, he couldn’t bring himself to do it. It was ridiculous—he had everything in place to move forward with the ritual — he had the doppelganger tucked away safely along with the other ritual ingredients. He was so close to achieving everything he had ever wanted. *And yet he did not take the moonstone.*

A month in Caroline’s company had passed by with barely an acknowledgment and Klaus had never been happier. He would stop by the mansion while she was overseeing restoration, gently teasing her until she blushed, starting off discussing historical architecture and design elements that slowly bled into something more meaningful.

They attended quaint events that small Southern towns like Mystic Falls seemed to have in abundance, from charity picnics and auctions to founding family celebration balls, and each time he could feel pieces of his soul embedding themselves a bit more deeply into this stunning, vibrant woman.

The little fictions he had to tell her about his life he reasoned was a small price to pay to get to know her better. Experience taught him that nothing good could ever come from bringing a human into his world; but no matter the countless lies he told Caroline, *the biggest lie he told was to himself.*
Something was off at the mansion. He could feel it the moment he stood on the stone steps. Not bothering to lift the heavy cast iron door knocker, he flashed inside the grand foyer, just in time to see Caroline take a delicate sip of tea...while sitting across from his mother, Esther. Confused, Caroline asked, “Klaus? Where did you come from? It’s like you just appeared out of thin air!”

Esther chuckled, her hazel eyes darkening with malice as she commented, “Almost like magic.”

Smiling, Caroline said, “Klaus, this is Esther, a specialist conservation contractor on loan from the university. She was just dropping off historic building assessments and statements of significance about the mansion.”

“Don’t forget the lovely tea, dear. Mayor Lockwood mentioned your penchant for milk oolong and I couldn’t resist showing off my personal collection,” Esther lightly admonished, unable to hold back an evil grin as Klaus seethed in silence. “Also, I needed to bribe Caroline since I’m not quite done writing my statement on items of significance regarding this property. As the current owner, Niklaus, do you happen to know of anything significant about the mansion we should address? Any little hidden gems of information we could bring to light,” she asked with an oily tone that made his fangs itch to dig themselves into her throat.

Klaus stepped forward, a low growl in his throat. His first order of business was to protect Caroline. Once she was safe, he would go after his mother and end her again, just like he did all those centuries ago.

The sharp-eyed woman sensed his intentions and quickly stood up from the small table where she and Caroline had been working. “Don’t bother, my son. I’ll just collect what I came for and be on my way. We can finish this another time.”

Caroline set down her empty teacup, frowning at the confusing exchange. “Wait — Niklaus? Son? Esther, what’s going on?”

Klaus felt his heart drop as he forced himself to look at the woman he had come to care about so deeply. His thoughts were racing as he tried to think of something to say that would somehow explain his lies and justify his selfishness for putting her in such danger. And somehow convince her to continue to want to be with him.

Esther distracted him by chanting in a dark voice, raising her arms over her head as the mansion trembled on its foundation. He watched in horror as a crack appeared in the ceiling medallion, briefly revealing the opalescent moonstone before it tumbled down into her waiting hand.

Klaus flashed to his mother, gripping her throat as he bared his fangs. “You think I will allow you to take what is mine, mother?!”

Caroline shakily stood, looking between the two of them as she clearly struggled with what she was witnessing. “What the fuck is going on,” she demanded, her voice vacillating between fear and anger.

Esther managed to force enough magic through her body to loosen Klaus’ grip. She flashed a vicious smile at Caroline. “Don’t worry your pretty head, pet. In a few moments you won’t remember anything of what you’ve seen.”

Terror flooded his body as he began to grasp the meaning behind Esther’s words. He
glanced down at the table, taking in Caroline’s empty teacup. “What did you do,” he raged, gripping his mother’s throat again as he raised her from the floor.

Choking on her words, she managed to answer brokenly, “Deadly nightshade-laced tea. Not enough to poison her. Just enough to make her forget you. Forever.” His horror caused his fingers to slip, releasing Esther once more. She carefully massaged her throat, nodding in Caroline’s direction. “With the amount she imbibed, she only has a few moments left before her memories of you disappear. I suggest you don’t waste them pointlessly chasing after me, Niklaus.” Without another word, she vanished, tightly clutching the moonstone.

Klaus immediately forced his vampiric features to recede, sweeping Caroline into his arms as she started to cry. “Sweetheart, this is all my fault and I’m sorry for what has happened. I don’t think we have much longer, so please just let me say this.”

He took a deep, shuddering breath, desperately trying to summon everything he felt for Caroline into something as simple as a few token words that she wouldn’t remember. “Our time together may have been short, but every moment has meant more to me than I can say. Somewhere along the way, I fell in love with you, Caroline. I promise you, I will find a way to restore your memories of us.”

Caroline’s blue eyes went wide at his revelation. She opened and shut her mouth several times, seemingly unsure of what to say. In a small voice, she finally asked, “And when you make me remember, will you explain the fangs and your magical earthquake-causing bitch of a mother?”

He gave a surprised laugh, taking her lovely face in both of his hands as his fingers brushed a few stray tears. “I promise.”

Nodding slightly, she asked brokenly, “But what if you can’t get my memories back?”

“Then we’ll create new memories. Even better ones, love,” Klaus vowed, kissing her with a desperate, feverish passion as he saw her beautiful blue eyes begin to glaze over.

She pulled away, breathless, and shakily whispered, “Klaus, I love —”

He watched, heartbroken as she looked at him with a dazed expression. Shaking her head, she gave him a bright, but distant smile. “I’m sorry, do I know you?”

Summoning every bit of strength he could, he stepped away from her, clearing his throat several times as he answered in a dead, hollow voice, “I was just dropping off some paperwork. But I imagine I’ll see you around.”

His tears had dried by the time he caught up to Esther in the forest. She seemed surprised to see him, but not as alarmed as he expected. Clearly, his mother had more surprises in store for him. She waved the moonstone at him, the object glowing a milky white under the stars. “So persistent, Niklaus. I had thought you would want to mourn what you lost with poor Caroline a bit longer.”

“You do not speak her name, vile witch,” he yelled, flashing over to her, fangs unsheathed.

She wagged a finger at him, smiling vindictively. “Careful, my son. You kill me, you kill your only hope of becoming a hybrid. And we both know that’s what you truly care for, not some poor girl you’ve told nothing but lies to.” With a wicked gleam in her eye, she revealed, “I’ve tied my life to that of your doppelganger. Any harm that befalls me will be visited upon her as well. If
your doppelganger is injured in any manner outside of the ritual, you lose any chance of breaking your curse.”

Lightly tossing the moonstone back and forth between her palms, she boldly looked him in the eye as she coaxed, “Of course, I’m sure we can come to some sort of arrangement where we can both achieve our goals. If you allow me to perform the ritual, I can siphon just a bit of magic to bolster my power. In return, I pledge to restore your wolf so that you can embrace what you’ve always wanted — to become a true hybrid at last.” Giving him a confident smile, she declared, “Unlimited power will be ours, Niklaus. All you have to do is say ‘yes’.”

Klaus listened to Esther dispassionately, and when she finished presenting her offer, he plunged his fingers into her chest, ripping into soft flesh and breaking through ribs with sickening cracks. He didn’t glance down at her heart as he pulled it from her body, dropping it on the ground as she lifelessly crumpled at his feet.

The gleam of white against the dark earth caught his vacant gaze and he knelt down to pick up the moonstone. He turned it over in his hand, thinking of how he had covetously guarded this object over the centuries. It represented everything he had wanted. With a soul-rending cry of anguish, he reduced the moonstone to a fine powder in his fist, sinking to his knees as he gave into the weight of his loss.

Klaus had visited every witch he could find, used every magical connection at his disposal, but to no avail. Caroline’s memories of their time together would never be restored. It was with trepidation that he returned to the mansion, his heart pounding furiously as he walked inside. Her familiar scent of honey and vanilla filled his senses, making him slightly dizzy as he realized that she always would smelled like home to him.

“Hi, can I help you,” she asked in a friendly tone, the lack of recognition on her beautiful face making his heart ache.

Taking a breath, he stepped forward, grazing her knuckles with his lips as he tried not to blatantly stare at her sapphire dress, the one that made her eyes a blue found only in the deepest seas, the one that she once confessed to him was her favorite. “Actually, I’m here to help you, love.” His gray eyes flicked up to the broken ceiling medallion high above their heads. “I can start with repairing the damaged plaster.” Licking his lips nervously, he noted how she followed the movement with interest. “Mending things is a recent specialty of mine.”

Her blue gaze held a slight flicker of heat as she asked, “Really? Do you have an interest in historic design?”

Smirking, he answered, “You could say I’m a fan of architecture.”
A Mean Right (Crochet) Hook

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Caroline and Katherine are two carefree vampires on a road trip that gets sidetracked when they manage to get arrested during a bar fight with a group of women who seem weirdly possessive about their knitting. Perhaps the arresting officer with the annoyingly sexy smirk will provide some answers?

Chapter Notes

Also, I have exciting news — my original work has been published through Amazon Digital Services LLC! It’s a contemporary rom-com and a fun summer read, available for download and in paperback! See my notes at the end of this chapter for a brief synopsis. Feel free to message me with questions!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Life...is a tale told by an idiot..."
— William Shakespeare, Macbeth

In retrospect, yarn would not have been Caroline’s first choice as a go-to weapon in a bar fight, but necessity was the mother of invention, and it’s not like she was just going to sit back and let a psycho Golden Girl stab Katherine with a crochet hook. She turned her blonde head to see how her friend was faring and was pleased to see that Katherine already had picked the lock on her handcuffs with one of the bobby pins that held back her tumble of brunette curls. She rattled her own handcuffs loudly in her direction, raising a questioning eyebrow. “A little help here?”

Snorting derisively, Katherine pulled the handcuffs closer to her and began working the thin metal pin against the locking mechanism until a satisfying click reached their ears. Pulling off the handcuffs, she answered, “And if I’d taken your loser advice about straightening my hair, we’d both still be in handcuffs right now, Caroline.”

“How do you really think now is the time to discuss hair,” Caroline hissed, glancing around the small, windowless room in which they were trapped. “We’ve been arrested and now we’re stuck in an interrogation room. What do you think is going to happen when they run our prints and find out that we died decades ago?” Caroline groaned in frustration, rubbing her temples as she willed away her growing bloodlust. There was something about this police precinct — actually, this entire bizarre town that was setting her fangs on edge.

They had been on a road trip for a while now, touring the countryside as they searched for a new place to call home for a bit. They’d learned over their years that their vampiric natures seemed
to catch wanderlust fairly easily, so they never settled down for too long in any one place. Katherine was nursing a slight heartbreak — not that she’d ever admit it, so Caroline had gone out of her way to make sure that this latest place they visited was known for its food. She was a big fan of eating her feelings, and when her foodie travel app pinged the tiny fishing village of Mount Oly as home to some of the best Greek food in the region, she couldn’t resist bringing Katherine there to drown her sorrows in ouzo and pastitsio.

At first, everything was fine — they had savored succulent lemon-oregano lamb gyros, creamy bechamel sauce-topped layers of pastitsio, and sticky-sweet, flaky baklava until they were ready to burst. They had sat out by the docks drinking a few pitchers of refreshing pomegranate sangria and then...ouzo shots happened. A godawful lot of them.

Several hours and some slight preemptive vomiting ago...

Caroline could still taste the lingering traces of the licorice-flavored liquor she had imbibed. She had noticed the effect the blue-tinged shots were having on her, and she wisely had started slowing down at the bar they stumbled into. Katherine, however, had no interest in recalling the attractive, two-timing werewolf that was causing her to drink, so she kept ordering more rounds, much to the amusement of the bartender, who kept eyeing her cleavage with a twinkle in his eye.

Not that Caroline hadn’t been doing some eyeing of her own. From the moment they had entered the bar, she immediately was drawn to a breathtaking man with chiseled features and piercing gray eyes that looked like the wet dream of a cover on Harlequin romance novel. His dirty blonde curls were tousled just so and Caroline could feel her fingers itching to touch them to see if they were as soft as they appeared. When she slid onto the barstool next to him, she could have sworn she detected a flicker of interest in that knowing smirk.

She sipped on her water, promising a pouting Katherine that she’d do another round of shots with her in a bit, and settled in to start her patented flirty eyes and impish smile routine to see if the sexy stranger was worth her time. She casually observed the fabric of his slate gray henley stretched deliciously over his muscles. She could sense power there, which normally would have made her wary since she couldn’t determine if he was a werewolf or vampire, but instead she found herself even more intrigued. She wondered if he tasted as divine as he looked. “I’m Caroline,” she ventured with an inviting smile.

“Klaus,” he responded in a seductive accent she couldn’t quite place. Subtly adjusting her favorite floral silk tank top to make sure her girls were looking their best, she started to lean into him and add something hopefully witty when she was interrupted by Katherine giving the bartender a rundown of the multiple reasons why werewolves were lousy lays. She nearly swallowed her tongue as her drunken road trip buddy loudly said the ‘w’ word, but a quick look around the bar told her that fortunately no one seemed to notice.

“Whisky dick is nothing — ever heard of werewolf dick,” Katherine slurred, squinting down at her pinky finger as she kept comically moving it from rigid to limp. “Several days after the full moon, they’re basically hairy eunuchs with a slobbery overbite. They waste so much energy transforming that they wear out their wolfy little wieners,” she confessed in a loud stage whisper.

Klaus chuckled derisively at Katherine’s words, shaking his head as he took another drink of beer. Caroline narrowed her blue eyes at him, suddenly deciding he might not be worth her time
after all if he was going to be a dick about her cheerfully drunk friend. The moment he started rolling his eyes at Katherine’s speech, Caroline made the decision to cut him loose — no guy, no matter how attractive, was worth more to her than her friendship with Katherine.

Caroline decided she needed a bit of distance from the condescending, curly-haired assat in addition to Katherine’s ouzo-induced word vomit, so she stood up from her barstool and was surprised to feel his hand on her arm. She refused to acknowledge the sizzling heat that made her ivory skin flush at the contact.

“Leaving so soon, love? I was hoping to buy you a drink,” he said with a twinkle in his gray eyes.

“And I was hoping you weren’t going to be a dick. Guess we’re both disappointed,” Caroline told him spitefully, grabbing her water and moving toward an empty table along one wall of the cramped bar. At first, it appeared that he would follow her, but he seemed to think better of it when he noticed where she was sitting, and instead went back to nursing his beer. Finding his behavior odd, Caroline looked around, not understanding what caused him to react that way.

She noticed that the table next to hers sat three elderly women draped in colorful paisley shawls who seemed to be working on a complicated knitting project using gold yarn. Curious about such an unusual sight in a bar, she saw how the women kept eyeing the news channel and muttering in low whispers that for some reason her supernatural hearing couldn’t discern.

Katherine suddenly blundered into several empty chairs as she made her way over to where Caroline was sitting, but instead of joining her, she unexpectedly plopped down beside the three strange women and wordlessly watched them as they furiously continued crocheting. Her glassy brown eyes suddenly became alive with mischief as she began loudly singing off-key the theme to The Golden Girls. Despite her secondhand embarrassment, Caroline couldn’t help but hum a few bars to the infectious song.

The three women glared at Katherine, muttering in whispers that neither vampire could hear. Never one to back down from a challenge, Katherine drunkenly grabbed an extra crochet hook sitting in a small woven basket on the water ring-soaked table and began trying to knit along one edge of the long, golden afghan-looking object the women were making.

“Katherine,” Caroline hissed through gritted teeth, “step away from the afghan.” She had become somewhat alarmed by the way the women immediately snapped their heads to glare malevolently at her friend in nearly perfect synchronicity. She flashed them a disarming smile and hastily said, “We don’t want any trouble.”

“Calm down,” Katherine muttered, continuing to sloppily thread her crochet hook through the golden yarn as she whined to Caroline, “it helps with cravings. Besides, if you screw it up, you can always start over,” she explained, yanking at a particularly stubborn knot her haphazard knitting had caused until she began to unravel some of the bizarre afghan the women were crocheting.

The three elderly women hissed in unison as they saw that Katherine accidentally had undone part of their work. Trying to diffuse the situation, Caroline quickly interjected, “Sorry about that! How about we treat you guys to another round of drinks?”

Nodding enthusiastically, Katherine waved her arms aimlessly in the air and yelled over her shoulder, “Hey bartender, we need some Metamucil on the rocks over here!”

Caroline groaned at Kathrine’s gleeful if somewhat hazy expression, but before she could
try to placate the women again, they stood up from the wobbly table, speaking in one creepy, raspy voice as they shouted,

“There once was a trollop who wailed,

Her lover’s affections had paled,

Despite her desperate pleas,

He felt ill at ease

And declared their courtship had failed.”

Caroline saw red at their insult even as she briefly wondered why it came in the bizarre form of a limerick. Yes, Katherine could be an obnoxious drunk, but there was never a time when slut-shaming was okay. She rose to her feet, pleased that she was wearing her stiletto gladiator sandals so she could tower over these judgey old broads. “Hey! Back off! Katherine doesn’t deserve your judgmental bullshit,” she snarled, helping an unsteady Katherine to her feet.

Klaus’ accented voice drifted over to their standoff, laced with an odd tone of authority as he called out, “Ladies, let’s just calm down, hmm?”

She inwardly winced at his poor choice of words — Katherine wasn’t a fan of being told what to do even when she was sober, and Caroline already could see her spine straighten as she tossed back her brunette curls defiantly. In a spiteful move, she knocked the small basket from the table, arching her brow at the women as though daring them to make a move.

A shattering sound reached Caroline’s ears and she glanced down to see a pair of golden scissors had broken on the stone floor of the bar. The old crones immediately shrieked, their wrinkled faces a terrible grimace as they chorused threateningly, “The slattern has despoiled the shears, as she pathetically drowns in tears —”

Huffing, Katherine cut off their strange, limerick-laced taunts by punching the middle woman squarely in the face. “There!” She turned to Caroline and asked, “What’s up with the random annoying limericks?”

Before Caroline could answer, she noticed the crazy grandma on the right had stealthily maneuvered behind Katherine and was gripping her crochet hook tightly as she prepared to stab her. Not bothering to conceal her monster any longer, Caroline welcomed her black veins and sharp fangs as they surfaced, shouting at Katherine to duck while she grabbed the ball of golden yarn and held a strand between her two hands as she leapt toward the would-be assailant and began choking her.

Katherine’s yelp of pain drew her attention and she was shocked to see that the remaining woman had chin-checked her with a swift uppercut and Katherine swayed drunkenly as she inexplicably began loudly singing, “Thank you for being a friend,” she paused to deliver a short jab to the middle angry stranger who had recovered from her blow to the face and had jumped onto Katherine’s back to start yanking at her long curls. Katherine managed to dislodge her with a grunt, continuing the theme song to *The Golden Girls* with, “Traveled down the road and back again.”

Somewhere in the scuffle, Caroline had managed to lose the yarn and was nursing a sore jaw from where the raging grandma had sucker-punched her. She dodged another swing and could feel Katherine waiting expectantly on her, so rolling her eyes, she sang, “Your heart is true; you’re a pal and a confidant.”
Suddenly, Klaus appeared in the middle of the bar fight, but not before Caroline accidentally took a swing, narrowly missing his face as he smoothly ducked. Katherine looked around in confusion as the elderly women who had been ganging up on her suddenly stepped away, muttering under their breath as they stared at Klaus. “That’s enough. Break it up,” he said firmly, a steel edge to his voice. The three women inexplicably sat back down at their table, resuming their knitting and as though nothing had happened.

Klaus turned toward Caroline and Katherine, oddly calm as he studied their black veins and fangs on display and said, “You two are coming with me.”

Crossing her arms stubbornly in front of her chest, Caroline snorted. “Good luck with that, asshat.”

He unexpectedly smirked, telling them, “I like my odds,” and then pulled out a badge.

Present

“Why couldn’t we compel Klaus,” Katherine asked as they sat in the cramped interrogation room.

“Maybe the better question is how did he manage to subdue two vampires with nothing more than his freakishly tight grip and a couple of pairs of handcuffs,” Caroline replied with a frustrated sigh. She made a mental note to have Katherine teach her how to pick locks as this was not the first time they’d gotten arrested and with Katherine as her road trip buddy, it was probably far from their last.

“Reminds me of that time in Miami,” her friend commented wistfully.

Caroline rolled her eyes. “That time involved strippers and borrowed yard gnomes and as I recall, it was your idea, so the only similarities I see between the two incidents is the fact that both were entirely your fault,” she answered wryly.

“You forgot the autographed bowling ball,” she told Caroline with a wink.

She shook her head, willing herself not to laugh. They needed to come up with a plan. “So obviously seeing vampires didn’t phase Klaus and he seems to be something — other like we are. Also, what was the deal with the psycho Golden Girls?”

“The Fates,” Klaus corrected, opening the door to the interrogation room and sitting across from them. At their incredulous expressions, he explained, “The trio you got into a brawl with were the Fates, also known as Moirai from Greek mythology. The three sister deities that represent incarnations of destiny and life.”

Caroline paled. “Oh crap. They spin the thread of life and use their shears to cut the thread to end a life. No wonder they were so freaked out when Katherine started unraveling their handiwork and broke their shears.”

“Guess it’s a good thing no one broke a hip,” Katherine quipped, toying with a brunette curl. She started humming the song, “Zero to Hero”, causing Klaus to raise his eyebrows in confusion.

“Seriously? Those were the Muses that sang that in the Hercules movie, not the Fates. How
can you not know that?” Caroline asked indignantly.

Katherine snorted. “Just because you forced me to watch that stupid movie over and over again doesn’t mean I was paying attention,” her friend corrected. “Your lady boner for Hercules is showing,” she added slyly.

Blushing furiously, Caroline stubbornly crossed her arms in front of her, prickling at the amused look Klaus was giving her. “It’s not like that! I just really like Greek mythology and Hercules’ adventures were always my favorites to read,” she said defensively.

“Far be it from me to judge, love,” Klaus reassured her, his dimples bracketing a teasing smile. “Now, regarding your current predicament, it’s standard policy for me to bring in any supernatural creatures who display aggression to make sure they won’t be a problem in Mount Oly.”

“You weren’t surprised to see vampires,” Katherine said shrewdly.

Klaus chuckled as though enjoying a private joke. “You’d be amazed at the things I see in my line of work. There’s days that I feel more like animal control when I have to tussle with a particularly large...cat and unruly, uh...dog. And don’t get me started on the incident in the farmer’s market when a dim-witted tourist tried to steal the Hesper...uh, a farmer’s co-op’s apples.”

Caroline absolutely refused to acknowledge the way his police uniform snugly fit him, beautifully outlining the firm muscles that his clothes only hinted at earlier. Shaking her head, a thought just occurred to her. “Wait — Mount Oly...is Mount Olympus?”

Klaus grumbled, “The stubborn Kraken kept eating that part of the sign, so we finally just changed the name.”

“Oh, for fuck’s sake,” Katherine interjected, throwing her hands in the air. “Now we’ll never leave.” She jabbed her thumb in Caroline’s direction and told Klaus, “She’s a huge mythology nerd in addition to her massive crush on Hercules.”

Caroline lightly swatted her friend, and in a shrill voice she hastily explained, “It’s not that bad. I just grew up on bedtime stories about mythology and I’ve always been fascinated by Hercules and the gods and...” she trailed off, feeling her cheeks redden as Klaus studied her with a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips.

He stood up unexpectedly, opening the door to the room and telling them, “I’m trusting that you two won’t cause any more problems during your stay here, so you’re free to go.” He cleared his throat, surprisingly shy as he looked at Caroline under his thick lashes. “If you like, um...I could introduce you to the Kraken, sweetheart.”

Blue eyes widening in excitement, Caroline said, “Really? That sounds amazing!”

Pushing past the two, Katherine breezily interrupted, “Awesome. So while Klaus shows you his Kraken, I’m going to go look for one of the Hecatoncheires giants. Just imagine the possibilities with those hundred hands,” she purred, causing both Caroline and Klaus to blush as she flounced away.

Biting her bottom lip, Caroline said awkwardly, “Are you sure you have time to show me around your town?”

“Of course, love.” Klaus patted his chest as though noticing something was missing. He reached in his pocket and pulled out his gold name tag, explaining, “I’m always happy to show off
what our quaint little town has to offer.” He added with a sexy smirk, “Especially to a fan.”

With a flourish, he finished pinning the shiny object to his chest, the block letters spelling out ‘Sheriff Hercules’.

Chapter End Notes

As I mentioned earlier, I’ve published an original novel through Amazon Digital Services LLC. You can find a link to it on my tumblr: supremeuppityone
It’s called Chicken and Vice. Feel free to message me for more info!

Here’s a brief synopsis:
Chicken and dumplings have never been so sexy!
Just ask Lily Cantrell, owner of the Saucy Wench Restaurant. A chance meeting at a nightclub with a mysterious, sexy British stranger named Jack turns her world into a pineapple upside-down cake from which she may never recover! Especially when she learns that Jack is a deviled egg-ecutive of Augustine Enterprises, the dastardly conglomerate that has harassed her to no end trying to buy the recipe for her famous chicken and dumplings.
Sparks fly as Jack relentlessly pursues Lily, but is he after her heart or her chef secrets? Fortunately, this fussy foodie can count on her zany grandmothers and friends to help her get to the root-abaga of Jack’s intentions (in between rounds of mahjong and Kitchen Peeper Bingo, that is!).
Chicken and Vice takes the reader on an enjoyable journey where our characters learn that letting someone in has never been so terrifying — or rewarding.
As alpha pack leader of the Crescent Clan, Caroline has enough to deal with keeping her wolves in line, but then a familiar sexy hybrid returns with his own set of problems and she can’t help but get involved...

Thanks so much for continuing to follow and support my work! Your reviews have been the best part of my day! This story ended up being bigger than I originally thought, so I’ve already decided to write a sequel for this chapter; I have it mostly mapped out and hopefully will be able to finish writing it soon!

Also, the Klaroline Awards are going on now, so please be sure to go nominate your favorite authors and their stories!

“[I]t is the wine that leads me on, the wild wine that sets the wisest man to sing at the top of his lungs, laugh like a fool — it drives the man to dancing...it even tempts him to blurt out stories better never told.”
— Homer, The Odyssey

Werewolf claws made excellent corkscrews. Caroline’s blue eyes twinkled in delight as she finished wedging the cork out of an aromatic ruby red cabernet and set it out on the picnic table to breathe. Her gaze swept over the gently rolling hills of her pack’s vineyard, Aconite Kiss. The sun burned high overhead and she could see the idiot Salvatore brothers were trying to water the grapes at noon rather than waiting until evening when the heat would be less likely to cause the vines to shrivel. With an impatient wave of her hand, Tyler quickly approached, reassigning them to one of the cellars to help the interns catalog the latest batches of wine.

The musical notes of the delicate copper pipes of her wind chime danced on the slight breeze, but her nose twitched as she sensed trouble was on its way. A low growl of aggravation rumbled in her chest as she placed the worn bookmark made of dried prairie grass back in her
book. From her vantage point sitting atop the tallest hill in the area for miles, her blue eyes narrowed suspiciously as she spied a black Cadillac Escalade slowly make its way over the gravel roads toward her home. She scoffed when she noticed how the bitter Oklahoma dust had coated the once-sparkling finish of the pretentious SUV. Good.

Caroline grinned wickedly as she recalled the first time Klaus had showed up on her pack’s land, a cocksure grin on his handsome face as he assumed a pair of unexpected dimples and accent-laced sweet-talk would convince her pack to join his silly hybrid army. Suffice to say, his visit didn’t turn out quite the way he had assumed it would. She shifted slightly in her white Adirondack chair, making herself more comfortable as she watched the attractive asshat unfold his lean, muscular frame from the vehicle, not bothering to see if his traveling companion was following him as he climbed the steep steps to her wraparound porch.

“Caroline, it’s been too long,” Klaus told her with a short bow. His gray eyes danced with mirth, but underneath his bravado, Caroline could sense he was troubled.

“Not long enough, depending on what shenanigans you’ve brought to my doorstep,” she muttered, turning her attention to the sullen girl that stood a foot behind him, glaring at her feet with her arms defiantly crossed in front of her. She was clearly a werewolf, but her scent carried some interesting secrets. “I’m Caroline. And you are...?” she asked the girl expectantly.

The hybrid quickly answered for her, his accented voice clipping off words in aggravation. “This is Hayley. She’s unfortunately become enmeshed with my family and now that her life has been threatened, I thought to bring her here for protection as she’s also a pack member of the Crescent Clan.” His eyes traced the half-moon birthmark perched near Caroline’s bare shoulder that all werewolves born into her pack carried.

Hayley’s brown eyes suddenly found Caroline’s, a note of challenge in her tone as she said, “I’m the pack’s queen.”

Klaus sighed in irritation at the girl’s bold statement, but otherwise remained silent while Caroline couldn’t help the small chuckle of amusement that escaped her lips. “You’re the Crescent Clan’s queen? Now that is interesting. The Crescent Clan doesn’t have queens. We have an alpha who leads us.”

The girl’s whole demeanor changed as she straightened her posture, pushing out her chest as she quickly scanned the vineyard’s property as though evaluating the various men she saw working to determine which one was the pack’s leader. “Okay, so which one’s the alpha,” she asked with an odd pout.

“That would be me,” Caroline smoothly answered, silently enjoying the way the sullen girl’s eyes widened as she took a further step back. A small, petty part of her relished in the way the young wolf had subconsciously started to submit in her presence. She sniffed, noticing how the air quivered suspiciously around the girl, putting Caroline on high alert. Her wolf made its presence known, straining against her skin to be released as it sensed a potential threat to her pack. Caroline soothed it for the moment, her eyes briefly flickering her signature wolf silver as she evaluated her options.

Her pack must come first. Sensing his alpha’s concern, Tyler immediately rushed to the bottom of the stairs, silently waiting for her to speak.

Klaus curled his lip at her pack beta’s arrival. He asked condescendingly, “Here to play fetch, runt?” Tyler’s answering growl made Hayley jump, her eyes darting nervously between the two aggressive males as they postured and puffed up more like peacocks than wolves.

Caroline rolled her eyes, holding up a hand for silence. “Enough. Tyler, this is Hayley.
Take her to the private dining hall and keep her company. Also, please inform Bonnie we may need to gather the pack for a conclave tonight.” With a quick nod, Tyler wordlessly maneuvered Hayley down the steps and herded her across the vast lawn toward a small cabin off to the side.

“Tell me, love, does his obedience training extend to the bedroom,” Klaus asked in a petulant tone, steel creeping into his glare as he watched the retreating figures.

She scoffed, standing up to reach into the alcove above her table and pull a second goblet from the rack. Pouring generous servings of the hearty cabernet, she handed him his glass before taking a sip of the heady wine. “Honestly, Klaus. You are a thousand-year-old hybrid, not a jealous schoolboy with his first crush. Tyler is my pack beta — you know damn well I don’t shit where I eat. The harmony of my pack is far too important to screw it up by screwing one of my own.” She tilted her head, her tone condescending as she added, “Besides, you certainly don’t have the right to ask me intrusive questions when you bring a pregnant wolf to my door.”

Klaus’ eyes widened, and she was surprised by the myriad of emotions she found upon his handsome face — shame, regret, anger, and even fear. Clearly there was more to this situation than she first imagined. She sympathetically watched him take a shuddering breath, settling into a chair next to hers as he stared blankly at the vineyard activity bustling below. He took a long drink from his wine, seeming to lose himself in the strong, spicy-sweet flavors as he searched for the right words. She allowed herself to admire the way his dark henley stretched across the smooth muscles of his chest, his collection of necklaces casually slung around his neck.

Finally, he set down his glass and said hoarsely, “It was a drunken one-night stand.” He shook his head angrily as he continued. “It was supposed to be meaningless. She was there to give me information on Katherine, an irritantly resourceful vampire that I’ve been hunting for centuries.”

Caroline bit her lip, trying to determine the best way to tell him what else she knew. She gently questioned, “And then she tracked you down and told you she was pregnant? Did she ask for something in return?”

“Actually, a clan of witches that want to try to overthrow my family kidnapped her, revealed to me that I’m the father, and bound her and the baby’s lives to that of the witches so that I cannot harm them,” Klaus explained, his anger at feeling so powerless was evident in his ragged tone and the way his knuckles turned white.

He glanced over at Caroline, arching an eyebrow. He curiously asked, “How did you know that she was pregnant?”

“Seriously? Any supernatural creature can hear the second heartbeat. I cannot believe human witches had to point it out. You’re the worst wolf ever. I bet you haven’t even turned since you first broke the curse, have you,” she teased, taking another sip of her wine.

“I’ve been a bit busy, love,” he muttered defensively, refilling his glass.

Caroline nodded to herself, cheekily announcing, “Yup. Worst.Wolf.Ever.” Clinking their goblets together she added, “And here’s further proof: I bet you haven’t tried to find out if the baby’s really yours, have you?”

“Of course I have,” he snarled, his eyes darkening dangerously. “Witches performed some sort of spell that proved it.”

“Witches. You mean like the ones that are currently threatening your family,” she asked
flatly. She refilled her glass as well, her blue eyes sweeping across the vineyard and noted with pride the way her pack worked together as a well-organized team as they sorted the grapes to prepare for pressing later that week.

“These were different witches, ones that are loyal to my family,” he answered in aggravation. “I’m not a bloody idiot.”

“Right. Because witches on your payroll couldn’t possibly be on someone else’s payroll too,” she mocked, unable to keep from rolling her eyes at his idiocy.

Suddenly alert, he straightened in his chair, his tone eerily soft as he carefully considered her words. “What are you not telling me? Did you sense something?”

“Obviously,” she scoffed. “In addition to the ridiculously shady circumstances in which Hayley became enmeshed with you and your family, I noticed a couple of things.” She sighed, mentally preparing for his undoubtedly hostile reaction at what she was about to tell him. “Klaus, Hayley doesn’t have your scent. The baby she’s carrying should smell like both of you. Whatever Hayley and the witches told you was a lie. The baby isn’t yours.”

Klaus blinked, his fingers twitching so violently that they neatly snapped his goblet stem in half, spilling the cabernet across the center of her wooden table. “It isn’t mine,” he half-stated-half-asked in a strangely hoarse voice. “It is nothing more than a plot against me! To keep me distracted while the witches try to overthrow my family,” he growled, eyes flashing a feral, murderous gold as he clenched his fists. “I’ll have that wretched wolf’s head for this,” he swore, leaping to his feet.

Caroline let out a threatening snarl, the same authoritative cadence she used to keep her own wolves in line. “Sit.Down.” Her sharp claws erupted from her fingertips, but she kept the rest of her wolf at bay for the moment. The power behind her words seemed to give him pause, and he reluctantly took his seat, the angry yellow of his eyes glowing brightly. “Seriously, Klaus, with that impulsive nature of yours, it’s no wonder I was able to so easily thwart your attempts at waging war against my pack when we first met.”

He growled lowly at her mocking tone. “It was a simple misunderstanding, sweetheart. I merely arrived with an enticing offer for your pack and you tried to kill me.”

She smiled fondly at the memories he raised. Back then, the foolish hybrid had no idea what he blundered into when he first approached her pack.

_Klaus had caused quite a stir in pack communities across the nation when he broke his curse to become a powerful hybrid. What he hadn’t anticipated was how knowledgeable Caroline and her pack had become regarding his plans for a hybrid army in addition to the Originals and their weaknesses. By the time he had arrived at her vineyard, she had dozens of contingency plans in place to ensure her pack’s survival as well as their continued freedom._

_When the arrogant hybrid greeted her with a flirtatious smirk, she had allowed him to spin his seductive tale of power and immortality and how he would selflessly give this gift to her pack once they submitted to his will. But Caroline would never submit. For generations, the Crescent Clan had been fiercely loyal to its own, and that was not about to change just because a pair of dimples and a sexy grin strutted onto her pack lands. Also, she could read the threat of violence in the powerful line of his muscles and knew that his promises of peace and goodwill were clever little lies meant to soothe her wolves into complacency before their freedom was snatched away._

_She had welcomed Klaus warmly to the vineyard and invited him to a feast in which she proposed they open negotiations. Although suspicious of her offer, he amicably agreed, sending_
her a heated gaze that she couldn’t help but reciprocate. After all, what general didn’t enjoy a side of wooing with their war? Seated next to him in her pack’s banquet hall, she easily distracted him with witty banter and sly little touches, winding him up to the point that he was oblivious to Bonnie, her pack’s healer, deftly swiping the protection talisman from around his neck.

Once Caroline noted all the necessary pieces were in place, she enacted the next phase of her plan, and invited her wolves to raise their wine glasses to toast their honored guest. As they all drank deeply, Klaus suddenly began choking, clutching wildly at his throat.

At his furious glare, Caroline had stood over him calmly, explaining in a cold voice, “Aconite. Also known as ‘wolfsbane’. Also, just a touch of white oak ash.” As Klaus valiantly fought off the effects of his drugged wine, she added matter-of-factly, “You should guard your secrets more carefully, hybrid. Like we do,” and then flicked her wrist, causing the powerful immortal to fly through the air until he was pinned to the wall by her unexpected magic.

“You tricked me,” Klaus grumbled, pulling her out of her fond memories.

She laughed, her long blonde curls dancing about her bare shoulders. “You wanted to be tricked.” She patted his hand in mock sympathy. “We eventually reached a favorable understanding, Klaus.” Her blue eyes narrowed as she recalled the reason for his visit. “Clearly our alliance has paid off for you, considering you’re already dumping problems on my doorstep.”

He huffed, fists still clenched in anger as he said, “You have destroyed the witches’ leverage over my family. Once I learn the depth of the girl’s treachery, she will be swiftly dealt with along with those bloody witches.”

Caroline crossed her arms in front of her chest and said defiantly, “Not on my watch you won’t. You’ve brought the wolf to my lands which means I now have a say in her fate. Hayley’s still pregnant and that’s a line we don’t cross.” The silver of her wolf danced in her eyes momentarily, a warning she expected Klaus to heed. Although his strong jaw tightened in annoyance, he nodded in agreement.

Taking a breath, she leaned forward in her chair and kept her voice even as she calmly explained, “The other unsettling thing I noticed about Hayley is the way the air around her shimmered slightly. One or more spells are at work here and I’m suspicious of that wolf’s incredibly convenient birthmark.”

Raising an eyebrow, Klaus asked, “You think she’s not part of your clan? I’ve never heard of pack marks being magically altered before. Are you sure it can be done?”

Caroline grimly answered, “With magic, anything is possible. I’m more curious to know why my pack was brought into your family’s shenanigans.” Reaching a decision, she stood up, draining the rest of her glass before telling him, “So let’s go ask her.” Not looking back to see if Klaus was following her, she headed down the steps, determined to learn the truth.

If her pack had an enemy, she would find out. Her pack must come first.
Chapter Summary

Here’s the sequel to Chapter 37 in this series. Thank you for your patience! As alpha of the Crescent Clan, Caroline is used to protecting her pack. However, a certain temperamental hybrid has brought his problem to her doorstep that may turn out to be her pack’s problem after all.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some adventurous sexy times ahead...peaches are in season right now and I got a bit carried away. :)

“In wine, there's truth.”
― Pliny the Elder, Natural History

“You’re here to kill me.” Caroline raised a surprised eyebrow at Hayley’s blunt statement, taking in the tense line of her small frame and the overpowering smell of fear coming off of her in waves. “You figured out the baby isn’t Klaus’,” she added in a weak voice, a note of resignation creeping in.

Caroline exchanged a brief glance with Klaus, who seemed content to allow the wolf to cower before them if his disdainful smile was any indication. She didn’t relish the fear she saw in the girl’s eyes, and couldn’t help but hear the rapid heartbeats that announced both mother and child were in distress. She kept her voice even as she answered calmly, “My pack doesn’t harm pregnant women or their children. It isn’t our way.”

She nodded toward Tyler who began setting out a bag of aromatic sumac leaves, a shallow wooden bowl, bloodroot petals, and black and white ribbons. She began crumbling the leaves into the bowl while Tyler added the white petals. “Should I send for Bonnie,” he asked her quietly.

She smiled at her pack beta as she dipped the black ribbon into the mixture. “No. Your magic is strong.”

Klaus huffed as Tyler preened under his alpha’s attention. “Pompous git,” he muttered under his breath.

Ignoring him, Caroline reached for Hayley’s wrist, wrapping the black ribbon around it and then dipping both hands into the bowl to let the mixture cascade through her fingers. “You’ll want to stand still during the ritual,” she told Hayley, whose eyes widened comically.
“Wait. You guys are witches? But I thought you were wolves,” she asked in confusion as she looked down to study the ribbon more closely.

Caroline rolled her eyes as she questioned, “Why can’t we be both?” She jerked her chin in Klaus’ direction, adding teasingly, “Hybrids always make a big deal about being two things. Like multitasking is hard or something. My pack has magic but you don’t see us going around bragging about it.” She bit her lip to hide her grin when she heard Klaus’ irritated grumbling.

Refocusing her energy, she grasped Tyler’s hand and together they pushed their power toward the concoction until the ribbon began to glow. Very carefully, Caroline allowed one claw to delicately peel back the black ribbon while Tyler quickly tied the white ribbon in its place. Chanting together, they felt the spell release its hold, and as the ribbon fell away, so did the crescent-shaped birthmark on Hayley’s skin.

Her brown eyes filled with tears as she looked down at her smooth olive skin, now bare of her mark that claimed she belonged with Caroline’s pack. She seemed to fight down a sob and instead tears fell silently down her face as she waited for someone to speak.

“Tyler, leave us. Go see how Matt’s doing with the new irrigation system installation,” Caroline quietly commanded.

The pack beta had barely closed the door before Klaus rested his palms on the long oak table, leaning over so that he could look down threateningly at Hayley’s huddled form on the bench seat. “My, my, how the tables have turned, little wolf. I recall not so long ago how you dangled your so-called leverage over my head, and now that the tables have turned, however will you recover?”

“Katherine convinced me to help her take down the Originals. Once she knew I was pregnant, she came up with this plan where I sleep with Klaus and make him think the baby’s his. Then, she had a witch create a glamour spell so it looked like I was a part of the Crescent Clan.” Hayley swiped angrily at her cheeks, staring blankly into space as she revealed in a choked voice, “The real father doesn’t want anything to do with me or the baby and I needed the money Katherine offered me.”

Caroline quickly cut off Klaus’ answering snarl, sharply asking, “Why bring my pack into it? What does Katherine want with the Crescent Clan?” She could feel her claws digging into her clenched fists, her wolf anxious at the thought of her pack being targeted.

Hayley’s fearful brown eyes flicked to hers briefly before she returned to staring at the table in front of her. “Katherine knew about the alliance between Klaus and the Crescent Clan. She said that Klaus was drawn to one of its wolves, so if I showed up supposedly pregnant with his child, it would cause trouble for him and possibly break the alliance. She said that losing such a powerful alliance would ensure the Originals lost their war with the witches.”

Hayley had barely finished speaking before Klaus let out a tremendous roar, flipping over the enormous oak table in his rage. He stormed over to the trembling wolf, gripping her neck tightly with one hand as he hissed, “Foolish little wolf. Do you know what happens to those who betray me?!” His eyes were a feral gold, glowing angrily as he threatened, “I may not harm one who is in your delicate condition, but once you give birth, start running, little wolf.”

Caroline’s wolf clawed just below her skin, drawn to the violence within Klaus and eager to force him to submit. Her wolf’s silver bled into her gaze as she growled, “The wolf is mine. I claim her as pack.”
Startled by her unexpected words, Klaus released his grip on the girl who scrambled away from him to cower in a corner. “Have you lost your bloody mind, Caroline?! That filthy traitor is loyal to no one but herself. She will betray you at the first opportunity!”

Caroline kept her gaze on the girl who seemed just as surprised as Klaus, but with a healthy dose of fear that kept her body trembling in the corner. Caroline declared, “She is a survivor — a trait my pack honors. She will earn her place in time.”

“I will not allow this to come to pass,” Klaus began, stomping over to Caroline with black veins crawling under his golden eyes as his fangs unsheathed.

Her own wolf snarled in response at his challenge, her eyes glowing silver as her curved fangs released. “On my land, you only possess the authority I allow, hybrid. Learn your place before I put you in it,” she warned.

Sensing his alpha’s anger, Tyler quickly returned, her pack beta starting to shift into his wolf, but she stopped him with a single gesture before he launched himself at the furious hybrid. “Tyler, stand down. Let Bonnie know that the conclave will happen tonight.” She glanced briefly at Hayley, who wore an expression of disbelief on her tear-streaked face. “Tell the pack we’re welcoming our newest member.” Tyler nodded once, glaring at Klaus as he left.

She turned to Klaus who was still seething with rage. “Take a walk. We’ll have things to discuss later.” He stormed past her, ripping the heavy wooden door from its hinges as he stomped out of the dining hall.

Caroline sighed in irritation as she watched the splintered pieces of hardy redwood clatter to the floor. “I’ll take that out on his ass later,” she muttered, feeling her wolf recede within her as she took a calming breath.

Hayley scrambled to her feet, brown eyes calculating as she quietly asked, “Why are you helping me?”

“I meant what I said. You are a survivor, something my pack values in its wolves.” Caroline’s eyes returned to their normal blue, but appeared no less threatening as she told Hayley, “Do not mistake my generosity for weakness. You will earn your place here just like everyone else.”

The other wolf nodded in agreement. “I understand.” She watched in awe as Caroline easily tipped the heavy oak table right-side up only using one hand. She fidgeted, as though unsure of what to do with her hands. “Katherine thought I just went along with her plan for the money,” she began hesitantly. “But I listened to the stories she told me about the Crescent Clan and its fierce alpha. How you faced down the Brotherhood of the Five and ended their centuries-old line of supernatural hunters. Or that time you took out these sirens that supposedly served the devil.”

“You’d be surprised by how easy the siren thing was resolved. Truthfully, it felt a bit pointless by the end,” Caroline chuckled, bending over to scoop up the spell ingredients that Klaus had spilled during his temper tantrum.

The eager expression on the wolf’s face revealed that she was hoping for Caroline to elaborate, but when she didn’t, she said, “But my point is that Katherine had all these awesome stories about how tough and smart your pack was, but what really got me was how the pack was a family. That all of the pack members were fiercely loyal to each other and would fight to the death to protect its own.” Her voice caught as she finished quietly, “I never had that before and I wanted it for me and my baby. Somewhere we could belong.”
Caroline straightened, placing the wooden bowl and other ingredients back on the table.
“You have it now,” she acknowledged with a reassuring smile.

Hayley blinked back tears as she cleared her throat. Glancing up at Caroline, she blushed a bit as she said in embarrassment, “Katherine told me the alpha was a guy, and I kept picturing all of the crazy battles you fought to protect your pack and I...I kinda had a thing for you...you know, before I knew you were you.”

Caroline threw back her head and laughed, blonde curls bouncing as she said with a twinkle in her eye, “While you’re not the first pack member to try to get in my pants, you’re definitely the first one to tell me it’s because you thought I was a guy.” She glanced at the large picture window, catching the faint outline of Klaus’ tense frame as he stomped past a few pack members who were pruning Carignane grapevines. She frowned, making a mental note to have his hide if he damaged any of those grapes as they were part of a special blend that was cultivated exclusively for the vineyard’s spicy, velvety cabernet.

Noticing Caroline’s attention, Hayley obviously misinterpreted her expression as she awkwardly remarked, “Um...so what happened with Klaus...it was just a one-time thing. I promise it’s not like that with us.” The alpha’s silence inexplicably seemed to entice her into further confessing, “Actually, I’m uh...kinda into Klaus’ brother, Elijah. Which I know is kinda squicky because of what happened with Klaus.”

Caroline arched an eyebrow, her voice matter-of-fact as she said, “We once had a foolish pack member who toyed with two brothers in our clan.” Her smile was a merciless blade as she shrugged nonchalantly, “We ate her.”

Gulping loudly, Hayley squeaked, “Oh.”

“No because of her terrible romantic choices,” Caroline elaborated, “She was executed because she betrayed our pack to a hunter named Alaric.” Her gaze turned fierce as she watched the wolf shiver slightly at her words. A hint of a growl entered her voice as she said, “Never forget — you’re a part of our family — unless you betray us.”

Her expression cleared as a lovely, dark-skinned woman entered the dining hall. “Hayley, this is Bonnie, our pack’s healer. She’s here to walk you through tonight’s conclave and dedication ceremony.” Nodding once at Bonnie, she left the women alone, walking back into the stifling Oklahoma heat to find her wayward hybrid.

A rustling noise caught her attention and once she realized it was the rough fabric of Klaus’ jeans as he moved through her orchard, she headed that way as well, her lips curving into a small, pleased smile as she could hear how his footsteps had lightened and were no longer as aggressive. The arrogant hybrid had calmed down since their disagreement, and by the pattern she could make out, it appeared that he realized he had company. She let out a tiny rumble of pleasure as she realized he was purposely leading her deeper into the orchard where they could be assured of no distractions.

Caroline inhaled the sweet aroma of ripening peaches, thinking that they smelled of summertime, which was the inspiration behind her combining them with Chardonnay grapes for the vineyard’s wildly popular white wine sangria. She came to a cluster of peach trees, finding Klaus casually leaning against a thick branch of the oldest peach tree in her orchard.

Crossing his arms in a huff, he finally spoke. “You’ve welcomed that deceitful jackal into your pack. Very careless of you, sweetheart.”
“Pack business doesn’t require your commentary, hybrid,” she countered, a hand on her hip as she playfully glared at him. “That said, it appears we’re going to need to fight a war together, so apparently some aspects of my pack business will intersect with you.”

Steel flashed in his gray gaze as he answered, “Don’t assume I will passively allow you decide which areas of business to discuss with me, love.” His eyes darkened as a sly smirk spread across his face, “However, I do look forward to our intersecting,” he finished with a low growl.

She felt her wolf lunge at his words, anxious to accept the hybrid’s challenge. Slowly stalking toward him, she rumbled, “You challenged my authority. And you owe me a door.” She allowed the tip of her tongue to tease an emerging fang, telling him, “I’m taking that out on your ass.”

“Oh, I certainly hope so, love,” Klaus countered, gold flaring in his gaze as he followed the seductive movement of her wicked tongue over her fangs.

She landed against him with an excited snarl, grabbing his strong shoulders and whirling him around until one dimpled cheek was pressed against the broad trunk of the peach tree. Her claws tore at his jeans, anxious to sink into his pale flesh. Once he was exposed, she grinned in delight at the way his skin seemed to quiver in anticipation. She sank to her knees behind him, roughly massaging his ass as he groaned in pleasure. A wicker basket lay on its side near her feet, spilling freshly picked peaches, and she leaned over to select a large one. As she held it in her palm, she could feel the fuzz-covered flesh slightly give, indicating that it was ripe and that its juices would be very sweet. Sweet indeed.

With a playful smile, she held the peach over his firm cheeks, crushing the blush-colored fruit so that its juices would stain his pale skin. Klaus let out a surprised gasp at the first touch of the cool liquid, then groaned as he felt her start to smear the juices over his ass, her sensual touches setting him ablaze. Caroline moved closer, allowing her breath to softly caress his pale skin, inhaling the heady aroma of his obvious arousal. With a possessive growl, she slid her tongue across his cheeks, chasing the sticky syrup of the peach, and playfully nipping his skin as he called out her name hoarsely.

One of Caroline’s hands scrabbled for another ripe peach from the overturned basket, and her voice rough with want as she commanded Klaus, “Turn around.” She caught the sexy gold in his gaze as he watched her hungrily. Blushing under his blatant perusal, she quickly turned her attention toward his cock, thick and aching as it awaited her touch. She crushed the peach’s flesh over his erect member, smearing its sweetness with both hands as she teased him mercilessly. The silver of her wolf flared in her blue eyes as she looked up at him, continuing her seductive strokes under his greedy gaze.

“Tell me what you need,” she told him, slowing down her movements as he let out a frustrated groan.

“You know what I need,” he growled lowly, stubbornly clenching his fists as he watched her with blazing golden eyes.

Caroline gave him an impish grin, lightly swirling her index finger around his swollen tip. “Yes, but I told you to tell me. Beg me.”

The commanding tone of her words seemed to spark something within Klaus, and, licking his lips at the sight of her playfully toying with his aching cock, he ground out, “Put those pretty lips on my cock and suck me.” At her sharp glance, he softened his voice, panting, “Make me come for you, love, please.”
Wolf-silver eyes alight with amusement, she surprised him by suddenly taking him fully into her mouth, sucking off the sticky peach nectar and sighing pleurably at the taste of his savory arousal mixed with sweetness. He let out a string of curses as she flicked her tongue along the sides, feeling how his body twitched delightfully. He bucked his hips eagerly against her mouth, moaning as she took him deeper, and at that final, delicate nip of her teeth, Klaus became lost in the delicious moment as he spent himself with a shudder.

“Your turn,” Klaus said with a ferocious snarl, ripping off his dark henley and attacking Caroline with a filthy, punishing kiss that left her writhing on top of the soft clover. He quickly stripped off her sage-colored halter top and ragged jean shorts, his hands desperate to touch her soft skin. She couldn’t help the sigh that escaped her at the feel of those determined fingers, watching with interest when he stopped his explorations to pluck another peach from the overturned basket.

Smirking down at her, he squeezed the ripe, rosy flesh until it burst over her hips and stomach, smearing the sticky juices along her torso. He slid his tongue in wide arcs over her form, lapping at the bits of fruit and nectar. “You taste divine, sweetheart,” he groaned, his talented tongue taking a wick detour over her mound before pausing to add with a possessive growl, “But my favorite flavors are here,” and then plunged the tip into her dripping core.

Caroline felt herself unravel as he swirled his tongue within her, stroking the slick walls and groaning at the taste. She could feel herself getting close, and began to grind against his sinful mouth until he pulled back with a smug smile. “Klaus,” she shouted angrily, unable to help the way her hips tried to chase after him.

“Say it, love,” Klaus teased, “Tell me what you need.” He allowed one finger to lightly touch her aching clit.

“Beg me.”

She groaned, in her lustful haze realizing she should have known he would get his revenge. “Fine,” she seethed, feeling how her body was near the edge and needing that final push he could give her. “Take your cock and fuck me. Spread me wide and fuck me deep. Now. Please.”

The surprised look on his handsome face was priceless, but he quickly recovered to shoot her a heated gaze full of gleaming hybrid gold. He grasped her thighs, pushing them apart as he exposed her quivering center. He positioned himself at her opening, digging his fingers into her inner thighs as he spread her legs wide. With a snap of his hips, he buried his cock within her, causing her to let out a delighted squeal.

Caroline was surprised to find how much she enjoyed allowing Klaus to take control. Her body responded eagerly to the way he pinned her down with his hybrid strength, and while she knew she could overpower him if necessary, she allowed herself to let go and enjoy the delicious fun of the powerful hybrid between her thighs. His thrusts were masterful, calculated to bring her to the precipice of pleasure, and his strangled moan as she purposely tightened around him made her flush with pleasure. He angled his hips in a way that rubbed her clit just as she needed and she groaned as her orgasm overtook her, clenching around him as he rode out the remaining waves of their combined release.

Klaus collapsed on top of her, panting, his fingers possessively tracing her jawline all the way down to the crescent birthmark near her shoulder. She was taken aback when he placed a delicate, reverent kiss on top of it. She had a feeling he was about to make their alliance in the upcoming war with the witches more...complicated. Perhaps she would let him. Her wolf seemed to be on board with that idea, lazily basking in the intoxicating scents of their playful sex mixed with sweet nectar and damp earth. She stretched her lean body underneath his, enjoying the effortless way they fit together. She reached up to kiss him firmly on the lips, allowing her tongue
to linger along the traces of their passion.

Finally breaking their kiss, Caroline cupped Klaus’ face, a wicked gleam in her eyes as she asked, “So, ready to start a war?”
Chapter Summary

This is written for LaLainaJ. I’m a HUGE fan of your writing and really hope you enjoy your gift! In this story, a quiet day at the museum takes an unexpected turn when circumstances throw together an arrogant hybrid, an intriguing blonde docent, a dark wizard and the captivating artwork of Hieronymus Bosch.

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: You guys – big news! I won Best Comedy Author for the Klaroline Awards! I also was nominated for: Most Creative Author and Best Crime/Mystery/Thriller Fic - Cursed Obsession! I can’t tell you how much your support for all of my work has meant to me – thank you so much!!!

Warning: Smutty fun!

“Art is the lie that enables us to realize the truth.”
— Pablo Picasso

Klaus found the sword-wielding skeletal man bursting out of the giant tomato mildly threatening. Although, he wisely recognized that the sparrow-headed man with a funnel perched jauntily on his oversized head certainly was alarming as well. Klaus frowned, realizing that he might still be coming off of a blood-high from that pathetic pack of werewolves that decided to make a move against him in Central Park. It had been an irritating inconvenience having to dispatch enemies on his way to the Met to see the famed Bosch exhibit. The wolves had been gloriously outmatched and Klaus had come out of the slaughter with only a jagged scratch across his cheekbone from an errant claw. A quick sip from a jogger had allowed him to heal instantly, and now he stood in the exhibit admiring some of his favorite pieces.

A cheerfully exuberant voice broke his concentration and a scowl crept across his handsome face as he turned to compel its owner to go rudely interrupt someone else’s enjoyment of the museum, but he faltered at the vision before him. Golden curls held back with sapphire hair combs, inquisitive blue eyes and delicate pink lips greeted him with nothing more than a disinterested glance and he suddenly found himself straightening his posture as he tried to catch her attention.
The woman clapped her hands to garner the attention of the small tour group that had gathered and announced, “Welcome to the Hieronymus Bosch exhibit! These extraordinary works are on loan from the Museo Nacional del Prado in Madrid. My name is Caroline and today we will explore this celebrated early Netherlandish painter known for his mesmerizing, imaginative and often gruesome landscapes.”

She raised her arm to gesture to a painting, causing the silk of her blue patterned dress to rustle pleasantly. Klaus stepped closer, suddenly curious about what this lovely docent thought she knew about one of his favorite artists. “Bosch’s work is best taken in gradually — his micro-portraits of humans, animals, demonic beings and a mish-mash of human-hybrid beasts are all designed to reflect human weaknesses and their ultimate fates as sinners.”

“You believe that all these ‘human-hybrid beasts’ are evil then, love? It seems a bit simplistic to assume that their purpose is to serve as a cautionary tale and nothing more,” Klaus blurted out, unable to help himself. He noted with delight the way her ivory skin turned a delicate rose as she grew angry. He suddenly could detect the delectable aroma of honey and he was surprised to find his control was shaken to the point that he needed to breathe more shallowly to avoid his hybrid features emerging.

Caroline shook herself, plastering on a wide smile for the rest of the small tour group and answered brightly, “As with all artwork, the beauty and intent behind each piece is open to interpretation. The lessons that can be learned are vast and limited only by the observer’s imagination. There always has been a mystery surrounding Bosch. While he was famous throughout Europe at the height of his career, little is known about his personal life. There are no letters or journals and only a few records exist that mention him.”

“What about the municipal records indicating that he belonged to the Brotherhood of Our Lady,” Klaus interrupted with a teasing gleam in his gray eyes, noting the way she huffed in annoyance at having her clearly practiced lecture interrupted once more. He found that he was rapidly becoming addicted to the fire that flickered in her blue eyes as he needled her.

“Actually, those are the records to which I was referring. Bosch used the name Hieronymus van Aken for legal documents and the Brotherhood lists him by this name as well. Research indicates that his father was an artistic advisor to this prestigious order that revered the Virgin Mary and Bosch became a member in the late 1480s. He appears to have learned his craft during this time, but our knowledge is further complicated as he never dated his work. In fact, only 25 paintings and approximately 20 drawings have been identified as his creations.” Straightening her shoulders, her blue eyes flashed a warning at Klaus that caused his dimples to deepen as he smirked. She quickly turned away from him, addressing the rest of the tour group as she explained the background and religious themes present in Death and the Miser.

“You mentioned his popularity as an artist, love. In addition to his religious patrons, surely wealthy secular patrons at the time would have commissioned Bosch as well? How can you be sure that no other undiscovered pieces exist,” Klaus persisted, thinking fondly of the intricate, bold work that Bosch had created for him in the late 1400s. He had presented himself as a wealthy duke from England, and spun a thrilling tale for the artist about a man who was turned into a monster only to discover a different sort of beast already dwelled inside of him. As Klaus had predicted, Bosch was intrigued by the story and happily painted the piece for him, never realizing that his work was so much more than mere allegorical myth and superstition.

Caroline looked at him sharply, pausing in her lecture about late medieval morality and visual interpretations of biblical and folklore metaphors to sigh in aggravation. “If you’re referring to The Beast of Two Bloods, the supposedly lost Bosch painting, it’s nothing more than a silly
fantasy. Scholars have searched for years and have yet to find concrete evidence that such a painting ever existed.” She resumed her lecture, pointedly ignoring Klaus’ flirtatious grin. “Now, turning our attention toward *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, we can see why this piece is arguably Bosch’s most famous work. Even today, musicians, designers, choreographers, authors and other artists derive inspiration from this masterpiece.”

Klaus was surprised by how reluctant he was to turn his gaze away from the argumentative blonde to focus on the priceless work before them. The depiction of Adam and Eve in bright, cheerful colors was a jarring contrast to the darker color palette the artists typically favored. Even the panel featuring hell and its punishments felt almost hopeful. He could tell from Caroline’s tone that this was a work she was quite fond of, and given the way the light seemed to emanate from her, it made sense that she would be drawn to this piece.

As he watched the way she beamed at the tour group, talking excitedly with her hands as her blue eyes lit up with wonder, he couldn’t help the slight feeling of melancholy that swept over him as he realized he was looking at a lovely woman that seemed to radiate sunshine and represented all of the things a dark creature like he could never hope to have. Despite his gloomy thoughts, he lingered in the tour group, wanting to bask in her presence as long as possible.

She was winding down the tour with the final work, *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, which happened to be Klaus’ favorite piece by Bosch. “This triptych features the four natural elements as the setting of one man’s loneliness as he faces demonic creatures who wish to tempt him into breaking his vows of morality,” she explained fondly. “This marvelous piece sat undiscovered for decades in storage at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Missouri before it was successfully authenticated as Bosch’s work. Who knows how many other priceless masterpieces are sitting somewhere undiscovered,” she asked the tour group in a voice full of hope that Klaus found endearing.

As the tour ended and the other museum guests wandered off, Klaus continued to stand near Caroline, still greedy for her presence. They stood silently in front of Bosch’s work, and while he tried to focus on the brilliant brush strokes of the talented artist, he couldn’t help but watch the stunning beauty out of the corner of his eye as she quietly took in the detailed imagery. He wondered what the charming little museum docent would think if he confessed that he was an immortal creature who actually had met the famous artist and that in addition to painting, his most notable talent had been his ability to tell a spectacular dick joke. He snorted at the thought, imagining the way her eyes would widen as she blushed prettily, and then she would lash out at him with a well-placed barb.

“I’ve seen a variety of reactions to Bosch’s work over the years, but snorting is a new one,” she wryly observed, turning her inquisitive gaze to him. “Also, I think I’ve earned a proper introduction after you sabotaged my tour, don’t you think? Or, should I keep calling you *Dimpled Art Ruiner* in my head,” she offered with a cheeky grin.

“Call me Klaus. And I was merely trying to enlighten you with little-known tidbits to add some spice to your tour, sweetheart,” he answered with a smirk.

Caroline rolled her eyes, crossing her arms in front of her chest as she huffed in annoyance, “Please. Nothing you said enhanced my tour. You just wanted to be a dimpled art ruiner.” She flicked her blue gaze critically over him, seeming to linger a bit too long at his open collar where his tangle of necklaces sat, before she added, “Also, your fumbling attempts to hit on me during my tour cracks my top five in worst skeevy pickup techniques I’ve been subjected to while at work. Congrats.”
Klaus let out a surprised laugh, finding her boldness refreshing. “Remind me never to introduce you to my younger brother then. You’d find his seduction technique is even more off-putting than mine, sweetheart.”

She nodded, a fond smile on her face as she commented, “Siblings are a handful, aren’t they? I have eight sisters and it feels like I’m always playing peacemaker or having to go bail them out of whatever trouble they’ve gotten themselves into.”

His eyes widened in surprise. “They sound like a handful, sweetheart. I have two sisters and three brothers, so I know what you mean about siblings and complicated situations.” He felt a strange calmness settle over him as he continued talking to Caroline, and he was struck by the inexplicable need to open up to her more. He added, “Over the years, it had been my hope that my siblings and I would grow closer, but it seems as though we’re always at odds with each other. Is your family close?”

Caroline let out a derisive laugh, her blue eyes flashing with momentary sadness as she explained, “My sisters and I are close, but mostly because we bonded over what a philandering piece of shit our father is. Our mother was one of his clueless side pieces and his actual wife is a spiteful lunatic with a flock of codependent peacocks who...” she trailed off, surprise registering on her face as though she didn’t mean to reveal so much of herself to a stranger. Her pink lips settled into a grim smile as she finished with, “Let’s just say my family is needlessly complicated.” She arched an eyebrow, her tone curious as she asked, “What about your parents? Are you close with them?”

Klaus’ incredulous bark of laughter took them both by surprise as they exchanged commiserating glances. He shook his head and said with a wry grin, “I’m afraid my familial situation also is needlessly complicated, love.”

She opened her mouth to answer, but seemed to think better of it when her blue eyes narrowed dangerously at the dark-haired man stalking toward them. “Speaking of needlessly complicated,” she muttered under her breath. “What do you want, Enzo,” she asked curtly.

Klaus noted the sudden coldness in Caroline’s voice and studied the stranger more closely. He didn’t look particularly intimidating — a medium build topped off by thick black hair. However, it was the unusual cunning he caught in the stranger’s dark eyes that gave him pause. “You know why I’m here,” he angrily spat at Caroline, “you ruined everything!”

Caroline was oddly calm as she faced the man’s rage. “Your client’s inevitable failure is one of your own making, Enzo. I told you that piece of garbage script was never going to be the next Blazing Saddles.”

Before Klaus could do more than raise a questioning eyebrow, Enzo threw a glass vial at Caroline’s feet where it shattered as he began a strange, guttural chanting. A putrid yellow mist rose from the floor, coiling sinisterly around Caroline’s ankles. Alarm briefly registered on her face before it was replaced by fury, and then Klaus realized that her ivory skin was becoming transparent. He reached out to her without thinking, noticing far too late that the same sickly smoke had curled around him as well. Snarling, Klaus tried to lash out at Enzo, but faded too quickly to do any damage as his body succumbed to the spell.

The Met’s exhibit hall was quickly replaced by an unrecognizable landscape of somber colors dotted with insidious shades of red. As nightmarish creatures flooded his vision, he blinked once, twice, three times to try to make sense of the impossible scene before him.

“Shit. Not again,” Caroline grumbled, brushing back an errant blonde curl that had escaped
from one of her sapphire combs. She glanced at Klaus curiously and asked, “Are you okay? Banishing ingredients can make you dizzy if you aren’t used to them. And I’m pretty sure Enzo used hemlock in that potion. Bastard.”

Klaus shook his head, eyeing Caroline suspiciously. He took an experimental whiff, frustrated that his blonde companion still smelled human, with her signature aroma of golden honey that made his hybrid fangs itch to taste her. “What the hell is going on? Where are we,” he demanded, gray eyes widening in disbelief as a sailboat sprouting an enormous fish head soundlessly floated overhead.

Caroline huffed in annoyance as she explained, “Enzo’s an agent who represents mediocre comedic actors and uses black magic to boost their careers.” She shook her head in irritation, adding, “He’s also a dark wizard, so it’s not like he’s bound by a pesky moral code. And it looks like he banished us into Bosch’s The Temptation of St. Anthony.”

Klaus gaped at a pig-snouted nude figure walking past them who was blowing a curved horn. “We’re in the bloody painting?!” His voice became a dangerous growl as he asked accusingly, “Why did he target you, sweetheart? Who are you really?”

“I told you, I’m Caroline. Also, I’m a museum docent, art lover, Capricorn...” she trailed off with a flirtatious wink.

He was surprised to find that he wasn’t irritated by her teasing. If anything, he was even more intrigued. Clasping his hands behind his back he asked, “And what else are you, love?” He studied the blonde beauty carefully, adding, “Museum docents typically do not incur the wrath of dark wizards.”

Caroline seemed to be deep in thought as she stared at the horizon where a series of farm houses were burning while a group of cackling demons flew overhead. “I might also be a muse,” she said offhandedly.

“A muse,” he asked in confusion, staring at her as though he could ascertain the truth of her outlandish words.

She rolled her eyes as she told him, “Yeah, a muse. There are nine of us. I’m Calliope, but I changed it to Caroline when I decided I was bored with epic poetry. There’s only so many times you can hear about ‘gray-eyed Athena’ and ‘swift-footed Achilles’,” she confessed with a disinterested shrug. “So, I invented textile painting and over the centuries whenever the mood struck, I’d inspire certain artists to explore their creativity further.”

She nodded at a large clay wine jug as it skipped by on two horse legs, a note of pride entering her voice as she revealed, “Bosch was one of mine.” At Klaus’ small grunt of surprise she nodded, explaining, “He was my favorite bartender and his tavern wasn’t making any money because the plague kept creeping in and killing off his best customers. So, I threw him a bone and may have tweaked his talent just a bit.”

Klaus blinked rapidly, trying to assimilate the tremendous amount of information she had told him. “You invented an art medium because you were bored and you turned Bosch into a world-famous artist because he was your favorite bartender,” he stated flatly, still attempting to process her extraordinary tale.

“Well, that, and the man told hilarious dick jokes,” she quipped, elbowing him in the ribs good-naturedly.
He chuckled, recalling how he had thought the same thing during her museum tour — back when he had assumed that she was simply a beautiful human who smelled delicious. He braced one hand against the side of the windmill where they were standing, leaning closer to inhale her signature fragrance once more. “Tell me, love, is that why you smell like honey? Because the ancient Greeks used to offer it as part of their sacrifices?”

Caroline gazed up at him, her pink lips curling in amusement. “Or, it could be my honey-almond shampoo,” she teased. As though a thought suddenly struck her, she lightly smacked his chest, and he couldn’t help but notice the way her warm palm seemed to linger there, lightly caressing his muscles through his black henley. “It seems like I wasn’t the only one hiding a secret, Klaus. I mean, I can sense you’re a talented artist, but I can’t figure out what else you are. No human would be this calm about being sucked into this painting and me being a muse.”

Klaus smirked as he told her, “Being trapped in here with you isn’t a hardship, sweetheart.” He felt himself flush with pleasure as he replayed her generous words about his skill as an artist. Ducking his head a bit, he shyly revealed, “I sketch or paint sometimes. It’s just a hobby I’ve dabbled in off and on over the years.”

“It’s more than just a hobby. Klaus, you possess an extraordinary gift,” she exclaimed, flashing him a brilliant smile. She shook her head, sending her blonde curls bouncing as she mockingly commanded, “But quit trying to distract me — how come you’re not more freaked out by Enzo’s spell?”

He shrugged, “I’m a hybrid; well, the Original hybrid that is, and after a thousand years, I’ve had my share of run-ins with those seeking vengeance against me and my family. Not that any posed a significant challenge.”

“It’s a wonder your ego fit in the museum while you were trying to ruin my tour,” she admonished, rolling her eyes at him.

“I wasn’t trying to ruin your tour, love,” he began, pausing briefly to admire a giant swan fishing boat as it floated by. “I couldn’t help my curiosity at learning exactly how much you knew of the artist. I happen to have met him during my travels and always was an admirer of his work,” he confessed.

Caroline’s blue eyes widened and she exclaimed excitedly, “Wait a minute — you’re the mystery guy, aren’t you?! Bosch wouldn’t shut up about you and this crazy myth you told him. You’re the one who commissioned him to paint The Beast of Two Bloods! He let me take a glimpse of it one time, but it was only half-finished. No wonder it’s been lost all these centuries — you’ve probably got it squirreled away somewhere!” She crossed her arms in front of her chest in a huff, adding, “When we get out of here, I want to see it. It’s the least you can do, Dimpled Art Ruiner.”

He smiled at her antics, delighting in her commanding tone. “Of course, sweetheart. It would be my pleasure to make amends for my rude ways. But first, we should start figuring out a plan to escape. You indicated earlier that this had happened to you before. How did you —” he abruptly stopped speaking when enormous rats and demonic creatures wearing animal skulls came racing toward them wielding spears and pitchforks.

He felt his hybrid features emerge at the promise of a good tussle, but Caroline’s terrified scream gave him pause. She took off, racing across the barren hill and dodging peculiar tree root creatures that attempted to grab the frightened blonde. He couldn’t quite grasp the foreign feeling of concern he felt, but he as flashed after her, the urge to protect her was overwhelming. He followed her intoxicating, honeyed scent to an enormous white egg with a crack in its shell. He
slipped through the opening, and Caroline threw herself into his arms, trembling in fear as she clung to him.

Klaus’ voice was muffled against her blonde curls as he spoke in a soothing voice, “It’s alright, love. You’re safe with me.” He blinked in surprise at his words, unsure if he had ever spoken them before. He found that he meant them — she was a beautiful, surprising creature who challenged him and he had no intention of allowing her to be harmed.

Caroline tensed in his arms and he saw that the nightmarish creatures had discovered their hiding place. A few of the demonic beings whose heads were topped with cow skulls stood outside the giant egg, waiving their weapons menacingly. She stopped trembling and sat up, sighing in irritation as she announced, “Okay guys, fun’s over.” At her command, two of the creatures eagerly poked their heads through the crack in the egg, and Klaus watched in surprise as she patted their bleached-white skulls affectionately.

As the creatures wandered away, Caroline turned to Klaus, arching an eyebrow as she said, “What? I was the muse that inspired Bosch’s creations; of course I can control them.”

Klaus shook his head, asking, “Why did you pretend to be frightened and allow those things to chase us if you could control them all this time?”

Her grin was mischievous as she answered, “You were playing with me at the museum; it was my turn to play with you. Besides, I enjoy being chased.”

At her unexpected confession, he smirked down at her, the predator within becoming aroused as his eyes flickered with wolf-gold. “And what happens once you’re caught, sweetheart?”

“Let’s find out,” she said with an impish smile, tugging on his necklaces as she pulled him down for a kiss.

He chased her pink lips with his own, his hands bunching up the soft blue silk of her dress until it pooled around her waist. The sensual brush of her thighs against his hips sent a shiver down his spine. He flicked open the tiny pearl buttons until he exposed her ivory skin, letting out a strangled grunt as he realized she was completely bare underneath her dress. “You are a goddess, love,” he whispered reverently, kneading her flesh with his skilled fingers as she squirmed pleasurably.

“Muse, remember? Although I once was worshipped as a goddess,” she confessed breathlessly as she leaned into his touch. At his questioning eyebrow, she explained, “That prestigious order that Bosch and his father belonged to didn’t actually worship the Virgin Mary. They worshipped me,” she finished with a slight flush of embarrassment coloring her cheeks.

Klaus smirked against her bare belly as he felt it tremble underneath the scratch of his stubble. “Permit me to show you how a true devotee worships,” he purred, sliding his tongue down to her hip where he playfully nipped at her skin. He took her helpless sigh as an invitation, and used both hands to spread her wide, his fiery touch lingering at her damp folds.

At the first brush of his tongue, he moaned at the warm, honeyed taste of her, digging his fingers into her hips so that he could bring her closer to his greedy mouth. Her strangled shout sent him reeling, and he excitedly swirled his tongue along her core, delighting in the way she desperately rubbed herself against his skin. He could feel her start to tighten, and he tipped her over the edge by sucking on her clit until she shrieked his name.

Klaus quickly removed his black henley and nearly ruined the zipper of his jeans in his
haste to shed his clothes. At Caroline’s amused giggle, he smirked at her, his eyes flaring a lusty gold as he fisted his aching cock. She watched him hungrily, licking her lips as he sped up his seductive movements. He was taken by surprise when she quickly pulled off her wrinkled dress and straddled him, rubbing her soaked core against his burning erection until his vision went white with pleasurable pain.

“You feel so good,” Caroline purred, her blue eyes dark with lust. “I need you,” she gasped, rocking against him as he pulled her down onto his cock with a groan. He gripped her ass, controlling every sensual push and pull as his thrusts deepened. He lightly smacked both cheeks, the naughty thrill of it causing her to shudder against his sweat-slicked chest.

She trailed kisses from his collarbone to his neck, pausing to impishly nibble on his earlobe as he moaned her name. He could feel himself getting close, and he increased the power of his strokes, his hips working faster as she writhed above him. He reached between them to find her clit once more, rubbing it until she clutched around his cock with a groan of satisfaction. Feeling her gripping him so tightly triggered his own release, and he slowly rutted his hips as they chased their pleasure together.

She seemed to consider his offer, but then her blue eyes sparkled with mischief as she countered with, “Or, we could get out of here, grab the ingredients for another banishing spell and christen a few of Picasso’s pieces. I’m partial to Guernica,” she propositioned him with a wink.

“He couldn’t help the bemused grin that crept across his face as he immediately envisioned all of the delightful fun in store for them. “Guernica looks like it would be a bit uncomfortable, love — all those edges. However, I’m willing to give it a try if you agree to let his Three Musicians watch. What do you say?”

“Deal,” Caroline answered enthusiastically, throwing him his clothes as she started getting dressed. As they exited the cracked egg, Caroline seemed to be studying the horizon intently. She must have found what she was looking for, because she tugged at Klaus’ hand, walking briskly past a red-cloaked man with a deer’s head, who waved at the couple cheerfully before returning to his conversation with a priest.

“So, how do we escape,” Klaus asked her curiously.

She shrugged, explaining, “A few decades ago, I added a portal into every piece of artwork that I ever inspired just in case I needed to stage another jailbreak.” She rolled her eyes, adding, “I learned that lesson the hard way after I got trapped in Warhol’s stupid soup can by a vindictive warlock who was mad that the variety show he and his insipid television siblings were on tanked worse than their ridiculous Christmas special.”

Klaus chuckled, delighted by every fascinating layer she revealed to him. He watched as she knelt down beside a floating blue wheel and held her palm against the center until light from the outside started to filter into the painting.
She bit her lip, her voice calculating as she warned him, “There’s a slight possibility that Enzo is still out there, watching to see if we try to escape.”

Klaus confidently took her hand, telling her, “Then let’s go make a dark wizard bleed, sweetheart.”

Caroline answered with a coy smile, “You know, I’ve been searching for a new medium to inspire artists...”
In this AUhuman! Klaroline story set during the Revolutionary War, shopkeeper Caroline is part of a notorious spy ring for the patriots. And now an annoying, smug British soldier keeps stopping by to add to her anxieties...

“Patriotism is as much a virtue as justice, and is as necessary for the support of societies as natural affection is for the support of families.” — Benjamin Rush, 1773

Her candle shop smelled like a chamber pot. How in all of creation did that beetle-headed Victoria manage to accomplish such a feat? Caroline stomped her way into her small shop, throwing open the wooden shutters of the two small windows and shoved two large goose feather fans into the spindly arms of her clerk. Cocking her eyebrow, she said gruffly, “Thou art the one who used rancid hog fat to make a batch of candles; therefore, thou hath the task of banishing that infernal stench out of the shop!”

The girl turned to her task, murmuring apologies for her forgetfulness, and Caroline somehow managed to tuck back in her scoff of derision as she recalled that just yesterday she had patiently explained to Victoria that candles made of hog fat carried a stench most foul in addition to excessive sputtering and smoking. Instead, her shop’s tallow candles were a clever combination of sheep and beef fat, which seemed to carry a much more pleasant odor and longer-lasting light. In a huff, she finally sent her off to market for additional supplies, noting that they were running low on a number of items.

She realized that part of her bad humor had nothing to do with her irritation with her clerk’s folly, but instead her own anxiousness about what the week would bring. ‘Twas the price she paid for trafficking in secrets. Sometimes, as she walked through the market, she fancied that she carried the secrets upon her skin, that they were stained upon her flesh for the world to see. While Virginia Colony had produced some of the greatest patriots the war knew — from General Washington to Thomas Jefferson — unfortunately, her small township of Mystic Falls remained fiercely loyal to the crown. The few families who were true patriots were forced to hide their feelings about the war lest the damnable loyalists sent them to the gallows.

When her childhood friend, Matthew Donovan, sought her out in confidence, he confessed that he recently was made a lieutenant in General Washington’s Continental Army, and he asked her to pass him intelligence to aid in the war effort. After quickly agreeing, she became anointed as one of the invaluable spies of the notorious patriot spy ring, the Travelers. She became learned in the secret of the ‘sympathetic stain’, a clever form of invisible ink that General Washington instructed his agents to use in their messages. Once she constructed a coded message, she would push the paper into the bottom of a candle and smooth additional wax over it. Then, when a courier for the Travelers appeared, she would sell him a batch of candles that easily could be smuggled through enemy lines undetected.
The Travelers had had rousing success thus far, and Caroline’s secret messages revealed the surprising weaknesses of the British fort that guarded the route to Norfolk. With her help, the Virginia militia laid siege upon the unsuspecting British, and secured the fort during the Battle of the Great Bridge. ‘Twas a stunning victory for the patriots, and Caroline vowed to bring them more, despite the shadow of the noose that awaited all traitors to the crown.

As she began the tedious process of weaving together the delicate linen fibers to craft sturdy wicks, she thought back to Matthew’s latest message to her. The Travelers’ faithful courier had been intercepted and imprisoned to await a farcical trial in which the poor soul’s fate already had been decided. A new courier would arrive at her shop sometime this week, announcing his presence by uttering the phrase, “Tie it with a blue ribbon.”

She anxiously awaited his arrival as it would take her mind off of the latest influx of a detestable regiment of British soldiers who had taken residence at the local tavern, Silas’ Cure. Led by arrogant Lieutenant Niklaus Mikaelson, she took special delight in undermining his war efforts by leaning heavily on intelligence reports from her friend Katherine who worked there. It never ceased to astound her at the carelessness of a man’s words when they were in the presence of what they perceived to be a harmless woman.

Lieutenant Mikaelson himself had wandered into her shop when his soldiers first arrived, his swaggering, boastful mannerisms immediately setting her teeth on edge. Victoria had worked herself into a tizzy as she tended to his purchases, fluttering her eyelashes and swooning over his dimples. In a huff of impatience, she finally dismissed her to the back so that she could conclude the detestable redcoat’s business and shoo him out of her shop with as much strained politeness as she could muster.

Instead, he seemed to delight in stretching out their interaction as long as possible, commenting upon the mild weather and asking after her family’s health. She absolutely refused to acknowledge how his gray eyes twinkled with merriment at her clipped words or the pleasing way his lips seemed to curl up whenever he addressed her as ‘Mistress Forbes’. Her heart palpitations in his presence were merely the result of porridge mixed with goat’s milk that had soured. And nothing more.

As though summoned by her shameful thoughts, Lieutenant Mikaelson strutted across the threshold, wearing a devilish smirk that had her furiously fighting back the blush that wanted to stain her cheeks red.

“Good day, Mistress Forbes,” he greeted her, his dimples on display as he removed his officer’s hat in a sweeping gesture, bowing his curly head respectfully. “How fare thee on this fine day?”

Caroline hated how the breath seemed to leave her when that infernal man appeared, as though her corset was too tight and she may faint. Flashing him an overly bright smile, she quickly placed the remnants of the hardened hog lard into the large iron cauldron over the fire, the powerful odor wafting over the flames as she stirred the concoction with a thick wooden paddle. “‘Tis a fine day. Lieutenant Mikaelson, but one that should be spent out-of-doors as I fear thou hath caught me on rendering day and the odors art far from pleasant.” She couldn’t help the bite in her sweet tone as she added from underneath her lashes, “We mustn’t spoil thy fine officer’s vestments with such a foul stench.”

His gray eyes twinkled as though he realized her attempts to shoo him out of her shop with haste. “Nonsense. Thou shall discover that a gentleman is willing to endure any number of trials to bask in the presence of a lovely maiden.”
She barely contained a scoff as she batted aside his empty words. She noted the exquisite silver filigree work of the fierce wolf’s head upon the pommel of his sabre, denoting him to be a man of wealth and privilege. Officer ranks such as his often were awarded based upon surname and affluence. No doubt his display of opulence and power along with his pleasing appearance drew many a starry-eyed maiden to him, and he must often spout such pretty, meaningless words.

Her calculating blue gaze swept over his fine scarlet overcoat trimmed in silver braid, a well-ballasted officer’s uniform that only served to fuel her anger when she thought of the blood of good patriots that hath spilled upon it during this wretched war. She adjusted her linen cap, pushing an errant blonde curl away from her forehead as she told him, “Thou flatter me with thy honeyed words, Lieutenant Mikaelson. I’m sure many a fair maiden anxiously awaits thy return to English soil."

He shook his head, dimples bracketing his indulgent smile as he confessed, “None that hath caught my fancy as much as a lovely blonde shopkeeper who seems to delight in sharpening her clever tongue upon my every breath.” He reached into his overcoat, removing a small bit of parchment tied with a length of leather. “I’d considered offering thou a trinket, a small token of my esteem, but feared thy wrath if thou deemed it an insult. Instead, I present a simple sketch, and pray thou look upon it in the spirit of friendship with which ‘tis offered, Mistress Forbes.”

Heart fluttering, Caroline felt her breath catch as she gazed upon her own face with lips curled into a teasing smile as she stood at her shop’s front window, one hand resting against her cheek. She was struck speechless not only by the depth of his artistry, but also by the curious fact he would willingly share his work with her. She gently touched the curled edges of the parchment, not trusting herself to speak as her thoughts raced.

“Forgive my forwardness,” Niklaus broke the silence, a seemingly uncharacteristic nervousness entering his voice, “Thy beauty lingered long after I’d returned to my quarters and it vexed me until I recorded every blessed detail.” She watched in amazement as his ivory skin suddenly bloomed with color.

Clearing her throat, she favored him with her first genuine smile since they met. “There art no words to describe thy talent, Lieutenant Mikaelson. Thou hath my thanks for such a thoughtful gift.” She hated the feeling of regret that tugged at her. This was a British officer and no matter how handsome or earnest his attentions might be, she could never turn her back on the cause of her homeland. She must continue her work under the guise of a damnable loyalist, so that she could ensure her people’s freedom.

He seemed on the verge of asking her something, but instead straightened his spine as the brass bell over her door rang, announcing another customer. He gestured vaguely toward her pine shelves where she kept the costly beeswax candles, and asked her to put together a parcel for him. While she carefully wrapped his purchase, she nodded at Jeremiah Gilbert who stood off to the side awkwardly.

Jeremiah was Katherine’s little brother, and she recalled the way he would follow them around begging for sweets as they traipsed through the market square. Lately he had been coming around more and while pleasant company, it always seemed as though he were delaying his leave to the point that she nearly had to shoo him from her shop so that she could complete a day’s work. A thought suddenly struck her that now that Jeremiah was of age, he could conceivably be the Travelers’ new mystery courier. Especially since his sister was loyal to the patriot’s cause.

She inwardly sighed as she watched the men take each other’s measure, and she wondered how much longer Niklaus would tarry before he was on his way. She was certain that if Jeremiah
was the courier, he would possess enough sense not to blurt out the secret phrase within earshot of the British officer. His brown eyes regarded Caroline warmly as he greeted her, and he comically sidestepped the soldier to stand closer to the counter. He paused in his ramblings about the weather, wrinkling his nose slightly at the rancid smell of hog fat, and she told herself she would reduce the number of coin she charged him for his purchases because of it. *Curse that vexing redcoat for costing her profits!*

“Mistress Forbes, what an enchanting drawing — thy lovely visage is rendered well,” Jeremiah told her, angling his body in a curious manner as though trying to block her view of Niklaus.

Caroline let out a bark of laughter as she shook her head at the young man’s antics. Barely a man but already such a shameless flirt. She was certain he would catch the eye of a sweet girl soon. “Thy flowery sentiments art growing bolder, Master Gilbert. I pray thou save thy best compliments for a worthy maiden.” She inclined her head at Niklaus who seemed to be taking in the scene with a glint of good humor and she added, “Although thy compliments art well-taken as Lieutenant Mikaleson was the esteemed creator.”

Frowning slightly, Jeremiah impatiently flicked his gaze at the soldier before returning his attention Caroline. “Yes, well, clearly an officer has more time to spare than one would assume.” He curiously seemed to puff out his chest as though taken by dropsy, and continued with, “Such idleness is a rarity for a planter; therefore, *where* I choose to spend my precious few moments art quite telling.”

“Indeed,” Niklaus intoned, a devilish smirk appearing as he kept glancing at Caroline as though sharing a secret. *Quite* enlightening, Master Gilbert.” He inclined his curly head respectfully toward Caroline and stepped away, announcing, “I must pay a visit to Master Lockwood’s forge. I will return for my parcel midday, Mistress Forbes.”

She nodded her assent, pleased that finally they would be free of the British soldier’s dizzying presence and Jeremiah would utter the secret phrase of the Travelers’ courier. However, as she observed the broad shoulders of Niklaus as he left her shop, she couldn’t deny the secret thrill she felt that she would see him later that day. Admonishing herself for her foolish, even traitorous thoughts, she returned her attention to Jeremiah, who seemed especially aquiver.

He swiped at the back of his neck, flushed as though with fever and she pitied the sweet boy for the strenuous labor he performed on the Gilbert farm — it seemed to be affecting him more than usual. She was starting to think it would be a mercy if he wasn’t the courier as he seemed overtaken by the strain of his task. Finally, he said, “Mistress Forbes, pray do not think me too bold in my query...” he paused, swiping at his brow, and she readied herself to hear the secret code of the Travelers: *Tie it with a blue ribbon.* “Would thou attend the harvest celebration with me,” he blurted out in one long phrase, as though relieved to hath finally spoken the words.

Caroline blinked repeatedly, trying to reconcile both her surprise that her dear friend’s young brother was not the courier and also that the boy viewed her in a romantic manner. “Oh,” she said in a strangled voice, reaching for gentle words to dispel his illusions of a romantic entanglement with her. “Master Gilbert, I’m flattered of course, but —”

“The lady hath already agreed to attend with me, young Master Gilbert,” Her flailing attempts were mercifully cut off by the confident voice of Niklaus, who had returned unexpectedly to the shop. Seeing the British soldier’s knowing smirk made her hackles rise even as she felt relief that Jeremiah likely would now move on to a more suitable companion than one who forever would look upon him as a younger brother.
Jeremiah’s sweet, boyish face fell at Niklaus’ words but as he left, he managed to mumble bland pleasantries as he bid them both a pleasant day. Once the boy was gone, Caroline raised a critical eyebrow at Niklaus. “Art all brothers of the blade as presumptuous as thou, Lieutenant Mikaelson?”

He leaned against the counter, a lazy smile perched upon his lips as her shrill tone washed over him. “Was I mistaken in assuming thy affections for young Master Gilbert ran toward that of a sibling rather than a *paramour*?”

Her cheeks flushed at the way he deliberately said ‘paramour’, as though his wicked tongue wished to lovingly caress the word between them. She quickly distracted herself by retying her apron strings, nearly ripping the thin cotton in her haste. Straightening her spine, she answered, “While I hath no desire to attend with a boy I hold to be a brother, that doesn’t mean that thou art a suitable escort.” Lightly scoffing, she added, “We’ve no common ground, Lieutenant Mikaelson, and I fear boredom would overtake thee.”

Niklaus seemed to take her rebuke as a challenge, and he moved closer than could be deemed proper as his gray eyes twinkled in merriment. “Thou art mistaken, Mistress Forbes. I suspect we share more common ground than ye perceive.”

Raising a skeptical brow, Caroline reached for the soldier’s parcel, fiddling with the brown string to tie it securely. Her hands stilled and she nearly dropped the parcel in shock when she heard Niklaus say, “On second thought, why don’t ye tie it with a blue ribbon?”
Part 2 - Something Wicked This Way Runs

Chapter Summary

This is the much-requested sequel to Chapter 17 in this series. Caroline has spent much of her young life in her Colonial American village rescuing innocents accused of witchcraft. When she gets caught, she needs her curly-haired, dimpled demon to do the rescuing...

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay in posting my writing lately; soul-sucking work projects selfishly stole away so much of my time! On the plus side, Angry Sales Guy had to eat his words about one of the proposals I wrote and project-managed after it secured a huge contract for the organization. Karma can be such a petty (but wonderful) ally. :)  

Warning: Some violence.

“People shouldn't call for demons unless they really mean what they say.”  
— C.S. Lewis, The Last Battle

The harsh copper scent upon the night air made Caroline realize she was clenching the small bronze coin in her palm until the roughened edges began to cut into her skin. She released her tight grip, wiping away the small streak of blood with grim determination. She vowed that what she had just learned of the world would not break her. Demons roamed her world. And Niklaus Mikaelson was one of them. His same gentle smile, suddenly framed by curved fangs along with his beautiful blue eyes turning demon gold had made her heart race; yet she did not sense wickedness.

‘Twas a curious thing, to be faced with the most dangerous creature she had ever encountered, and yet not be consumed by the fear the church elders had preached to her village all her life. Was it because he had captured her heart? She often had watched him from afar, modesty preventing her from approaching him too often lest it sent village busybodies’ tongues wagging. She always had been drawn to the handsome governor’s son, but his elevated station, not to mention her own family’s reputation was in tatters after her mother had been executed for witchcraft, stayed her hand. Instead, she had taken to visiting his apothecary shop with tales of fantastic illnesses that had befallen her father and herself, lingering in Niklaus’ presence just a bit longer each time.

It nearly broke Caroline’s heart when the vile Governor Mikaelson, Niklaus’ own father, hurled accusations at him, calling him a demon, and rallying the council elders to his wretched cause. She couldn’t bear to watch poor Niklaus tied to the whipping post in the center of the
village, the pale skin of his back cruelly split open by the braided leather of the whip. The darkness upon Governor Mikaelson’s face as he witnessed his son’s torture made her shiver — the delight he took in seeing innocent blood spilled was a terrifying sight to behold.

*Although, perhaps not so innocent blood,* she thought. She had made it her mission after her mother’s unjust execution to save as many as she could from the hangman’s noose, and believed the governor and council elders’ talk of witchcraft to be mere foolishness. However, tonight Niklaus had shown her such wonders and she had learned that the world was a far more mysterious place that she could ever imagine.

Caroline traced the coin’s peculiar symbol of a crescent moon sitting upon a circle, recalling how Niklaus had told her ‘twas his talisman and that if she held it in her hand while calling his name, he would be summoned to her. He had boasted, “One day, when thou hast finished thy quest to save everyone around thee, thou shall summon me.”

She shook her head, muttering as she recalled his smug grin. She should toss the token in the nearest river for his impertinence, but she also recognized that her work was dangerous, and it would be foolish not to hold onto such an unexpected boon. She secreted it within a hidden seam upon her linen shift, the weight of it a strange comfort. She detected the faint hint of an exotic fragrance emanating from the coin, and with a pang of regret, she wished she’d had the presence of mind to inquire about Niklaus’ mysterious world. *Regrets and wishes shall serve thee no good,* she admonished herself as she carefully slipped through the shadows of the oak and hickory trees, quietly making her way back to her village.

The gnarled limbs overhead choked the night sky, hiding the stars from her view. A sharp cry from a crow startled Caroline, and an inexplicable sense of dread washed over her even as she saw the familiar torchlights of the village guard posts in the distance. The toe of her cracked leather shoe had barely grazed the frost-tipped grass of the field that led to her village when she felt a presence.

Heart thudding in her chest, Caroline whirled around, suddenly finding herself face-to-face with Governor Mikaelson. His lips curled into a mocking smile as his cold, malevolent voice pierced the stillness. “Out cavorting with demons, Mistress Forbes? Thou hast brought shame upon thy kinsmen; just like thy wretched witch mother.”

The sun blinded her as she stood upon the splintered platform in the market square. She squinted, wishing she also could somehow shut her ears to the vicious mutterings of the people that surrounded her. She spied her father, William, at the edge of the crowd, his eyes downcast as he refused to look upon her. *Coward,* she thought contemptuously. He refused to speak out in defense of her mother; she had no reason to assume his guilty conscience would urge him to do so now.

Reverend Atticus Shane, Johnathan Gilbert, and the rest of the council elders flanked Governor Mikaelson as he walked toward her with a predatory gleam in his eyes. The stone-faced council, with their grim expressions, already revealed her fate — but first, they wished to engage in this farcical ceremony, to appease the villagers with their false promises of fairness and truth. Even though Caroline had borne witness to what was to come, she still felt the icy hand of fear grip her heart as it beat rapidly within her chest.

Governor Mikaelson’s cold, calculating voice called out, “Mistress Forbes has been caught my own hand, fleeing the woods where she hath been cavorting with demons. She conspired with Niklaus, a demon convicted by this most holy council, to escape God’s punishment. ‘Tis evident
that she also conspired with witches who plagued this village, aiding in their escape from God’s wrath. ‘Tis God’s will that the wicked shall be put to death!”

At the villagers’ rallying cries, Caroline shook her head, catching the gleeful expression upon the governor’s face. She fervently hoped that he choked upon his false righteousness. Trying to ignore the absurd accusations that the villagers began hurling at her, she focused on one small corner of the market square, where this past planting season Niklaus had visited with her while she sold her needlepoint.

“Good day, Mistress Forbes. How fare thee?” She always fought a shiver whenever he spoke to her; his voice affecting her far more than was deemed acceptable.

“I am well, Master Mikaelson.” She winced, fervently hoping he hadn’t noticed how unnaturally high-pitched her words were. She did her best to fight down the crimson that threatened to stain her cheeks as she realized his gaze was lingering upon her. “Can I interest thee in something,” she asked hopefully, gesturing to her stacks of embroidered bed linens.

His blue gaze darkened as he lightly traced the delicate, swirled pattern she had embroidered along one edge of the material. “Yes, these seem to hath caught my fancy, among other things.”

Caroline was rudely pulled from her memories of Niklaus by Master Lockwood unexpectedly shouting, “Mistress Forbes hath used her witchcraft to force unclean thoughts upon me! I imaged all manner of lustful, sinful deeds with her!” His brown eyes flickered to her momentarily, and she scoffed when she noticed the way he took pleasure in her discomfort.

“The foul witch hath laid her hands upon me in my dreams; beckoning me to engage in wanton acts against our Lord,” Master Donovan cried out, his nonsensical accusations mingling with the others as the villagers glared at Caroline.

Nodding enthusiastically, Master Saltzman condemned her with, “Upon my oath, Mistress Forbes hath bedeviled me; charging me to trade my soul for the filthy pleasures of her flesh!”

She grimaced as the drink-addled old man looked upon her lecherously, and she marveled at a society that would allow a man nearly thrice her age to follow her about the village, barely keeping a modest distance as he stared at her with open lust. She even had taken to altering her schedule of chores on a daily basis, just to avoid his vile presence.

“Enough!” Governor Mikaelson’s commanding tone brooked no argument as it cut through the angry crowd. “The dire charges against Mistress Forbes hath been read. She shall endure the trial by our council elders and then judgement shall be rendered.”

Caroline didn’t miss the way his empty eyes seemed to spark to life at the prospect of her suffering. Whatever fate had in store for her, she prayed for strength to see it through.

The cold might kill me before Governor Mikaelson, Caroline thought bitterly as she shivered in her thin linen shift. Lead by Governor Mikaelson, the council elders had dragged her to the nearby river and pushed her into the churning, icy water after cruelly binding her wrists and ankles. While she had never witnessed the trial by water, she knew of its deadly purpose — an innocent is said to sink like a stone while witches, who spurned the sacrament of baptism, would be rejected by the water and forced to the surface.
Her memory was hazy after she had plunged into the cold, terrified as she swallowed a burning lungful of water and thrashing uselessly against the current. She doubted the governor had bothered to wait for her head to break the surface before he and the rest of the council tugged on the rope haphazardly tied around her waist and yanked her to the muddy shore. The men had forced her to walk barefoot back to the village, wet and shivering as they condemned her as a witch and sentenced her to hang on the morrow.

Caroline angrily banged her head against the stone wall of the jail, pitifully rubbing her hands and feet as she tried to return feeling to them. She could see her breath, and she trembled as her wet linen shift clung to her. She could feel Niklaus’ bronze coin against her skin, and she wondered again why she’d been unable to summon him. She’d held the coin in her hand and called his name until her voice was hoarse, but he hadn’t appeared. Her heart broke at the thought that he had abandoned her.

Before she could wallow in her pity, the small door creaked open, and in the dim torchlight, she saw the vicious smile of Governor Mikaelson. “I sincerely hope the accommodations are to thy exacting standards, Mistress Forbes.” He leaned closer, whispering conspiratorially, “I’ve heard thy wretched witch mother once stayed here. Worry not, for soon she shall keep thy company in eternal hellfire.”

Her blue eyes widened as she tried to inch away from him, her movements stifled by the cold iron shackling her wrists to the stone wall. He chuckled darkly at her discomfort, removing a curved knife from his leather belt. A flaying knife. Terror flooded her body as she lunged against her chains, desperate to escape before the governor could use the iron blade upon her.

“Ah, I see thou is familiar with my righteous blade.” He lightly ran his thumb across the edge, adding in a nostalgic tone, “It hath tasted the blood of many a witch. Tell me, Mistress Forbes, did thy wretched mother feel the burn of a just blade before she faced her eternal punishment?”

Caroline felt tears prick her eyes at the mention of her mother’s horrendous torture before her execution, but she refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing her affected by his callous words. Instead, she simply glared at him, clenching her jaw in anger. He would not break her.

Governor Mikaelson nodded as though she had spoken, telling her, “Very well, if thou hath no interest in speaking of thy cursed mother, mayhap we instead discuss my wretched son. Did thou know of his wickedness? How long did it take him to tempt thee, foul witch?” He ran the flat of his blade across the damp linen covering her belly, causing her to tremble in fear.

“Unbeknownst to me, my wife, Esther, was barren and forged an alliance with dark forces to fill her womb. I unwittingly raised her demon spawn, but once his unnatural condition began to manifest, I struck Esther soundly for her sins against God.”

Caroline couldn’t hold back her gasp as she said bitterly, “Thy wife didn’t pass on from illness as thou claim; she was slain by thy own hand!”

“Clever witch, did thou conjure that truth from spells my demon son taught thee?! ‘Tis no crime to perform our Lord’s work and snuff out evil,” he exclaimed, a wild glint in his eyes that made her heart race in alarm.

“I am no more witch than thee,” she spat, wincing as he dug the sharp tip of the flaying knife into her skin, placing just enough pressure on the iron to cause a tiny drop of blood to spot her linen shift.

A cruel smile spread across his face as he told her, “Ah, but thou hath been crying out for
him, attempting to summon thy demon lover as a witch would do.” Dark eyes glittering, he slyly added, “But thy attempts hath fallen upon deaf ears; thou fear thy demon lover hath abandoned thee? Fear not, wretched thing, for Niklaus is unable to attend thee as I hath warded the village against his unnatural presence. He shall only appear to thee once I remove the protections from our boundaries.”

Despite her growing fear of the deranged man, her heart fluttered at the realization that Niklaus hadn’t cast her aside; even now, he could be prowling outside the village, trying to break through the barrier. She was wrenched from her racing thoughts by his rough hand grabbing her throat while he used his blade to slice open the thin fabric covering her from collar to sternum.

Ignoring her cries of indignation, he explained, “I shall bind the demon to thee, thus removing his power which is an affront to God. Then, thou sinners shall face judgment before the village council.” Without waiting for her reply, he began making shallow, painful cuts into her exposed belly, the blood welling up to the surface before her horrified eyes. She bit her lips until they bled, doing her best to hold in her cries.

Governor Mikaelson took his time, delighting in slowly drawing out his carvings upon her flesh, the oddly-shaped symbols similar to the etchings she once spied around the shackles that had bound Niklaus. She retched as bile gathered at the base of her throat, the sickening stench of copper-laced blood mingling with the sour earth of the floor.

His mocking laughter at her distress caused her blue eyes to flare in anger and she lashed out, the small length of chain affording her enough movement to soundly claw at the governor’s forearm, drawing a thick line of blood that dripped onto the cold, earthen floor. He reared back, snarling at her, “Filthy wench!” He slapped her harshly, the force of the blow causing her nose to bleed as pain exploded along her cheek. “Remember thy place. Now, I must remove the protection symbols from our village boundaries. Upon my return, thou shall summon Niklaus to me.”

“Never,” she hissed, clenching her teeth to keep from moaning at the pain of the open wounds on her belly.

Caroline swore his dark eyes were soulless, empty vessels as he swept over her huddled form with a sinister gaze, leaving the tiny cell with a flutter of his black cape.

She could feel the mocking weight of the bronze coin next to her skin, but she refused to give into the temptation of calling for Niklaus. She would not willingly put him in danger.

Whatever his true nature, he could not begin to touch the evil that existed within his cursed father. Shivering from the cold and her growing terror in equal measure, the iron chains clanked against her wrists as she struggled to wipe away the blood from her wounds with the tattered remains of her linen shift. Fortunately, the crudely rendered cuts were shallow, and she already had stopped bleeding. She briefly worried about scarring, but admonished herself for such beetle-headed thoughts of vanity when she was to be hanged on the morrow.

Suddenly, her weary gaze was drawn to a corner of her cell, where the dim torchlight flickered briefly as the long shadows seemed to twist and curl until a distinct shape began to form. She gasped as she immediately recognized the dark blonde curls and merry blue eyes. “Niklaus! Thou must flee; ‘tis a trap and I cannot bear witness thee fall to thy father’s wrath,” she cried out worriedly.

He knelt beside her, his voice a comfort to her as he swore, “My brave little bird, what hath that vile fiend done to thee?” He shook his head, telling her regretfully, “I’ve been attempting to reach thee ever since thee first spoke my name in terror, but I knew of my father’s plot and his barrier blocked my way. Unfortunately, his protections hath rendered my powers useless at the
moment, or else I would heal thee.”

“Yet thee appeared before me anyway, despite the loss of thy power,” she whispered in a surprised tone.

Niklaus gently took her hand in his, confessing, “Of course, dear Caroline. I shall always protect thee.”

Caroline fought down a blush that threatened to stain her cheeks as she marveled at his bold words. “Well, I’m not so delicate a maiden that I cannot defend myself,” she boasted as she told him, “I delivered a stinging rebuke with my nails upon thy wretched father’s arm, and the moment he releases my bonds, I shall deliver more!”

Niklaus laughed heartily, his dimples framing his impish grin as he said, “There is that fire I first glimpsed when thee tarried in my shop. ‘Tis still a marvelous sight to behold.” As though a thought just struck him, he studied her intently as he asked, “Thou hast spilt my father’s blood, little bird?” At her hesitant nod, he smiled gleefully, exclaiming, “Then thou hast unwittingly saved us both!”

“Whatsoever does thou mean, Niklaus,” Caroline asked in confusion, a small grunt of pain escaping her as her slight movements caused her skin to pull at the edges of her fresh wounds.

His blue eyes reflected his distress at the sight of her suffering as he explained, “Being what I am, ingesting only a drop of my enemy’s blood can break the protections in place. My can be power freed once more and I shall heal thee, little bird.”

Her hand trembled slightly as she allowed him to lift it to his mouth, and she felt herself flush with shame at the overwhelming feeling of lust that swept through her body at the first hint of his tongue upon her fingers. Now is neither the time nor the place, she scolded herself as she fought to get her emotions under control once more.

Gold bled into his gaze as Niklaus’ demon came out to play, and he seemed to sense her attraction as he took his time savoring the blood upon her skin. Finally pulling away with obvious reluctance, he told her huskily, “I promise we shall explore this further, little bird.” Placing his hands lightly upon her damaged skin, a faint glow appeared in the dancing torchlight, and a sudden warmth seemed to envelop her entire frame as she gave herself over to his healing touch.

“I thank thee,” she whispered, watching in awe as her ruined flesh knitted itself together before her startled gaze.

Niklaus leaned forward until their foreheads rested against each other, seeming to drink in the sight of her whole once more. “Dear Caroline, thou are under my protection now. I swear that no further harm shall come to thee.” He easily broke her shackles, allowing her to lean upon him as they made their way toward the door to her cell.

However, before they could make their escape, the door flew open; Governor Mikaelson cutting an imposing figure as he blocked the threshold. “Abomination,” he hissed at them both, “I knew thee would return to defend thy worthless witch, demon.” With his lips curved in triumph, he boasted, “And now thou hast foolishly fallen into my trap.”

Caroline shrank from his cutting gaze, and Niklaus quickly swept her behind him as he fearlessly looked upon the governor. “Thy laughable trap makes thee the foolish one, father.” As he took a menacing step toward the governor, his sharp fangs unsheathed and his fingers suddenly were tipped in claws.
Governor Mikaelson paled, but his voice still thundered with judgement as he proclaimed, “Cower before me, powerless demon! ‘Tis God’s will that thou punishment is swift and true!”

Niklaus let out a soft laugh as he answered, “Thou always were a shameful braggart; overestimating thy abilities and measure as a man. Behold my true power.” He raised a clawed fist, his magic sending the governor flying to the furthest wall, pinning him there helplessly.

Caroline couldn’t help the small thread of satisfaction that wound its way through her at the sight of her assailant suddenly fearful. She watched in fascination as Niklaus gripped the wretched man by his throat, choking off the foul vitriol he had begun to spew. His gaze flickered momentarily to her, his blue eyes reflecting their demonic golden flare once more as he urged her, “Look away, little bird. I do not wish for thee to witness what must be done.”

“No,” she said firmly, surprising them both, “That cursed soul owes a blood debt for all the evil he hath put upon our village. I intend to see him pay it.” She moved until she was standing beside Niklaus, never taking her eyes off of the governor as he continued to squirm underneath the iron grip of his son.

A pleased grin spread across Niklaus’ handsome face as he returned his attention to the foul man before him. “I hath dreamed of thy destruction at my hands for ages, father.” A surge of power seemed to go through him, and a curious heat could be felt within the small cell. Bright orange and red flames erupted across Governor Mikaelson’s pale skin, and soon he was engulfed in a raging fire that ceased to affect Niklaus as he continued to grip him by his throat.

The sights and smells of her enemy’s charred flesh turned her stomach, but she refused to look away as she wanted to witness the retribution firsthand. *Thou sufferst for all the women thy poisonous words sent to the gallows. For all those poor souls I could not save.* As the governor’s burnt corpse fell to the earthen floor, relief washed over her as she could all but taste her freedom.

Niklaus pulled her to him, gently stroking her tangled mess of blonde curls as he rumbled, “I shall lay waste to this entire wretched village for betraying thee, dear Caroline.”

Shaking her head in protest, she answered, “No, these are good people led astray by the governor and the council of elders. I do not wish them harm.”

He let out a long-suffering sigh, a mischievous twinkle in his eye as he reasoned, “Very well. Then I shall only do away with the council.”

“Good.” Caroline thought of Reverend Atticus Shane, Johnathan Gilbert, and the rest of the council who had watched stone-faced as innocent women just like her had been judged and unfairly put to death. *These men who were so swift to pass on God’s judgement deserve for Him to weigh their souls as well.*

Niklaus looked positively delighted by her response, murmuring, “I believe I hath been a dreadful influence on thee.” Cocking his curly head to the side, he asked hopefully, “Are thou ready for me to show thee the wonders of this earth?”

Caroline was immediately reminded of their previous encounter, when he had promised to show her a world she had never imagined. Her curiosity had been piqued, and as she tried to summon logical reasons for remaining in her village, she found none. Whatever loyalty she had once felt for her father ceased the moment he failed to speak for her when she was brought before their people.

*But Niklaus would be loyal to her.* “Yes, Niklaus. After all, someone needs to keep thee out
of trouble.” She rendered him speechless as she reached upon her tiptoes and placed a sweet kiss on his cheek. She didn’t know what the future held, but she could sense that with his dreadful influence, it would be a marvelous adventure.
How Sharper Than a Serpent’s Tooth

Chapter Summary

Caroline knows exactly who she is and is perfectly satisfied with her average, normal life. Just because she’s having a weird day doesn’t mean anything out of the ordinary is going on...except for that sexy, accented voice she keeps hearing in the back of her mind...

Chapter Notes

I use some quotes from canon because upon occasion, I’m a dramatic little thing. Also, the shade is strong with this one. :)

“Note for a moment do I take you for a truth that is real...You are a falsehood, you are my illness, you are a ghost.”
— Fyodor Dostoyevsky, The Brothers Karamazov

The harsh scrape of curved fangs upon glass always got to Caroline. It made her cringe and she had to force her blue eyes to remain open for the duration of this dangerous task. She focused on the extraordinary beauty of the rattlesnake, from its lovely diamond-patterned bands to the keen intelligence she saw reflected in its dark eyes. As one of the foremost biochemists in the region, her expertise in herpetology, specifically her research with the Eastern diamondback, was highly sought after. Her work focused on venom extraction and studying its properties for creating effective anti-venom and other medical research. She had made several breakthroughs in her research, alleviating some of the dangerous side effects inherent in certain blood pressure medications.

She admired the broad, flat head of the snake, applying a gentle pressure at three key points as the yellowish venom was expelled. While feared as deadly and aggressive, this particular species actually made it a point to avoid human interaction and only attacked in self-defense. Caroline hated how misunderstood snakes were, and always had been drawn to powerful creatures who were seen as frightening, but in reality, were simply misunderstood. She rolled her eyes as she thought of how her friends always teased her that that’s why she was still single — after interacting with dangerous creatures all day, the men in Mystic Falls seemed downright tame and predictable by comparison.

She secretly agreed with them — she craved excitement, and felt like there was something more she was missing out on.

A whole world out there waiting for you. Great cities, and art and music. Genuine beauty. And you could have all of it. She shook her head in confusion — where had that thought come
from? She decided she was just distracted because she was meeting her friends, Bonnie and Elena, for drinks later that night.

She repositioned the long-handled hook that kept the rattlesnake in place, allowing the creature to coil around her forearm before carefully sliding it back into its enclosure. She catalogued the venom deposit, turning her attention to her computer screen. Pulling up her latest data spreadsheets, she grabbed her stack of colorful Post-Its and blinked in confusion when her vision swam and they somehow turned into a scrap of parchment paper. “What the hell,” she muttered, tentatively touching the edges in disbelief. She gasped as she realized there was a beautifully rendered sketch of her face.

*I fancy you.* She whipped her head around, her loose bun nearly coming undone with the force of her movement.

She knew she was alone in the lab today, and yet she could have sworn that same, accented voice she heard earlier had returned. Sighing, she rubbed her temples, deciding she was just exhausted from the extra hours spent on her latest research tangent. In fact, when she flicked her gaze back to her desk, her colorful notes lay where she had dropped them, and there was no parchment anywhere to be seen. “That’s weird,” she mumbled tiredly.

When she checked her watch, she realized she’d been feeling a dull ache in her forearm all afternoon. “Must have banged it on something,” she said to herself, closing out her research logs for the day to head home for a quick nap before meeting Bonnie and Elena at their local pub later that night.

The rough scrape of tree bark as it crumbled against her bare back made her gasp in pleasurable pain, closing her eyes as she reveled in the sinful, stolen moment. His sexy, accented voice purred against the shell of her ear, “I want your confession.” She bucked her hips against him, twisting her body to try to see him properly, but he was strangely cast in a shadow, and she was far too focused on the thrilling sensation of his stubble rubbing against her sensitive flesh.

She could sense the power in his hands and inherently knew that while he was capable of violence, he would never turn on her. Instead, he used his strength to curve her body around his, their cries of ecstasy mingling in the forest as they clawed their way toward a primal release. While she was frustrated she couldn’t see him properly, she somehow understood in her heart of hearts that he was hers. That she was safe and cherished and if she could just stay in this moment, it could be that way forever.

Caroline woke with a start, her heart pounding as she played back the sensual moments of her dream. She shook her head at her imaginative escapade. It had felt so real. She should really get out more — clearly, her dry spell had stretched on for far too long. She and Tyler had broken up...well, she couldn’t exactly remember when, but it had been awhile now and she should really think about putting herself out there again.

Tyler always seemed to be away and she would miss him terribly. At the moment, she couldn’t pinpoint why he always was traveling, but she knew it used to make her anxious. After his mother passed away, he seemed angry all the time. She didn’t understand his anger — Carol had passed away from an accident. Caroline wrinkled her forehead as she tried to remember the type of accident; it seemed like she had drowned, but the details escaped her at the moment.

Shaking her head, she started getting ready to meet the girls. While putting on her makeup,
she noticed a fine sheen of sweat dotted her forehead. That was clearly an impressive illicit dream she’d had for it to have that kind of effect on her. Or maybe she was coming down with something — she’d been feeling off all day, but continued to ignore her symptoms because she’d been working hard and deserved to have fun with her friends tonight.

_You’re beautiful, you’re strong, you’re full of light._ What was that? That same sexy, accented voice had purred enticingly in her ear as she’d taken a final glance in the mirror.

Rubbing at her temple, she chose to ignore both the insistent voice she kept hearing and the slight dizziness she suddenly felt and headed toward the door. There was a perfectly logical explanation for the bizarre occurrences that had happened to her today, and she was determined to push through and enjoy her evening out with her friends. As she clutched her car keys, she relented, realizing that even a slight dizzy spell was a good indicator that she shouldn’t be driving. She pulled up her phone app and accessed the Originals Taxi Service to come pick her up.

The gleaming black Escalade appeared almost instantly, the steady hum of the engine strangely comforting to her after the recent string of oddities cropping up throughout her day. The windows were heavily tinted, so she was unable to see her driver, but as she climbed into the back, she detected a bite of cologne that seemed to ensnare her senses with its hints of citrus and leather — a warm, masculine fragrance that sent her pulse racing. The radio was playing softly, a tune that somehow felt familiar to her, but she couldn’t quite place it. It sent a wave of longing through her, and she almost could feel strong arms holding her as they swayed to the romantic melody.

The evening kept the driver’s face cloaked in shadow, and despite the fact that he didn’t speak, she felt safe with him. She couldn’t explain where the certainty came from; it was just there, and she took strange comfort in that knowledge, especially after the day’s bizarre events. When she arrives at the Mystic Grill, she turns to wave at the driver, only to see that he’d already disappeared. Slightly disappointed, she headed inside, finding her favorite bartender, Enzo, behind the counter already whipping up a tray of doppelganger delights — a frothy, overly sweet drink with a surprising kick that Elena absolutely adored.

Enzo had given up long ago trying to get Caroline and her friends to embrace what he called his signature cocktail — the Salvatore Slump. He could extol its supposed virtues all he liked, but Caroline decided long ago that it was a terrible, weak drink that left you disappointed and bitter. As Enzo winked and called her “Gorgeous”, she wondered yet again why it was that she couldn’t seem to fall for his harmless flirtations. He was certainly attractive enough, with an accented voice and devilish smile, but something about him just didn’t feel right.

_He’s your first love. I intend to be your last. However long it takes._ The sexy voice was back, purring in her ear, and she valiantly fought to keep her expression neutral as Enzo carried on with his bawdy joke about a sentient cucumber. She rolled her eyes at his over-the-top antics, picking up the tray of drinks and carrying them over to where Elena and Bonnie were waiting. She winced slightly when she felt her forearm throb again. Shaking it off, she handed her friends their cocktails, clinking rims as she sat down. “Hey guys! Sorry I’m late. I decided to catch a ride with the Originals.”

Raising an appreciative eyebrow, Elena commented, “Wow, Care, you must really be planning on tying one on tonight, huh?”

She shrugged her shoulders, surprised to notice she’d already finished her first drink. “Maybe. I dunno. I suddenly just felt so thirsty, you know?” She signaled Enzo to have another round sent to them. She grabbed her water, having to restrain herself from gulping it down like she’d been running a marathon. What was going on with her?
Bonnie sighed dramatically, “Maybe I should join you, Care. Work has been so awful lately. I feel like I’ve been pulled into another dimension, almost like a prison world, you know?”

Caroline hummed in agreement, finishing off her water before she could stop herself. Bonnie was always so stressed out with her job. At the moment, the details of her job escaped her, but she knew that whatever Bonnie did, it was important, but people always seemed to take her for granted. When the waitress brought over another round of drinks, she surprised the table by ordering almost every appetizer on the menu. “What? I realized I’m hungry, but honestly nothing in this place sounded good, so I figured I’d try a little of everything until something caught my interest,” she said in a slightly defensive tone.

“I wish something would catch my interest,” Elena muttered, taking a big sip of her cocktail. “It’s been ages since someone fascinating has come to town. I’d love to get swept up in the romance of a stranger.” She wiggled her eyebrows comically at her friends, adding, “Or maybe even two mysterious strangers.”

Bonnie giggled, “Ooooh, maybe they could be brothers and they’d both be obsessed with you!”

Caroline shook her head at her friends’ silliness. A love triangle with two brothers? Talk about causing a lot of ridiculous, completely unnecessary drama. She was pleased to see that a fun local band, Vikings with Improbable Accents, would be playing later on. She was hoping that in addition to their signature song, “Dagger Me with Your Insecurities,” they’d try out some of their new material despite the fact that they’d received mixed reviews on their latest album, Wildly OOC in New Orleans.

When the appetizers arrived, she gleefully piled her plate high and began tearing into the food with gusto. She felt ravenous, but at the same time, she noticed her stomach had begun to cramp and her headache had returned full force. Hopefully, she could alleviate both once she had something solid in her system. She squinted as the overhead table light seemed to glow brighter, nearly blinding her. Grappling for her drink, she didn’t bother trying to hide her thirst as she took huge, noisy gulps, finishing it off before her friends’ startled eyes. She was just so thirsty.

“Care, are you feeling ok,” Elena asked worriedly.

Caroline looked up, sniffing the air as the intoxicating aroma of something delicious suddenly caught her attention. It wasn’t the appetizers; they were subpar at best and didn’t seem to curb her enormous appetite. But whatever this new fragrance was, it made her mouth water. Ignoring the way her forearm throbbed painfully, she stood up, leaning closer to her friends to inhale the wonderful aroma coming off of them in delectable waves. “Just a taste,” she snarled at them, leaping over the table intent upon finally sating her insatiable hunger.

“Caroline! You have to drink. Come on, sweetheart, that’s it,” he soothed, pulling her out of the nightmare in a confusing rush of salt and iron in her mouth. The tangy sharpness of the flavors brought her out of her haze and she gratefully clung to the wrist he offered until she’d had her fill.

Caroline blinked rapidly, realizing she was staring up at a pair of gray eyes ringed with gold, the urgency in his expression warming her heart. Klaus was here. Letting out a small shriek, she exclaimed, “Klaus! I remember you!” Laughing hysterically, she pulled the surprised Original into a fierce hug, breathing in his familiar scent as she felt immense relief once she recalled what happened.
She and Enzo had been doing a pub crawl in Colorado near the Rocky Mountains and didn’t realize that it was a werewolf hangout where vampires weren’t welcome until it was too late. They had flashed away, but Caroline had been bitten. After that, things had gotten blurry quickly, so she wasn’t sure what happened afterward.

Klaus tenderly kissed her forearm, the mangled bite already fading away now that his healing blood was flowing through her. Sensing her unasked questions, he explained, “Your irritating drinking companion had the foresight to use your phone to call me, love. That’s the only reason his head is still attached after he foolishly put you in danger.”

A slight smirk tugged at the corners of his lips as he added, “Well, that, and he seems to have a penchant for getting under Rebekah’s skin; their banter has been almost as amusing as the time Kol replaced every other page of Elijah’s limited edition of Shakespeare’s *First Folio* with *Mad Magazine* fold-ins artwork.”

Caroline giggled at the imagery Klaus’ words described, thinking that maybe she didn’t have to be so hasty getting back on the road with Enzo. “Thank you for saving me,” she murmured, turning to kiss him softly before resettling in his comforting arms.

“Of course, love,” he rumbled, kissing the top of her tangled curls. “I don’t suppose I could entice you to stay for a bit,” he asked, the tentative plea in his voice endearing him to her even further.

She gave him a sly smile. “Maybe. What did you have in mind?”

Clearly encouraged by her answer, he replied, “Well, it seems I need to teach a lesson to some werewolves; perhaps you’d like to join me? But after that, perhaps we could do a few pub crawls of our own and just go from there?”

She kissed him soundly, sinking into his warmth as she realized she’d never felt peace the way it felt when she was with Klaus. Maybe her hallucinations were onto something? As they broke apart, Klaus helped her to her feet, and as she grasped his hand, she asked curiously, “By the way, have you and your family ever considered starting a band? Because I have some ideas...”
Promising Him the Moon

Chapter Summary

This Klaroline Winter Wonderland Gift Exchange story is for the amazing venomandchampagne/sushibunny! In this AU story, Klaus is looking for the moonstone in Mystic Falls when he comes across sassy witch Caroline. When she casts a spell for him, he learns he may have greatly overestimated his wooing capabilities...

An oozing, festering, potentially disfiguring pox on this Yelp reviewer, Caroline thought to herself, her foul mood worsening as she realized that the disgruntled customer was the same one she kicked out of her store just the other day for having the balls to argue with her about the return policy. He’d been a fussy little vampire, not even two centuries old, and far too invested in his ridiculously coiffed mane.

He had purchased their best-selling organic peppermint-ginger hair wax and then proceeded to try to return it the next day despite the fact that half of the jar had been used, and as she cast a critical eye at his crunchified locks, it appeared that it had all gone onto his oversized head in one gloppy application. She’d denied his ludicrous request and sent him on his way, amused by his drama-queen threat about how he was going home to journal about this grave injustice immediately. Vampires, she inwardly sighed, such flighty creatures.

She and her friend Bonnie owned Witchy Women, a boutique that sold wonderfully fragrant body care products. Their store had been successful from the moment they opened the doors...almost like magic. She grinned at that thought — while she and Bonnie may have used some of their magical influence to get their fledgling business off the ground, it turns out that one should never underestimate the humans’ inexplicable desire for organic, delicious-smelling body care products.

Bonnie interrupted her thoughts as she set down a small crate of glass jars on the counter, announcing, “These need to be relabeled. I know we agreed to a .5% increase, but word’s getting out and it’s our fastest-selling product, so I say we take advantage and bump up the price by 2% and see what happens.”

She nodded, quickly calculating profit margins while weighing potential risks. “Agreed. We can always do a buy one, get one sale if we cast a foreshadowing spell to detect any future backlash.”

“My, my, aren’t you a sly little minx,” an accented voice purred in amusement. Caroline looked up in surprise, her blue eyes widening as she took in a devilishly handsome face and a smirk framed by deceptively innocent-looking dimples. The power she could feel radiating off of him was enough to put her on her guard. Vampire. An old one by the feel of it; possibly even an Original. He reached into the crate, pulling out one of the jars of body cream, casting a critical eye at it before asking skeptically, “And this little container of lotion you’ve called, ‘Your Favorite Dessert’ is causing all the fuss among your customers? Forgive me, sweetheart, but I just don’t see the appeal.”
Bonnie huffed in annoyance, her green eyes flashing dangerously, but Caroline lay a placating hand on her arm. Arching an eyebrow, she said in a challenging voice, “Open the lid.”

Shrugging his shoulders, the stranger unscrewed the lid, taking an experimental whiff that rapidly became a deep inhale as his whole body seemed to involuntarily shudder. The steel in his gray eyes softened, making him seem almost human. “Never in all my years...” he confessed shakily, “I swear that infernal concoction smells just like blod kaker. It’s a cake filled with apples baked in honey. We ate it during Haustblót, our autumn harvest.” He cocked his head to the side, hand still clutching the jar as he asked, “Tell me love, however did you achieve such a marvelous thing?”

She and Bonnie exchanged mischievous smiles, immensely pleased with themselves. “It’s created with a modified faded memory spell laced with an olfactory enhancer charm,” Caroline explained as Bonnie pulled out their signature purple bag with silver stars and began loading it with the group of jars he hastily began stacking on the counter.

“ Ingenious,” he intoned with quiet awe threading through his voice. He fixed Caroline with seductive look as he inquired, “And what does dessert smell like to you?”

She giggled happily as she answered, “Lemon pudding. As a child, I would stuff myself silly with it.”

“ Still do,” Bonnie stage-whispered, elbowing her in the side good-naturedly as she finished ringing up the stranger’s transaction.

Leaning over the counter to study Caroline more closely, he said, “I must confess I had an entirely different reason for seeking out your shop, love.”

“You sure about that, Dimples? Because there’s no way those curls are that on-point-tousled without wielding some major product know-how,” Bonnie observed wryly.

He stiffened slightly, but cast his most charming smile at them both before directing his gaze back at Caroline. In a flirtatious voice, he said, “Is your tongue as sharp as your friend’s, Caroline?” Noting the wary surprise on the women’s faces as they realized who they were, he explained, “I may have asked around about Caroline Forbes and Bonnie Bennett, the sassy little shop owners in Mystic Falls. Your reputation as powerful witches is spoken of only in hushed whispers within the supernatural world — were you aware? I say, I’m quite impressed by your lengthy resume. And I’m not easily impressed.” He gave a short bow, his lips softly grazing Caroline’s knuckles before she even realized that he had grasped her hand in his. “I’m Klaus Mikaelson.”

Tugging her hand away, Caroline kept an edge to her tone even as she smiled and said, “We look after our own. And we stay out of vampire business unless provoked. As an Original, though, I hear provoking is your middle name. So, what trouble have you brought to our doorstep?”

“You’ve heard of me,” he said in a delighted tone, lips curling into his signature smirk.

Caroline rolled her eyes, exchanging a knowing glance with Bonnie. “We figured you had to show up here sometime. Mystic Falls is a supernatural hotspot that attracts all kinds of terrifying, dark energy. For example, several Hallmark movies were filmed here.”

Bonnie playfully smacked her shoulder, “Bitch, please, like your weeping white ass wasn’t parked on my couch last weekend marathoning the Good Witch movies.”
At Klaus’ chuckle, Caroline scowled, pointing a finger at her friend as she accused, “I can’t believe you just violated rule number two of the friendship pact: Thou shalt not divulge TV habits. It’s almost as crucial as rule number one!”

“What’s rule number one,” Klaus asked in a curious tone, clearly enjoying the women’s playful dynamic that spoke of many years rooted in friendship.

The women replied in perfect harmony, “Thou shalt not dessert shame.”

Caroline allowed the group’s brief laughter to fade before crossing her arms in front of her, peering at Klaus critically as she inquired, “So, back to my question — what trouble did you bring to us, Klaus?”

“No trouble, love. Just a simple request,” he claimed, gray eyes twinkling. “My sources have tracked the moonstone to your sleepy little town. I believe Katerina Petrova compelled someone to hide it. I request a powerful locator spell to break whatever barriers are preventing the moonstone from being found.”

“What’s in it for us,” Bonnie asked him suspiciously.

Before he could answer, Caroline said sharply, “Bonnie! Let’s not be hasty. After all, a favor owed by an Original could prove quite invaluable later on,” she suggested with a sly wink at Klaus, “I’m sure we can come to some sort of arrangement.”

“Of course, love,” he readily agreed, eyes alight with mischief, “Perhaps we could start by you accompanying me to dinner this evening?”

Nothing that dangerous should be that charming, she thought to herself. With an enigmatic smile, Caroline responded with, “How about we discuss it after the spell is concluded...if you’re still interested. After all, we strive for complete customer satisfaction here at Witchy Women.”

“Then I look forward to my satisfaction being complete, sweetheart,” he flirted with her as she and Bonnie started piling spell ingredients on the counter, from clay mixing bowls to tied bundles of dried bloodroot and feverfew. Caroline glanced over Klaus’ shoulder at the open sign on their door, willing it to flip over to read ‘closed’ as the deadbolt slid back into place. She opened a black velvet bag for Bonnie to reach into, pulling out a handful of bleached bone tiles carved with various symbols.

The women chanted lowly over the tiles before scattering them across the polished counter, the tray of white candles behind them suddenly aflame as the spell began. Crumbling the bundles of bloodroot and feverfew into one of the clay bowls, Caroline added several drops of a smoke-colored oil from a tall glass jar.

A confused expression spread across Klaus’ face as he watched the women come to a stop and look at each other while wearing twin grimaces. They raised their fists and began what appeared to be a quick game of rock-paper-scissors. When Caroline’s ‘rock’ lost to Bonnie’s ‘paper’, she whined, “Seriously? How about best two out of three?”

Cackling, Bonnie shook her head, “Nope — you lose, you bleed, Blondie — those are the rules.”

“Fine,” Caroline huffed, blowing a messy blond strand out of her face as she held out her open palm over the bowl. Ugh, I hate this part. Bonnie made a shallow cut, Caroline wincing slightly before closing her fist to encourage her blood to flow on top of the spell ingredients. With a
final round of chanting, the women seemed pleased as a thin layer of smoke rose into the air, hovering almost quizzically for a moment before dissipating as quickly as it appeared.

With a bright smile, Caroline nodded at the Original. “It’s done.”

“And I’ll be able to find the moonstone now,” Klaus asked eagerly, standing up a bit straighter and causing his dark henley to stretch across his well-defined chest.

Stop eyeing the sexy sociopath like he is a gooey, delicious pizza. You do not need the chaos his spicy pepperoni will bring. Handing him his purchases from earlier, Caroline answered confidently, “I promise that whomever you speak with on this matter will now feel compelled to show you their moonstone.”

“Well done, love. I will return later to see if you’ve changed your mind about dinner,” Klaus replied, kissing her knuckles once more as he left the store with a sexy smirk.

Caroline laughed delightedly, calling after him, “Oh, I’m counting on it, Klaus!” As soon as the brass bell over their door sounded, the women dissolved into a fit of giggles, their cackles carrying on for a bit even as they cleaned up the remnants of their complicated spell work.

“Let’s see how Klaus is doing on his quest,” Bonnie suggested, pulling Caroline to stand in front of a colorful framed poster that advertised one of their favorite retired fragrances, Qetsiyah. It possessed all the components for a compelling, enigmatic scent, but unfortunately became too needlessly complex for their customers. Despite its marketing failure, they kept the poster as a reminder that not all ideas required an elaborate structure to succeed. Plus, they turned it into a scrying portal, Caroline thought, watching the vibrant colors swirl hypnotically before their eyes. As the colors settled and shapes reformed, Caroline couldn’t help the little sigh of contentment that escaped her as she gazed upon Klaus’ impossibly perfect bone structure.

“Really, Caroline? Did you learn nothing from when you were with Ivan,” her friend asked with a hint of judgment in her tone.

Caroline rolled her eyes. “Whatever. He wasn’t that terrible. Historians can be so dramatic.” Her blue eyes glittered as she added, “And like you’re one to judge, Borgia-banger.”

Bonnie pushed her playfully. “Pfft — there weren’t that many Borgias.”

“Seriously? Because I seem to recall you treating their family tree like your personal to-do list,” Caroline giggled, returning her gaze back to Klaus to watch with interest as he approached his first target. “Oooh — Tyler Lockwood — good choice, Klaus.”

The women gleefully watched as Klaus and Tyler exchanged bland pleasantries before Klaus set about compelling the unsuspecting man to show him the moonstone. To Klaus’ credit, he employed the perfect balance of lilting, commanding tone with a seductive, hypnotic stare. His lips curled into his signature smirk as Tyler nodded excitedly, but then he turned around, unbuckling his belt. Extreme confusion marred the Original’s face as Tyler pushed down his jeans and boxers, bending over to inexplicably display pale buttocks. Klaus was so stunned by what he witnessed that he allowed Tyler to quietly walk away without further comment.

“You know, I figured that with Tyler’s werewolf side, his moon would’ve been hairier,” Caroline commented dryly.

Shrugging, Bonnie answered, “Probably only when it’s a full moon.” They watched Klaus shake his head, clearly trying to rid himself of the image of Tyler’s impromptu mooning, his
confusion evident as he stared at his retreating form.

Laughing at Klaus’ bewildered expression, Caroline asked, “Do you think he’s sufficiently
distracted?”

“Definitely. It’s time,” Bonnie responded, waving her hand to clear the scrying portal.
Gathering a few supplies, the women quietly slipped out of their store, anxious to fulfill a promise
they made to a friend long ago.

Caroline forcefully blew away a thick layer of dust from the top of the coffin. Sneezing as
the particles flew into the air, she motioned for Bonnie to help her crack open the ornate silver
locks. As the brittle metal pieces gave way under a squeaky groan of protest, Caroline panted,
“You’d think that carting around these coffins would make Klaus more paranoid about security.
But nope — here they are, inside a moving truck he foolishly double-parked down the road from
our shop.”

Bonnie wiped her sweaty brow, adding resentfully, “I’m casting a spell to speed up the time
left on his parking meter too — that bastard deserves it for putting these ridiculous reinforced locks
on here. I’m going to need to conjure twice the usual number of sexy masseuses when I get home
tonight.”

Leaning over the open coffin, Caroline removed a thin, razor-sharp silver dagger from the
desiccated corpse. “You owe us $20, loser,” she announced with a teasing grin, while Bonnie
tossed in a couple of blood bags.

“And that’s why David Bowie is our favorite reincarnated deity,” Caroline explained,
adding another handful of fresh blackberries to the pitcher of mojitos.

Kol Mikaelson drained his highball glass, rattling the ice around impatiently until Caroline
refilled it to the brim once more. Appearing deep in thought as he absorbed the thorough pop
culture history lesson Bonnie and Caroline had given him, he finally nodded, “Okay, that makes
sense. Now, can you kindly go over your theory again about how the Kardashians are Gorgons?”

“Well,” Bonnie began, “as you know, it’s derived from the ancient Greek word, gorgós,
which means ‘dreadful’, and once you see their soul-blackening reality show, you’ll definitely
agree that —”

An incensed Klaus suddenly burst into their shop, rudely cutting off her explanation as he
shouted, “What the bloody hell do you think you’re playing at, sending me on that pointless
search?!”

With a wicked gleam in her blue eyes, Caroline asked in a tone of mock innocence, “Out of
curiosity, how many times were you mooned before you realized something might be amiss with
the spell you requested?”

Growling, he answered, “After Tyler Lockwood, I had to compel both Jeremy Gilbert and
Alaric Saltzman to pull their pants back up.” He grumbled resentfully, “Stubborn gits.”

At the hilariously awkward images his angry words caused, Bonnie, Caroline and Kol burst
into laughter, doubling over as they wiped the tears from their eyes. “That’s bloody brilliant,” Kol exclaimed, toasting Klaus with his cocktail, “You know, I helped Caroline and Bonnie invent that spell, brother.”

“Kol,” Klaus shook his head, as though only just realizing his brother was there, “You should be daggered — what betrayal is this?!”

No one should look that attractive while angry. Trying to ignore the strong line of his clenched jaw, she tossed her blonde curls behind her with an irritated huff, “Will you relax? Also, I gave you fair warning that we look after our own.” She shared a fond glance with Kol, clinking their rims together before sipping their drinks.

Klaus’ tone reflected a curious bit of jealousy that made Caroline’s breath hitch as he retorted, “And you consider my brother one of your own, love?”

“Eww,” Bonnie said, wrinkling her nose as she shoved a blackberry mojito into the angry Original’s hand, “not like that. We’ve been friends with Kol for ages. We helped him out when that clingy czarina set her sights on him. Talk about false advertising — someone with ‘the great’ tacked onto the end of their name shouldn’t be riddled with that many insecurities.”

With an impish grin, Kol answered, “Don’t act like you two birds were the only ones doing the saving. Or, did you forget the time you managed to incite a riot in Paris that tipped off the bloody revolution because a soldier got a bit handsy with you in the marketplace? Bloody hell, nearly wore myself out with all the compelling I had to do that day.”

Shrugging, Caroline said, “It’s not our fault that happened — if a royal fortress can be so easily dismantled by a handful of angry peasants with pitchforks and a few muskets, I say it deserved to fall.”

Seeming to temporarily forget his anger for a moment, Klaus gestured to the trio with his glass, “So, you decided to distract me with a farcical errand while you rescued my brother.”

Caroline rolled her eyes before smacking Kol on top of his head, saying, “That reminds me — you owe us $20. Pay up.”

“With what, darling?” Kol reached into his pockets, turning them out as he added, “You’ll just have to be patient while Nik sets me up with one of those bingo cards so I can access an ATV.”

At Klaus’ questioning eyebrow, Bonnie explained helpfully, “It was a somewhat hasty crash course in history that we gave him.”

Nodding in understanding, Klaus inquired, “What exactly was the nature of your wager with my brother?”

“In 1903, we bet Kol $20 that we could influence modern transportation more than he could,” Caroline explained, adding defensively, “$20 was a lot of money back then,” when she noticed Klaus’ condescending smirk.

Bonnie playfully ruffled Kol’s chestnut locks, gleefully revealing, “So Caroline and I may have influenced this Henry guy that used to do our gardening to draw some blueprints for a horseless carriage.”

“And I tracked down my old gambling buddy, Will Harley, and convinced him that bicycles should probably go faster,” Kol added, stubbornly crossing his arms in front of his chest as he added petulantly, “And just because I haven’t seen any steam-powered bicycles flitting about here,
doesn’t mean it wasn’t a good idea.”

Catching Caroline’s eye and giving her a roguish wink while Kol was distracted by his drink, Klaus said with a false tone of commiseration, “Unfortunately, brother, I doubt anyone today has ever heard the name ‘Harley’. Truth be told, I don’t believe he ever got his business off the ground. But your idea of making bicycles go faster is an interesting one, nonetheless.”

Klaus pulled out a barstool behind the counter, appearing more at ease than he did when he first stormed into their shop, and Caroline was feeling optimistic. He quietly studied his brother, lips curling into a knowing grin as he asked, “You’ve had the moonstone tucked away since before I daggered you, haven’t you, brother?”

“Don’t be daft, brother. Of course I have,” Kol answered with a cheeky grin. His normally boyish face grew serious as he warned, “And I’ll only part with it if we can come to an understanding about those little ‘cat naps’ you’re fond of forcing me to take over the years.”

Bonnie’s voice took on a hard edge as she stood protectively beside Kol and told Klaus, “No more daggering Kol and we’ll hand over the moonstone.”

“And we’ll help you locate your other spell ingredients and perform the ritual,” Caroline added, standing on the other side of Kol in solidarity with her friends.

Klaus calmly took in the trio’s united front, a flicker of respect registering on his handsome face. “I believe we can reach an accord, brother,” he said with a smile before turning his attention to Caroline once more. Leaning across the counter toward her he smirked, “I’d also be most interested in learning what it takes for you to consider me one of your own, sweetheart.”

With a flirtatious wink, Caroline took him by surprise when she laced her fingers with his, pulling him toward the door as she answered, “Well, you can start with buying me dinner.”
Faking a Difference

Chapter Summary

Fed up with her job, Caroline wanders into a charity to volunteer. But as much as she enjoys the new challenge, she can’t help but notice something is a bit...off. And no sexy accent is going to distract her from finding out what’s really going on.

Chapter Notes

This gift is for klarolinedrabbles, who runs one of my absolute favorite blogs ever! And FYI, there is a Part 2 to this!

In other writing news, I posted the first chapter of a new AU Klaroline multi-chap called The Price of Ambition. I’d love to hear your thoughts!

“Be good for something while you live and it is in your power.”
― Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

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*I’ve witnessed more intelligence when my cat nearly strangled himself in my underwear drawer,* Caroline thought to herself, marching angrily down the street, only a block from the office, where, until fifteen minutes ago, she was employed as lead web designer. She cringed when she thought back to the marketing meeting she just fled, where the executive team unveiled their latest marketing campaign for a weight loss shake called *Salvatore Shot.*

She watched in utter disbelief as the owner’s idiot son, Stefan, gave his presentation. An insipid mix of what looked like *The Bachelor* contestants appeared on the screen, while a sensual-but-hollow voiceover proclaimed, “Just because you’re a strong, independent woman doesn’t mean you stop caring about your appearance. Shed those unwanted pounds with the Salvatore Shot.” As applause broke out in the room, the cheery tagline, “Feminism doesn’t equal fat,” flashed across the screen before it faded to black.

It was the wakeup call Caroline needed to finally quit the corporate job that was slowly draining her soul. Of course, now that the adrenaline had worn off (and several blisters had formed from stomping around in her Rene Caovilla heels), she was starting to panic as she realized for the first time in her highly organized life, she didn’t have a plan. As she stubbornly kept marching, she noticed that the once-empty storefront across from a coffee shop she liked appeared to be suddenly bustling with activity.

A statuesque blonde with fierce blue eyes was loudly directing two impossibly attractive men who were carrying multiple boxes. Curious, Caroline moved closer, reading the plain black
lettering in the glass window that proclaimed the new business was called *Pies for Charity*. Despite the lackluster name, she was intrigued by the idea of volunteering. “Excuse me,” she called out to the blonde, who immediately snapped to attention and looked at her in an oddly suspicious manner, “How do I sign up?”

The two men stopped unloading boxes to appraise her; the one with dirty blonde curls smirked as he asked, “Sign up for what, sweetheart?”

She refused to be thrown off by that unexpected sexy accent. “It’s Caroline, *not* sweetheart.” She gestured toward the storefront and explained, “To volunteer.” At the group’s confused glances, she asked, “This is a charity, right?”

The woman hurriedly answered, “Of course! Um...yes, we would be happy to accept volunteers.” She smiled and said, “I’m Rebekah and this is Klaus and Enzo.”

“Do much baking sweetheart,” Klaus asked teasingly, flashing an unexpected pair of dimples as he studied her more closely.

Feeling her temper flare up, Caroline crossed her arms and said snidely, “Owning a vagina doesn’t magically give me baking skills. I’m the lead web designer at Silas & Salvatore Inc.” Scowling slightly, she added in annoyance, “Or, at least I was until 15 minutes ago.”

Softening slightly at her unexpected revelation, Klaus replied gently, “Look, I don’t think it’s a good idea, love. It’s too...unpredictable at the moment. We’re just getting organized and aren’t sure what...uh...skill set we’ll need in the future.”

“Come on, mate. I think Gorgeous would be good for us. Give our little enterprise some legitimacy and professional polish,” Enzo cheerfully disagreed, nodding his dark head at her with a grin.

She rolled her eyes. Apparently, if she was planning on doing this, she’d need to get used to the stupid nicknames. “For the past eight years, I’ve been working in web, mobile and application design — from creating responsive page layouts to managing multiple project and marketing teams. I am well-versed in UX design practices along with frontend development using HTML, CSS, and JavaScript with a bit of coding on the side.” She eyed the plain lettering of the storefront sign once more and added confidently, “If your digital presence looks anything like your storefront advertising, you *definitely* need me.”

Rebekah let out a bark of laughter, elbowing Enzo as they traded amused glances. “I like her.”

Klaus sighed, glaring at his coworkers even as he shook Caroline’s hand, telling her, “Welcome to the team, sweetheart.”

Caroline had experienced her fair share of unorthodox employee orientations during her career; when she started at Silas & Salvatore Inc., they expected all the new hires to submit daily journal entries about their feelings, but her initial foray into volunteer work still struck her as odd. Her first indication that Pies for Charity was unconventional was when she began quizzing the trio about their organization so that she could get a feel for the culture and create a winning web design that would maximize their fundraising.

When she asked what cause they represented, they looked slightly alarmed before Rebekah
hurriedly answered, “Oh, it’s for the starving children in...Africa.”

Nodding, Caroline then asked if there was a specific country they were focusing on, and all three of them immediately responded with the name of a country. *Three different names.* Flashing her a dimpled smile, Klaus clearly tried to diffuse the awkwardness by telling her, “It’s probably best that we don’t limit our focus at the beginning. We can start with the entire continent and then re-evaluate later on, right, love?”

Despite the first few bizarre meetings with the trio, she’d ignored that nagging voice in her head that something wasn’t right and continued to work with them as she was determined to create a winning design for their charity. She’d also never felt so relaxed while working and she enjoyed getting to know her coworkers a bit more. *Not to mention the way her heart did that fluttery thing whenever she caught Klaus staring at her.* She thought she’d been sending him all the right signals, letting him know she was into him, but so far, he’d either failed to notice or he wasn’t interested. *She couldn’t decide which was worse.*

Which is why she was determined to take a more direct approach today. She’d arranged a quick meeting with Klaus under the guise of needing to review the color scheme and typography, and in between discussing the benefits of pre-installed fonts, she kept getting distracted by his dimples and seductive smirk. Clearing her throat, she said in an overly casual tone, “So, my friend Bonnie is a local sculptor and has a couple of pieces displayed at the Expression Gallery. I couldn’t help but notice that you sometimes draw on the edges of our receipts, so I thought you might like to go with me sometime?”

His gray eyes widened, but the look of surprise that flitted across his handsome face was replaced quickly with something akin to interest as he leaned over the counter and his voice dropped to a sexy growl, “Well, sweetheart, as it so happens...”

Unfortunately, he was cut off by Enzo barging into the kitchen, carrying a large box in front of him as he asked, “Klaus, this is the package of...” noticing Caroline was in the room, he paused briefly and then continued with, “The ingredients we requested have arrived. Where did you want them?”

Standing a bit straighter, Klaus quickly directed Enzo toward some shelves in a back office. After their coworker left, Klaus was quiet for a moment, as though contemplating something. He finally sighed and said, “Sweetheart, I appreciate the offer, but unfortunately this isn’t the right time for me to be...distracted at the moment.”

Feeling her cheeks flush with embarrassment and indignation at being referred to as a ‘distraction’, she hated how she thought she heard a hint of regret in his tone. Squaring her shoulders, she flashed him an overly bright smile and replied, “It’s fine, really. I normally keep my professional and social lives separate anyway. If you get a chance, you should go check out the gallery though. We have some really talented local artists.”

“Love, it not that I don’t —” he started in a gentle tone, reaching out to grasp her hand. Caroline quickly moved away, gathering her laptop and purse as she gave him another fake smile. As she fiddled with the silver buckle on her purse, she said reassuringly, “Klaus, really, it’s fine. I’m fine. It’s all — fine. I think I have enough for this phase of the project, so I should get
She managed to get out the door without further mortification, and decided to sulk across the street at her favorite coffee shop, Malcontent Coffee.

She used to stop by a few times a week because she enjoyed their cutely named ‘pseudo dark side lattes’, plus the two pretty-boy owners, Marcel and Lucien, were always nice to look at. She hadn’t been by since she’d started volunteering across from them, partly because she’d gotten the impression from watching her new coworkers that there was some sort of rivalry going on between the two shops and she had no interest in whatever was going on. The odd glances, the awkward silences and whispered conversations convinced her to stay out of it.

As she stood in front of the register, Marcel brightened as he recognized her. “Caroline, haven’t seen you in a bit. Everything going ok?”

She nodded politely and explained, “I started volunteering across the street; their web pages were a bit more complicated to redesign and have been taking up quite a bit of my time.”

Lucien poked his head out of the back office and said with a charming lilt to his voice, “Did I hear correctly that you’re donating invaluable computer skills to the degenerates who run that questionable pie shop?”

“Seriously? Look, I don’t know what bizarre pissing contest you guys have going on, but leave me out of it,” she said, rolling her eyes as she inhaled the heavenly aroma of vanilla and caramel with a hint of garam masala.

Exchanging an amused glance with Marcel, Lucien said in a placating tone, “Easy there, we’re just wondering if you’d extend us the same courtesy, Caroline.” Frowning slightly, he explained, “Our site’s been glitching and it’s beyond our paltry IT skills to fix it. Any chance you could help us out?”

Rattling an empty coffee cup, Marcel said in a pleading tone, “Free lattes for the next century...or until the Tampa Bay Bucs win the Super Bowl.”

Giggling, she agreed, “Fine. But they better come with some of those saffron sweet potato muffins.” She glanced at the clock and realized the edits to the landing page that Rebekah requested still needed to be done, so she told them both, “I’ll come around in the next couple of days and take a look.”

Waving good-bye, she headed out, feeling a bit lighter as she realized that just because Klaus wasn’t interested in her didn’t mean that others wouldn’t be. She could have sworn that both Marcel and Lucien seemed to have perked up considerably when they noticed her walk in...

The next day, Caroline had planned to avoid Klaus by working with Rebekah on the revisions she requested, but when she arrived at the shop, the demanding blonde was nowhere to be found. She had just finished telling Enzo to have Rebekah call her when she was ready to review the new layout when Klaus intercepted her at the door.

His gray eyes seemed to light up when he saw her, but his voice was uncharacteristically soft and hesitant. “Caroline, I’m pleased you stopped by. How goes the website redesign?”

Why did he have to look even better today than he did yesterday when he rejected her? She tried to ignore the way his dimples cut into his cheeks when he smiled at her, and she told herself that the collection of necklaces he always seemed to wear was clichéd and off-putting rather than
immensely appealing. Putting on her best professional tone, she answered reassuringly, “The project deliverables are on schedule. Rebekah has agreed to the fixed-width layout for consistency across platforms and I’ve input her latest edits to the focal point design along with the navigation features we discussed. The menus and links are functioning properly and I just need someone on your staff to do a final review before we re-launch.”

He nodded, the slightly glazed look in his gray eyes familiar to her whenever she discussed web design with anyone outside of the industry. Shaking his head slightly, he replied, “That sounds...complicated, but I trust our business venture in your capable hands, sweetheart.” He paused, rubbing the back of his neck awkwardly as he seemed to search for the right words to say. “And um...how are you doing? We didn’t get a chance to talk again yesterday...”

Blue eyes widening in alarm at the thought of having to revisit her humiliation with the object of her crush so soon, she quickly said in a brisk tone, “There’s no need. We’re friends and that’s great. Everything is...great.” Giving him what she hoped was a convincing smile, she hurriedly placed her laptop back in its red leather case, tucking a few blonde strands behind her ear as she hastily told him, “I should be heading out anyway. I’ve uploaded the latest draft of the site to your company’s shared drive, so if you could take a look at it this morning, I’d appreciate it.”

A frown marred his handsome face, but he nodded in agreement and told her, “I’ll do that after I discuss a few business items with Enzo.” He turned to head toward the kitchen, but stopped suddenly to look at her once more. Her questioning brow seemed to throw off his normally confident demeanor and he awkwardly added, “Caroline...you look...I mean to say that I think...um...”

His bizarre words were mercifully cut short by Enzo shouting through the kitchen door, “Klaus! On a bit of a timetable, mate!”

Klaus told her abruptly, “You look pretty today. Every day, actually. That’s all,” and then stomped toward the kitchen until he was out of sight.

*What the hell was that?* Shaking her head in confusion, she walked out the door, only managing to get a few feet before she realized that she left her phone on the counter. Groaning at the likelihood of another awkward-yet-confusing encounter with Klaus, she decided to quietly sneak back in the store, hoping that he and Enzo were still in the kitchen and wouldn’t hear her come in.

She breathed a sigh of relief when she managed to tuck her phone into her laptop case without incident, turning to quietly walk out of the store again when she couldn’t help but overhear Enzo telling Klaus, “It’s gone up in price and the supplier is getting nervous. We may have to take him out of the equation.”

“Not yet,” Klaus said in an authoritative voice. “Not until he’s given us everything. Then we can talk about moving the kilos to a neutral location. Soon, we’ll be ready to make our move.”

Caroline managed not to gasp as she stood frozen in place, Enzo and Klaus’ damning words playing over and over in her mind. *Supplier. Kilos. Take him out.* Heart pounding, she realized that it sounded like her coworkers were talking about drugs. As ridiculous as it seemed to her, based on her late-night crime drama marathons, they likely were coke dealers. *Holy shit. Pies for Charity was a front for smuggling coke.*
Author’s note: Here’s the sequel to Chapter 44 in this series. I’ve enjoyed everyone’s guesses about what’s really going on — I hope you’ll like the direction I took this story! Thanks for sending me your reviews; they keep me motivated!

“Wealth without virtue is no harmless neighbor.”
— Sappho

Caroline’s thoughts were racing as she recalled all those nagging little moments when she questioned the odd inner workings of Klaus’ business model. How they only received a handful of customers throughout the week and yet somehow maintained funding for their enterprise. How the same number of online orders appeared several times each week. Or the fact that their creepy, unmarked, windowless delivery van parked outside never seemed to go on pie deliveries. Or how they were ridiculously vague about what cause they were supporting.

As she eyed the room critically, it made sense now why there was no decor to speak of — everything was very stark and clinical and other than a random poster of the African continent on one wall, there were no clues to indicate that their pies were for fundraising. It was the perfect cover; using a charity to launder their drug profits. Realizing the incredible danger she was in, she quickly exited the store, planning to regroup at her house with a bottle of wine and the largest tub of caramel brownie-laden ice cream she could find. And then another bottle of wine. And possibly another until she could forget the wildly misplaced regret she felt when she realized that she couldn’t possibly be around Klaus anymore now that she knew who he really was. It was just a stupid crush and she would get over it. Probably.

Her plans were interrupted when Marcel startled her, calling out, “Caroline! Any chance you could take a look at our site now?” His warm brown eyes twinkled as he added gleefully, “Lucien is about to tear his hair out; which will just make that little bald spot in the back more noticeable.”

Sighing, she rubbed her forehead, grumbling, “Fine. But with the day I’m having, I need a bigger bribe than a muffin.”

He nodded eagerly and with a mock serious tone he said, “Understood. One enormous slab of praline fudge cake coming up.” Linking his arm with hers, he led her into Malcontent Coffee, bypassing the main counter in favor of the back office. He gestured to an office chair beside a small table and told her he’d be right back with her delicious bribe.

Already salivating at the thought of the decadent dessert, she almost forgot her recent discovery about the trio across the street. Sighing heavily, she chose to push those chaotic thoughts from her mind as she needed more time to decide if she was going to the police with her suspicions.
or if she should just avoid them and keep her mouth shut.

The frozen computer screen in front of her caught her eye and she grimaced when she saw the poor coffee shop guys were experiencing the “spinning wheel of death” so common with that model. Deciding to get started, she used a few hot key tricks that finally unlocked the system. Once inside, she intended to do a quick search for their design software, but instead she found several tabs open to multiple spreadsheets. As she went to minimize them, she couldn’t help but notice that the spreadsheets appeared to be for the same quarter with the same transactions listed. However, what caught her attention was the drastic variation in profits reported. One spreadsheet showed significantly higher profits — *tens of thousands of dollars higher*.

Standing up abruptly, she attempted to calm her racing heart as she tried to make sense of what she’d seen. It was too much of a coincidence that she would stumble across two different instances of illegal activity in one day — clearly they were connected. But how? Maybe Klaus and his friends were dealing coke out of their shop and Marcel and Lucien laundered the money? That was a thing, right? Drug dealers couldn’t just walk into a bank and deposit their profits; they needed a middle man to keep away the police and IRS.

Legs shaking, Caroline realized she needed to get out of there before Marcel and Lucien realized she was onto them. Unfortunately, before she could make her escape, Marcel returned, his normally friendly smile replaced with something cold and calculating that made her stomach sink. He was gripping a handful of long zip ties and a roll of duct tape. She impulsively put the rolling black office chair between them, as though it would somehow prevent him from attacking her.

She shakily gestured toward his creepy kidnapper supplies and said, “Those don’t look like the dessert bribe I was expecting. I’m not sure what kind of IT folks you’ve used before, but they seem to offer more exotic services than what I provide.”

Marcel quickly whipped out a black handgun, pointing it at her with ease. His tone was casual, as though they were merely continuing their discussion from earlier about his computer issues. “You know, Caroline, at first, we thought you were playing the long game — casually visiting the store a few times a week to earn our trust and learn all our dirty little secrets. After all, you just *happened* to start volunteering across the street the instant Klaus and his crew opened up their shop.” He cocked his head to the side, studying her carefully. A sly grin spread across his face as he mockingly told her, “But we’ve been watching you all this time and finally figured it out—you have no idea what’s going on, do you?”

Despite the fact that she had a gun pointed at her, she could feel her temper flare at his condescending tone. “Klaus and his friends are drug dealers and they use your business to launder their money.” At Marcel’s amused expression, she angrily threw up her hands, yelling, “Or with all the random animosity between your two shops, maybe you guys are rival drug lords and you’re pissed that Klaus is moving in on your turf.”

He laughed heartily, his gun only wavering slightly as he seemed to thoroughly enjoy her enraged expression. “That’s fucking hilarious. Klaus and his friends aren’t dealers, you nitwit. They’re all undercover cops trying to bust our operation. We use the coffee shop as a legit cover while we move our product.”

Klaus was a cop? *There was a uniform to go with that sexy accent?* She chastised herself for having ridiculously inappropriate thoughts at a time like this and responded in irritation, “I don’t get why you’re involving me in your mess though; I’m nobody special.”

Marcel’s twisted grin as he stepped closer to her filled her with revulsion. “That’s where you’re wrong. You’re very special — to Klaus.” At her incredulous expression, he laughed. “He’s
terrible at hiding how he feels about you. You should have seen him the other day, pacing back and forth in the parking lot clutching a stupid sunflower and rehearsing what he was going to say to you. But then he managed to fumble his words with you and just left the sunflower on the counter where you assumed Enzo had brought it in for Rebekah.”

She gasped at his revelation, everything falling into place now that Marcel filled in the missing pieces. She had been in deep design mode, barely acknowledging Klaus when he walked into the shop because she was trying to resolve a frustrating broken links issue. He had mumbled a few phrases while she was working, but she only nodded at him, not really paying attention. Later on, she couldn’t figure out why Klaus had been so grumpy, and now she realized it was because she’d clearly missed his carefully crafted speech.

Marcel interrupted her thoughts, continuing his explanation. “The moment we realized his team had incriminating surveillance on our operation, we realized we needed to make a trade — your life for the footage.” He grabbed her, tightly binding her wrists together and forcing her back into the chair where he proceeded to also bind her ankles.

Caroline hated how fear had seemed to paralyze her. She knew she should be doing something, but it was all too much to handle and she couldn’t stop staring at the gun. Despite the fact that he had set it down when he grabbed her, the inherent threat of violence made her uncharacteristically submissive. On TV, guns always seemed shiny and bigger somehow, but the dull black finish of the one he’d pointed at her was more sinister. Because it was real. She realized that even if Klaus and his team gave Marcel and Lucien the evidence they had on them, there was still no guarantee she would survive this nightmare. She needed a plan.

“Lucien will be contacting Klaus and his team soon, so just sit there quietly while we negotiate the trade,” Marcel explained with a wink. “You and Klaus will be back to your painfully awkward will-they-won’t-they interactions before you know it.”

She eyed the piece of gray duct tape he held between his fingers. Furious despite her growing fear, she spat, “Go to hell. And FYI — your honey corn muffins taste like soggy Corn Flakes. And another thing —”

The rest of Caroline’s colorful diatribe was cut off by the sticky duct tape Marcel slapped over her mouth. He chuckled at the rage he detected in her glare. “I’ll be sure to pass along your critiques to our kitchen staff. Now sit tight and I’ll be back to collect you once we’ve reached an agreement with Klaus and his team.”

Once her captor was gone, she started tugging uselessly at the thick black plastic on her wrists and ankles. At least Marcel had bound her hands in front of her, so it was slightly less uncomfortable than it could be. She started to remove the tape that was uncomfortably pulling at her skin, but she hesitated to do anything that obvious to show she wasn’t cooperating. Not that she was going to just sit there.

Once he told her that he and Lucien intended to trade her for incriminating surveillance of their drug operation, she started thinking of ways she could help put Marcel and Lucien away. She had no guarantees that she’d survive this and she wasn’t about to trust the man who tied her up at gunpoint. The spreadsheets — the ones that showed two vastly different profit margins for the coffee shop — that was the evidence that could be used against Marcel and Lucien.

She marveled that her captor left her alone with their laptop, but she assumed he must have thought the programs were still frozen and that she’d be too afraid to move from her chair to investigate. But he didn’t realize how well she could multi-task — she could be afraid and snoop around his laptop at the same time. Unfortunately, she didn’t have Klaus’ email, so she couldn’t
send him the files she discovered, which meant she’d have to improvise.

Crossing her fingers that Klaus actually followed her instructions and was reviewing the website like she asked, she quickly logged in as an admin and placed an enormous text box in the middle of their landing page with the message, “Help! Marcel and Lucien have me in their shop. Attached these files from their computer — Caroline.” It was a challenge typing with her wrists bound together, but she felt a small smile of triumph try to form around her duct tape as she uploaded a zip file she created that included not only their incriminating spreadsheets but also several suspicious-looking files with what looked like code names, places and dates. She quickly shutdown the laptop when she heard footsteps coming back to the office where she was being held.

Marcel poked his head inside with a disturbingly cheerful grin. “It’s your lucky day, Caroline. Klaus readily agreed to our terms and says he’ll come alone with the evidence against us at the old warehouse outside of town. “This will all be over soon,” he breezily said, pulling her to her feet and leading her out of the room.

Caroline watched Klaus cautiously approach the abandoned warehouse through a broken window upstairs. His jaw was clenched and while he held his hand up to show he was unarmed, it was clear from his twitching fingers that he wanted to curl them into fists and punch something. As he crossed the threshold, he called out, “Caroline?! Has he hurt you?”

She felt the thick plastic digging into her skin, causing her hands to tingle as the circulation was cut off. She grimaced as Marcel lightly pressed the barrel of his gun between her shoulder blades. Somehow managing to keep her voice from shaking, she yelled down at him, “I’m fine! But seriously, there has to be an easier way to get my attention, Klaus!”

She could hear the faintest hint of surprised amusement in his tone as he answered, “This seems rather effective, sweetheart.”

Marcel roughly pushed her into a dusty corner of the upstairs loft, commanding her, “Stay there.” He waved his gun at her one last time before descending the rusting stairs. He stopped halfway across the room, leveling his gun at Klaus’ head. “Toss the USB drive to me. Once I’ve left, you can go rescue your girl.”

Klaus nodded curtly, simply telling him, “Next time,” and then threw the device at Marcel’s feet.

“There won’t be a next time, Klaus. Lucien and I have already made plans to disappear.” He gave Klaus a mocking salute with the drive, keeping his gun pointed at him as he slowly backed out of the warehouse.

Klaus’ heavy footsteps were thudding up the stairs toward her before Lucien drove their getaway vehicle out of the parking lot. The concern she saw in his gray eyes caused a lump to form in her throat and she blinked rapidly, trying to keep from crying. She hated feeling weak, but Marcel and Lucien took away her power with their actions and she wasn’t sure when she would feel safe again.

“Sweetheart, are you alright,” he asked, quickly cutting off her restraints and eyeing her closely for injuries.

She leaned into the warmth of his touch, drawing strength from him. “I’m fine. They didn’t
hurt me. Just kind of scared me, is all,” she reluctantly admitted.

He gently rubbed the angry red lines the sharp plastic had made in her skin. “I shouldn’t have involved you in my operation. It was foolish of me to put you in danger like that just because I thought having a civilian volunteer for us would help to sell our cover.”

“Yeah, next time, you should read me in on the situation,” Caroline told him, lacing her fingers into his.

Klaus snorted in amusement. “Read you in? Can I assume you’re a bit of a crime drama enthusiast, love? Because I hate to dash your expectations, but those shows are appallingly inaccurate.”

She raised an eyebrow as she argued, “Really? Because my TV marathons taught me enough to suspect you guys were drug dealers and either laundering money through Marcel and Lucien’s coffee shop or you guys were rival drug lords fighting over the same turf.”

Lips quirking, he said, “Cop actually. Although apparently not a very good one if this latest undercover assignment is anything to go by.” Smirking he added, “But I did save the girl.”

“Yeah, and I saved you, so we’re even,” she countered with a sly smile. At his confusion, she explained, “I sent you an SOS message on your website, which you clearly didn’t see, so we’ll have to work on that. But, the important thing is that I attached a zip file full of shady-looking information I found on Marcel and Lucien’s laptop.” She added wryly, “I’m guessing your team should be able to analyze it and figure out where the bad guys are heading.”

His gray eyes grew wide as he processed what she said, he opened and closed his mouth as though unable to properly form words. Unable to hold it in any longer, Caroline blurted out, “The sunflower was for me. I’m special.” Squeezing her eyes shut in embarrassment, she rambled, “To you, I mean...uh...see, Marcel told me that he saw you in the parking lot with the flower and you were practicing what you were going to say to me.” She cautiously peeked at him, suddenly more confident as she saw the desire reflected in his gaze. “He said that’s why they took me. Because I’m special. To you.”

Klaus tugged gently on her hands, pulling her close until their foreheads touched. “Yes. They leveraged the one person I would willingly compromise my operation to keep safe. I was gobsmacked from that very first day when you told me that owning a vagina didn’t magically give one baking skills.” Chuckling, he added, “And then you proceeded to argue your way onto my team by simultaneously flaunting your intimidating skillset and mocking our storefront.” Clearly relishing the blush that crept up her neck, he rumbled, “You were confounding and utterly charming and had this light about you that bathes everyone in its brilliance. And I need more.”

Throughout her career, Caroline had built a sterling reputation for articulating the most complex web design terminology to clients of all sizes and industries. She prided herself on her impressive communication skills, and yet, all she seemed to be able to utter was, “Good.” And then she grabbed his face with both hands and kissed him with a feverish passion that left them both breathless.

He leaned back slightly, placing a gentle kiss on the tip of her nose before telling her, “I’m taking you out tonight, sweetheart. For what I hope will be the first of many dates. And I’d also like to offer you a job.”

Taken aback, she tried to calm the fluttering of her heart at his words, excited that he was interested in her. Then, she focused on the other part of his invitation. “A job?”
“Of course. You’ve displayed a real knack for data mining in high-pressure situations and we could really use you on our team,” he told her. With a charming grin, he asked, “What do you say? Are you interested, love?”

With a teasing wink, she replied, “I might be. As it so happens, I’m in between jobs at the moment.”
Thank you so much for all of the wonderful reviews (especially guest reviewer who made my day with your kindness!!!) In this story, Caroline just wanted to save the world. However, while testing her scientific theory that had the potential to save the environment, she accidentally might have caused the apocalypse when she woke up a dangerous creature with a teasing smirk. But maybe just a little apocalypse. After all, what kind of god had dimples?!

Warning: A bit of smut because it’s been awhile!

“When a thing is done for the first time, it releases a little demon.”

— Emily Dickinson

When the safety buckle on her climbing harness broke, Caroline let out a shriek that was more anger than fear despite the fact that she was now dangling approximately fifty feet in the air. Her curses echoed throughout the deserted limestone quarry and she fumbled at her waistbelt for another anchor, managing to firmly set it in the chalky stone before her arm started cramping.

Once her line was secure, she continued her descent, grumbling to herself that she probably shouldn’t have sent the field techs home early. Except there’s no way she would trust anyone else with her expensive subsurface mapping equipment — especially after that debacle on her last project when Tyler managed to erase four months’ worth of geological and petrophysical data when he dropped the ground-penetrating radar system in a creek. With an annoyed huff, she reached the rocky surface of the bottom, unbuckling her protective helmet and harness.

Caroline pushed aside her irritation at her incompetent employees on this latest geophysical project, and instead focused on her growing excitement at what she hoped she was about to achieve. As a senior geophysicist, she’d worked for years in the oil and natural gas industry, seeing the devastating environmental damage that fracking, a method used to extract oil and natural gas from rock deep within the earth, had caused over the decades.

She’d studied the issue extensively, and after several failed prototypes, believed she’d finally created a nontoxic gel that could contain the harmful fracking fluid and transform it into an environmentally safe vapor. Her theory, which she tentatively called “The Cure”, could be manufactured globally with minimal impact to resources and could eventually eliminate most of the hazardous chemicals associated with fracking.

She apprehensively approached the well the drilling team had put in place, hating how her
hands shook. So much was riding on this. Her career. Her reputation. Being a woman in the oil and gas industry was an almost impossible task, and while a man in her position would be forgiven for any scientific miscalculations, she would have a tougher time reestablishing her credibility if her project failed.

She programmed the system to release the first batch of her gel upon initial contact. The instant the drill pierced the shale, she would have a preliminary data analysis of The Cure. She set the drill for a depth of two miles, the grinding of gears and the low whine of the motor were all familiar, comforting sounds that soothed her nerves as she waited for her test results. She tucked her frizzy blonde curls back into her ponytail, wiping her sweaty forehead as the harsh Oklahoma sun blazed high overhead.

Suddenly, a deep rumble echoed throughout the quarry, and as the ground began to quiver, Caroline quickly moved away from the heavy drilling equipment as she prepared for a potential earthquake. While Oklahoma was on some nasty fault lines, earthquakes hadn’t been large enough to feel until the state began increasing its fracking and drilling activities. Now, the state surpassed California in the intensity and frequency of earthquakes. However, having experienced her fair share of earthquakes, she couldn’t help but notice that this one seemed unusual.

An immense shadow swept across the brilliant blue sky, worryingly blocking out the blazing sun. While the break from the intensity of the sun was a welcome relief, she couldn’t help the slight shiver she experienced at the scientific impossibility of a random eclipse. She quickly leapt back several feet as a sinister red light suddenly shot out of the well. What the hell was going on?

Caroline watched in disbelief as the earth continued to shudder, as though casting off an immense burden, and suddenly, the well split neatly in two, allowing more of the odd beams of blood red light to flood the quarry. She gasped when she spied a hand tipped in razor-sharp claws dig its way out of the limestone bedrock of the well. Without thinking, she raced forward, grasping the hand in hers and began pulling with all her strength, intent on saving whoever (or whatever) it was despite those fierce-looking claws.

A muscular forearm gripped her hand, and suddenly she was staring into a hypnotic pair of gray eyes that briefly flashed the same red light coming from the well. A head full of dirty blonde curls and a wicked smile greeted her as the man finished pulling himself out of the well to stand before her, magnificently bare-chested and wearing some sort of linen fabric that covered his thighs and brushed the tops of his knees.

As though noticing the unusual darkness during midday, he frowned, glancing up at the sky and impatiently waving one of his arms until the massive shadow faded away, leaving behind the blazing Oklahoma sun once more. Caroline realized she was gaping, but couldn’t seem to stop herself as she asked in bewilderment, “Did you just melt the eclipse?”

He turned his intense gaze upon her, evaluating her curiously. He said, “Dingir xul, Ninkilim, shūtur eli sharri.”

Caroline shook her head at the stranger as he waited expectantly for her to reply. She noted a harshness to the foreign words, and she couldn’t deny her attraction to the commanding way he spoke them.

At her obvious confusion, he tried again, switching to what sounded like a simpler language with shorter syllables: “Bishu Ninkilim, dammu...” he trailed off, clearly noting her continued lack of understanding. Grunting in frustration, he held up his hand to her, as though asking her to wait there. Before she could do more than blink at the ridiculously attractive man (who came out of a
Almost as soon as he vanished, he reappeared, a newfound shrewdness on his handsome face. “I am Ninkilim-Niklaus, god of the Sumerians. You have my eternal gratitude for freeing me, powerful sorceress.” He gave her a brief nod with his curly head, his gray eyes dancing with amusement as he placed a flirty kiss on her knuckles, adding, “But as a token of my undying affection, you may call me Klaus.”

Jerking her hand out of his grasp, her blue eyes were wide in wonder as she watched his lethal-looking claws fade back into fingers. “Wait. What,” she stammered, her thoughts racing as she furiously tried to catch up to what Klaus had told her. “You’re an ancient god and you think I rescued you?” Scrunching her nose in confusion she asked, “Also, how do you suddenly speak English?”

“When I left you just now, I traveled the world and learned all of the languages to ensure I could communicate with you,” he revealed, the smugness in his voice both irritating and strangely appealing as she kept staring at his beautifully sculpted chest, the collection of necklaces merrily glinting in the sun. He leaned close, the sensual curve of his lips teasing her as he told her, “I was trapped for millennia by my vindictive siblings for daring to amass the armies of my faithful, marching them across the known world to conquer what is rightfully mine. And then you used your incredible magic to break through my prison deep within the earth, freeing me so that I may reclaim my kingdom once more.”

Rubbing her sweaty forehead, Caroline replied, “Okay, I’ll admit the traveling the whole world and downloading all its languages in an instant is impressive. Plus, you know, the whole melting the eclipse thing. But not everything has magic. You keep saying I’m a powerful sorceress who freed you, but I did it with science, and also completely by accident. Actually, I’m a geophysicist,” she explained, taken aback by how Klaus seemed to hang on her every word.

“Geo fist-us. Hmm, I must admit, love, that you practice a powerful brand of magic of which I’m unfamiliar. It sounds marvelously wrathful. Tell me, sorceress, did you come by your gifts through your lineage or did you sacrifice many souls to procure your extraordinary power,” he asked, once again grasping her hand and sensually stroking her upturned palm.

Charmed by his antics despite the ridiculousness of the situation, she quipped, “Like most high school graduates, I went to college to solidify my uh...sorcery where I majored in geophysics with minors in geology and physics. I was in the middle of an experiment that might just save the environment and I apparently broke you out of the ground with a drill bit, a superheater and a hydration unit.”

“Then you are as wise as you are powerful to command your useful minions of Geo Lugy and Fist-us.” Cocking his head, Klaus asked curiously, “This sacred ceremony of ‘biting of the drill’ — does it require multiple blood sacrifices or coupling upon the altar with your priest of Hide-rayshun Un It?”

She couldn’t help the snort that escaped as she blurted out, “What the hell kind of god are you that you so casually ask about sacrifices and creepy ritual sex?”

His devilish smirk came out to play, bracketed by deceptively innocent dimples. “For you, I can be many, many things.” At her derisive snort, his expression grew slightly more stoic as he explained, “I’m the Sumerian god of thieves and trickery.”

Intrigued, Caroline couldn’t help flirting back a little. “Prove it,” she challenged, the
logical, scientific part of her completely enchanted by the idea of real magic actually existing. She was perplexed by how he just stood there, gray eyes twinkling, and then she felt a cool breeze which was completely out of place in the midday sun. She blinked and suddenly Klaus was dangling a daisy-patterned bra from his finger. Her bra.

“What the hell,” she shrieked indignantly as she snatched her bra from him, feeling her cheeks turn rosy. At his teasing laughter, she scoffed and said, “I would’ve been more impressed if you stole us some greasy fries and ketchup from the diner back in town.”

Raising an eyebrow at her challenge, Klaus immediately vanished, only to appear before her once more, a triumphant grin as he handed her a white plastic basket full of crisp, steaming-hot fries and a bottle of ketchup. He gave her a sweeping bow, telling her, “This is such a paltry bounty compared to what I require from my subjects, love.”

He watched her with open curiosity as she maneuvered a large chunk of concrete from the well casing that had broken during his escape, finally using his powers to assist her in turning it over so that they could sit on it. He explained in a nostalgic tone, “My Sumerian shrines and temples were overflowing with priceless treasure from my clerics and other faithful subjects. As their patron deity, thieves who desired my blessings would lay much of their ill-gotten gains upon my altars.”

Caroline rolled her eyes at his arrogance, and yet continued to sneak peeks at that well-defined chest that seemed to glow from the sun’s intense rays. Dipping a French fry in the pool of ketchup she’d squeezed in one corner of the basket, she closed her eyes as that first salty goodness of fried magnificence touched her tongue. “Yeah, I guess I’m easier to please — a basket of fries after being at a well site all day is my idea of a priceless treasure.”

His gaze carried a hint of heat in them as he watched her tongue chase the salt on her lips. He shifted slightly, as though uncomfortable, and turned his attention toward the ketchup bottle. He questioned, “I assume this chalice bears the blood of your enemies — these Tomato people of the Kingdom of Heinz.” He eagerly dipped a fry into the ketchup, his eyes lighting up at the first taste. “Delicious! The tortured souls of the Tomato people are positively scrumptious. I’m curious as to what the fallen Kingdom of Heinz did to incur your vengeance, sorceress.”

Letting out a delighted laugh, Caroline shook her head, not bothering to correct Klaus. She couldn’t remember when she’d had so much fun. “Nothing. I just enjoy the way the Tomato people taste.”

Nodding in understanding, he ate another fry, remarking thoughtfully, “Bloodthirsty as a means to cater to your every whim — I approve.” Licking a bit of ketchup from his thumb in a manner she found ridiculously erotic, he said, “Now, as a boon for freeing me, I will discuss carving this world into territories rather than simply seizing it all. I’m impressed by how much larger the world became during my absence. During my brief travels earlier, I spied a magnificent herd of wild horses in a kingdom called Wyoming. I lay claim to this land.”

“Seriously?! You can’t just take Wyoming because you like the horsies,” she lectured him, noticing the way his smirk deepened as she argued with him, adding as an afterthought, “Take New Jersey. Please.”

He pushed aside the nearly empty basket of fries, leaning closer to her as he countered with, “Only if you take the Kingdom of Washington DC. The momentary glimpse I received of it seemed utterly preposterous.”

“Huh. You’re not wrong,” Caroline acknowledged with a sigh. She leaned over, grabbing
her water bottle from her backpack. Taking a quick drink, she handed it to Klaus, suddenly unable to tear her gaze away from the way his throat bobbed as he swallowed. Good grief, did it suddenly get hotter? His gray gaze swept over her once more, the intensity of his stare making her lash out in the unbearable heat of the quarry. “Seriously?! Will you quit staring at me like that!” She paused, clenching her fists as she gave into an impulse she’d been nursing ever since he appeared. “Or, do something about it.”

A flash of red gleamed in his eyes as he practically purred, “I accept your challenge, sweetheart.” He captured her lips, drawing out her breath and leaving her gasping for more as he pulled her blonde curls free, a sexy growl escaping.

Caroline eagerly mapped the contours of his bare chest, loving the slick feel of the light sheen of sweat as she breathed in his arousing scents of warm, earthy spices. When her fingers tangled with his collection of necklaces, he pulled back, as though intending to remove them. She shook her head, possessively touching them as she panted, “Leave them on.” Pulling him down for another soul-burning kiss, she relished the feel of his smirk against her lips.

Klaus encouraged her to lean back on the cracked well casing, bowing his curly head to her waist where he circled the button of her pants with his tongue. Her skin tingled as she felt his hot breath through the lightweight fabric, biting her lip when he easily unbuttoned her pants with his teeth and skillful tongue. She quickly scrambled to help him pull them off, loving the way the stubble from his cheek scraped deliciously along her bare thigh.

“My faithful would flock to my temples, so eager to prove their devotion as they offered their riches, their bodies...” he rumbled, licking a determined path along her skin, “their souls,” he finished huskily as his intense stare bore into hers. “Tell me how you demand your faithful worship you, sorceress.”

Caroline shivered at his words, the sinful pictures they painted making her arch into his powerful body. “No faithful,” she murmured, toying with the hem of the linen wrap he wore, “because the devotion I demand they can’t seem to fulfill,” she finished confidently, moving her hands underneath to cup his ass.

He grunted at her touch, grinding against her as she quickly yanked on the knot at his waist, leaving him bare. “Permit me to show you how a god proves his devotion,” he swore, his eyes flaring red as he shredded her thong with his claws, wrenching open her thighs and curling his tongue within her until she screamed his name.

She writhed against every stroke, already feeling her orgasm build. With a final swirl and a determined flick at her clit, she came with a hoarse shout, grinding her pelvis against his stubble as he eagerly lapped at her arousal.

Klaus smirked down at her, gently petting her still-shivering flesh as he crawled up her body to rip off her red t-shirt, taking a nipple in her mouth until it became a stiff peak. At the first bite of his teeth, she gasped, tugging at his curls to bring his mouth closer. He moved his mouth to her other breast, pulling at her nipple with an urgency that left her panting.

She could feel her core throbbing once more and yanked on his curls until she could see his lust-blown gaze. “Fuck me. Now,” she demanded, spreading her thighs wide at his sexy growl of assent.

He dug his fingers into her hips, positioning the tip of his hard cock against her folds, rubbing against her slick center until she bucked against him helplessly. That first taste of his searing flesh as he sank into her ripped a groan from her that he swallowed with his mouth, moving
urgently within her. His long, punishing strokes filled her over and over, and she loved the way he seemed to touch every part of her with his wandering hands.

The side of her breast, the long column of her throat, even her trembling belly felt his reverent touch. She could feel herself falling once more, and eagerly chased her high by squeezing her thighs around him to pull him close. As she shuddered around him, he let out a hoarse yell, slowing down the exquisite feel of his strokes as he savored the final moments of their powerful connection.

Leaning together against the demolished slab of concrete, Caroline found she didn’t even mind the blazing sun beating down on her sweat-soaked flesh. Like a content cat, she languidly stretched, allowing the warmth to sink into her bones as she regarded the god beside her. Klaus also seemed startled by their chemistry, and she understood his surprise — it had been ages (if ever) since she’d been this excited about someone. What the hell was that? Normally, nothing took away her focus on her work; she was passionate about her career and determined to continue to make a name for herself in the industry. Wait! Her work! How the hell did she completely forget about her latest test data? Scrambling to her feet, she left an amused Klaus in her wake as she raced over to the drilling equipment to examine the preliminary readouts. She clapped her hands together excitedly. Her test was successful — according to the data, she’d just discovered an environmentally safe method for fracking. Holy shit.

A slow, confident grin spread across Klaus’ handsome face as he leaned against the concrete, completely unconcerned by his nudity as he studied her bare form unabashedly. “Tell me, love, how do you feel about ruling the world with me?”

Caroline nodded, preoccupied with her exciting data readouts before turning to flash him a wicked smile. “First, we’re going to save the world. Then, we’ll talk about ruling it.”
What Makes Up a Monster

Chapter Summary

Klaus is the star of a wildly popular horror movie franchise and assumes that the attractive blonde with a sharp tongue is just another star-struck fan. Oops.

Chapter Notes

In other news, I expanded a one-shot from A Beautiful Symmetry. It’s called The Blonde Witch Project. The new stuff starts on Chapter 2!

“Everything you can imagine is real.”
― Pablo Picasso

One of his cloven hooves was missing. And his werewolf claws were chafing. Klaus Mikaelson was the star of the wildly successful horror franchise Hell’s Hybrid, and as the popularity of the movies grew, so did his expectations for a certain level of quality in his character’s monster costume. He was currently on set of Hell’s Hybrid 5: Terrible Tears in New Orleans, and he could admit that while the first couple of movies had unique concepts that showcased the character’s enigmatic, devilish side, once the property changed studios, the franchise suffered from formulaic, weak writing, ridiculous plotlines and phenomenally awful special effects.

He sighed in resignation as he watched several production crew members move a large lattice wall full of plastic vines with thorns that through a hilariously convoluted plotline would somehow lead to his demise for this particular movie installment. Enchanted thorns. Bollocks. He turned to stomp awkwardly toward his dressing room wearing only one cloven hoof when a nervous giggle distracted him.

“I believe this belongs to you,” a lovely blonde told him, dangling his missing hoof between two of her fingers. He lazily flicked his gaze over her body, taking in the delectable way she filled out her pink tank top emblazoned with a Day of the Dead skull. From the flush that quickly stained her cheeks, his could tell that interest hadn’t gone unnoticed. Before he could respond, she dropped to her knees and looked up at him, cooing appreciatively, “Looks like I have a lot of work to do. Can I get started?”

He raised a questioning eyebrow, completely gobsmacked. He was used to overenthusiastic fans and had certainly encountered his fair share of groupies, but the seductive little vixen before him took his breath away. Clearing his throat, he projected his voice an octave lower than normal,
ensuring his accent was on display as he replied, “As much as I’d love to watch you work, sweetheart, perhaps a more private venue is in order?” He gestured to the hallway behind him, adding, “My dressing room, perhaps?”

Confusion registered in her blue eyes but she nodded gamely as she stood up and said, “Of course. We can do this wherever you’re most comfortable, Mr. Mikaelson. I actually have most of my gear set up in there.”

Klaus couldn’t deny the little thrill he felt when she called him by his surname, and it sounded like she had quite the show in store for him. He vaguely recalled his brother Kol had sent him a strippergram for his birthday last year. He wondered if this coy little minx had a collapsible stripper pole too?

“Klaus! There you are,” Enzo St. John, the director, called out. He glanced at the blonde and said, “And I see you’ve met Caroline.” Nodding in approval at her, he clapped Klaus on the back, telling him, “Caroline is the best horror special effects artist in the business. Now that the franchise has taken off and we have new investors, we can finally afford the professional touch our productions have been missing!”

*Special effects artist.* Bloody hell. Feeling his ears grow hot, Klaus did his best to look politely interested rather than reflecting the embarrassed surprise that he felt. He shook Caroline’s hand, perhaps a tad too enthusiastically, and told her, “Welcome to the team, love.”

Lips curled in a teasing smile, she answered, “Thank you, Mr. Mikaelson.” Gesturing toward his dressing room, she added, “We should probably get started, though.” Not bothering to see if he was following, she headed down the hallway.

“Of course, sweetheart. And please, call me Klaus,” he called after her lamely, gritting his teeth when he saw Enzo’s knowing grin. “Sod off,” he growled lowly, hurrying after Caroline. He found her melting gelatin cubes beside his makeup chair, impatiently brushing aside several blonde strands that had escaped from her messy bun.

She fixed him with an unreadable look as he sat down, tilting her head to the side as she asked teasingly, “Stripper or groupie?”

“Excuse me,” he asked, swallowing hard as he realized what she was asking.

She shook her head indulgently, blue eyes twinkling in amusement as she explained, “Which did you think I was — a stripper or a groupie?”

He watched her carefully tint the melted gelatin and answered wryly, “In my defense, sweetheart, you were somewhat misleading with your intentions when you approached me.”

“What are you—” Caroline broke off abruptly, clearly thinking back to their first few moments together. Realization seemed to dawn on her as her mouth fell open with an embarrassed groan. “Seriously?! I was so focused on the art direction and overall makeup concept I didn’t even think about how that would look to you...” she trailed off awkwardly. With an adorable blush staining her cheeks, she shrugged, gently stirring the gelatin. “So, not my smoothest transition to a production crew. Sorry,” she muttered, carefully pouring the melted gelatin into a shallow mold.

“It’s fine, love,” Klaus reassured her with a chuckle, “It’s actually not the oddest way someone has introduced themselves to me. On *Hell’s Hybrid 4: Burning White Oak*, the producer had to hire additional security for my trailer because I kept finding fans in my shower.”
Giggling, Caroline flipped open a metal toolbox at her feet, pulling out several long strips of red, orange and yellow LED lights. “I’m sure just one of the many hazards of shooting on location,” she said sarcastically, lightly applying prosthetic adhesive to his calves.

“Well, we were in the middle of a bloody swamp on that film, so in addition to a stray alligator or two nosing through our rubbish, the crew waged a losing war against bugs the size of Chihuahuas.” Intrigued as he watched her carefully coil the lights in spiraling patterns from his ankles to knees, he asked, “What’s that you’re doing, sweetheart? In four movies, this is the first time my character’s costume has included headlights.”

“Welcome to the future of special effects, Klaus.” Scrunching her nose adorably, she confessed, “I’ve studied the makeup techniques used in your previous movies and we can get more realistic-looking flames if we strategically place LED lights with microchips linked to a software program I designed to mimic fire.”

Recalling the previous movies’ cheap-looking effects more akin to construction paper cutouts than high-end CGI, he cringed. Making an impressed noise, he admired the technique she was using to blend the edges of the lights into his skin with nothing more than a thick cream base and a sponge. “That’s very creative — I’m a bit of a horror movie buff and I don’t know that I’ve seen this innovative technique before.”

Blue eyes lighting up excitedly, Caroline said, “Really?! I’m a huge horror fan too. I love the old ‘30s Hollywood black and white movies like The Gemini Coven and Doppelgänger Blood Magic. I mean, the special effects were rudimentary at best, but the artists used the new media of cinema to showcase their art to the world. They fused their passion for their art with the manic energy on set created by the infamous love triangle between the flaky actress Elena Gilbert and the volatile Salvatore brothers. Not to mention the youthful exuberance of her baby brother Jeremy when he would try to mimic Damon Salvatore’s sleazy pickup lines on all of the extras.”

“You speak as though you were there, sweetheart,” he replied, charmed by her obvious enthusiasm for her art.

Starting her complicated technique on his other leg, Caroline wore an enigmatic smile as she said, “I get that a lot.” She lightly tapped a small brush with flesh-toned powder and asked, “What about you? Are you a fan of old school horror or retro horror?”

“Definitely ‘60s horror. Pageant Screams, Chupacabra Cheerleaders, Unholy Pregnancy — those movies defined the supernatural slasher genre. They used to run those old movies on Sunday afternoons at this little theater in town. I grew up on them,” Klaus explained in a fond, nostalgic tone. “The monster makeup was absolutely brilliant and actually inspired me to pursue an acting career.”

Caroline’s cheeks took on an odd rosy glow as she muttered, “You watched those? I wouldn’t have guessed.”

As he watched her slip the cooled gelatin from its shallow mold and place the realistic-looking burned flesh on his forearm, he observed, “Having watched those movies repeatedly, I can’t help but notice you seem to use a similar technique with your own work. The swirled pattern you make with the bristles of your brush almost perfectly matches the gray scales on the monsters in Chupacabra Cheerleaders.” Noting her questioning brow, he ducked his head in embarrassment as he mumbled, “I may have purchased the limited edition boxed set with five hours of special effects features.” With a wry smile, he commented, “Although it seems I’m not the only one who’s a fan, love.”
“My world is pretty big — I derive my inspiration from a variety of places,” she offered hesitantly. She shrugged, adding, “I may have seen those movies a few times myself.”

Klaus favored her with a seductive smirk. “Perhaps I could interest you in stopping by later to watch one of those movies? You could tell me more about your world.”

She laughed at his obvious flirtation. “We still have three more hours of work ahead of us. Let’s see how that goes first.” She rifled through her tool box, appearing to be missing something.

As she started to leave his dressing room, he teased, “Unless you’re afraid to get to know me, love.”

Caroline paused as she turned the doorknob, telling him, “It’s been a long time since I was afraid.” She glanced over her shoulder, shocking him into silence as he watched veins appear underneath her blue eyes which had darkened to almost black.

With a sunny smile suddenly tipped with sharp fangs, she added, “When I get back, I’d be happy to tell you what it was like working on set in those ‘60s movies you like. I can’t promise it will be as fascinating as five hours of special effects features, but you did want to know more about my world...”
Chapter Summary

Caroline’s research team has discovered a new planet that may be able to support life, and there’s no way she’s about to share credit with some foreign astronomer...no matter how cute his dimples are.

“The third planet is incapable of supporting life. Our scientists have said there's far too much oxygen in their atmosphere.”
— Ray Bradbury, The Martian Chronicles

There was a nosy ferret that kept walking across Caroline’s keyboard, radically altering her data in NASA’s archive. With an impatient sigh, she pushed aside the fluffy white and gray menace, intent to finish mapping out the latest radial velocity data before she finished her shift at the observatory. She should be vibrating with excitement — she was part of a team of astronomers whose latest research yielded a new planet that had the potential to support life. Instead, she was absolutely furious because she’d received an email this morning from Director Saltzman, commanding her to collaborate with a new astronomer on loan from the White Oak Observatory in the UK.

She turned to her furry coworker and grumbled, “Klaus Mikaelson sounds like an extra in a cheesy Viking porno, not an astronomer who supposedly possesses the skillset necessary to measure miniscule Doppler shifts in relation to planetary orbits. Don’t you agree, Bradbury?” As she affectionately stroked the ferret’s soft fur, an amused chuckle startled them both, causing her pet to bristle and hiss at the intruder.

Swiveling in her chair, Caroline discovered a beautiful stranger standing in the doorway, an amused smirk on his handsome face. “I can assure you, love, if I was ever cast in a porno, I would be the star, not an extra. Although I don’t believe my people have any Viking origins to speak of.”

Clearly enjoying her embarrassment, he stepped into the lab, hands lightly clasped behind his back as he teased, “Also, the radial velocity method, often called the Doppler wobble method, indirectly can detect planetary orbits from lightyears away. However, years ago in my graduate studies, I modified the Drake Equation which saved hours of data processing. I trust my paltry skillset will be sufficient enough to assist you in your research, Dr. Forbes.”

Blushing furiously at being caught by the colleague she was badmouthing, she scrambled to stand up, nearly losing her footing on the slick tile floor. Her hurried, awkward movements sent her rolling chair skidding across the tile floor, slamming into the opposite wall as she blurted out, “Caroline! Is me...I mean, you can call me Caroline.” She couldn’t help but gape at the unexpected dimples that framed his grin, the way his lean frame hinted at well-defined tone underneath his simple blue dress shirt.
Quickly shaking her blonde head to rid herself of distracting and wildly inappropriate thoughts, she stubbornly said, “And I will need more proof of your skillset before I make up my mind about you.” At his arched eyebrow, she realized what she had implied and in a scandalized tone she stammered, “Your astronomy skillset, not your...um...other stuff you might do. So yeah, um, welcome to the team, Dr. Mikaelson.” She gave him an overly bright smile, fully intending to power through the humiliating awkwardness...and when their project was finished, she’d burn all of her possessions, change her name, and run away with her ferret to the furthest corner of the earth, wandering aimlessly until an alien spacecraft took pity and whisked them to another planet where they didn’t have a word for *crippling embarrassment*.

“I think we’ve already moved past casual acquaintances at this stage, sweetheart, so please, call me Klaus.” In an obvious bid to redirect the conversation that she appreciated immensely, he leaned in to inspect the data on her screen, commenting, “The Doppler shifts you’ve noted seem to indicate the mass of the new planet Arcadius is larger than first hypothesized by NASA’s Travelers Space Telescope. Have you formulated any theories to account for this variation?”

Nodding eagerly, she accessed her spreadsheets complete with color-coded graphs that tracked the fluctuations in her readings. “It could be anything from atmospheric interference with our instruments to the first stirrings of a supernova. I also wouldn’t mind you taking a look at my math just to ensure I haven’t overlooked something more obvious before I make an ass out of myself at Director Saltzman’s next staff meeting with NASA.”

Rolling her chair back and settling into another one nearby, Klaus examined her graphs, a thoughtful look on his face as he replied, “Or, it’s possible that the new planet’s gravitational pull is several times higher than any other planet that earth’s scientists have discovered. The entire rocky surface could contain enough magnetic alloys to account for the unexpected gravity denseness.”

“You talk like you’ve been there,” Caroline mused, appreciating that Klaus seemed to possess not only the knowledge but also the intellectual curiosity needed to excel at research. “Ever since I was a kid, I always wanted to explore other planets. I read Ray Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* all the time even though it scared the crap out of me.” She jabbed her thumb in Bradbury’s direction, adding with a wry smile, “I even named my ferret Bradbury.”

Chuckling lightly, Klaus held out his hand for Bradbury to sniff, clearly taken aback when the ferret’s white and gray fur stood on end and he backed away, hissing at Klaus before Caroline intervened and scooped him up. “It doesn’t appear he’s very fond of strangers,” he observed. “Bradbury sniffs out untrustworthy humans — he didn’t like Tyler, my lying asshat cheater ex-boyfriend, and he also hated Elena, this former lab assistant who tried to steal credit for one of my research projects,” Caroline explained, cocking her head to the side to ask him, “So which type of untrustworthy human are you?”

He made an odd choking noise, telling her, “One of a kind, love.” With a soft smile, he added, “Or maybe not as I also often dreamed of traveling the universe and learning about other worlds. Although the author Bradbury wasn’t a part of my world as it was yours, I did enjoy the writings of those who dreamt of planets of unimaginable beauty and adventures.”

In a nostalgic tone, she revealed, “When I was a kid, I was so convinced I’d meet an alien I came up with this whole conversation I’d mapped out in my head for that first encounter. The alien will have been observing me for a while, and once they decide that I can be trusted with their secret, they’ll tell me my favorite line from *The Martian Chronicles*: ‘It is good to renew one’s wonder. Space travel has again made children of us all.’ And then I’ll smile and tell them,
‘Welcome, friend.’"

An unreadable look crossed his face, and he told her quietly, “It’s a testament to your strength of spirit that you’ve retained your childlike wonder. Any alien would be fortunate to cross paths with you, sweetheart.”

Feeling her cheeks warm, she cleared her throat, thinking this project was going to be even more complicated than expected.

The next day, Caroline tried to present a more professional demeanor to Klaus, hoping that the initial impression she made hadn’t completely destroyed her credibility in her colleague’s eyes. *His incredibly piercing, dark eyes that seemed to stare right through her, learning her secrets before she knew them all herself.* Fighting down a blush, she directed Klaus’ attention to the recently mined spectrograph data plotting the stars’ periodic shifts along the color scale. “Based on this trajectory, Arcadius is an incredibly slow-moving planet — crossing three meters per second. By comparison, earth moves 460 meters per second. That would mean that potentially a day on Arcadius would feel like —”

“This forever,” Klaus injected in an oddly wistful tone, his dark gaze never straying from the projected orbital pattern on the screen.

“Well, closer to ten earth years, but I imagine there’s times that a day on Arcadius would feel like forever,” she amended, watching the graceful arc of the new planet as it swooped across the monitor. She leaned back in her chair, the cheerful Miami sun streaming into the lab. “I guess this weather is way different than what you’re used to, right?”

Eyes wide, his tone was defensive when he asked, “What do you mean?”

“Just that I know you’re on loan to us from the White Oak Observatory in the UK. I’ve never been there, but I’m picturing storm clouds and never-ending rain.” She shivered slightly despite the warmth of the sun’s rays. “I wouldn’t last long there — I’m a fan of the sun.”

“You’re a creature of the light,” he mused, tugging playfully at one of her blonde curls, which instantly drew a threatening hiss from Bradbury who glared at Klaus from his perch on her tallest bookshelf.

Frowning at Bradbury’s rude behavior, she turned to Klaus and commented lightly, “But you don’t appear to be a creature of the UK, judging by your accent.”

Still looking slightly uncomfortable, he said carefully, “My accent? It’s actually...Welsh. Do you know much about the Welsh, love?”

“Nope. Diana being the Princess of Wales is the extent of my Welsh knowledge.”

At her admission, the tense lines of his shoulders seemed to relax, and he chuckled softly as he said, “I’m sure Wales has a bit more to offer than that. But, I will acknowledge that the food in this place is worlds apart from what I’m used to.” At her inquisitive brow, he ducked his head shyly, confessing, “I’ve grown quite fond of ceviche since I’ve come here.”

Blue eyes lighting up, Caroline said, “Have you tried Lapis Lazuli downtown?” At his slight headshake, she explained, “It’s a fantastic tapas spot with a dozen different yummy ceviche recipes to try. I go there all the time!” Realizing she was gushing, she tried to reign in her
enthusiasm as she tucked a blonde curl behind her ear, mumbling uncertainly, “Maybe you’d like to come with me sometime?”

Klaus seemed taken aback by her invitation, but he smiled softly, telling her, “I’d be delighted, sweetheart.”

Several hours later, they were sitting in a cozy booth in Lapis Lazuli, a former steamboat that had been restored as a unique restaurant downtown. They shared ahi tuna and shrimp ceviche with a decadent bottle of Tempranillo. Caroline savored the tart lime juice mixed with the spicy serrano chilies, giggling when she saw Klaus sweating slightly from the heat of the peppers. “I didn’t think our ceviche was that spicy,” she commented, handing him a spare napkin to dab at his sweaty brow.

Clearing his throat uncomfortably, Klaus gulped down half of his water glass before telling her, “Where I come from, the food is considerably more simple fare. It’s filling, of course, but you’d be disappointed in the flavor, I imagine.”

Nibbling on a salty piece of Manchego cheese, she asked, “I’m not familiar with Welsh cuisine; what are some traditional dishes you ate growing up?”

“Um, well, my village was...remote, so we didn’t have a lot of diverse ingredients,” he hurriedly explained, refilling their glasses with the rich wine and clinking the rims together with a wink. “So, besides that Bradbury author you named your infernal beast after, what else made you decide to be an astronomer, love?”

Rolling her eyes at him, she said, “I’ll have you know Bradbury’s an excellent judge of character. Clearly you have glaring personality defects that Bradbury picked up on. Fortunately for you, his owner is less picky about the company she keeps.” Enjoying the way he ducked his curly head shyly, she added, “But to answer your question, I guess I just always felt like there was something more than this. Something I needed to find. I liked to look up at the stars and imagine all of the other worlds that could be waiting for me to explore.”

“I know what you mean,” Klaus began, somewhat hesitantly. “I never felt like I belonged in my own world, so I felt compelled to try to find others in the hopes that I might discover my place.”

Caroline’s heart fluttered a bit at his words. She’d never felt such a connection before, and she worried about what it could mean — especially since Klaus was only on loan for this project and likely would be called back to the UK observatory before long. He’s not for you.

That initial dinner together was the first of many for Klaus and Caroline, and while she’d made the conscious decision to keep things professional, they’d still managed to become friends. It started with him bringing Bradbury fancy duck treats despite the fact that her spoiled, overprotective ferret still bared his teeth threateningly whenever Klaus walked into the room.

One night, after she learned that Klaus had never gone to a planetarium, she convinced him to attend a late show with her so they could make fun of the embarrassing inaccuracies. In between whispers and giggles about how many errors they found in the prerecorded presentation, Caroline learned that Klaus came from a large family, but from his downcast eyes and hesitant tone, she
could tell he was holding something back. Likely he was homesick, she surmised. In return, she told him all about how her love of unconventional pets began when she was five and demanded her parents buy her an axolotl because she thought the hairy salamander looked like a Muppet.

Despite telling herself that she wouldn’t get attached, Caroline kept noticing little things she found endearing about Klaus; like the way a little furrow would appear in his forehead when he was data mining, or the way he would get flustered if she showed an interest in his research. She even caught him covering her with a fluffy blanket she kept in her office when she nodded off while working late. He’d weaseled his way into her heart and now she was hyperaware of him. Those dimples. That mischievous glint in his eyes. A knowing smirk that never failed to make her blush. Damn it.

It had been a month of lingering glances, painfully platonic touches and almost-but-not-quite-innuendos. She arrived at her desk to find a Post-it note from Klaus in which he’d written, “What do black holes talk about?” When she looked up, she found Klaus poking his curly head above his computer monitor, another Post-it note impishly taped to his forehead that answered, “Dark matters”. Giggling at his terrible sense of humor, she peeled off his note and tossed it at his sly smirk.

He quickly wadded up several notes and lightly pelted her in retaliation, moving closer to her until they were face-to-face, giggling like naughty schoolchildren. His dark gaze seemed to trace the curve of her lips and her breath caught as he whispered, “You’re the most stunning creature I’ve ever encountered, love.” She found it endearing the way his hand trembled slightly as he swept a blonde curl from her cheek, adding in an awestruck tone, “The light within you burns brighter than any star.”

Heart pounding, Caroline couldn’t deny what she felt any longer. She surged forward, catching Klaus by surprise as she kissed him soundly, throwing her arms around his neck and pulling him close. He enthusiastically responded, his oddly cool lips moving in harmony with hers. Just as she was trying to decide where she wanted to ride Klaus’ telescope, they were interrupted by the insistent beeping of the spectrograph and the ringing of the observatory’s phone.

Breaking apart with a chuckle, Klaus walked over to the machine to examine the latest data while Caroline answered the phone. She rolled her eyes at the familiar, accented voice of Enzo, an astronomer at the White Oak Observatory, who cheerfully greeted her with, “Gorgeous! Are you ready to accept my sexytimes webcam offer?”

“Not even if you and I woke from cryogenic sleep to discover we were the only survivors launched into the TRAPPIST-1 system,” she retorted with a giggle.

Enzo heaved a theatrical sigh as he answered, “You wound me, Gorgeous. I figured since you’ve been all by your lonesome down there, you’d reconsider.”

Confused, she replied, “What are you talking about? Your colleague, Klaus, has been here with me for a month. Your observatory loaned him out to collaborate with us on the Arcadius research.” She flicked her gaze at Klaus, noting the way his back had stiffened at her words.

Enzo’s voice turned uncharacteristically serious as he said, “No one from this observatory has been sent to work with you.” He added cautiously, “Caroline, are you ok? Should I call someone?”
Heart racing, Caroline’s thoughts scurried to process what Enzo had revealed. She carefully watched as Klaus turned around, an unreadable expression on his face. “I’m fine, Enzo,” she said in a measured tone, “It’s just a simple misunderstanding, I’m sure.” As she hung up the phone, she took a deep breath to calm her pounding heart.

Klaus glided soundlessly across the lab toward her. In the heavy silence, she realized that in the past month, she’d become used to the effortless, fluid way that Klaus always moved. She’d assumed he’d had formal dance training and had once teased him that it was obvious he was boneless. And he’d choked and sputtered as though scrambling for an explanation.

Squaring her shoulders, Caroline was proud of the way her voice didn’t waver as she asked, “It’s not a misunderstanding, is it? Who are you, Klaus?”

He was unnaturally still as he considered her question. After what seemed to be an intense internal debate, he nodded as though he’d decided something. Sighing, he allowed his gaze to settle upon her, his dark eyes suddenly glowing an unnatural gold.

While that action was unexpected enough to shake her faith in science, what Klaus said next nearly caused her to faint: “It is good to renew one’s wonder. Space travel has again made children of us all.”

Caroline’s voice cracked, but she still managed a tremulous smile as she said, “Welcome, friend.”
Part 1 - The Tangled Web

Chapter Summary

Caroline had no idea that the disappearance of one useless vampire would cause such a fuss. And now she has to deal with a suspicious hybrid who might stumble across her even bigger secret...

Chapter Notes

I had too many ideas for this one, so I’m turning it into a two-parter; can’t wait to hear what you think!

“Will you rest upon my little bed?” said the spider to the fly.
“There are pretty curtains drawn around, the sheets are fine and thin,
And if you like to rest awhile, I'll snugly tuck you in.”

“Oh no, no,” said the little fly, “for I've often heard it said,
They never, never wake again, who sleep upon your bed.”

- The Spider and The Fly, by Mary Howitt

Who knew that biting off a vampire’s head was just as effective as staking them? Yet another thing the Twilight movies got wrong, Caroline inwardly scoffed, plucking a stray bit of bloody cartilage from a curved fang. The rest of the vampire’s corpse was crumpled on the cave floor, the graying flesh already stinking of decay. From the moment Damon Salvatore oozed into her life, she knew he would be a pain in the ass. Although, she could admit to herself that it was amusing watching him lay on his sleazy lines, obviously confused when they didn’t work.

However, once he foolishly tried to compel Caroline, she knew it was time to play along if she wanted to keep up the pretense of being a helpless human.

Damon compelled her to follow him into the narrow alley behind the Mystic Grill. She was careful to keep her face expressionless as she allowed him to toss her against a rough brick wall. He leaned in menacingly, flashing his fangs as black veins crawled underneath his dark eyes.

“Stupid, worthless human. Girls like you are only good for a quick grope with my meal.”

Caroline inwardly rolled her eyes, wondering if he’d ever learn how to talk around his puny fangs without that ridiculous lisp. Not that it mattered — his fate had been decided the moment he dared to pat her blonde head like she was a Pomeranian. Before he could pull away his
hand, she grabbed his wrist, crushing the delicate bones until they felt like gravel underneath her powerful grip. “And useless, ignorant vampires like you are only good for a very painful death when they become MY meal.”

The shock on Damon’s face was worth every moment she’d been bored pretending to be helpless. “What the hell are you,” he asked, a tremor of fear creeping into his voice as he failed to yank away his ruined wrist.

“Something that I intend to keep a secret,” Caroline answered, unsheathing her fangs and viciously sinking them into his neck, flooding his veins with toxic venom. His body immediately went rigid with muscle shock as paralysis set in. She stood over his rigid body lying in the dirty alley, enjoying the way his unblinking eyes stared at her with growing horror. “Normally, I’d need to draw out some of my venom to prolong my victim’s death, but sleazy vampires like you won’t die from my venom right away. Of course, I may just eat you if I get bored.”

Licking the last traces of blood from her mouth, she cast a critical eye at the remains at her feet. “Hmm. A headless Damon is a little over five feet,” she muttered to herself, “probably will take about 2,000 square feet to wrap him up for a post-dinner snack.” Lacing her fingers together, she popped her knuckles with a series of satisfying cracks and then set to work.

Caroline had assumed that a vampire this depraved and yet utterly useless wouldn’t be missed. *Oops.*

It had taken an immense effort not to rip out every strand of the insipid doppelganger’s hair when Elena came to her in hysterics the next day. “Damon’s missing!”

Caroline pushed aside her rare tenderloin, eying the beautiful cut of meat regretfully, knowing that if she had the staff reheat it later it would be far too cooked for her liking. In reality, she’d have preferred a platter of delightfully chewy millipedes, but suspected that even the dimwitted doppelganger would eventually start asking inconvenient questions.

She gestured toward the empty seat in her booth, her blue eyes wide as she asked with mocking innocence, “Have you checked underneath a helpless girl’s skirt? He seems the type for that to be his natural habitat.”

A surprised snort caught her attention, and she used her enhanced peripheral vision to catch Klaus, the Original Asshat, sitting at the bar with his usual smirk. He tilted his curly head, raising his glass to her in a mocking toast. Klaus had been an irritating fixture in her life ever since he’d arrived with his plan to use Elena in some overly elaborate ritual to free his werewolf side and become a hybrid. However, if he suspected Caroline wasn’t human, he kept it to himself, seemingly more interested in playing cat-and-mouse with the doppelganger and her two Captain Save-a-ho vampires.

*And yet he still seemed to notice her.* Always favoring her with a contemplative look, a seductive glance, a sly smirk — making it clear that they were long overdue for a conversation. She still wasn’t sure how she felt about that, but if he proved too problematic, she supposed she could always eat him.

“Caroline!” Elena’s shrill voice interrupted her thoughts as she admonished, “Why would you say that about Damon?!”
She shrugged nonchalantly, answering, “Maybe because he creeps on unsuspecting jailbait?” At Elena’s look of confusion, she rolled her eyes, adding, “Come on, Elena, didn’t you notice all the times he would stand too close to one of us, or his pervy innuendos, or how he kept trying to get me to leave with him even after all the times I told him I wasn’t interested?”

Flustered, Elena tossed back her long, dark hair, huffing, “Damon didn’t mean anything by that and you know it!” She leaned closer, hissing, “Besides, it’s not like you didn’t encourage him!”

Blue eyes narrowed, Caroline could feel her fangs itching to descend as her venom glands filled in preparation for attack. She spied Klaus studying her closely, as though he could see her debating whether Elena’s long hair would get caught in her teeth. Groaning inwardly, she decided against pissing off Klaus — for now. But that didn’t mean she wasn’t going to put the insipid doppelganger in her place.

They’d grown up together along with Bonnie Bennett, never suspecting that each of their families had supernatural legacies to protect. First, Bonnie revealed the Bennett line’s impressive magical heritage, and then there was Elena and that doppelganger nonsense. Of course, the Forbes’ ancestry had its own complicated secrets, but Caroline had been raised on the ancient rites, and knew better than to reveal such a sacred legacy to her blabbermouth friends when they couldn’t even keep their own families’ secrets. Besides, they were human; they’d never understand something like her.

“Elena, I get that you’re pissed that repressed social conventions in our little town prevent you from a desperately needed group bang with both Salvatore brothers, but maybe dial down the jealous bitch, hmm?” She couldn’t stop the grin that spread across her face as Elena let out a choked gasp before leaving the Mystic Grill in a cloud of righteous indignation and cheap perfume.

“Tell me love, do you always talk to your friends that way,” Klaus purred, sliding into Elena’s empty seat across from Caroline.

She toyed with the end of her straw, an edge to her voice as she replied, “Only when they try to victim-shame me.”

Something dangerous flashed in his eyes as he emitted a low growl. “It would be my pleasure to visit a bloody, painful end on that despicable gnat once he’s served his purpose.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I’ll pass; I don’t have any interest in getting caught up in vampire business.” Tilting her head, she shrewdly asked, “So, the mysterious, almighty Original thinks Damon is useful? Wow, I guess good help really is hard to find these days.”

Klaus let out a bark of surprised laughter, his gray eyes twinkling. “You are a delight, sweetheart. I can assure you that it’s an extraordinary struggle to summon the energy to care that he’s missing. However, he can be a somewhat useful pawn and I take pride in knowing where my chess pieces are at all times.”

“Then don’t let me keep you,” Caroline answered breezily, tossing some cash on the table to pay for her meal.

He grabbed her hand, dimples on display as he told her, “What’s the rush, love? You’re such an intriguing little minx; I’d like to get to know you better.”

As his lips seductively brushed her knuckles, she fought down a pleasurable shiver while pulling back her hand. “Not much to tell. Small-town teenager. Turnoffs include Beliebers, low-fat
As she turned on her heel to leave the smirking hybrid in her wake, Stefan appeared, his brow furrowed as he said, “I can’t find Damon. Have you seen him, Caroline?”

She thought back to all the times Stefan had ignored Damon’s predatory behavior, emitting long-suffering sighs about how it was his terrible burden to be the ‘moral’ brother. Voice full of mocking innocence, she replied, “Not since the last time Damon demonstrated his inability to understand the concept of consent.” Enjoying the way Stefan took a step back from her as though she’d slapped him, she smoothly exited the Mystic Grill, feeling a certain Original’s curious gaze upon her.
Caroline may have gotten rid of one irritating vampire, but it seems there’s still an Original vampire that’s far too nosy for his own good.

This is the sequel to Chapter 49 in this series; thanks for sticking with my story! And thank you for all of the reviews; you inspired me to keep going!

Warning: Some smutty goodness!

And you O my soul where you stand,
Surrounded, detached, in measureless oceans of space,
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing, seeking the spheres to connect them,
Till the bridge you will need be form’d, till the ductile anchor hold,
Till the gossamer thread you fling catch somewhere, O my soul.

— A Noiseless Patient Spider by Walt Whitman

Caroline had just finished rearranging her pantry when she heard the heavy footsteps scrape along the narrow rock ledge of the cave. She whirled around, letting out an aggravated groan when Klaus crossed the threshold. “Seriously?! We’re 200 feet in the air and the cliff facing is perfectly smooth — are you part mountain goat?”

With an amused smirk, Klaus said, “Not to throw stones, love, but it appears I’m not the only one with an unusual bloodline.” He glanced at the tall cave ceiling, taking in the various human-sized cocoons that Caroline had anchored there to snack on at her leisure. “Care to explain?”

“What? This is completely normal teenage girl behavior,” she teased, gesturing from the impressive collection of cocoons to the elaborate, delicately spun spider web that spanned an entire wall. At his unimpressed expression, she rolled her blue eyes and sighed. “Fine, so I may have fibbed a bit about who I am.”

Allowing a fine silk thread to shoot from her fingertip, she playfully wound it around one of her wrists, asking him, “What do you know about the story of Arachne?”
Intrigued, he answered, “Ovid wrote that Arachne was a mortal renowned for her weaving ability. However, she was boastful, and swore that she even outmatched the goddess Athena’s skill. Enraged, Athena challenged Arachne to a contest and when the mortal woman’s work outshone hers, she turned her into a small spider.”

Letting out a snort of derision, Caroline said, “Well, that’s just ridiculous — a human body could never be altered to squeeze inside the body of a tiny spider — I don’t care how arrogant the goddess was.” Allowing her fangs to descend, she carelessly waved toward the human-sized cocoons overhead and her massive spider web, explaining, “Athena transformed Arachne — that part of the myth is true — but what actually happened is that she cursed the mortal with certain attributes of a spider. The Forbes line (originally Forbopoulos) contains descendants from Arachne, and many of us share her fate.”

Klaus flashed before her, seemingly unable to resist brushing aside an errant blonde strand from her cheek. His voice was uncharacteristically soft as he observed, “You feel you were cursed by your lineage then, that your own blood betrayed you. We have that in common, sweetheart.”

She was quick to disagree with him. “While there are some in my family that have seen what we are as a curse, I embrace it as a strength.” Blue eyes flashing, she added, “I’ve been able to take care of myself since I was 10. And a good thing too — considering the pervy vampire infestation in our town and everyone turning a blind eye to those creeps who view the varsity cheerleading squad as a jailbait-y buffet.”

“At least you can say that you had a spider as a friend.”

“Your strength is the first thing I noticed about you, love. It radiates from you more powerfully than any sunbeam.” Klaus ducked his head, somewhat embarrassed. “It had been centuries since a human held my interest and I desired to learn more about you.” Flashing his dimples impishly, he said, “And then I started to notice how fluid your movements were and the way they hinted at a powerful energy for one so young, not to mention the predatory gleam in those lovely blue eyes of yours. I knew you were something more than what you appeared, but I never would have guessed all of this.”

“Yeah, when I was little, I couldn’t wait to grow into my powers; especially back when I thought that spidey sense was a real thing. But there were some drawbacks they don’t really prepare you for. Like how once puberty hit, my spinnerets would sometimes randomly shoot out silk until I got them under control. Or, how occasionally on boozy girls’ nights, I sometimes accidentally leave pheromonal trails.”

At Klaus’ outburst of laughter, she found herself giggling, telling him, “It’s completely ridiculous — these random dudebros would drunkenly follow my trails, not realizing their bodies’ primal instincts had taken over and they were presenting themselves as potential mates.”

“And did you eat all of them after sex, sweetheart,” he cheekily asked.

Caroline answered with a wry grin, “Only if they couldn’t find my g-spot. And even then, it usually was just their heads — dudebros’ misogyny tend to give me indigestion.”

Squinting at the large cocoons overhead, he asked casually, “And did Damon give you indigestion?”

“Nope,” she answered firmly, raising an eyebrow as she dared him to protest the sleazy vampire’s fate.

Raising his hands to mocking surrender, Klaus replied, “Far be it from me to get between you and your midnight snack, love. I just wanted to verify whether you had your eye on any of my...”
other chess pieces.”

Caroline rolled her eyes. “I don’t hunt where I live — I only ignore that rule when threatened. It’s critical to my kind’s survival that we stay hidden.”

“That sounds like a lonely existence, love. To be forced to hide your true self from those around you,” he slowly began, a surprising sadness in his tone. “I’ve spent centuries with the weight of my own curse; no one understanding how it feels to have a piece of yourself cruelly locked away.”

Caroline was surprised by his revelation. “There’s more to you than I thought, Klaus. You’re this ancient, powerful creature whose existence seemed more myth than fact, and you certainly had those in the know in this sleepy little town terrified — you’re the last one I would’ve imagined as lonely.”

Klaus asked her carefully, “And do I frighten you, sweetheart?”

The way his gaze bored into her made her feel the weight of his question. The air was electric and she realized they were on the brink of something larger; that everything was about to change. “Never,” she swore, a little breathless as she caught him staring at her lips.

Her admission seemed to snap his rigid control and he grabbed her face with both hands as he pulled her in for a punishing kiss. She moaned at the way he ran his tongue along her fangs, worshipping them even as he unsheathed his own. The delicious scrape of bone sent a pleasurable thrill through her body, and she wrapped her legs around his waist, pulling him closer.

As Caroline rubbed against him, he growled, snapping the narrow straps of her tangerine romper. As soon as her breasts were exposed, he latched onto a hardened nipple, his fangs tracing patterns that straddled the line of sweet and sharp until they blurred together sinfully. “You want to taste me,” she gasped, tugging on his disheveled curls until he looked up at her, his vampire’s visage on display.

“Naughty minx,” Klaus murmured, sliding his tongue along her jawline, “I’ve thought of nothing else from the first time I saw you, arguing with your minions over their substandard draping of streamers.” Heat flared in his gaze as he continued, “You were magnificent, all fiery passion as you ordered them about the gym and they scurried to please you.” He dipped his head, his fangs pricking the gentle curve of her breasts as her blood began to flow.

The coppery aroma fueled their passion, and she allowed him to take leisurely sips of her blood until she sought his lips once more, smearing them both with her warm blood. With a snarl, she ripped apart his gray henley, anxious to explore his muscular frame. His skin twitched delightfully underneath her touch, and she took her time mapping his chest with her fingertips, placing delicate kisses every few inches as he sighed in contentment.

When she paused to run her hands through his dirty blonde curls, he ground his prominent bulge against her, gripping her thighs tightly as they rocked against each other. Driven wild with desire, he tore away the rest of her garment, exposing her ivory skin to his greedy gaze.

Caroline hurriedly reached between them, unzipping his dark jeans and running her hands appreciatively along his ass. The way he jumped at her touch made her lips curve into a wicked smile and she purred in his ear, “Inside. Now.”

He answered with a devilish smirk, pressing his thick cock right where she craved it, the hard line of his flesh causing her to cry out at the marvelous feeling. She bucked against that
delicious slide of his slick flesh against hers, their twin groans echoing through the cave.

“Fuck,” Klaus hissed, digging his fingers into her ass as he angled his hips just right. His every movement seemed designed to wring the pleasure from her, and she writhed against him in ecstasy.

She could feel her desire building, that wonderful golden sensation, and she moaned incoherently, “Deeper, harder...need it...there!” She lost control as her orgasm crashed over her, digging her fangs into the side of his neck as he found his own sweet release.

Once she’d taken her fill of his thick, rich blood, he turned his head to look at her, a silly grin on his face. Shit. She quickly came back to herself and examined his pupils to see how badly her venom had affected him. She’d never chowed down on a vampire older than a few centuries, so she wasn’t sure how an Original would react to her poison. From his dilated pupils, it appeared that Klaus’ reaction to her venom would be a bit...odd.

“Hello there, lovely,” he slurred, “did you...that...did you know when I was in the bloom of my youth...I fancied myself a truly sublime goat herder. I desired to be...to be called brusi reisiligr, the magnificent goat herder.” He scrunched his face adorably, adding, “Wait...no, no...that’s actually magnificent he-goat. Fuck me, the mother tongue is a vicious harpy.”

Caroline had to bite her lip to keep from laughing. As she bent her head to draw back out the venom, Klaus sighed happily, murmuring, “And you, my ravishing girl, are sólskin í korni, my little sunshine squirrel.”

“Yeah, that’s...something,” she snorted, removing her poison from his veins before he decided to reveal more of his bizarre woodland critter fetish. As she took the final bit of venom from his veins, she watched his eyes slowly returned to normal, wryly asking, “Feel better now?”

Shaking his head as though to clear it, he answered, “I suspect I’m in for a bit of a hangover, sweetheart, something I haven’t had in centuries.” Cocking his curly head, he added, “Perhaps I’ll return the favor once I’ve been made a hybrid. Innumerable experiments between us — just imagine the possibilities, love,” he rumbled, swooping in for another kiss.

Feeling her heart flutter, Caroline broke their kiss, lightly tapping the end of his nose with her finger as she told him, “Just so you know, I’ve decided not to eat you after all.”

Klaus answered with his seductive smirk, “Pity.”
Probable Claws

Chapter Summary

As a cop, Caroline had seen her fair share of the bizarre. But throw in Hot Gym Guy, a wooden stake and his conspiracy nut job neighbor, and this was shaping up to be her weirdest dispatch call yet.

“...that satisfactory sense of superiority the members of the police force get...by which the vanity of power is soothed, and the vulgar love of domination over our fellow creatures is flattered as worthily as it deserves.”
— Joseph Conrad, Secret Agent

Of all the ways Caroline had fantasized about seeing Hot Gym Guy again, rescuing him from a wooden stake was not one of them. She’d been on her usual nightly patrol when dispatch had sent her to check out a disturbance at one of the secluded mansions along Moonstone Drive. She’d parked her police cruiser at an imposing wrought iron gate but didn’t bother pressing the intercom when she heard two men shouting at each other near the back of the property. After scaling the immense gate tipped with decorative fleur de lis, she stealthily had moved across the immaculate lawn, crouching behind a cluster of marble statues to get her bearings.

She was taken aback by the scene before her — familiar dirty blonde curls and dimples that belonged to Hot Gym Guy, a sexy stranger from her gym she’d developed a crush on and what appeared to be a furious, unstable man threatening him with a large wooden stake. “I’ve come to send you back to hell, demon!”

“I don’t know what you’re on about, mate, but I suggest you get the fuck off of my property before I show you a demon,” Hot Gym Guy growled, the dominant tone in his voice sending a pleasurable shiver down Caroline’s spine.

Normally, Hot Gym Guy’s voice had a teasing lilt as his accent did more for the English language than Shakespeare and the Oxford Dictionary combined. In fact, she’d taken to monopolizing the weight rack and bench on the other side of the gym just so she could hear him interact with the personal trainers (and have a perfect, unobstructed view of his well-toned...everything). And his incessant gym groupies, she scoffed, recalling how giggling women would pretend to run into him and then ramble on and on about how going to the gym was practically a spiritual experience and how they could tell he felt the same way.

To his credit, Hot Gym Guy projected polite disinterest in his gym groupies and then went out of his way to try to catch her eye as he pointedly chose machines next to her, always seemingly on the verge of speaking to her but never actually making a move. Which was for the best, Caroline kept telling herself. While she’d love nothing more than to indulge in some of the deliciously raunchy fantasies she’d constructed about Hot Gym Guy, she knew better than to start something with a civilian when her life was so dangerous. Not to mention complicated.
Another shouting match between the two men broke out, bringing Caroline back to the present as she stood up, announcing authoritatively, “Mystic Falls Police Department! I need both of you to calm down and let’s settle whatever the problem is here.”

Hot Gym Guy’s gray eyes widened with recognition as he glanced over at her, and she felt herself grow uncomfortably warm at his blatant perusal of her uniform. Not now, she inwardly lectured herself, focusing on the potentially dangerous situation at hand. “I’m Officer Forbes. Now, tell me your names and what’s going on here.”

“Klaus Mikaelson,” Hot Gym Guy introduced himself, jerking his chin angrily at the agitated man still shaking the enormous stake in his direction as he scoffed, “And this is my gormless neighbor, who’s clearly gone starkers.”

The stranger kept his wild gaze on Klaus as he told Caroline shortly, “Alaric Saltzman. And I swear to you, officer, I’m a sane man who’s recently learned the world has gone insane.” Sweating profusely, his light brown hair was plastered to his forehead as he regarded her gravely. “The world isn’t what we thought it was! There are unnatural, dark creatures who threaten mankind’s existence! Have you ever seen things you can’t unsee, officer?”

“More than you know, Mr. Saltzman,” Caroline answered, unable to keep the edge from her tone as she thought back to some of her darkest moments.

Klaus impatiently said, “Well, I’ve seen my share of oddities as well, mate, but that doesn’t give you the right to just barge in here and threaten me with that hunk of wood.”

“You know nothing,” Alaric told Caroline peevishly, “Only I can save us all from this creature!”

She nodded, calmly telling him, “Okay, Mr. Saltzman, and what do you think he is?”

Whipping out a battered old cross, he screeched, “He’s a vampire!”

She raised an eyebrow, doing her best to process Alaric’s words with a perfectly blank expression. At Klaus’ startled laugh, she flicked her gaze to him, allowing herself an indulgent moment to take in the magnificent lines and the hint of power she detected in Klaus’ muscular frame. “A vampire,” she said slowly, keeping her tone matter-of-fact. “You said you were a rational man, Mr. Saltzman, can you tell me what proof you have against Mr. Mikaelson?”

“You believe me,” Alaric said hopefully, lowering his cross slightly as he continued, “and you’ll help me destroy this foul creature if I can prove to you he’s a vampire?”

Ignoring the snort of derision Klaus emitted, Caroline gave Alaric a small smile, telling him lightly, “It’s my job to protect humanity.”

“I’ve witnessed a giant beast prowling around Klaus’ property each month,” he accused, waving his cross wildly in Klaus’ direction.

Klaus folded his arms across his chest, giving Caroline a skeptical look as he said wryly, “Giant beast. Well, considering how particular my landscaper is about the zoysia grass, surely he would’ve mentioned if such a creature had botched up his masterpiece.”

With a wild glint in his eye that caused Caroline to place her palm lightly on her sidearm in her holster, Alaric yelled, “It’s a hellhound! Everyone knows that they are the vampires’ guardians.”
“Mr. Saltzman, I’m going to need you to lower your voice,” she told him, carefully turning her body so that she could tackle Alaric before he could harm Klaus. “Have you noticed anything else?”

Eyeing her carefully, Alaric said uncertainly, “This is all going in your arrest report, right? So, when we take Klaus out, everyone will understand that we had no choice?”

“I’m listening to everything you say,” she told him firmly, watching his expressions in the moonlight for the slightest indication that he was ready to act on his outrageous delusions.

Taking a breath as though gearing up to reveal his most damning evidence yet, the disturbed man told her, “I’ve found dozens of animal carcasses in the surrounding woods. The monster just leaves them there to rot when he’s done drinking the blood.”

“The State Fish and Wildlife Conservation released a mountain lion this year, you wanker. They’re incredibly territorial creatures, so I’d mind your lap dog, mate,” Klaus taunted him with a smirk, flashing Caroline a set of dimples that she found far too distracting.

Damn it.

Letting out a bellow of rage, Alaric lunged at Klaus, but she easily stopped him with a simple straight arm takedown, trying to ignore the flutter in her stomach when she heard Klaus’ low growl of pleasure.

“You don’t understand! He’s a goddamn vampire,” Alaric shouted over and over until he was hoarse, struggling to break her hold.

Rolling her eyes at his stupidity, she executed a standard pull-down with arm compression, quickly pinning him to the ground but reminding herself not to exert too much force. She read him his rights as she handcuffed him, hissing in pain when she put her hand on the grass to stand them both up.

Rushing to her side, Klaus asked in a concerned tone, “What happened, love?”

Caroline finished pulling Alaric to his feet, shaking her head as she said hurriedly, “It’s nothing; I’m fine. That stupid cross must have a sharp edge.” Muttering as she kicked the metal cross away from her, she marched Alaric across the immaculate lawn back toward her police cruiser to take him to the station for processing.

“I didn’t get to thank you, Officer Forbes, Klaus called out, lightly jogging to catch up with her as she pushed Alaric’s head down and placed him in the back of her car. She turned to find Klaus standing very close, the steel in his gray eyes glinting as he studied her intently. “Perhaps you would allow me to treat you to dinner to show my gratitude?”

Ignoring that persistent fluttering of her insides at his flirtatious tone, she answered, “I can’t; I’m on duty,” she told him resolutely, inwardly cursing her complicated life as she reminded herself of the dangers of dating a civilian, being what she was.

“Very well, sweetheart,” he told her with a flirty tilt of his curly head, “But I’m not one to give up the chase that easily. We’ll chat again at the gym when you’re off duty.”

Laughing at his persistence, Caroline nodded at Alaric, who was still ranting in the backseat. “I can’t believe your neighbor thought you were a vampire. Seriously?!”

“Utter nonsense,” he agreed with a deep, velvety chuckle that she knew she’d still hear when she closed her eyes that night. Flashing him a smile, she drove off, resisting the urge to glance back and memorize the way the moonlight seemed to dance on the gorgeous planes of his
As Klaus watched Caroline drive away, he stretched languidly, the pull of the moon sinking into his bones as he sighed in satisfaction. The steel in his gray eyes flashed gold as he observed the nearly full moon. “Vampires,” he scoffed, “There’s no such thing.”

After finishing up her report and booking Alaric down at the station, Caroline was happy to come home and put the bizarre arrest behind her. Changing into her fluffiest pjs, she curled up on her couch with a blanket, the TV remote...and a blood bag. Her lips curved around her fangs into a knowing smile as she marveled at the silly misconceptions people could have.
Growl’s Anatomy

Chapter Summary

As chief physician of a hospital that catered to supernatural creatures, Caroline has zero time to get involved in the New Orleans turf war — not to mention zero patience for the arrogant hybrid king who has the nerve to ask for her medical help.

Chapter Notes

This story is for laufire for the KC Vacay Gift Exchange.

“The art of medicine consists of amusing the patient while nature cures the disease.”
— Voltaire

The succubus kept touching her. While Caroline normally wasn’t opposed to a freebie orgasm, it was a huge inconvenience considering she was wrist-deep in the succubus’ vagina, trying to dislodge a diaphragm that had become stuck during an orgy that seemed to involve most of the city council. After biting back another pleasure-soaked moan, she managed to find the edge and began a series of small tugs to get a proper grip on the device.

Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed Katherine, one of the hospital’s top residents, gritting her teeth as she also seemed to be riding the wave of an especially explosive yet inconvenient orgasm. To her credit, she managed to maintain a tone of professionalism as she repositioned the speculum, muttering to Caroline, “I’m going after that thing with a plunger if you don’t hurry the hell up; one more orgasm like that and I’ll need to smoke a whole tobacco field.”

Rolling her eyes, Caroline finished pulling it out, washing her hands thoroughly as she willed herself to stop blushing in the afterglow of multiple orgasms as she gave aftercare instructions to the succubus. When she exited the patient’s room, she noted with pride the carefully organized chaos of Lafitte Hospital.

As chief physician of New Orleans’ only hospital that catered exclusively to supernatural creatures, she was pleased to see her ideas had been implemented seamlessly into the everyday operations. From color-coding digital files by species to revised schedule rotations, her hospital had streamlined wait times while maximizing healthcare opportunities to an often-overlooked portion of the New Orleans community.

Especially with this infernal war. For the past few months, her beloved city had been a
battleground between the usurper, King Marcel, and Klaus, the Hybrid King. She’d carefully crafted her reputation in the supernatural community as being neutral; her hospital would treat all creatures, regardless of the side they’d chosen. However, privately she seethed with rage at the way Marcel had kept her city under his thumb. He treated the witches as second-class citizens, openly discriminated against the werewolves, and only allowed his inner circle of vampire sycophants to possess daylight rings. Power-hungry bastard.

And speaking of power-hungry...Klaus’ own quest for dominion over everything was legendary, but he’d made impressive inroads with the leaders of the various supernatural clans. What he proposed was radical social reform for all supernatural creatures, allowing them to govern their own affairs for the most part, imposing his position as ruler only in times of discord that threatened the overall peace of New Orleans. Rumors of his penchant for violence still left many fearful, but the few times she’d witnessed his rallying speeches had swayed her opinion and left her more than a little breathless. Damn those dimples.

Somehow, she’d caught Klaus’ attention at the last gathering she’d attended with Katherine, and he’d asked her out. Somewhere between the buttery, succulent oyster appetizers and a decadent goblet of Bordeaux, she found herself on quite possibly the worst date she’d been on in decades. His perfectly chiseled features and sexy smirk hadn’t been able to hide his arrogance, or his obvious prejudice against vampires less than a century old whose bloodline sprang from humble beginnings.

After insufferably bragging about his various estates and vast wealth, he’d raised a critical eyebrow to ask, “Surely you don’t have to work at the hospital, sweetheart? You seem like a clever girl — how did you manage to squander your fortune over the centuries?”

“I was turned in the 1960s; I’m not yet a century old, much less several,” Caroline answered in confusion. “And my parents worked as schoolteachers — there was never any fortune to speak of.” She’d immediately thought of Katherine, her friend as well as her sire, and told him fondly, “My friend Katherine tells me building a fortune takes time these days; apparently, it used to be easier back in her corset-and-coyly-fluttering-eyelashes days.”

His eyes immediately had shaded to a furious gold as he ground out, “You mark that deceitful peasant as a friend?!”

Barely restraining herself from digging her fangs into his throat, she leapt to her feet, hissing, “Damn straight, you arrogant asshat. Next time, have your minions do a better job screening your dates for peasants like me, your majesty.” She’d stormed out of the romantic jazz bistro, snagging the open bottle of pricey Bordeaux on her way out because she figured she’d earned it.

Shaking her head in irritation that she was still replaying last night’s disastrous date, she marched past a group of bloated, woozy satyrs being admitted to the detox unit for coffee addiction. She accessed their files through her app and was pleased to see that they’d be placed on a cleansing diet of chardonnay before gradually increasing their tannin levels with merlots and cabs until their natural equilibrium had been restored.

A shiver suddenly went down her spine as her vampire senses kicked in and she realized she was being watched. The heavy scrape of footfalls indicated it was slowly drawing near, and she whirled around to find Enzo, one of their orderlies, slowly shuffling down the hall as he returned an empty wheelchair to one of the supply rooms. As he merrily waved his rotting hand at her, she couldn’t help but smile, confident that she’d made the right choice in her ‘zombie-friendly’ hiring practices, despite the fact that their bite transmitted the virus to both human and supernatural alike.
Katherine hadn’t been on board with her choice at first, but Caroline stubbornly told her that as vampires, they knew what it was like to face discrimination and she refused to make anyone else feel badly for being what they were. She ran her hospital as an equal opportunity employer for all supernaturals, and expected everyone to leave their prejudices at the door.

“Hey, don’t think you can distract me with succubus-induced orgasms,” Katherine cheerfully shouted, flashing to her side as she inwardly groaned at her friend’s persistence. “So what happened with your date? The way you both were serving up the eye fucking at that last rally made me think you’d call in ‘sick’ today and keep the sexy times going.”

Caroline snorted, “There was definitely no sexy times. The date didn’t even make it past the appetizer. But I did drink the rest of the fancy bottle he bought once I got home, so the night wasn’t a total loss.”

Katherine’s brunette curls bobbed in unison as she nodded her approval. “I’ve taught you well.” Brown eyes full of amusement, she asked, “So what went wrong? Did you talk about your collection of vintage medicine bottles again?”

“No,” she answered defensively, “he’s just an arrogant, judgy asshat!” She bit her lip, having no interest in bringing up his hurtful words about Katherine. Awkwardly averting her eyes, she pretended to suddenly finding her white lab coat fascinating.

Katherine was quiet for far too long, rocking back on her heels as she studied her closely. “You mentioned me, didn’t you? Damn it, I knew I should’ve told you sooner.”

Caroline glanced up sharply at that, eyeing her friend curiously. “Told me what?”

“The fact that I had a fling with Klaus’ brother, Elijah, a couple of centuries ago when I so wasn’t relationship material and instead cleaned out his safe and stole all of his priceless artwork…and then ran off without a word,” she finished sheepishly.

Cocking an eyebrow, Caroline sighed, “Well, that explains a lot. Although, that’s still no excuse for Klaus’ completely obnoxious reaction or his weird, elitist assumptions about me being centuries’ old and well-off.”

“Yeah, I don’t get that either. Elijah was always the stuffed shirt in that family; with him it was all about your sireline and who you knew and your personal wealth,” Katherine replied in confusion, shrugging as she said, “Fuck both of them. Maybe we’ll just steal this kingdom for ourselves, huh?”

Caroline giggled, “Between my expert list-making skills and your ability to sweet-talk the surliest of the werewolf clans into trying our experimental wolfsbane-laced antacids, we would definitely win the war.”

“Whatever, you just won’t admit you were wrong about those antacids. After I tweaked the formula, not only did the werewolves stop being so gassy on full moons, it also got their breath to stop smelling like a sewer,” Katherine retorted with a triumphant grin.

Before Caroline could respond, something slammed into her, its weight somewhat wobbly as she took in what appeared to be someone wrapped tightly in a burgundy bedsheet. On closer inspection, she realized that at one time, the sheet must have been expensive, but being dragged down the back alleys of New Orleans had taken a toll and the frayed and stained edges revealed long, pale toes that twitched as she tentatively pulled aside the fabric that covered the individual’s face.
Both she and Katherine let out a small gasp of surprise as Klaus’ sweaty face unexpectedly was revealed. He wheezed, clearly trying to summon what little strength he had left to whisper brokenly, “White oak ash. Marcel. Help.”

Caroline always hated to see another in pain, but even she was surprised by how much it worried her to see Klaus so broken. The desperation in his voice was alarming, and her heart immediately ached for the amount of pain he had to have been in to seek them out when he was at his most vulnerable. Her brain caught up to his words and she realized that Marcel must have somehow poisoned Klaus with white oak ash and was likely pursuing Klaus even now to finish what he started. Not on her watch, she swore.

She and Katherine moved swiftly, doing their best not to call attention to themselves as they maneuvered Klaus into an empty exam room and locked the door. “Katherine, first, contact security and tell them to monitor Marcel’s movements as soon as he arrives. I’ll examine Klaus and call you with a list of supplies we need.”

Katherine eyed Klaus warily, obviously concerned for Caroline’s safety as everyone knew that while an Original was dangerous, a wounded Original was even worse. “Are you sure,” she asked quietly.

Warmed by her friend’s concern, she gave her a small smile, waving her out the door. “Everything will be fine.” Katherine finally left, but not before glaring threateningly at a wheezing Klaus.

“Protects you,” he muttered weakly, his surprise evident.

Gently pulling aside the filthy sheet, she answered briskly, “We protect each other.” She began listening to his lungs, grimacing as she heard the gurgle of unwelcome fluid as his body struggled with the white oak ash he seemed to have inhaled. Damn it. If she didn’t extract it soon, he could die. Thoughts racing, she considered different treatment options, from bloodletting to potions and spells from the hospital’s homeopathic witches, but knew they would need more time than what Klaus’ gravely injured body could spare.

Blue eyes widening, she realized what Klaus needed. She quickly called Katherine, barking out, “Klaus needs oak beetles, now!” After she hung up, she noted that despite Klaus’ extreme pallor and profuse sweating, he still managed to look at her skeptically. She snapped at him, “Seriously?! Stop with the judginess; oak beetles can chew through a whole forest of white oak trees if they’re not caught in time. Plus, one of our RNs is Camazotz, a Mayan bat god, whose favorite snack happens to be those little guys. Fortunately, she’s always happy to share.”

He began seizing and she quickly turned him on his side to keep him from swallowing his tongue, using her supernatural strength to prevent him from rolling off of the exam table. She breathed a sigh of relief when Katherine flashed back in the room with a bowl full of beetles. “Quick — I’ll hold him while you intubate,” she commanded Katherine, inwardly cringing as she watched her feed the shiny black beetles through the tube she placed down Klaus’ throat.

While Caroline checked his vitals, Katherine pulled blood bags out of her pockets and set up an IV to combat Klaus’ desiccation. “You sure this royal asshat is worth all this trouble,” Katherine asked, chasing the leftover beetles back into the bowl to return to Camazotz.

“Yes, he was a complete jerk last night, but there’s that pesky Hippocratic Oath, Katherine,” Caroline chided, noting that Klaus’ vitals were bouncing back quickly while the beetles ate the white oak ash he’d ingested.
Clearing away the intubation equipment, Katherine muttered, “Saved his life and I bet the arrogant bastard will still have a stick up his ass about what I did to his brother.” With a final glare at their patient, Katherine left the room again to check on the hospital’s security.

“To clarify, Elijah’s the one with a perpetual stick up his arse,” Klaus wheezed, trying and failing to sit up from the table.

Caroline firmly pressed him back on the table, doing her best not to let her gaze linger too long on the elaborate feather and bird tattoo along his shoulder and chest. “I don’t care about either of your asses,” she told him, “but I need you to keep yours on this table while you heal. You may be an Original, but it’s going to take some time for you to regain your strength after that white oak ash injury.”

He grimaced, gingerly touching his stomach as he said, “Speaking of that, sweetheart, does this mean the bloody ash is gone now...and what of those blasted beetles?”

“Based on your skin lividity, it appears the beetles devoured enough of the white oak that the rest can be safely flushed from your system in a few days,” she explained brightly. Playfully tapping his belly, she added, “and your stomach acid will kill off the beetles soon and you’ll be able to pass them naturally.” She couldn’t help but take some pleasure at the way he blanched at her words, never guessing that the big bad Hybrid King would be so squeamish about a few bugs.

Klaus coughed as he settled more comfortably against the padded table, studying Caroline long enough that she began to fidget. “I’d intended to seek you out today...uh, obviously not in this manner...” he finished awkwardly.

“Why,” she asked curiously, “I got the impression you weren’t interested in spending time with us mere peasants.”

He rubbed the side of his face, wincing as she threw his ugly words back at him. “It certainly wasn’t my intention to offend, sweetheart. Unfortunately, I heeded the wildly inaccurate advice of my brother, Kol. He told me that you were a centuries’-old countess who only liked arrogant braggarts who boasted of their wealth.”

She snorted at his admission. Of course Kol was involved. “Kol kind of has a grudge against me at the moment. He was brought into our ER a couple of weeks ago, stoned out of his mind on magic mushrooms laced with fairy dust. He kept yelling that he was a randy were-rabbit and proceeded to dry-hump all of our fire extinguishers.” Giggling at the memory, she added, “I may have uploaded the security video to his Twitter feed on a continuous loop after he refused to pay his hospital bill.”

Pinching the bridge of his nose, he sighed in aggravation, “It shouldn’t surprise me that my arse of a brother is at the center of our disastrous date.” He hesitated, adding, “Although my reaction to your friendship with Katherine could’ve been a bit more tactful, perhaps.”

“Perhaps,” she said evenly. “Katherine told me what she did to Elijah back in the day. I guess you Mikaelsons can really hold a grudge.” At his grumbling, she asked hesitantly, “The things she stole — were they very expensive?”

“Priceless.” At her small gasp, the corners of Klaus’ lips twitched and he admitted, “But then I just compelled the old masters to repaint their works, so I suppose the term ‘priceless’ is relative.”

“Seriously?!” Shaking her head, she checked his vitals, pleased to see that he was
recovering steadily. At this rate, she estimated he would regain his full strength within a couple of days.

He surprised Caroline when he reached for her hand, his gray eyes staring at her face intently. “After you stormed out last night, sweetheart, I realized what an arse I’d been and was determined to set things right today.” He chuckled, gesturing around the room, “Of course, the day took an unexpected turn before I had the chance to see if you’d be willing to go out with me again.”

Feeling the heat rise in her cheeks, she couldn’t help but be charmed by his hopeful tone, and she suspected that he could hear how rapidly her heart was beating as he lightly stroked his thumb over her palm.

Before she could answer, she received a text from Katherine: “M here. Switched patient records to hide K. Get out here now!”

Correctly interpreting the panicked look on her face, Klaus said grimly, “Marcel has arrived, hasn’t he?” Trying and failing to move from the exam table, he swore through gritted teeth, “I’ll give that upstart bastard a fight.” Looking at her softly, he added, “Run away, love. I won’t see you hurt in this war.”

Caroline was surprised at his words, instantly feeling the inconvenient warmth once more that left her breathless whenever she was with Klaus. “That’s incredibly sweet...and also incredibly stupid since I might need to steer Marcel away from this room,” she said lightly. Putting on her game face, she exited the room before he could protest.

She was relieved to see Katherine had distracted Marcel, her white lab coat that was pristine just moments ago suddenly covered in a colorful combination of congealed animal blood and viscous fluids. She waved her arms around, clearly doing her best to sling some of the rancid mess on Marcel.

Biting her lip to keep from laughing at the vaguely ill expression on his face, she overheard Katherine tell him cheerfully, “You picked a great day to stop by for a visit, Marcel. A whole herd of chupacabras contracted hepatitis from drinking contaminated goat blood and I’m sure they’d appreciate a visit from their king while they’re getting antiviral treatment. Just watch out for the vomit puddles.”

Shaking his head and muttering under his breath, Marcel hurried away, giving Enzo a wide berth when he glared at him despite the fact that one of his eyes had fallen out again. Caroline made a mental note to give her favorite orderly a raise. “Caroline,” Marcel said, his normally deceptive, silky tone somewhat off as he clearly was still disturbed by the imagery Katherine evoked. “I suppose you know why I’m here.”

“To interrupt my staff and throw off my carefully orchestrated shift schedules,” she asked innocently, delighting in the way his brown eyes narrowed in anger.

His lips curled back into a snarl as he told her, “Don’t bullshit me. I’ve tracked Klaus right to your doorstep. The coward ran away when he realized he couldn’t beat me and now it’s time for me to end this war once and for all.” He roughly pushed past her, obviously intent upon going into the exam room where Klaus was hidden.

Fighting down the panic she felt, she casually slid past him, tapping on her tablet as she accessed patient records. “Whatever you think you’re doing here, go do it somewhere else — the patient in here is highly contagious with the morbillivirus.” As she swiped through the record that
Katherine had switched, she inwardly cursed Katherine’s sense of humor. “It’s um...a female Encantado.” Muttering under her breath, she explained, “It’s a Brazilian trickster dolphin.” There was a long pause, and then Klaus let out a muffled ‘Ee eee’ noise through the door.

Raising a suspicious eyebrow, Marcel replied, “She didn’t sound Brazilian.”

‘She’ also didn’t sound like a dolphin, Caroline thought, but she certainly wasn’t about to bring that up. Giving him an unimpressed look, she answered sternly, “Her esophageal lining has been severely damaged by the virus; it’s a wonder she’s coherent enough to communicate.” At her words, another half-hearted ‘Ee eee’ could be heard, Klaus inexplicably deciding to throw in a honk like a goose that made her inwardly cringe.

Shaking his head, Marcel said, “Man, that is one sick broad.” He flashed her an indulgent smile, one clearly designed to disarm, and she grew suspicious, her vampire senses on high alert as he suddenly grabbed her by the throat and shoved her into the wall. Black veins crawled underneath his eyes that had grown dark as his monster emerged. Fangs unsheathed, he hissed, “Thought you were supposed to be neutral, bitch. But here you are, protecting that sorry excuse for an Original.” Digging his nails into her skin, he threatened, “Tell me where he is or you’ll be doing your doctoring without a head, Caroline.”

Caroline heard Katherine shout, preparing to flash toward Marcel and attack, but Caroline caught her eye and shook her head, willing her to understand she didn’t want her to get hurt. Enraged, Caroline’s vampire face emerged, and she managed to gouge a deep crevice into his cheek with her claws as she struggled against him.

Enzo suddenly let out an unearthly shriek, tossing aside the IV stands he’d been moving down the hall and barreled into Marcel before Caroline could stop him. “You! You don’t — DON’T — hurt gorgeous,” he yelled, struggling to get his rotting larynx to work properly. Marcel’s eyes widened in alarm, flashing only a few feet away before realizing that Enzo had latched onto him with his vicelike grip and had no intention of letting go.

Marcel’s brown eyes paled with Caroline, but she met his gaze steadily, a cold kind of satisfaction washing over her as she realized that while she hadn’t planned for this to happen, it would effectively end this devastating war. With an encouraging nod, she watched Enzo dig his blunt teeth into Marcel’s neck, tearing at the flesh with relish as he transmitted the deadly virus.

*Best employee ever*, she thought, noticing how Marcel started transforming right away. The door to the exam room banged open, Klaus huffing slightly from exertion, “Are you alright, love?”

Caroline was touched by the concern she heard in his tone, and rushed forward to catch him as his knees started to buckle. “Easy there, Klaus. Yes, I’m fine,” she answered. Glancing back at Marcel, she registered his sudden sluggishness, his more docile personality as he finished his transition. With a wry grin, she added, “I guess that’s one way to end this war.”

Klaus, still stunned by the odd turn of events, replied, “I must admit, that’s not the ending I’d envisioned for my enemy, sweetheart.”

“As an added bonus, Enzo’s been wanting a friend,” she told him, observing how Enzo clumsily high-fived the newly turned Marcel, who seemed pleasantly confused but babbled happily at the attention. She turned back to Klaus, forgetting how close they were standing as the tip of her nose nearly grazed the stubble of his cheek. “Everyone needs a friend,” she said coyly.

With a seductive smirk, he murmured, “Well, I certainly look forward to earning your
A Comedy of Farriers

Chapter Summary

This was written for KC Week Day 7 - Emotions. We’ll mostly explore confusion and, of course, embarrassment in this story as Klaus meets a bubbly blonde at his family’s stable and is irritated to see that she appears to be dating his brother (when she could be dating him instead). Misunderstandings abound as Klaus clumsily attempts to be the noble brother...

“Horse sense is the thing a horse has which keeps it from betting on people.”
— W.C. Fields

A thousand hot knives pierced his skin and painful flames radiated from his bicep as Klaus let out an impressive string of curses that echoed throughout the stable. He glared at the Andalusian, who tossed back its thick black mane as though daring him to come closer after delivering such a powerful (and incredibly painful) bite to his bicep.

An annoyed huff startled him, and he whirled around to see a stunning blonde glare at him before scolding, Seriously? What the hell did you think would happen when you approached his blind zone? Marcellus is very sensitive.”

Despite his annoyance at the blonde, he couldn’t help but appreciate the way her dusty jeans and faded black tank top hugged her curves. “I can assure you, I’m quite familiar with Marcellus’ mood swings.” Cocking his head to the side, he smirked down at her as he asked, “You don’t know who I am, do you, love?”

“You’re one of the over-privileged, overindulged Mikaelsons. Since I hear Elijah is a fussy chronic suit-wearer and Finn would cut out his own tongue before stooping to speak to the help, I’m assuming you’re Klaus — internationally renowned artist whose mood swings are even more legendary than Marcellus’,” she told him with another unimpressed eye roll.

What remarkable fire. Intrigued, he started to hold out his hand to properly introduce himself when an involuntary spasm of pain from his arm reminded him of his injury courtesy of his temperamental horse.

Concern flickered in her blue eyes despite her obvious irritation with him, and she quickly maneuvered him out of the stall and sat him on one of the wooden benches just outside. Her touch was surprisingly tender and he found himself leaning into it while breathing in the smells of saddle soap and a hint of peaches that made him wonder what she would taste like. “I’m Caroline. I’m the farrier for Mystic Stables,” she introduced herself with a brief nod, pushing up his shirt sleeve to get a better look at the horse bite.

Klaus dumbly stared at her as she examined the rapidly bruising flesh, oddly compelled to count the adorable cluster of freckles dancing across her nose. “Klaus...I’m uh, Klaus Mikaelson,”
he clumsily offered, noting her amused expression as he hurriedly added, “But you already knew that I guess.” Inwardly groaning at how ridiculous he sounded, he tried to regroup and think of something witty to say, but was too distracted by the warmth of her touch as her fingers grazed the wound.

“Even though horses are grass eaters, their jaws are very strong and they have surprisingly sharp teeth. If startled, they’ll act out aggressively, even if they recognize you. Of course, you haven’t been to visit Marcellus since he was moved to Mystic Stables a year ago, so I’d argue his reaction is perfectly understandable,” Caroline told him in a voice full of reproach. Standing up, she rummaged through a cabinet above their heads, her tank top riding up to give him a teasing flash of her bellybutton.

Clearing his throat, he turned his head slightly, not wanting to come off as a creep. “Can I assume that is how you handle stable visitors with poor manners then, sweetheart?”

Grinning down at him, Caroline grabbed a bottle of hydrogen peroxide and began lightly dabbing at the edges of his bite where the horse’s teeth had sunk in slightly. “Actually, I have a few different methods of dealing with bad behavior at the stables.”

“Like threatening completely innocent, slightly tipsy blokes with a shotgun,” drawled a newcomer, and Klaus grit his teeth as he recognized the voice of his mischievous little brother, Kol.

Klaus watched with a sinking feeling as Kol draped his arm companionably around Caroline’s shoulders, and Caroline bumped him affectionately with her hip as she told Klaus, “It was my second day here and I was working late when a completely shitfaced Kol and his equally drunk buddy had climbed over our gates and were clumsily trying to put saddles on Tyler and Mason.” She shrugged, smearing a bit of ointment on Klaus’ bruised flesh as she added in fake innocence, “I thought they were trying to steal our clients’ best Quarter Horses, so naturally I pulled a shotgun on them and threatened to shoot off their balls.”

“Fairly certain Josh pissed himself when this fiery little minx started shrieking at us about deep cracks causing pressure on laminate and how it could lead to Tyler being lame,” Kol joined in with a cheeky smile, “Honestly, we would’ve picked a different horse to race against Mason had we known Tyler was injured, little bird.”

While Caroline returned the medical supplies to the overhead cabinet, Klaus studied the way his brother watched her with a fond smile that was worlds away from his typical smugness. Damn it — Kol genuinely liked her. “It’s sensitive laminae, Kol. And yes, had you and Josh tried to do your stupid drunken race, Tyler might’ve ended up permanently lame. And you and Josh would’ve ended up permanently ball-less,” she told him with a sinister gleam in her blue eyes.

“That’s why I’m your apprentice farrier, little bird. That and I bring you lunch every day,” Kol replied, shaking the sack his was holding.

Caroline squealed adorably, snatching it and inhaling deeply. “Your brother is the best, Klaus. He’s always looking out for me,” she told him, ruffling his brother’s brown locks affectionately. “I’m going to go take my break now and Kol, please get started measuring Mason for those special racing shoes we discussed.” She nodded at Klaus and told him, “It was nice to finally meet you, Klaus, but watch out for blind zones next time, okay?”

As the brothers watched her walk away, Klaus couldn’t help but feel as though part of his future happiness was walking away too. Stop being such a prat. Kol is clearly happy with her. “Hell of a story, mate. Caroline seems like a special girl.”
Quirking an eyebrow, Kol replied, “She is, Nik. She was so bloody protective of the horses, not realizing at the time that our family owned over half of the ones stabled here, and I knew I needed to figure out how to get her to be that protective of me.”

“And that’s why you’re mucking about this place as her assistant, rather than gallivanting across Europe like usual,” Klaus asked curiously. He briefly recalled a completely gobsmacked Rebekah telling him that Kol had moved in with someone, but it hadn’t occurred to him that his spoiled, selfish little brother had finally decided to settle down.

Buckling a leather tool belt across his waist, Kol answered somewhat defensively, “Caroline is a good person who didn’t see me as the constant screw-up our family thinks I am. All us Mikaelsons have more money than we could ever spend, but so what? She saw through who I’ve been pretending to be all my life. I like the person I am now because of her and I’d hate to think what kind of mess I’d be if Caroline wasn’t in my life.” Brown eyes narrowed, he pointed a finger at Klaus, warning him, “And I saw how you were trying to chat her up. Nik, don’t cock this up.”

Klaus reassured his brother, “I wouldn’t dream of it, mate.

Having never played the role of the noble brother, Klaus found himself a bit lost over the next two weeks. He told himself that he started frequenting Mystic Stables because he missed Marcellus after being overseas at various gallery openings for the past year. However, it wasn’t his temperamental Andalusian’s company he kept seeking out. He’d take Marcellus out for a quick gallop through the main trail dotted with apple trees, but he found himself constantly craning his neck for a glimpse of golden curls tucked underneath a ragged baseball cap.

He watched with an admiring eye the gentle manner she had with all of the horses, clearly willing to take the time to get to know their individual personalities and earning their trust. She’d once confessed to Klaus that she’d had few close friends growing up, always feeling more of a kinship with horses, and wanted to repay the kindness those gentle giants had shown her by giving them the best life she could. Selfless, gentle soul. She was a hard worker and incredibly loyal to the creatures, and Klaus found himself feeling almost as jealous of the horses as he was of his brother.

And then there was the singing. The first time he’d heard it while walking Marcellus for his post-ride cooldown, he’d assumed one of the grooms had left a radio on. However, the second time it occurred, he realized it was Caroline softly crooning to a skittish Dutch Draft. The gigantic creature was stomping the ground, but Caroline was fearless. Her melodic voice seemed to soothe the beast until it docilely allowed her to lift each of its massive hooves as she trimmed and filed away, blissfully unaware of her enthralled audience.

When she wasn’t unwittingly serenading Klaus, Caroline could be found working in one of the smaller pens to take advantage of the sunshine and gentle breezes. The precious few times he’d seen her astride a horse had left him breathless and blushing like a schoolboy. She’d been magnificent, like a fierce warrior queen charging into battle. She’d caught him staring one time too many and had teased him with, “What’s the matter, Klaus? Did you forget how to ride?”

“I’d be open to a riding lesson, sweetheart,” Klaus purred, inwardly berating himself for his dodgy innuendo. Stop trying to flirt with your brother’s girl.

Caroline threw back her head, laughing as she told him, “You Mikaelson boys are shameless flirts. Kol warned me about you, you know. Sexy broody artist-type who Kol swears
collects hearts the way I collect boots.”

The fondness in her voice as she spoke of Kol sent him crashing back to reality, and he felt the teasing smirk leave his face as he told her abruptly, “Yes, well, Kol has been known to exaggerate from time to time.” Uncomfortable with the way her own sunny smile dropped at his sudden coldness, he mumbled something about being late for a previous engagement and rode Marcellus back to his stall. A few days later, he found a flyer for children’s riding lessons and Caroline’s cheerful, curly-cue writing at the bottom that read, “Hey grumpy, I signed you up for the beginner’s class.” He couldn’t help the small chuckle that escaped as he looked at the smiley face she’d drawn with its tongue sticking out.

After that, he was on his best behavior — friendly, but not overly so in case he forgot himself and started shamelessly flirting again. It helped that Kol seemed to be popping up more than usual lately, teasing his brother good-naturedly and always leaving the stables when his shift ended with a careless wave in Caroline’s direction, telling her, “See you at home, little bird.” Granted, he felt his heart sink just a bit more each time he heard Kol say that, but he couldn’t fault his brother for wanting to constantly announce that he was the lucky bastard Caroline came home to. If it were him, he’d probably have hired a skywriter.

Of course, he could’ve sworn that Kol seemed to take particular delight in pointedly dropping little tidbits about his relationship, going on and on about something they called Margarita Monday Madness, wiggling his eyebrows comically whenever Caroline’s back was turned.

Or, the time Caroline asked Kol to move a few of the hay bales and he did a mini-striptease as he stripped off his shirt in front of her as she rolled her eyes and giggled. Klaus recognized the challenge in his troublemaking brother’s expression, and pulled off his own shirt, unable to stop himself from casually peeking to see if Caroline was watching. From the pink staining her cheeks, he thought she was, until he realized Kol had added to his little show by slowly pouring his water bottle over his chest. Bloody wanker.

Klaus accidentally had left his sketchpad behind, telling himself he wanted to document Marcellus grazing along the picturesque ruins of an old farmhouse. Bloody liar. Caroline featured quite prominently in his sketches these days. Giggles coming from the office drew his attention, and he decided to see what mischief Caroline was getting up to. He rounded the corner and stopped short at what he saw through the open doorway.

One of the stable hands, a dodgy bloke named Enzo, was leaning in dangerously close to Caroline, his dark eyes shifting from side to side as though checking to see if they were alone. Klaus hung back in the shadows, fists clenched as he watched Enzo whisper something that was no doubt scandalous in her ear.

Whatever he said made Caroline squeal in delight, clapping her hands excitedly as she enveloped him in a hug, pressing her curves against him as Enzo squeezed her tightly, his eyes closed blissfully. Bloody hell. That blonde tart was cheating on his brother. How could he have been so wrong about her? How in the hell was he going to tell Kol? Or, should he stay out of it? Fists clenched in anger, he stormed off, intent to drink until he no longer had the disgusting image of Caroline and Enzo seared into his brain.

Daylight streamed through Klaus’ bedroom window, temporarily blinding him as he rolled
over and let out a string of curses as his head began to pound from his hangover. Caroline. Enzo. It all came rushing back to him and he rubbed the side of his face with a heavy sigh. He had to tell Kol. Just picturing how heartbroken Kol would be made his own heart ache, but he couldn’t allow his brother to be played for a fool. Ignoring the pounding in his skull brought on by far too much bourbon and self-doubt, he threw on some clothes that didn’t appear too rumpled and drove over to the flat Kol shared with Caroline.

High on equal parts righteous indignation and adrenaline, he didn’t bother knocking before using the key Kol gave him for emergencies to barge in. He found them passed out on their couch, the TV playing softly in the background. He glared down at Caroline, hating how her soft golden waves perfectly framed her beautiful face. Deceitful trollop.

As though sensing Klaus’ presence, Caroline stirred, yawning loudly as she opened one eye to regard him blearily. Nudging a snoring Kol with her foot, she grumbled, “Why is your hot, grumpy brother glaring at me so early on a Saturday morning?”

Klaus hated the way his heart fluttered hopefully when he heard that Caroline thought him attractive, but he quickly tamped down that feeling. He was furious — how dare she be such a callous creature and toy with his baby brother like this?! Jabbing an accusing finger in her direction, he ground out, “Tell him what you’ve been doing, Caroline! And don’t try to deny it, I saw you yesterday!”

Shifting to rest on his elbows, Kol mockingly gasped at Caroline, “I knew it! You did eat the last slice of chocolate raspberry torte!” High-fiving Klaus, he added, “Good show exposing that dirty lying vixen, Nik.”

With an exasperated sigh, Klaus told him, “No, Kol. I saw Caroline with Enzo yesterday.” As his little brother’s eyes widened, Klaus ran his fingers through his messy curls, his tone apologetic as he told him, “I don’t know how long it’s been going on. I’m so sorry, brother.”

He threw another glare at Caroline, who had the gall to look offended. “What the hell, Klaus? So, you’re my grumpy stalker now?”

“That’s a bit rich, you feigning righteous indignation, sweetheart,” Klaus seethed. At her angry scoff, he shouted, “You’re cheating on my brother with Enzo!”

Klaus watched in confusion as Kol and Caroline glanced at each other, seeming to carry on a silent conversation with a quirk of their eyebrows. When they both burst into hysterical giggles, Klaus realized he’d clearly made a mistake.

Still breathing hard from laughing, Caroline said, “Kol and I are roommates and friends. Where the hell did you get the idea that he and I were dating?!”

Kol wore a chagrined expression as he cleared his throat awkwardly, “Yeah...so I might’ve figured out you thought Caroline and I were a couple and I had thought about setting you straight, but you so clearly fancied her that I thought it would be a bit of a laugh to see how long I could keep up the pretense.”

Caroline began brutally smacking Kol in the face with one of the fluffy pillows from the couch, muttering mostly incoherent phrases like “let me go on and on” and “you knew this whole time” heavily laced with curses while Klaus just yelled, “Arsehole!”

Jumping off of the couch to escape Caroline’s pillow assault, Kol’s brown eyes glittered with mischief as he said, “Nik, I swear I was going to tell you soon...for your birthday.”
Klaus growled, “My birthday is next summer, you wanker!”

“I think we’re all forgetting the most important bit we learned here — Enzo.” Bouncing on the balls of his feet, he asked her anxiously, “Did you talk me up? Is it time to get out my naughty spurs? Come on, help a bloke out, little bird!”

Thoughts racing, Klaus tried to make sense of everything he’d just learned while fighting off the remnants of his hangover. “So you’re not dating Caroline. And you’re gay?”

Rolling her eyes, Caroline answered for his brother, “Kol’s not a fan of limiting his dating pool.” Glancing at Kol, she told him, “And yes, I was an awesome roommate and lied my ass off about you and didn’t even tell your crush how you secretly think Mariah should’ve gotten an Oscar for *Glitter*.”

Horrified, Kol hurriedly said, “That’s not what I said! The movie was just not as bad as everyone says it is...And also, Margarita Monday Madness secret confessions are supposed to stay secret!”

Klaus couldn’t help the indulgent smile that crept across his face as he watched his brother and Caroline bicker back and forth good naturedly. He saw it now, the connection they share was clearly one of a close, loving friendship, and he couldn’t believe how blind he’d been. Before he could begin to form an apology for his ridiculous assumptions, Caroline commanded Kol, “And you can return the favor by joining Enzo at his favorite breakfast spot over on Augustine Street so I can show your brother my naughty spurs.”

Klaus could feel his neck flush from Caroline’s blatant interest, but still managed to throw a flirtatious smirk her way which caused her to blush prettily under the heat of his gaze. Kol interrupted their moment when he poked him in the chest on his way out of their flat, warning him, “Nik, don’t cock this up.”

Klaus smiled as he reassured his brother, “I wouldn’t dream of it, mate.”
The Old Megalomaniac and the Sea

Chapter Summary

This latest story also was written for KC Week Day 8. Klaus isn’t entirely sure how he ended up on a dolphin-watching tour, but the mysterious blonde captain is rather enchanting and the gentle waves are quite relaxing...almost like magic.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all of your reviews and kindness you showed me with my recent chapter (Chapter 53). If you enjoyed that story, you also may like another Klaroline human AU I wrote in this series that’s another case of mixed signals and hilarious misunderstandings — it’s Chapter 34 – “Romances with Wolves” and I’d love to hear what you guys thought of it!

“Luck is a thing that comes in many forms and who can recognize her?”
— Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea

An army of dolphins. The idea had merit, Klaus thought to himself as he recalled the utter stupidity of the hybrids he’d sired in preparation for the battle against Mikael. He leaned against the padded bench seat of the pontoon boat, an unusual calmness settling over him as he watched the gentle rise and fall of the waves as several dolphins frolicked in the distance.

Klaus basked in the blinding lights as he stood on the stage, addressing the crowd as he mockingly taunted the Mystic Falls group who no doubt would attempt to foil his plans. “Thank you for being here with me to celebrate! It’s been a long time coming!” As he basked in the sunlight, he recalled the anticipation he felt that night, knowing that his father would die at his hand, despite whatever lies the Mystic Falls group tried to feed him about Mikael already being dead.

He blinked, realizing that he couldn’t quite recall how he came to be sitting alone in a boat on what appeared to be the Gulf. A soft laugh behind him gave him pause. As he turned around, he was greeted by a pair of blue eyes that regarded him in amusement. Tipping the brim of her faded baseball cap emblazoned with, “Good vibes happen on the tides,” she said, “You’ve been deep in thought for awhile. Is everything ok?”

While Klaus couldn’t exactly recall how he came to be there, he did recognize the stunning blonde at the wheel. After he’d broken his curse and he’d set out in search of werewolves, he’d
made his way to Florida and a charming coastal town had proven to be home to a few werewolves he could add to his army. As he’d wandered among the docks to seek out his recruits who were fishermen by trade, his attention had been diverted by a lovely blonde rinsing off a boat that gave dolphin-watching tours.

His attempts to chat her up had been frustrating as she’d narrowed those fierce blue eyes of hers and gave him the brush off each time. Finally, he’d grumbled that he was even willing to go on her bloody tourist trap cruise if it meant he could get to know her, but the feisty boat captain had smiled an oddly sad smile and replied enigmatically, “It’s not time.”

He’d been both confused and charmed by the mysterious woman, but then Stefan had lured him back to Mystic Falls by claiming Mikael was dead, and he had no choice but to take his freshly made hybrids and leave. He’d been intending to seek her out again once he’d eliminated the threat of Mikael for good, and he was pleased to see he’d clearly followed through on the promise he’d made to himself.

Realizing he’d been staring at the beautiful woman for a shade longer than was deemed polite, Klaus shyly ducked his curly head, answering with, “I can honestly say sweetheart I feel more peaceful than I have in years.” He added flirtatiously, “It must be your superior seafaring abilities, sweetheart.”

She laughed in delight, her twin blonde braids flirting with the thin straps of her black tank top. “Usually the people I transport aren’t nearly as charming as you seem to be. You can call me Caroline.” She jerked her thumb behind her, pointing to two enormous black dogs that seemed to be the result of a Staffordshire shagging a bulldozer. “And that’s Acheron and Styx.”

He blinked in surprise. How the bloody hell had he not sensed those beasts? “Interesting names for your companions. A fan of the classics, Caroline?”

“You could say that,” she replied with a saucy wink that made him twitch pleasurably.

Smoothly sliding over to the bench seat across from where she was driving the boat, he told her with a sexy smirk, “You can call me Klaus. And you could say I am a classic, love.” The Gulf breeze brought an unexpected chill with it, sending a shiver down his spine as he recalled Mikael’s taunts: “The big bad wolf. You haven’t changed. Still hiding behind your playthings like a coward.”

“Something on your mind, cheeky classic guy,” Caroline asked curiously, bringing him out of his dark thoughts.

Klaus sighed, letting his gaze drift to the horizon, where the endless blue water seemed to beckon him. “Family troubles,” he offered, hating the hurt that tinged his voice as Mikael’s voice echoed in his mind: “Nobody cares about you any more, boy! What do you have other than those whose loyalty you forced? No one.”

She nodded knowingly. “Yeah, I know what you mean. My parents are the personification of primordial darkness.”

Taking in the way the sun gleamed in her hair and the brightness of her smile, he snorted derisively. “Rubbish. You’re a creature of light, anyone could see that.”

The blush that stained her cheeks was immensely gratifying. Clearly embarrassed by his flirtation, she hastily asked, “What about you then? Which relative is giving you trouble?”
Frowning at the reminder, Klaus answered, “My father. Well, the bastard I’d thought was my father. We recently had a...battle and despite knowing that the vendetta has been settled, I somehow still feel as though things are unfinished.” He was surprised at how easily the words tumbled from his lips, no regrets at having revealed his innermost concerns. As the waves gently rocked the boat, the peaceful calm returned, and he found himself returning Caroline’s soft smile.

“I’ve seen my share of people with unfinished business,” she mused, sliding a finger along the opening of a dusty jar full of coins, “It’s easy for people to get lost down here.” Scrunching her nose adorably at him, she added, “You don’t seem the type though — there’s an inner strength you have that’s unusual in someone so young.”

He chuckled at her ridiculous comment, closing his eyes momentarily at the curious noise the edge of the glass made as she continued to trace it with her finger. It was almost like a melody, one he couldn’t quite place but it felt like home. When he looked at her again, he was pleased to catch her returning his gaze with something akin to curiosity and perhaps even a hint of lust. “You flatter me, love. Although I must confess I’m a bit older than I look.”

A metallic glint from a sunbeam caught his attention, and he noticed that the jar contained a variety of coins from all over the world. He was taken by surprise when he realized he didn’t recognize some of them, which appeared quite old. Arching a brow, he gestured toward the jar, “That’s quite the coin collection you have, sweetheart.”

“You pay what they can afford,” Caroline answered with a shrug, “you could say I’m a collector.”

Klaus was surprised by his wistful tone when he admitted, “In my time, I was a collector as well. Rare and beautiful artwork, some of which I flatter myself into thinking I’d inspired.”

“And some of which you created yourself,” she said shrewdly, casually steering the boat as it gliding smoothly along the current. Noting his surprise, she explained, “You’re obviously a creator; I could sense it.”

“Such an intuitive creature,” he thought. He wondered what else she could sense about him. He was surprised when Acheron and Styx suddenly approached him, one placing its massive head on his knee and the other nudging his hand until he started petting him. Sighing contentedly, he scratched behind their ears, not even minding the puddles of drool seeping into his clothes. Once he broke his curse and became a hybrid, he’d found that most animals were wary of him, sensing his ‘otherness’ and marking him as an even larger threat than when he was an Original vampire. However, these two beasts showed no signs of nervousness; in fact, whenever he tried to stop petting them, they seemed to take turns nudging him with a cold, wet nose or insistent paw.

Noticing her pets’ antics, Caroline grumbled, “Acheron, Styx, down.” They immediately stopped pestering Klaus and lay on the floor between them, taking up all but a tiny sliver of space between their feet with their immense yet strangely calming presence.

He was silent as he considered Caroline’s companions along with her enigmatic words during the cruise. Normally, his hybrid senses delivered nearly everything he needed to know about a person, but for some reason, he felt off. While his millennia of experience told him he wasn’t in any danger from Caroline or her odd companions, he still understood that he was missing something. There was something ‘other’ about Caroline that he didn’t understand how he could’ve overlooked. Searching for clues, he hastily put together the dogs’ unusual names and the ancient coins he saw peeking through her tip jar, and finally guessed, “You’re a Nereid, aren’t you, love?”

“Because I have an affinity for the Gulf,” she asked with a knowing smile, “Trust me,
anyone down here can make that claim; they wouldn’t put up with the ridiculous humidity otherwise.”

Shifting a bit underneath her flirtatious gaze, he responded gruffly, “Also your beauty, sweetheart. I’d consider it an honor if you’d permit me to paint you.”

“I think I’d like that,” she answered a bit breathlessly as she steered the boat toward a vibrant sunset. However, she grew unusually serious as she told him, “But I’m not a child of Nereus.”

Before Klaus could ask what troubled her, he was struck again by the echo in his mind, thinking back to some of his final words to Mikael as he threatened to end the doppelganger’s life: “My whole life you’ve underestimated me. If you kill her you lose your leverage. So, go ahead. Go on. Kill her. Come on, old man. Kill her. Kill her!” And then the Mystic Falls gang created a distraction as they double-crossed Mikael, while Klaus grappled for the white oak stake. Ending Mikael’s life had been his life’s quest for hundreds of years, and when he finally plunged that weapon into his cold, dead heart, he felt...odd. Why couldn’t he remember that moment? The details of his battle with Mikael were suspiciously blurry and he couldn’t understand why.

Suddenly realizing that they couldn’t possibly have been on the boat long enough for it to be sunset, not to mention that he’d never seen a sunset with ribbons of blackest night like the one they were heading toward, he carefully asked, “Then what are you, sweetheart?”

Caroline’s beautiful blue eyes darkened into twin glowing coals, reflecting the same darkness that threaded into the unusual sunset. As though sensing his disquiet, she placed a comforting hand on his arm, telling him, “Before time began, I was called Charon.” At his confused expression, she hastily explained, “The gods aren’t as the stories would have you believe. We appear as we choose. Tell me, Klaus, would you prefer to ferry lost souls to the underworld as a haggard, bitter old man, or a sassy little blonde with a fondness for dimpled bad boys?”

Her flirtations charmed him despite what he now knew deep in his soul to be the truth of his battle with Mikael. It was Mikael who had plunged the white oak stake into his heart. Mikael had killed him. Not ready to contemplate what that dark knowledge meant, he cleared his throat and flicked his gaze to the two enormous dogs at their feet, asking, “I don’t recall Charon having pets, love, wherever did you find them?”

Caroline chuckled, her twinkling eyes resuming their innocent blue as she told him, “Hades freaks out if Cerberus isn’t guarding the underworld at all times, so he stubbornly only lets me take two out of the three heads with me when I’m out on the boat.”

Blinking as the fog from his mind lifted, Klaus saw how the beasts merged into a two-headed dog. They whimpered, nudging his hands until he petted them once more, while a massive tail whipped against his legs with a force that would’ve knocked him down had he not already been sitting. With a sigh of resignation, Klaus asked her softly, “Mikael killed me. Now what is to become of me?”

Caroline’s powerful gaze studied him in a way that was far from unsettling. If anything, it drew him near and warmed him from top to bottom, igniting a flush across his cheeks that he was helpless to stop. Seeming to reach a decision, she nodded to herself and switched off the boat, the curious sunset before them fading away into glorious day once more. “You’re far too intriguing to be trapped in the underworld, Klaus. So, I’ve decided to revoke your boarding pass.”

She helped him to his feet, slinging her pale arms around his neck as she toyed with his dirty blonde curls. At his gobsmacked expression, she whispered, “So, go get your revenge. I can’t
wait to watch you kick Mikael’s ass.”

As much as Klaus wanted to celebrate the fact that he would be given a second chance, an almost suffocating sadness gripped his heart. Barely believing the words that hastily tumbled from his lips, he protested, “But I want to stay here with you, sweetheart.”

Caroline pulled him in for a passionate kiss, both of them pouring everything left unsaid between them in that powerful moment of blissful connection. Pulling back slightly, she mumbled against his lips with a wicked smile, “Who said you’d be going alone? I’m long overdue for a vacation. And you better pack your paintbrush.”
Prompt: The Ghoul Next Door

*Body bags do not prevent freezer burn.* With a huff of annoyance, Caroline continued dragging the body into the woods, pleased that the moonless night provided the perfect cover for her cleanup activities. She normally did a better job monitoring her food storage by correctly labeling each corpse and stacking them in chronological order in her walk-in freezer, but Alaric had been problematic from the moment he moved in next door.

Within moments of introducing himself, he eyed her up and down and told her that she was the ‘perfect candidate to bear his children’. Flabbergasted, she realized Alaric was completely oblivious as to why his proposition was wildly inappropriate — even if she had been human. She belonged to an ancient race whose roots could be traced back to Mesopotamia. Her tribe, the Siduri, required an elaborate blood magic ritual for a female to become fertile, and she seriously doubted that this sad little creeper would be willing to sacrifice one of his testicles over an open flame while ingesting the blood of a freshly slaughtered jackal.

Not that she’d be willing to mate with him even if he survived the ritual. Underneath his foul odors of desperation and expired lunchmeat, she detected a genetic disorder that could be passed along to his progeny. *Definitely not an ideal mate.* Not that she had time for children at the moment — she’d just gotten her wine bar started and the stress was making her molt more than usual. Between both of her hostesses quitting during opening week and her distributor accidentally switching her painstakingly crafted, oak-aged merlot cases with cheap, candy cane-sweet white zinfandel, it had been a particularly trying time.

So, Caroline had been binge-eating a bit more than usual, and Alaric happened to catch her chowing down on her favorite comfort food — fried ears sprinkled with ghost pepper sea salt. She could hear his heart pounding, but her supernatural reflexes allowed her to snap his neck just as he opened his mouth to scream. She’d been so aggravated, she’d tossed his stiffening corpse into a spare body bag and shoved him into her enormous freezer without another thought. She hadn’t thought about him again until she was performing her monthly freezer cleanout. As much as she’d like to toss him in the garbage with her disastrous attempt at marinated belly button chili, she couldn’t afford to have his disappearance tied back to her, so here she was, digging a hole for this jackass in the middle of the woods.

That first shovelful told her the forest was mostly rock, and she grimaced as she realized the thin topsoil would do a crappy job of covering up Alaric’s corpse. *She was going to be here all night.*

“First body dump, love,” drawled an accented voice in amusement.

Caroline stiffened — it had been ages since another creature had caught her by surprise.
She studied the attractive man with suspicion, his dimples cutting into his high cheekbones as he noted the intensity of her gaze. “Hardly,” she scoffed, allowing a hint of her true age to bleed into her blue eyes as she gestured to the shredded, bloody mess in a pile beside his boots, “and are you always such a messy eater?”

“My wolf is relatively new to the hunt,” he offered with an enigmatic smile.

Taking in his enticing scent, she hummed in understanding, “You’re a hybrid. One of the older ones, I assume?” It makes him far less breakable. The seductive little voice in the back of her mind made her blush, and she wondered if he could smell her sudden arousal.

Stepping toward her with a predatory smirk that she found strangely appealing, he replied, “Klaus Mikaelson, the Original hybrid.” Cocking his head to study her closely, he observed, “And you’re a ghoul. I must confess, sweetheart, I had no idea your kind came in such enticing packages.”

Leaning against her shovel handle, she warned him with a low hiss, “It’s ‘Caroline’, not ‘sweetheart’. And I swear, if you make one grave-robbing Igor reference, I’ll bury you right next to my pervy stalker.”

Gray eyes lighting up in amusement, he held up his hands in surrender. “My apologies, Caroline. Is it safe to assume that your unfortunate lad’s foolish persistence led to his demise?”

“Well, that and he’d already pissed me off by propositioning me to be his baby incubator,” Caroline growled, landing a satisfying kick against Alaric’s head. “Seriously, the more time I spend in the human world, the more surprised I am that their females haven’t burned it to the ground.”

Nodding at the bloody mess of flesh and freshly cracked femurs on the ground beside him, she asked, “So what did yours do to piss you off?”

Shrugging, Klaus revealed, “He attempted to steal my family. However, the moment he touched the first coffin, the warding magic stopped him. I generously gave him a sporting chance, but my wolf easily tracked him through the woods. The scent of repetitive, pointless angst and hair gel is unmistakable.”

She laughed along with him, finding his morbid sense of humor quite charming. “It hadn’t occurred to me to try coffins for food storage — do you think they’d prevent freezer burn better than body bags,” she asked him curiously.

Raising an eyebrow, Klaus folded his fingers around her shovel handle, lightly grazing her knuckles. “I’ve never had a reason to find out. It just so happens that I have a few coffins lying around. Why don’t we tidy up here a bit and then we can find out together, hmmm?”

Enjoying the way his hybrid warmth stoked a sensual fire in her cool flesh, Caroline boldly stroked the handle, favoring him with an impish wink as she purred, “Perfect. We can see if I have a lovely cabernet that pairs well with angst and hair gel.”

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Prompt: The Rocky Horror Picture Show
It was the perfect way to hide in plain sight. No one would ever suspect that the local musical production of *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* was made up entirely of vampires. They could be as weird and creepy as they liked and the audience ate it up (*and later on, the actors might return the favor*).

However, as director, Caroline ran a tight ship and expected her actors to abide by several non-negotiable rules including healing after biting.

For the most part, her actors behaved themselves, but if she had to warn Enzo and Kol **one more time** about leaving their meals tied up in their fishnets, she was going to banish them from the stage and make them man the ticket booth.

*And then, there was Klaus.* Beautiful, arrogant Klaus who awakened in her a fetish for men dressed in leather corsets and heels that she hadn’t even known she possessed. She was hooked from the first moment he sang in that delicious accent, “Give yourself over to absolute pleasure. Swim the warm waters of sins of the flesh — erotic nightmares beyond any measure, and sensual daydreams to treasure forever. Can’t you just see it? Don’t dream it, be it.”

*She wondered if his bedroom eyes on stage could translate into something even hotter backstage…*

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**Prompt: Pumpkin**

“Lucy is my spirit animal,” Caroline cheerfully told Klaus, adding more cinnamon to their cider.

Raising an eyebrow, he watched the television with a bemused expression. “Watching cartoon children worship a fictional pumpkin deity is how you celebrate this holiday?”


Settling more comfortably against the couch, Klaus pulled Caroline closer to him as he mused, “I approve of Linus. His faith in this fictional pumpkin deity is admirable. He would’ve made a loyal minion.”

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**Prompt: Spiderweb**

[This is a prequel to Chapters 49 & 50 - *The Tangled Web.*]

“Did you seriously think you could pass off a crappy paper-mache disco ball instead of the glittering mirror ball I specifically instructed you to pick up from the party supply store before they closed,” Caroline snarled at one of the useless dance committee members, sending them scurrying for the correct supplies. Clapping her hands at the remaining volunteers covering the benches with gold and burgundy velvet, she announced, “People! The theme of the fall dance is Studio 54 — the embodiment of glamour and excess! I expect every trace of these tacky streamers taken down before you leave tonight!”
Grumbling, she rubbed her forehead, realizing that part of her irritation stemmed from hunger. She hadn’t had a proper meal in several days with the gang on high alert trying to plot against Klaus and prevent him from using Elena in his creepy ritual. It was really difficult to sneak off to her hideout for a snack when the Mystic Falls gang was so paranoid these days. *The last thing she needed was them to find out her family secret after she’d been so careful.* She wondered if she could take a detour through the woods on the way home and snag some chewy millipedes or spicy fire ants.

Caroline continued adding the gold bulbs to the large ‘54’ sign, stretching to reach the top row. She only pretended to be using the tall ladder as her kind was very adept at climbing, but it was important to keep up appearances. However, she nearly lost her footing when a familiar voice called out in amusement, “Do you need some assistance, love?”

“Oh, not from you,” she said as she glared down at Klaus, mildly alarmed that he may have observed how her toes weren’t quite connecting with the ladder steps as she dangled from the wall. *Damn it.* So far, she’d been able to keep up the facade of humanity around the pesky Original, especially since he seemed more interested in his upcoming ritual, but she noticed he’d been coming around more lately, and she wasn’t sure what to think. *Perhaps she’d eat him.* “Shouldn’t you be terrorizing Elena and her faithful Muppet sidekicks, Bert and Ernie?”

Klaus chuckled, his accent sending a pleasurable shiver down her spine as he replied, “You aren’t a fan of the Salvatores then, sweetheart? We have that in common.” His gray sparkled with mischief as he added seductively, “I’m most curious to learn what else we may have in common.”

“Nothing,” Caroline answered sharply, “you’re a terrifying immortal vampire who wants to use Elena like a juice box to unlock your inner Chihuahua and I’m a stressed-out human who needs to finish decorating this gym so I can get to my calculus homework.” She used her enhanced vision to read the micro expressions on Klaus’ handsome face. So far, he appeared to be amused with her — not suspicious. *Good.*

Holding out his hand to her he said, “That’s an awfully long way up, sweetheart. Wouldn’t you be more comfortable down here where we can chat properly?”

Caroline rolled her eyes at his terrible attempts at flirting. “Heights have never been a problem for me,” she answered flatly, but took his hand anyway, resisting the urge to show him just how strong she really was. Her finger joints were like steel, one of the attributes of her species that enabled them to climb great heights and spin their webs. Just a tiny bit of pressure and she could break the arrogant Original’s hand. Just imagining his surprise made her smile, but she found him to be a fun diversion and didn’t want to cause him harm unless necessary.

She allowed him to lead her toward the main stage, leaning against the white horse she’d borrowed from the theater department to study the Original more closely. His lean, powerful frame was more appealing than she cared to admit, and she enjoyed the way he brushed back his dirty blonde curls when wanted to draw her attention to him. The bits of humanity she occasionally spied within him were fun to see, and she found herself wondering what he was like beneath the cocky swagger.

Eyeing the horse, Klaus observed, “You’ve impressed me with the level of detail put into your dance theme, love. Tell me, will you be dressing as Bianca Jagger and riding the horse to make your entrance?”

Caroline scoffed, “Let me guess — this is the part where you impress me with a story about how you were at Studio 54 for her birthday when she arrived on the white horse?”
Threading his fingers through the strands of silver and gold beaded curtains beside them, he smirked, “Not quite, sweetheart. You’re far too clever to fall for my typical stories of adventures throughout the centuries. Although, if you’re ever interested in viewing artwork and other artifacts of historical importance that you won’t find in museums, well, you know where to find me,” he finished with a roguish wink that left her a bit breathless.

Noticing that the banner she’d hung earlier was slightly crooked, she mentally calculated how much silk she’d need to spin into a sticky spiderweb to do a quick fix without any of the volunteers noticing. “So, you took time out from gathering your spooky ritual ingredients to confess to me that you’re a hoarder?”

Dimples cutting into his cheeks, Klaus ducked his curly head almost shyly as he told her, “Actually, I stopped by to tell you that I know my doppelganger is attending your event and I’ll be chaperoning to ensure the Salvatore’s don’t do anything ill-advised. I was hoping you would save me a dance.”

Mildly surprised, Caroline recovered quickly, favoring him with a wicked grin as she said, “I could be persuaded — especially if you happen to have some vintage Halston in your creepy collection I can borrow.”

Prompt: Horrible Horror Movie Marathon

“Would never happen, love,” Klaus told Caroline, shaking his head as he snorted at the television screen where the movie’s title card flashed at them. “No amount of dark magic will resurrect human ashes mixed with gingerbread spices — no matter how evil the soul in question might be,” he added with a smirk.

Rolling her eyes, she grabbed another handful of popcorn, munching slowly as she considered something. Blue eyes suddenly alight with mischief, she conceded, “Fine. I’ll give you that one, but you and I both know the leprechaun thing could totally happen.” At his skeptical expression she hurriedly said, “Ok, maybe not the space part, but we both know the rest could be true.”

“That layover in Galway, then we drank our way through that distillery and got lost in the woods and found...” he trailed off meaningfully, pleased that she’d agreed to keep that unexpected ‘little’ discovery one of their secrets.

With a sigh of contentment, she leaned against him, pulling the soft blanket closer as she changed the channel. A surprised chuckle escaped her when she saw possibly the most ridiculous plot idea for a horror movie ever. “No way. No way can that even remotely happen, right?”

Looking down at her, his expression turned contemplative as he said, “Well, sweetheart, while it wasn’t exactly a snowman, there was the time Kol ran afoul of an Icelandic coven who enjoyed making living ice sculptures of men whom they felt betrayed them...”

“Pics or it didn’t happen,” she cheerfully told him with a quick kiss. When he changed the channel again, she shivered when she recognized the movie. “Now that one I know is real. One time, Enzo and I drove up the East Coast because I wanted to see the leaves change colors and then there was...”
an epic pub crawl, and then one thing led to another and suddenly the townsfolk were trying to sacrifice us to their pumpkin deity.” At Klaus’ hilariously stunned expression, she shrugged, smiling at the memory as she confessed, “Best.Pie.Ever.”
Klaroween Bingo - Part 2

Chapter Summary

Drabbles created for the Klaroween Bingo Event

Prompt: Weird ‘Sexy’ Costumes

The orange feathers were making her toes itch and she was fairly certain the yellow polyester bustier was giving her a rash. With an irritated huff, Caroline moved her enormous yellow beak to take another gulp of her poisoned appletini. If only she and Katherine hadn’t made that stupid bet with their coworker, Kol, they could be wearing their cute Grace and Frankie costumes right now, instead of getting weird glances and even weirder pervy comments. Shęd greatly underestimated how many people apparently wanted to bang a Sesame Street character.

Although it could be worse — Katherine had been fending off dudebros all night who kept asking to be her Ernie. She was doing her best with the lime green overalls and hideous striped crop top, but it was the enormous orange nose and thick black unibrow that had her friend constantly scowling at Kol, who kept wiggling his eyebrows at both of them.

Caroline noticed that Kol had become distracted by an attractive brunette wearing a sparkly sexy witch costume and decided to march up to him and tell him that it was time to go pick up Kol Jr. However, before she could put her revenge fantasy into action, a jumble of bright red fur and bells suddenly stumbled into her. “Pardon me, love,” he told her as he reached out to steady her with an apologetic expression on his handsome face.

She blinked, trying to determine if she was imagining things or if the hot British guy was seriously wearing a sexy Santa costume. The red fur boxers and tall black boots were far too ridiculous to look sexy, especially given how uncomfortable he appeared to be, but she couldn’t help but admire the way his dimples cut into his cheeks and the adorable way his Santa hat was perched jauntily on top of his dirty blonde curls.

Having already indulged in two poisoned appletinis to try to get over her humiliation, her filter wasn’t working very well and she blurted out, “Wow. Your costume is um...just wow.” At his raised brow, she quickly squeezed her eyes shut and hurriedly added, “Sorry! I know that’s totally hypocritical coming from the blonde in the sexy Big Bird outfit.”

A small chuckle escaped him as he answered, “Trust me, sweetheart, if I’d had any other choice, this would be the last costume I would’ve chosen.” Grimacing slightly, he explained, “I lost a wager with my vindictive git of a brother.”

“Me too,” Caroline replied, blushing to the roots of her hair as she realized she’d been fluttering her lashes at the attractive stranger while her enormous yellow beak was perched on her forehead. “I’m Caroline,” she said, ripping off her beak and trying to casually slide it on the bar behind her.

He favored her with an embarrassed smile as he introduced himself, “I’m Klaus.” At her
immediate giggles, he sighed with a helpless gesture to his outfit, “My brother thinks he’s so bloody clever.”

“Well, what about you? What bet did you lose?”

Throwing back the rest of her drink, she groaned as she explained, “So, Kol conned me into being his personal shopper because he told me this bullshit sob story about how his beloved grandmother’s birthday was coming up and he wanted to find her vintage 1920s jewelry like what she wore when she was young.” She glanced at his silly costume, sheepishly telling him, “Sorry it’s my fault you had to be a sexy Santa.”

“Cheeks flushing a bit at being caught staring, he quickly told her, “I say we exact some revenge on my sneaky bastard of a brother and then possibly have a late dinner?”

Charmed by the hopeful tone of his voice, she nodded, a slow smile creeping across her face.

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**Big Bird was going to ride Santa’s sleigh until his bells fell off.**

**Prompt: “Why don’t you just take your broomstick and shove it?”**

Caroline had escaped the noose before. No reason to think she couldn’t do it again. All witches led two lives — the false life in which the face they showed the world was a mask, carefully crafted to protect them from the ignorant masses, and then their true life, the one in which they dance between realms and conjure their hearts’ deepest desire.

When Magistrate Niklaus first accused Caroline of witchcraft, she’d barely begun to grasp
the depths of her power. She’d easily convinced the council of elders that her crimes were nothing more than an innocent, childish fascination.

*But that was before she’d opened the portal.* It had been mostly through luck, but from the moment she saw the swirling, dizzying vortex of demons and felt that immense surge of power, she knew it was fate. The pull of that realm called to her, and she found herself leaving this world to wander the cursed hellscape more and more, and her absence hadn’t gone unnoticed in the village. *Especially by Magistrate Niklaus.*

Magistrate Niklaus’ interest in her was nothing short of vexing, and had he been less of an arrogant, insufferable man who always lorded his powerful position within the community over the villagers, she might have been intrigued. The heat of his gaze sparked something within her, and though he seldom smiled, whenever he did those smiles always seemed directed at her, with just a hint of flirtation in his dimples. But she refused to allow him to coax her into a handfasting that would serve to clip her wings and keep her subservient. *No matter how pretty his words may be.*

Caroline had been so anxious to return to the demonic portal and feel that burst of power electrify her being once more that she failed to take the necessary precautions and Magistrate Niklaus had seen everything. The shock on his handsome face quickly was replaced by an unreadable expression, and he’d hauled her to the jail near the edge of the village without a word. At first, she’d assumed the council of elders would question her as they did before, possibly engage in a bit of torture to try to break her, but instead, she’d been left alone to plot her escape. *Should she turn into a begging, crying mess to garner a sympathetic ear or use her power to sway her accuser to release her?* Before she’d decided on the best strategy, the door creaked open, Magistrate Niklaus approaching her with his usual confident swagger. “What an unexpected mess you’ve landed in, Mistress Forbes,” he told her in a tone of amusement which set her teeth on edge.

Because he already harbored an inconvenient affection for her, Caroline decided to employ her powers to persuade him of her innocence. “You know in your heart I’ve been falsely accused. Nothing would please you further than to set me free and restore my good name,” she told him softly, her power threading through her words as she gave him a gentle smile.

Gray eyes seemed to cloud in confusion as he blinked at her, and for one golden, triumphant moment, she believed it had worked and she would walk out of jail at any moment. Then, his lips turned up in amusement, tossing back his dirty blonde curls as he laughed heartily at her while she scowled at him. “I’ve never met a witch whose power and charm were found in equal measure, Mistress Forbes.” Clasping his hands behind his back, he added teasingly, “Tell me, love, did you use your influence upon the elder Master Lockwood? He’s normally quite disagreeable when it comes to his wares, and yet he agreed to craft a very fine set of shoes for your mare without charging a single shilling.”

Forgetting herself, she burst out, “Why didn’t that work on you?” At his impassive expression, she realized he had no intention of answering her question until she answered his. With an irritated noise of displeasure, she finally replied, “That old married letch is nearly thrice my age and when my plow horse threw a shoe, he had the audacity to offer a dismissal of payment if I pledged to *help him keep his forge burning hot.*” Rolling her eyes, she snorted in disgust, “A new set of horse shoes was the least that despicable man could gift me after having to endure his offensive proposition. He’s fortunate I kept my temper and didn’t *influence* him into giving me ownership of one of his parcels of land.”

With a small chuckle, Magistrate Niklaus acknowledged, “I admire that fire you have,
sweetheart. It’s what drew me to you and my interest has only grown with this pleasant discovery of who you are. Of what you are.” He knelt beside her, his long black cloak sweeping the stone floor as he grasped her shackled hands in his as he told her, “And you’ll find your powers won’t work on me — at least not the way you assume they would.”

“What do you mean,” Caroline asked him suspiciously, yanking back her hands with a harsh clanking of her chains.

Smirking at her, the steel in his familiar gray eyes suddenly was replaced with red and gold flames as he answered, “You’ve been a frequent traveler in my homeland; surely you recognize one of my kind by now?”

Gasping in surprise, she said, “You’re a demon? How did you hide yourself all this time?”

“Well, part demon and part witch,” Magistrate Niklaus amended, tapping the metal that bound her wrists in a teasing manner, telling her, “And yet you kept insisting we had nothing in common, sweetheart. Such a vexing thing you are.”

Bristling at his mockery, Caroline asked sharply, “What do you want from me, Magistrate Niklaus?”

“Everything, of course. But first, I wish for you to free my family who were cursed into that hellscape.” At her scoff, he narrowed his eyes, his tone a bit more threatening as he told her, “You don’t wish for me to mark you as an enemy, love. A single word from me and the council of elders would see you hang for your crimes.”

Scrambling to her feet, she glared down at him, hissing, “Why don’t you just take your broomstick and shove it?”

He leisurely took his time standing, a knowing smirk on his face as his arrogant tone echoed in the small cell. “I always enjoy spirited negotiations, Mistress Forbes.”

Prompt: Mummy

That first delicate swipe of Klaus’ brush tickled — unfortunately, the wood pitch still sealed Caroline’s lips — not that her desiccated body would permit her to giggle, much less move. The powerful warding spell in the tomb was just as strong today as it was nearly 2,500 years ago when the priests of Sobek had first trapped her soul, forcing her to experience the decay of her corpse.

When the Pharaoh’s Queen Qetsiyah caught the sleeping sickness and died, Caroline had been sacrificed so that she could serve her in the afterlife just as she had in the realm of the living. She’d had millennia to plot her revenge, studying every facet of the tomb from the treasures to the hieroglyphics and finally had grasped the significance of the blue scarab necklace. The priests of Sobek had placed it in the tomb so that Queen Qetsiyah could use it to break the warding spell and regenerate her flesh to become immortal. Now, if only this charming archaeologist would move the necklace just a bit closer...

An attractive human, she’d admired the way he pushed his damp curls off of his forehead, grimacing as his sweat spotted the inlaid lapis lazuli on the low table she’d been placed. Men of
learning always held a special fascination for her, and from the way he easily read the hieroglyphs on the wall, he clearly had studied her culture for many years. She also appreciated the reverent manner in which he touched the artifacts — he seemed to respect rather than covet the treasures encased in the tomb.

Speaking into an earpiece, he murmured, “October 6th, Dr. Klaus Mikaelson, at the ancient burial ground in Saqqara, approximately 40 meters deep. The tomb belongs to the Saite-Persian Period, and is several miles south of the Unas pyramid. Tomb contains canopic cylindrical jars, gilded silver funeral masks, ivory faience cups and a mummy.”

He peered down at her, his expression softening as he said, “You were called Caroline. You were brutally slaughtered and must have endured tremendous pain. I will ensure your story is told. Mark my words, love, you will not be forgotten.”

Charmed by his boldness, Caroline was pleased that her unwitting rescuer was as lovely to behold as he was passionate. She noticed the way his elbow briefly caught the edge of the scarab necklace on the elaborately carved shelf above her, pushing it closer to where she lay. *It was only a matter of time.*

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**Prompt: Goblin**

Caroline hated the smell of blood — especially her own. While her kind didn’t have an enhanced sense of smell, she was sure she’d left a captivating, coppery scent to follow as she raced through the dark forest. Her neck ached where Klaus viciously had torn chunks of her flesh, and she worried that she’d used too much of her magic trying to heal and now she was defenseless. *It had been decades since she’d been this afraid.*

With a start, she heard his familiar snarl nearby, and hated how much it hurt to hear his rage. During their time together, she’d seen his anger directed at others, had even been thrilled by the fear he could evoke in his enemies. But this was the first time he’d turned on her, and the betrayal she felt made her heart turn cold and long for revenge. Revenge was second nature for her species, but she did her best to fight the dark urge. *Because neither of them could’ve anticipated that this would happen.*

They’d met several months ago when Caroline had first laid eyes on Klaus when he traveled through her forest. An Original vampire at the time, he was carrying a gorgeous pearlescent stone that she immediately coveted. Her kind delighted in stealing jewels and precious stones from unsuspecting travelers. While perched on a thin branch far above his head, she carefully observed him, noting the lean, powerful lines of his body with interest as he moved confidently through the dense forest.

She altered the pitch of her voice, sounding helpless and afraid as she called out in the night. He was a fierce predator, and she saw the way his eyes sparkled at the promise of a hunt. She found the curved fangs teasing the edges of his wicked smile incredibly erotic, and briefly wondered if his ferocity would be an asset in more intimate encounters.
While the Original was distracted, she misted behind him, using her long, clawed fingers to pluck the beautiful stone from his grasp. Unfortunately, she’d miscalculated his strength, and soon found her neck in his powerful hand.

Dark eyes appraised her, his tone cool with just a hint of violence as he appraised her, “Only steal from the weak, Goblin. Or risk becoming prey.”

Struggling in his iron grip, she hissed through her razor-sharp teeth, “I am not prey, Vampire.”

With a slight smirk, he traced the pointed tip of her ear, telling her, “On the contrary, sweetheart, I suspect you would be quite delicious prey.”

Growling at his arrogance, Caroline misted out of his grasp, enjoying the look of surprise on his handsome face. “I am not for eating!” She lunged forward, maliciously dragging her claws across his hand as she snatched the stone and vanished from his sight. She carefully calculated the distance she’d traveled, knowing she easily had outrun the Original and he’d never be able to track her.

Reappearing at the bottom of the mountain, she tapped on the massive rock buried on its side, her incantation opening the entrance to her hidden vault. She’d almost crossed the threshold when an immense force knocked her flat on her back, the Original straddling her with a look of annoyance laced with intrigue as he stared down at her. “Rude to run away in the middle of a conversation, love.” Tracing the delicate green skin along her forearms, he purred, “I’m Klaus, Original vampire on the verge of breaking my curse with the moonstone you keep trying to steal from me.”

“Caroline, pissed-off goblin who demands tribute from those who wander into my forest. That’s mine,” she hissed, lunging for the stone that he twirled in his hand.

A delighted chuckle escaped him as he eyed her intently, an unexpected rumble escaping his chest as he challenged, “If you want it, take it.” As she reached for the stone once more, he unexpectedly captured her lips in his, catching her by surprise. She soon found herself returning his kisses, a ferocious passion igniting between them that left her breathless. And that was just the beginning.

They were together after that, traveling the world and gathering the remaining rare ingredients needed to complete his ritual. She’d proudly stood by him as he broke his hybrid curse, her monster’s penchant for vengeance and mischief making her a valuable asset to wrangle troublemaking vampires, werewolves and witches who tried to stop Klaus from completing his ritual.

Caroline was pleased to learn that their passion deepened even further once Klaus unlocked his wolf, and the connection they shared went far beyond anything she’d ever felt with another. As a vampire and now as a hybrid, she knew he craved her blood and wanted them to blood share to seal their bond, but she hadn’t been ready. While she’d indulged in various supernatural lovers, she’d never once considered blood sharing with them as it was a level of closeness that frightened her. To let someone in after she’d lived a mostly solitary life for nearly a century was daunting.

However, from the moment Klaus had broken his curse, the joy she’d experienced in her lover reaching his lifelong goal, was unparalleled. As a creature primarily fueled by selfishness and greed, she’d never cared enough about another to feel as though their triumphs were hers. She was stunned to realize she’d started thinking of their relationship in terms of centuries. That’s when Caroline knew she was ready to blood share with Klaus.
He’d been elated when she’d told him, and immediately had whisked her away to her forest where they first met. The gesture had moved her immensely, and she’d rewarded him with a few new tricks she’d learned from her wood nymph yoga instructor. As they lay together under the stars, panting and lazily tracing patterns across their naked flesh, before she drank from her, Klaus had confessed, “This will be a first for us both, love. While you’ve never blood shared, I’ve never tasted goblin blood.”

Blue eyes glowing from the intensity of her feelings, she pulled him in for a searing kiss, nibbling lightly on his bottom lip as he purred in contentment. She suddenly pulled back, baring her neck to his lusty gaze. The sharp press of his fangs against her flesh was immensely pleasurable, and she writhed against him, savoring the heat of him against her cool skin.

Caroline could sense the subtle shift in his soul, but he still caught her by surprise when his powerful jaws clamped down and ripped out chunks of her flesh. Screaming in alarm, she’d used her magic to push him away, registering the empty void in his stare. She’d heard of vampires turning off their emotions, but it hadn’t occurred to her that that was a danger with a hybrid. *But as she watched the slow, cruel smile crawl across his blood-smeared face, she knew Klaus was gone.*

Which led to this unthinkable moment where the lover she’d thought she’d always adore was now hunting her in her own forest. Weakened from using her magic to heal herself, she stumbled over a tree root, barely keeping herself upright as she leaned against a tree trunk. Suddenly, Klaus’ arm shot out of nowhere, ripping into her wild tangle of blonde curls as he snarled, “Rude to run away when I desire another taste.”

As he tightened his grip, the top of her head ached from losing so much hair all at once, but she fought back tears as she bravely faced down the violent stranger her lover had become. “Not yours to taste any longer. Not until we fix this,” she screeched, pleased when her ragged claws dug deeply into chest.

Klaus let her go with a painful hiss, his dead eyes assessing her. She recognized the tenseness of his frame, the way his muscles bunched together as he prepared to strike. Summoning her last tendrils of magic, she misted away, hopefully putting enough distance between them so she could heal and come up with a plan.

A pair of strong hands gripped her arms, causing her to let out an unearthly shriek as she wildly fought against her assailant. “Calm down, little vicious parrot,” an impish voice wryly told her, whirling her around until she was facing what appeared to be a vampire. She sensed he was an old one from the vibrations of his soul.

“Not a parrot,” Caroline hissed, gnashing her teeth as she studied the mischievous glint in the stranger’s brown eyes. She allowed herself to relax slightly as it appeared he didn’t mean her any immediate harm. “You’re an Original vampire. One of Klaus’ brothers,” she bluntly stated, trying to recall what little information he’d offered about his family. She knew one or two had died, and that there was at least one sister, but that was the extent of what he’d told her.

“Kol Mikaelson,” the stranger said, offering her a funny little bow with a quirk of his lips. “I heard a rumor my brother had become enamored with a goblin and refused to bring you around the family for proper introductions, so I wanted to see what all the fuss was about.” Wiggling his eyebrows at her as he took in the dried blood smeared all over her, he added, “I must admit, darling, you seem to have brought out a considerably kinkier side to him than I recall.”
Scoffing, she crossed her arms over her bare breasts, inwardly appreciating that while Kol seemed to be a typical mischievous bratty brother, he at least wasn’t creeping her out by staring at her nude form with anything more than a fleeting interest. “Klaus never drank goblin blood before — he’s clearly having a violent allergic reaction.” Shuddering slightly, she added, “A **really** violent reaction.”

“That’s putting it mildly, little vicious parrot,” Kol observed with a slight grimace. “I suspect a vindictive coven may be at fault for this cockup.”

He held up a golden dagger, the glint of precious metal causing Caroline to shiver as she gazed at it covetously. She could feel power radiating from it — some sort of sleeping spell that she found intriguing.

Noting her interest, Kol grinned wickedly, “Tell me, darling, how handy are you in a knife fight?”
Part 3 - Klaroween Bingo

Chapter Notes

Even more drabbles created for the Klaroween Bingo Event! It’s been a lot of fun creating these for the event. :) Thank you for the kind reviews; I plan to revisit some of these drabbles later on and expand them into longer stories. Please let me know which ones have caught your interest!

Prompt: Competitive Apple Bobbing

It was for a good cause. That’s the only reason Caroline was paying such close attention to the way the water dripped from Klaus’ wet curls and onto his bare chest as he lifted his head from the barrel of apples in triumph, taking a hearty bite out of a bright green Granny Smith as the crowd cheered him on. Were apples a kink? Was that a thing?

Taking a long sip of her tequila sunrise, Caroline did her best not to read too much into the way Klaus’ gaze never seemed to stray too far from hers while he was on stage with the rest of the local firemen and police officers she’d recruited for the Halloween competitive apple bobbing charity event. Benefitting the Mystic Falls Animal Rescue, the event pitted the two groups against each other, with the audience placing their bets for not only the winning team, but also individual categories like sexiest apple bobbing.

So far, Klaus seemed to be in the lead if the giggling women out front holding up scorecards was any indication. Not that Caroline was jealous. If Klaus wanted to smirk and send his stupid flirty glances at random women, that was his business. They’d met a month ago when his sister, Rebekah, had recruited half of his fire department to help them set up the new indoor play area at the animal rescue. There was some teasing banter, but she was terrible at this sort of thing and couldn’t decide if he was into her or was just a ridiculously attractive flirt.

As he exited the stage, he made a beeline for her, but an incredibly pushy realtor who kept having the bartender send Klaus drinks all night, intercepted him with a toss of her long red hair and a contrived throaty laugh. “You were magnificent, darling,” she gushed, her ruby red fingernails trailing along his bicep seductively, “it’s so good of you to give so much of yourself for such a wonderful cause. I was thinking that you and I could—”

Caroline barely recognized her voice as she shrilly cut her off, telling her, “He’s busy!” At Klaus’ raised eyebrow and quirk of his lips, her cheeks turned scarlet as she hurriedly stumbled over her words, “He’s not done giving himself...uh, I mean giving his time...and uh, he’s helping me haul the donated supplies back to the shelter tonight.” Where the hell did that awkward word vomit come from? She’d been successfully living in denial about her growing feelings, but the woman so aggressively pursuing him right in front of her set her teeth on edge and brought out a fiercely possessive side she hadn’t seen since high school.

Klaus favored the redhead with a faint smile, politely agreeing with Caroline, “Caroline requires my assistance with quite a few things. I suspect her to-do list is quite extensive.” Nodding dismissively in the woman’s direction, he led Caroline to a quiet corner, his hand spreading a
pleasant warmth through the back of her flapper costume. When she turned to face him, he leaned in slightly, the bite of his cologne sending a pleasant shiver down her spine.

“Sorry about that,” she began awkwardly, doing her best not to stare at his incredibly sculpted chest, “she just um...seemed very eager and I thought you might need a rescue.”

With teasing dimples, he replied, “Feel free to rescue me whenever you like, sweetheart.” Dropping his voice to a seductive whisper he confessed, “And I’d be delighted to give myself over to your cause. Just say the word.”

Prompt: “Have you ever seen a horror movie?”

“This looks like a great place to be murdered,” Elena joked, peering into the seemingly endless darkness at the cave’s opening.

Rolling her eyes, Caroline told her, “If you’re not going to take this seriously, I’m sure there’s plenty of other freshman dying to pledge Alpha Theta Pi.” The hint of warning in her voice was slightly softened by the playful smile tugging at the corner of her lips. “As head of this sorority, it’s my job to shepherd our pledges through hell week and this is the last step of your initiation, you know — proving your bravery to your sorority sisters by venturing deep inside these haunted caves.”

“I know! It’s so exciting to think that soon I’ll be a full member of Alpha Theta Pi,” Elena squealed excitedly, the beam of her flashlight wildly waving in the night sky. At Caroline’s indulgent smile, she quickly composed herself, following her sorority sister into the creepy cave, asking, “So, is this the part where you rehash the old legend about this place?”

Snorting, the blonde shook her head, artfully messy curls dancing about her shoulders. “Hardly. Unlike our other pledges, you’re a local, so you probably know the story even better than I do.” When the eager pledge stumbled, she quickly caught her arm to keep her from falling.

“That story always made me sad,” Elena mused. “A thousand years ago, a brave Viking warrior was punished by the village witch and supposedly buried alive in this cave — all because he dared to love another.” She gave a hopeless sigh, “I can identify with him on a spiritual level.”

Moving her flashlight in a steady stream, Caroline chuckled softly, “Can you? Every time I hear that story, I always wonder how much of it is bullshit. I mean, do we honestly think a broad with that much power is going to be that petty over one guy?” Shrugging, she added with a sly wink, “Of course, your situation isn’t just about one guy.”

Feeling her way across the cool, mossy stone walls of the cave, the pledge gave another hopeless little sigh. “It’s just so hard, you know, when I have feelings for both of the brothers. I mean, Damon and Stefan are just so intense and I can’t imagine what my life would be like without them. Ever since they moved to town, Mystic Falls is so much more exciting!”

“Juggling two guys, especially brothers is just asking for trouble,” Caroline lightly warned with a careless shrug, “I guess I’ve just always been more of a one-man woman. Not a fan of having to split focus.” At Elena’s downcast expression, she hurriedly added, “Not that I’m judging!
First rule of Alpha Theta Pi — no slut-shaming. And the second rule is?"

Giggling, Elena answered dutifully, “Always use a coaster.” Playfully bumping into the blonde as she made her way down the rocky path, she practically swooned as she said, “It’s just that the Salvatore brothers are so mysterious. They’re like fairytale princes running away from a dark past or something.”

“Bitch please — All Stefan seems to be running away from is a good time — he never met a broody pout he didn’t immediately steal for his own,” Caroline snorted. “Still, he’s less awkward than his brother. Have you seen that weird bulging eye thing Damon does at some sorority socials? He should really get that checked out — maybe he needs a different brand of contacts,” she mused.

“That’s just part of the older guy mystique,” Elena insisted, slightly defensive. “But you’d know all about that, right? I know you said you were dating someone older, like out of college?”

A playful smile graced Caroline’s lips as she tugged her companion deeper into the cave. “Yeah, he’s a bit older. He’s not a big people person though, and is kind of private, so I haven’t brought him around.”

“Wow,” Elena observed, “our flashlights keep going out but you haven’t stumbled once. You must be able to see really well in the dark — who knows what crazy monsters I’m getting ready to run into down here!”

Snickering, Caroline replied with a wry grin, “Have you ever seen a horror movie? It’s always the blonde who gets killed first. And it’s always up to the clever brunette to save the day.”

“Not this time though,” Elena cheerfully predicted, “I saw the shape some of the other pledges were in when you brought them back from their turn in the cave. You were practically carrying Vicki out of here and remember how April passed out? Not that I’m a lightweight when it comes to liquor, but I bet I’ll have to lean on you when we make our way back out of here.”

Patting her on the back companionably, Caroline reassured her, “I have a good feeling about you, Elena. I bet you’ll do some saving one way or another.”

A dark chuckle echoed throughout the cave, the tone lightly teasing, “I agree. After all, Elena’s the one we’ve been waiting for — right, love?”

Elena gasped as a beautiful stranger flashed in front of them, his innocent dimples at odds with the terrible darkness she saw in his eyes. When his cruel smile revealed razor-sharp fangs, she shrieked, blindly groping for Caroline. When the dying beam of her flashlight swept across Caroline’s face, her scream became a pitiful, wailing thing.

Her beautiful, confident sorority sister’s face had transformed into a monstrous visage, complete with curved fangs and a gaze even more soulless than the other creature’s. Caroline studied her with a cunning gleam in her eye that Elena had never seen before, finally addressing her with a foreign accent she couldn’t place. “All legends begin somewhere, Elena. Over the ages, facts become twisted, rumors turn to certainty, and what we’re left with is a hollow echo of what once was. There once was a Viking family, whose matriarch was a powerful witch. She defied nature to turn them into powerful creatures, but when she realized their hunger would never truly be sated, she trapped them in caves underneath their village.”

“I, I don’t understand,” Elena stammered, slowly backing away from the two monsters, only to be stopped by a smooth cave wall.
The man slid his arm around Caroline’s waist, pulling her to him to nuzzle her neck intimately. “Fortunately for me, I’d finally won the affections of a clever little thing who had figured out the secret to my immortality. I’d only just turned her when my mother enacted the curse. She’s been by my side ever since, gathering all of the necessary ingredients to break this wretched spell.”

Caroline smiled at Elena, snatching her wrist in a blindingly fast move before she could let out a startled yelp. “You’re the final ingredient,” she told her with an inhuman snarl.

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**Prompt: Vampire that loves Italian food**

*If only garlic was lethal.* Caroline seethed with rage as she crushed several bulbs to add to the stockpot of prosciutto tortellini soup. Her Italian restaurant, Vesta, was tucked away in a quiet block along the Mystic Falls River, but she’d recently learned that Hybrid Industries had decided to transform the entire block into luxury lofts. The Klaus Mikaelson, CEO of that faceless, clearly evil corporation was coming to dinner that evening to discuss the terms of the transition, and Caroline had every intention of making him change his mind.

Inspired by her love of Italian food, she’d opened the restaurant decades ago, and despite her many travels, it still felt like home to her. One of the unfortunate drawbacks to being a vampire was having to move away every so often so the townspeople wouldn’t get suspicious. She always made sure to leave competent managers in charge so that she could oversee Vesta from afar, and then after an acceptable amount of time had passed, she’d return as the owner’s daughter or granddaughter to carry on a renowned family legacy that didn’t technically exist.

She finished sautéing the pancetta for the Bucatini Carbonara, adding several splashes of a crisp Pinot Grigio to complete the sauce. She’d carefully planned out the meal she would serve Klaus, wishing she knew what he looked like so she could properly visualize eviscerating him in her revenge fantasies. It was beyond irritating that none of her research had turned up a photo on the greedy bastard. She kept picturing a short, balding, surly asshat without a soul who didn’t care about traditions or people, who was used to bullying people to get his way.

**But not me. And not my restaurant.** Vesta was her heart, her first love, and no one was going to take it away from her. Caroline had organized her plans carefully in alphabetical order, preparing for every possible scenario. Her initial plan was to showcase some of Vesta’s signature dishes, charming him with witty banter and heartfelt stories of her “family’s legacy”. Of course, if that didn’t work, she intended to compel the bastard to leave her alone and possibly also remodel her kitchen — call it the asshat tax.

Bonnie suddenly interrupted her scheming, poking her dark head in the kitchen and telling her in a hushed whisper, “He’s here! And he’s...wow.”

Raising an eyebrow at her friend’s gobsmacked expression, she said dryly, “I can’t believe all it takes to impress you is a job title and a bit of money. That kind of blatant overcompensation is a major red flag, you know.”

Bonnie impatiently waived aside her comment with a quick nod of her head toward the
cozy dining area. Rolling her eyes, Caroline grabbed a bottle of her favorite local merlot and two goblets and strolled into the room to put her plan into action. And then immediately stopped short when she saw him.

_Holy hell_. Fancy job title, money, and perfect hair? He was a live-action Ken doll and he was sitting right in front of her. _No. Klaus was the enemy. She was taking him down._ Putting on her most winning smile, she set down the wine and glasses at their booth, shaking his hand as she said, “Mr. Mikaelson, it’s a pleasure to meet you. I’m Caroline.”

He stood to greet her, stopping her handshake and slowly transitioning it into an unexpectedly seductive kiss that he placed on top of her knuckles. “Please, call me Klaus, sweetheart.” As they settled into their booth, he uncorked the bottle, pouring them generous servings as he commented, “Vesta, the Roman goddess of fire, hearth and home. It’s a charming name for a charming restaurant.”

Bristling at the hint of condescension in his tone, Caroline told him with mocking sweetness, “Yes, that’s what we strive for in our little town — charm. As opposed to faceless, overpriced lofts that suck out every bit of personality our town has to offer.” _Oops. She hadn’t meant to let her temper get the best of her._ Looks like she was going to have to compel this beautiful bastard.

His gray eyes twinkled merrily in the candlelight as he smirked, “Aren’t you a firebrand, sweetheart? I must say, I’d expected you to attempt some form of flattery, but this is so much more exciting. I’m looking forward to our negotiations.”

_Time to compel this beautiful bastard._ Now she was thinking she might make him remodel not only her kitchen but also her office — call it the unbelievable asshat tax. Leaning forward, she captured his curious gaze, holding it steady as she spoke softly, her tone commanding as she told him, “You will abandon your selfish plans to ruin this neighborhood. You also feel an overwhelming urge to assist me with some restaurant remodeling projects.”

Shaking his head slightly, he replied with a chuckle, “You just tried to compel me. Aren’t you full of surprises, love?”

As Klaus’ wicked smile suddenly grew fangs, she inwardly groaned. _Damn it. There goes plan A._
Part 4 - Klaroween Bingo

Chapter Summary

Here's some more drabbles I created for the Klaroween Bingo Event.

Chapter Notes

Thanks for your reviews! Thank you for letting me know which ones you'd like to see expanded further!

Prompt: “Just one bite.”

The imported sitatunga blood wouldn’t set properly in the royal icing Caroline was trying to pipe along the sides of the cake sample slices. Grumbling to herself, she realized she should have known better — marsh buck blood tended to be thinner than standard domestic deer blood. As owner of Monster Cravings, her bakery catered to the unique palettes of New Orleans’ supernatural population.

Freya and Keelin’s hand fasting was in less than a month and Caroline had been asked to create their wedding cake. She had an appointment with the women this morning for a tasting, and as the bell jingled cheerfully over the door, and she called out, “You guys are right on time! I’m having a bit of trouble with one of the ingredients Keelin requested, but I think she’ll fall in love with the hazelnut praline-rabbit blood filling.”

“Your creativity seems to know no bounds, sweetheart,” came a familiar accented voice.

She poked her head out of the kitchen and rolled her eyes when she saw Klaus leaning against her counter. The Hybrid King of New Orleans was a ridiculously attractive pain in her ass, who insisted on her creating all of the desserts for his various social events, but always wanted to argue with her over every single detail. He claimed to be a perfectionist, but Caroline knew he was really just a control freak. “Klaus, when your sister signed a contract with me, I included a paragraph that expressly forbid you from interfering. It was a Klaus clause,” she swore, blue eyes glittering dangerously.

With a knowing smirk, he held up his hands in surrender. “Freya and Keelin had an unfortunate scheduling conflict with the priestess or the venue coordinator or some such nonsense and they asked me to stop by instead.”

Raising a disbelieving eyebrow as she studied his fake innocent expression, she crossed her arms defensively in front of her B+ plasma and buttercream-smeared apron. “Fine. But we have a hard stop at noon — prominent members of the Carrolton troll clan are arriving for a tasting. And they are serious about their toasted coconut and caramelized thyroid glands.”
“Understood, love,” he nodded in agreement, “from the aroma, it smells like you’re experimenting with venison blood and frosting?” He sniffed the air in appreciation, pushing up the sleeves of his henley to rest his powerful forearms on her counter.

Surprised, she answered, “Good nose, Klaus, even for a hybrid. Color me impressed.” She slid the first slice toward him, explaining, “This is a sitatunga blood-laced royal icing cream cake. Keelin requested it as her wolf ancestors used to hunt the sitatunga in their homeland.”

When his beautiful lips wrapped around that first decadent bite, Caroline did her best not to react. As a vampire, getting involved with a hybrid was a bad idea, but getting involved with the Hybrid King of New Orleans was an easily avoidable catastrophe. He would complicate her life in ways she couldn’t begin to imagine. No thank you.

Closing his eyes and letting out a small, seductive moan, he told her, “This is exquisite, sweetheart.”

As his tongue snaked out to delicately swipe at the corners of his mouth, Caroline watched in fascination, wondering if a little complication in her life would be so bad...

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**Prompt: Speed dating. In costumes.**

The Creature from the Black Lagoon impatiently tapped her curved claws against the small table where she waited for the cheesy ‘Find Your Boo’ speed dating event to begin. It really wasn’t her scene, but she decided it was time to stop pining over a certain dimpled asshat and put herself out there again. She’d begun working at Mikaelson Industries a year ago as a mid-level architect, and despite her laser-like focus on her career, she still managed to develop an inconvenient crush on one of the vice presidents.

Klaus Mikaelson was an arrogant bastard with a penchant for intimidating subordinates whenever he felt they weren’t devoting their entire being into a project. He also was devilishly handsome with a sexy confidence that Caroline found appealing and irritating in equal measure. Her department was managed by a different vice president, so she only knew Klaus superficially. However, circumstances kept pushing them together — first there was the time he needed someone to review a construction schedule, then he asked her to accompany him on that site visit, and a myriad of other tasks that somehow all seemed to involve her expertise.

Slowly she’d gotten to know him, had learned his little tells that others seemed oblivious to — like how his left dimple deepened more than his right if he was amused but trying to mask it behind his usual scary face. Or, how his brow furrows slightly when he’s fighting down a wave of disappointment — like the time his brother, Elijah, forgot his birthday. She’d recognized the signs that she was starting to fall for Klaus, and did her best to actively ignore this inconvenient crush, but last month, she finally couldn’t take it anymore and did something about it.

The light was still on in Klaus’ office despite it being after seven on a Friday night. Taking a deep breath, she knocked softly on the doorframe, her heart fluttering in her chest when Klaus greeted her with a warm smile. “Hello, love. You’re here late.”
“So are you,” she replied, gesturing to his loosened tie and messy curls as she stepped further into his office. “Looks like your Friday was as rough as mine.”

Groaning good naturedly, he gestured toward her and replied, “Not all of us can look as stunning as you.” As though realizing what he said, his gray eyes widened, and he awkwardly coughed, suddenly finding the smoky glass top of his desk immensely interesting.

Emboldened by his words, Caroline seized the moment with, “I always think you look great too. In fact, I was hoping you’d be interested in having dinner tonight. Like a date. With me.”

His stunned silence was deafening in his office, and Caroline could feel her face flaming in embarrassment when she realized she must have really read the signals wrong. When he finally opened his mouth to speak, she knew that whatever he said, no matter how polite, it would still really hurt. “I’m sorry, Caroline. I don’t think that’s a very good idea.”

Despite the genuine apology she heard in his voice, she could feel her heart sink in disappointment. Doing her best to smile, she kept her tone light as she nodded, “Of course. I understand. I apologize for being so unprofessional.” Backing out of his office with what little dignity she could muster, she mumbled, “I’ll let you get back to your work, then.”

After a month of wallowing (and actively avoiding Klaus), Caroline decided enough was enough and she joined her friends for this 1930s horror movie-themed speed dating event. At the sound of Bela Lugosi’s iconic line, “I bid you welcome,” the game started, with an attractive, cocky jock-type sitting across from her in a hastily thrown together Wolf Man costume. It was the type her teenage self would squeal over, but as he droned on about himself without letting her get a word in edgewise, the allotted ten minutes seemed to stretch on for eternity.

Finally, their date was over, but then she had to endure a bizarre brother duo dressed as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde who insisted they were a ‘package deal’. They seemed way more into each other than her, but at least they didn’t obsessively try to find the outline of her nipples in between the rows of scales on her costume like the Wolf Man kept doing.

By this point, her smile had drifted into something more automatic and probably painful-looking, but when Karloff’s version of the Mummy sat down, she instantly perked up. “Are you a fan of Karloff’s work? When I was a kid, The Mummy was my favorite!”

The man laughed, his voice a charming mix of playfulness with a hint of seduction. Noting that sexy accent, she realized she clearly had a type. “I was more a fan of his Frankenstein monster, but my mate called dibs, so I decided to be a gentleman about it. Actually, I preferred his work in 60s and 70s horror — Cauldron of Blood, Isle of the Snake People,” he trailed off, seeming to realize he hadn’t introduced himself yet. “I’m Enzo. And who might you be, gorgeous?”

Shaking his hand, she answered, “I’m Caroline. Actually, they show old horror movies every Saturday at midnight in the old theater downtown. Have you been?”

“I only recently moved to town,” he said, leaning a bit closer as he suggested, “perhaps you’d be interested in showing me around, gorgeous?”

Feeling the first stirrings of excitement, Caroline started to answer when a familiar voice cut her off. “She’s busy, mate. In fact, consider her unavailable for the foreseeable future.” She looked up to see Klaus glaring at Enzo, his jaw twitching.

“Seriously?! What the hell, Klaus,” she hissed, just as Lugosi’s voice alerted them to move onto the next date. Enzo got up reluctantly, impishly sweeping in to brush his lips across her cheek,
telling her, “Once you get this sorted, feel free to give me a call, gorgeous.”

*Did Klaus just growl? What the hell is wrong with him?* Caroline watched in disbelief as he glared at the next unfortunate suitor standing awkwardly by Caroline’s table until he finally shuffled away. “I’d prefer to whisk you off to somewhere considerably more private to discuss things, but I suspected you’d have some objections, love,” he explained.

“How considerate,” she said icily. “Now, what the hell are you doing here?”

Klaus let out a sigh, clearly uncomfortable at her scrutiny. “I’ve been trying to work up the nerve to speak with you ever since that night, but I couldn’t find the words and you ducked out of rooms any time you saw me, so I assumed you wouldn’t be willing to listen.” Frowning, he continued, “But then I overheard you telling Rebekah about attending her speed dating event, and I knew I’d run out of time.”

“Out of time for what,” she asked, perplexed by his manner. *Was he nervous?* She’d never seen him nervous.

“To ask you out,” Klaus blurted, loud enough to turn heads at several tables nearby.

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**Prompt: Ghost Stories**

**Warning: Some angst with this one.**

*The handcuffs were starting to chafe.* Caroline huffed in annoyance, glaring at the one-way mirror where she was sure she was being watched by the ungrateful detective. Only a couple of hours ago, she’d been wandering throughout the open-air galleries of St. Calude’s Corridor, losing herself in the work of incredibly talented local artists, when the terrified young boy had approached her.

He looked to be around seven or eight, his tearful eyes widening as he stood in front of her. “Please help me,” he said in a small, broken voice, “No one wants to help me.” His tears made her heart ache, but she had to remind herself not to do something foolish, like wrap him up in a hug like she wished that she could. *Because he was dead.*

As one of the most sought-after spiritualists in New Orleans, Caroline was familiar with ghosts asking her for help, but it was rare that one so young understood enough about the afterlife to recognize her gifts. Taking a calming breath, she quietly told him, “I will help you. My name’s Caroline. What’s your name?”

“Henrik,” he answered, his mouth trembling as he tried to get his emotions under control.

“Okay, Henrik, do you know what you need from me,” she gently asked, heart pounding as she recognized telltale signs that the boy likely had been an abused child during his short lifetime. She’d already made up her mind that once Henrik’s spirit was at rest, she planned to get revenge on whatever coldhearted bastard had hurt him.
Sniffling, the boy said, “I need to tell my brother, Nik, something. It’s important.”

Nodding in understanding, she replied, “Okay, I can help you deliver your message. Do you know where I can find Nik?”

Henrik eagerly pointed to a curly-haired man nearby, who was surrounded by a vibrant display of oil paintings she’d been admiring earlier. “That’s him. I’ve been trying to talk to him for so long and he just won’t listen,” he said, stomping his sneakers in frustration.

“But I can talk to him, Henrik, and I promise I’ll make him listen,” Caroline swore to him, steeling herself for the next phase. As part of her process, she had to absorb a bit of the spirit’s energy, not only to keep them on this plane while she spoke with their loved one, but also so that they could communicate crucial details that would help smooth over the skepticism she tended to receive. As she completed her task, she watched Nik, secretly pleased that he was part of the small artist community here — a creative soul tended to be more open to the ethereal and less likely to be stubborn about things they knew nothing about.

She wasn’t sure what to make of the small blush that stained her cheeks as she saw the way his gray eyes lit up with interest when she approached him. “Nik,” she said hesitantly, “I have a message for you.”

The attractive, somewhat cocky expression on his handsome face evaporated as he said, “It’s Klaus, actually. Only family calls me Nik.”

Rolling her eyes, she said, “Yeah, I know. The message is from your brother.”

“You know Elijah,” he asked curiously, flicking his gaze at her with a bit more interest as he said with a wry grin, “You appear to be a bit more laidback and creative than what I’m used to seeing dangling upon my uptight brother’s arm, sweetheart.”

Crossing her arms in front of her chest, she glanced down at her loose floral sundress topped off with a worn denim vest, and defensively answered, “This is my favorite outfit and I look really cute in it and I can assure you I don’t dangle!” She could tell from the way his eyes lit up in amusement, he likely was gearing up for some teasing banter that she normally couldn’t resist, but she glanced over at Henrik’s bittersweet smile, and remembered why she was there.

She held up her hand to stop whatever Klaus was getting ready to say, and told him in a serious tone. “I don’t know your brother, Elijah. Actually, I know Henrik. He approached me just now and needs me to deliver his message.”

“My little brother has been dead for years,” Klaus growled, his handsome face suddenly closed off and suspicious. “Whatever you’re after, you won’t find here. New Orleans is full of disgusting charlatans like you.”

What happened next was a confusing mix of indignant shouting as Caroline defended her profession, and then furious bellows when she told Klaus several secrets from his childhood offered as ‘proof’ of her gifts. And that was when the handcuffs came out. Because apparently, brooding artist was just a hobby for Klaus. His day job was New Orleans police detective...

Which led her to this moment, where Klaus had shoved her in an interrogation room, had accused her of stalking his family, and had stormed off to no doubt run an extensive background check on her. She inwardly cringed as she wondered what he’d think about that time she was
arrested for dancing naked among the jazz statues in Louis Armstrong Park. In her defense, she
never backed down from a dare, and also, jazz musician spirits were hard to resist when they
begged her to dance to their music.

Klaus suddenly returned, his voice mocking as he commented, “You’ve quite the colorful
past, Caroline. Public nudity, grave robbing, disturbing the peace — in all your brushes with the
law, it didn’t occur to you what poor judgement it shows to try to con a police officer?”

Rattling her handcuffs in frustration, Caroline groaned, “That charge was total bullshit!
That bokor wouldn’t leave me alone until I broke into his crypt to find his talisman and give it to
his daughter. Voodoo shamans are insistent fuckers — especially after they’re dead,” she
confessed.

Klaus snorted in derision. “Despite the utter nonsense of your so-called profession, you
mark an impressive list of influential clients from local celebrities to politicians.”

_He had no idea_, Caroline smirked inwardly. Since word had gotten around about her, she’d
advised three different Oscar winners and a foreign prince. She didn’t have to prove she was real
— it was already known. She could feel Henrik’s presence in the room, the inevitable chill a spirit
brought was something she’d never full get used to, but she was angry enough at his stubborn
asshat of a brother that it kept her warm.

“Look, I get that you refuse to believe in things you can’t see, but I’ve given you details
about your family life that no one else could have known. Surely that should allow you to open
your mind to alternative possibilities,” she entreated, trying to keep her tone even and matter-of-
fact. “Henrik told me how all of you were terrified of your abusive father, Mikael. How you’d hide
him in the treehouse you built at the edge of the woods whenever your father’s temper would get
so bad that you all feared for your lives.”

“Bloody useless considering I failed to keep him safe,” Klaus muttered, a faraway look in
his eye. Shaking himself, he glared at her once more. “This proves nothing. You’re a fake,
Caroline. Admit that you’re only doing this to sabotage Elijah’s mayoral campaign. This is just the
type of dirty, underhanded tactics the Lockwoods would stoop to!”

Caroline sighed loudly, throwing her blonde head back as she stared hopelessly at the
stained tile ceiling. _They were getting nowhere_. “Henrik wants me to give you a message and I’m
not going away until you listen to what your brother has to say, damn it.”

“Well, then, what’s the bloody message,” he asked in exasperation, running his fingers
tiredly through his dirty blonde curls.

She bit her lip, looking down at her handcuffs as though they might have the answer. “I’m
not exactly sure,” she confessed in a small voice. “He’s been a little vague on the exact details of
the message so far. Just that it’s important you listen to him.” She shivered suddenly as she felt
Henrik’s presence a bit more strongly than before. “There’s a feeling I get off of him that’s more
unsettled than many of the spirits I deal with. He’s clearly a frightened child with a horrific past,
but there’s something else. Whatever’s going on, it’s incredibly dark and the poor kid is still afraid
even after all of these years.”

Caroline hated how her words seemed to cause Klaus more pain. Clearly the loss of his
little brother, despite the passage of time, still weighed heavily on him. She told him softly,
“Maybe his message is more about helping you find peace? He knows you feel guilty for being
away from home the night he was killed. I’m sure he knows that it wasn’t your fault. Mikael was a
truly evil soul and if he wasn’t already dead, I would be happy to call in a few favors on Henrik’s
He started to say something, but was interrupted when a dark-headed man opened the door. His suit was impeccably tailored, and Caroline immediately felt the need to straighten her posture and stop chewing gum in his no-nonsense presence. “Niklaus,” the man said impatiently, “we do not need to encourage such ridiculous drivel. Release this riffraff back to the streets where she belongs.”

Frowning, Klaus addressed the man with an impatient wave of his hand. “Elijah, this is my precinct and I will conduct this investigation as I see fit.”

Henrik’s spirit suddenly flooded her mind, his terror making her heart race as she processed what he was trying to tell her. When she finally was coherent enough to speak, she leveled her icy gaze to Elijah and said, “All this time, I assumed it was Mikael. But it was you, wasn’t it, Elijah?”
Part 5 - Klaroween Bingo

Chapter Notes

Here are some more drabbles from the Klaroween Bingo Event. Thanks for all of the wonderful reviews and support you’ve shown! It’s wonderful to hear which stories you’d like to see more of!

Prompt: Everyone becomes their Halloween costume

The angry swirl of the purple and black cloak was his first clue that Caroline’s Sabbat didn’t go as planned. Klaus admired the fire he saw blazing in Caroline’s blue eyes as she grabbed the goblet of mulled wine he held out to her, gulping down most of it in one go. His love was furious.

“I can’t help but notice you’ve returned considerably sooner than expected from your gathering, love.” Raising a questioning eyebrow, he added, “Furthermore, there’s a distinct lack of Kol and Bonnie in tow.”

Caroline threw back her head with a groan, almost dislodging the black horns perched among her blonde waves. “My coven had planned every detail for the celebration of Samhain — it took us forever to carefully pile the nine sacred wood logs for each Beltane fire to maintain equal distance of flames to properly honor the four corners of the earth!”

Doing his best to avoid smirking at the thought of Caroline ordering about her coven like the glorious leader he knew her to be, he nodded sympathetically, asking, “And then what happened?”

“Kol,” she snarled, rattling her goblet insistently for him to refill it.

Topping off her glass with a long-suffering sigh, he took a large gulp from his goblet, finally inquiring, “What did my dim-witted brother do now?”

“He added wormwood to the bonfires because the idiot believed the old wives’ tale that it would heighten his allure and he might finally get Bonnie to go out with him,” she explained, marching over to the carved cabinet to rifle through several drawers. “Instead, the clueless idiot threw off our coven’s groove with the chanting and we accidentally invoked the trickster spirit of Anansi and it manifested long enough to transform everyone into their chosen Halloween costumes!”

Klaus did his best to remain expressionless as he took in this news. He understood the magnitude of the situation, but he couldn’t help the surprised laughter that escaped him. When he spied the green sparks emitting from Caroline’s closed fists that signaled her irritation, he quickly muttered ‘sorry’, and put on his most contrite appearance. “Certainly an unusual curse, sweetheart. But I’m sure you handled it admirably.”

Carefully stacking several dusty grimoires on the sideboard, she grumbled, “I have the
majority of my coven safely contained in a suspension spell out in the courtyard. I put Kol and Bonnie under a harmless sleeping hex upstairs while we figure this out. There were some complications with their costumes.”

“Complications,” he asked, helping her steady the growing pile of ancient tomes as a note of concern entered his voice, “what happened to them?”

Caroline quickly reassured him, “They’re fine, I promise! Nothing that can’t be undone, at least. Bonnie turned into the sexiest Jessica Rabbit I’ve ever seen and in between rubbing up against me in that painted-on red silk dress, she kept looking for Roger so she could stroke his ears.” Laughing softly, she added, “And somehow, she’s convinced that Kol is Roger and she freaked out when she couldn’t find his fluffy tail.”

Stomping back over to her goblet for a refill, she continued, “And then there’s Kol, who thought he was dressed as Freddy Krueger, but all he could find was a red and white-striped sweater, so he colored in the white with a green marker.” With a grimace, she explained, “Apparently, that wasn’t good enough for the spell and instead, he became the embodiment of Where’s Waldo. I couldn’t find him anywhere, and actually had to track his essence to bind him.”

Klaus nodded sympathetically, filing away these tidbits for later so that he could mercilessly tease his baby brother about his ineptitude not only at magic but also wooing his crush. A hint of pride colored his tone as he observed, “As the powerful High Priestess of your coven, you managed to avoid being cursed. Well done, love.”

Caroline mumbled something unintelligible, not quite looking him in the eye. When he cocked his head curiously, she let out an exasperated sigh, telling him, “I didn’t avoid it completely. I retained my sense of self obviously, but as for the rest, well, it turns out Maleficent’s horns are really itchy and I keep having to duck through doorways!”

Prompt: Truth or Dare: Halloween Edition

Who knew cinnabuns were real? How is this a thing? Did Klaus know? Caroline narrowed her blue eyes suspiciously at the hybrid as he helped her dodge a particularly nasty-looking spiked chain as it shot out of the sheetrock of his mansion. “You wouldn’t think something called cinnabuns would be such creepy pain freaks.”

“That’s Cenobites,” Klaus said through gritted teeth as he wrested a rusted hook out of his shoulder.

Quickly offering him her wrist so he could heal properly, she hissed, “That’s what you’re choosing to care about right now? Not that fact that the Hellraiser movies are apparently real?” They should have never agreed to play Kol’s Halloween edition of truth or dare. They’d returned from a rather lackluster Halloween parade over on Decatur, and they made the mistake of complaining to Kol that this was the dullest Halloween they’d ever had. That was when Kol had the genius plan that they’d play his version of truth or dare — all dares to find out the truths.
He’d had each couple select an object associated with a horror movie and dared them to use the object to try to summon its monster and determine if the legends were true. Elijah and Katherine picked the unmarked videotape, both of them eyeing it curiously as Elijah muttered that they should make their attempt at resurrecting the dreadful, water-logged little girl in a room that did not have an antique Turkish rug.

Kol grabbed a tarnished hand mirror, elbowing Bonnie excitedly as he told her that he had some ideas for what they could do with the leftover honey their creature was sure to leave behind. Klaus stoically held the puzzle box; Caroline only sensing his discomfort because of their bond. She’d watched a couple of the Hellraiser movies, but since torture porn had never been her favorite go-to in the horror genre, she wasn’t sure what to expect.

And now she was running away from a teeth-chattering monster who kept trying to flay the skin off of her forearms. Gasping as a series of long spikes exploded through the floor, showering her with the splintered remains of the hand-scraped maple floors she’d made Klaus special order, she threw him an exasperated look, asking, “Did Kol specify if we had to bring back all of the cinnabuns?”

“One cinnab-Cenobite should suffice,” Klaus told her as he carefully checked her for injuries. “Unless you’d prefer to end this now? I easily can solve the puzzle box and banish them back to their realm.”

Doing a complicated handspring-twist she hadn’t performed since her cheerleading days, she narrowly avoided a nasty head-butt from their leader with the giant nails sticking out of his skull. As she turned to see Klaus wrestling with the creature, she called out indignantly, “And forfeit the game?! No way!” She used her vampire speed to slam into the creature from the side, knocking it into their staircase where it bellowed with rage.

Pushing away several sweaty blonde strands, she told Klaus, “And don’t think you can just let something like that slip without me commenting on it. You said you know how to solve the puzzle box — you better believe I have follow-up questions, hybrid,” she told him with a wry smile.

As Klaus pulled the monster into a vicious headlock with a series of loud cracks, Caroline instructed, “Don’t kill that one! I think he’s the head cinnabun and I can totally see Kol telling us we forfeit because we brought back one of the cinnabun lackeys instead of the chief cinnabun.”

Letting out a good-natured sigh, he looked at her fondly as he kept the creature in his iron grip. “Very well, sweetheart.” Cocking his head to the side, he added, “Should I be concerned that you’ve spent so much time with my degenerate little brother you’re now wise to all of his dirty tricks?”

Slamming her boot into the throat of another cinnabun, she smiled slyly at Klaus, “Maybe. Just think of the awkward conversations I can start if we return to your family and I ask you to tell me all about your fondness for puzzle boxes?”

“Well-played,” Klaus muttered with a twinkle in his gray eyes as he fiddled with the puzzle box to send them back into their world with their prize cinnabun. “So, I may have gone through a slight Cenobite BDSM pain kink in the late 80s...”
didn’t mean she couldn’t fantasize a bit about future possibilities with her hybrid. She felt her mind wander to intriguing new places while a surly Elijah and a thoroughly drenched Katherine complained that Kol purposely placed televisions on top of every antique Turkish rug in their manor. Then, an irritated, honey-splattered Bonnie put the giggling Original prankster in his place when she enchanted bits of broken mirror she pulled out of her hair to continuously place themselves underneath his bare feet whenever he tried to move.

Sighing contentedly, Caroline settled back against Klaus’ embrace, wondering what Halloween adventure they’d have next year.

Prompt: “Let’s check the basement.”

Undead corpses undergo rigor mortis considerably faster than the average human corpse. Rarely did this fact inconvenience Klaus; however, he typically avoided murder during one of Rebekah’s charity events. Unfortunately, his sister’s wrath didn’t deter him from swiftly staking Damon Salvatore with a bamboo skewer plucked from a serving tray. While a human corpse took two to six hours to become far too stiff to maneuver into cramped spaces, impudent vampire corpses like Damon became brittle in the time it took for Klaus to finish his scotch.

When he heard approaching heels, he cursed under his breath and mentally calculated whether the useless vampire would fit inside the dishwasher. **Bloody unlikely given the oversized skull that vampire had sported.** Fortunately, the charity gala was being held in one of the more luxurious mansions in town, so the gourmet kitchen was equipped with oversized appliances. He winced at the loud crack Damon’s femur made when it snapped as Klaus crammed his corpse into the double wall oven.

He’d narrowly avoided ripping off one of the vampire’s arms as he slammed the door shut, just in time to hear that same determined pair of heels click across the marble threshold of the kitchen. “So, I came in here to yell at the catering staff for using mismatched parfait cups, but based on that gorgeous Brioni tuxedo, it’s a safe bet you’re not affiliated with the staff.”

Klaus eyed the stunning blonde dressed in soft tulle, the turquoise gown perfectly complimenting her fierce gaze. “Well-spotted, sweetheart. Do you happen to have a background in fashion design?”

“Market researcher,” she said with a note of pride, “well, senior researcher as of yesterday. My firm is partnering with Mikaelson Industries to host this event.” She held out her hand, her eyebrow lifting slightly at the awkward way Klaus refused to move away from the oven. “I’m Caroline Forbes.”

“Klaus Mikaelson,” he murmured, waiting for a sign of recognition and the typical accompanying awe and/or fear that he normally experienced in these types of situations. He noticed her slow heartbeat, which instantly marked her as a vampire. In fact, her blood still carried traces of human, so she was still a fledgling, barely a few decades. At her politely blank expression, he added somewhat peevishly, “Of the Mikaelson clan. The Original Hybrid.”
Blue eyes twinkling, she nodded, “Oh, right — one of Rebekah’s brothers. I met her earlier this evening and am relieved to report there was minimal bloodshed.”

While it rankled that Caroline seemed to know him only as one of Rebekah’s siblings and not by his formidable reputation, he couldn’t help the intrigue he experienced at the thought of this baby vampire running afoul of his sister. “If you’ve managed to catch Rebekah’s ire, then you’re fortunate to still have your head attached, love.”

She snorted, telling him, “Please. It wasn’t my blood that was spilled.” At Klaus’ expression of disbelief, she shrugged slightly, adding, “I have slight a temper.” She pointed to the corner of the oven above his shoulder, a slight frown marring her face as she asked, “Is something wrong with the oven? The St. John family promised their appliances were top of the line, but it will be a disaster for the third course appetizers if we’re down an oven.”

Klaus experienced an unfamiliar flood of panic as she stepped closer to critically eye his temporary hiding place. While Caroline clearly wasn’t a fan of his sister’s, that didn’t necessarily mean she wouldn’t mention a vampire corpse later on. “No, no, everything’s in tiptop shape, I assure you, sweetheart. Rebekah had asked me to do a quick inspection of the equipment.” Carefully gauging her expression, he added with a long-suffering sigh, “You know how she can be.”

“Seriously. And I thought I was uptight.” Giving him a final appreciative glance that left him feeling ridiculously pleased with himself, she told him, “I need to check on the bartenders, but maybe we’ll run into each other again later?”

Smirking, he replied, “Count on it, sweetheart.”

Her soft laugh left him a bit breathless, and he admired her graceful stride as she exited the kitchen in a delicate cloud of tulle. After she left, he suddenly scowled, remembering the dimwitted vampire rotting away in the oven behind him. He roughly yanked the brittle corpse out of the oven, grinding his teeth when a foot snapped off, hitting the marble floor with a dull clatter. He glanced around, looking for a shadowy crevice in which to kick the desiccated piece, but unfortunately the kitchen was immaculate. He was certain that even if Rebekah failed to spot his mishap, Caroline certainly would.

With an aggravated sigh, he gripped the various pieces of Damon’s brittle corpse, doing his best not to ruin his suit now that the intriguing blonde had complimented it. He used his supernatural senses to determine if any of the connected hallways were free, and flashed away to the one that he knew was the most direct path toward the basement. His fingers had just brushed the ornate brass doorknob that marked the entrance when he overheard his sister call out from another corridor, “Let’s check the basement. Surely there’s more suitable serving bowls than what the caterers brought. Honestly, what imbecile decided plastic was appropriate for an event this posh?”

Bloody hell. Klaus held his breath, quickly considering his options. Fortunately, his sister’s footsteps abruptly stopped when one of her insipid minions sounded like they found whatever bit of nonsense they deemed crucial to their event. Enveloped in blissful quiet once more, he opened the door, breathing a sigh of relief. And then stopped short when he was greeted with an unexpected sight.

Caroline was wrenching a blood-splattered stiletto out of the oozing eye socket of a freshly dead, partially transformed werewolf. Glancing up at Klaus, she waved at him cheekily, moving over to the wet bar in the corner to wash off her shoe. “You know, when I said we’d run into each other later, I meant some flirty banter on the dancefloor. This makes me wonder if you’re a creepy
stalker, Klaus.”

Realizing belatedly he still was clutching Damon’s worthless carcass, he dumped it unceremoniously onto the concrete floor, flashing Caroline a smirk as he replied, “It merely was fortuitous timing, I assure you, sweetheart. I encountered a minor convenience that demanded my immediate attention and had no interest in earning my sister’s ire during her charity event.”

Cocking his head to the side, he studied Caroline’s victim a bit more closely, taking in the somewhat familiar, moronic expression and observed, “And your minor inconvenience appears to be a consort of the Crescent Pack’s alpha. Quite the bold move, love.”

“Howley operated under the assumption that she was a special snowflake and was above our supernatural community’s laws. When I overheard her bragging about hunting children down in the 9th Ward last full moon, I performed a community service and took the bitch out.” Shrugging, she added, “I’m all about charitable giving.”

Klaus felt his blood rush at his unexpectedly bloodthirsty vixen’s confession, stepping closer to examine her kill. “Impressive. I’m curious where you were hiding a gun loaded with silver bullets in that lovely ensemble of yours,” he ventured with a seductive tone.

Caroline giggled, tapping her stiletto heel with a perfectly manicured nail. “Sterling silver heels. I like to be prepared — after what happened a few months ago when a sorceress was left off of a guest list — trust me, it wasn’t pretty. I’m still not sure we unshrunk all of the guests’ heads.”

“What an enterprising creature you are,” he complimented her, flashing over to run his thumb teasingly across her palm as he confessed, “I had to improvise with a cocktail skewer.”

She laughed, shaking her head teasingly, “Then you were fortunate to grab one before Rebekah ordered the staff to replace them with something more elegant.”

Being reminded of his sister’s wrath, he asked, “Considering my sister’s unreasonable demands of nonviolent outbursts during her social functions, may I assume I have your word our indiscretions will stay between us, love?”

Favoring him with a saucy wink, she replied, “Of course. And I look forward to our future indiscretions.”
Klaroween Bingo - Part 6

Prompt: “Who ate all my candy?”

“You don’t find it the least bit suspicious that there’s an elaborate, life-sized, gingerbread house tucked away in this forest,” Klaus asked dryly, watching his brother, Kol, gorge himself on a white chocolate shutter.

Briefly pausing to lick his fingers before breaking off a large piece of another shutter, he replied, “We’re Originals, Nik, there’s nothing in this forest more dangerous than us. Besides, this is a spectacular white chocolate blended with a hint of Hungarian paprika. That extraordinary taste alone is worth it.”

“The shutters on the other side are blended with Garam masala, or did you already scarf those down, little piggy” a new voice icily told them as an irritated woman suddenly appeared before them, clutching a broomstick and glowering at both of them. “Who ate all my candy,” she asked, impatiently shoving some of her windswept blond hair back underneath her witch’s hat. Pointing at Klaus, she added, “Did you eat my house too or just your friend? I can make two little piggies just as easily as one,” she threatened with a fire in her blue gaze that Klaus found immensely appealing.

“Easy, love, I’m sure we can compensate you for any damage my wayward brother may have caused,” Klaus said smoothly, his teasing smirk growing as he saw the way the lovely little witch’s hands curled into fists, her magic shedding brief flurries of pink glitter in her anger. “I’m Klaus and this is Kol,” he added, sweeping in to kiss her knuckles and letting out a surprised chuckle when some of the pink glitter petulantly stung his lips.

“Caroline,” she bit out, snatching back her hand with the prettiest scowl Klaus had ever seen.

Kol noticed their exchange with glee, nudging his brother to say, “The little witch seems a bit cross, Nik. Perhaps if you offer to bring her a tasty child?”

“No thanks — they’re really high in cholesterol and my doctor told me to cut back on the Hansels and Gretels in my diet,” she told them with a small pout. At the brothers’ gossmacked expressions, she rolled her eyes, exclaiming, “Seriously?! Hurtful stereotypes like that are what’s wrong with the supernatural community!”

Klaus glared at his brother, whose obnoxious laughter wasn’t helping matters, telling the fiery witch, “Apologies, love. We’ll be happy to pay for Kol’s impolite snacking, if we have your word you won’t turn us into pigs,” he offered with a flirtatious smirk.

Caroline crossed her arms in front of her, studying them both as though judging their sincerity. Finally nodding, she told them, “Fine. But you’re paying for everything Kol touched AND you’re both helping with the repairs.” Eyeing Klaus’ hands for a moment, she told him with a wink, “I hope you’re good with an icing spatula.”
“We have to burn my tooth,” Henrik said in a voice that was so matter-of-fact, Klaus had to replay his little brother’s words several times to make sure he heard him correctly. Fortunately, the waiting room at the pediatric dentist’s was empty, so Klaus felt comfortable asking him, “Why would you say that?”

Shrugging, the little boy continued coloring at the table, fixing his innocent gaze on his older brother as he explained, “So the witch won’t have power over me. The kids in my class said that an old witch takes your teeth and casts spells and then you’re hers. So, when you lose a tooth, you have to burn it so she can’t take you.”

Klaus felt a chill go down his spine at Henrik’s words, thinking back to several articles he read online after he moved them to the small town of Mystic Falls a few months ago. There was a series of child abductions several years ago that were never solved. The authorities had been baffled and while no arrests were made, the disappearances stopped as suddenly as they began.

Shaking his head to rid himself of the disturbing images, he patted Henrik on his shoulder and reassured him, “That’s just a silly story made up to scare people. I think we should do a tradition from when I was a kid and put your baby tooth under the pillow for the tooth fairy to find and leave you money.”

While Henrik looked intrigued at the idea of earning pocket money, he still seemed hesitant to let go of the witch story that frightened him so much. Before he could say anything, the assistant led them back to the exam room where they were greeted by a lovely blonde wearing a traditional white doctor’s coat.

“Hi, I’m Dr. Forbes, but you can call me Caroline,” she told them with a warm smile, shaking both of their hands, which made Henrik’s small chest puff up with pride.

Favoring her with a flirtatious smile, he said, “I’m Klaus and this is my little brother, Henrik.” He admired the slight flush that came to her cheeks, and he wondered if it would be too forward to ask her out once Henrik’s appointment was done.

As though realizing they had stared at each other a bit too long to be considered strictly platonic, Caroline busied herself helping Henrik into a padded exam chair painted a cheerful blue. Henrik’s eyes grew round with wonder as he discovered the enormous underwater-themed mural on the ceiling. “I really like fishes and sharks are my favorite,” he happily chirped, pointing at a beautifully rendered tiger shark.

Klaus glanced up, taken aback by the extraordinary detail he found, from the vibrant orange of the fire coral to the iridescent school of fish swimming in formation. “What a marvelous creation,” he commented, his artist’s eye catching more and more amazing detail the longer he stared. “It looks so realistic.”

“My friend Bonnie is a local artist. She can work magic with her paintbrushes,” she bragged, the fondness in her tone foolishly making him wonder what it would take for her to speak of him with such warmth.

Henrik looked slightly worried as he asked Caroline, “Is she a witch?”

“Why do you ask,” Caroline gently probed, setting aside her dentist tools to give him her
“Because of the old witch who used magic to cast spells on your baby teeth and then she takes you away,” he told her with a slight tremor in his voice.

At the questioning glance she threw Klaus, he hastily explained, “We’ve only lived here a few months and some of the children in Henrik’s class brought up a nonsense legend to scare him.”

“I see,” she nodded, telling Henrik, “Small towns like Mystic Falls take a little while to warm up to new people, and sometimes they say mean things like that scary story just to see what you’ll say. I’ve only lived here a few years myself and when I first opened my practice, it took a bit before people became my friends. In fact, the locals still think of me as the new girl.”

Henrik was persistent, a trait Klaus feared he inherited from him, as he questioned, “So you know about the evil old witch?”

“That’s just a scary story. I promise evil witches don’t exist here. But I know for a fact that good exists and there are people who want to make the world better for everyone,” she told him in a serious voice, her blue eyes displaying a kindness that instantly had Klaus under her spell.

Henrik’s voice was small and on the verge of cracking when he asked her in a hushed whisper, “Do you promise?”

Giving him a sweet smile, she held out her pinky and hooked it with the little boy’s. “I promise,” she told him solemnly. Klaus felt his breath hitch as he watched Caroline’s tender interaction with his brother.

As though noticing the way Klaus was staring at her, she cleared her throat, turning to the x-rays on her monitor, observing, “From Henrik’s x-rays, his first and second primary molars have begun to touch, which is what we’d expect in this age range. I don’t see any cavities or shadows which could indicate periodontal disease; Henrik has been taking great care of his teeth.” She high-fived his brother, telling him, Good job!

As he watched Caroline give his brother a glittering gold sticker, he couldn’t help but feel ridiculously pleased with himself, as though he gained the lovely dentist’s approval too. “Keep brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and floss regularly.” Glancing at Klaus with a twinkle in her eye, she said, “I’m expected to tell you to only eat candy every once in a while, but tonight’s Halloween and I bet your big brother has an epic trick-or-treat rout planned for you. So maybe just promise me that you’ll brush your teeth after every candy binge, ok?”

“You give floss out to trick-or-treaters, don’t you,” Klaus asked wryly.

Helping Henrik out of the chair, she rolled her eyes at Klaus, telling him, “Yes, but the floss comes in these really cute pumpkin dispensers and taste like pumpkin pie.” She handed his brother a small gift bag with cartoon teeth wearing witch hats, filled with toothpaste and the pumpkin-shaped floss dispensers that Henrik immediately started playing with. Smirking at Klaus, she said, “And I bet my trick-or-treaters will enjoy theirs too.”

As she walked them out, Klaus’ thoughts were racing, trying to determine a clever way to ask her out without it being awkward. Be casual. Keep it light. Just say something offhandedly. Caroline smelled like peppermint toothpaste and sunshine and it had completely thrown off his game.

She surprised him when she quietly murmured, “I usually hang out at Bonnie’s bar, The
“Count on it,” Klaus said, feeling the tips of his ears redden at her pleased grin.

Caroline waved at them as they pulled out of the parking lot, her pleasant smile slowly changing into a vicious blade as she returned to her exam room to gaze up at the elaborate mural. Splaying her nails wide until wisps of crimson smoke swirled around the images, creating a howling vortex to another dimension. A haggard crone appeared, gasping for breath as she failed to expel the saltwater from her lungs. Rendered speechless by Caroline’s magic, she sent a searing glare her way that only caused the clever blonde to chuckle in amusement.

Caroline swore, “Foolish witch, I swear by my power you will never harm another child again.”

Prompt: “Shh, candy now, world-ending problems later.”

*Her enemy had fallen this Hallows’ Eve. He just didn’t know it yet. Caroline’s blue eyes glittered maliciously, a hint of her wolf gold still remained as she gazed upon Elijah’s broken form restrained by the barrier spell that Enzo, their pack’s shaman, had placed upon the disgraced beta.*

Years ago, she’d run afoul of the powerful Mikaelson pack when she’d been a roaming omega, snacking on a delicious buck that had crossed her path. She hadn’t known she was on their territory until Elijah suddenly appeared, his biting, ugly words about her lowly omega status bothering her more than she cared to admit. Not one to mince words, Caroline snarled, startling the standoffish beta by lashing out with her claws, slicing just underneath his jawline. “That was a warning. You won’t get another,” she swore.

“What a fierce little wolf you are,” a new voice commented, as an attractive, dimpled stranger stepped into the clearing, the heat in his gaze surprising her with its intensity. *And that was how she’d met Klaus, ruthless alpha of the infamous Mikaelson pack.* Despite the irksome way her heart began to race in his presence, she every intention of moving on with her travels, but instead Klaus had enticed her to extend her stay.

While Elijah had learned his lesson and didn’t outwardly challenge Caroline again, she often caught him scowling at her while running a finger along the scar her claws had left behind. The underlying animosity of the beta complicated her stay with the pack, but she paid no mind as she expected to be leaving soon. *But then she and Klaus realized they were mates.*

Caroline had settled into her duties nicely as the alpha’s mate, and while she stayed busy, she still noticed Elijah’s unusual behavior. At first, she’d attributed it to his distaste of her humble
pedigree; however, she’d traveled to the shadowy corners of the world and knew something about expression magics — and she realized Elijah now carried that familiar dark stench. Their pack beta, Klaus’ brother, for fuck’s sake, had betrayed them all and had sided with their worst enemies, Qetsiyah and her coven.

Convincing her mate of his brother’s treachery had been a heartbreaking ordeal, but their bond gave them the strength to acknowledge what needed to be done. Klaus trusted her implicitly and she fought by his side under the blue moon when Elijah attempted to sacrifice their pack elders in a blood ritual to free the coven’s desolate god, Silas. Qetsiyah used her magic to bind Klaus in chains, and it tore Caroline’s soul when she realized as his second, her first duty was to protect the pack.

*And that meant battling Elijah.* She unleashed her white wolf, sinking her powerful jaws into Elijah’s forearm as she pulled him from the coven’s fire-laden circle. Always so arrogant, he never believed in her power and the look of surprise on his face as he failed to throw her off of him was a memory she planned to treasure for years to come. When he stupidly tried to punch her in the face, Caroline lashed out with her fangs, cleanly severing one of his fingers as he attempted to transition into his wolf.

She spat out his claw, making note where her trophy fell, even as she continued to pin him to the forest floor with her superior strength while Enzo began his spell to keep Elijah in stasis before his trial. Qetsiyah’s coven retreated once they lost Elijah, and Klaus had managed to free himself before Caroline reached him. They embraced, reaching out with their heightened senses to carefully catalogue each other’s injuries.

Once the stress of the battle dissipated, their bond settled once more and Caroline welcomed the calming influence of his wolf. As his mate, she felt a duty to be his steady, reassuring source of strength as well, so she immediately jumped into a strategy session with him, quietly discussing their options and pulling in various pack sentinels on the trek back to their lands.

However, once they were home and Klaus left her briefly to contact their allies within regional packs, Caroline’s wolf was restless, so she wandered into their enormous kitchen before finally succumbing to her desire to see her fallen enemy once again.

Which is why she found herself in the dungeon, stress-eating Halloween candy while toying with Elijah’s freshly cleaned claw she’d ripped off. She intended to add it to a necklace she wore that contained all of her important battle trophies, including her first kill. She’d just settled more comfortably into the chaise she’d commandeered from one of the living rooms when Klaus’ familiar scent surrounded her.

He sat next to her, rubbing the stubble along his jaw as he stared blankly at his brother’s unconscious form. “All this time — it was Elijah who betrayed our pack.”

“Yup,” Caroline agreed, tearing open another package of caramel M&Ms and snacking on a handful.

“He aligned himself with Qetsiyah’s coven and actively worked to free Silas,” Klaus continued, running his fingers through his messy curls in exasperation.

Rummaging around the overflowing candy bowls, her eyes lit up with excitement as she found Ghirardelli chocolate pumpkin squares. Offering him one while quickly stashing the rest
behind her back, she nodded, “And he was totally obvious about it.”

“Caroline,” Klaus growled irritably, “If Silas walks the earth again, the best-case scenario is triggering a violent war among the supernatural factions and at worst, causing the apocalypse.”

Caroline leaned over to kiss the tip of his nose, purposely leaving a chocolate smear behind. “We hashed all of these details out with our pack sentinels on the way back from the battlefield. Let our people celebrate this initial victory. Nothing further is being decided tonight.” As he opened his mouth to disagree, she kissed his cheek and firmly told him, “Shh, candy now, world-ending problems later.”
Part 7 - Klaroween Bingo

Chapter Notes

Here’s my final installment of all of my Klaroween Bingo prompts. Thanks so much for supporting me while my muse took a vacation to get extra creative with these prompts!

Prompt: “And...what are you supposed to be?”

*Fire. Why did it have to be fire?* Shamans used to banish her kind to the shadows. Fire still burned, but since Caroline’s awakening, it no longer meant her death. She’d lived two lives at once — her familiar life as a small-town sheriff’s daughter — and her other life, the one she was just discovering that hummed its secrets in her bones.

Caroline used her enhanced hearing to listen to the argument taking place in Elena’s living room. To her horror, she realized that Elena had killed Kol in this fool’s errand to find the cure. And now, Bonnie had trapped Klaus. *Children playing with matches.* Any loyalty she felt for her friends faded the moment they chose to kill the thousands of vampires Kol had sired — all for an insipid doppelganger who would never love any of them as strongly as she loved herself.

Feeling her blood sing as her monster emitted its familiar, mocking laugh, she crossed the threshold, startling the young witch who shouted, “Caroline! What are you doing here?”

She let her gaze flicker briefly to the boundary of flames that kept Klaus trapped. The hybrid eyed her curiously, the heat in his stare giving way to a wary alertness she’d never seen before. His monster seemed to sense the change within her, clearly trying to determine if she was a threat.

Ignoring him for now, she focused on Bonnie, taking a confident step forward meant to serve as a warning. “I’m here to choose a side.”

“What are you talking about,” Bonnie’s brown eyes widened in confusion as her pulse sped up. “You’re on our side, Caroline. You know this is the only way!”

A sinister cackle erupted as she corrected Bonnie, “No, I’m on my side. Also, there’s always another way — especially when it’s a choice between potentially unleashing an evil immortal warlock, or you know, *not.*”

Bonnie clenched her fists angrily, “That won’t happen! We’ve got it under control and we’ll be able cure Elena. And you too!”

Klaus snorted in amusement from behind the fire, exchanging a knowing glance with Caroline that made her beast wonder what he’d taste like. From the heat in his gaze, it didn’t look
like he’d mind if she took a nibble. “Bonnie,” she replied, slowly blinking until the blue of her eyes was replaced by monstrous black, “Even if I wanted the cure, it wouldn’t work on me.” At Bonnie’s gasp, she realized the skin exposed by her tank top had roughened, the dark brown spots of her beast’s fur starting to appear.

While Bonnie looked horrified, Klaus looked intrigued as he asked her, “And...what are you supposed to be?”

Before Caroline could answer, Bonnie backed away from her, shaking her head in disgust, “I’ve never seen a monster like you. You shouldn’t exist,” she screeched, straining to use her powers. When nothing happened, she glanced down at her hands before hysterically asking, “Why doesn’t my magic work on you?!”

“Seriously?! Bonnie, you do realize there’s other folklore besides the Western world, right? Stop limiting yourself to this sad little town,” Caroline told her, deciding against using the charms her kind was known for to sway Bonnie’s opinion. “Now, I’m going to release Klaus, so I suggest you get out of here.” As Bonnie scrambled to leave, Caroline called after her, “You’re a worthy enemy, Bonnie. But you’d be an even better ally. Come find me when you’re ready to choose which one you’d like to be.”

She felt Klaus’ eyes upon her, silently searching for her true intentions. “You didn’t answer my question, love,” he lightly admonished, his lips curling into a teasing smirk.

“Nope,” she answered cheerfully, completely immersing her hands now tipped with black claws into the fire barrier. As she used her monster’s energy to counteract Bonnie’s spell, she felt a deep sense of longing. Despite Klaus being a wolf, her creature still longed for a kindred spirit. Her kind typically lived in groups, and she’d been on her own long enough for her monster to be restless.

As the flames disappeared, Klaus flashed in front of her, a thousand questions dancing on the tip of his tongue, but instead, he told her with a seductive gleam in his eye, “I choose ally.”

Prompt: “My favorite holiday is tomorrow: half-price candy day.”

The heat was reassuring, a constant that he could control. Klaus always was methodical, in his previous profession as well as his current one. As owner and head chocolatier of Original Chocolates, he demanded perfection from his work, crafting his technique in the art of confections just as he once crafted other techniques long ago. He smiled nostalgically as the delectable chocolate pieces cheerfully began to bubble in the double boiler, recalling a time when this was one of his favorite tools to use when certain targets required motivation.

His musings were interrupted when his younger brother, Kol, stumbled into the kitchen, pretending to drop the miniature skull-shaped chocolates that he knew Klaus had spent most of last night painting with habanero-infused cocoa. “My favorite holiday is tomorrow: half-price candy day,” he cheekily told Klaus, selecting the largest skull on the tray and popping it in his mouth.
Klaus rolled his eyes at his mischievous brother’s antics, lightly admonishing him, “We are purveyors of gourmet chocolates, Kol. We don’t do half-priced candy. Besides, what does it matter to you? You eat all of our inventory for free.”

The melodic jingle of the antique brass bell alerted him to a customer and he felt his heart pound just a little faster at the chance that it might be his favorite patron. He turned off the burner, knowing Kol would get distracted and burn the chocolate. Hoping his brother was too busy being a shameless glutton in the kitchen, he stepped into the front of the shop, his breath catching slightly as he saw her familiar blonde curls. “Caroline, how lovely to see you,” he greeted, secretly pleased at the blush staining her cheeks.

Caroline was a stunning blonde who’d started frequenting his shop several weeks ago, admiring each of his confections with a seemingly practiced eye as she surprised him with her clever questions about his in-depth processes. She was friendly and engaging, and her visits each week were the highlight of his day. He wanted to ask her out, and was almost certain she’d say yes, but he kept hesitating. Caroline seemed bathed in light, and he carried the burden of so much darkness. It wouldn’t be fair to her.

“Klaus, I actually stopped by to see if you’d like to come to a party with me,” she said, nervously tucking a curl behind her ear in that endearing manner of hers.

“A Halloween party?! Count me in, darling,” Kol eagerly said as he came out of the kitchen, wiggling his eyebrows at her.

Out of the corner of his eye, Klaus spied a confectionary funnel, mentally using the stainless steel tubes to effectively cut off any further interruptions by his nosy brother.

Caroline replied sweetly, “Sorry, Kol, it’s kind of an exclusive invite and I already asked Klaus to be my date.”

“Fine,” he huffed, his brown eyes reflecting a wicked gleam as he announced, “it’s about time someone had the stones to do something about this awkward sexual tension — it obviously wasn’t going to be my dear brother.”

With an irritated sigh, Klaus bribed Kol with, “If you leave now, I’ll prepare all of the red velvet-black sesame truffles myself tomorrow.” He could see his troublemaker brother’s thought process as he debated the joy of teasing his older brother in front of his crush versus getting to sleep in late on their shop’s busiest baking day. Fortunately, Kol’s signature laziness won, and he raced out the door, leaving them with a final teasing grin.

Caroline had asked him out. Despite his resolve that he shouldn’t pursue her, he felt a flutter of excitement. “Is it a costume party, sweetheart,” he asked, noting with confusion at the way her entire demeanor seemed to change the moment they were alone.

All shyness seemed to evaporate and a confident woman stood before him, assessing him with an authoritative air he found immensely appealing. “Kind of,” she answered with an enigmatic smile. “Project White Oak is in jeopardy. You’ve been reactivated, Hybrid 01.” With an impish wink at his gobsmacked expression, she added, “I’m your commanding officer.”
Claws deliberately scraped along metal, the sound sending a chill down her spine. Slow, very soft scratches meant to mimic a small rodent — innocent noises easily explained. However, as Caroline’s steps hastened in the dark corridor, the scratching grew bolder, a more sinister tune taking shape in the night. She took a deep breath as she pressed the button on the elevator to head into the basement. They’d warned her about the elevator.

As the doors shut with an unearthly groan, Caroline could feel the icy presence of a dark soul. Clutching her iPad, she busied herself with her checklist, mentally going over her protocols. She’d never been to this storage facility before, but it was rapidly becoming infamous in some circles. The stories were usually enough to keep people away, but not Caroline. She knew what had to be done. Unfortunately, she had a job to do. The rusted steel walls began to pulse, almost as though a gigantic beast had swallowed her whole, and she shifted nervously.

Finally, she reached the basement, her steps echoing down long rows of storage units. She glanced down at her iPad to double-check the unit number, when she felt claws grip her throat, pinning her against the steel door with a resounding crash. “Seriously?! No wonder I was summoned,” she shouted angrily, focusing her energy to remove her assailant’s claws from her throat. “You won’t win against me, Klaus Mikaelson — trust me, you don’t have a ghost of a chance.”

She couldn’t decide if it was her irritated tone or her awful pun that surprised the Original into materializing before her, a baffled expression on his handsome face. “Who are you,” he asked suspiciously, stepping closer in another failed attempt to intimidate her.

Caroline stuck out her hand to shake his, telling him briskly, “Caroline Forbes, Director of DEAD.” At his confusion, she explained, “It stands for Departed Entities And Demons. I’m tasked with managing the more challenging newly deceased. To guide them through the haunting process, discuss a few guidelines, that sort of thing.”

His lips twitched in amusement as he said, “I’m a challenge, then, sweetheart?”

“No to me,” she replied with a casual shrug of her shoulders. Consulting her iPad, she told him, “It appears that Alaric Saltzman staked you after he was transformed into an Original Vampire.” At Klaus’ furious snarl, she hurried through the rest of her notes, “Because your corporeal form was terminated in this storage facility, your spirit still lingers here — along with your anger.”

Klaus seemed to pick up on her judgmental tone as he replied tersely, “I have every right to be angry, love. I had carefully crafted plans that have now been delayed until this inconvenience can be resolved.”

Tossing her hands in the air, her iPad nearly slipping out of her fingers, she told him sharply, “And you think I didn’t have plans? Things that I wanted out of my life?! When my car wreck happened, I was furious. I raged along that deserted stretch of highway, screaming into the void over and over. It took me a long time to finally let go of my anger, but when I did it, I was free.”

Her blue eyes suddenly became misty as she revealed, “But more importantly, my soul was
free. And that’s when I understood that death doesn’t have to be the end for us — we can make a new existence, a new life.” Shaking her head slightly, sending blonde curls dancing, she regained her composure and advised, “So I suggest your first step in your new life is to begin to let go of your anger toward Alaric.”

Klaus scoffed, crossing his arms in front of his chest, as he seethed, “That pathetic upstart is nothing more than a fleeting thought. It’s the Bennett witch upon whom I shall exact my revenge.”

Eyes lighting up excitedly, Caroline accessed her calendar and told him, “Okay, great — there’s actually a Bennett witch revenge group that meets every third Tuesday to discuss plans for exacting painful retribution upon the entire line of Bennett witches.” At his incredulous expression, she added helpfully, “It’s really more of a revenge group-slash-support group. And a great opportunity for you to mingle with some of the long-timers and trade stories about your schemes where the punchline is always, ‘And I would’ve gotten away with it if it hadn’t been for those meddling kids!’”

Despite Klaus’ obvious frustration, he let out a chuckle, the lines of his well-muscled shoulders relaxing in a way that made her realize she was far too aware of the things his toned body was doing underneath that gray henley. “You seem to have a great deal of experience dealing with incompetent villains,” he observed, the steel in his gray eyes softening.

Considering his statement, she wrinkled her nose slightly as she recalled some of her toughest cases as Director of DEAD. “Honestly, it’s the demons that make this job a nightmare. They’re such whiny babies when it comes to their own mortality. They’re all ‘pox upon your household’ threats and ‘carve out the enemies’ entrails to use in eternal cursing rituals.”

Letting out an aggravated sigh, she confessed, “Ever since the company cutbacks forced the Demon Department to be consolidated underneath my leadership, it’s been a nightmare.” Elbowing him teasingly, she added, “I’ll take a moody hybrid over that mess any day.”

Klaus brightened visibly at her slight flirtation, his dimples deepening as he teased, “I’m intrigued by your bold offer, sweetheart. Perhaps we could start with a drink and see how it goes before we get to the taking part of our evening, hmmm?”

Caroline was so startled, she nearly dropped Klaus’ Boo Welcome Kit. “Damon Salvatore,” she asked, her voice suddenly strangled. After Klaus confirmed with a slight nod, she laughed

Caroline could feel her face warm at his blatant invitation, and was surprised that she was considering taking him up on his offer. Normally, she kept her work separate from her social life, but there was something about the cocky hybrid that made her want to break her rules. Later, she told herself sternly. At least get through your orientation first before you give into your urge to dry hump him until all that’s left is a pile of ectoplasm. “So, rules,” she said brightly, doing her best to avoid gazing at his knowing smirk, “We advise against the following clichés: appearing in mirrors behind the living, rattling chains, or scaring pets.”

He asked wryly, “Anything else, sweetheart?”

Nodding, doing her best to keep her tone professional, she said, “We also ask that you limit your appearances in found footages. That whole Blair Witch-causing bullshit genre has been a fiasco. Seriously, that vain bitch has created a mountain of paperwork for my department!”

“I can imagine,” he commiserated, “once my witches finally resurrect me, I will personally ensure that she is no longer an issue for you, love. I’ve so many enemies to rip asunder — the Bennett witch, the doppelganger, Damon and Stefan Salvatore — what’s one more?”

Caroline was so startled, she nearly dropped Klaus’ Boo Welcome Kit. “Damon Salvatore,” she asked, her voice suddenly strangled. After Klaus confirmed with a slight nod, she laughed
bitterly. “It wasn’t really a car wreck. I just tell people that because the truth is more complicated. I was driving on a deserted highway at night when my headlights caught the shape of a man lying in the middle of my lane. I quickly stopped and raced over to him, thinking that he’d been hurt. Suddenly, he transformed into a monster, attacking me with his fangs until he drank his fill and then snapped my neck.”

Klaus growled at her words and she found she liked the idea of him sharing her pain; it had been a long time since someone had taken an interest like this and she couldn’t stop smiling. “So, how would you like a partner when you go exact your revenge,” she ventured hopefully.

At Klaus’ look of surprise, Caroline revealed, “Because I might know a few loopholes to expedite our jailbreak.”
Chapter Summary

In this story set in the 16th century, Klaus is an Original vampire who finds himself at the newly established Roanoke Colony to seek out a local tribal legend. It turns out that even an Original can still be surprised...

Chapter Notes

This Klaroline Sweet Swap Challenge story is written for the absolutely wonderful 3tinkgemini!

Quick history lesson: Not much is known about the lost colony of Roanoke. Colonists arrived from England in the summer of 1587, led by Governor John White. They rebuilt an outpost on Roanoke Island (today part of the Outer Banks of North Carolina). White returned to England to gather supplies and additional colonists, but his return was delayed by the war with Spain. When he finally managed to return to Roanoke Island three years later, the settlement was deserted. No one knows what happened to the colonists; the only clue was the word “Croatoan” carved on a tree. Over the centuries, one of the weirdest theories about what happened involves a local tribal myth about an ancient, evil reptile demon, which inspired my story below.

Warning: This one has gore/violence. And later, some really, really great sex. Ye hath been warned.

“We need the tonic of wildness...At the same time that we are earnest to explore and learn all things, we require that all things be mysterious and unexplorable, that land and sea be indefinitely wild, unsurveyed and unfathomed by us...”
— Henry David Thoreau, Walden: Or, Life in the Woods

If a reptile demon existed on this wretched crop of land, ‘twas quite well-hidden. Klaus waded through a tall clump of sea oats, eyeing the dense forest on the horizon. The Original vampire had been traveling the world, amassing his power by seeking out the oldest covens and curryng their favor to serve him. Over the centuries, he’d learned that many legends about mysterious creatures turned out to be merely powerful witches who guarded their privacy. He’d formed many an enviable alliance by seeking out these superstitions, and that had been his goal when he’d recently traveled to the New World.
Local tribal legends had reached his ears, an intriguing myth about an ancient reptile
demon that supposedly inhabited Roanoke Island. ‘Twas said to be able to possess humans and
cause them to perform all manner of unspeakable evil. The legends were so terrifying that the local
tribes had sworn off the island as a place of darkness and refused to settle anywhere near it. With
an indulgent smile and a shake of his curly head, he noted that despite these well-known stories,
that hadn’t stopped Sir Walter Raleigh from sending approximately 100 men, women and children
to establish a colony. The willful ignorance of humanity.

Unfortunately, Klaus hadn’t discovered anything of interest on this island — no powerful
covens and certainly not a preposterous reptile demon — and was frustrated that it seemed to be a
wasted journey. With an aggravated sigh, he started to head toward the outskirts of the tiny village
to turn a colonist into a quick meal when a flash of gold stepping out of the woods caught his eye.
Blonde curls peeked out from underneath a modest linen cap, and he watched in amusement as the
woman began twirling in a circle with her basket, her feet tapping merrily to a rhythm all her own.

He flashed to her, unsure if he wanted a quick meal or just to satisfy his curiosity about the
peculiar little human who seemed to radiate joy with every movement. “Good morrow, fair
maiden,” he said softly, barely refraining from chuckling as she jumped in surprise, an adorably
annoyed look upon her lovely face as she turned to him.

Her blue eyes narrowed suspiciously at his sudden appearance, but he was surprised at the
steel he saw as she straightened her shoulders and addressed him with a stinging rebuke, “’Tis quite
unseemly to sneak up on a lady like a shameless coward.”

Intrigued by the vengeful fire found within such a small creature, he smiled, bowing low
before her in a grand, sweeping gesture, as he said, “Please forgive my impertinence. ‘Twas not my
intention to startle thee. Klaus Mikaelson, at thy service.”

Self-consciously tucking blonde tendrils back under her cap, she seemed to study him
closely, her silent observation making him shift awkwardly. Nodding toward the elaborate gold
buttons upon his embroidered waistcoat, she said, “Thy garments announce thou are far from
home, Master Mikaelson.” With an impish smile, she pointed toward the crashing waves in the
distance and said in a voice full of mocking innocence, “Her Majesty’s court is that way, I
believe.”

Dimples flashing, he grinned at the little human’s cheeky demeanor. “Please, call me
Klaus. What, pray tell, may I call thee, fair maiden?”

Scoffing, she swung her basket to and fro as she told him, “So forward! My mother would
be most offended by such unseemly behavior.” Her blue eyes twinkling wickedly, she added,
“Caroline Forbes. I suppose thou may call me Caroline, then.” She reached into her basket, pulling
out a handful of ripe strawberries that she poured into his upturned hand. “Have a strawberry. I’ve
traveled the forest thrice over and the ones from this patch seem to be the sweetest I’ve ever
tasted.”

Charmed by her enthusiasm, he tasted several, savoring the pleasant sweetness of the wild
strawberries. “Delicious,” he pronounced, “I thank thee, Caroline.” He admired the sun’s rays as
they glinted off of her stray tendrils, barely resisting the urge to touch them and see if they were as
soft as they appeared.

Blushing prettily under his gaze, she bit into a particularly large strawberry, the juices
staining her lips. When her tongue peeked out to capture the wayward drops, he nearly groaned
aloud at the image she presented. It had been a long time since a human had captured his interest,
and the monster within him wanted to bathe in her innocence and light. Feeling his fangs threaten
to drop, he coughed loudly, turning away briefly to hide any wayward signs of his monster at play. *Gods, how long had it been since his control had been challenged?* He impulsively decided to prologue his stay in the colony and better acquaint himself with the intriguing creature before him.

“Are thou well,” Caroline’s sweet voice asked, a small frown marring her face as she studied him closely. “Mayhap we should get thee to some shade?” Surprising him with her firm grasp, she pulled him toward an enormous red cedar whose wide branches afforded them a comfortable rest from the sun. Inhaling the sharp, clean scent of the dark green needles, he watched as she rummaged through her basket to procure a waterskin, quickly thrusting it into his hands.

“Drink,” she commanded sweetly, with just a hint of the fire he detected earlier. Klaus humored her, taking a long sip before handing it back and gesturing for her to do the same.

“What is thy business in the New World,” she boldly asked, setting aside the waterskin. “We aren’t expecting the merchant ship with more supplies until next spring.”

Raising an eyebrow at her forwardness, he replied, “Sir Raleigh conscripted me to oversee his investment. It seems thy Governor White hath run afoul of creditors and his journey back to Roanoke Colony hath been delayed.” He’d already compelled the village elders, not wanting to complicate his search for the truth behind the local legend with the inconvenience of suspicious colonists. He was surprised by the pang of guilt he felt as he watched her flier of relief at his words, and he was somewhat wistful that he couldn’t tell her the truth. *She would run from a creature such as he and he didn’t fancy to see terror upon her lovely face.*

“Here, lest thou suffer from hunger pains,” Caroline said, lightly tossing him a red apple. “In my wanderings in the woods, I found a few apple trees. They should make our upcoming harvest celebration even more jubilant.”

He smiled, chewing thoughtfully as he mulled over her words. She seemed to spend a great deal of time wandering by herself in the woods. While he’d yet to find proof of a mystical influence or other supernatural danger on the island, it didn’t mean that Caroline couldn’t fall prey to other harm. “Perhaps I could accompany thee on thy adventures in the woods,” he lightly suggested, surprising himself with his concern for her.

“Without a chaperone,” she teased, “what an uproar we’d cause in the village, Klaus.” She opened her mouth to take a large bite of her own large apple, a distinctive popping noise causing him to look at her curiously. Nodding in understanding at his unasked question, she lightly touched her jawline, explaining, “‘Tis an old injury. Pray do not trouble thyself.” Her blue eyes boldly assessed him, only lowering her lashes demurely when he returned her gaze. Blushing once more, she said hastily, “Living the life of a nobleman, I don’t suppose thou hast cause for much injury.”

Klaus heard the challenge in her voice, and he inexplicably felt the need to show her he was more than a titled nobleman. Pushing up his breeches past his leather boots, he pointed to a jagged white scar just underneath his knee. “A souvenir from my childhood, sweetheart. Chopping wood in an ice storm can be quite perilous.” His bittersweet expression darkened when he recalled how his father had beaten him bloody for failing to properly cut down the tree once he’d injured himself.

Caroline surprised him as she lightly traced the messy lines of his scar with her fingertips. ‘Twas the only scar he still possessed from his mortal life, and it felt as though she was touching his humanity, drawing it out of him in the sweetest way imaginable. “Then thou wasn’t always what I now see before me,” she asked quietly, quickly withdrawing her hand as though realizing the impropriety of her actions.

Klaus took his time answering her question, her unwitting perceptiveness intriguing him.
“Mayhap I merely wish to be something thee would look upon favorably, love.”

Clearly taken aback by his brash words, she opened her mouth and closed it, whatever biting retort seemingly lost. Brushing the dust from her petticoat embroidered with tiny pink roses, she stood, companionably linking her arm with his as she said, “Well, thou can start by escorting me back into the woods to gather more fruit since we seemed to have eaten most of what I’d been tasked with gathering.”

“It would be my pleasure, sweetheart,” he replied, pleased that she seemed to be warming to him. Also, he reasoned, he could better see to her safety if she invited him along rather than having to skulk in the woods out of her line of sight. While he had yet to sense any large predators in the forest, he also noted that smaller prey seemed unusually sparse, and until he could find the cause of such an oddity, he would feel better keeping watch over her.

Gritting his teeth, Klaus realized that he had nearly bent his fork in half in his irritation. He was dining in the village square, watching feeble-minded Tyler Lockwood being far too familiar with Caroline. “I say, Mistress Forbes, ‘tis fortunate for thee I’ve finished plowing the remaining acreage and can now assist thee in fetching water.” Patting a bicep comically, he boasted, “Thou shall surely need my strength.”

Rolling her eyes, she forcefully cut into her roast pheasant, answering with mocking sweetness, “If I suddenly hath need of an insufferable braggart, I shall recall thy generous offer, Master Lockwood.”

While her mother, Elizabeth, soundly admonished her, Klaus could barely contain his glee at Caroline’s delightfully sharp tongue. Over the past few days, he’d settled into the colony quite nicely, his compulsion of the village elders solidifying his position of authority. He escorted Caroline into the woods during several of her gathering trips, giving him the opportunity to spend more time with her while also keeping an eye out for signs of any supernatural force that could have spawned the local folklore. Thus far, he’d yet to encounter any colonist possessed by an evil demon, and deemed it a fool’s legend meant to frighten off greedy settlers. Despite finding no trace of anything unusual in the woods, he found himself unable to move on from the colony. To move on from Caroline.

He’d learned that she craved the sunlight, loving nothing more than to stretch out upon a large, flat rock in a clearing near her favorite strawberry patch and bask the rays. He would sit beside her, spinning carefully edited tales of his travels, and he could tell by her voracious questions that she longed to escape the small island and see the world. Perhaps he would show it to her.

That sharp-tongued little firebrand had him completely under her spell and he marveled at the power a single human could have over an Original. Watching the oafish manner in which Tyler hungrily watched Caroline had him gnashing his teeth, and he toyed with the idea of compelling the blithering idiot to practice his nonexistent charms upon the village sheep. Finally, the evening’s meal concluded and he subtly maneuvered through the crowd until he was beside Caroline. Taking her hand, he spun her around until she squealed in delight, moving them behind the small cabin she shared with her mother.

He admired the way the lantern’s soft glow brought out her rosy cheeks, and he couldn’t stop his fingers from toying with the stray blonde curls that escaped from her linen cap.
“‘Tis quite forward of thee, Klaus,” she breathed, her hushed voice brimming with excitement.

A low growl escaped his lips as he leaned forward until their foreheads touched, telling her, “No more forward than that simpleton Tyler and his uncouth ways.”

“I’m surprised thou noticed, what with Camille’s constant prattle in thy ear,” Caroline huffed, her jealous tone pleasing him to no end.

Smirking, he asked, “Do I detect a hint of envy, sweetheart?” At her endearing scowl, he reassured her, “I only have eyes for thee.”

“Good,” Caroline told him firmly, taking him by surprise as she surged forward and quickly pressed her lips to his.

Reveling in her sigh of contentment, Klaus pulled back to caress her soft cheek, staring into her eyes as he teased gently, “Stealing kisses, sweetheart? Whatever does thou take me for?”

“Kisses aren’t stolen when freely given, Klaus,” she replied with flushed cheeks, stubbornly adding, “And I take thee for mine, Klaus.”

Her possessive tone struck a chord deep inside him, and he cupped her face with both hands as he deepened his kiss, feeling her hands slip between his waistcoat and linen shirt, her explorations tentative at first, but growing more confident as he moaned his approval.

“Caroline,” called out Elizabeth Forbes from the front of the cabin, causing her to jump away from Klaus as though burned.

Pressing her hand to her mouth, she shook her head slightly, muttering in embarrassment, “Good gracious, what thou must think of me, Klaus.”

“None of that, sweetheart. Thou must know of my high regard for thee,” Klaus reassured her with a tender kiss upon her open palm. “In fact, I would be honored to escort thee to the harvest festival.”

Blue eyes lighting up with excitement, Caroline gave a delighted squeal and said, “Yes, of course! I just know in my heart that our harvest festival shall be quite memorable.” Her warm smile made his heart give a funny little tweak and he found himself ridiculously excited for this trivial event that clearly meant so much to her.

If only my enemies could see the mighty Original vampire now, Klaus thought scornfully. He was out in the woods, attempting to hunt a deer to bring to the harvest festival. All because of that insufferable braggart, Tyler. Just that morning, Tyler had paraded a freshly killed turkey in the village square, loudly boasting of his hunting prowess in front of Caroline. As though her head could be turned by such a simpleton. However, Klaus couldn’t deny his competitive nature, which is why he planned to return with the largest deer the woods had to offer.

An abrupt shift in the wind caught his attention, and he gave an involuntary shudder as an inexplicable feeling of dread washed over him. Something was coming. A high-pitched whistle pierced the air, and he lifted his gaze to the clear sky suddenly grown dark and foreboding.

He didn’t register the first few objects that fell, but when one landed near his boot with a
muted thump, his eyes widened as he spied the dead owl. Nudging it off to the side with his heel, he let out a gasp of surprise when the tall grass suddenly became littered with them. *Owls were falling from the sky.* Local tribes believed owls were death omens, and Klaus had been around powerful sorcery long enough to recognize the effects it could have on nature. The foreign feeling of panic set in as he realized that Caroline could be in danger.

No longer concerned with keeping up the pretense of humanity, Klaus flashed to the large, flat rock in the clearing that was Caroline’s favorite place to sun herself. Gnashing his teeth in frustration when he didn’t find her there, he started to flash back to the village when a cacophony of screams mixed with the scent of blood filled the air. He paused at the outer perimeter of the village, eyeing the woven sapling fence warily as he noted the sun-bleached bark had been stained an ominous red. *Blood. So much blood.*

Hissing and growling noises distracted him, and he slid his gaze to the side of the large meetinghouse where a group of colonists were clawing and biting at each other despite the fact that all appeared to be mortally wounded. Their blood soaked the earth, and yet they grappled and warred even as their strength faded. *What in all of creation...?*

An ear-splitting shriek rang out, and his gaze slid over a pile of freshly slaughtered colonists to find Damon, the blacksmith’s apprentice, gripping a woman’s long brunette strands in one hand as he brought a pair of sharpened tongs to her hairline and slowly began to peel away her scalp, his dark eyes glittering with malice. Slick with blood, she blindly grabbed a heavy file from the top of the anvil and swung it in a large arc, hitting him squarely across his forehead with a resounding thud. Klaus recalled the woman’s name was Elena, and the village gossips claimed she’d captured the affections of both Damon and his brother. He assumed the legs broken at odd angles on the ground nearby was the brother.

Clearly dark magic had swept through the village to have them turn on each other in this grisly manner. He could feel a vibration in his bones as a powerful force threaded through the air, and while it didn’t affect him in the same manner, the prickling of his skin set his supernatural senses aflame.

Damon bellowed, stumbling back as he managed to rip away a large swath of Elena’s scalp and most of her ear. She screamed in pain and rage as her blood flowed freely, sinking her blunt teeth into his forearm and viciously ripping into his flesh before her body flopped to the ground and finally lay still.

Klaus felt his fangs itching to drop at the sight of so much carnage, but he restrained his impulses, still searching frantically for Caroline. Two women paid him no mind as they suddenly ran past him, clearly eager to attack Damon, who continued to wander unsteadily after his struggle with Elena. He recognized one of the women as the dour-faced Camille, whose incessant prattle during meals made him want to wrench her neck like an unplucked hen. She placed several swift kicks to the groaning man’s stomach and pelvis until he crumbled to the ground in agony. The other woman, Hayley, grabbed the heated tongs that had fallen from his grasp, plunging the hot iron through his eye. Wailing as his flesh burned and sizzled, he screamed until he was hoarse.

The ferocity of the humans attacking each other left Klaus gobsmacked; he’d never witnessed such a frenzied massacre without explanation. Once Damon was dead, the two women turned on each other, delivering blows along their bodies with painful grunts and shrieks. Suddenly, Hayley dug her fingers into the spongy flesh of Camille’s neck, a shout of triumph falling from her lips as she harshly shredded the skin until the thick blood poured forth, staining them both as they tumbled to the ground.
Hearing the thud of racing footsteps, he turned in time to see Elizabeth run through the fields, wielding a long, curved scythe above her head. Before he could stop Caroline’s mother, she swung the blade over the still-twitching bodies of Hayley and Camille, viciously stabbing them until they no longer moved. He flashed to her side, gripping her arm as he said, “What in the hell hath become of thy village?! Where is thy daughter?”

Her blind rage briefly shifted to bewilderment as she told him, “We must bleed. ‘Tis time.” As she tried to wrench her arm from his iron grasp, she muttered in confusion, “Daughter? No daughter.”

“Caroline! Thy daughter is Caroline,” Klaus shouted, gracefully stepping out of the way as Elizabeth attempted to swing her blade at his head.

A low growl erupted from her throat as she snarled, “No daughter! Caroline was found wandering in the woods when we first arrived on the island.”

Too stunned by her revelation, Klaus didn’t bother trying to stop Elizabeth as she stumbled toward another group of colonists, wildly waving her bloody scythe. As he watched the mob bloodily grapple with each other, he narrowed his eyes as he considered her words. The implications.

The wind shifted, bringing with it her familiar, girlish giggle. Caroline. Following the sound, he flashed to the armory, unable to mask his surprise at what he saw when he wrenched the narrow door open and entered the small building. Despite her slight frame, Caroline held Tyler against a wall with one hand, his useless struggles causing several broadswords to clatter to the dirt floor with a loud clang.

Clearly hearing his arrival, Caroline kept her powerful hold on Tyler’s neck, but glanced over her shoulder to regard him with a sly smile. “Klaus, I’d hoped thou would join us.” She slowly blinked, her blue eyes bleeding to black as the pupils disturbingly narrowed to a slit. Like that of a venomous snake.

He’d come to Roanoke Island to seek out the truth behind the tribal myth of an ancient reptile demon. All of the signs had been there — he’d just been too foolish to see them. Caroline basked in the sun as though she craved the warmth — like a snake. The popping noise her jaw made likely indicated it could be unhinged — also as that of a snake.

“Thou journeyed to my island to find me. Am I still pleasing to thine eyes,” she asked, displaying curved fangs that she seductively caressed with a forked tongue.

Klaus felt his own fangs drop, black veins darkening his pale skin as his vampire face emerged. “Even more than I could’ve imagined, love,” he confessed hoarsely, flashing over to her as he felt the absurd need to show off his own supernatural prowess.

Lust flashed in her eyes, the snakelike pupils glowing as she seemed to admire his monster. “And you’re considerably more sturdy than I realized,” she told him, jerking her head at Tyler who continued to wordlessly struggle, adding “certainly more so than young Tyler. Would thee care to join me for supper?”

Intrigued, he took his place on the other side of Tyler, watching Caroline closely so he wouldn’t miss the moment she started to feed. He rarely fed from the same human with another, finding it far too intimate. However, with Caroline, he found himself instantly aroused by the idea, and was curious to see how the experience would differ with a demon.
She bent her head to Tyler’s neck, smoothly slicing her razor-sharp fangs into his skin and releasing a steady stream of warm, rich blood. The familiar copper scent made his monster snarl, but held himself back to watch her take several generous gulps. Tyler’s face contorted in agony, his mouth open in a silent scream, obviously under Caroline’s mind control. When she finally released Tyler’s neck with a sigh of satisfaction, a small trickle of crimson fell from her lips.

Klaus groaned at the sight of her forked tongue seductively licking at the stray drops. Recognizing the challenge in her raised eyebrow, he dug his fangs into Tyler’s neck with relish, hearing her tiny moan of pleasure as she savored their prey once more. He repositioned a weakening Tyler so that he could brush his fingers teasingly against the nape of Caroline’s neck, pleased at the slight twitch she gave.

She returned his touch in kind, a slight scrape of her nails against his collarbone before ripping a jagged line through his waistcoat and undershirt, the sumptuous silk parting to reveal his chest to her insistent exploration. He groaned at her touch, allowing her to take the final vestiges of Tyler’s life force before tossing his corpse into a dusty corner near several gunpowder barrels. With a lusty growl, he gripped Caroline tightly, tearing apart the bodice of her simple gown until she was bare before his greedy gaze.

She tilted her face to steadily meet his stare, a hint of her familiar blue seeping back into the narrow slits of her darkened pupils. “Thou thinks to devour me? Thy boldness is arousing, Klaus.” She hooked her fingers into the waistband of his breeches, shredding the fabric until only narrow strips clung to his hips. She surged forward, attacking his lips with a feverish passion, their monstrous fangs playfully slashing lips and tongues in a symphony of pleasurable pain.

An explosion of flavors overwhelmed his senses as their blood mingled together on his tongue along with that of their prey, sending him reeling. In his many centuries, he’d never tasted anything as delectable as Caroline; her blood was a heady mix of spice and sweetness and he wanted to bathe in her essence until he drowned. “Thy taste is pure ambrosia of the gods, sweetheart,” he growled against her lips, trailing urgent kisses along her throat and breasts.

Caroline rubbed sensually against him, her blood-smeared hands massaging his chest as she flashed him a wicked grin. Her explorations seared his flesh in the most delicious of ways and as her fingers trailed lower, his cock swelled against her hip. He couldn’t stop the helpless grunt that escaped his lips as her hand gripped him tightly, coating his cock in Tyler’s blood. Her agonizingly slow strokes left him panting, and he chased her erotic movements with his hips, wordlessly beseeching her to increase the tempo.

As his pleasure climbed higher, he reached out to caress her breasts, alternating his touches from soft caresses to firmly grasping her flesh, reveling in her gasps of surprise as she thrust her hardened nipples into his eager hands. She squeezed his leaking tip, bringing him to that marvelous edge where pain met pleasure and her confident strokes finally sent him tumbling into bliss. He moaned, marking the soft flesh of her belly with his release as his softening cock fell from her fingers.

Dragging a sharp nail across his essence, she impishly placed it in her mouth, savoring his taste before telling him, “Thou hath fire in thy veins. It warms me.”

“Then permit me to warm thee further, love,” Klaus growled, attacking her crimson-smeared lips with a ferocious kiss before getting on his knees to gaze up at her with a playful smirk. Tyler’s blood had painted macabre streaks down her enticing body, and Klaus lapped at the edges with the tip of his tongue. Caroline’s impatient huff made him chuckle as he’d purposely licked her flesh around her center, but avoided the little pleasure button that she clearly needed him to touch.
She surprised him by gripping his dirty blonde curls with her sharp nails, exerting considerable strength as she playfully warned, “I’ve no qualms about leaving thee aching and unsatisfied while I venture out into the village to seek my pleasure. Perhaps there’s yet a few I’ve left alive who would be eager to please me.”

The images her taunts evoked stirred his monster, and the thought of another touching her made him snarl possessively. Harshly gripping her hips, his gaze burned into her as he swore, “I accept thy challenge.” He eagerly suckled at her center, diffusing whatever witty retort she’d prepared as she gave a strangled cry and circled her hips to encourage his sensual explorations.

The scent of her arousal was overwhelming, and Klaus reveled in the way her beautiful body responded to his touches. Her soaked core trembled as he alternated between soft and rough strokes, and the moment he slid a finger into her channel seemed to be her undoing as she released a guttural groan. With a soft hiss at the back of her throat, she took command, rubbing her center along his tongue as she continued to chase the waves of pleasure.

His cock hardened once more, and he pulled Caroline to the dirt floor, draping her over him as she continued to writhe from his burning touches. Once she’d recovered, she straddled his torso, her slit pupils glittering as she flicked her forked tongue to appraise him. “I crave more of thee, Klaus,” she purred, sliding down his body until her gore-smeared lips brushed his aching cock.

“Take thy fill, sweetheart,” he replied, unable to help the involuntary jerk of his hips as she engulfed his cock and began a series of fluttering motions with her tongue that felt wonderfully wicked. Her mouth was sweet agony as she applied just the right pressure with the sharp points of her fangs to keep him on the edge of release.

With a savage growl, Caroline removed her lips, quickly reseating her body above him as she slid his cock inside her wet core. The sour stench of human fear and the coppery blood mingled with the smells of their combined arousal, a riotous feast for the senses that inflamed their bodies as they rutted together upon the cool soil. She raked her nails down his chest, bending forward to sensually lap as his blood welled to the surface.

Moaning at the feeling of her rough tongue as she teased his flesh, he gripped her arse and set a fierce pace with his strokes, causing her to gasp as she continued to ride him. She was a stunning, wild creature as she tossed back her blonde hair, tugging at her breasts as her core began to spasm around him, her ecstasy nearly complete. With a coarse shout, he found his release once more, curling his powerful arms around her as they watched the sunbeams lazily filter in from the gaps in the narrow door.

“Does thou still desire to find another for thy pleasure,” Klaus asked, unable to keep the smugness from his voice.

Caroline responded with a throaty chuckle, using a nail to trace a pattern along his neck. “Thy boasts are well-founded and I can attest to thy prowess. Perhaps I may keep thee yet for my pleasure, Klaus,” came her amused reply.

Later on, they stood together on the shore, the dark blue water of the Sound at their backs while they quietly studied the dense forest on the horizon. Their clothes had been torn apart during their passionate tryst, so they’d dressed in blood-stained clothes stolen from the dead colonists. It had been ages since Klaus had been excited as he pondered his future, but now that he’d found his intriguing Caroline, he found himself most ardent to set off on their next adventure together.
He turned, admiring her blonde waves in majestic disarray as he observed, “It shall be at least another planting season before Governor White settles his debts with creditors and can complete the return voyage to the colony. Perhaps we should leave him a message before setting out on our journey?”

“Carve my true name in the oak tree that marks the settlement,” Caroline told him, her eyes returning to their human shape, only the faintest glow hinting at her supernatural origins.

At his questioning brow, she added with a wicked grin, “Croatoan.”
Drowning Secrets in the Sea

Chapter Summary

In this AU human story, Klaus discovers the archaeological find of the century with an ancient underwater city and now he’s expected to share credit with a brazen blonde upstart who enjoys arguing and flirting in equal measure.

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: This is a gift for the lovely klarolinesbuttons — thank you for all of the wonderful works you created for the Klaroween Bingo Event! I hope you like your gift!

Historical note: In 2001, there was an amazing archaeological find — the underwater city of Heracleion, that plunged into the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Egypt nearly 1,200 years ago. Definitely ‘worth a Google’ when you see the amazing artifacts they’ve found!

“The thief is not the one who steals, but the one that is caught.”

— George Bernard Shaw

Its bite radius seemed to be the size of a bloody golf cart, and rather than shrink back in terror when faced with arguably the most dangerous shark species in the world, Caroline appeared to be glaring at it while forcibly grabbing several gold Egyptian idols she’d excavated from the seafloor. Klaus swore that blonde menace was bloody insane as she faced off with the aggressive bull shark, defiantly swimming off without a backward glance to see if it intended to chase after her.

As lead archaeologist for the ancient city of Heracleion, Klaus had endured a mind-numbing amount of red tape as his board of regents dictated every aspect of his research off the coast of Egypt, but he lost count of the number of times he almost quit after they sent Caroline Forbes to join his team. She arrived a month ago, with her sunshine curls, mischievous blue eyes and maddening spreadsheets that rearranged every one of his excavation processes. And her insufferable know-it-all attitude left him gritting his teeth after he secretly fact-checked her various research arguments with him only to discover that she might be the foremost expert in Egyptology.

And that was when he knew he was in trouble. Because in his decades-long academic
career, he’d never allowed anyone or anything to distract him from his research. But Caroline was a force of nature who swept into his life and left him completely out of his depth for the first time in his life. Klaus had tried to maintain a comfortable professional distance, but his control was worn thin every time she argued with him about proper sarcophagi preservation while wearing those distracting mid-thigh scuba suits she preferred.

Shaking his head in irritation at the blonde’s recklessness, he forced himself to ascend slowly in the warm water to avoid decompression complications. When he finally broke the surface, he scowled at the cheeky grin that greeted him. Caroline leaned over the lower deck of their research vessel to help him scale the steel ladder. “Took you long enough, Klaus. I was starting to think my friend decided to play tag with you,” she teased.

“Our ‘friend’ has a fearsome reputation for jaws of steel that ruthlessly hang on with no tolerance for provocation, and you chose to taunt the beast by encroaching on his territory. What the hell were you thinking,” Klaus growled, hating how his schoolboy crush made him irrationally angry at his colleague.

Rolling her eyes, she bent over, inadvertently giving him a front-row seat to the perfection that was her magnificently sculpted arse as she retorted, “Well, I was thinking my friend could wait his turn because it’s finders keepers.” Straightening with one of the tarnished gold idols, she shrugged carelessly, “It’s the law of the land.” Excitedly stroking the statue, she gushed, “Do you see the beautifully rendered electrum? I estimate it’s 80% gold and the pharaonic head covering almost perfectly mimics the Amun-Gerb temple burial masks!”

It was that unique adventurous spirit, along with her obvious enthusiasm for their scholarly endeavors, that had him completely captivated, Klaus realized with a small smile. Just the other day, the bloody lunatic had casually shooed away a venomous lionfish that had grown curious about an extraordinarily well-preserved stele she’d unearthed.

But she wasn’t always so fearless. The first week she’d arrived, they’d breached a narrow passageway in the underwater cave where the oldest artifacts seemed to be located. Excited at the prospect of uncovering more priceless treasures, Caroline barely paid attention to the rope guideline strung along the cave walls as she paddled deeper into the dark cavern, their safety lights reflecting off of the vibrant red and orange coral.

Irritated that she wasn’t following basic marine archaeology protocol, he quickly increased his speed to catch up her, intent on airing his grievances with his board of regents as soon as they surfaced. However, his indignation was short-lived when a cloud of air bubbles suddenly blocked the passage. Concerned about Caroline, he slowly floated forward, taken aback when he saw her furiously struggling against a jagged crevice. Her eyes were fearful as she flailed her limbs wildly, clearly unable to break free.

Hating the helpless look of panic on Caroline’s face, he quickly moved into her line of sight, doing his best to calm her down so that she wouldn’t prematurely deplete her oxygen supply. His presence seemed to calm her down slightly, although she held her body rigid as he leaned closer to investigate the tangled ball of fishing line that prevented her tank from clearing the narrow passage.

Klaus gestured for Caroline to grip her regulator so that it would remain safely in her mouth while he carefully helped her out of the buoyance compensator so that he could cut through the tangled line with his diving knife. Once he’d freed her scuba equipment, he helped her put everything back on, noting the slight tremor in her hands as she snapped the buckle in place.

He watched her carefully as they slowly made their ascent, pleased to see that she’d shaken
off her fear and was now swimming with smooth, confident strokes once more. Once back on deck, she’d quietly sat there, dangling her feet off the side as she stared aimlessly at the stunning turquoise waves that lapped gently at the boat.

Sitting next to her, Klaus quietly told Caroline, “I was diving an ancient Greek trading vessel in the Black Sea a few years ago, and managed to get tangled in an old lobster trap. I lost my head for a bit, thrashing about in the water, but fortunately, one of the other divers appeared to help me. Later, he told me, ‘The sea is full of tricks; it doesn’t give up its secrets without a fight.’”

She considered his words, squeezing his hand as she murmured, “I’m used to working alone. I’m very grateful you don’t, though.” she told him, the depth of her gaze searing into him, leaving him to wonder about all the things she’d left unsaid.

Realizing she’d caught him staring at her a beat too long, he replayed her words and finally answered, “Yes, yes, you’ve already established your superior appraisal skills with this site’s artifacts. Fairly certain I caught you drooling over the gold coins of Ptolemy the First you had spread out over the tables yesterday morning.”

“Only because you kept classifying them incorrectly! It’s supposed to be creation date then metal weight, or else those stoner interns you brought along will never get them catalogued properly in time for your university’s unveiling,” she argued cheerfully.

As she carefully set down the idol, she added, “And, it’s thanks to my superior appraisal skills that I secured your funding for this dig site another two years. Seriously, Klaus, you’ve been short-changing yourself for years if you’ve simply relied on a cursory estimated value of the artifacts you excavate. When you write reports to your board of regents, you have to sell them on not only the historical value of the artifacts but also the prestige and interest they’ll generate when unveiled to the public. They care about money and generating even more money under a thinly veiled guide of scholarly endeavors.”

He grumbled, realizing she had a point. “You’re quite well-versed in the duplicitous ways of academia, sweetheart. You must drive your own board of regents barking mad trying to keep up with your exacting demands,” he observed fondly.

Caroline replied, “It’s really more about knowing people and how to appeal to their greed.”

Klaus noted the slightly bitter tone to her voice, suddenly feeling the need to commiserate. “I know a fair bit about the greed in people’s hearts,” he began, resisting the urge to brush aside her wet strands when she jerked her head sharply at his statement. “My father fancies himself a world-renowned collector of priceless artifacts, but he’s actually a foul cutthroat who exploits the black market in an attempt to sate his bottomless greed.”

Raising an eyebrow, she asked wryly, “So, you set out to become an accomplished archaeologist in one of the oldest civilizations known to man out of spite? I can respect that.”

Not wanting to discuss his wretched father another moment, Klaus gave her a brief smile, and asked, “Well, what of your parents then? We’ve been so busy navigating the underwater work site that I’ve barely learned anything about you, love.”

Carefully stowing the waterproof metal detectors, Caroline bit her lip, something he’d learned she did whenever she was debating something. “I never knew my father. You’ll have to tell me if that’s better or worse than having one like yours. My mom’s all I ever had.”

Klaus observed the hard edge her voice took on — there’d only been one other time he’d
heard it — when she found out he’d contacted her university to double-check her credentials. She’d been furious that he hadn’t trusted her and much to his chagrin, had forwarded him the incredibly detailed background check his own university had performed when they vetted her to join his research project. “Apologies, love, I didn’t mean to pry,” he replied, “I just thought since we’d been spending so much time together, it might be nice to get to know each other,” he finished awkwardly, feeling the tips of his ears burn slightly at the quirk of her lips.

Caroline shook her head, scattering water droplets across the deck. “I’d like that.” Letting out a long sigh, she helped him carefully place the idols into bins of nitric acid and fresh water to start their preservation. “But, getting to know me is kind of a depressing conversation that requires many, many drinks. So, why don’t we finish up here and the first round is on me.”

The acrid smoke filled his lungs as he made his way through the narrow bar, looking for Caroline. It was one of the oldest bars in Alexandria, a mishmash of old world-charm of the ancient Mediterranean port city with the eclectic vibe of the various tourists that drunkenly wandered in from the cruise ships. Klaus finally spied her blonde waves as she leaned over the well-worn bar to order a drink. When a drunken lout squeezed in beside Caroline and grabbed her wrist, her voice carried over the tinny, muffled classic rock playing through the speakers. “Let go before I make you let go.”

Klaus was taken aback by the heat in her threat — even when furious, her tone was steel wrapped in sunshine. He was distracted from his thoughts when the stranger aggressively jerked her closer, slurring, “Just having some fun, but now I get to teach you uppity bitch a lesson.”

Just as Klaus raced forward, blood rushing angrily in his ears, Caroline’s scowl turned into a dangerous blade and in one fluid move, she’d delivered a vicious uppercut to his sagging jawline with her left fist, and when he quickly released her right hand, she wrenched the boorish tourist’s arm behind his back, effectively pinning his sweaty head to the scuffed bar top with a hard thunk. Klaus arrived in time to hear Caroline hiss in his ear, “Go back to your cruise ship before I teach you a lesson, bitch.” With a final, cheeky pat across the back of his pastel polo shirt, Caroline let the stranger make his hasty, stumbling retreat out of the bar.

Raising an eyebrow, Klaus couldn’t deny the small thrill he felt watching Caroline display this unexpected new side. “Impressive. I dare say you could use a drink.”

As he signaled the bartender, she slapped a brown leather wallet on the bar between them, casually digging through it until she held up a credit card, announcing, “I agree, and it looks like Mr. Saltzman generously has agreed to foot the bill.”

Against his better judgement, he fell for that impish wink she threw him, and slid the card toward the bartender to start their tab. Clinking their beer bottles together, he commented, “Care to tell me where you learned how to fight like that? Or that pickpocket routine, sweetheart?”

Admiring the scribbles in various language along the wall behind them, she shrugged, “I grew up in a rough neighborhood. When no one’s looking out for you, you’ve got to look out for yourself. And I may have picked up a few other...unorthodox skills somewhere along the way.”

As Klaus considered what Caroline wasn’t saying, he asked carefully, “Earlier you mentioned it was just you and your mother. What happened that she wasn’t looking out for you, love?”
“My mom’s been sick for a long time which is why I started taking on more specialized assignments to try to keep up with her medical bills,” she ventured, taking a long drink from her bottle.

Feeling a pang at her confession, he couldn’t help but inquire, “How bad is it, sweetheart?”

“She needs a kidney and I’m not a match,” Caroline told him, worry lining her brow as she stared off into space. “There’s this waiting list and it’s her only hope now and I don’t know what I’ll do if...” she trailed off as she seemed to struggle to rein in her emotions.

Klaus hated how defeated she sounded, all traces of her vibrant personality were gone and she looked so alone that he squeezed her hand. He suddenly felt the unexpected urge to tell her, “I had a little brother, Henrik, who was sick. By the time they found the leukemia, there was only time for a few rounds of chemo...we lost him within a year. I read him Greek mythology stories every day he was in the hospital.” A small, sad smile touched his lips as he added, “His favorite story was the one about the minotaur and the maze.”

“My mom likes me to read Ovid to her when she’s getting her dialysis treatment. We’re both fans of Jason and the Golden Fleece,” Caroline said, nudging his shoulder.

Klaus contemplated his beer as he revealed, “I think that’s part of why I became an archaeologist — to connect with that childlike wonder at ancient myths bigger than the world as we know it. There’s always a mystery to unravel with each new artifact; we’re restoring a bit of humanity’s lost heritage that we never even knew was missing. Unlike the other priceless works lost to the ages and likely never to be recovered like the coronet of Llywelyn ap Gruffudd, or the end piece of the Bayeux Tapestry.”

Caroline’s hand stilled as she reached for her beer, finally grasping it to clink it against his once more, cheerfully telling him, “I’ll drink to that.”

He suddenly was aware of how close they were sitting. He watched her carefully, cataloguing too many emotions to decipher them properly. Heart pounding, he decided to take a chance. He closed the space between them, meeting her lips with his in a kiss that was hesitant but hopeful. Ignoring the catcalls of the drunken patrons, he deepened their kiss, encouraged by the way her hands touched his face, as if wanting to keep him in this moment.

Suddenly, Caroline broke their kiss, her blue eyes full of regret as she told him sadly, “I can’t. We’re heading in different directions and it’s not fair to you. I’m sorry, Klaus.” Not waiting for his response, she abruptly left, disappearing into the night as he struggled to understand what happened.

Several shots later, Klaus left the bar, weaving a bit as he made his way through the market square and back to the cramped office space that had been rented for the research project. He didn’t understand Caroline’s rejection — they were both respected archaeologists specializing in the same regional histories, their research project had been extended for several years — why did she believe were they heading in different directions? His thoughts were muddled from drinking, but he wasn’t sure it would make more sense after he sobered.

He fumbled with his keys, finally fitting the correct one in the lock. He didn’t bother turning on the lights in the downstairs work area, instead slowly trudging through dusty piles of boxes until he was at the foot of the stairs that led to the staff’s sleeping quarters. As he began the
unsteady climb, he paused when he heard Caroline’s irritated voice. From the sound of it, she was arguing with someone on the phone. “It’s over, do you hear me? I’m done!”

Was she fighting with a lover? He strained to hear more, not caring about something as inconsequential as manners if it turned out Caroline had only turned him away because she needed to end something with someone else first. “No,” she swore angrily, “no more. I told you I’m done and I mean it!” Klaus held his breath, waiting for her to speak again, but when he didn’t hear anything further, he finished climbing the stairs to his quarters and fell into bed.

The next morning, the sun blinded him, and from his throbbing head, he could tell his hangover was shaping up to need more than his usual greasy breakfast to cure. Groaning, he clumsily pulled on less-rumpled clothes and made his way over to Caroline’s room across the hall. He hesitated before he knocked, replaying last night’s events from their heated kiss to her confusing rejection and then the argument he overheard. He cared for her, but if she didn’t feel the same, surely he could set aside his hurt so that they could continue working together.

_Easier said than done, mate._ Every time he replayed her words and the regret in her eyes, his heart sank in his chest. Rubbing a hand over his scruffy jaw, he squared his shoulders as he gently knocked. “Caroline? Would you care to join me for breakfast before we start cataloging our excavations?” Frowning when there was no response, he knocked a bit more firmly, her door swinging wide to reveal her bed was already made. Gray eyes narrowed, he noticed that the small closet was open, showing that it was empty save for a few coat hangers.

Caroline was gone.

His hangover was no match for the rising panic he felt, terrified that he’d pushed her away with his impulsive kiss. He raced downstairs, unsure what to do. Spying his phone on a desk, he grabbed it, frantically looking for her number. Before he made the call, however, a noise near the back of the office caught his attention.

A local bank had donated a vault to secure the artifacts, and Klaus realized that the noise was coming from inside. Feeling a slight glimmer of hope that it was Caroline, he ran inside, stopping short at the sight that greeted him.

It was the flash of silver on the gun that he noticed first, his gaze tracing the length of the pistol until he registered that it was his father who held the gun. “Mikael,” he snarled, refusing to show this contemptable man any fear. “We haven’t spoken in years. Why are you here?”

Mikael’s smile was cruel and twisted as he revealed, “To finish the job my assistant couldn’t get done.”

Klaus hated the way his father possessively ran his hand across the piles of gold and bronze coins, eyeing the intricately carved statue of Hapy, god of floods, with pure greed. “What are you on about? What assistant?”

He nodded behind Klaus, the blade of his smile sharpening as he greeted, “Why, the lovely Caroline, of course.”

Caroline suddenly entered the vault, stoic and coldly calculating as she studied Mikael. “I told you I was out. I’m not helping you steal this treasure from Klaus.”

Klaus felt his temper rise, forgetting the gun his father had trained on him as he growled at her, “All this time, you’ve been working for my father?! Was anything you told me real?!”
“Yes,” she snapped, momentarily tearing her eyes away from the gun, “My mom was on a waiting list for a kidney but Mikael used his connections to get her kicked off of it. He said he’d only get her put back on if I pulled this job for him.” At Klaus’ noise of disgust, she shouted, “That list is her only chance! She’ll die without a kidney and I already used everything I had to pay her medical bills — there was nothing left to try to buy her one off the black market!”

Despite his anger at being betrayed, he also felt a sliver of sympathy for her situation. It was the most vulnerable he’d ever seen her, even when he saved her in the underwater cave it didn’t compare to the raw emotion he now found in her eyes, and it took everything in him to hang onto his fury. Gray eyes narrowed, he replayed her words, picking up on her obvious familiarity with the black market, not to mention the other unusual traits he’d noticed but carelessly shrugged off. Whipping his head around, he asked Mikael suspiciously, “You could’ve used any thief to steal from me. Why Caroline?”

“Because she’s the best grifter in the world,” he answered with an approving nod in Caroline’s direction, “among her illustrious accomplishments, she stole the end piece of the Bayeux Tapestry from a collector whose family had hidden away for generations.”

Klaus’ gray eyes widened and he couldn’t help but be impressed — the final section of that famous medieval work had vanished sometime before the 16th century. Over the centuries, it only had been spoken of in whispers in the academic and art worlds, believed to be lost forever.

Caroline seethed as she corrected his father, “I’m a treasure hunter, NOT a thief.” Flicking her gaze back to Klaus, she explained, “It’s how I knew so much about ancient artifacts.”

“Obviously, you’re not a professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago,” Klaus muttered, feeling completely ridiculous — he’d been quietly working on a lecture series that he’d intended to petition his own university to approve a visiting professorship for Caroline once their project grant had been depleted.

Caroline sheepishly replied, “I may have picked up some digital forgery skills at some point,” she shrugged, “I knew your board of regents performed extensive background checks, so I wanted to be prepared.”

Mikael sighed mockingly, “As amusing as this interlude has been children, it’s time to put an end to this embarrassing debacle.” Waving his pistol in Caroline’s direction, he ordered, “Start hauling the treasure to the front of the office. I’ve arranged for secure transport within the hour.”

Despite the obvious danger, she narrowed her gaze at him as she challenged, “And if I don’t? Seriously, do you have any idea how many times I’ve had a gun pointed at me in my line of work?”

While he admired her courage, Klaus barely resisted the urge to roll his eyes at her complete lack of self-preservation. He realized he was subconsciously angling his body as though trying to block Mikael’s line of sight.

Mikael’s voice retained that cold, vicious certainty that had terrified Klaus as a child. “If you don’t follow my instructions, the fact that I will shoot both you and my worthless son is inconsequential. What should concern you is the depraved, agonizing torture I will visit upon your poor, sickly mother once you’re dead.”

“Leave Caroline out of this, Mikael,” Klaus shouted, his heart plummeting when he saw how pale she’d grown the moment her mother was threatened.
The fleeting warmth he felt when she flashed him a grateful smile was doused when his father chuckled darkly. “Useless boy, too foolish to understand he’s already dead.” The deadly click of the hammer as he cocked the pistol echoed throughout the bank vault, and Klaus hated the helplessness he felt, knowing he was about to die.

Suddenly, Caroline whipped out a black handgun that had been concealed behind her back, tucked in her waistband. “Not him, Mikael. You.” She confidently stepped away from Klaus, keeping her cold gaze trained on Mikael.

“You’re nothing but a scared little girl. You won’t pull the trigger,” Mikael taunted her with a sinister curl of his lip. Klaus registered the predatory way his father stalked toward Caroline, and he instinctively moved to protect her.

A shot rang out with a sharp crack, sending adrenaline flooding through his system as he grabbed Caroline and threw them both behind a pile of dusty boxes. As he lay halfway on top of her, he quickly scanned her for injuries while listening for his father.

He was surprised by the gentle press of Caroline’s palm on his back. “Klaus, it’s ok. It’s over.” She moved out from under him, pulling him to his feet as her smile turned grim. Klaus followed her gaze across the floor to where Mikael had fallen. The small bullet hole was centered in his forehead. A perfect shot. How the bloody hell did she know how to do that?

“You saved my life,” he acknowledged in a harsh whisper, staring down at the monster who’d haunted his dreams for as long as he could remember. “He’d planned on killing me regardless of your decision to help him steal the treasure, and yet you risked your own life to save mine.”

As she put away her gun, Caroline looked uncomfortable, shuffling her feet a bit as she muttered, “Well, I couldn’t just let you die after everything...” she trailed off awkwardly. As though noticing the way his eyes kept wandering back to his father’s body, her brow furrowed worriedly and she grasped him by the arm, leading him out of the vault and into their main work area. Biting her lip, she told him, “Mikael said there’s a transport arriving within the hour — so, we have a few options to take care of this. I just need to know whether you want him to have a burial. Or, do you just want him gone?”

His thoughts raced as he processed her words. How in blazes did she know about these things? He thought back to his horrific childhood with that vile creature, and realized that he only felt relief as he’d stared at his father’s corpse. The cold, calm certainty of his voice still surprised him as he decreed, “Mikael was an abusive monster who deserves every indignity you care to inflict.”

Nodding once, she pulled out her phone, typing a quick message. Flicking her blue gaze at him, she announced, “Understood. I called in a favor and everything will be taken care of before Mikael’s security detail arrives. My friend has secured a safe house for you to continue your work at the site and the artifacts will be transported safely.” At his shocked expression, she gave him a small smile, explaining, “He’s the one who commissioned me to find the missing Bayeux Tapestry piece.”

Curious, Klaus asked, “How did you find it?! The bloody thing has been lost for centuries without a trace — How did you even know where to begin?”

Shrugging, Caroline coyly said, “I just happened to hear a few interesting whispers that seemed like they’d lead to an adventure.” Her tone grew serious as she seemed to search for something in his expression. “I’m sorry for everything. I lied to you and while I had my reasons, it doesn’t change what happened. I fell for you, Klaus.”
Laughing nervously, she shoved her phone back in her pocket, playing with the frayed belt loops on her jeans as she couldn’t seem to look at him when she confessed, “I put everything I had into fighting it, but I couldn’t help myself — you’re so passionate about your work and fiercely intelligent when we debate and you have this crazy charismatic pull and my god, you look like you’re chiseled from marble...” she rambled, cheeks flushing. “And I’m sorry I left — it’s just all I’ve ever known; it’s what I’m good at. But it hurt my heart to do that to you, so I came back because I couldn’t stand the thought of what Mikael would do to you.”

Caroline fell for him. Klaus took a breath, not knowing what to say. It was everything he’d wanted to hear, but somehow, it still wasn’t enough. She’d lied to him. She’d every intention of stealing those artifacts, possibly irrevocably damaging his career. How could he trust her after that?

She studied his face, as though cataloguing every emotion that flickered across it. In a small voice, she asked him, “Now what?”

He sighed, suddenly exhausted. “I don’t know, Caroline.” Running fingers through his curls in frustration, he hated the way bitterness started to bleed into his voice. “I don’t know if I can move past everything. I don’t know if could ever trust you.”

She was wistful as she replied, “I understand,” and placed a quick kiss on his cheek as she walked away.

Klaus stopped her when she opened the door. “What’s next for you then? Off on another adventure?” He was still greedy for her presence, wanting to soak up their last moments together, but couldn’t bring himself to tell her how he really felt. Stubborn arsehole.

“In my downtime here, I’ve heard a few interesting whispers that might lead to an adventure.” Caroline winked, taking her heart with him as she walked away.

For the next week, he walked around the new office like a ghost, barely paying attention to his research as his every thought was plagued by Caroline, and occasionally yelling at one of his irksome interns if they dared to breathe wrong in his presence. He was a miserable bastard and knew he only had himself to blame.

When the package arrived, he’d been staring off into space, remembering the endearing way Caroline used to flush an angry red whenever he argued with her about discrepancies found in radiocarbon dating techniques. She’d been a veritable wealth of knowledge — surely it wasn’t solely the result of treasure hunting. Yet another thing he’d never know about her, he thought grimly. Mindlessly opening the box, he paused when he registered the crudely wrought bronze. A quick assessment revealed two bracelets, an axe head, four sickles and a handful of spear points. Was he actually holding a shipment of priceless artifacts from the Bronze Age?

Klaus’ hand trembled as he recognized Caroline’s handwriting:

“There’s more where this came from. If you happen to be in the neighborhood, maybe you could stop by?”

She’d written a series of GPS coordinates that made his heart hammer with excitement. Klaus knew that this interesting whisper would definitely lead to an adventure.
Part 2 - Probable Claws

Chapter Summary

In this sequel to Chapter 51 in this series, both Caroline and Klaus are supernaturals pretending to be human — can they continue to fool each other with their human charade?

Chapter Notes

This was created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event (Step 2: fluff is in the air).

“We know what we are, but not what we may be.”
— William Shakespeare

This was going to be a disaster. From the moment Caroline rescued Hot Gym Guy from getting staked by his crazy neighbor, she knew she was in over her head. She’d done her best to maintain a professional distance — she’d been a cop for more than five years and easily had avoided getting attached — until now. But the problem with rescuing Klaus is that she’d already developed an inconvenient crush on him just from seeing him at her gym. And then when he asked her out while she was shoving his neighbor in her patrol car, and then again when he ran into her at the gym later, she was far too weak to say no.

And she knows she should’ve said no. Because as a vampire, she had absolutely no business trying to date a human. She was doing her best to blend in with the human world, but she also knew how dangerous it could be for a human to get caught up in the supernatural. Damn those dimples.

She was surprised to see Klaus scowling when he returned from talking to the hostess. “Apparently, we can’t have my usual table, sweetheart. It’s already occupied,” he grumbled, gray eyes flashing.

Confused, she didn’t understand what the big deal was, but Klaus was being weirdly territorial about this. Making a small, frustrated noise, she patted her pockets and said, “Oh, no, I think I left my phone in your car. Would you mind checking for me while I wait for a table to open up?”

“Sure — I’ll be right back,” he told her, sending the hostess a final look of irritation as he headed outside.

Moving quickly, Caroline compelled the hostess to let them have Klaus’ table, and then
swiftly compelled the group of businessmen camped out there to move to the bar. As she settled into their booth, she somewhat understood Klaus’ insistence when she saw the sweeping views of the forest that was once part of the old Lockwood estate.

“Incredible, isn’t it,” Klaus murmured as he slid across from her. “I must admit I’ve become somewhat territorial about the woods since I moved here,” he explained as he rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly. “Uh, there’s fantastic running trails.”

Caroline raised a questioning eyebrow, not completely convinced that ‘fantastic running trails’ completely explained his earlier aggressive behavior with the hostess. If she’d been human, his odd behavior would’ve raised concerns. However, she knew her supernatural strength would be more than enough to put Klaus in his place if necessary, no matter how formidable his well-toned frame appeared. Realizing she’d been blatantly staring, she blushed, quickly saying, “Well, I see you at the gym all the time, so I knew you liked to stay in shape, but you add running to your routine too? You must have a fairly flexible schedule. What do you do?”

He seemed somewhat embarrassed as he revealed, “There’s a family trust in place, but I also paint. I actually have a few pieces in the Bennett Gallery downtown.”

_Seriously?! That amazing body plus brooding artist?_ It was like the _Hallmark Channel_ had grown him in a secret lab. “Color me impressed and a little jealous — I always wished I had some sort of artistic talent, but the closest I ever came was the time I turned some old tactical vests into tote bags for a charity auction.”

Visibly perking up, he told her, “You’re the one with the fascinating career, sweetheart. What made you decide to go into law enforcement?”

“Well, I needed a career that would let me use a portion of my supernatural strength and let me gain access to blood banks and hospitals without raising suspicion. “I’ve just always liked helping people,” she said with a shrug, doing her best to quell the brief flash of anger when she thought of the more malevolent vampires she occasionally came across who only saw humanity as food. It was lonely sometimes, knowing that her dating pool was limited to vampires with questionable morals or easily breakable humans.

_Speaking of breakable humans,_ Caroline inwardly groaned as their waitress stopped by to take their order, smelling far more delicious than she should have. Caroline’s blue eyes widened in alarm as she realized her strength was somewhat depleted from her hasty compulsion earlier and she needed to feed soon.

“It must be very rewarding,” Klaus commented, ordering the largest ribeye on the menu along with enough side dishes to make her briefly wonder if he was planning to share with the family of five across the aisle.

Doing her best to breathe through her mouth to keep from pouncing on the delectable waitress, she clenched a fist in her lap as she quickly ordered an extremely rare tenderloin and a large glass of merlot to help fight her cravings. As the waitress left, Caroline tried to focus on Klaus’ words so she didn’t accidentally eat him. “It can be,” she acknowledged hesitantly, recalling that in between the monotony of long night shifts and aggravating traffic stops, there also were the satisfying arrests on domestic violence calls or child abuse cases. “Sometimes you catch a case that really makes you feel like you made a difference for someone, that you changed their lives for the better.”

Klaus reached for her hand, squeezing it slightly as he studied her intently with his gray eyes. “You certainly made a difference for me when you saved me from being staked.”
Rolling her eyes, she answered, “I still can’t believe your neighbor thought you were a vampire.”

“Honestly, of all the foolish notions,” he chuckled, “Vampires? What utter nonsense.”

Taking a generous gulp of her merlot, she said in an overly casual tone, “You’d be amazed at some of the bizarre calls I get sent out to answer while on a shift.” Flicking her gaze down to where their hands were still joined, she exclaimed, “You have a dog?! I love dogs!”

His handsome face registered momentary confusion, but as he followed her nail to where she pointed to a long, silver-gray hair clinging to his white henley, he blurted, “Wolf! Uh, he’s a wolf-dog mix.”

“Really? Wow,” she said excitedly, “what’s he look like?”

Pausing to take a sip of his beer, he finally answered, “I guess...kind of like a husky but considerably larger.”

Practically squealing in delight, Caroline told him, “Big dogs are my favorite! All that fluffy fur on a giant, slobbery monster. I love to wrestle and play-fight and I give the best belly rubs!”

Klaus flushed slightly, shifting awkwardly in the booth. “Yes, well, dogs are certainly...mischievous creatures, sweetheart.”

“They are,” she agreed, making room for the waitress to serve their food. “I bet you have all kinds of cute stories about him,” she added, savoring her rare tenderloin, despite her monster being irritated that it wasn’t more bloody.

“Of course, love. That rascal keeps me quite amused,” he replied in between hasty bites, adding, “there’s just so...so many stories. Like the time he...uh, came through the window and tracked muddy paw prints all through the kitchen.”

Taken aback by his voracious appetite, she decided he must not have eaten lunch. “Seriously?! The window — as he ok?!”

Gray eyes widening as though he was quickly replaying his words, he explained, “Yes, well, I’d stored some...exotic jerky in the pantry. You know how dogs can be, sweetheart.”

“I wish,” she answered wistfully, “My HOA has really strict rules about pet size and there’s no way they’d let me get the kind of gentle, slobbery giant I really want.” And I can’t use compulsion since the world’s most uptight vampire, Elena Gilbert, was on the board. “Maybe sometime I could play with him,” she asked in an overly casual way — or so she hoped.

Klaus coughed a bit as he drank his beer, hurriedly setting down the bottle as he replied, “Of course — that would be, uh, I’d really like you to stop by and play. With my dog, I mean.” His phone dinged with a message, and Klaus scowled, briefly telling her, “Sorry, love. My extended family is having a get together next month and there’s some sort of bollocks disagreement regarding the venue. Do you mind if I step out to make a quick call?”

“Go ahead,” she nodded, mildly relieved when he disappeared to the entrance as she covertly whipped out a small flask of blood she kept for emergencies and took a large gulp, breathing through the mouthwatering B+ so the black veins underneath her eyes disappeared quickly. Feeling more like herself, she hardly noticed the intoxicating bite of Klaus’ cologne when he returned. Although she still wanted to bite him. A little. Or possibly a lot from the way his gaze darkened as she pushed the narrow strap of her dress back to the top of her shoulder.
Nostrils flaring slightly, Klaus asked in a concerned voice, “I smell blood — did something happen?”

Mildly surprised that he could smell her snack, she discreetly sliced open the tip of one finger with her nail, explaining, “I accidentally nicked myself with the tip of my steak knife.” Klaus must be an exceptional human, she thought to herself, flushing slightly as she traced the smooth line of muscle along his forearms. Very exceptional. “You must have a nose like a bloodhound, Klaus,” she said with a giggle.

He quickly laughed, offering her an elbow as they left the restaurant. She found the gesture oddly sweet as she snuggled a bit closer than strictly necessary. As she sank into his cheerful warmth, she finally gave into the connection she felt, pressing her lips to his in a soft kiss that rapidly turned from sweet to sensual.

Klaus let out a sexy growl and took her by surprise when he whirled her around until she was pressed against the side of his sleek silver sports car. He deepened their kiss, tightly gripping her blonde curls in a rough manner that made Caroline purr. She had to remind herself not to forget her strength and accidentally hurt him, but his primal reaction to her was a huge turn on.

She was so lost in their passion, Caroline didn’t hear the footsteps behind Klaus until it was almost too late. Quickly pushing him to the side, she took the full brunt of the assailant’s switchblade to the side of her neck. She gasped painfully as blood poured out of the gaping wound, glaring at her attacker who immediately started grappling with her, while Klaus shouted her name and joined the scuffle.

Worried that Klaus would be hurt, she quickly swept her leg in a wide arc, easily toppling the mugger, who let out a wheezing protest. There was something about hearing his voice that triggered her fury, and Caroline forgot all about protecting her supernatural secret as she flashed on top of her attacker. Operating on pure instinct, Caroline dug her razor-sharp fangs into his meaty neck, taking her fill until she felt her wound properly heal.

She came to her senses as she heard his rattling breath, realizing she’d need to make a decision about whether to compel or kill. Shit. Klaus. Caroline realized she was still straddling their assailant’s chest, and she prepared herself for the worst as she cautiously flicked her gaze up to Klaus to gauge his reaction to her monster. She wasn’t sure what she expected — hysterical screaming, disgust — but his perfectly blank expression was completely unexpected.

As the awkward silence stretched between them, she swiped at the stray bit of sticky blood she could feel smeared across one cheek. Neatly tucking away her vampire’s visage, Caroline finally said, “So, I guess we should talk.”

Klaus knelt on the ground nearby, picking up her bracelet that had been torn off during the struggle. As he handed it to her, he hissed in surprise, and Caroline tried to make sense of the wisps of smoke she saw curling from his reddened skin. From her silver bracelet. “I guess we should,” he rumbled, his grey eyes flashing a feral gold.
Mixed Feelings

Chapter Summary

Media mogul Caroline has traveled to Mystic Falls to find out what’s happened to Rebekah. Given what her friend has told her about Klaus, it’s safe to assume he’s daggered her again. Good thing Caroline’s not above using Klaus’ misguided notion that she’s a helpless human to her advantage...

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: This was created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event (Step 8: Celebrities (actors, musicians, youtubers, etc.)

Warning: A tiny bit of smut – enjoy!

“The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy, we can all sense a mysterious connection to each other.”
— Meryl Streep

One word from me and I could sic an entire nation of soccer mom book club members on this self-important asshat, Caroline thought disdainfully as she furiously pounded on the elaborately carved double doors of the ostentatious mansion. Although best known for her talk show, Seriously?!’, over the past decade, Caroline had built an impressive media empire that was responsible for launching several television networks and movie production companies helmed by women. Her legions of fans knew her to be extraordinarily empathetic — eager to listen and always willing to help her talk show guests’ resolve their conflicts and live their best lives possible — they just didn’t know that she was aided by her marvelous abilities as an empath.

The Forbes’ line of witches, while not known for their power, occasionally did produce gifted empaths, and among her people, it was whispered that Caroline possessed the strongest abilities seen in centuries. Right now, her own feelings of rage and frustration were drowning out everything else in the vicinity, because she could no longer feel Rebekah’s spirit. She was a very close friend, and based on Rebekah’s stories about her megalomaniac brother, this could only mean he’d decided to dagger her during one of his childish tantrums.

When the door swung open to reveal a scowling hybrid, she couldn’t help but momentarily forget her mission when she noticed how ridiculously attractive he was in person. It was absolutely criminal how the pictures on Rebekah’s phone hadn’t prepared her for those beautifully sculpted...
features. As his sneer gave way to a mocking grin, her temper flared and she recalled why she was there. “What the hell did you do?!”

Seemingly taken aback by her ire, Klaus raised an eyebrow as he said, “Quite bold of you to appear on my doorstep unannounced, Caroline Forbes. I’ve done a great many things. You’ll need to be a touch more specific.”

“You know who I am?” She cringed at the surprise in her voice as she blurted out the question, unable to mask her surprise that this centuries’ old creature, a bit of a celebrity in his own right in most supernatural circles, would recognize her.

Klaus favored her with a lazy grin, his tone suddenly flirty as he answered, “Of course I know who you are. I doubt there’s a corner of the world that doesn’t at least have passing familiarity with you. Quite the influential empire you’ve carved out for yourself, love.”

Caroline blushed at his praise, hating how no matter how polished she’d become at interacting with powerful dignitaries and celebrities, something about this sexy hybrid kept her off-balance. Channeling her irritation, she flatly said, “I’m friends with Rebekah and she’s not answering her phone. Given what I know about you, I’m willing to bet my entire fortune your daggers are the reason.” She wisely chose not to reveal her empath abilities, realizing she may need to use it on him if he proved as stubborn as he looked.

He looked mildly surprised, inviting her inside with a charming, sweeping gesture. “I wasn’t aware that my sister was capable of making friends. She tends to eat those she considers a threat and your ethereal beauty combined with your influence most certainly would raise her ire.”

Taking a seat across from Klaus in a study tastefully decorated with rich mahogany panels, she did her best to look unaffected by his compliments. Rolling her eyes, she scoffed, “All of those centuries together and you still don’t know a thing about your sister. She wears her superficiality as armor against society and her brothers in particular — because no one ever expected her to be better. We met in Tanzania when I was overseeing construction of a women’s clinic and she was on one of those luxury safaris with a handful of hangers-on who got bored halfway through and ditched her for the beaches in Zanzibar. I was arguing with a government councilman in the marketplace because they’d removed the security guards and we lost half of our building materials overnight.”

A small choking noise escaped him as his gray eyes shown with amusement. “That’s an excellent way to get yourself killed, sweetheart. The political landscape over there is incredibly volatile — I can’t imagine you were welcome once you started making waves.”

Caroline smiled fondly at the memory of that ferocious blonde creature appearing out of nowhere and gripping the man by his throat, effectively cutting off his feeble excuses. Caroline had been conversing with him hesitantly in Swahili, but based on his condescending tone, she wasn’t making adequate progress and she refused to back down when people needed her help. Rebekah not only had compelled the entire council to organize additional security at the clinic, she also accompanied Caroline to a neighboring town to hire additional construction workers so that the clinic opening could stay on schedule.

“Basically Rebekah swooped in to save the day once she heard about the women’s clinic. She stayed on to help me oversee the opening and even generously donated to my charity so that we could open another clinic in a neighboring town,” she told him, delighting in his obvious gobsmacked expression. While the Original seemed especially adept at guarding his thoughts and emotions, with a small push, she could still pick up on his bewilderment and surprise that his sister had bothered helping anyone, much less a well-known celebrity whose fame could potentially...
expose the supernatural.

“So, in addition to your sister being my friend, I owe her,” she added in her formidable tone that she normally reserved for the few remaining industry misogynists who stupidly tried to mansplain ratings and production schedules to her.

Handing her a bourbon, Klaus gave her an amused grin, his dimples throwing her off-balance as they projected a deceptive innocence she knew couldn’t possibly be genuine. “I’m envious that Rebekah can inspire such loyalty, sweetheart. Quite brash of you to face me alone.”

Rolling her eyes at his arrogance, she took a large sip, allowing herself a moment to enjoy the warm vanilla and caramel flavors. “Well, it’s not like I could bring my entourage. They’d hound me with questions like if I wanted a latte or which meetings need to get rescheduled or why is this Original Hybrid asshat trying to eat their spleen.”

“Actually, love, I prefer the liver,” he corrected her with a devilish smirk as he clinked the rim of her crystal tumbler with his own. “Out of curiosity, what excuse did you give your minions for your sudden absence? I can’t imagine someone like you just flits off on holiday alone, sweetheart.”

Tossing back the rest of her drink, she did her best to quash her temper at his bullshit assumptions. In an even tone with just a hint of irritation she told him, “Actually, my staff is used to me taking off by myself every once in a while. One of my favorite things to do is fly to the furthest point I’ve ever traveled, fully immersing myself in a culture I’ve never experienced before. I’ve helped the Changpa herd yaks and goats across the Tibetan Plateau and cultivated date palms with the Al-Mahrah tribe on Socotra Island.”

Making an impressed noise, Klaus asked, “I’d no idea you were such an adventurous spirit, love. Tell me, have you ever tried raw reindeer meat in the remote Russian village of Oymyakon? There’s something about immersing yourself in the bitterest cold to make you feel alive,” he reminisced with a fond smile.

“No,” Caroline admitted, leaning forward eagerly to share more stories with a fellow traveler, “but I have driven a dogsled across Ittoqqortoormiit to watch the Northern Lights.” She started to tell him more, but then frowned as she realized they’d gotten completely off-topic. “But that’s not why I’m here — what the hell did you do to my friend, Klaus,” she finished with a low snarl.

Letting out a long-suffering sigh, he revealed, “You are correct that Rebekah ran afoul of one of my daggers. I’m waging a slight battle with some of the Mystic Falls supernatural community who wish to locate the cure for vampirism and then use it against me. Unfortunately, my sister chose the wrong side.”

From his smug smirk, she realized they were at an impasse. “And I assume you’ve no intention of revealing where you’ve creepily stashed your sister’s desiccated body,” she asked flatly, accepting his wordless offer for another round of bourbon.

Resettling comfortably in his wingback, his dimples bracketed an impish grin as he told her, “I’m afraid I cannot release Rebekah just yet, love. However, you have my word that once I’ve destroyed the cure so that my enemies cannot use it against my family, I will restore my sister.”

At least I asked first, Caroline told herself, not feeling a twinge of guilt as she pushed her gift further, skin tingling a bit at that first taste of the hybrid’s emotions. Amusement, lust and intrigue swirled together, and it was difficult to determine which was his primary feeling for her.
She did her best to fight the blush that threatened to stain her cheeks as she went deeper, finally getting a small peek at his thoughts.

Despite his age and obvious skill at guarding his secrets, she heard useful snippets: *An attractive little minx. Is that a spark of power? I do believe she’s got a bit of witchcraft in her veins. Intriguing. Perhaps after this mess with Rebekah is behind us, she’d be open to exploring...no, must stay focused. Stefan knows. The younger Salvatore will guard Rebekah.* Tossing back her drink, Caroline quickly stood, briskly telling Klaus, “I see. While disappointing, I suppose your response isn’t unexpected.” Glancing at her phone, she accessed her phone’s task list, adding, “I’ve other avenues to explore, so I’m sure I’ll see you around, Klaus.” Not bothering to wait for his reply, she smoothly made her exit, determined to pursue the lead Klaus unwittingly had given her.

The best part about a small town like Mystic Falls was the fact that everyone knows everyone and their business, so it only took Caroline approaching two separate people before she found the local bar and grill where Stefan Salvatore was known to haunt. She also was pleased to see that without her hair and makeup painstakingly done, no one seemed to recognize her other than a slight frown or furrowed brow when someone was trying to recall why she looked so familiar. From experience, she knew it wouldn’t last, and it was best to accomplish her mission fairly quickly.

She inwardly groaned as she crossed the threshold and noticed Klaus sitting at the bar with his younger brother, Kol. She briefly considered ducking out before the stubborn hybrid saw her, but from the knowing smirk on his face, she realized it was too late. Rolling her eyes, she hopped on a barstool next to him, smiling politely as she ordered a beer. (Being an empath didn’t give her supernatural alcohol tolerance and she still felt the buzz of the bourbon from earlier.)

“Caroline,” Klaus greeted her with a devilish grin, “Fancy meeting you here, love.”

She rolled her eyes. No way this was a coincidence — especially based on the heated feelings she was picking up from him that made her own cheeks flush. She noticed Kol was squinting at her, then looking at something on his phone, then squinting back at her again. He opened and closed his mouth several times, practically vibrating in his seat. She recalled from Rebekah’s stories what an unpredictable little shit he could be, and she assumed he was preparing to loudly blurt something bizarre or incredibly crude (or both). “Hi,” she said, leaning forward to shake his hand, “I’m Caroline—”

“Forbes! Bloody hell, you’re Caroline Forbes,” Kol shrieked in an unnaturally high-pitched voice. “I care, you care, we all care,” he happily babbled, reciting the signature closing she used at the end of every show. A stunned silence followed, with Klaus looking absolutely gobsmacked by his brother’s outburst, while Kol seemed horrified and quickly muttered, “I mean, if you like that sort of thing.”

Before Caroline could properly process the fact that apparently Kol was a fan of hers and managed to hide it from his siblings until now, a loud commotion of chairs scraping across the floor alerted her to a familiar occurrence. *She was about to be mobbed.*

“Oh, my god! You’re Caroline Forbes!”

“We love you so much!”

“You changed my life — I never thought I’d get to meet you!”
She looked on in amusement as the Originals were shoved around until finally the crowd knocked them off of the barstools in their eagerness to surround Caroline. She was bombarded with requests for autographs, pictures and hugs and she had to breathe through the whirlwind of emotions that slammed into her from the enthusiastic fans.

As though sensing her discomfort, Klaus and Kol subtly compelled the crowd to return to their seats, and she could feel her body relax as the flood of intense thoughts and feelings dissipated slightly. “Thank you,” she told the brothers quietly, giving them a grateful smile.

“It’s the least we could do, sweetheart,” Klaus told her with a careless shrug. “Especially considering how my brother is a bit of a fanboy and now I get to pass along that unexpected tidbit to the rest of our siblings.”

Coloring slightly, Kol scowled at his brother, muttering under his breath as Caroline felt his inner struggle to save face with his older brother but also really, really wanting to ask Caroline for her autograph. However, Kol managed to resist giving into his impulse and instead adopted a breezy tone as he bid farewell to Caroline and made his exit. She caught a bit of his thoughts as he walked past, surprised to hear that in addition to watching her show religiously, he also had a fondness for her annual Favorite Things List in which she shared with her audience all of her favorite products she’d discovered over the past year. In particular, he always bought the items that she rated the ‘cuddliest’, so she made a mental note to have her assistant send him the soft snuggle lounger robe she recommended last week and an invite to a show taping.

Turning to Klaus, she accused, “No wonder your brother didn’t tell you guys he watched my show — are you always such an insufferable, judgmental ass?”

Gray eyes twinkling, his lips curled into a smirk as he leaned in close. “You know, sweetheart, I’ve inadvertently come in contact with a few celebrities in my time, but you may be the first to be exactly the same in person as you are on TV. Beautiful. Brash. Fearless.”

Caroline couldn’t help the way her body responded to his words — cheeks flushing, pulse racing — and from the subtle lick of his lips and the heat in his gaze, it appeared that she wasn’t the only one responding to the electricity between them. She observed his strong jawline, finding the scruff along the edges charming and briefly wondered how it would feel against her skin. This is such a bad idea. And then she pushed those pesky thoughts away as she closed the space between them, pressing her lips softly against his.

Klaus’ emotions were a jumbled mix of surprise and lust along with a curious bit of longing and she rode that sweet wave of feeling as it flowed over her. He broke away slightly to whisper in her ear, “When I compelled the patrons not to notice you, I compelled them not to notice anything else for that matter, love.”

Her blue eyes widened as she realized what he was telling her. He’d granted her an enticing bit of freedom that as a celebrity she’d never had before. There would be no stories about her — nothing online, nothing on the gossip channels — she could do something impulsive. She quickly pulled Klaus in for another kiss, fanning the flames between them as she ran her hands through his dirty blonde curls.

With a sexy little growl, he pulled her barstool closer, his hands sliding down to briefly rest on her hips before his fingertips began to play with the silken hem of her wrap dress. She nibbled on his lower lip, parting her thighs slightly. That first brush of his fingers against her thong nearly made her jump out of her skin, she was wound so tight. At her breathy sigh, he murmured, “That’s it, sweetheart. Just let go.”
Caroline curled her tongue against his, just as he pushed aside the lace that covered her center. She shivered, hardly believing that she was doing this in the middle of a bar. But there was something about the steady hum of the oblivious crowd around them, their various tangle of emotions threading through the air that made her heart pound as she chased her high. *Not to mention Klaus’ incredible charisma.* She’d have to think about their connection later. For now, he pulled her back into the moment with his sensual strokes, the heat between them rising as she shamelessly bucked into his hand.

Klaus increased his seductive rhythm, just enough to tip her over the edge, and she cried out, not bothering to muffle her orgasm as it swept over her. “Wow,” she gasped, “that was...” she trailed off, suddenly a bit embarrassed by Klaus’ smug grin.

“Yes, it was,” he silkily agreed, tracing an aimless pattern across her thigh. “Perhaps we can continue this in a more comfortable venue, love?”

She considered his offer, hearing his lusty thoughts about taking her against nearly hard surface of his house, and a few positions that she intended to research thoroughly before their next encounter so she could do some yoga beforehand. But she was still irritated at his refusal to give back Rebekah and she was nothing if not loyal to a fault. Standing up, doing her best to ignore her somewhat shaky legs, she swooped in for a quick kiss on his cheek, airily telling him, “Some other time. As I mentioned earlier, I’m on a mission to find your sister and your stubborn refusal to tell me where she is means I’ve still got some work to do.” She swiftly left the grill, delighting in his surprised expression at her unexpected refusal.

Klaus swiped the bottle of Macallan he’d hidden behind the bar, pouring a generous amount for himself as he replayed what just happened. He hadn’t imagined the surprising connection between them; he was sure Caroline felt it too. She was a stubborn, enigmatic little minx and he fully intended to pursue her once he’d settled this cure business. Unfortunately, not even the pleasant burn of the delectable single malt soothed his nerves and he found his leg jiggling nervously as he debated flashing after her.

However, the bell over the door jingled, and he looked up hopefully, wondering if she’d returned, but was disappointed to see it was just Kol. Clearly registering his brother’s crestfallen expression, Kol scoffed, “Blimey, I know we’ve been on the outs lately, Nik, but that’s no excuse to scowl like that when you see me, mate.”

Not bothering to stop Kol as he swiped the Macallan and drank straight from the bottle, Klaus grumbled, “Contrary to your overinflated ego, not everything is about you.”

Brown eyes flicking to the sides, Kol’s lips twitched into a mischievous grin as he observed, “Ah, can I assume your sour mood is due to a certain blonde celebrity not falling for your tired old lines, hmm, brother?”

“No,” he answered quickly, *obviously too quickly* based on Kol’s widening grin.

Tone suddenly commiserating, Kol slid the Macallan back to Klaus, telling him, “Could be worse, Nik. At least you were just a typical bumbling wanker in front of a pretty bird. However, I’m quite certain when she read me I came off like a right nutter.”

“Read you,” Klaus asked in confusion, pouring a bit more scotch into his glass.
Shrugging nonchalantly, he explained, “I thought you knew about Caroline. She’s an empath; a bloody powerful one if you believe the stories about her bloodline combined with her commercial success. Reads emotions and thoughts like Bex reads Vogue.”

Thinking back to his conversations with Caroline, the things he carefully left unsaid, he quickly leapt to his feet in alarm. Without another word, Klaus flashed away, anxious to ensure Caroline hadn’t found Stefan.

Cursing loudly, Klaus made his way through the narrow passages of the caves that ran under Mystic Falls. He’d found Stefan and compelled him to reveal where he’d hidden Rebekah. While Stefan assured him that he hadn’t encountered an attractive blonde, much less the famous media mogul Caroline Forbes, it did little to calm him. It wasn’t until he saw her coffin exactly where Stefan said it would be that he forced himself to relax.

His arrogant smirk was short-lived, however, when he opened the lid to find an empty coffin. No, not empty. There was a brief letter resting on the satin pillow that he couldn’t help but chuckle at as he read:

Dear Klaus,

Since I was able to easily catch your minion’s thoughts from several blocks away, you should really consider getting a better one. Also, what’s with the incredibly obvious hiding place? Clearly, an abundance of hair gel doesn’t make up for a lack of imagination with broody vampires. And Rebekah and I are taking a well-deserved vacation. I might look you up to finish what we started when I’m done being pissed about your control freak tendencies.

Caroline

P.S. Rebekah says, “Tell that wanker I stole his credit card to fund our little world tour.”
12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas Event

Chapter Notes

These were a series of drabbles I created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event – I hope you enjoy them! Please let me know if any catch your fancy that you’d like me to continue (as always, please let me know if any of my other chapters spark your interest enough to need an encore!)

Author’s note: This was created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event (Step 4: Forbidden Love).

Her mark burned, but Caroline bore the familiar sting with only a slight furrow of her brow. It was a warning. They were coming. Klaus tentatively traced the dark lines of the triangle on her bare shoulder, the mark of her people. “All of this is because of me,” he told her bitterly.

It was an old argument, well-worn and oddly comforting. Caroline was a gorgon, part of a fierce race of immortal creatures cursed by petty gods. Her people sought vengeance against the gods by terrorizing mortals, hunting them nearly to the brink of extinction. She’d never given much thought to mortals; they were merely an instrument to harm the gods. Until Klaus. The moment he foolishly crossed into her territory, she’d been captivated by the arrogant soldier hell-bent on destroying her.

“No,” she told him with a quick kiss, “the burden is mine. I knew the risk but I was too selfish to care.” They warily watched the valley dotted with temple ruins, their hidden cave in the side of Mount Lykaion providing the perfect vantage point for the impending battle. She impatiently plucked at her bowstring with one sharp claw, the familiar hum echoing against the rock walls.

“That was the first image I have of you, love,” he told her fondly, “aiming an arrow at my heart with the certainty of a warrior. It was in that moment I knew I’d found a kindred spirit.”

Willing her snakes silent as they rustled along her crown, she sighed, “My instincts demanded I set my gaze upon you until you were stone, but for the first time, I found myself doubting my people’s quest for vengeance.” It was rare that one of her sisters would fall by the blade of a mortal, but when it occurred, it was said that carving out their eyes as trophies bestowed the victor with foresight. This was the reason Klaus had sought her out. Or so he’d been told.

“When my mother’s infidelity was revealed, Mikael charged me with reclaiming honor for myself and our family by battling a gorgon and claiming her eyes,” Klaus reminisced, lacing his fingers with her claws as he pulled her close.

Caroline’s scales took on a faint glow the color of a sunset as she recalled her anger at discovering Mikael’s true plan for the young man he’d once called ‘son’. “He sent you on a fool’s errand, thinking you’d be killed to restore your family’s good name. He was a fool to not see your
worth,” she reassured him, her snakelike pupils flashing a dangerous gold.

But Caroline had known. She’d felt the weight of his soul and knew the fates had established her visceral connection with Klaus for a reason. Perhaps their love was destined to change the world. Unfortunately, her people believed their love to be unnatural, an affront to their beliefs. Her sisters decreed that she spill her soldier’s blood — or they’d quench their blades with hers.

Caroline trusted in the love she felt for Klaus, and as she watched the initial phalanx of the formidable gorgon army converge upon the valley, she could only hope the fates knew what they were doing.

Author’s note: This was created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event (Step 6: fantasy/fairy tale/ mythological).

When the snake spoke to Klaus, he felt the pull of archaic magic from a powerful bloodline, the likes of which he hadn’t sensed in centuries. Since his wolf was stolen from him. “Doppelgangers are not nearly as hard to find as you think, Klaus Mikaelson.”

He didn’t bother pretending to search for a more likely owner of the voice. The cold, inhuman tone with the slight softening of certain sounds could only belong to the gleaming red and black coils delicately draped along a low branch.

He failed to keep the fleeting look of surprise from his face, and the snake observed knowingly, “Of course I know who you are. I’ve made it my business to learn all I can about my enemies’ greatest enemy. I want to make a bargain with you.”

Raising an eyebrow, Klaus clasped his hands behind his back, quietly studying the enigmatic creature with the fierce red eyes. “I must admit that in my years in this world, this may be my most unusual encounter. Care to tell me who you really are? You wear the scent of twisted sorcery like a snug skin.”

A narrow red tongue flicked in and out, and there was a faint hiss to its reply, “My name is Caroline and up until a few weeks ago, I was a human. I crossed paths with a psycho vampire who tried to turn me into a snack, but instead I staked him and set him on fire. So, then his equally twisted brother and the insecure girl they’re both creepily obsessed with took it personally. Long story short, they convinced a witch to turn me into this.”

Klaus was fascinated as he watched Caroline silkily uncoil part of herself from the branch to regard him at eye level, her piercing red eyes carrying a fierceness that intrigued him. “They thought they’d won, that I’d just slither away. Idiots. Instead, I hid away in gutters and trees and carefully listened to every whispered conversation. Noted every fear. That’s when I learned about you and I made it my mission to learn everything I could.” A cold hiss escaped her as she added darkly, “It turned out I actually had the bargaining chips to make a deal with you all along.”
Smirking at her, Klaus replied, “You mentioned doppelgangers, so you must know something of the curse I’m trying to break. Tell me why you think your bargaining chips are enough to convince me to help you.”

Caroline reared back with a flash of small fangs, her fury at his condescending tone amused him. “I know everything about your curse, you ungrateful asshat! You need the human doppelganger, a vampire, a werewolf and the moonstone to free your wolf.” Flicking the point of her tail in irritation she taunted him, “And I know where all of those ingredients are.”

A flicker of surprise registered in his gray eyes before he smoothly said, “Impressive, sweetheart. But how can you trust that I’ll keep my word and have one of my witches restore you to your former self once you’ve revealed where my ritual components are? Surely you recall from your past unsavory experience how untrustworthy vampires can be.”

Klaus swore if a snake could form a cunning smile, that was the expression that crept across her scaly face. And it galled him when he realized the depth of his fascination. “Because I have one more bargaining chip, Klaus. And I won’t give it to you until after I’m back to normal.”

“Do tell, love,” he humored her, curious to learn what Caroline thought he’d value as much as his ritual ingredients.

Tightening her coils along the thick tree branch, her red eyes reflected a smug satisfaction as she revealed, “The vampire that you’ve been hunting for centuries — I know the location of Katerina Petrova.”

Author’s note: This was created for the 12 Steps for Klaroline Xmas event (Step 10: Holiday Volunteering). It’s a sequel to Chapter 57 - Part 3 - Klaroween Bingo, “Vampire that loves Italian food”, found in this series, A Beautiful Symmetry.

The bells on her elf hat jingled angrily as Caroline chopped through the thick carrots with a large chef’s knife, not bothering to hide her vampire speed since it was just her and one other person in the kitchen with her. One annoying, dimpled hybrid asshat person. It was the holiday season, but she couldn’t be further from a festive mood ever since Klaus Mikaelson, CEO of Hybrid Industries, invaded her life when he bought the block where her Italian restaurant, Vesta, was on, transforming decades-old Mystic Falls businesses into luxury lofts.

At first, she’d tried to compel him, but when she discovered he couldn’t be compelled, she modified her plans and sought out Elijah, the most sensible of the Mikaelsons and head of Hybrid Industries’ legal department. After showing him Vesta’s solid financials along with detailed records of how her sound business strategy had evolved over the decades, she could tell she was close to winning over the skeptical Original. But she really sealed the deal with she provided a detailed estimate of how her business plan could bring in additional revenue from the loft residents on the block, securing their investment for years to come.

As Caroline finished splashing olive oil and balsamic vinegar on the vegetables to roast for the antipasto platters, she recalled how Klaus had been impressed rather than furious that Elijah had sided with her. He’d commended her on outmaneuvering him and had shocked her when he’d
invited her out to dinner as a peace offering. Still pissed at all the Mikaelsons for trying to ruin her neighborhood, she’d scoffed and told him where he could shove that no doubt expensive-yet-subpar dinner.

Still, the hybrid had been persistent in trying to make amends, from sending her contractors to remodel her kitchen to celebrity chefs to host theme nights, that she’d all sent back with a stern warning to him to stop trying to buy her forgiveness. (She may have kept some of the white truffles he’d sent though — imported from the forests of northern Italy, they sold for thousands of dollars a pound and their flavor made egg- and cheese-based dishes taste like they were made of stardust. After all, she was vindictive and bitter — not crazy.)

Despite her refusal to accept Klaus’ actions as genuine, he stubbornly insisted on volunteering at the Holiday Dinner for the Hungry event she was hosting. Knowing that she couldn’t turn away help regardless of how irritating she might find the volunteer, she rolled her eyes and picked out an apron with the ugliest food stains she could find to make him wear while he helped her start the food prep.

They had two more tables of main entrees to finish prepping before the local shelter brought over their temporary residents to take part in what Caroline hoped would be a meal they’d remember. Glancing at the clock, she hurriedly finished grating the parmesan and carefully mixed it with the whole milk ricotta she’d insisted Klaus go back to the store to purchase when he had the nerve to defile her kitchen with part skim ricotta. “No one will be able to tell the difference,” he mocked from across the long steel counter, finely dicing the basil and rosemary to add into the marinara.

Rolling her eyes, Caroline stomped to the rack where the fresh-baked Tuscan boule sat, wielding her bread knife almost like a chainsaw in her irritation. She slathered several thick slices with the ricotta cheese mixture she’d blended and used her wooden pizza paddle to carefully slide them to the edge of the wood-burning oven to toast. She scowled at the way Klaus watched her movements with amusement, and was determined to wipe that smirk right off of his stupidly attractive face. When she pulled them from the oven, she added just a hint of cracked black pepper and wordlessly shoved a slice at him.

Klaus’ evolution from polite amusement to mild surprise to absolute delight was hilarious to watch. “That is absolutely superb, sweetheart.” She did her best to ignore the sensual way his tongue peeked out just a bit to catch the remaining crumbs on his lips.

But that became even more difficult when he brushed against her to grab the dried mango strips from her leftover breakfast and some apple cider vinegar. At her skeptical look, he murmured lowly in his seductive accent, “Just trust me, love.”

And that was how Caroline and Klaus almost burned down her kitchen. Well, the first time, anyway.
The Best Safety Plan

Chapter Summary

Caroline and Bonnie are having a bad day. First, there’s a dead body they need to get rid of, and then they meet a dimpled psycho in the woods who believes he’s an ancient supernatural creature who then kindly offers to help them bury the body.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Mentions of domestic abuse.

“Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim.”
—Nora Ephron

Surprisingly, Caroline didn’t learn how to dispose of a body during her Ocular Pathology IV class. Or her Human Neuroanatomy and Physiology class. Or any of the other courses she took to become an optometrist. She was starting to think her optometry school hadn’t properly prepared her for real-world situations. Like a dead body.

“I don’t know about you, but I’m seriously considering asking Virginia Tech for my money back,” Bonnie grumbled, shifting slightly to get a better grip on the feet.

Stumbling a bit over a sharp rock, Caroline cursed. “Bonnie, we’re medical professionals. We should know how to clean up a crime scene properly.”

“We’re optometrists! And I doubt binge-watching CSI Miami magically imbued us with the skillset we need to pull this off.”

To pull this off. God, was this even going to work? Caroline still wasn’t entirely sure how this all happened. She and Bonnie had opened their practice about a year ago, and had hired their painfully shy receptionist, Elena, almost as soon as she walked through the door. There was something about her eyes that made you want to help her. Haunted eyes. Something was off, but they couldn’t figure out what it was at first.

They’d wanted to make her feel included, like a part of their team, so they kept inviting her to lunches and dinners and drinks with the rest of their staff, only to be given a mumbled excuse about needing to be home on time. Then, her silver locket had fallen behind a desk and she’d had a panic attack as she clawed her way between the heavy furniture and the wall to retrieve it, still shaking even after she clasped it back around her neck. Noticing everyone’s confused expressions, she’d flushed red, stammering that it had been a gift from her boyfriend, Damon.
He was featured in every story Elena told; not that she opened up much. She never mentioned any siblings or friends, and while Caroline and Bonnie had no real reason for concern about their employee’s home life, they couldn’t shake the feeling that something was wrong. *And then the accidents started.* A sprained wrist from backing into a shopping cart. A black eye from running into a door. A dislocated elbow from falling down the stairs. The flimsy excuses worried them, and when Caroline spotted the finger-shaped bruises underneath Elena’s scarf, she realized they’d been right to worry.

“Young did we let it get this far? We should’ve done something sooner,” Bonnie sighed, frustration evident as she stepped around a fallen tree trunk while carrying her end of the corpse.

Caroline shook her head, glad they were carrying the body facedown. She had no interest in seeing that flat, dead stare ever again. “We did the best we could,” she reminded her. “We researched and did everything that hotline said to do to get Elena to feel safe enough to come to us.”

And they had. They’d cautiously approached her, almost like a skittish colt, and let her know that they were concerned about her safety and that she always could come to them for anything. At first, Elena had been angry and defensive, denying the abuse despite her freshly bruised jaw that she hadn’t bothered trying to explain. But Caroline and Bonnie had been persistent, offering their unwavering support and listening without judgment. They helped her make a safety plan like the domestic abuse hotline had urged them to do, empowering Elena to slowly start to take control of her life.

A few days ago, Elena finally left Damon, and Caroline and Bonnie immediately put their safety plan in action, taking her to the local shelter they’d researched. The case manager at the shelter had warned them that it was common for the abuser to stalk their victim’s workplace to try to intimidate coworkers into revealing their victim’s location. While they’d been wary, they’d foolishly thought Damon would start with Elena’s friends and family first. *They’d been wrong.*

A sharp crack, pulled Caroline from her thoughts, and she was sure the terrified look on Bonnie’s face matched her own. *What if they’d been followed?* After what felt like an eternity of standing in place, dangling the corpse between them, no further sounds were heard and they quietly resumed their unpleasant task. The familiar wave of guilt washed over Caroline as she thought again of all the different ways they could’ve helped Elena sooner. “We should’ve known, Bonnie. It’s not like Damon was suffering from uveal coloboma. He just had plain old crazy eyes and we ignored it.”

And we were almost too late.

“But we weren’t too late,” Bonnie insisted vehemently. “We stopped it. We stopped him.”

Caroline regarded her friend with a grim smile. “Yes, we did.” Damon had stormed into their office, tossing around furniture and bellowing at the top of his lungs to tell them where they’d hidden Elena. He’d cornered them in the first exam room, and it was around the fourth time he’d called them ‘nosy bitches’ that something in them snapped.

As they watched this scrawny, hate-filled little man stomp closer to them, they shared a brief look, silently coming to an agreement before they each grabbed the hefty arm of the phoropter equipment, swinging it around with as much force as they could muster. The heavy metal head caught him in the temple with a very satisfying smack, and he immediately crumpled to the floor.

“I’ve never seen that much blood,” Bonnie said quietly, glancing suspiciously at a thick stand of trees nearby.
Caroline shrugged, losing her grip and sending the body crashing to the ground. There was something deeply gratifying watching Damon fall face first into the pine needles. “Which is why we picked optometry. Less squishy bits to deal with.” She recalled how they’d approached Damon’s fallen form so carefully, waiting for him to leap up and grab them like something out of a horror movie. *But that growing pool of blood was too big to ignore.*

Visibly trembling, they took turns crouching down to check his pulse, realizing he was dead. *Because they’d killed him.* Knowing Damon’s brother was a police officer, they didn’t trust that he’d believe that it was self-defense. *After all, how many times had he seen Elena’s injuries and did nothing?* “I’m glad we killed him. It’s the only way Elena will be safe. The only way we’ll be safe,” Caroline declared, not bothering to hide her disgust as she angrily kicked his side.

“My, my what bloodthirsty creatures I’ve stumbled across,” teased an accented voice, causing both women to jump in surprise.

Caroline looked up to find an attractive, smirking stranger casually leaning against a nearby tree. She exchanged a worried glance with Bonnie, rapidly thinking of excuses that would explain what they were doing. *Consulting with a patient? Taking out the trash?* She opened her mouth, having no idea what she was about to say, and ended up saying more than she meant to — as usual. “Well, we decided digging a hole in the woods for our receptionist’s abusive jackass boyfriend was more fun than dealing with the policies of our patients’ insurance. And it’s not like he didn’t have it coming, although I’d like to think that if we had planned out Damon’s murder, it would have been *way* more elaborate than just beat him over his greasy head with optometry equipment! And I didn’t rack up nearly $200,000 in student loans to go to jail over some loser asshole who beats his girlfriend!”

She didn’t have to look at Bonnie to feel her horror. Quickly slamming her eyes shut, she fervently wished for the ground to swallow her whole. Of course, when that didn’t happen, she remembered they were in the middle of the woods with a dead body and a potentially dangerous stranger and realized that scrunching her eyes shut probably wasn’t the best way to deal with this bizarre situation.

He chuckled, gray eyes darkening as he casually swept over her form before giving Bonnie a polite nod. “Please forgive the intrusion. I couldn’t help but overhear your intriguing discussion and decided to make myself known. I’m Klaus Mikaelson.” He looked between the two expectantly, waiting for them to introduce themselves.

He raised an eyebrow at their pointed silence, and added, “Your reluctance to give me your names is understandable given the odd circumstances of our meeting. Perhaps if I share a secret of my own?”

His accented voice did funny things to Caroline, and she cursed her libido for being so needy. *Especially at a time like this.* Bonnie’s face was completely closed off, but she recognized her nervous tick of flexing her fingers into fists as though she was getting ready to punch someone. *Hopefully, Klaus didn’t give her a reason to ruin that pretty face.*

“While I commend you on a virtuous kill, experience has taught me this is your first one,” he continued, clearly ignoring their looks of surprise. “I’m a thousand-year-old hybrid and have lost count of my kills. In fact, I’d just finished burying my dinner when I happened upon your delightful little exchange.”

In her usual cut-through-the-bullshit manner, Bonnie asked incredulously, “Hybrid of what?”
Caroline whipped her head to her friend, exasperated as she accused, “Seriously?! Way to gloss over the lead! Or, did you miss the part where we’re talking to a crazy psycho killer who thinks he’s a Viking?!”

Klaus’ amused grin revealed an unexpected set of dimples, and Caroline did her best to ignore that it seemed like he was purposely flashing them at her. *Delusional psycho killer is not your type.* “Vampire and werewolf,” he said unexpectedly, almost purring the nonsensical words to her.

“Wait — what?!”

Caroline and Bonnie’s perfectly timed response drew another amused smirk from Klaus as he explained, “In fact, all vampires and werewolves are descended from my family’s bloodline.”

“Right,” Caroline said slowly, gesturing toward Klaus as she told Bonnie, “See? This is what I’ve been telling you about the dating prospects here — the hot ones are either dudebros or crazy.”

Cocking his head to the side, he asked curiously, “Tell me, sweetheart, which is the greater evil?”

“Dudebros,” Caroline and Bonnie both answered flatly. Although the women were still wary of him, they realized this wasn’t getting Damon buried any faster, so they seemed to come to a silent agreement to start digging. Noticing the slightly irritated look on Klaus’ face when she ignored the flirty eyes he kept sending her way, she cheekily threw a large shovelful of dirt and pine needles on top of what appeared to be his very expensive leather boots.

When Klaus didn’t take the hint and continued to lurk off to the side, Caroline tucked several sweaty blonde strands behind her ear and told him irritably, “Do you mind, Mr. Werewolf-Vampire Viking? This is our spot to hide a body and we’re on a schedule.”

“My apologies. And *Klaus* is fine. I’m not one for formalities,” he told them, nodding at their measly foot and a half they’d managed to dig. “Perhaps I could be of service? It’s been my experience that the best way to ensure a corpse remains hidden is to bury it quite deep, and I’d be happy to assist as it seems you’ll both be here well into the night otherwise.”

“Nope,” Bonnie said determinedly, taking turns with Caroline keep their eyes on Klaus as they continued to struggle to dig the grave. Caroline rolled her eyes at the ridiculous suggestion. *Who was this guy? A creepy good Samaritan who got off on helping random broads hide bodies?*

However, three more heavy shovelfuls and a twinge of back pain had Caroline reconsidering their stance. “What if you dig the entire hole,” she blurted out, noticing Bonnie seemed less concerned than before, now that she too realized just how long it was taking.

“For that, I require a date with you, sweetheart,” Klaus countered her offer, his devilish smirk making Caroline blush slightly.

Bonnie stabbed the ground with the end of her shovel, leaning against the handle as she shrugged at Caroline. “Honestly, a date with a psycho killer who thinks he’s a werewolf-vampire Viking probably won’t even crack your top five worst dates.”

“Seriously?!?” Embarrassed by her friend’s judgy tone of her dating history, Caroline put a hand on her hip, telling Bonnie, “Fine. But you’re coming with us and I’m bringing my shovel in case we have to do this again.”
Klaus looked delighted as he reached behind a tree where he’d apparently stashed his own shovel and began digging the grave with enthusiasm. “Do many of your dates end in such a violent manner, love?”

“Well, there was the time you pushed that old guy into the lake at the Lockwood estate when he took you to that charity auction. He didn’t drown, but he could’ve broken a hip if he hadn’t been so hammered,” Bonnie answered helpfully.

At Klaus’ derisive snort, Caroline stomped in aggravation, “His dating profile said he was 30! Although, I guess I should’ve been more specific and asked if that meant he was 30 now or way back when Fleetwood Mac played their first gig. But I didn’t throw him into the lake until that stellar moment when his wife showed up! Apparently, he was using a different definition of ‘single’ than I was.”

The women started giggling, the adrenaline and stress of the night wearing them down until all that remained was hysterical laughter. The moment they quieted again, they were shocked to see that Klaus already had finished digging Damon’s grave and was tamping down the earth with the back of his shovel. How in the hell…?

“I look forward to our date, sweetheart. I’ll plan an activity away from any bodies of water though, just in case,” he teased, exchanging phone numbers with Caroline as Bonnie led her away with a stunned look on her face.

Klaus watched the women leave, the enchanting blonde minx who’d stubbornly refused to give her name tugging at something foreign within him. What an intriguing creature. A stirring from the earth caught his attention and he watched in amusement as two arms hastily began clawing their way out of the grave. “Ah, right on time. Damon, right?”

“Those bitches! Thought they could kill me?! Nosy bitches get what they deserve and I’ll make sure mine is the last face they see before they die,” Damon choked out, furiously scrubbing his dirt-covered face.

Klaus observed the worthless man in amusement, only a heated flash of gold in his gaze hinting at the danger in which Damon was oblivious. “I could hear when your heartbeat returned to normal and the clever way you controlled your breath so the women wouldn’t realize you’d merely been knocked out rather than killed. I also happened to overhear your many sordid crimes, mate.”

He ignored the sputtering, half-hearted protests from the man and carried on in his silky tone, “However, given what I know of useless animals who beat women, I’m quite sure you’re guilty of numerous offenses for which you’ve never been properly punished.” Leaning forward, he allowed his fangs to emerge and relished in the stench of fear coming off of Damon in waves. “Allow me to rectify that grievous injustice,” he proclaimed, messily shredding through the shrieking man’s chest and removing his heart.

As he stared at the gory mess in his hand, he briefly considered gifting it to the blonde as the little firebrand appeared to be the type to appreciate out-of-the-box-style thinking, but instead decided flowers likely would make a better impression for their first date.

The bleeding heart of one’s enemy seemed more like a second date gift.
Fly the Friendly Guys

Chapter Summary

When Caroline moved her supernatural ride-sharing service to New Orleans, she had no idea the stubborn Hybrid King would be so territorial. And he better stop harassing her gargoyles before she showed him how a city should be ruled...

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: This is for a fantastic Klaroline author whom I really admire, coveredinthecolors! Her KC work, Between the Shadow and the Soul, is positively inspired and one of my favorite fics to read over and over!

I blended two of her favorite tropes: Fantasy AU with any sort of magical creatures and enemies to lovers. I hope you enjoy it!

Warning: Some violence plus a side of smut later on that I couldn’t resist throwing in!

“The best to weigh the enemy more mighty than he seems.”
— William Shakespeare

The last time Caroline had seen a gargoyle this angry, it was because the cable company excluded the Lifetime Movies Channel from their basic package. In between gnashing their fangs and angrily stomping their hooves, she finally got the whole story — and then it was her turn to be livid. As a former priestess from Mystic Falls, she’d grown tired of her people’s narrow-minded views and elaborate rituals to worship the ancient ones — the gargoyles. So, she’d gathered a group of progressive gargoyles who were fed up with being worshipped and they relocated to the thriving supernatural city of New Orleans.

Mystic Falls hadn’t provided many opportunities to learn marketable skills, but Caroline was a consummate planner with an enviable head for business, and after studying the local ride-sharing apps, she realized they could offer an innovative, completely unique experience to users. Garguber, the gargoyle ride-sharing service, was an instant hit with both humans and the supernatural community. Their catchy marketing slogan, ‘Fly with a fantasy’, was emblazoned on billboards and buses, and all the local channels constantly ran their sleek commercial showcasing the gargoyles’ speed, strength and agility in addition to providing an eco-friendly, flying alternative
New Orleans had been a dream come true for Caroline and her gargoyle friends. *Until the Hybrid King of New Orleans decided to show an interest in her business.* At first, she’d been flattered that Klaus Mikaelson, a centuries’-old creature who had seen his share of business dynasties rise and fall, would be impressed by her creation. But it didn’t take her long to realize that his *real* agenda was to recruit her gargoyles for his supernatural army.

Not that Klaus succeeded. In fact, Caroline delighted in watching him spectacularly fail. She helped her employees establish their own union, she offered medical, dental and even tuition reimbursement. Her gargoyles were loyal to *her*, not the insecure, immortal asshat who had the audacity to call himself ‘king’. She’d initially thought that after his first few overtures were soundly rejected, he’d give up trying to persuade her employees to join his army, but now her gargoyles were reporting that he’d invited them to a sumptuous feast at his estate to show what he could offer.

Doing her best to keep calm as she knew her gargoyles would rip apart the whole block if they sensed her distress, she reassured them, “I’ll go take care of this. While I’m out, check with Matt for today’s schedule. And Larry found a new spa on Bienville Street run by a selkie who really has a knack for challenging skincare, so consider making an appointment for those rocky hides. We want our riders to be comfortable, okay?”

The two muscle-bound hybrids at the imposing iron gate to the Mikaelson manor were far from polite when she arrived and asked to speak with Klaus. Her patience wore out once the misogynistic posturing began, so she used her magic to pin them to the gate. Once she crossed the threshold, she turned around, a wicked smile spreading as she channeled her gifts to cause the heavy gate to repeatedly slam shut with the hybrids still attached until they vomited like frat boys during pledge week. With a skip in her step, she wandered into the mansion, deciding the fastest route to the arrogant Hybrid King was to follow the screams.

*The first time she’d met Klaus, she’d been on a cemetery tour when the Original appeared seemingly out of nowhere to make an especially bloody example out of a few redneck swamp wolves whose pack thought they could challenge him. She’d smoothly stepped out of the way from the tourist group who’d run screaming in terror. As a recent New Orleans transplant, she’d been curious to observe the supernatural community’s power structure firsthand. While she’d been impressed by the eloquence and creativity of his threats and subsequent torture, she’d miscalculated the splatter range and ended up sending Klaus a bill for her dry cleaning.*

“It’s considered poor manners to arrive unannounced, love,” Klaus called out, smoothly sliding what appeared to be a vervain-laced blade deep into the bound vampire’s thigh. He added teasingly, “Surely that small town from which you hail imbued you with some semblance of etiquette?”

 Damn that delicious accent of his that made everything he said sound marvelously seductive. Rolling her eyes as she watched him slowly twist the long knife, Caroline stepped around the widening blood pool, acidly telling him, “And even a city slicker showoff should know better than to continue torturing a victim when company arrives.” Grimacing at the squelching sound the sharp tip made as it pierced an organ, she warned, “These are my favorite suede boots — I’ll expect you to replace them if you don’t watch those juicy bits.”

Flashing her a devilish smirk that made her heart inconveniently flutter, he pulled out the
knife, toying with the razor-sharp tip as he corrected her, “Marcel is hardly a helpless victim, sweetheart.” He gestured toward a side table piled high with a variety of gory body parts — a fluffy, over-styled brunette scalp, a stringy, greasy black scalp, an assortment of mangled fingers and toes, and long, bloody strips of pale white skin — and explained, “He and two imbecilic brothers attempted to strike an alliance with the witches in a futile effort to dethrone me.” He casually reached out to cleanly snap Marcel’s elbow, allowing the dislocated joints to continue dangling over the screaming vampire’s head.

“Seriously?!” Squinting her blue eyes at the heavy chains looped around an elegant crystal chandelier, she told him, “Like Marcel or whatever that goopy mess on the table over there used to be are serious threats. Just admit it — your wolf will get bored and in a couple of hours, you’ll loosen his shackles just enough to allow Marcel to escape and right before he flashes across the furthest boundary of your land, you’ll drag him back.”

Klaus chuckled in delight, gray eyes twinkling as he admitted, “You know me so well, love. Although given that knowledge, I’m surprised you chose to face me without your gargoyle cohorts.”

Raising her voice to be heard over the piercing wails of Marcel as Klaus viciously dug his hand into a gaping wound, she scoffed, “I had Jeremy drop me off on his way to pick up another customer because April went with Larry to check out the new spa. And unlike some insecure asshats, I don’t need to amass a supernatural army to feel good about myself. The gargoyles are my friends and I’m here to tell you to back the fuck off and quit harassing them. They’re not interested in joining your bullshit supernatural war.”

“Jeremy, the gargoyle,” he asked incredulously, “And April and Larry? I assumed that as some of the oldest beings in creation, their names would be a bit more...dignified.”

Stomping her boot in aggravation, Caroline shouted, “That’s what you got out of what I said? Seriously, you’re such an insufferable asshat. And trust me — I have enough asshats in my life already — ever since Councilman Saltzman tried to rally the city council to pass a bullshit ordinance limiting areas where my gargoyles can fly. That’s blatant gargoyle discrimination and I won’t stand for it!”

“Ah, yes, Alaric, with his questionable views on the supernatural, certainly enjoys poking into the shadows where he most certainly doesn’t belong. Still, the wonderfully corrupt politician has his uses whenever I require certain favors to keep my businesses above reproach in the human world,” he admitted with a sly grin.

“What a surprise you’re buddies with a sleazy councilman,” she said flatly. “Look, I get you’re weirdly threatened by my business, but I promise me and my gargoyles are keeping out of both human and supernatural politics. So, stay in your lane, and we’ll stay in ours.”

As she whirled around to storm off, Klaus flashed in front of her, his handsome face nearly close enough that she could nudge a dimple with her nose. Not that she’d fantasized about that. Ever. Except once or twice. A day. Stop it — your life is complicated enough. “Perhaps I’ve no interest in staying in my lane, sweetheart. I find myself fascinated by the little human priestess who’s earned the loyalty of such a fierce race of supernaturals.” He softly touched her cheek, his gravelly voice barely a whisper as he added, “Who bravely faces the Hybrid King alone and doesn’t flinch at the violence she sees within him.”

_Seriously? Someone should just eat this pompous hybrid assat already. Maybe me_, she thought slyly, before quickly shaking her head to focus on the matter at hand. Arching an eyebrow, Caroline couldn’t help the snort of derision as she replied, “You don’t know the first thing about
me — but I know enough to stay away from guys who refer to themselves in the third person. Plus, I’ve heard all about your numerous supernatural liaisons and have zero interest in being an Original groupie.”

“Aren’t you a sharp-tongued little minx,” came a delighted chuckle from the top of the grand staircase that stood in the center of the marble foyer. An attractive man with a boyish face and a naughty smile nodded to her, “Kol Mikaelson, undoubtedly the most handsome of Nik’s brothers. And it’s truly a shame that I wasn’t the one to make your acquaintance first, sweet Caroline.”

He winked at her, clearly enjoying the territorial growl that rumbled in Klaus’ chest. “Love your app, by the way. After all, who doesn’t want to ride a gargoyle, eh? In fact, given Nik’s fixation on your gargoyles, I reckon he’s desperate for a ride…” Wiggling his eyebrows comically, he whisper-shouted, “But you’re mistaken if you think my brother has so much as glanced in the direction of an Original groupie much less shagged one since the day he came across a feisty blonde who soundly scolded him for ruining her cemetery tour.”

Blue eyes widening at Kol’s unexpected confession, she glanced at Klaus, who glared at his brother while an embarrassed flush crept up his neck. “I told you I’ve been busy with a whole bloody kingdom to run,” he muttered, embarrassed.

Suddenly feeling awkward and hating how her own cheeks started to redden at the thought of Klaus’ interest being genuine, Caroline quickly left, doing her best to remind herself that he was the enemy. And she had no business complicating things further.

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The sharp snap of leathery wings. Alaric’s terrified shrieks as he fell hundreds of feet. Her friends darting in and out of his freefall, lazily slicing their claws across his skin. With an irritated sigh, Caroline stopped daydreaming about how she wished she could deal with the evil city councilman (instead of being civil and trying to schedule a meeting with his office to lodge her complaints — calls that Alaric clearly was dodging).

In addition to her issues with Councilman Saltzman, the Hybrid King continued to be a pain in her ass. This time, she didn’t bother trying to be pleasant to his hybrid guards — with a small a flick of her wrist, she pinned the burly men to the ostentatious front gate before storming into Klaus’ mansion to yell at him.

He was hunched over an intricately carved board, deep in thought. Inwardly pleased to be breaking his concentration, she yelled, “What the hell do you think you’re doing?!”

Stretching languidly, clearly exaggerating his movements to emphasize his well-toned torso, Klaus replied, “At the moment, love? Playing a bit of Skáktafl.” Glancing at his opponent, he added smugly, “And winning.”

“Only because you were around to help invent it,” muttered the younger vampire under his breath.

Huffing in annoyance, she happened to notice the unusual shape of the pieces they were moving. Morbid curiosity made her ask, “Are those fangs? Are you seriously playing a board game with vampire fangs?!”

Shrugging in amusement at his minion’s obvious discomfort, Klaus replied, “Calm down,
sweetheart. It’s not like Josh knew them — well.”

“Whatever. I’m not here to address how ruling through fear and intimidation is the obvious marker of a lazy leader. How you want to wreck a perfectly good kingdom is your business,” Caroline retorted, watching with barely concealed delight the way his jaw tightened at her words.

Josh’s eyes widened, and he quickly pushed away from the table, awkwardly stammering, “Yeah, so it seems like you two have this weird...thing happening now, so I’m going to just...go. So, yeah,” and then quickly flashed away, barely refraining from tripping over his feet.

Klaus’ bladed smile shouldn’t have had such a lethal effect on her senses, but there was something about that blatant danger that made her skin tingle.

Damn it. No Caroline. Bad.

“Besides foolishly goading a powerful immortal, was there another purpose for your visit? Kindly explain what’s gotten my fierce little human all riled up today.”

“I’m not your anything, you hybrid asshat,” she growled. “And I’m here because it turns out that in addition to being a shameless flirt, Kol is apparently a vindictive hacker whom you asked to upload a virus into my Garguber ride app!” Tossing back her blonde curls angrily, she added, “Now, every time someone downloads my app, they’re subjected to some truly awful journal entries from self-absorbed, broodypants vampires!”

His lips quirked as he acknowledged with faux innocence, “There certainly seems to be no shortage of those in my city. I merely thought your users might appreciate the insight into such a complex species.”

With her hands on her hips, she snorted, “Please. Immortal creatures feeling the supposed weight of their immortality and choosing to be the unnecessarily angsty soundtrack to New Orleans’ supernatural population? Pass.” Pointing a finger, she threatened, “And don’t think you’ve won, either — Matt and April are both pursuing advanced degrees in computer science and are nearly finished untangling Kol’s nasty code from our app.”

He leaned back in his chair, arms behind his head as his smirk deepened in amusement. “I wish your gargoyles luck — Kol is a mischievous imp and enjoys coding almost as much as a sorority car wash.”

Caroline allowed a hint of smugness to enter her expression as she gleefully told him, “Oh, they won’t need luck — once I announced that Garguber is offering free rides to those who donate to the relief fund we’ve set up for victims of the Hybrid King’s childish temper tantrums, several faction leaders reached out to offer their support.”

Blue eyes twinkling as she watched the color drain from his face, she explained, “It seems the Lockwoods, the Guerrera wolf clan and the French Quarter and Ninth Ward Covens all have pulled their support from your upcoming supernatural summit in favor of buying Garguber a superior, far more secure app, complete with immensely powerful anti-hacking hexes.”

“You dare to side with my enemies,” he growled, leaping from his chair as his eyes bled a furious gold. “You think to challenge me, love?!”

There was that traitorous shiver again. No one should be that attractive while trying to menace. “I told you that my gargoyles and I have zero interest in this city’s politics as long as you left us alone. You didn’t keep up your end of the bargain, so maybe you’re secretly relieved someone’s stepping up to show you how to rule New Orleans properly,” Caroline goaded him with a playful grin.
“I may fancy you, but my patience wears thin, little human. It’s foolish to assume your paltry priestess’ magic can protect you,” he threatened, black veins crawling underneath his searing gaze as he flashed in front of her.

*Time to put this smug asshat in his place.* Finally giving into the insistent tug of her ancestral bloodline, she allowed herself to partially transform. Pointed bat ears poked out of her blonde curls as her ivory skin roughened into a rocky hide. Power radiated throughout her newly muscled limbs, and she easily gripped the Hybrid King by his throat, slamming him into the wall.

Klaus’ gray eyes widened, shock registering on his handsome face as he took in every startling detail of her semi-transformed state. “You’re...not human?”

“No? You thought you and your minions were the only hybrids in this city,” Caroline taunted, slowly removing her claws from his throat. Enjoying keeping him off-balance, she placed the dripping tip of one claw in her mouth. That first bite of the Original’s blood left her breathless, the spice and age of him flooding her senses. “Half-human, half-gargoyle,” she explained, “no wings, though,” she grumbled mulishly.

Blinking slowly as though trying to reconcile what he thought he knew about Caroline with what he suddenly saw before him, he reached out to touch her sharpened cheekbones. In a hoarse whisper, he declared, “I’ve seen sweeping vistas of nature’s endless bounty, centuries of priceless artwork. And yet yours is a beauty that makes me ache in a way I haven’t since I was human.”

Caroline’s breath caught in her throat at his words. His touch was soft despite the roughness of her skin, and for the first time since they met, she was at a loss for words. He was her enemy. Remember?

He suddenly looked awkward as the tips of his ears reddened slightly. He mumbled, “And Alaric’s not avoiding your calls. I ate him after your last visit.”

*The Hybrid King ate one of his most useful allies for her?* All rational thought fled her mind and instinct took over as she surged forward, kissing him with all the pent-up fury and passion she’d been feeling since their very first argument.

At his grunt of surprise, she plunged her claws into his curls, tugging insistently on the ends as she explored his mouth. Of course, Klaus quickly recovered from his shock, taking control of their desire-filled kiss as he lifted her off her feet, pressing her against the edge of the table. Her t-shirt dress rode up as she molded her thighs around his waist, pulling him closer.

She ground her center against his prominent bulge, causing him to shudder as wolf gold flared in his heated gaze. A quick swipe of his claws easily ripped open her dress, and that subtle lip lick of his made her vibrate with need. Growing impatient with his teasing smirk, she clenched one fist, summoning her magic to rip open his zipper.

Caroline’s boldness seemed to snap Klaus’ tenuous control, and with a sexy growl, he pushed her to the table’s polished surface, scattering the vampire fangs across the room in his haste. His feather-light touches along her thighs made her core ache in anticipation, and as she arched up, she noticed the gouges in his neck were still healing. That first swipe of her tongue made them both moan, and she allowed her fangs to emerge just enough to dig into the edge of his wound for a proper taste.

Klaus bent his head to her collarbone, his hybrid fangs smoothly sliding beneath her skin. She’d never allowed another to drink from her, and the blood high made her feverish and dizzy with want.
“You are a revelation, Caroline. Tell me, love, do you feel as good as you taste,” he rumbled, using his tongue to smear a messy trail of her blood along her breasts.

Panting against his lips, she replied, “Find out, Hybrid King.” She spread her thighs just enough to taunt him, and he eagerly pushed inside, filling her until they both cried out in ecstasy. She raised her hips, meeting his powerful thrusts as she raked her claws along his back. She loved the feel of his muscles, the way they flexed and strained to bring her pleasure.

A low whine escaped as she clenched around him, and when he traced an inquisitive fingertip along the sensitive points of her ears, she came with a hoarse cry. As she blissfully rode out her orgasm, Klaus’ thrusts became more languid, but the heat of his gaze showed he was nearing his peak as well. One final clamp of her walls had him groaning helplessly, and he gave a shudder before collapsing against her.

Blood, sweat and sex swirled together to create an intoxicating feast for the senses and the beast within Caroline hummed in pleasure as her arousal spiked once more. Coyly looking up at Klaus through her lashes, she saw the way the hybrid gold flashed in his gaze, and she knew they were far from finished.

Klaus reverently caressed the sharp angle of her monster’s cheekbone, a gentle smile appearing. “It seems Kol was right all along — I do want to ride a gargoyle.”
Skin Deep

Chapter Summary

A violent creature is stalking the area, and as a shaman with important responsibilities, Caroline should be focusing on that instead of flirting with a curly-headed merchant from a neighboring village.

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: Thanks for reaching out and sending me such kind reviews!

Warning: Some smut :)

“If you want to keep a secret, you must also hide it from yourself.”
— George Orwell, 1984

Red. The violence of it was startling. The stench of copper filled her lungs and made her retch. Caroline woke up with a start, the woven grass fibers of her bed roll soaked in her sweat. The air of her small sandstone dwelling was heavy with the screams still caught in her throat. As her people’s shaman, she sometimes had visions, but never as intense as these most recent ones. It was because of the beast.

A yenaldooshi, also known as a skin-walker, recently had been terrorizing the villages that dotted the vast Phoenix Stone Canyon. Bodies were torn apart, partially eaten, and left to rot out in the open desert. Fear and dread choked the land and most refused to venture out after the sun had set. Legends spoke of powerful monsters with long claws and fangs that hunted and feasted as it pleased. As a powerful shaman, she possessed a spiritual connection to the land and could feel her people’s pain, which unfortunately meant she had to endure the horrific visions of the creature as it stalked the canyon. She must protect her people.

She adjusted her pack, the soft hides providing some relief from the blazing afternoon sun as she made her way along her well-worn shortcut to the neighboring village. To his village. Niklaus was a prosperous merchant in the neighboring village, and since he’d settled in the Phoenix Stone Canyon several months ago, Caroline had gone to him for almost all of her ritual ingredients — because he carried the best quality. The fact that he happened to be the most extraordinarily beautiful man she’d ever seen was beside the point.

She instantly felt her cheeks flush as she pushed open the split pine door of his dwelling.
Maybe he’d assume her blush was from her long hike. The way his gray eyes lit up when he saw her sent a small shiver through her body. “Caroline,” he exclaimed, “always a pleasure. Why did you journey so far to see me today?”

Caroline bowed her head, silently cursing that despite her prominent position among her people, there was something about the way her name flowed from his flirtatious tongue that left her stammering like a young maiden before her first agave nectar ritual. “Desert needlegrass. You. Me...Uh, give me two jars please. Plus, dried creosote bush and powdered moon opals.”

Niklaus considered her requests for a moment, something unreadable flashing in his gaze for a moment. “You’re creating a banishment spell,” he observed shrewdly, “to rid us of the yenaldooshi.”

Her eyes widened in surprise. It was rare to find someone not linked to the spiritual plane to know the intricacies of a banishment ritual. What else did he know about the beast? She finally answered, “The elders of my village have charged me with protecting this canyon. It’s my sacred duty.” She opened a small tanned leather pouch, carefully weighing several pieces of turquoise before handing them to Niklaus.

As she hoisted her pack to a more comfortable position before turning to leave, his cry of alarm startled her, “No! The sun will set before you reach your village.” He grabbed her hands, holding them tightly in his as he said worriedly, “It’s not safe, sweetheart.”

She was taken aback by his concern. While he’d always shown her a friendly, somewhat flirty face whenever they crossed paths, she honestly thought the attraction between them was something she’d imagined. The thought that he might feel something for her made her cheeks warm. “I know it’s not safe — that’s why I need to do this. The sooner I perform the ritual, the sooner I can keep the people of Phoenix Stone Canyon safe.”

“If something happened to you...” he trailed off uncertainly, his eyes fully of worry.

Caroline could feel the weight of his gaze, suddenly unsure of herself. What happens now? “I didn’t know that you felt...I mean, if you felt something...”

“I do,” Niklaus quickly interrupted her, “you have no idea, Caroline. From the moment I first saw you months ago, you’d captured something in me. The way you argue with me about proper storage of rose quartz to dismissing the quality of my herbal remedies,” he gave a helpless little sigh as he continued, “and the way you bite your lip while looking at me when you think I won’t notice.”

Her heart was pounding at his words. She’d never had anyone speak to her like that. To express an interest. As her people’s shaman, there was a certain amount of distance others kept from her, respectful to be sure, but it also made her feel isolated. This felt new. She licked her lip nervously, “Well, someone needed to speak up about the inferior quality of those herbs.”

He laughed, “You and I both know all this time you’ve been buying my sage bundles despite the fact that you easily could pick the sage leaves between your village and mine.” He leaned close, his voice barely above a whisper as he confessed, “Every time you cross my threshold, it feels like you become a little bit more mine and I can’t bear the thought of you being caught by the beast.”

Before Caroline could respond, he brushed his lips against hers, sending a spark that traveled all through her body as she returned his kiss. He broke away, his breath warm on her face as he pleaded urgently, “Stay?”
She quickly nodded, reaching up to tangle her fingers in the leather and beaded cords around his neck to pull him back in for another heated kiss. He suddenly picked her up with surprising strength, tossing her with ease on top of a thick pile of fox furs near the fire. As he prowled toward her with a feral gleam in his gaze, she shivered with anticipation.

The brush of his fingers as they impatiently untied the knotted sweetgrass belt at her waist nearly sent her reeling. She’d never met another who could spark such longing and she quickly untied his breechcloth, anxious to explore his skin against hers. The powerful flex of muscle underneath her hands was addictive and she breathed him in, a heady mix of tobacco and soap made from the yucca plant.

He pushed up the soft deer hide tunic, exposing her legs to his greedy gaze. He rumbled in approval, running his hands appreciatively over her thighs. “My radiant goddess.” Heat pooled in her belly as he bent down to place reverent kisses along her body until she arched into his touch.

His possessive touch stirred something within her, a primal need to claim him until their scents mingled together and she yanked him back up until she could slide her core against the hard line of his cock. “I want to feel you,” she told him hoarsely, grinding against him until her vision nearly went white.

“Yes. Feel,” Niklaus moaned, parting her folds with one forceful thrust. They rocked together against the soft furs, building that delicious tension until their bones vibrated with need. As he strained against her, she ran a teasing line along his collar bone, nibbling just enough to make him shudder above her.

She cried out the moment his hand slid between them to press against her tight bundle of nerves, her orgasm rolling over her as Niklaus growled out his own release.

They quietly held each other in the soft glow of the fire, sharing tender looks that required no words. If only she could stay. As Caroline settled next to him, she began to subtly yawn, allowing her eyelids to grow heavy to mimic sleep. She could feel his breathing lengthen, the smallest rumble from his chest indicating that he would begin to slip into a deeper sleep soon.

As she waited patiently for him to fall asleep, she glanced at the unusual objects that adorned the adobe mud walls, surprised at the collection of powerful symbols in a merchant’s dwelling. A bleached white badger’s skull surveyed the room with its empty, yet somehow all seeing eyes. Hanging beside the aggressive, fearless totem animal was a long coyote jaw — the embodiment of a stealthy trickster whose shape was ever changing. She shivered slightly when she noticed several raven feathers, her people believing the creature to be a powerful harbinger.

The light snoring in her ear alerted her to the fact that Niklaus had fallen asleep. Caroline carefully slid out from underneath his arm, silently slipping her tunic back over her head. She turned to study him, the beautiful lines of his body warm and inviting in the firelight. With a small sigh of regret, she unclasped her brightly colored abalone necklace, setting it next to Niklaus’ arm so that when he awoke, he’d know that she’d return for her token. Before she crossed the threshold, she performed the strongest blessing she knew to protect him. Niklaus would be safe.

The moon lit up the night sky during her trek to the sacred white cedar. She hastened her steps as it was important to perform the banishment ritual once the moon was at its apex. The tall yucca palms in the distance signaled that she was getting close to the site. A fierce growl startled her, and she whipped around to confront the noise, uncertain of where it came from. Yenaldooshi
were tricksters, stories told of them luring unsuspecting victims to the empty desert through cunning mimicry of a child’s cry or pretending to be a wounded animal.

Adrenaline shot through Caroline, and suddenly her heart increased its pace until she became dizzy. Wiping her brow at the sudden fever that overtook her, she blinked rapidly as she willed her vision to come back into focus. Was she having a panic attack?

Hot, heavy breath hit her face, and she quickly leapt away, scrambling to stay upright in the soft sand. A searing heat across her skin made her realize the creature had begun its attack, ripping away her ritual ingredients in its anger. She swung blindly with her arms, a scream locked in her throat. She refused to be its next victim.

The Mystic Mountains far off on the horizon seemingly mocked her, underscoring her vulnerability to the yenaldooshi in the open desert. She grappled for the obsidian knife at her waist, a feeling of relief washing over her as she felt the familiar carved antler bone handle. She slashed upward, the brush of rough fur firmly keeping her in this surreal moment. This was happening.

Deep bellows of rage tore the night sky, and she felt a smug sense of satisfaction at the realization that she’d wounded the beast. Unfortunately, the sudden burning in her side alerted her to the fact that she’d been injured as well. The fierce pain threatened to overwhelm her and she had no choice but to turn and flee, hoping she’d crippled the yenaldooshi enough to keep it from catching her as she stumbled across the desert toward her village.

Somehow, she managed to make it back to her people without seeing the yenaldooshi again. She quickly consulted with the village elders, realizing that she was foolish to travel alone to the ritual site. Of course the monster would sense her purpose in the desert and would try to stop her. The entire time she met with the elders, her thoughts raced. Something was off. No, something was familiar...

It was rare for anyone outside of the sacred shaman circle to know of the banishment ingredients for the yenaldooshi. And the creature had ripped them away. The collection of powerful objects she’d seen — someone who recognized the strength of those totems had displayed them together on purpose. His surprising strength, and his inherent possessive nature that seemed almost feral at times. His genuine fear at the thought of her alone in the desert at night. Niklaus was the yenaldooshi.

Without bothering to explain to the elders what she’d realized, she ran from the ceremonial room, all rational thought gone as she headed back into the open desert. To confront Niklaus.

When Caroline reached up to grip a jutting rock formation and swing herself over a deep crevice, she fought back a groan of pain. The yenaldooshi must have injured her worse than she realized during their fight. Niklaus had injured her. She shook her head angrily, stopping those traitorous feelings before they had a chance to gain any traction. She’d let him into her body—not her heart. She would see this through and do what needed to be done to protect the people of Phoenix Stone Canyon.

The familiar outline of the tall sandstone structure where Niklaus lived once made her stomach flutter and her breath quicken. Now, she was boiling with rage against the man she thought she knew. A monster.

Niklaus’ eyes widened when he saw her, and she roughly pushed past him as she crossed
“It’s you. All this time, you were the beast,” Caroline shouted, fists balled up as she prepared to strike.

He scoffed, “You’ve lost your mind. I’m no more yenaldooshi than you.”

“I’m no fool, Niklaus,” she growled, leveling him with her fiercest glare, “No one knows of the banishment ritual ingredients except for shamans. And the yenaldooshi.” She gestured around the small room, her gaze momentarily distracted by the gruesome coyote jaw. The shape-shifting trickster. “You display objects of great power in a manner that reflects knowledge of one who understands how to use them.”

His face reddened in anger as he yelled, “I’m a merchant, and a damned good one at that! It stands to reason I’ve learned through my travels certain rare knowledge.”

“The unusual strength you displayed, coupled with that animal-like possessive side, not to mention how you kept trying to stop me from going into the desert last night,” she sneered, adding, “where you felt the heat of my blade.”

Niklaus suddenly ripped his deer hide shirt over his head, furiously throwing it behind him. He stalked over to her, gray eyes blazing as he displayed smooth, unmarred flesh before her startled eyes.

With trembling fingers, Caroline reached out, unable to stop herself from touching his skin. His skin which was whole. Aside from a faint, crisscross pattern of scars that spoke of a fierce battle with multiple spearheads, no knifepoint had pierced his flesh. Certainly not hers.

“I don’t understand,” she whispered hoarsely, her limbs feeling strangely heavy, “I battled the yenaldooshi last night.” She fumbled for her obsidian knife at her waist, showing him the crimson stains along the blade.

Niklaus’ gaze softened as he witnessed the violence she’d seen. “Brave, stubborn warrior,” he said in a tone full of awe.

A feverish heat overwhelmed her, and her knees buckled unexpectedly. As his palm grazed her side, she let out a yelp of pain. Confused, she allowed him to hold her as she pushed up the soft hide of her tunic to investigate.

Together, they stared in shock at the deep knife wound carved into her flesh.

*From Caroline’s knife.*
Summer of Salvatore

Chapter Summary

It never occurred to Klaus that a human would find a link between murders that span more than a century. But then he meets a feisty cold case investigator who might be too smart for her own good. And if she happens to mistake him as a coworker, well, there’s no harm in playing along...

“The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.”
— Arthur Conan Doyle, The Hound of the Baskervilles

A tape measure had no business looking that formidable. Or oddly appealing. And yet, the longer Klaus watched Caroline Forbes carefully recording measurements from the torn chunks of flesh scattered about the floor, the more intrigued he became. A millennium among the humans had taught the hybrid caution — to practice discretion if leaving behind corpses — and he maintained a watchful eye to avoid unnecessary exposure. Inviting Stefan Salvatore along on his search for werewolves in his emotionless, ‘ripper’ state had been impulsive. And possibly a grave error in judgement, if this cold case investigator was as clever as her reputation claimed.

As his traveling companion reverted to his previous ripper ways, Klaus had left behind a pet hybrid to ensure the supernatural aspects of the murders remained hidden. If Tyler’s reports were accurate, Caroline had built an impressive reputation as a cold case investigator, solving decades-old crimes with little more to guide her than a few bloody fingerprints and intuition. While this information alone wasn’t cause for alarm, he’d learned that among her impressive achievements was a well-received master’s thesis on the 1912 Ripper of Monterey. Considering Stefan was the Ripper of Monterey, and now the authorities had purposely enlisted Caroline’s expertise with the latest string of murders, Klaus wanted to ensure that she reached the proper conclusion that a copycat killer was to blame, rather than a melodramatic vampire with amusing blood addiction issues.

“Well? What are you waiting for,” Caroline’s voice startled him from his thoughts, and much to his chagrin, he realized she’d caught him staring at her a bit longer than polite.

Straightening, Klaus flashed her a disarming smile. “Pardon, sweetheart?”

Her tape measure loudly snapped shut in irritation. “The samples?!”

His questioning brow seemed to further aggravate her. Blue eyes flashing, she snarled, “Seriously?! You’re supposed to be transporting forensic samples — you’re the new dispatch driver, right?”
What a curious little firebrand. He couldn’t recall the last time anyone, much less a mortal, had spoken to him with such disregard. A slow, curling smile touched his lips as he nodded politely. “Of course, love. Please, call me Klaus.”

“She answered stiffly, jerking her chin toward several plastic cases nearby as she added, “Do I need to remind you about basic protocols like crime scene integrity and chain of custody like your useless predecessor?”

She must be referring to his pet hybrid. Now what could Tyler have done to incur her wrath? Tyler dutifully had obeyed his sire, providing regular reports regarding his interactions with the investigator and any progress she’d made that might expose the supernatural community. But clearly he’d left out a few pertinent details. “Actually, I’m quite well-versed in procedures, love. However, if you’re going to treat me to a proper lecture, you might also wish to delight me with a thorough review of the dangers of forensic contamination during transport.”

The rosy blush that came to her cheeks was immensely satisfying, and he fully intended to commit that image to his sketchpad when he had a moment. What a lovely muse she’d make. She sighed, carefully maneuvering around the blood pools and mangled corpses to stand before him. “That was completely uncalled for. I apologize, Klaus. I’m sure you’re quite capable, and just because Tyler had no idea how to fill out a basic Chain of Custody form despite my repeated attempts to explain it to him doesn’t mean you have that problem.”

She rolled her eyes, wryly adding, “Of course, if he’d spent less time creepily staring down my shirt during those lessons, he might’ve come away with a clearer understanding of basic form completion.”

Klaus felt a flare of anger at that, the idea of his dimwitted hybrid behaving improperly toward her making his fangs itch to tear into something and leave it bloody. Caroline was far too clever to fall for such crude tactics. She deserved to be courted properly. Startled by that unexpected thought, he said, “I certainly hope he was reprimanded for his improper behavior. If not, it would be my pleasure to handle the matter if you prefer.”

Caroline seemed surprised by his reaction, but shrugged it off. “I appreciate the gesture, but I can take care of myself. Besides, I don’t want to pull focus from my research — especially with these latest findings.”

He delighted in the way her blue eyes lit up with excitement, her beautiful smile utterly charming. Using his enhanced vision, he spied complex notations on her laptop across the room, and asked, “I noticed you were taking quite a few measurements of the victims’ wounds. Is that related to your research?”

The way she bit her lip made his wolf restless, and he found himself most interested in soothing it with his tongue. As she grabbed his hand to eagerly pull him toward her data, he marveled at how the warmth from her touch somehow felt like home. Needing a distraction, he gestured toward the complex equations, surprised that most of it was unfamiliar. Say something intelligent. “That’s a derivation of the formula for pressure?”

“Tha’s right,” she nodded excitedly. It was bloody ridiculous the way her beaming smile warmed him from the inside out, and he fought to keep his own grin from looking as foolish as he felt. He watched as she scrolled through several data sheets, finally stopping at a detailed graph to explain, “I modified the equation to assess the pressure of puncture wounds and measure the exact force the killer uses when he rips apart his victims. By measuring the units of pressure associated with each corpse’s wounds, I’ve figured out the killer’s signature force of pressure. This can get us one step closer to identification!” She whispered conspiratorially, “I’ve even found similar patterns
with the famous Ripper of Monterey — looks like we have a copycat.”

Eyes widening at her revelation, he tried to determine the best response that wouldn’t arouse her suspicion. Perhaps focus on her methodology? While he’d accumulated a fundamental understanding of higher mathematics over the centuries, what Caroline had created was beyond him. *What an impressive little human.* “Pascal would be proud,” he told her, “when he wasn’t inventing the formula for pressure, he spent his time creating terminology for geometric principles.”

Under her curious gaze, he found himself blathering on like a green lad attending his first harvest dance. “He was a bit of a hermit, what with his father being an unrepentant drunkard and his mother plagued with headaches that modern medicine would diagnose as severe migraines, but unfortunately the quack physicians of the time proclaimed she was plagued by demons.”

She arched an eyebrow, her voice teasing as she remarked, “You sound as though you were there. Do you know what happened to Pascal and his mother?”

“I...um read that a dashing stranger introduced Pascal to Kepler and other like-minded philosophers who helped them secure passage before the local priests decided her ‘demons’ were an affront to their god.”

Caroline snapped on a pair of gloves, opening a set of empty specimen jars that she placed near one of the headless bodies. As she used an eyedropper to painstakingly collect blood samples, she chuckled, “You know, if forensics doesn’t work out, maybe you should write a book. You have a gift for storytelling, Klaus.” Tossing back her blonde hair impatiently, she gestured toward the remaining jars, adding, “These samples aren’t going to collect themselves, though. If you’re going to stand there, you might as well be useful...unless you’re squeamish?”

Klaus let out a bark of laughter, amused by her unwitting cheekiness. “No, sweetheart. While I’ve been accused of many things over the years, squeamishness has never been one of them.” He tried to ignore the funny tweak his heart gave at her earlier praise. *A gift for storytelling.* Oh, the stories he wished he could tell her, he thought wistfully. While it seemed she was warming up to Klaus, the dispatch driver, he assumed that Klaus, the immortal hybrid mass murderer would put a damper on the mood.

As he dutifully gathered the blood smear samples, the utter nonsense of the situation was not lost on him as he pretended to be this bumbling human for the sake of...what, exactly? Appearances? Monitoring the little blonde spitfire who was too clever for her own good? He could foolishly tell himself he lingered at the crime scene to protect the supernatural from discovery, but a wry voice in his ear kept whispering that his current actions were completely unnecessary — all it would take is some carefully worded compulsion and exerting a tighter leash on his ripper to keep the supernatural world’s secrets.

He watched her with a fond smile on his face as she carefully labeled each jar and input more data into her laptop, her nose wrinkled adorably as she seemed deep in thought. “Did you always have such passion? For forensic sciences, I mean,” he blurted out unexpectedly, cringing at how absurd he sounded. *She must think him quite daft.*

Caroline looked up in surprise, seemingly assessing the gory crime scene before she shrugged, “I know this is the part where I’m supposed to regale you with some tragic hero revenge fantasy where I’ve lost a loved one to a horrific crime which put me on the path to catching murderers, but honestly, it’s about the puzzles for me.”

“Puzzles?”
Her brow wrinkled as she hastily explained, “Don’t get me wrong — I feel for the victims and the pain they went through and of course I want to find whoever’s responsible, but also, I really enjoy the challenge of putting together random events and evidence to fit a theory until all of the pieces of the puzzle are in place and we catch the murderer.”

“You’re a perfectionist. I do so admire a meticulous creature,” Klaus murmured, earning a faint blush upon her cheeks once more.

She shuffled her feet awkwardly, opening and closing her mouth as though rethinking her words. It was the first time he’d seen her appear as anything other than confident, and he was curious to learn what had her looking so uncomfortable. “So, this is going to be a pretty late night for me, but when you stop back by for the next set of evidence to transport, maybe we could go grab some coffee?”

Such a simple question shouldn’t have earned this type of a response from him, but Klaus found himself unable to stop grinning like a lunatic. *Caroline had asked him out.* While he understood that modern courting rituals placed less importance on a coffee date, it did carry the weighty implication that if all went well, a dinner date could follow. *Perhaps many dates.*

“It would be my pleasure, Caroline,” he answered, purposely deepening his accent as he rolled her name across his tongue, pleased to see the way her blue eyes darkened a bit, a hint of anticipation lingering in the air.

Wanting to keep up the charade, Klaus carried out the stack of evidence containers, casually compelling one of the officers outside to take them to the proper station for cataloging. Initially, he’d intended to catch up with Stefan in the next town once he’d assessed Caroline’s competence and potential threat to exposing the supernatural community, but now his plans had changed. An emotionless ripper would think nothing of him delaying his stay, but he’d now need to determine exactly what layers of compulsion he’d need to give Stefan. Not only would Stefan need to be more discreet with his appetites, he’d also need to keep him far away from Caroline. *His Caroline.*

After checking in with his hybrids, he returned to the crime scene, carrying two cups of coffee from a local shop that was a favorite of his. There was an eagerness to his step as he anticipated the way her lips would twitch into a teasing smile at his gesture, and he was so caught up in his daydream of their flirtatious banter that he didn’t notice the distinct lack of police officers patrolling the perimeter until after he heard Stefan’s voice inside the house.

“Your reputation precedes you, Detective Forbes. You should be flattered — I normally don’t bother with cleanup,” Stefan silkily told her, the predator in his dark eyes coming out to play.

Caroline’s tone was suspicious as she stood before him, seemingly not the least bit intimidated as she said, “Mostly I’m confused — who the hell are you and what makes you think you can stomp all over my crime scene?!”

“Because it’s *my* crime scene, and I believe you’ve been tracking my crimes for some time now. Even longer than you’d ever believe.” Stefan smoothly answered, taking a menacing step toward her.

As Klaus watched the scene unfold, his hands clenched into fists, shredding the coffee cups he’d been holding. He hadn’t anticipated Stefan taking an interest in Caroline, and while he was certain she was quite capable in dangerous situations, she’d never encountered the supernatural
element before. Stefan was there to kill her.

He flashed inside, just as Caroline drew her sidearm on the ripper, proclaiming, “I was close to catching you. My data already told me you were of average height and build.” Scoffing slightly, she added contumuously, “And I do mean average. I don’t know what you thought you’d accomplish by coming here tonight, but it’s over.”

Stefan glanced over at Klaus as he mockingly raised his hands in the air, pretending to cower in fear. “So authoritative, Detective Forbes. I certainly hope you’ll use excessive force on me. You see, I crave a bit of brutality in my police.”

Klaus edged closer to Caroline, realizing that Stefan was moments away from attacking her. He was in a quandary — while he intended to keep her safe by any means necessary, he also preferred to continue his charade of human dispatch driver. Because he liked the way Caroline looked at him. Like he wasn’t a monster. The idea of compelling away her memories of anything supernatural she might witness was distasteful to him.

“It’s going to be ok, Klaus,” she told him in a calm voice, “just stay where you are.”

His heart gave that odd tweak again at the combative stance Caroline took, angling her body to shield him. It had been centuries since someone had attempted to protect him. But it was Caroline who needed protecting — she just didn’t realize it. Unfortunately, before he reached a decision on how to handle the situation, a snarling Stefan advanced on Caroline. He couldn’t help but admire her quick reflexes as she shot him in the leg, just below the knee. The flash of relief on her face was short-lived — no doubt, she’d expected the bullet to wound Stefan enough to make him reconsider attacking her. But she didn’t know that Stefan wasn’t human.

Stefan leapt at her, his teeth a touch too sharp to be completely human. Klaus felt his claws lengthening, and just as he moved to tear open Stefan’s throat, Caroline expertly shot the ripper in the forehead. As he collapsed with a satisfying thud, Caroline quickly pulled Klaus away, running her hands along his chest and arms as though checking him for injuries. He had the presence of mind to retract his monster, claws shrinking back into human nails. He slowly exhaled, allowed himself to curl into the warmth of her touch, his wolf purring as it sensed her concern.

“I’m alright, sweetheart, thanks to you,” he told her, gently reaching out to tuck a wayward blonde strand behind her ear. She surprised him with the way her arms suddenly enveloped him into a hug, her body shaking slightly.

Giving him a final squeeze, she straightened, her voice a bit hoarse as she told him, “I had to. He was going to hurt us. He wasn’t going to stop.”

He readily agreed. “You’re right about that. Creatures like that don’t change. You did what you must.”

Favoring him with a small smile, Caroline stepped outside to wait for the dispatch unit she’d called.

Klaus studied Stefan dispassionately, knowing the bullet in his skull eventually would push its way out, and then the ripper would visit all manner of horrific torture upon Caroline for trying to stop him.

He knelt on the blood-stained floor beside Stefan, casually snapping off a jagged piece from a baseboard. As he positioned the splintered end over the ripper’s heart, he smirked.
Caroline had protected him; the least he could do was return the favor.
Chapter Summary

Like any hardworking griffin, Caroline just wants to do her job — guarding treasure and fending off Klaus’ inept attempts to steal from her boss. But then, she’s asked to guard something that might be the perfect bargaining chip...

“Where the waters do agree, it is quite wonderful the relief they give.”
— Jane Austen, *Emma*

*The urn filled with that mouthy idiot’s ashes was still singing.*

“I like to shag in the morning; the sun streaming in my face.

And her jubblies in a bit o’ lace.

I like to shag during elevenses; the tea piping hot

And my dangly bits —”

“Seriously?! You’ve been singing that same stupid rhyme all morning,” Caroline screeched, her irritated voice echoing throughout the vast underground chamber. She clicked her curved black talons, barely resisting the urge to stomp over to the marble pedestal and shatter the elaborate crystal urn with a flick of her tail. But Marcel paid her an absurd amount to watch over his treasure vault, and she intended to uphold the code of the griffin: To use her power to guard priceless possessions.

Marcel had brought in the urn earlier, acting even shiftier than usual, his body practically vibrating with excitement at his recent acquisition. She noticed the way he purposely avoided offering any information about the identity of the cremains, just reiterating the immeasurable value
of his latest treasure.

_She couldn’t help be a bit curious._

“Not a fan of original songs, then,” the sly voice asked. “I also take requests, little bird.”

Caroline scoffed, feeling her enormous brown and white feathered wings twitch. “I’m hardly a _little_ bird.”

“No,” the voice readily agreed, “but you _are_ part bird — a griffin. And I could use someone with your considerable skills on my side.”

She rolled her eyes. “You’re nothing but a pile of ashes crammed in a fancy Mason jar. What makes you think you can offer me a better deal than Marcel? For what he pays me to guard his treasure, I’ve bought vacation homes on several islands.”

“Oh, little bird, that’s mere pennies. With my resources, you can buy entire islands.”

Bored, she began sharpening the tips her talons along the thick quartz wall. “Uh huh. And who are you to be making those kinds of ridiculous promises?”

The smugness of his voice was unmistakable. “I’m Kol Mikaelson.”

All playfulness left her expression and she was so surprised that her feathers retracted back into her human form. _Marcel was right — this particular treasure was valuable._

She’d lived in New Orleans long enough to be familiar with the Originals — Klaus Mikaelson in particular. It was because of his petty, ongoing feud with Marcel that she’d been hired in the first place to guard Marcel’s most valuable possessions. The first time she caught Klaus’ idiot hybrids sniffing around, they were after the Tupperware Bowl of Inexplicable Angst. (A powerful object created by witches that imbues alpha male-types with an overwhelming urge to constantly weep and act wildly out of character. Never let it be said that witches didn’t have a sense of humor in addition to being insufferable twats.)

She’d bloodied his minions with a few swipes of her talons and tossed them into Rousseau’s where she knew Klaus enjoyed holding court with his adoring sycophants. She still recalled the way her gut twisted unexpectedly when she caught the Original’s gaze, and how his dimpled grin lit up his face.

She did her best to ignore the way Klaus looked at her, not to mention the way he seemed to look for her whenever she stopped by the bar for a drink at the end of her shift. But then he kept sending his minions, which meant she’d have to see him every time she dropped off whatever was left of his idiot followers post-battle. She couldn’t deny that she’d started to enjoy their flirty banter, and it was refreshing to have a supernatural creature not immediately trip over themselves to get into her good graces or try to recruit her for whatever bullshit power grab they were plotting among the factions. Her thoughts drifted to their last encounter a few days ago...

_Caroline slid onto the barstool next to Klaus, inhaling his familiar scents of cedar and that fancy scotch he insisted they drink whenever she stopped by. The sleeves of his henley were pushed up to his forearms, and she wondered if he did that on purpose because he’d caught her staring at his arms so often._

_“I suppose I can guess why you’re here, love,” he rumbled beside her._

_She took a sip of his scotch, allowing her powerful gaze to trace the sculpted planes of his_
chest. Her fingers were aching to touch his henley and see if it was really as soft as it looked. Maybe it was time they act on the electricity that zinged between them every time they met. “Can you,” she asked, allowing some of that lusty heat into her appreciative gaze.

“You’re here about Katerina.”

Caroline froze at her friend’s name. She owed Kat a life debt. Centuries ago, Kat had stumbled across a weakened Caroline, bound in silver shackles and strung up in a cave. At the time, Kat had been a young vampire, only a few decades old, but still strong enough to kill the two trophy hunters who’d intended to carve Caroline into pieces and sell to dark magic sorcerers. “What about Kat,” she asked sharply, feeling the tips of her talons itching to pierce through her fingers and throttle Klaus.

“It seemed her luck wasn’t infinite. I’ve had her desiccated and locked away.” Klaus must’ve noticed the anger flash in her eyes, because he offered, “I do not take betrayal lightly, sweetheart. Had it been another who had thwarted my attempts to break this curse, they’d experience every torture, every ounce of pain I could inflict upon their wretched carcass before I finally chose to kill them — many centuries from now. But because I know of your fondness for that traitorous creature, I granted her mercy.”

Caroline ground out through gritted teeth, “It’s not merely a fondness, you asshat. I owe Kat a life debt. My people don’t take that lightly.” She couldn’t believe she’d been moments away from licking into those dimples to see what they tasted like. So, it wasn’t just his minions; apparently, ALL hybrids were idiots.

She tossed back the rest of his scotch, slamming it to the scuffed bar top with enough force that she cracked the oak. Damn it — she always forgot her strength when she was angry. A quick glance around the room told her the handful of clueless humans just assumed she was drunk, but the other supernatural creatures knew she was a griffin and wisely kept their distance. “What’s your price, hybrid? What will you trade for Kat?”

The way his gray eyes darkened at her words pissed her off all over again. If he turned this into a creepy dudebro innuendo, she’d pull out his spleen in juicy little slivers. Fortunately, Klaus seemed to reconsider his words and instead told her, “You have access to some of the most rare and powerful objects in the world. I’m sure we can reach an accord, love.”

“Hello? Little bird? I’m used to getting a reaction upon introducing myself, but it’s rare I leave my audience speechless for this long,” Kol’s amused voice rang out, interrupting her thoughts.

Caroline’s mind was racing as she considered what this could mean for her. New Orleans’ supernatural community had been buzzing for months with fearful whispers that the Original hybrid had torn apart entire cities searching for the thieves who had stolen his brother’s ashes before he could complete the resurrection ritual. And now, Kol’s ashes had practically fallen in her lap. You’ve sworn an oath to guard your employer’s vault; to uphold the code of the griffin.

She also was certain Klaus would willingly trade Kat for his brother. Screw the code of the griffin — she was getting her friend back. “Don’t flatter yourself,” she finally answered, “you aren’t the first Original I’ve met. Although, it seems your ego is almost as big as your brother’s.”

Kol’s voice was intrigued as he playfully replied, “I can think of a few things of mine that surely must be bigger than Nik’s...if you’re interested, that is.”

“I’m only interested in trading you to your brother in exchange for my friend.”
“Marvelous, little bird. Then, let’s scoop me up and take me to Nik,” he cheekily commanded.

Caroline shook her head, forgetting that he couldn’t actually see her. “Nope. You’re not going anywhere until I make the deal with Klaus. No way does he get what he wants until he frees Kat.”

“Not the trusting sort, are you,” Kol mused. “Also, I have some follow-up questions concerning your willingness to go against the griffin honor code for a cat. Perhaps you should consider online dating?”

She let out an indignant screech at his words, not wishing to be reminded of her fleeting moment of insanity where she’d thought about hooking up with Klaus. “I see now why this is the third time you’ve been killed this century,” she ground out, quickly texting Marcel’s other on-call griffin to pick up her shift.

*Looks like she had a date with Klaus after all.*

Rousseau’s was fairly dead — only a few dedicated day drinkers lined the bar when Caroline arrived. She was taken aback when the bartender slid her a lemon drop — she came here often enough the bartenders knew she wasn’t a fan of overly sweet cocktails. A greasy-haired vampire leaned into her, his blue eyes glazed over from drinking. “That’s from me, Blondie,” he told her proudly.

“Thank you, but I’m actually looking for someone,” she began, quickly scanning the room.

His voice had an edge to it as he pushed the drink toward her a bit more forcefully. “And you found him, trust me.”

She stopped looking for Klaus to briefly assess the presumptuous vampire before her. Mortality still lingered in his scent, and she guessed he wasn’t even two centuries. The arrogance of youth never failed to amuse and irritate her in equal amounts. He kept gazing into her eyes, his forehead wrinkling in confusion, and she finally realized the nitwit was trying to compel her. It’s a miracle he’d survived in New Orleans this long if he couldn’t recognize other, more dangerous supernaturals in his midst. Useless creature. *Or, was he?* Her blue eyes twinkled with malice as she realized she’d need to replace that gaudy crystal urn with someone’s ashes to keep Marcel from finding out he was missing a valuable bargaining chip. “Congratulations, it seems you’re worth my time after all. I’ll come find you after I conclude my business, little vampire,” she breezily told him as she headed toward the back, ignoring his slurred invitation to join him at the bar.

She didn’t bother knocking on the dusty office door as she gripped the doorknob with enough force to leave dents. Apparently, the useless vampire had touched a nerve after all. Seriously — what kind of clueless idiot would you have to be to try to compel a griffin?

Klaus took note of the ruined doorknob, smirking up at her as he wryly said, “I may have to start charging more for drinks if you keep damaging my bar, sweetheart.”

“Your bar,” she asked in surprise, “since when?”

He waved a hand carelessly, before handing her a glass. “Since Elijah kept prattling on about tax advantages for small business owners and I promised Rebekah I wouldn’t dagger any more siblings until after we located Kol.”
Caroline took a sip, allowing the smooth, delicious warmth of Klaus’ favorite scotch to sink into her bones. “Original family dynamics make me glad I’m an only child.”

He chuckled, dimples bracketing his smile as he regarded her fondly. “I must admit, I’m a bit surprised to see you so soon, love. I’d assumed that temper of yours would win out and I wouldn’t have the pleasure of your company for far too long. I’m pleased to see that isn’t the case.” Raising a quizzical eyebrow, he slyly observed, “I haven’t heard from Aurora lately. In fact, she’s missed the past two check-ins. I assume this means her attempts to break into Marcel’s vault have been met with certain...difficulties?”

“That’s...unexpected. Klaus thought he knew her weakness and refused to exploit it for fear of hurting her? She fought to keep her tone even as she pondered what that meant. “Well, points for effort, but it wouldn’t work anyway. I took measures long ago to ensure silver is no longer an issue for me.” She could tell he was impressed, and it made her inwardly preen as she assumed few in Klaus’ lifetime had managed that small feat.

She cut him off before he could ask more questions, anxious to get to the purpose for her visit. “I’m here to trade your brother for Kat. I can get you Kol’s ashes.”

“Marcel has had them this whole time,” he inhaled sharply, his voice a deadly whisper. “My witches are bloody useless — their extensive dreamwalks, incantations, and potions all indicated Kol had been spirited far away from New Orleans.”

“Well, wonders never cease — sometimes Marcel isn’t always an incompetent boob.”

He choked a bit at her assertion, flashing her a delighted smile. “Despite my wayward progeny’s defects, I’m sure he’d eventually notice Kol has gone missing. May I assume you have a plan to replace the ashes?”

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“You really should recruit better minions, Klaus. This is just getting embarrassing for both of us.”

He leaned over the desk, the soft glow of the lamp caressing the planes of his beautiful face in a way that made her pulse quicken. “Now, what pleasure would be gained in that? I enjoy you far too much to consider bringing you actual harm. Why do you think I’ve never instructed my minions to use silver weapons against you?”

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He choked a bit at her assertion, flashing her a delighted smile. “Despite my wayward progeny’s defects, I’m sure he’d eventually notice Kol has gone missing. May I assume you have a plan to replace the ashes?”

“Of course. I picked out a donor on my way in. He’s still at the bar, likely boring some other poor woman with his lousy taste in cocktails. I’ll bring him, you bring Kat, and we’ll meet up at Marcel’s vault?”

Klaus reached out to take the hand she offered, but rather than shake it, he impishly placed a gentle kiss above her knuckles. “I knew we could reach a satisfying accord, love. Perhaps later on we could discuss how you took the griffin’s little-known weakness to silver and made yourself invulnerable? I’ve a similar allergy to white oak that could use your cleverness in curing.”

As he favored her with that dimpled grin once more, she couldn’t help but smile, curious to see what satisfying accord they could reach.
Before (and After) One’s Time

Chapter Summary

In 1492, Klaus wanted a quick glimpse of the future to see when the next doppelganger would appear. It never occurred to him that someone far more intriguing would capture his interest...

“Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space.”
— Margaret Atwood, Cat's Eye

His witches told him that he would travel more than 500 years into the future through a swirling vortex. However, what appeared before Klaus was nothing more than a simple rip, like one would find in a swatch of fabric. Skeptical, he cautiously pushed through the ragged opening, his supernatural senses immediately flooded with raucous laughter and insipid chatter along with the foul odors of sweat and cheap beer.

The bonfire’s orange and red flames revealed he’d been transported to a wooded area where some sort of revelry was taking place. Various youths wearing odd garments were standing about, drinking from crimson-colored cups. From the giggling and odd grunting noises he heard from deeper in the forest, it appeared that more than a few couples were rutting among the trees.

He smirked, pleased to see that future generations would practice a more carnal version of the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain — he suspected that future vampires readily would gorge themselves upon such easy prey. Klaus was slightly irritated that he was unable to partake in the delicious, unwitting feast before him — the spell was a temporary ripple in time, and he’d been given strong warnings from the witches not to upset the natural balance. He was there for a brief glimpse of when the next doppelganger would appear, since Katerina had escaped and foiled his attempt to break his curse. The curl of his grin became more pronounced as he recalled how only days ago he’d returned from slaughtering all of Katerina’s kinsmen. It was only a matter of time before Katerina would join their fate.

“That smirk spells nothing but trouble,” a lilting voice teased, as an enchanting blonde creature patted an empty spot beside her on a fallen tree. “Of course, you ripping a hole in the universe was kinda a giveaway too,” she added with a small shrug.

Letting out a surprised chuckle, he settled beside her, eyeing the small fur pieces she wore that were dyed a peculiar pink and purple. “Tell me, love, is sorcery a normal occurrence in the future? You don’t seem particularly disconcerted by what you’ve witnessed — consider me suitably impressed.”

She shrugged her shoulders, a curious set of pointed feline ears poking out of her blonde
curls. “I’m good in a crisis. A guy who looks like he’s an extra from a pirate movie cutting a hole through thin air is definitely not the worst thing I’ve experienced. Try being the designated driver for half the cheerleading squad with one girl puking in my floorboards while a catfight breaks out in the backseat. Trust me — I’ve seen some dark times.”

His lips quirking in amusement. “I must confess that while I recognize many of the words you’ve spoken, I’m a bit confounded.” Enjoying the pretty blush that stained her cheeks as he leaned close, he added, “But I enjoy the manner in which you string them together. You may call me ‘Nik.’”

“I’m Caroline.” He was taken aback by how her blinding smile left him a bit breathless. He was an Original vampire, after all — he’d experienced all manner of beauty in his long life — but there was something about this girl with her sunshine heart that valiantly tried to hide the shadows in her blue eyes. “So, time travel’s actually a thing, huh? While raging blue velvet shirts are a fashion don’t for guys at the moment, you’re working the hell out those black leather pants,” she told him, her heartbeat speeding up as the blush that stained her cheeks darkened.

He sensed from her commentary that she was both teasing and complimenting him, and he felt the absurd need to justify his clothing as he smoothed down the front of his tunic. “This is the height of fashion in 1492, a signifier of my prestige and station within society. ‘Twas cargo from Italy for which I paid handsomely to have sent to England.” He gave her an indulgent smile, dimples deepening as he purred, “However, it seems my breeches have caught your favor?”

Klaus didn’t miss the way her eyes shamelessly followed the outline of his thigh in his breeches, and he subtly shifted a bit closer to her, enjoying the heat of the intriguing little human.

“Um yeah, you’re...very...” she trailed off, rolling her eyes as she huffed in irritation, “Seriously?! You must know how attractive you are; bragging about your wealth and privilege, blah, blah, blah, so I’m sure you own at least one mirror in your castle or whatever.”

He felt the foolish urge to boast, “Actually, I’ve multiple castles on the continent, as well as strongholds in countries throughout the world.” He impulsively grasped her hand, lightly tracing the soft skin of her open palm as he told her, “And I find your beauty utterly breathtaking, Caroline.” He inwardly winced at the honesty present in his words — he couldn’t recall sharing such emotional truth with another in recent memory.

Her musical laughter took him back to the green of his youth, and he ducked his head shyly as she joked, “Wow, you really brought your A-game. I’ve had more than my fair share of lines thrown at me tonight, but yours are definitely the best. Maybe you could perform a community service and educate some of these drunken losers while you’re here?”

Klaus glanced beyond the firelight in the distance, noting with disdain several lads clumsily hoisting another upside down on top of a metal barrel, unsure of their objective. “I prefer to spend what limited time my witches’ spell has afforded me here with you, love,” he told her, delighting in the pleased smile she quickly tucked away. “Unless you’d prefer to join your friends? It seems I’ve interrupted quite the revelry.”

“I’m ok here,” Caroline answered, her nose wrinkling slightly as she explained, “It was supposed to be this cool Halloween party with a Hellraiser steampunk theme that I spent forever planning and instead my friends completely ignored months of hard work to move the party to the woods instead.” Clenching her fists in frustration she ground out, “Seriously, it’s basically just another lame Friday night in Mystic Falls.”

_Hellraiser?_ Was this bewitching woman an apprentice necromancer or conjurer? He found
himself intrigued. At the very least, her commanding tone and passionate words made his dead heart suddenly pick up the pace, and his body warmed at the thought of learning more about the spirited blonde. While his senses were assaulted by the sweat and cheap libations in which the surrounding adolescents reeked, he noticed that Caroline’s strangely fashioned red chalice appeared to contain only water. “Is your disappointment in the festivities the reason you aren’t partaking?”

“Lately it’s seemed like a good idea to stay sober. My friends may be drunken idiots, but they’re mine, you know? And I feel like I should probably look after them just in case.” With a start, he realized that Caroline’s vague gesturing to the crowd interestingly had revealed a brunette with a very familiar face. It appeared that Caroline counted the doppelganger among her dimwitted friends. He suspected this might complicate matters between them.

“In my time, Samhain, what you call Halloween, is an ancient Celtic rite performed with bonfires and costumes to ward off evil. It’s a precise moment when the veil is at its thinnest, which is how I was able to temporarily brought here to the future. Are the Halloween parties in your time especially perilous to warrant that slight trembling I detect,” he asked softly, unable to ignore the hint of fear he smelled underneath her lovely scent of vanilla and honey.

She glanced at the party off in the distance, seeming to consider her words carefully. “There’s a couple of new guys that recently came to town and everyone just thinks I’m this shallow blonde cheerleader, but I know sketchy, and these guys are definitely that.” She nodded at two pale men standing near a group of giggling young ladies. Frowning, she whispered, “Damon and Stefan look at me and my friends like we’re their next meal. Something is wrong with them; I can feel it.”

The irony wasn’t lost on Klaus that Caroline was expressing concerns about dangerous men in her midst when she unwittingly was sitting next to the most dangerous creature on earth. However, he found that he didn’t take pleasure in her obvious terror. Bollocks. He fancied her.

Studying the two men she indicated, he quickly discerned that she was correct in their unnaturalness. Vampires. Less than two centuries — hardly a threat to him, but to a fragile human like Caroline, his expression grew dark as he realized what evils they could inflict. “You seem unusually open to the idea of things in this world that are greater than what you’ve been taught. Do you trust me, sweetheart?”

She contemplated him, surprising Klaus with the intensity of her gaze. He appreciated the care she took with her words, and found himself thinking that under different circumstances, she’d have made a marvelous warrior queen. “You haven’t earned my trust. But I’ll happily consider any advice you have to give me. After all, you seem to know a thing or two about messed-up shit. And by the way, don’t think I’m not still waiting for an explanation about the punching a hole through the universe thing.”

Klaus was inordinately pleased with Caroline’s answer — measured yet clever. What a fierce leader she would be. “There are true monsters in this world, and unfortunately for you and your friends, they’ve come to your village. If you stubbornly choose to remain here, you can defend yourself with an herb called vervain. Of course, a more direct approach would be subjecting those two creatures to a stake to the heart, decapitation, or lighting them on fire.”

Once again, her pragmatism filled him with glee. “Well, I guess if time travel and witches who can do actual magic are real, vampires might as well be too. Out of curiosity, do you happen to know if the Loch Ness monster is real?”

“You’re acquainted with the Scottish Highlands folktale of the Picts,” he asked in surprise. At her expectant expression, he shook his head, telling her, “To my knowledge, the stories predate
even the Romans’ march across Great Britain, but they appear to be nothing more than tall tales.”

Caroline sighed dramatically. “Well, that sucks.” They sat in silence for a bit, listening to the steady hum of the party. Finally, she said, “Although I know I should really get going on that whole vampire thing you told me, maybe we could hang out a bit more? I’d really appreciate the distraction.” At his eager nod, she grinned, quickly pelting him with questions. “So, I’ve got lots of questions about the time-travel stuff, like what made you want to come to this time? And how did you even know enough about actual spell-casting witches to get them to send you here?”

Klaus knew better than to tip his hand, so he impatiently batted away the thought that when he saw Caroline again, eventually she’d learn the truth about his plans for her friend, the doppelganger. All in good time. After all, he’d still need time to gather the rest of his ritual ingredients and make the necessary preparations. Time enough to woo Caroline and perhaps even sway her to his cause. Although he suspected her feistiness would make for pleasurable banter. “Let’s just say I’m from a prominent family of considerable means and influence. I found myself curious about the future and fancied a peek.”

Raising an inquisitive eyebrow, she questioned, “And does the future live up to his majesty’s expectations?”

“Immeasurably.” He smirked at her reddened cheeks, pleased that she seemed to enjoy their flirtatious banter.

Snorting, she observed, “You really set the bar low if you’re impressed by some drunk high school kids partying in the woods because no one had an empty house. It’s almost like everybody’s parents just conspired to all stay home this weekend.”

“But surely some of these youths are landed gentry with their own households,” he asked in confusion. “Most appear to be of marriageable age.” Cocking his head, he regarded her curiously. “I’m most curious about you, love. Are you spoken for? Has your dowry been presented?”

She choked on her drink, spluttering at his words. “My dowry? Yeah, as a small-town sheriff’s daughter, I have a charm bracelet from Target, a curling iron and a stack of Vogue magazines to my name. That’s about it. Plus, social norms have shifted since your time — if people decide to get married, it’s usually later in life and more about a loving commitment than a necessity for survival.”

He couldn’t deny the hopefulness that bloomed in his chest upon hearing that she wasn’t spoken for. “What a fascinating time you live in, sweetheart.”

She shrugged, blue eyes alight with wonder as she replied, “You’re one to talk — fifteenth century England was such an exciting, turbulent time — or, so I’ve been taught anyway. You’re at the end of the Plantagenet rule and the Tudor dynasty has started up with Henry VII.” She lightly elbowed him and teased, “If I were you, I’d get out of England now because trust me — the next Henry is a sociopathic douchebag who collects divorces like he’s Elizabeth Taylor.”

He laughed, despite not fully grasping her jesting words, he still found himself utterly delighted at the clever little human beside him. He scowled, though, as he felt the tell-tale pull of magic signifying that the spell was nearly complete. “It appears the magic that brought me here is fading. It was a pleasure to meet you, Caroline.”

“I wish we had more time, Nik,” she whispered, pressing a gentle kiss to his cheek that made his flesh burn with anticipation.
As the spell pulled him back to his time, he murmured, “I expect I’ll be seeing you soon, love.” The confusion and endearing hopefulness on her lovely face would stay with him for centuries.

Klaus did his best to adopt a casual expression on his face as he leaned back in the creaking porch swing at Caroline’s quaint home. While it would seem as though only one day had passed for her, for him it had been centuries since he’d seen the lovely blonde and he was practically vibrating with excitement. Upon his arrival in Mystic Falls this morning, he’d already paid a visit to the troublesome vampires who’d frightened Caroline. His lips curled into a satisfied smirk as he recalled the ease with which he dispatched Damon and Stefan.

A soft gasp of surprise alerted him to her presence. As Caroline’s blue eyes widened in recognition, he flashed before her, breathing in her familiar vanilla and honey scent. With a soft kiss to her knuckles, he hummed knowingly, “I told you we’d see each other soon.” With a sly wink, he added, “And you were right about Henry VIII being a sociopathic douchebag.”
Chapter Summary

All Caroline wanted to do was ensure her fair-trade website helped the people who needed it the most. Instead, she gets caught up in a war between greedy, gunrunning werewolves and an insufferable hybrid on a supernatural scavenger hunt.

“Doing nothing for others is the undoing of ourselves.”
— Horace Mann

Vervain-soaked cable ties. During Caroline’s time as a vampire, she’d occasionally found herself in trouble — the kind that involved iron shackles, handcuffs, that one time with the cursed red licorice ropes, etc. But vervain-laced restraints really pissed her off. She grit her teeth as a sharp edge began to cut its way into one of her wrists, the vervain causing her skin to bubble and smoke. She banged her head against the rusted tin wall, causing the corrugated metal to vibrate and scrape against the concrete floor where she sat.

She’d come to eastern Kenya to source products for her fair-trade website, *Eternal Good*, and was pleased with the meetings she’d had with the Kamba tribe elders. Despite their well-known reputation for exquisite wood carving and pottery, she knew that most lived in poverty, forced to sell their wares for a fraction of their value. It was exactly why she’d started her website — to help people receive fair wages for their work and elevate their standard of living.

While her sources had indicated violent unrest within the local political climate, she was confident in her supernatural abilities. *Overconfident, as it turned out.* But then again, how was she supposed to know that an especially ruthless werewolf pack was involved?

A meaty fist connected with her cheekbone, causing her head to snap back against the thin metal wall once more. “Who are you? Why have you come here?!”

Despite the blinding pain that had her momentarily seeing stars, she still managed to roll her eyes. Apparently, she was in for the same set of questions the wolves had been harassing her with ever since they’d attacked her outside of the crumbling community center and drove her to the outskirts of a remote village. No wonder members of the Kamba tribe were unable to make a better life for themselves — the greedy werewolf pack had forced them to be their gunrunners. In league with the corrupt local government, they’d terrorized the tribe into smuggling guns among the warring political factions.

She suspected they were affiliated with the Somali militant group who had claimed responsibility for vicious attacks along the border. She angrily ground her teeth, black veins emerging as she recalled the destruction and chaos during the university attack in Garissa. Nearly
150 people were gunned down, with more wounded during the subsequent bombings. She would take her time with these wolves, and find out the depth of their disgusting crimes.

“My name’s Caroline and I’m here to source products for my fair-trade website; just like I told your idiot pack mates on the ride over here.” Spitting a mouthful of blood on his camouflage shirtfront, she growled, “Of course, my goals have shifted slightly, now that I see the best way I can help the tribe is to take out their trash.”

He bared his teeth, a touch too sharp to be human. “Worthless creature! You think to take down my pack alone?!”

“I counted five of your pack’s little puppies that I put down before you managed to catch me,” Caroline taunted, turning her head so the next blow glanced off of her other cheekbone rather than break her nose. Putting herself in harm’s way had honed her skills, and she’d learned the hard way how to defend herself. Not weak anymore.

“You killed five werewolves on your own? Impressive, sweetheart,” called out another voice.

She raised an eyebrow, refusing to wince at how the movement caused several of her not-quite-healed gashes to bleed more. The new voice was wrapped up in a delicious accent that made her wary rather than swoon. There was power in that voice. She was taken aback by the disarming dimples and angelic features, but she hardened her glare, knowing better than to trust a face that pretty. There were always strings.

He moved like a vampire with quite a few centuries behind him — blatantly predatory, any trace of humanity long since forgotten. However, he smelled wrong. He smelled like a werewolf, and it wasn’t just from his close proximity to the pack. She narrowed her eyes, thinking hard. While she’d seen some things over the years, the concept of a vampire-werewolf hybrid seemed silly. Like, TV-writers-had-run-out-of-ideas silly. She inwardly sighed. “Almost as impressive as an ancient hybrid.”

“You’ve heard of me, then. Excellent,” he crowed, gray eyes twinkling.

“No,” she said flatly, “But I have eyes and since this whiny werewolf pack never learned how to throw a punch, my nose is working fine.”

At her snarky outburst, the werewolf who’d been interrogating her snarled, “Stupid little vampire. The full moon is tonight. We’ll bite you and leave your filthy carcass to rot in the sun.”

Caroline felt a small sliver of fear at his words, having seen a few acquaintances over the years fall prey to a werewolf bite. It was a slow, agonizing death, and she’d staked a friend just to save them further pain. Carefully schooling her features into a mask of boredom and disdain, she taunted, “Do it. I’ll just cure myself and come back here and kick your asses all over again.”

“Idiot girl — there is no cure,” her tormentor growled, the heat of his breath on her sweaty cheek making her want to gag.

“You and your pack clearly have been keeping tabs on me while I’ve been here. I’m sure you’ve noticed the connections I’ve made, the effortless way I’ve been able to move among the warring territories without incident? There’s powerful shamans who can shape the world as they choose, and I’m fortunate enough to have earned their blessing.” Caroline leveled the werewolf with her fiercest glare. “Try me, bitch.”
She did her best to keep her heart rate steady, refusing to twitch a single muscle and give away the fact that she just spun a ridiculous number of lies. *There was no cure for a werewolf bite.* The only shaman she knew was an old fisherman missing a thumb who made a fucking fantastic amaretto sour. And the last time he’d done magic bigger than a locator spell, he’d accidentally caught his hair on fire. And his bushy eyebrows. She thought his ears had finally grown back, though.

The calculating look on the smirking stranger’s face was hard to read. He flashed his dimples at her before commanding the werewolf, “Leave us.” Her captor bristled at the order, but seemed to have enough fear of the hybrid to do as he asked — for now. *Werewolf tempers bubbled too close to the surface to truly let things go.* Even if she hadn’t recognized the power behind his tone, the self-assured confidence he wore like a second skin boasted of an uncompromising leader. She found herself curious about the events in his life that had created that enormous ego. *Damn those dimples.*

He casually sat in the dented metal chair across from her, nodding politely as he introduced himself. “Klaus Mikaelson, Original Hybrid. And you’re quite possibly the boldest young vampire I’ve ever met, sweetheart.” Tipping her a saucy wink, he whispered conspiratorially, “I also know for a fact there’s only one cure for a werewolf bite — my blood.”

“Awesome, then I’ll know who to bite if these wolves sneak in a nibble when I make my escape later.”

Klaus chuckled, admiration in his tone as he observed, “You are a delight, Caroline. Tell me, do you fight off werewolves for sport back home?”

She shrugged, doing her best to keep her voice light despite the darkness that flooded her mind. *Almost a century had gone by and she still carried those damn memories.* “Mystic Falls didn’t have werewolves when I lived there — at least, none that I ever knew about. But they did have a vampire problem. I still don’t have all the whys and hows of what happened to me, but after I became a vampire, some memories returned that I didn’t like. Took off the same night I was turned and never looked back.”

*Her sheriff mother shoving a shotgun in her face, refusing to see her daughter as anything other than a monster. She didn’t want to know how Caroline was shaking from her body’s new urges. How she was reliving the terror-filled memories of cruel fangs, mocking laughter and a viselike grip.*

He seemed intrigued by her revelation, a brief flicker of anger marring his handsome features when she implied the compulsion and the dark things done to her. She also noted his reaction to her hometown. Mystic Falls was familiar to him. *Something to explore later — provided she managed to get out of this mess.*

He relaxed into the chair, casually resting his arms behind his curly head as he told her, “You’re a survivor, love. As a token of my respect, I’d free you from those bonds, but it seems you’ve already removed your restraints and only are pretending to be shackled to determine how much of a threat I pose.”

“So much for the element of surprise,” she said dryly, flicking the blood-streaked plastic ties onto the floor between them. She was shrewd, studying him carefully while doing her best to ignore the way her heart fluttered as she caught him checking her out again. “You’re not a part of this pack. But you want something from them. What is it?”

“Clever girl.” He considered her, seemingly weighing his options before finally revealing,
“I’m having some difficulties with a few acquaintances in my kingdom, and it’s rumored that the Serratura Medallion has surfaced in this area. I’m currently in delicate negotiations with this pack to recover it.”

Suspicious, she asked, “What kind of damage does it do?”

A wicked gleam flared in his gaze as he explained, “It’s a bronze disc carved with intricate hieroglyphics that produces an unbreakable boundary to trap both the living and the dead.”

Caroline’s breath caught as she recalled an odd interaction with one of the Kamba elders. She’d been admiring a beautiful wild olive wood carving, the painstaking precision of arthritic fingers that could transform a splintered chunk of wood into a delicate ribbon that seemed to float on the breeze. The collar of the elder’s brightly colored kitenge shifted, and she noticed an unusual coin threaded with a strip of leather hung from her neck. It looked old, and she immediately was intrigued, but before she could ask about it, the woman quickly had covered it back up, a nervous tremor to her hands that spoke volumes.

“Ah, it seems you’re familiar with the object I seek.”

She lifted her chin defiantly. “Yes.”

He was perceptive, his gray eyes alight with mischief as he surmised, “But you’ve no intention of revealing its location to me.”

“Nope.”

Several pack members suddenly burst into the building, the leader Caroline had spat on earlier still fuming. From the way he and his lieutenants glared, it seemed they were ready to attack both of them.

Klaus smirked, winking at her as he said, “Then I look forward to our negotiations, love — after we punish these wolves for rudely interrupting us.”
Chapter Summary

This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June.
Prompt: Brewery weekend

*How much is one life worth? Apparently, it worth a medical license.* Klaus smiled grimly at the thought, finishing the rest of his beer and signaling for another round. After equal parts raging and moping around his condo for a month, Kol finally dragged him away for a brewery weekend to help him ‘to stop being a sad wanker and get his priorities straight.’

Grumbling to himself, he noticed that his idiot brother seemed more interested in trying to bed the attractive beauties that flitted through the main taproom rather than help him move past the fact that his professional reputation had been destroyed. Currently, the lovely copper-skinned bird he’d been trying to chat up looked like she’d gladly slit his throat with her nails without losing that enigmatic smile the women all seemed to carry around there.

As Kol shamelessly followed after her when she left the room, Klaus snorted in derision. Not that he could fault Kol for his infatuation; Klaus couldn’t help but notice that he too kept getting distracted from his miserable thoughts of hospital board hearings and the humiliation of medical board investigations. Every time he caught sight of those bright blonde curls, he held his breath, trying to work up the nerve to approach her. He was man enough to admit he’d lost his edge; before his life’s work had fallen apart around him, he’d had no problem approaching such a gorgeous creature.

In fact, he used to view it almost as a sport — dazzling attractive women with his impressive credentials as a board-certified trauma surgeon. And if that didn’t work, he used his dimples and accent as a trusty fallback. But now, it just all seemed so overwhelming.

He’d gleaned from his casual observations that her name was Caroline, and she appeared to be one of the owners of Founding Family Brewery. She always was surrounded by a group of women who all wore similar shark-like grins. Despite their relaxed postures as they sat around the same table near the back, there always seemed to be a tenseness to their shoulders, a tightening of their jawlines as they carried on discussions in hushed tones.

Today, he watched as she laughed at something one of the other women said, tossing back her blonde curls to reveal an intriguing feather tattoo tucked behind her ear. He’d noticed the rest of her group seemed to have the same tattoo in different places — along a shoulder blade, a wrist, an ankle. He planned to ask Caroline about its origins once he managed to find the courage to talk to her. “I expect you to convince them,” her voice rang out, followed by another throaty chuckle that made his skin twitch.

At her commanding tone, two of the women immediately stood up, the brunette twins that already had shut Kol down when he approached them earlier with a ridiculous line about offering them a ‘toad in a hole’. “Take protection,” Caroline murmured quietly, the women acknowledging her with a terse nod as they left the taproom.

Klaus raised an eyebrow at that — while he understood that contraception was important,
Caroline and her friends’ serious expressions certainly gave him pause. But then, she raised her head, those piercing blue eyes of hers capturing him in a way that made his cheeks warm. She quietly dismissed the other women at her table, sending him a smile that somehow seemed both aloof yet inviting.

She rose like a goddess from her table, strutting confidently toward him in a fitted red dress that had him gripping the beer bottle until his knuckles went white. “Are you and your brother enjoying your stay,” she asked, sliding in the empty chair across from him. At his look of surprise, she explained, “Kol has made an impression on my girls. But don’t worry — I warned them to be gentle.”

“Yes, our brewery weekend has been quite relaxing, sweetheart. But please allow me to apologize for my brother — I hope he’s been behaving himself?”

An amused grin crossed her lovely face as she replied, “I promise my girls can handle themselves.” She leaned forward, holding out her hand for him to shake. “I’m Caroline, by the way.”

“Pleased to meet you. I’m Klaus.” He allowed a flirtatious smirk to slide into place as he kissed her knuckles. After all, she was a formidable woman, and he knew he likely wouldn’t get another chance to make an impression. Despite her indulgent smile, he noticed a slight flush to her cheeks that hadn’t been there before.

Perhaps he did have a chance.

“Has the brewery been in your family long?”

“Not too long, but it’s been an interesting adventure, managing the family business,” Caroline replied, nodding to one of the bartenders who had scurried over to bring her a beer. She clinked the glass necks of their bottles, taking a sip as her eyes carefully swept the taproom. What was she looking for? “Kol mentioned you were considering switching careers and maybe looking for a change of scenery?”

Coloring slightly that his brother might’ve been discussing his personal business with strangers, he did his best to keep the resentment from his tone. “I suppose it was more that I’m legally obligated to switch careers, love. The hospital board and the medical board were quite insistent.” He waited for her pitying look, and a downturn twist of her lips before she suddenly made up an excuse to leave him wallowing in his misery. He knew he had nothing to offer such a vibrant, attractive woman.

“Well, that’s bullshit,” she said unexpectedly. “So, some uptight old white guys tore up a piece of paper. That doesn’t mean they tore up your education.” There was a fierce glint in her blue eyes that he found immensely appealing. “No one can take that away from you.”

He scoffed, “No one’s about to hire a disgraced surgeon who’s lost his license.”

“You never know,” she mused. “An organization like mine can make room for a variety of skill sets.” A striking redhead suddenly appeared at her side, lowly whispering something about a shipment. An unreadable look crossed her face as Caroline stood suddenly. “It seems my presence is requested at a...meeting.” With a final flirtatious wink, she promised, “I’ll find you later, Klaus. I think we may have business to discuss after all.”

Confused (and more than a little turned on), he watched the graceful sway of her hips as she walked away.

After Kol unsuccessfully tried to get him to join a scavenger hunt on the grounds in order to chat up what appeared to be a large group of sorority pledges, Klaus went back to their suite,
hoping his brother had enough sense not to invite anyone up to the room.

He’d barely drifted off to sleep when firm hands harshly shook him awake. “Get up. Now,” a female voice growled in his ear. A lamp was flicked on in the corner and he blearily registered his suite was now filled with many of the women he’d seen with Caroline around the brewery this weekend. Fumbling for his jeans, he cursed indignantly, “What the bloody hell are you doing in my room?”

One of the twins scrutinized him, giving a decidedly unimpressed snort. “Recruiting you, Doctor Dimples.”

He couldn’t help but notice the way the group of attractive women moved toward him in unison, looking vaguely threatening. *This is something right out of Kol’s deluded fantasies and the little wanker isn’t even here to witness it.* “Recruiting me for what exactly,” he asked, eyeing them suspiciously. *Why was Caroline not at this bizarre gathering?*

Suddenly, his Henley and boots were thrown at his chest, the black woman with blazing green eyes telling him in a no-nonsense voice, “Enough! Get dressed and come with us now.”

“Who the hell—” Klaus began angrily, only to stop short when the twins simultaneously pulled out guns, leveling them at his head with a precision that spoke of years of practice. “Right,” he said hoarsely, quickly throwing on his shirt and lacing his boots, doing his best not to make any sudden movements. While the other women had yet to produce guns, he assumed they were armed as well. *What the hell was going on?*

His career working trauma in the ER had taught him to read people quickly, and while the women moved with an intimidating, coordinated effort that implied a penchant for violence, he couldn’t help but notice the rigid manner they held themselves, the slight muscle twitches that gave them away. *These formidable women were scared.* A cold trickle of fear slithered up his spine as he started to suspect the reason why Caroline wasn’t in the room with the rest of her people.

He’d seen his share of criminals in his ER, and he understood the danger he was in. *Cooperate fully. Don’t give them a reason to shoot.* He worried about Kol, hoping that wherever he’d shacked up with the sorority girls, he’d stay there until this mess could be sorted. With a curt nod at the twins still holding the guns, he said, “Lead the way.” He didn’t miss the brief looks of relief that flashed across everyone’s faces.

They hustled him out of the suite, marching quickly down the deserted hall and pausing briefly to press a nondescript panel that startled him as it revealed a hidden elevator. *Well-organized criminals,* he thought to himself. *Organized crime. Mafia.* Gray eyes widened suddenly as he realized belatedly what was going on. *Kol’s ‘carefree, stop-being-a-sad-wanker’ brewery weekend was at a brewery that served as a front for the mob.* If they got out of this alive, he was going to murder his brother.

Gleaming mahogany doors were thrown open, leading to a sumptuously decorated suite. One of the twins roughly pushed him forward, shouting, “Boss, we brought you Doctor Dimples!”

As he stumbled slightly, he found himself in front of an enormous four-poster bed, where an alarmingly pale Caroline was propped up on multiple pillows, her blood soaking into the linens. Despite her shaky grip on the gore-soaked towel she’d pressed to her abdomen, her voice was
Moving to Caroline’s side, he gently moved aside the towel, patting her blood-streaked hands as he told her, “Easy, love. Let’s see what kind of mess you’ve gotten yourself into.” A quick glance told him she’d been shot, but he couldn’t feel an exit wound, which complicated matters — especially given that any number of internal organs could’ve been hit. He started making a mental list of supplies he’d need — piles of towels, hydrogen peroxide, ice, sharp knife, tweezers, fishing line or dental floss, antibiotics, etc.

Despite the intense pain she obviously was in, she held herself with a rigid discipline that he couldn’t help but admire. A fighter. Ever since these women had barged into his room, he’d been redefining what he thought he knew about Caroline, and he found himself even more intrigued. He finally realized he and Caroline had been staring at each other, something fierce passing between them that couldn’t be ignored.

Caroline raised her voice over the cacophony of voices in the room, commanding the women, “Elena, Kat — secure the shipment in the warehouse. Call for backup in case the Salvatores follow you or stupidly think tipping off the cops will save their scrawny hides.” Nodding toward the redhead by the door, she added, “Aurora, get ready to play nurse and fetch whatever Klaus asks for.”

Klaus warily eyed Bonnie as she produced a gun, casually holding it in her hand. Caroline sharply told her, “There’s no need for that. Klaus understands the stakes.”

Despite a painful shudder that went through her body, she somehow managed to wink at Klaus. “Looks like your job interview will be a bit more hands-on than I’d intended.”
Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Strawberry

The steel had been warmed by bodies all night long. She wrapped her hands around the pole, swinging her legs up into a cross ankle layback which drew appreciative whistles from the crowd. The stage lights blazed like the sun, but she soaked it in until her skin glowed and became its own beacon. Caroline reveled in how powerful her body felt as she seemed to defy gravity and effortlessly slide along the pole, transitioning into several combination spins that ended with a backflip that flowed into splits.

The air was heavy with pheromone-laced anticipation, and she wondered if those gathered understood how the performers toyed with their senses, feeding on their energy until they were sated. Of course, at Bacchanalia, no one was ever completely satisfied. That was the point — to always leave the patrons wanting more. They flocked there in droves, eager for a wink, a caress, a teasing whisper from the dancers as they lounged upon velvet and silk.

Caroline gazed confidently at the entranced patrons, watching how the wine flowed freely in jeweled chalices, eyes glassy and heavy-lidded as they observed the beautiful bodies writhe in intricate patterns. She could smell the sweet strawberry wine, almost tasting the seductive, rich flavors as she watched the nude servers pour the blush pink aphrodisiac from the marble fountains. She’d recently fallen in love with strawberries, especially its intoxicating wine — grapes were so BC.

She painted ripe strawberries and vines along her body, weaving the leaves across her bare flesh, as the patrons delighted in tracing the intricate lines — when she allowed them to touch. They begged so sweetly, their slurred words a jumble of silly promises. Sometimes she was feeling generous — like tonight. Especially when she caught sight of his dirty blonde curls in the crowd.

Most assumed she was a nymph like the other dancers, and she did nothing to dispel those assumptions. It was so easy to blend among the humans and demigods; they could sense her free spirit and innate wildness, but never guessed her divinity. Which suited her just fine — she’d grown weary of ruling; the gods were petty and their world was so small. Caroline wished to live wide. Only satyrs would see her as she truly was, and so far, none had crossed her path. Good thing too — satyrs were nothing but trouble.

With a sly wink to the crowd, she performed a quick handspring before wrapping her legs around the pole for an elaborate aerial invert. Brushing a blonde curl from her face, she blew kisses to her admirers as she seemingly floated off the stage. She paused at the bar, Bonnie handing her a delicious strawberry wine sangria that tasted like pure pleasure.

Dryads were a rare find in this particular world, and Bonnie had been reluctant to coax out of her dimension. Especially with those secrets. But then Caroline promised her a safe home and all the soul energy she could devour, and suddenly Bacchanalia had the best bartender in the six realms. It was a comfortable companionship that suited them both, and she stroked the shining oak bar affectionately as she headed toward the champagne room. Where he was waiting.

Klaus was far too charming and attractive to be a mere human; from his scent, she could
detect a subtle hint of power and was certain he was a demigod. That seductive smirk of his made her think he was possibly of Eros’ bloodline, but the way he spoke of his art gave her reason to believe his mother was one of the muses. He’d been booking time with her in the exclusive champagne room for a while now, and it was rapidly becoming the highlight of her evenings.

“You are a goddess,” Klaus told her, making a pleased hum as she wrapped her body around the steel, seductively bringing her legs into a split grip variation that made his eyes darken with lust. *She knew what he liked.* Every slow, sensual movement left him desperate for her, his greedy gaze making her a bit breathless.

Arching her back into a shoulder mount, she rolled her eyes, muttering under her breath, “You have no idea.” The bite of his cologne flooded her senses, and she needed his touch *now*. She straddled him as he lay back against the silken pillows, her hips barely brushing against his lap.

Rumbling in pleasure, he rested a possessive hand at her waist as he guided her movements, fingers trailing lower as her breath caught. She could feel his need for her, and while she’d indulged in their playful explorations for some time now, she’d never broken the rule that she’d set for herself to never take it further — too much intimacy felt like, well, *too much*. And while that rule had served her well in this world, it was nearly impossible to ignore this connection with Klaus.

She pushed his hands to her breasts, feeling his strength as he kneaded her flesh. As though sensing the shift in her mood, he pulled her more fully onto his lap, crushing their lips together. They writhed against each other, creating a delicious friction that scorched the air between them. Caroline shoved her fingers through his dirty blonde curls, startling when she felt two pointed horns rising. *Satyr horns.*

There was a wildness in his gaze she’d never seen before. His lips curled into a knowing smirk. “I suppose both of our secrets are out. Wouldn’t you agree, Dionysus?”

**Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Dog days of summer**

*If he’d known that this was where his day would take him, he would’ve bought the whole bloody park and furnished it properly.* He’d endured torture from Mikael that was more comfortable than this park bench. Klaus scowled, settling further against the splintered wood as he tried to look inconspicuous. *Like he wasn’t the world’s most powerful immortal spying on a small-town charity event.*

Caroline’s bubbly laughter hit him like a beam of sunshine, warming him as he used his supernatural hearing to listen in as she ordered about the volunteers. She’d cheekily called it ‘Dog Days of Summer’, providing bathing and grooming for dogs to benefit a local animal rescue.
He watched in anticipation as the enormous beast tentatively approached the lovely blonde, sitting perfectly in front of her with a friendly tail wag. *Come on, mate — just like we practiced.* A satisfied smirk slid across his face as he watched it raise one heavy paw to shake, yipping excitedly when Caroline dissolved into a mess of cooing noises, stroking its gray and white fur.

“Tell me, Nik — when you see such a spectacle, does your wolf pull focus and insist on gawking at the fluffy doggy rather than the hot blonde?”

Klaus grit his teeth, turning to glare at Kol who’d cheerfully plopped down next to him on the bench. “Don’t you have a doppelganger’s brother to frighten off with your ill-conceived propositions?”

“I still say he was intrigued by the idea. But I think it was when I suggested the doppelganger bring the bacon and nipple clamps that I lost Jeremy,” Kol admitted with a careless shrug.

He eyed his little brother critically. “Fairly certain it was the fact that you wanted to involve his sister in your threesome that soured the mood.”

“So you’re suggesting I should start by inviting Jeremy’s aunt instead,” Kol nodded, rubbing his hands together gleefully.

Klaus was distracted by Caroline bending over to scoop up a stack of towels, so didn’t bother wrenching his gaze away as he muttered, “Actually, I killed their aunt. But perhaps there’s a cousin you could creepily suggest?”

“Bollocks. You’re murder on my sex life, Nik.”

He mumbled something non-committal, far too focused on the line of soap suds that Caroline accidentally had brushed across her forehead. She laughed with the other volunteers, playfully throwing bubbles in the air as the beast in the plastic tub frolicked. *Excellent. Keep things friendly, mate. No hints of aggression.*

Kol was incredulous as he told him, “You shaped Italian politics over the course of multiple centuries, from the Borgias to the Medicis. You once triggered a world war because a clumsy archduke accidentally stepped on your shoe. And now...you’re lurking in a park pretending not to be listening in on an insignificant town’s do-gooder party?”

“There are bigger strategies than you can fathom at work here. I’ve intricately laid the groundwork for future endeavors, I can assure you,” he answered defensively, crossing his arms as he noticed that the mongrel was now enthusiastically licking Caroline’s face. *Keep your tongue to yourself, mate.*

Kol snorted, elbowing him as he teased, “And the fact that Caroline supposedly broke up with your dullard of a hybrid has nothing to do with your sudden interest in tasty blonde surveillance?” He squinted at the gigantic fluffy beast that she was rinsing off, suddenly exclaiming, “Bloody hell! Is that another of your hybrids?”

Klaus shifted uncomfortably, feeling the tips of his ears burn. “I may have invoked the sire bond and had a hybrid shift and infiltrate the dog grooming to verify that rumor.” He squinted at the gigantic fluffy beast that she was rinsing off, suddenly exclaiming, “Bloody hell! Is that another of your hybrids?”

Klaus shifted uncomfortably, feeling the tips of his ears burn. “I may have invoked the sire bond and had a hybrid shift and infiltrate the dog grooming to verify that rumor.” His fists clenched as he noticed the mutt was bumping his nose a bit lower than necessary along Caroline’s collarbone.

He chose to ignore his brother’s hysterical giggling and growled when he observed his
hybrid had resumed licking Caroline’s face and neck, getting an eyeful as she leaned over to rub a towel through his fur. *You’ve crossed the line, mate.*

He didn’t bother hiding the skip in his step as he sauntered across the way to show that hybrid what his liver tasted like.

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**Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Ra (sun god)**

Back by popular demand —This is a continuation of my ‘Mummy’ drabble from A Beautiful Symmetry: Chapter 56 - Klaroween Bingo. Enjoy!

Considering Klaus wasn’t the one regenerating organs, muscles, and flesh, he certainly was making the most agonizing noises. Finally, he tapered off, emitting a few odd grunting noises like a constipated camel. *Good thing he was cute.*

Moments ago, he’d accidentally brushed the sacred blue scarab necklace onto Caroline’s mummified corpse, breaking the warding spell and triggering her regeneration. *Not to mention immortality.* The priests of Sobek had placed the mystical object in the tomb for Queen Qetsiyah’s resurrection, and would not suffer a lowly servant receiving such a boon. *Time to make a plan.*

Caroline stretched, scattering the crumbling linen cloth strips to the low table where she’d lain for nearly 2,500 years. She flexed her fingers, wincing slightly as the newly formed joints popped loudly in the tomb. Praise be to Ra — regenerated skin was positively humming beneath her curious touches! *She’d never felt so alive.*

Noticing the handsome archaeologist had calmed down to just slight hyperventilation, she gave him a tentative smile, clearing her throat as she felt the roughness of her voice after thousands of years of disuse. “You’ve earned my eternal gratitude; your selfless act has freed me.”

“You are...were...a mummified corpse!” He winced, as though concerned his words had offended her, quickly adding, “I mean, your people had...uh, laid you to rest thousands of years ago. How is this possible?”

*Laid her to rest. Right.* When Qetsiyah passed on from the sleeping sickness, the pharaoh had ordered all of her servants to be sacrificed so that they could continue to serve her in the afterlife. Caroline still recalled the glint of bronze as the curved edge of the khopesh was pressed against her throat. But she was stronger now. *She would never be weak again.* “The scarab necklace that was meant for another was my salvation. Today you brought me good fortune.”

She noted with interest how he seemed to be actively avoiding looking at her naked flesh, a pleasing blush staining his cheeks. *He warms to me.* “I am Caroline. May I call you Klaus?”

“Yes, of course, love.” His gray eyes flicked over her form, quickly moving back to her face as he removed his denim overshirt and handed it to her. “I...uh...don’t worry, ok? I can help you
Caroline was touched by the tenderness in his tone. *His concern for her welfare.* When had another cared about her well-being? Never in her lifetime. *But perhaps this new life will be different.* She gave him a soft smile, enjoying the way his dimples topped his answering grin. She donned his shirt, breathing in the warm spice of his scent with a pleased hum.

Unfortunately, now wasn’t the time for carnal desires. She pushed aside the gilded silver funeral masks, examining the hieroglyphs on the wall behind them to help direct her search. Nodding to herself, she scooped up several clay jars, thrusting them into his arms. “We need to take these with us,” she told him decisively, not bothering to offer more details despite his questioning brow. She grabbed the scarab necklace, irritated that she couldn’t find the one item that would afford them the most protection.

“What are you looking for?”

She studied the table where her body had been stored, noting with interest the lapis lazuli stones that decorated the edges. Praise be to Ra! Her eyes widened as she realized what the gemstones were hiding. She grabbed a copper axe head and used the sharpened edge to pry off the stones until she located the true prize — the blood red Phoenix Stone. She tucked it away in her shirt pocket, telling him with some urgency, “We need to leave this place. The priests of Sobek will be angry that I’ve abandoned their queen to the spirit plane, stealing her resurrection. They are coming.”

Klaus frowned, shaking his head. “That’s ridiculous, sweetheart. The priests died thousands of years ago.”

By Ra’s holy scepter — how could he be so naïve? She grumbled under her breath, fetching a few more protection charms from the queen’s ornate sarcophagus. “Believe what you like,” she answered simply, pulling him from the tomb and into the sun’s brilliant rays. She stood there, dazzled by the light she’d been denied for thousands of years.

He noted her awestruck expression, gently squeezing her hand. “If I wasn’t standing beside you, I’d think you were a desert mirage. You’re glorious.”

*Charmer.* He’d have enraptured pharaoh’s entire court with his silver tongue. She allowed him to lead her back to his sleeping quarters, an impressively sized room — he must be a man of great stature. Even the queen’s personal rooms were miniscule in comparison.

They’d just settled on the terrace, a feast before them of delicacies she’d never imagined when she suddenly felt them. Lifting her eyes to the crowded street below, she saw the group of men clad in red and black robes, wearing the feathered atef crowns. When they spied her standing with Klaus, they raised their ankh scepters, hurling curses and accusations.

Caroline turned to Klaus, noting the way the color drained from his face. She could feel her new power rising. *No harm would come to him.* She smiled, allowing a teasing note to enter her confident tone as she said, “See — I told you. But don’t worry; I’ll help you acclimate.”
Chapter Summary

Chapter 76: Part 3 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Flower garland & "Just drive until you see water."

Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: Flower garland

It took everything in her power not to shred the delicate, breathtakingly beautiful flower garland in her hand as Kol favored her with another teasing smirk. Caroline had to admit, if she hadn’t heard from Bonnie what a disgusting cheating bastard he was, she’d been downright jealous of her best friend.

Caroline had arrived in town last night to surprise Bonnie, but instead, she’d been greeted by red-rimmed eyes and a hiccupping voice so choked with tears she only understood about every third word. Finally, Caroline managed to pry the story out of her friend and learned she’d been seeing a guy named Kol and right after he asked her to move in together, she caught him cheating on her. It was heartbreaking to hear all of the details, not to mention the fact that Bonnie already had been making the flower arrangements for his sister Rebekah’s wedding.

Which is how Caroline ended up opening Bonnie’s flower shop that morning so Bonnie didn’t have to face Kol when he stopped by to pick up the flowers. While Bonnie hadn’t shown her a picture of the rat bastard, she figured it wouldn’t be too hard to spot a rich, attractive asshat with a British accent in a town as small as Mystic Falls.

“Hello, love. I’m here to pick up some sort of flower garland things for a wedding.”

She eyed him critically, taking in the expensive lines of his suit. Damn, that beautiful bastard could wear the hell out of Brioni. “Rebekah’s brother, right?” She didn’t bother to hide the contempt in her tone as she finished packing up the boxes topped with the Bonnie’s Blooms store logo.

“You’ve heard of me then?” He kept trying out that sexy grin on her, this time throwing in some unexpectedly innocent dimples. She felt her temper flare at the thought of Kol using those dimples to weasel his way into her friend’s heart.

Caroline gave a brief jerk of her chin, muttering, “I was told you’d be stopping by.” Was he seriously not even going to ask where Bonnie was? Unbelievable. “Just point me to your car and I’ll help you carry these out,” she said briskly, scooping up several boxes and heading toward the door.

“And what’s your name, sweetheart,” he asked, a twinkle in those gray eyes of his that she did not appreciate.
“Caroline,” she practically snarled, resisting the temptation to slam the trunk lid of his Mercedes on his hand as he loaded the rest of the boxes.

He didn’t seem to be the least bit discouraged by her rudeness; if anything, it appeared to intrigue him. Weirdo. “Caroline. Beautiful name. Perhaps when this wedding nonsense of my sister’s is behind us, I could stop back by and we could go for a drink?”

Seriously?! Kol was unbelievable. He was actually hitting on someone he just met in his girlfriend’s flower shop?! She narrowed her blue gaze, giving an unimpressed snort as she stomped off. “Not. Interested.”

She was still fuming when she saw Kol go into the bakery down the street. Leaving his sleek Mercedes unattended...hmm.

Not bothering to think through the consequences, she grabbed a can of hot pink spray paint from Bonnie’s craft table and raced outside, blood roaring in her ears. She took a moment to appreciate the elegant curves of the gorgeous Mercedes before gleefully painting ‘Cheating bastard’ in enormous block letters.

And that’s when it got awkward.

She assumed that in a few years, she’d look back on this day of numerous firsts and laugh. Her first act of vandalism, her first arrest, her first ride in a cop car, her first time in lockup. She snorted, wondering if her one phone call should be to Bonnie to see if she could sweet talk that cheating bastard boyfriend of hers into dropping the charges.

“Nothing about this is particularly amusing, Caroline,” a low voice growled, and she was startled to see Kol glaring at her from the doorway.

She rolled her eyes, assuming the rich asshat had bribed the deputy on desk duty so he could sneak back there to taunt her. “The look on your face was pretty funny, you sleazy bastard.”

He looked genuinely puzzled as he replied, “I must confess that attractive, hostile women always have been a weakness of mine, but I can’t for the life of me decide what I’ve done to earn your ire, sweetheart.”

Caroline didn’t bother keeping her voice down as she shrieked, “Seriously?! You waltz into Bonnie’s shop and hit on the first skirt you see and you don’t see anything fundamentally wrong with that?!” At his confused expression, she threw her hands up, yelling, “Bonnie saw you with that girl! She knows you’ve been cheating on her, Kol!”

She detected a sudden shift in the air, and didn’t understand the speculative look he gave her. “Ah, well, that explains several confounding aspects of our brief interactions, love.”

He stepped forward, delivering an oddly formal bow that felt even more out of place given they were in a police station. “Allow me to properly introduce myself. I’m Klaus, Rebekah’s other and arguably better brother.”
One night stands shouldn’t be milling around my store like they own the place. Caroline narrowed her eyes at the inconveniently sexy hybrid as he pretended to aimlessly wander around her tea shop, hands clasped behind his back as he purposely avoided her gaze.

She continued to glare at the back of Klaus’ curly head while she assisted a customer on the phone. “Yes, we have vervain Darjeeling, and we’re open until six if you’d like to stop by today. We’re at the end of Bienville Street overlooking the Mississippi. Just drive until you see water.”

“Or, you could have told them to follow the beautiful light emanating from the Quarter. You could power all of New Orleans with your smile alone, sweetheart.”

Rolling her eyes, she hung up the phone, reaching for the green and black bag from underneath the register. “Here’s the Bolivian moonstone black you wanted to try. Not that I care, but do you realize that you’ve spent more in my shop in the past two weeks than I typically earn in a business quarter?”

“I told you I was a connoisseur of fine teas. And your quaint little shop happens to carry everything I could desire,” he told her with a seductive smirk, flashing to the counter in a showy flash of supernatural ability that she definitely shouldn’t find so appealing. After all, she’d grown up in the spiritual nexus of New Orleans; supernatural was the most normal part of this town. But there was something about the cocky hybrid...

“While I agree my shop carries the most rare and unusual teas that I’ve personally curated over the years, you know damn well that’s not why you’re here.” She raised an eyebrow, her tone a bit spiteful as she added, “You’re the Original Hybrid — you like the chase. And the fact that we had one night together and then I slipped away the next morning somehow screwed with your lizard brain and now you’re out to prove you’re a mighty hunter or whatever.”

His gray eyes darkened a bit, a hint of wolf gold as his temper flared. “You’re making assumptions, love. We’ve shared a connection ever since I arrived in this city. Don’t deny what’s between us just because you’re frightened.”

He’s an Original. An ancient immortal. What does he know about fear? A decade ago, Caroline and her coven had waged a war against Marcel and his army, and when they lost, all of the witches in New Orleans came under his tyrannical rule. Witches were no longer allowed to practice their ancestral magic, and his loyal gangs of daywalkers and nearly feral nightwalkers were a constant, menacing threat to keep them in line.

“I don’t have time for this today, Klaus,” she huffed in annoyance, glancing at the moon phase app on her phone.

He shrewdly observed, “Because you have to gather the burdock root precisely at moonrise to distribute among your coven?”

Caroline fought to keep her expression impassive even as her heart began to thud in her chest. How did he know about their plan? Her closest sister in the coven, Bonnie, was to be executed tonight. Marcel had imposed laws upon his kingdom, many too numerous and convoluted to properly recall, but there was one above all others that must be obeyed: Thou shalt not kill a
vampire. Murdering one of his chosen army was a death sentence — no trial, no mercy.

_Bonnie didn’t have a choice_, Caroline angrily thought. Damon, one of Marcel’s psychotic daywalkers, had attacked Bonnie, and he would’ve drained her had she not used her magic. Not that Marcel cared about such things — he’d been looking for the flimsiest of excuses to end the powerful Bennett line. However, Caroline refused to let that happen; she and the rest of the coven would save her tonight. _But if Klaus chose to stand in their way..._

She didn’t bother playing coy; clearly he’d guessed their plan to rescue Bonnie. She bluntly asked, “Are you going to try to stop us?”

“No.” She waited for him to say more, to tip his hand and reveal his loyalties in the upcoming battle. She knew of his history — the fallen king who’d returned to reclaim his throne. He kept his schemes to himself; it was rumored that not even his noble brother Elijah was privy to his plans.

When an amused smirk spread across his face at her obvious impatience for his brief answer, she put a hand on her hip and snapped, “Well, are you going to help us, then?”

“I’m afraid I must stay neutral at this juncture, sweetheart,” he replied, the hint of regret sounding foreign on his tongue as he tried to reach out to stroke her cheek.

She jerked away, blue eyes spitting fire as she told him, “Only cowards refuse to pick a side.” Pointing to the door, she commanded, “Get out.” She turned away, too angry to see the hurt register on his face before he flashed away.

The courtyard of the abandoned hotel was lit with bonfires, the firelight reflected in the savage gaze of the nightwalkers that gathered around Marcel like slavering dogs. Bonnie had been forced into a binding circle, weakened and stripped of her magic. From her vantage point behind the broken neon sign, Caroline glanced around the perimeter to ensure key coven members were in place. She could feel the magic rising in her blood, comforted by that familiar rage. _Marcel should’ve known better than to fuck with one of their own._

Just before Marcel gave the signal, Caroline caught sight of Klaus in the crowd, his hybrid face emerging. She held back her coven for a moment, giving him a chance to prove what side he was on.

_And then, the war would begin_.
Part 4 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

Part 4 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Baseball & Tiki bar.

Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Baseball

Company-mandated organized fun sucked every bit of enjoyment out of any activity. Caroline rolled her eyes, checking her watch again to see how much longer the game would go on. As she squinted at the scoreboard, she realized she had no idea what it meant by ‘ball’ and only vague understandings of ‘inning’. Baseball rules were almost as confusing as football rules, but she was pretty sure there were nine innings in baseball versus four quarters in football. Probably.

As general counsel for Mikaelson Inc., her position was too high profile to discreetly slip away like she wanted to, and she noted that CEO Klaus Mikaelson kept glancing her way, so it definitely would be poor etiquette to leave the corporate event while he was watching.

Klaus was an enigma, a formidable presence in the boardroom, and typically surly and taciturn with subordinates. Which was probably a blessing considering how achingly beautiful he was. The last thing she needed to do was give into the inconvenient crush she’d been harboring.

He rarely showed another side to himself which is why her coworkers had been surprised when he gleefully announced during their department meeting that he was sponsoring a company-wide day at the local ballpark. Based on his uncharacteristically broad grin that showed off his adorable dimples, he apparently was a huge fan of the Augustine Tigers, who’d be playing their local team, the Mystic Falls Lightening.

An excited murmur from the crowd caught Caroline’s attention and she glanced over to see one of the players wandering over from the dugout to greet some of the fans. She giggled when she spied Klaus rush forward with an awestruck expression on his face, excitedly shaking the player’s hand and having him sign a baseball and a hat and even the jersey he was wearing.

“Caroline? Caroline Forbes?”

She blinked in surprise, trying to figure out how the player knew her name. She gave a friendly wave, taking in his handsome features — especially that mischievous grin — and finally it hit her. “Enzo?!” She didn’t remember getting out of her seat, but suddenly she was racing to the edge of the railing and hurled herself into his arms as soon as he’d climbed into their section.

He lifted her up, twirling her until she teased, “I’m totally going to hurl my nachos on your head if you keep doing that, you know.”

As Enzo set her down, he wiggled his eyebrows, reminding her, “Wouldn’t be the first time
you vomited on me, gorgeous.”

Caroline was suddenly aware of loud throat-clearing and she glanced over at Klaus whose voice had grown tight. “And how might you two know each other?”

“Enzo and I went to middle school together,” she happily explained, remembering how he’d gotten into multiple fights on her behalf when some of the boys had teased her about her braces and awkward, gangly limbs. “He was my fiercest protector and knew the absolute grossest but somehow best food combinations with peanut butter and jelly.”

He slung a companionable arm around her shoulders, bumping her with his hip as he said mildly, “Yeah, but once I got you to try jalapenos, soy sauce and Doritos with peanut butter and jelly, you ate them so much, mom started keeping a separate ‘Caroline’ grocery list.”

“So you knew each other quite well then,” Klaus asked, his tone oddly accusatory.

She tucked a blonde curl behind her ear, choosing to ignore whatever weird possessiveness Klaus felt toward his baseball idol. “We were best friends all through middle school; he beat up people who teased me and I protected him from Mrs. Gilbert’s evil Chihuahua.” She smacked Enzo’s chest, adding playfully, “When you’re rounding the bases, do you pretend Damon’s still chasing you?”

“Gorgeous, that dog was evil and you know it. I still see those crazy bug eyes when I go to sleep.”

She rolled her eyes, jokingly telling him, “You’re such a baby. Does your mom still iron your underwear?”

“I’d be happy to show you, gorgeous.”

Klaus’ grip tightened on the team merchandise in his hands and he practically snarled at them, “Right. Well, I’ll make myself scarce so you two can catch up. Although Enzo might want to finish his game first.”

Caroline narrowed her eyes as she watched Klaus storm off, not entirely sure what happened. *Was he seriously acting like an ass hat just because she happened to know his favorite baseball player first?*

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**Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Tiki bar**

He felt the crystal tumbler splinter in his hand, the shards embedding themselves in his palm as he cursed. It was the third glass he’d broken in the past hour, and he doubted it would be his last before this infernal fundraiser was over. *Bloody hell, he was touching her again.*

Klaus Mikaelson didn’t consider himself a patient creature, but that woman seemed to delight in testing what tenuous limits he possessed. As he carelessly set aside the chunks of broken crystal, his gray eyes narrowed as he watched Tyler Lockwood teasingly caress Caroline’s back. She looked amazing tonight, the red satin of her evening gown gleaming in the firelight of the
torches. *He preferred her in blue.*

As he watched the bounce of her long blonde curls, he recalled exactly how silky they felt in his fingers and how she loved it when he tugged on the ends *just so.* He knew exactly how soft her skin was, the delicious twitch of her as she came apart under his touch. *And now Tyler was experiencing everything he’d foolishly thrown away.*

Caroline smiled brightly at the bartender behind the tiki bar, accepting the fruity cocktails with colorful umbrellas jauntily perched on top. As she handed one to Tyler, he leaned down to whisper something, causing her to dissolve into giggles. *She looked happy.* And it wasn’t fair — not when he was this miserable. Or, maybe it was exactly what he deserved. After all, he’d made her cry. *And even worse, didn’t chase after her that night.*

But that was all going to change tonight. He’d been furiously searching for a way to make her see reason, to get her to understand that he needed her, that he wanted her for no other reason than because she was Caroline. *His Caroline.* And now, he’d received the information he needed to prove that Tyler didn’t care for her. *Not the way that he did.*

Klaus maintained a rigid control on his monster, which was no easy feat as he watched Tyler gently kiss her cheek. He willed away the urge to unsheathe his fangs, and waited patiently for the upstart wolf to leave Caroline’s side. The moment she was alone, Klaus flashed in front of her, doing his best to appear casually interested rather than devastated at the look of disdain that came across her lovely face.

“What do you want,” she hissed at him, briefly turning to wave at Governor Donovan and his wife, her friendly smile making his heart give a funny little tweak, despite it melting away as soon as they were alone once more.

“I need to speak with you, love.”

She scoffed, setting her carved coconut drink on the tiki bar and starting to walk away. When he grabbed her hand, she snarled, “Don’t call me that. And there’s nothing more to say, Klaus.” A few of the Samoan fire-knife dancers must have picked up on the distress in her voice, because they paused in setting up the bamboo stage to look at her with concern. She favored them with a reassuring wave, purposely stepping toward the shadows to avoid further interruptions.

“Fine. Speak.”

“Tyler is using you to gain support from the human factions.” He winced at the harshness of his words. He hadn’t meant to blurt out what he knew, but there was something about having Caroline so close and yet so far away that set his teeth on edge. He hadn’t missed the way her piercing blue eyes kept flicking around the lush venue, clearly looking for Tyler.

Disbelief mixed with anger colored her tone. “Seriously?! As opposed to you? Don’t forget I overheard Elijah and Finn telling you about the importance of currying favor with the human factions by making our relationship *more visible.* For fuck’s sake, they referred to me as the ‘Caroline Effect’ and you didn’t say *anything!*”

Klaus wisely left out his brothers’ other shrewd observations about Caroline’s close ties with the witch community, not to mention how several werewolf packs had invoked lifetime protection for her after she fought her school district to allow pack children’s post-full moon care not to count against their attendance. Underneath sunshine curls and her bubbly personality, she was a gifted teacher, not to mention fierce and loyal and everyone gravitated toward her. *Especially him.*
Their last day together, they’d attended her school’s carnival, and she’d cleverly sweet-talked him into helping her with the face-painting booth. He was a bloodthirsty Original, ruling the vampire faction for centuries, and yet, he found himself grinning foolishly and feeling lighter than he had in decades as he painted unruly children’s cheeks.

Later on, he’d left her sleeping in his bed to foolishly see why his brothers decided to visit him in the middle of the night. He’d sat there, listening in disbelief as Elijah and Finn rattled off ridiculous statistics from their market research staff, encouraging him to use his relationship with Caroline to strengthen alliances with the human factions. He’d been taken aback by their proposal. Not to mention tempted — after all, one could never have too much power. However, he knew he couldn’t hurt Caroline in that manner; he cared about her too much.

His instincts told him to be cautious in revealing the depth of his feelings to his brothers — his family was ruthless and opportunistic and couldn’t be trusted not to see her as a weakness to exploit. Unfortunately, he realized too late that Caroline had stumbled across them.

The look of utter betrayal on her face was heart wrenching, but he couldn’t seem to find the words to fix things. Instead, he seemed rooted to his chair as he watched her stubbornly set her jaw, blue eyes blazing in fury as she stormed out of his house. And out of his life.

Caroline’s voice was quiet and bitter as she pulled him from his unpleasant memories. “You weren’t angry with your brothers; you weren’t even offended on my behalf! Instead, you just muttered that you’d ‘take it under advisement’!“ She glared at him once more before she stomped off, joining Bonnie Bennett, the newly crowned head of the witch factions, at the limbo game set up across from the tiki bar.

As Klaus watched her angrily walk away in a delectable cloud of red satin, he couldn’t help but admire her fiery spirit. Tyler couldn’t handle her fire. *He didn’t deserve her fire.*

It was time to get Caroline back.
Part 5 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

Part 5 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Shakespeare in the park & Swimming hole.

Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Shakespeare in the park

The sweat stung her eyes as Caroline helped Bonnie lift the unwieldy metal archway from the pristine lawn, wondering if Matt’s beat-up truck bed would be long enough to transport it back to the park where the rest of their theater group had started building the sets. The Shakespeare in the Park Event was going to be a success; Caroline had put too much of herself into the pre-production planning to let it all fall apart now. Even if their flighty director Sibyl had decided at the latest minute to turn this year’s production of *Titus Andronicus* into a fusion Western.

Because of the last-minute changes, she and Bonnie had been scrambling to source low-cost props that would transform the production sets into an Old West-style town with a Shakespearian twist. To help stretch their meager budget, Caroline had the brilliant idea to drive around the fancier side of town on trash collection day to see if they spotted any furniture that could be repurposed.

“You know, all this dumpster diving could’ve been avoided if you’d just played nice with Damon,” Bonnie grumbled as she struggled to hold up her end of the metal structure. “I know he’s a jerk, but he’s Stefan’s brother and agent and he convinced Stefan to star in the production for free to boost ticket sales. He even offered to pay for the set costs; all he wanted was—”

She shook her head violently, nearly adding another dent to Matt’s battered fender. “Was for the female cast to agree to a gross version of ‘Girls Gone Wild’ theater edition calendar as part of the promotional materials. It’s one thing to celebrate the female form, but another to make it mandatory for the entire female cast. I shut that shit down as soon as Sibyl brought it to me.”

Bonnie awkwardly cleared her throat, telling her quietly, “Oh. Um, I didn’t realize that’s what he was after. I just overheard him ask Sibyl for the girls to do some promotional posters. I didn’t know about that part of it.” Grunting under the weight of the archway, her tone turned outraged as she added, “To hell with Damon then. We don’t need his help.”

“Exactly,” Caroline nodded, using the corner of her t-shirt sleeve to wipe her sweaty forehead. She recalled with a pang that in addition to their concerns about sourcing props, they still hadn’t cast the lead, Tamora, the Bandit Queen. Normally, anyone in their theater group would relish the opportunity to play such a well-written villain, but everyone knew that it would mean sharing almost every scene with the other lead, Titus, who’d be played by Stefan.

While Stefan was a classically trained actor whose enviable professional career included numerous Broadway productions and several well-known Indie film accolades, behind the scenes,
he was a pompous ass who clearly thought his talent allowed him to rise above common manners...and hygiene. Apparently, he was in the middle of a durian fruit and fermented soybean paste juice cleanse that made him smell like an outhouse in July and the organic sardine oil hair gel he insisted on wearing made one’s eyes water if you got too close.

Caroline sighed in exasperation, “Can’t you just play Tamora this one time? Sibyl’s getting desperate and she’s one crazy eye twitch away from making us meditate underwater to commune with our inner siren. Again.”

“Nope. Besides, it’s just like Demetrius says in Act 2: ‘She is a woman, therefore must be wooed.’ So far, no one’s done much to woo me into taking this role. Let’s just stall a bit longer. Surely some nitwit will stupidly volunteer because Stefan’s their sad little celebrity crush.”

Caroline favored her friend with a small smile, hoping she was right. She tossed Bonnie several bungee cords and began tying down the archway to make sure it didn’t fall out of the truck when she heard a woman’s indignant screech.

“What the bloody hell do you think you’re doing; traipsing about our lawn as though you lived here?”

They both looked up to see an intimidatingly beautiful blonde come storming out of the impressive colonial-style mansion, waving her arms angrily at the truck. Following close at her heels was an equally attractive man with a dimpled smirk, and Caroline inwardly questioned whether a free archway was worth what looked like an exasperating conversation.

“We were careful not to step on your flowerbeds,” she called out, wondering what the big deal was, “and your gardener told us that you’d approved the removal of the archway to be tossed out on trash day. Since you didn’t want it, we’re repurposing it.”

The blonde crossed her arms, eyeing Caroline’s paint-stained t-shirt and cutoff shorts disdainfully. “Do you just flit through posh neighborhoods, collecting rubbish then?”

A frown crossed the handsome man’s face, and he hissed, “That’s enough, Rebekah.” He stepped forward, offering his hand for Caroline to shake as he introduced himself. “I’m Klaus, and this vengeful harpy is my sister, Rebekah.” He gestured toward the legs of the archway that Bonnie had been struggling to tie down. “And yes, the gardener had been instructed to toss that out. Do you need any help making it secure?”

“Honestly, brother, the blonde doesn’t look particularly discerning. I’m sure offering to buy her a beer would require less effort and produce the same results.”

Caroline felt her temper flare, but she didn’t have time to get into it with whatever crippling insecurities this woman had dragged with her into adulthood. She also saw that familiar vicious smile of Bonnie’s, the one that had signaled two separate brawls down at the Mystic Bar and the super-charged prune and apricot laxative in an ex’s drink. She quickly said, “I’m Caroline and that’s Bonnie. We’re out looking for things we could turn into props for our local theater group. Bonnie, why don’t you get them a flyer out of the front seat?”

Bonnie ungraciously thrust the flyer at Klaus, who immediately seemed intrigued by the unique Old West-inspired wanted poster that formed the background of the ad. “You’re performing Titus Andronicus as a Western,” he asked, a healthy bit of skepticism in his accented voice as he said dryly, “That’s one of those creative ventures that’s either positively inspired or sheer madness.”
“It can be two things,” Caroline cheerfully agreed as she helped him secure the remaining side of the metalwork into the truck bed.

Klaus chuckled, sharing a smile with her that made her grateful for the already stifling morning so he would assume she was just flushed from the heat. His tone turned thoughtful as he offered, “Actually love, if you’re searching for pieces to help sell the Old West atmosphere, there’s some leftover ceiling beams from when we remodeled the downstairs study — perhaps they could be made into a fence? In fact, I happen to have some kits leftover to transform pieces into more of an antique woodgrain appearance if you’d like to have them.”

Caroline’s eyes lit up with wonder. “That sounds perfect, thank you!” She did her best not to fidget under his warm gaze, trying to sound casual as she asked, “Uh, do you maybe want to stop by the park sometime to see how the sets are coming along?” She caught the teasing little half-grin on Bonnie’s face and knew she’d hear all about it later.

“I’d be honored,” he quickly answered, that accent of his doing fluttery things to her stomach that Caroline was helpless to ignore.

“Really, you’d offer utter strangers African mahogany,” Rebekah scoffed, snatching the flyer from Klaus.

While Caroline had no idea what that actually meant, from the way the tips of his ears reddened, it sounded like their production company just received an unexpected windfall. As Bonnie was texting Jeremy to bring his truck over to pick up Klaus’ generous donation, an odd, strangled noise came out of the angry blonde that made everyone glance over in surprise.

“You’re part of the Shakespeare in the Park Event,” she asked faintly, her perfectly manicured hands shaking slightly as she seemed to be rereading the same few lines on the flyer in disbelief. “You get to work with Stefan Salvatore, one of the greatest modern talents of both stage and screen?”

Bonnie raised an eyebrow, telling her flatly, “Yeah, he’s playing Titus, the reformed bank robber returning to his family’s homestead. So far, it’s been...something.”

Rebekah’s entire demeanor changed, and she was practically bouncing as she gushed, “I’ve seen all of his shows on Broadway and his movies and I’d wanted to stop by the park for an autograph but was told it was a closed rehearsal. I’d do anything to meet him!”

Caroline exchanged a sly look with Bonnie, who looked positively gleeful. “Well, as it so happens, we need someone to play Tamora...”

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**Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Swimming hole**

It was said to be a place of bad spirits. Since distant memory, the villagers shunned it and only spoke of it in fearful, hushed tones. But Caroline had been desperate and Katerina needed to rest, so she’d swallowed her worries and guided her friend over the fallen trees to the hidden
swimming hole in the forest. She helped Katerina settle onto the small blankets they’d stolen from a basket, and then knelt by the water and filled the roughly carved wooden bowl.

“Drink, Katerina. Your baby needs you to be strong.” She couldn’t keep the tremor from her voice as she observed her flushed skin and harsh breathing. Once it had been revealed in their village that Katerina was pregnant, her family had forced Katerina to remain inside to hide their deep shame. Caroline listened to the villagers whisper, learning disturbing rumors that left her with little choice.

First, the Petrova patriarch had arranged for the baby to be sent away to a convent, clearly expecting to dangle Katerina in front of the lesser nobles to make a favorable match once the rumors had died down. That alone was enough to force Caroline to take action, but then she heard the darker stories — that a seer had foretold of malevolent creatures who would come for Katerina and her child, that they desired their blood for unspeakable rituals. It was said that they would hide behind a pleasing human visage, but would be nothing more than cruel, vicious monsters.

“Rest with me, Caroline,” Katerina, said, clutching her belly that barely had begun to swell, “you’ll need your strength too.” Her dark eyes darted around the shaded area, clearly finding the unnaturally silent woods unnerving. “Whatever we must endure, it is to be faced together.”

Caroline finally saw the wisdom of her friend’s words, only realizing as she sat beside her how weary she’d become. Staring down at her mud-caked turnshoes, she sighed as she contemplated her plan. The best place to disappear would be in a larger city, and the closest one to their tiny village was Vidin. While it was an obvious choice and she worried that they would be followed, it also was a port city and perhaps they could hide among some ship’s cargo and never be found by the Petrovas or the fearsome creatures from the prophecy.

She reached into the hidden pockets she’d sewn into her underdress, pulling out the thin, copper coins she’d managed to save over the years, plus the simple silver bracelet she’d spitefully stolen from the Petrova patriarch’s hateful mistress. “This is what I could gather without rousing suspicion. While it will serve us until the next moon, I want us to secure better sleeping quarters soon.”

Katerina nodded, placing a steady hand upon hers. “We will do better than survive the coming troubles. We will _thrive,_” she swore vehemently.

Caroline knew of hardship. She’d also learned firsthand what it meant to survive. As a small child, she’d been found by some of the villagers, wandering alone in the woods, crying and screeching in a nonsensical language. They’d thought her mad, and some even suspected she’d been touched by demons. It was said that the elders had subjected her to the holy trials where it was confirmed she was human, and therefore they did not cast her out.

While a family had taken her in, it was a small mercy as she forever was treated as an outsider. She’d no memories of her life before the village, and was told that all she’d been able to communicate had been her first name. Whatever memories she’d had of her native tongue and her people had been lost to her over the years as she grew into a young woman, building a meager life for herself in the village.

Katerina had been one of the few to show her kindness, even going so far as to tell off the dangerous old letch who’d attempted to force an offer of marriage on Caroline. He’d stank of spoiled boar meat and dogged her steps for several moons, but it wasn’t until Katerina had hissed violent words that he’d ceased his vile attentions. It was her most cherished friendship, and she swore to protect Katerina just as she’d done for her.
“We can’t stay long,” she murmured regretfully, feeling the unnatural shift in the wind. “Something’s coming; I can feel it.”

Her friend nodded quickly, helping Caroline gather the blankets to place in the burlap sack that carried the last of their food rations. As the still waters began to churn, she hissed fearfully, “This is old magic, something of the dark tales the seer used to spout. The air screams with it.”

The swimming hole came alive, a swirling vortex of brilliant colors that left the women speechless as they watched two men emerge from its depths. Caroline blinked, and suddenly the strangers were before them, studying them intently. *It truly was a place of bad spirits.*

She didn’t like the way the man with dark hair was gazing possessively at her friend. As he reached for her hand and whispered, “Katerina,” Caroline quickly stood in between them, pushing her friend behind her. Despite the venomous threats that Katerina hissed at the men, Caroline could feel her trembling.

Caroline clutched the wooden bowl, finding the roughest edge with her thumb and positioning it so she could hopefully slice into the other man’s dimpled cheekbone if he came any closer. She couldn’t help but notice the way his handsome features reflected intense relief when he saw her. “Caroline,” he breathed, stepping forward just as Caroline pushed Katerina more firmly behind her, snarling at him until he seemed almost hurt by her visceral reaction.

The men were clean-shaven, with closely cropped locks and wearing strange garments. They cut a formidable presence, and she could sense power and something other about them. Were these the malevolent creatures the seer had foretold would come for Katerina and her baby?

The dimpled stranger ran a hand through his short curls in frustration, rapidly spitting out words in a garbled language that she didn’t understand. Both men seemed to register her confusion, exchanging an unreadable look. They seemed surprised that she didn’t understand them, and proceeded to have a brief, intense argument using that same mysterious, sharp-edged language.

Finally, the curly-haired man shocked her by suddenly speaking the native tongue of Katerina’s village, stumbling a bit with his accented words as though it had been ages since he’d spoken the language. “Caroline, you’ve no idea how pleased I am to see you again. I know this will be hard to understand, but you’re actually from another timeline, approximately 500 years in the future. *My future.* When you were a child, my enemies ripped you out of time and space, sending you to a moment when my present self would be the most dangerous.”

Caroline could feel Katerina’s reassuring grip on her hand, and she silently squeezed back, doing her best not to do something foolish like faint in the face of these fanciful tales. She desperately wanted to believe that these men were touched by madness, but there was something in their demeanor that was difficult to ignore. It went beyond their implied power, *their otherness.*

*It felt like fate.*
Part 6 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

Part 6 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Hiking in Peru & “Good job — now the mermaids are glaring.”

Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Hiking in Peru

The rough scrape of the scales against the rock’s facing made Caroline wince, too terrified to scream. Everyone was dead. The unnaturally strong hand that suddenly covered her mouth reminded her that some people apparently started out that way. Despite her terror, she glared at the unfairly attractive creature, still trying to figure out how she went from hiking in Peru with a tour group to learning that the world was actually one giant supernatural clusterfuck.

Yesterday, she’d been drinking chilcanos at a tiny bar hidden in the San Blas area of Cusco, waiting on the rest of her tour group to arrive. “Impressive for a tourist,” the accented stranger sitting next to her said, eyeing her drink. “I would’ve expected someone like you to order a mojito, love.”

“Not that it’s your business, but I drink like the locals when I travel,” she replied, not bothering to hide the slight edge to her voice. She allowed herself to study him briefly, flicking her gaze appreciatively over a strong jawline, well-defined chest and intense gray eyes. Pity — had he kept his mouth shut, she’d have been interested in some hot vacation sex.

He smirked, flashing unexpected dimples that she was certain had swayed far too many before her. “I didn’t mean to offend. When one has been around as long as I have, you develop a certain sense about people.” He smoothly held her hand, lightly brushing his lips across her knuckles as he said, “I’m Klaus.”

“Caroline,” she replied a bit stiffly, doing her best to fight the shiver that went down her spine from the touch of his lips. “And feel free to keep to yourself whatever you’re sensing about me.” She busied herself with another sip of her cocktail, savoring the delicious lime and doing her best to ignore the smirking shadow beside her.

Misinterpreting her brushoff as a challenge, he signaled the bartender for another round, studying her closely. “Of course, sweetheart. Then I will certainly keep to myself that from the delightful lilt of your voice, I would hazard a guess that you originate from the southern United States, perhaps South Carolina or Virginia? You also appear to carry yourself with a great deal of confidence, and I surmise a certain amount of stubbornness that at times lands you in trouble. However, I suspect you possess a great deal of charm and honeyed words to smooth over any
feathers you may ruffle.”

Woah. Blue eyes wide, she downed the rest of her drink, wordlessly scrambling for the fresh one the bartender had set in front of her. How the hell did he read her so well? “So, you’re like a mysterious grifter scamming dumb American tourists in bars,” she asked, the sarcasm heavy as she added, “Nice work if you can get it, I guess.”

“Something like that,” Klaus replied with an enigmatic smile.

And that’s where she thought they’d part ways, leaving her a little curious about what might’ve been...

But instead, her once-in-a-lifetime hiking in Peru adventure took an unexpected turn when a flash of brilliant green scales unexpectedly slithered out of a twisting gorge and ate their scruffy tour guide. She’d barely managed to hide behind a clump of giant ferns when the leviathan reared back, sweeping the screaming tourists into its enormous mouth. Curved fangs. Sinister hissing. Was that seriously a giant snake?

A streak of movement caught her eye, and she let out a small gasp as she watched in disbelief as Klaus seemingly appeared out of nowhere, his handsome features morphing into something monstrous, complete with deadly-looking fangs. He attacked the creature, displaying incredible strength as he managed to claw a gaping hole into the snake’s flesh, spilling sickly-sweet blood that caused it to let out a terrifying screech that echoed throughout the valley.

When it was clear the creature wouldn’t die easily, Klaus retreated, tossing Caroline over his shoulder and flashing them up the steep mountainside where they currently were hiding in a narrow gap between the rock facing.

Caroline barely kept the hysterics under control as she whispered, “Seriously?! Giant snakes are a thing?” She gestured toward Klaus, noting that gold had bled into his gray eyes, not entirely sure what to make of it. “And whatever you are, I guess.”

“Hybrid. A vampire-werewolf. One of the originators of both species,” he murmured, a note of pride entering his voice. “And that was the Yacumama, the giant serpent of Peruvian folklore. I honestly thought it to be nothing more than myth. Rest assured, I’ll be having words with that troublesome demon shaman when this is over.”

She blinked in surprise, not entirely sure what to do with that information. What the hell do you even say to that? She blurted out the first thing that came to mind: “How is this my life?! I just wanted an adventure; but one of those safe, glossy magazine-type adventure where the biggest actual danger would be running out of anti-frizz serum, and now I’m going to die in this dirty cave and I never even got to have hot vacation sex!”

The gold in Klaus’ gaze brightened, and she couldn’t help but wonder if maybe that hot vacation sex was still a possibility...

Klarosummer Bingo prompt: “Good job — now the mermaids are glaring.”
It was the gleaming scales in the garish lights of Silas’ Traveling Carnival that caught Klaus’ attention. *She was here.* It burned to know that unscrupulous humans had taken what he’d considered his.

He’d first encountered Caroline earlier that summer, playing in the shallows near a barrier island in southwest Florida. He’d foolishly run his sailboat aground, and his colorful string of curses had been interrupted by a soft giggle.

“She was here. It burned to know that unscrupulous humans had taken what he’d considered his.

“He’d first encountered Caroline earlier that summer, playing in the shallows near a barrier island in southwest Florida. He’d foolishly run his sailboat aground, and his colorful string of curses had been interrupted by a soft giggle.

“Let me guess — growing up you wanted to be a pirate?” The lovely blonde grinned up at him cheekily, the iridescent scales of her long tail shimmering in the sunlight. Mistaking his silence for shock at encountering such a creature, she quickly reassured him, “No, you’re not hallucinating. But I promise, I’m not going to hurt you.”

Her sunshine smile made his heart twinge unexpectedly. She thought he was human. “I appreciate the reassurances, love. And though it’s been some time since I was a child, I don’t recall any pirate fantasies.” Perhaps after they were better acquainted he could amuse her with how he’d inadvertently ran afoul of the fearsome cutthroat Grace O’Malley, while securing his idiot brother Kol’s release when he happened to be aboard one of the Spanish galleys her crew raided in the 1560s.

He jumped over the side, purposely slowing his body’s supernatural reflexes to appear human. As he pushed on the starboard side of his beached sailboat, he cocked an eyebrow, asking, “Care to give me a hand...or a fin?”

Scoffing, she flicked the edge of her tail, sending a spray of water that soaked him from head to toe. “You seem the type to save yourself.” As she trailed her hand through the water, she added gleefully, “Better get to work — the tide’s out for another five hours.”

He’d been so amused by his encounter with that intriguing creature that he’d returned every day for a week, teasing and shamelessly flirting just to see that telltale blush stain her cheeks whenever she found him especially vexing. He was careful with the stories he shared, not wanting to reveal his true nature. Her kind were notoriously distrustful of both humans and other creatures. He tried to deny it, but seeing the way her blue eyes twinkled as she teased him had become something of an obsession. *It was a shame it wasn’t time to tell her the truth — that they didn’t meet by chance.*

The angry flick of her tail pulled him from his thoughts, and he immediately raced to the glass case where she was being kept along with two others. Her blonde head broke the surface of the water, blue eyes blazing. “Klaus! What are you doing here?!”

“When you stopped coming to our island, I knew something had happened to you. It took me weeks to learn you’d been taken by this foul circus to be *displayed.*” Klaus couldn’t keep the anger from his voice when he saw how Caroline had been caged like an animal, forced to be part of a distasteful sideshow attraction. He barely maintained control on his hybrid features, his fangs
aching to emerge and eviscerate the humans who’d dared to enslave such a beautiful creature.

She shook her head worriedly, her voice an urgent whisper as she warned, “You need to get out of here. The men who took me are dangerous and Silas is the worst of them all!”

When was the last time someone had been concerned for his welfare? He honestly couldn’t remember. He hated the fear he saw etched upon her lovely face, and he felt the need to soothe her. “All will be well, sweetheart. I know of Silas and men like him are driven purely by greed. I’m here to purchase this reprehensible carnival from him. You will be freed.” He impatiently ignored the cold pit that had settled in his stomach. Would Caroline still favor him with her sunshine smiles when she realized the half-truths he’s spoken?

As he walked away, Caroline comforted the brunette twins caged with her, the women still eyeing him suspiciously despite her reassurances. He found Silas in a rundown trailer near the edge of the carnival, smoking a cheap cigar as he boasted to the local news outlet on the phone of his unique sideshow attraction.

He’d intended to simply compel the reprobate into signing over the circus, but Kol had reported that he appeared to be under a witch’s protection, which would complicate matters. Obscene amounts of money seemed to be the answer, as was often the case in these matters, and his meeting concluded with his new ownership as soon as he added enough zeroes to his offer. *Humans were such ridiculous creatures.*

Kol was waiting for him outside the trailer, an impish grin on his boyish face as he teased, “You could’ve bought a small country for what you just paid that dullard. That’s quite the freak show fantasy you have, brother.”

His blood boiled at Kol’s innuendo, and he wasn’t about to allow him speak of Caroline in such a manner. His hybrid gold burned in his gaze as he seethed, “You know bloody well I purchased the carnival because I require a mermaid to summon a hurricane. Otherwise, the spell won’t work.”

A series of angry splashes jarred both brothers from their heated discussion. Klaus cast a wary eye over his shoulder and felt his heart sink when he realized that some idiot stagehand had relocated the mermaids’ enclosure next to Silas’ trailer. *Bollocks.*

Slapping him on the back, Kol observed sarcastically, “Good job — now the mermaids are glaring.”

From the fierce glint in Caroline’s stare, it appeared his plan just became more complicated.
Part 7 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

Part 7 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Museum docent & “The ritual needs daisies, not sunflowers!”

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all of your reviews and support with my drabbles I've been posting - I really appreciate the kudos!!!

Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: Museum docent

The incubus’ expression still wasn’t right. Klaus frowned, carefully smudging the charcoal to deepen the shadow. He’d been fascinated by Fuseli’s *The Nightmare* ever since it was first exhibited in 1781. When the local art museum announced Fuseli’s most recognized piece on loan from the Detroit Institute of Arts, he couldn’t resist. During his initial visit, he’d fully intended to compel the security guards into delivering it directly to him...but then he caught sight of a pair of blazing blue eyes that had no business belonging to a mere human.

Her name was Caroline, and she was a fascinating mix of brilliance and sass wrapped up in sun-kissed curls and a no-nonsense blazer. He’d overheard the surprisingly knowledgeable museum docent give multiple tours, each time delighting the patrons with unique insights into the exhibits and witty anecdotes about the featured artists.

He was intrigued, and impulsively told her he was an art student studying the Swiss masters to have an excuse to keep stopping by. Each day, he brought his sketchpad, alternating between recreating Fuseli’s work and sneaking drawings of the feisty blonde. Despite his attempts to get to know her, she kept a professional distance that he respected. However, he also noticed that she’d started to linger a bit longer during her breaks, and slowly, he began to learn little tidbits about her life. *From a small town. Art history major before dropping out of college. A surprising penchant for darker-themed masters like Bosch and Moreau.*

“Ohmm. Your attempt at depicting haunting and dreamlike evocation of infatuation and erotic obsession is slightly better than yesterday’s attempt. Or the day before that. Or the day before that...” Caroline gleefully stage-whispered as she walked by the small alcove where he sat.

He smirked, assuming if she ever saw the numerous drawings of herself that she’d form considerably different opinions on his artistic interpretations of *infatuation and erotic obsession.* “Then you feel I’ve improved upon Fuseli’s work, sweetheart?”

“Fuseli’s talent is unparalleled in depicting horror that fascinates as much as it terrifies.
Often hailed as a master of light and shadow, he was a rebellious soul who once had to flee Switzerland because of his politics,” she replied, a teasing grin on her face as she casually flicked her gaze over Klaus to add, “While you seem like a trust fund baby who’s wasting his talent copying the masters when he could be creating original art.”

*If she only knew.* Over the centuries, he’d influenced and, in some cases, even taught many of the so-called masters she revered. Chuckling, he asked, “And what of you, love? Do you harbor artistic ambitions of your own?”

Shrugging, she answered lightly, “Not a trust fund baby, so nope. Just happy to get to work surrounded by so many beautiful pieces.” There was a sadness to her eyes that Klaus had started to notice whenever he tried to get her to speak about herself, and a subtle caution with her words that was unusual in one so young. She was a mystery he intended to unravel. She stiffened beside him, and he glanced over his shoulder to see the museum’s director heading their way. A beady-eyed man who seemed to delight in barking orders at his subordinates, Klaus had idly contemplated eating him for a while now, and he suspected this exchange would solidify that urge.

“Klaus, right? I’m Dr. Alaric Saltzman, Director of New Acquisitions,” he said with a certain amount of bluster that Klaus would’ve found amusing had he not blatantly interrupted his conversation with Caroline. Not bothering to wait for a reply, the irritating man carried on, gesturing to his most recent charcoal lines, telling him, “Say, that’s some talent you have there, son. I’m having drinks tonight at the White Oak Pub with a few friends and would love for you to join us; it’s never too early for a young art student to start networking, right?”

Klaus narrowed his eyes, his supernatural senses picking up a suspicious combination of nervous sweat and rapid heartbeat coming from Director Saltzman. He needed Klaus at that meeting. *But for what purpose?* He also noticed Caroline’s rigid posture, the way she leaned away from the director and almost seemed to be blocking Klaus from the man’s line of sight. *How curious.* “I’ll have to get back with you,” he answered coolly, “but I appreciate the offer, mate.” The director turned to leave, clearly displeased by his response, and tersely reminded Caroline she had a tour group waiting.

She visibly relaxed once he was gone, pasting on a painful-looking smile as she told Klaus, “I should probably get back to work. Here’s hoping it’s retirees or schoolkids. I’ve hit my quota of bored dads who wink and stand way too close.”

Klaus narrowed his eyes at that; he’d quietly eaten a few of the more insistent patrons as they were leaving the museum; he didn’t appreciate the lack of decorum they’d shown around Caroline.

She started to walk away, but stopped, quickly glancing around before leaning down to whisper urgently, “Don’t meet the director tonight.” She didn’t bother to say anything more, leaving him confused and a bit alarmed by how frightened she seemed.

Later on, he’d decided to wait around for Caroline, hoping to stage an ‘accidentally on purpose’ run-in so that he could try to learn what was going on. As he came downstairs and passed the hallway that led to the personnel offices, that’s when he heard her vehemently hiss, “I told you no, Alaric. Not Klaus.”

Klaus felt his fangs threaten to drop as the director threatened, “And I thought you’d learned your lesson after what happened to your mother.”

“You’ve already recruited enough forgers to get the job done. You don’t need Klaus,” Caroline revealed, clearly shaken by his words.
A crime ring within the art museum? Now that was interesting. Klaus felt the warmth spread through his chest as he realized that despite her obvious fear of the consequences, Caroline was trying to protect him. As he listened to the director detail his plan, interwoven with despicable threats to Caroline, he started to make his own plans.

Caroline had tried to save him. It was his turn to save her.

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Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: “The ritual needs daisies, not sunflowers!”

Fighting demons naked wasn’t her first choice, but she’d be damned before she allowed them to steal the gold she’d spent the past month creating. Apparently, word had gotten out that Caroline was the only competent alchemist in the region, and the lower-level demons had been getting bolder in their attacks because they needed her gold to entice humans into bargains.

She jumped out of the bathtub, wet feet sliding on the tile as she raced downstairs to her lab. She saw the flare of red from the two demons’ searing gaze as they crouched behind the table. Damn, the Lockwood clan was getting bold.

As their long, scaly fingers crept toward the stack of thin, gold plates, Caroline snarled, “Touch what’s mine and you’ll lose a hand.” While they exchanged a series of guttural grunts in their language, Caroline quickly felt underneath the well-worn planks of the table, her hand instinctively curling around the familiar polished bone handle of her favorite scimitar. “Last chance,” she warned, irritated that they barely gave her a second glance, clearly unconcerned by the threat she posed.

The moment one of the Lockwoods’ claws covetously stroked the stacked gold, she rolled her eyes, cleanly slicing through his hand with her curved blade. She muttered under her breath as she saw the way the acidic yellow-green blood ate into the carefully applied varnish. Damn it — there went her weekend.

As the creature screeched, clutching its mangled stump while uselessly trying to claw at her, she caught movement out of the corner of her eye and cringed as she saw her crystal alembic head shatter against the skull of the other demon. “Seriously?!” She whirled around to scold the familiar dimpled face who looked entirely too amused by the situation. “That was an antique, Nik! There were perfectly good, cheap glass beakers sitting right there.”

“Well, forgive me for finding the most expedient method to defend you, love,” he replied dryly, turning a menacing glare on the demons as they scrambled out of her house.

Caroline couldn’t help the giggle that escaped as she watched Nik finally register that she was naked, a red flush creeping up his neck as he quickly averted his gaze. Nik had moved next door a few months ago, a somewhat competent warlock who’d come to her for help with some rudimentary spells that somehow blossomed into a flirty friendship. A friendship that she’d been trying to move along into something more, but so far, Nik had been frustratingly dense at picking up on her hints.
“I had it under control,” she replied, rattling her scimitar for emphasis.

His voice was a bit strained as he mumbled, “Beautiful, naked blonde wielding a sword. Bloody hell, I swear you’re trying to kill me.”

Caroline grinned, taking her time finding the oversized long-sleeved shirts she wore to protect her skin when she melted down metals. “That’s what you get for showing up early for your magic lesson,” she cheekily admonished. Noting the sunflowers he was clutching, she let out an exasperated sigh, “The ritual needs daisies, not sunflowers!” She’d told him that over and over when he’d stopped by for a consultation yesterday. At least, she thought she did. She’d been growing increasingly alarmed by the bits of time she’d been losing lately.

And she had far too many secrets to not be in control. She was the only living alchemist to have successfully created the Philosopher’s Stone — the key ingredient in immortality spells. Not only could she create powerful beings; she also could unmake them. She’d wisely hidden her abilities because of the warring supernatural factions, and now that there were whispers about the Originals’ fearful return, she knew she’d made the right choice. Every story she’d ever heard about the oldest vampires in creation involved destruction and chaos as they slaughtered the world around them. No one knew why they’d suddenly resurfaced, and she had no interest in finding out.

“Are you alright, sweetheart? Did they harm you?”

She shook her head, her heart speeding up as she heard the concern in his voice. She squeezed his hand and softly reassured him. “I’m fine. I just have a lot on my mind.”

Nik’s eyes sought hers, and she was touched by the worry she found there. “Would you like to tell me about it?”

The halting way he asked made her think that it was unusual for him to do so, and she filed that away to think about later. As much as she wanted to share her burden — the nagging fear that the Originals might find out about the Philosopher’s Stone and her worries that the holes in her memory were more than just simple forgetfulness — she couldn’t bring Nik into her mess. It was selfish and she couldn’t bear the thought of her innocent warlock getting hurt because of her.

Suddenly, he placed both hands on her face, impulsively kissing her until they were both breathless. He broke away just as she’d started to take things further, panting slightly as he touched his forehead to hers. “I have something to confess, sweetheart. My name is Niklaus...”
Part 8 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

A collection of random AU one-shots featuring Klaroline. Chapter 81: Part 8 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Campfire & The Hamptons.

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: Thank you so much for all of the great reviews and kudos you’ve sent my way with my latest drabbles! It’s such a wonderful boost of confidence to hear that you’re enjoying my work.

Also, big news!!! My original work has been published on Amazon. It’s called Twice Burned. I’ve included the synopsis at the end of this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: Campfire

This one gets a bit smutty. :)

It was when Caroline saved Klaus from drowning that he finally stopped being an asshat. They’d been working together for almost two weeks and he’d barely acknowledged her with more than the occasional grunt or irritated sigh whenever they needed to compare underwater scans and other seismic data as they searched for the Loch Ness Monster.

She’d noticed his tense frame every time they went out on the boat, but it never occurred to her that it was because he couldn’t swim. However, the moment he fell overboard with a terrified yelp, she immediately dove in after him, deftly navigating the murky water to grab his flailing body and hoist him back onto the boat’s small deck.

“Thank you,” he’d gasped, coughing up water and shivering.

Caroline rolled him to his side, making sure the water didn’t settle in his lungs. “Probably not the best time of year to go for a swim in the Scottish Highlands,” she joked, noting the thick fog that had settled on the surface.
“You’re quite the swimmer, sweetheart.”

With an enigmatic smile, she replied, “I grew up in the water.”

She’d made a campfire when they returned to shore, wanting to make sure that Klaus stayed warm. They sat together with a large blanket wrapped around them, enjoying a comfortable silence that hadn’t been there before.

“I apologize about before. The way I behaved — it was unprofessional.” He sighed, staring into the bright orange and red flames, “Experience has taught me to be wary of anyone who shows an interest in my research. As you know, cryptozoology is looked upon with derision in most scientific circles, and when you suddenly appeared with your impressive credentials, I unfortunately assumed you were here on a lark to mock my life’s work.”

She shook her head, quickly telling him, “Klaus, I’m here because I want to be. I was fascinated by the work you’ve published and wanted to know more.”

He looked at her in awe, a childlike wonder in his voice that she found endearing. “I’ve just never met anyone who was as drawn to the myth of Nessie as I am. The legends, dating all the way back to the Picts’ stone carvings — it’s intriguing how similar the sightings have been throughout the centuries.”

“I’ve always been partial to the St. Columba accounts from 565 AD where the creature was depicted with a bit of humanity. It must be a lonely existence,” she said quietly.

He appeared thoughtful, threading his fingers through hers unexpectedly. “All the years I’ve been searching for Nessie, I’ve never considered that. You have a tender heart.”

Caroline’s eyes widened in surprise. “No one’s ever said that about me.” She leaned in, close enough to see the tiny curls at his temple, and felt the heat of the fire as it warmed his skin. She’d always known he was attractive, but hadn’t succumbed to his allure until now. She had a sudden urge to taste him. Judging from the darkening of his eyes, it appeared Klaus wouldn’t mind.

She’d meant to barely brush her lips to his, waiting to gauge his reaction, but instead he surged forward, eagerly exploring her mouth with his tongue that both surprised and delighted her. She pushed the blanket from their shoulders, following his body to the ground as she helped him remove his soft Henley. She gasped at the feel of his hands pulling off her jeans, his impatience to touch her skin making her shiver.

“I enjoy your form,” she purred, tracing the hard planes of his chest and abdominals. As she bent to take an experimental lick, he groaned, tightening his hold on her thighs.

“Likewise, love.”

She rocked against him, tracing the outline of his bulge against her damp core. Curious to understand the growing heat she felt between them, she quickly unzipped his pants, fumbling a bit before she managed to free his cock. That first press of him left her breathless, an unearthly whine at the back of her throat as she caught onto the sensual rhythm he seemed to like best.

Klaus bucked his hips with a strength that she found immensely appealing. She allowed a bit of her true strength to push through, gauging his reaction. Surprisingly, it seemed to spur him on, his strokes becoming wild as he moaned his approval.

A brilliant reptilian yellow bled into Caroline’s eyes as she admired her lover.
She’d chosen well.

**Klarosummer Bingo prompt: The Hamptons**

The ring was lovely — a simple band of delicate pink and cream, and as Klaus slipped it on Caroline’s finger, she realized that he’d carved it from the conch shell they’d found that first night they walked on the beach. **Damn him.**

The blue button-down he wore brought out his eyes, and he’d rolled up the sleeves to reveal those impressive forearms. The first time she saw him, she thought he looked like he’d been sculpted from marble — and was just as cold. She had no idea that underneath that cocky exterior was such a tender, passionate heart. She looked at the world differently because of him.

“Sweetheart, you and your sunshine heart took me by surprise; I never expected to feel this way. You showed me that I deserve something special,” he told her, his voice faltering a bit as he added, “something real.”

She felt her lip tremble. **Damn it — you can do this. Just keep it together.** “Klaus, I...” she trailed off, her throat tight with unshed tears. She knew that what she told him would be her truth, but it also would be a lie. Instead, she surged forward, putting everything into the kiss that she was too afraid to say.

She didn’t start crying until she went back to the beach house she shared with Katherine and Bonnie.

**Three months ago**

“Christ, it’s hot as balls out here,” Katherine muttered under her breath as she casually dabbed at the sweat along her temple.

Caroline took a small sip of her Limoncello Collins, keeping her pleasant smile plastered on her face as she inwardly scoffed at the fact that the liquor in her cocktail cost more than her rent when she first got out on her own. But that was a long time ago. As she quietly took in the gorgeous gleam of diamonds, pearls and platinum adorning the elite residents of the Hamptons, she couldn’t help but smile at how easy this would be. “Do you see them yet,” she whispered to Bonnie, who leaned against the yacht’s railing, her sharp green eyes carefully studying the crowd on the lower deck.

Before Bonnie could reply, Caroline caught sight of their targets. Aching beautiful, enigmatic, and fabulously wealthy — the Mikaelson brothers had caused quite the stir when they arrived in the Hamptons. Klaus, Elijah and Kol were the first marks she and her friends had targeted that actually lived up to their hype. From their careful research, they knew the brothers came from old money, their family rumored to have established powerful connections in numerous
political circles — both stateside and globally.

They were the culmination of everything Caroline and her friends had worked for — conning even a fraction of the Mikaelsons’ wealth would set them up for life — it was the final score they needed to secure their financial future. When she saw that dimpled smirk Klaus flashed at one of the servers, she did her best to ignore the strange fluttering sensation she experienced. “Dibs on Klaus,” she quickly muttered to Katherine and Bonnie, not caring that they both favored her with amused grins.

Katherine shrugged, eyeing the impeccably tailored Isaia that Elijah was wearing, and shrugged with a naughty lilt to her voice as she said, “Who knows? Underneath that gorgeous suit might be a good time waiting to happen.”

“Fine. I guess all that babysitting I did will come in handy with that one,” Bonnie grumbled as she nodded toward Kol, who had plucked two bottles of the Bollinger special reserve from the sterling buckets and was racing up a narrow ladder to the observation deck above.

Targets acquired, the women scattered to start what they hoped to be the last con of their lives.

Caroline let out a wet sob, jarring her from her memories. She opened the door to the beach house, barely resisting the urge to throw her heels. Stupid, uncomfortable heels that she had to carefully measure each step she took to keep from wobbling because she hated wearing heels. She glanced down at her dress, smoothing out the wrinkles of the perfectly fitted floral sheath dress. She hated florals. And dresses.

The man she’d accidentally fallen in love with didn’t even know that she preferred jeans with ragged holes in both knees and faded rock t-shirts. And she was sick of champagne that cost more than her first car. The rare vintages tasted like ashes now. She missed good old cheap beer — it had been ages since she’d had a Corona.

“Well, you look like shit,” Katherine drawled, surprising her when she flicked on a small lamp in the foyer.

Caroline wasn’t surprised by her friend’s tone — she’d grown increasingly bitchy as the summer months had passed. At first, Caroline and Bonnie assumed it was because she hated to feel tied down to one place and wanderlust had set in, but the more they discussed each other’s strategies with the brothers, the angrier she’d become. Wild, unpredictable Katherine miraculously had grown protective of the stuffy older brother. Caroline would laugh if it wasn’t so depressing. A grifter falling for her mark had tragedy written all over it.

“And you’re still the same manipulative bitch who doesn’t think anyone will ever love her.”

The brunette raised an eyebrow, replying dryly, “My, my, I haven’t seen you this rattled since the Donovan job. That sweet little cattle baron had you tied up in knots with guilt. Don’t tell me we’re dealing with that shit again.”

“That’s not what this is,” Caroline replied with a low growl. She realized she’d been unconsciously toying with the ring Klaus had made for her, running her finger along the polished edge over and over. She recalled the warmth she heard in his voice, his expressive eyes that
showed too many emotions for her to register.

She angrily swiped at a stray tear as she said, “Don’t act like you don’t know what this is, Kat. Bonnie fumbled the Anchor con she tried to run on Kol the other night. We’ve watched her do it a hundred times without fail but she couldn’t even get through the first step. And you’re a complete bitch anytime we start pushing you to work your connection with Elijah.”

Katherine froze, her beautiful features suddenly an ugly mask of fear and insecurity. “Goddamn it! We caught feelings.”

The women shared an awkward, commiserating look, unsure of where to go from there.

Caroline was restless, finally tired of tossing and turning in her bed. She impulsively took a walk on the beach, heading away from the rows of gaudy mansions and toward the small fishing pier. Taking advantage of the low tide, she ducked underneath the worn planks, leaning against one of the mossy posts as she watched the waves lap at the shore.

“This is bollocks, Nik!”

She startled, realizing that was Kol’s voice she heard carry over the water. She peered into the dark, squinting at the familiar outline of Klaus and his younger brother.

“Don’t tell me this is just another job for you,” Klaus replied angrily, “You got too close to Bonnie and Elijah’s all but forgotten the rest of the world exists thanks to Katherine.”

Kol scoffed, “And Caroline? I saw that ring — don’t think I’m not aware of what that means to you.”

Caroline’s heart thudded in her chest as she waited for Klaus’ reply. She didn’t fully understand what was going on, but she knew that nothing would ever be the same again.

After all, a grifter falling for her mark had tragedy written all over it.
mysterious dark force. While trying to protect his sister who is next in line to be medicine woman and fighting creatures of Choctaw folklore, he still finds the time to try to seduce the argumentative, passionate voodoo priestess who’s caught his eye. Together, they’ll unravel the mystery behind the dark force, in between exploring an intriguing blues club underneath the Mississippi, a hidden werewolf village and torturing enemies conveniently locked away in invisible rooms. Nash may have initially offered Susannah a taste of real power, but he’ll soon learn that it pales in comparison to the power of her loyalty and above all, her heart.
Chapter Summary

Part 9 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: Peach festival & “So, can we turn this into a Weekend at Bernie’s situation?”

Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: Peach festival

*Peach jam was not a weapon.* Caroline would resist the urge to hurl one of her heavy Mason jars into the smug face of Elena Gilbert as she pretended to care about how she was doing post-Tyler breakup. *Because that’s not what that nosy bitch really wanted to know.* She wanted to know the same thing everyone else did — why she attacked Tyler in the middle of class *weeks* after he broke up with her. Caroline hadn’t been back to school since, so those desperate for gossip apparently had decided to corner her while she was working her family’s booth at the Mystic Falls Peach Festival.

“I’m doing great, Elena. In fact, I bet I’m doing *way* better than Tyler’s balls these days,” she answered with a vicious smile. When she was feeling depressed or angry about her situation, she just recalled the way Tyler’s skin turned the color of sour milk when she hit his balls with multiple uppercuts. *The one bit of good parenting her sheriff mother had provided was making sure Caroline could throw a punch.* “If you have follow-up questions, I’d be happy to make you throw up just like he did,” she added cheerfully.

Elena gasped, doing an excellent impersonation of the pearl-clutching society bitches who loved to look down on townies like Caroline. Caroline gave her a cheeky little wave as she stormed off, almost running into Klaus, another of their classmates.

Caroline narrowed her eyes at his approach — the timing was suspicious. While they had a couple of classes together at Augustine Prep, they’d never spoken more than a few words to each other. *Clearly, he wanted to revel in her misery.* She didn’t like how that thought seemed to hurt her more than the breakup with Tyler. Damn it — she’d thought she was over her stupid crush on Klaus.

At first, she’d been happy with Tyler, flattered even that he didn’t seem to care that she was a scholarship kid from town rather than from an affluent, East Coast family like him and the majority of their classmates. The first time she saw his temper had been after they lost their homecoming game. When he roughly shoved her against the side of his SUV, she hit the back of her head, and the heavy thudding noise seemed to pull him out of his rage. She reasoned that as quarterback, he was under a lot of pressure, and his dad expected him to excel at both sports and grades, so she tried to ignore it. But the next time he pushed her, she slammed into a row of lockers hard enough to make her teeth rattle, and she told him she had enough.
Klaus’ assessing look gave her pause. She wasn’t sure what he saw in her expression, but whatever it was had him choosing his words carefully. “I wasn’t sure if you’d be here today.”

“I never miss the peach festival. Certainly can’t afford to these days,” she muttered, unnecessarily straightening one of the stacks of peach jam to avoid his penetrating gaze.

“What do you mean,” he asked carefully, “are you in trouble?”

She thought of all the plans she’d carefully made, plans that Tyler had tried to destroy. “Nothing I can’t handle,” she replied stubbornly.

“Look, I know we don’t know each other that well, but anyone who was even slightly paying attention knows you aren’t upset about the breakup. Something else happened and I’d like to know what it is.” At the obvious flash of anger in her eyes, he hastily added, “I’d like to know so I can help, I mean. If you’d let me.”

The pink flush that stained his dimpled cheeks was amusing — and confusing. Was Klaus seriously asking because he was concerned about her? She was pretty sure this was the longest conversation they’d ever had other than the time he’d asked to borrow her notes for World History and Tyler had glared at him the entire time it took her to dig through her backpack.

The words unexpectedly tumbled out, and the relief she felt made her realize that she hadn’t had anyone to really talk to in a long time. “Everyone knows I’m a scholarship kid, right? But what they don’t know is that it was from the Lockwood Foundation. Then, I broke up with Tyler and I refused to get back together with him even after he did this weird, passive-aggressive begging/stalking while reciting Shakespearian sonnets outside my bedroom window for like a solid week. So, he convinced his dad to withdraw my funding and now I can’t afford to go to Augustine Prep.”

She noted with interest the way his fists clenched at her words. “Bloody hell. I knew Lockwood was a bastard, but I never knew he’d stoop so low.” He studied her carefully, cocking his head to the side in a way that was more familiar than she’d care to admit.

She’d glimpsed it enough times whenever she stared at him in class when she thought no one was looking. “So, what’s your backup plan, then? By now, you’ve had time to construct half a dozen safeguards.”

“How would you know that?”

He smirked at the apparent surprise in her voice. “Because I wouldn’t expect anything less from the girl who painstakingly catalogued the intricate, mind-numbing relationships of the Greek and Roman pantheon as her Latin midterm project.”

*He’d been paying attention. To her.* The thought filled her with unexpected warmth and she did her best to downplay the silly grin that she was sure she was wearing. Shrugging, she replied, “I’m back to being a townie. I’m finishing out the semester at Mystic Falls High and I’m applying for every scholarship I can find to get back into Augustine Prep next year.”

There was a fierceness to her voice that she didn’t both trying to hide as she growled, “And even if that doesn’t work, nothing’s going to stop me from going to a great college and getting a first-rate education. I refuse to let Tyler fuck with my future.”

“*You are fierce and determined and bloody brilliant and I have no doubt that you’re going to change the world one day.*” Klaus looked just as surprised by his confession as she did, and the blush staining his cheeks was even more pronounced as he stuttered, “I, uh, what I mean is that...that’s what I plan to tell my dad anyway. He’s on the Board of Directors at Augustine Prep
and in charge of discretionary scholarship funding. He can help you.”

_She’d been burned before when she trusted a boy with her future._ But Caroline took in Klaus’ earnest expression, heart pounding in her chest as she fought the urge to kiss him for giving her hope.

Maybe this time it would be different.

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**Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: “So, can we turn this into a Weekend at Bernie’s situation?”**

The werewolf didn’t look that intimidating. _Of course, that’s probably because he was missing his head now._ With a long-suffering sigh, Caroline stepped over the decapitated body, careful not to get any blood on her new boots. As she hopped up on a barstool, she flexed her toes in irritation, mentally weighing several scenarios to determine the best course of action.

“Nice boots, love,” Klaus teased, deepening his accent on purpose because he knew what it did to her.

“Thanks. A gift from Kat for making a rat problem go away,” she said flatly, refusing to get pulled into his usual flirtations when she was pissed at him for potentially derailing the negotiations she’d worked for months to set up.

“Python skin? I thought you were a pacifist.”

She straightened her spine, an edge to her tone as she corrected, “They’re faux snakeskin — I’m a vegetarian. And do you seriously think I could stomach this job if I was a pacifist?” She thought back to some of the sick shit she’d helped cover up over the years and would’ve shuddered if she felt anything other than general disgust for the whole of humanity.

She’d grown up in politics, the Forbes family steeped in government shenanigans since the Eisenhower Administration. It’s what made her a brilliant fixer, something that even members of the supernatural community had noticed. It had been quite a shock with Kat approached her for help, revealing that she was a 500-year old vampire in the middle of a touchy situation with the Originals and a voracious werewolf pack. Caroline was still proud of how quickly she’d adapted to the knowledge that there was a completely hidden supernatural world. _A world with vampires and even older ones called Originals and werewolves and who knew what the hell else._

Once she set aside the shock of immortal creatures, she viewed the situation just like any other political mess she needed to untangle and she expertly negotiated Kat’s freedom and secured all of the properties Kat had abandoned over the centuries she spent on the run. While she’d been surprised to get a loyal friendship out of Kat, it never occurred to her that anyone else in the supernatural community was paying attention.

“So, can we turn this into a Weekend at Bernie’s situation?” She rolled her eyes at Klaus’ downcast eyes. Feigning remorse was _not_ one of his strong suits. “You know, you hired me to help you with your image problem as a ruthless hybrid dictator. It would help if you didn’t keep acting like a ruthless hybrid dictator, you asshat.”

_That sexy smirk should come with a warning label._ “He was a useless wolf unfit to be alpha of that troublesome pack. They should thank me for my thoughtfulness.” Draping his muscular
form across the bar top, he leaned in close as he said in amusement, “And how, pray tell, do you advise we turn this mishap into that dreadful movie?”

She rolled her eyes at his blatant attempts to flirt, wanting to stay focused on the potentially explosive political fallout bleeding onto the oak floor. “The upcoming conclave I negotiated between the factions never specified the location. Logistics and agenda items were on my to-do list this week.”

She pulled out her iPad, scrolling through her contacts until she found the right one. “So, we’re now declaring the venue to be a video conference. These wolves are so prideful, they’ll jump all over themselves trying to prove how they’re just as in-demand and jet setting as the hybrid king is, and therefore couldn’t possibly make time for an in-person meeting. We’ll spread the word that their alpha has joined you here to work on pre-meeting agenda items and will appear beside you on the video call. And the best special effects team in the country owes me a huge favor after some unfortunate tentacle porn surfaced right before Oscar nominations were announced.”

Klaus looked impressed, but tried to quickly hide it so he could poke and prod at her well-constructed plan. “Marvelous — so we’ll pop back on his head and store him in a freezer when we’re not trotting him out for public appearances? Seems a bit shaky for a long-term solution, sweetheart.”

“ Seriously?!” She playfully nudged his leg with the pointed toe of her boot in mock anger. “Even after you’ve seen me in action for the past three months, you still doubt my unshakable planning skills? If I had feelings, they’d definitely be hurt.”

Glancing through her calendar, she considered the supernatural landscape for the next few months, weighing potential fallout scenarios. “The alpha suddenly will get a severe case of wanderlust, and at some point during his well-documented globetrotting, an unfortunate scandal will surface, complete with irrefutable social media posts that will cause him to renounce his title and membership within the pack.”

His gray eyes darkened, fiery wolf gold flickering momentarily as he appraised her. “I absolutely adore your clever mind; your brilliance was wasted on human politics. This actually would put us in a favorable position to sway that irksome pack into selecting an alpha of our choosing. Bravo, sweetheart.”

Caroline didn’t like to admit what that rumbling praise did to her. Clearing her throat, she said, “Agreed. In fact, I pre-vetted potential candidates back when this pack first came on our radar. I sent you a slide deck earlier today that you should review. It contains brief bios and pertinent stats such as number of kills, relationship diagrams, susceptibility to compulsion or subtle bribery…” She trailed off when she realized that his face was entirely too close, breath ghosting over her lips.

“When are you going to give in, Caroline?”

She pushed back slightly, needing to get a grip on her emotions before she did something unprofessional. “I did give in, remember? Right before I signed a contract with you.”

“If you think one deliciously decadent night with you was enough to sate my curiosity, you’ve greatly underestimated my wolf, love,” he purred in her ear, nearly causing her to combust as she recalled flashes of that unbelievable night.

She cleared her throat again, hopping off the barstool to wander closer to the decapitated alpha. “The timing was on purpose, Klaus. I told you I’m not a boss-banger.” Gesturing toward the
bloodstains seeping into the floor, she said breezily, “If we’re putting my plan into motion, we need to get started.”

Klaus stalked toward her, a seductive sway to his hips to accompany the predatory gleam in his eyes that left her breathless. “Of course sweetheart. Let’s begin.”
Part 10 - Klarosummer Bingo

Chapter Summary

A collection of random AU one-shots featuring Klaroline. Chapter 83: Part 10 - Klarosummer Bingo: This was written for the Klarosummer Bingo Event going on for the month of June. Prompts: “Of course I’m right — I watched Shark Week”, Backpacking in Europe, Temple ruins of Wat Phou, & “Newsflash — seashell bras give me hives!”

Chapter Notes

Author's note: Thank you so much for all of the support you've given my stories! I appreciate all of the reviews and kudos and asks you've sent me. These should be the last of the Klarosummer Bingo prompts I'm writing for the event; be sure to let me know if there's any you'd like me to add to my sequels list.

Klarosummer Bingo prompt: “Of course I’m right — I watched Shark Week.”

Also — this one got a bit dark.

The ocean was pouring into their boat, courtesy of the enormous hole Kol managed to rip into the hull when he crashed into a reef. “I think we can agree our wild weekend is off to a smashing start,” Kol cheekily told her, stuffing the rest of the beer into a cooler.

“Seriously?! That’s all you have to say? Not ‘Hey Caroline, sorry I wrecked our boat because I was driving like an irresponsible man child?’ Do you even hear yourself right now?!?” Caroline shook her head angrily, not bothering to pick up her floppy hat when the breeze blew it off of her head. What was the point? They were sinking into the ocean and would have to swim for the small island in the distance. She assumed that Kol’s Original strength would mean he’d be an exponentially better swimmer, but she still planned to drown him if she could catch him by surprise.

Jackass — this was all his fault anyway — she’d been perfectly content to continue her ‘losing herself while globetrotting’ sabbatical alone when he suddenly showed up in the middle of her elephant-riding lesson, begging her to go on an adventure with him. They’d been friends for so long, she couldn’t turn him down, especially since she felt guilty about cutting off all ties with the
“Yes, I hear you, pet. And more importantly, it seems they can hear you too,” he answered, a nervousness in his tone that had her following his gaze to multiple dark-tipped fins that had begun circling the sinking boat.

She took a deep, albeit completely unnecessary breath, assessing the scene. “Okay, we need to relax as soon as we slip into the water. Those are bull sharks, the most aggressive of the species along with the strongest bite.”

Despite the hint of fear on his face, he scoffed, “And you’re suddenly an expert? Sounds like bollocks to me.”

“Of course I’m right — I watched Shark Week.”

Kol snorted, shaking his head as he observed quietly, “There’s the Caroline I’ve been missing.”

That stung. She and Kol had been surprisingly good friends while she’d been dating Klaus, but after she ended things, it was important for her own sanity to cut off everyone that had any connection to Klaus.

As the water lapped at her ankles, she closed her eyes, feeling a bit faint. What an awful year it had been. Several of her students had gone missing — they seemed to have vanished without a trace from her boarding school. They were all orphaned supernaturals, so the police were less than useless. Caroline had done everything to find them, even asking Bonnie to try multiple location spells — but they never found the children. And then Bonnie was murdered.

Suddenly, she heard the sound of a boat speeding toward them, pulling her from her dark thoughts. She opened her eyes to study it, surprised as Kol had told her the island was deserted. She grew increasingly suspicious when she saw the sun glinting off very familiar dirty blonde curls.

Noting her anger, Kol quickly said, “Ah. That. So, I should probably explain. When I told you we were headed to a deserted island, it is deserted...except for Nik, who owns it, of course.”

“Are you fucking kidding me,” she seethed with rage, “Klaus killed Bonnie! I will never forgive him!”

Caroline thought she’d seen Kol angry before, but it was nothing compared to the barely-controlled fury she saw cross his boyish face now. “You need to talk to him, pet. Listen to what he has to say. I’ll make you listen if I have to.”

She wrenched her eyes away from Klaus, who’d slowed the boat down as he approached them. Raising her voice unnecessarily, she announced, “There’s nothing Klaus can tell me that I don’t already know. He’s evil. The end.”

There was a certain amount of pleasure to be had in watching how Klaus’ carefully controlled expression fell at her words, a flash of hurt apparent before he quickly masked it. His hoarse whisper carried over the waves — and hit her straight in the heart. “Because you know everything, isn’t that right, love? Like the fact that Bonnie was practicing expression magic again in an attempt to raise Silas? Or, how that particularly deplorable magic required very special, very supernatural ingredients?”

Caroline felt her breath catch as an ugly, snarling thing settled in her soul. Bonnie’s location spells never worked because she already knew what happened to the missing children.
She’d never be able to look upon her homeland without remembering the fear. From her hiding place in the dense forest of eastern Slovakia, Caroline could see the Vihorlat Mountains, but she’d never felt so far away from her home. She was still reeling from Klaus’ violent attack, the smell of her blood turning her stomach. Placing a hand to the torn green flesh of her neck, she was relieved to realize she’d stopped bleeding.

Eyeing the golden dagger that Kol continued to twirl in his hand, she finally answered, “You asked how handy I am in a knife fight — I’ve never needed a knife; my kind prefer teeth and claws.” She didn’t bother flexing her long, clawed fingers or flashing her razor-sharp teeth; Klaus’ brother clearly could smell the blood she’d spilled while fighting the hybrid. He was not challenging her power.

“Calm down, little vicious parrot,” he replied, “I’m just trying to come up with the best plan to put my brother down so we can fix this bloody mess.”

Despite the mischievous glint in his brown eyes, he couldn’t mask his obvious worry from Caroline. She still didn’t understand what happened — one moment she and Klaus were in the middle of some bone-jarringly spectacular sex that led to blood-sharing for the first time, and the next moment, he’d become a feral beast, tearing into her flesh and stalking her through the forest.

At first, she’d assumed her blood had changed him somehow; to her knowledge, goblins had never blood-shared with any creature, so it was impossible to predict what might happen. But then, Kol suddenly appeared, telling her that it was likely a vindictive coven that was responsible.

“Well, what’s the plan then?”

He snorted, dryly observing, “Impressive how you manage to be impatient yet intimidating and bordering on terrifying without a stitch of clothing. Bravo.”

Clearly noticing the furious glow of her blue eyes, he hastily added, “I told Nik I was backpacking in Europe...which may have been a slight exaggeration. I’d actually tagged along with this charming little bird I’d been spending time with and then another little bird came along, and then another...and it was my poor luck that they all happened to belong to the same coven, but I didn’t realize it until we’d already made it to Bratislava.”

Klaus had mentioned some of his younger brother’s wild exploits, at times impressing her with the level of debauchery, but most of the time irritating her with the idiotic fallout that Klaus often found himself having to step in to resolve on Kol’s behalf. Despite the fact that she’d weakened herself using too much magic trying to heal, she had no problem summoning enough raw energy to choke him with a slight clenching of her bony fingers. “Klaus’ pain is caused by your selfishness,” she hissed, giving considerable thought to eating his skin.
He gurgled, a flare of anger in his eyes as he seemed to use more Original strength than he anticipated to break free of her depleted magic’s hold. “Which is why I’m fixing it! Bloody hell, were you even listening?!” He thrust the dagger into her hand, explaining, “Nik’s wolf is hunting your blood now; you need to pretend to be passed out and when he gets close enough, you stab him with this.” At her look of alarm, he added, “It’s spelled to desiccate, not kill.”

Caroline was unimpressed. “Seriously?! You’re over a thousand years old and the best strategy you can come up with is me playing possum? And while I’m risking my life doing all the work, what are you doing? Failing to seduce another vindictive witch?”

“I didn’t fail — that’s how we got into this mess,” he muttered, squinting at a thick beech limb in the distance. “I’ll be watching from over there and step in if needed. Nik’s wolf is single-minded in its pursuit now, and shouldn’t sense me if I’m that far away.”

“How reassuring.”

She didn’t bother watching him flash away before she collapsed to the ground, strategically sliding the blade underneath her thigh. It wasn’t difficult pretending to be unconscious — a goblin’s breathing patterns were far too shallow to sense, and her physiology was designed to mimic atrophy while waiting for prey.

The crisp, clean scent of the forest was tinged with worry, and she could sense the continued darkening of Klaus’ soul as he approached. It was a subtle shift, she amended, one that she longed to ignore so that she could go back to that time when she reveled in the fear he could evoke in his enemies. But now she was his enemy.

The moment she felt his hot breath flavored by her blood, she curled her fingers around the handle of the blade, fervently hoping that this wouldn’t be another of Kol’s epic fuckups as she prepared to stab Klaus.

Vindictive witches would be the least of Kol’s worries if she had to travel to the underworld to fetch her lover.

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Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Temple ruins of Wat Phou

The flames scorched a searing trail across the top of her arm, but she stubbornly refused to cry out. Wasn’t the Phaya Naga supposed to be a benign deity? Caroline quickly ducked behind a crumbling stone wall, trying to catch her breath. Maybe it wasn’t the best idea to go back for the rest of the dragon’s hoard, but once she paid off Enzo’s gambling debts with that pearlescent moonstone she snatched from her first raid, she couldn’t resist the temptation.

There was just so much gold. Shiny, gorgeous and practically begging for her to take it. She’d been a scared little kid out on the streets when Enzo found her. She owed him a life debt,
which is how she found herself halfway around the world playing hide and seek in the temple ruins of Wat Phou with a Laotian dragon god.

The rough scrape of scales along the elaborately carved pillars made her shudder. “This is just a big misunderstanding,” she shouted, hoping the echo of her voice down the narrow hallway would confuse the dragon enough for her to escape. “I got separated from my tour group!” She gasped as its powerful tail landed just inches from her head, shattering half of the wall she hid behind. She quickly leapt to the side, tucking her small body into a tight ball as she rolled away from the dragon’s heavy coils as it tried to crush her.

“Aren’t you a nimble little thing,” an accented voice teased behind her.

Caroline whirled around, completely unprepared for the attractive stranger before her. Her eyes narrowed at the smirk, temper flaring when she realized he was making fun of her. She stubbornly remained silent, assessing the situation as she came up with possible escape plans. The dragon had been the most formidable creature she’d come across in her travels with Enzo, but there was a power radiating off of the stranger that gave her pause. He was dangerous.

She could see the Mekong River over his shoulder, and she wondered if she could somehow get the dragon to chase him while she raced back to the tiny cove where she’d hidden her three-plank canoe.

“You’d never make it,” he replied, a devious glint in his eye as he studied the furtive glances she’d taken at the river.

“I’ll take those odds,” she acidly replied, surprising the stranger when she climbed on top of the small brick tower he stood next to, waving her arms as she shouted at the dragon, “Hey, over here! Smug Accent Guy is trying to steal your treasure!” The moment she heard the fierce roar of the dragon that signaled another burst of flames, she rapidly scaled the sharp edges of the seven terraces, relieved when she caught sight of her boat.

Her canvas shoes sank in the soft sand as she pushed the end of the canoe back into the water, wading into the cold river until the water was up to her knees. She quickly hopped into the boat, shivering slightly as the wet fabric of her long skirt clung to her legs. A tiny sliver of panic shot through her as she patted down the rough floorboard, realizing it was empty. **Damn it — where was that oar?**

A sharp whistle caught her attention and she warily raised her eyes to the shore. Smug Accent Guy cheerfully waved to her using her long oar, a cheeky grin on his face. “Missing something, sweetheart?”

“Yeah, a dragon’s hoard,” she muttered, irritated that the stranger was most definitely not reduced to ash and still inconveniently attractive.

“That was impressive — can one assume that sort of situation is an ongoing occurrence in your life?”

While she knew better than to give away too much power to a stranger, she couldn’t resist the urge to brag a bit about her exploits with Enzo. “I let a hungry mwanga track me for days.” She absentmindedly ran a finger along the thin scars that crisscrossed her calf. **That giant cat’s claws had been a bit longer than she realized.**

His gray eyes widened at that, and she instantly was intrigued — few supernaturals knew of the supposedly mythical beast that stalked the Ivory Coast. **Well-traveled AND good-looking?**
“Definitely trouble. ‘Why on earth would you do that?’”

“Boredom,” she said breezily, purposely leaving out the part where Enzo had gone missing and she found out through whispers in the marketplace that local gunrunners had left him in the dense rainforest as a tribute for the creature.

Caroline realized she needed to make a decision about Smug Accent Guy. *Fight or flight?* With the powerful lines of his body, both options seemed better than floating oarless in the shallows, waiting for his move.

The calculating expression on his handsome face made it clear that he assumed more about her than she cared to reveal. “You appear to possess certain *skillsets* of which I have need. I’d like to hire you for some...freelance work.”

“Seriously?! I just tried to feed you to a dragon. What makes you think I’d ever work for you?”

There was a dangerous glitter in his gaze that Caroline had no business finding so appealing. “Because you’re already indebted to me as you’ve stolen a certain moonstone I require.”

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**Klarosummer Bingo Prompt: “Newsflash — seashell bras give me hives!”**

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Apparently, *The Little Mermaid* was a bigger fetish than she realized. Caroline straightened the ridiculously long red waves, glad she spent the extra money on a quality wig that didn’t itch underneath the sweltering stage lights. She discreetly slid an impressive wad of tips into the hidden pocket of her sequined tail, popping several giant bubbles that had formed a cloud around her bare shoulders.

She blew kisses to the packed club, her signal for the stage hands to have the hidden levers raise her enormous clamshell backstage. Once the curtain fell, she felt like she could breathe a bit, not expected to be ‘on’ at the moment while she repaired the makeup she’d managed to sweat off underneath the lights. *Unfortunately, it also meant she’d removed herself from a prime location to spy on the Salvatores.*

Adding a fresh layer of foundation and a few more swipes of mascara, she inwardly cursed her friend for getting her into this mess. *Bonnie had lousy taste in men.* But when Bonnie came crying to her about that loser boyfriend owing money to some drug dealers, she somehow found herself agreeing to this idiotic plan.

“Newsflash — seashell bras give me hives!” *It was the first thing she’d blurted to Bonnie after hearing her plan, but it didn’t stop her from getting a job at Salvatore Sirens, the mermaid-themed burlesque club run by Damon and Stefan.*

Unzipping the slit in her blue-green tail so she could walk, she slid on a pair of strappy stilettos and descended to stairs to mingle with the customers on the main floor. She was careful to
keep her arms from blocking the ostentatious seashell bra, a tiny camera hidden among the pearls. She’d been working there for a month, but still hadn’t seen evidence of the Salvatores’ drug operation.

*It was frustrating — but not as frustrating as Klaus.* He was the ‘new money’ business that she overheard Damon practically salivating over and had assumed he was a skeevy old man. *And then she saw him and nearly fell out of her clamshell in the middle of a song.* From the way those gray eyes darkened, it seemed she wasn’t the only one affected. He’d beckoned to her with a curling smirk topped unexpectedly by dimples, and Damon had all but served her on a silver platter in his haste to court his new business partner.

At first, Caroline had put on her best customer service personality around him, wanting to ingratiate herself to learn whatever she could about the Salvatores’ drug business, but he’d been so charming that she lowered her walls more than she meant to. In between shows, he always led her back to his VIP booth where he’d spoil her with expensive champagne.

“You realize that buying my time isn’t the same as buying me,” she’d told him, feeling the need to set some ground rules after he’d snarled possessively when one of the other patrons had clumsily approached her.

The affronted look on his face had been almost comical, but then the steel in his gaze softened and he replied, “Of course, love. You aren’t an object and I apologize if I’ve made you feel otherwise. I value the time we’ve spent together.” His tone grew hesitant as he told her, “But I don’t want you to feel obligated to continue to sit with me every night if you’re uncomfortable.”

And that was the moment she knew she was in trouble. Because Klaus looked at her differently than the other customers and while she always felt his admiring gaze, it never weighed her down. Instead, she felt free — laughing with him made her forget her mission. *A dangerous habit.* She found herself wondering about his own business — was he a drug lord like the Salvatores or something even more dangerous? Underneath those expensive suits that fit him like a glove, she sensed he had secrets, but it was hard to get a read on him.

Stefan suddenly appeared at her side, placing his hand on her bare back to guide her toward the back lounge. She forced herself to relax, her skin crawling from his touch. While Damon was at least open about his skeevy intentions, Stefan’s quiet creepiness was inherently more disquieting. “What’s going on,” she murmured in what she hoped was a casual tone.

“There’s an important business meeting and we need our new partner’s favorite party favor there to bring us luck.”

Caroline quickly tucked away the scowl that crossed her face, realizing that this was the moment she’d been waiting for — she was about to get a front row seat to the Salvatores’ illegal activities and finally get the evidence she needed to turn them over to the cops. With a pang in her heart, she realized it meant turning over Klaus too. *Maybe there was a way to keep him out of it?*

She was so wrapped up in her thoughts that she didn’t register something was wrong until Stefan roughly pushed her through the doors, causing her to stumble on her heels as she ran into a coffee table. Confusion gave way to shock as she registered that Klaus was tied up on a couch, his face bruised and bloody.

The first blow to the back of her head left her dazed, and she fuzzily stared at a shiny gold object tossed on top of the coffee table. *Was that a badge?*
It was the last thought she had before she lost consciousness.
The Traitor and the Coward

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, Original!Caroline has spent lifetimes running from her lover and his family. Despite the centuries of loneliness, she regrets nothing. And soon, she’ll bring an end to this madness.

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: And yes, as you read this, I’m already working on a sequel to this one. :)

Warning: So.Much.Angst.

“For all evils there are two remedies — time and silence.”
— Alexandre Dumas, The Count of Monte Cristo

A thousand years and she still remembered the smell of Esther’s blood. The startling warmth of the witch’s heart against the cold of Caroline’s freshly turned flesh. The choking scream of the deceitful whore who was undeserving of such a swift death. Mikael’s angry bellow as he swore vengeance. And then, there was Klaus.

The betrayal carved into her lover’s face haunted her fitful dreams as well as her waking hours. He’d come upon them in the clearing, just as she’d plunged her hand into Esther’s chest, destroying her black heart. Anguish became rage as he lost all reason and flung her against a red cedar, his newfound strength breaking several branches that dripped sap upon her cheeks. To this day, the smell of tree sap made her retch. The ferocity of his attack was caused by his wolf. The wolf that no longer would be lost to him thanks to her.

Upon her rebirth, she’d raced away to the woods, confused and terrified as the sun scorched her skin. She longed for Klaus, but was trapped in the caves until nightfall. As she grew acquainted to the foreign sensations and urges, her supernatural hearing caught a most damning exchange between Esther and Mikael. Esther shamefully revealed that Klaus was not of Mikael’s lineage; she’d lain with one of the wolves from the forbidden village. Mikael was enraged, but the selfish witch plotted with him to hide her disgrace through the binding of Klaus’ wolf. He would never again know that fragile piece that would make him whole. Caroline refused to let that come to pass — Klaus deserved his connection to nature, to his wolf.

She didn’t regret taking Esther’s life; but she hated herself for not realizing that Klaus bore
witness to her wrath. As he loomed over her, she couldn’t help but shrink away from the lover she’d entrusted with her heart. He was a mask of pain and fury. A stranger’s face. “Spiteful wench, you’ve spilled the blood of my kinsman, of the woman who bore me.”

She barely felt the press of his claws at her throat, too consumed by the madness in his black gaze. *If only she could tell him the truth.* But there was too much at stake — Mikael had made sure of that. She would never risk that which she loved. *Even if she must endure his hate.*

Despite the power she felt in his body, her own monster rose up, refusing to cower before a threat. Her curved fangs emerged and she lashed out, her body responding to a primal call that caught them both by surprise as she tossed him aside. She fought her newfound instincts to latch onto his throat with fang and claw, knowing that she could never take his life. She was his. *But he would never be hers again.*

She flashed away, abandoning the only home she’d ever known, her heart forever broken by Klaus’ words: “Hell awaits you, Caroline. Upon my oath, I will send you there.”

Since that terrible day, she’d hardened her heart, knowing she couldn’t allow herself to care for another. *And she still had to save Klaus.* That fateful day had revealed more than Esther’s guilty secret. Mikael took his revenge on both Caroline and Klaus by having the witch bind his life to Klaus’. His vindictive words echoed through the ages, forcing her silence: “Speak nothing of what you’ve learned to Niklaus. The moment you confess Esther’s deeds, I will spill my blood to end Niklaus’ retched life.”

Caroline sighed, running her fingers through her curls as she glanced around her quiet cottage for the last time. It had been her safe haven for almost a year, and even if everything wasn’t coming to an end, she would’ve had to move on on soon anyway. Running from Klaus and his siblings meant that she was never truly safe, and she didn’t dare to stay in the same place for longer than a year. It was a blessing and a curse, the way she’d lived — witnessed every sunrise and sunset in every part of the world — but always alone. Her immortal life had been filled with extraordinary beauty and wonder, but it was a hollow shell of what could’ve been. Mikael’s revenge had been twofold — punish her for killing Esther and take away Caroline, the only love Klaus had known.

*She couldn’t help but hate Klaus a little for that.* As a starry-eyed maiden, she’d have sworn that his love was infinite. That he would never believe the worst of her and wouldn’t rest until he learned the truth. *But now she knew better.* His rage had swallowed them both.

Buckling the canvas satchel, she noted with pride how it was overflowing with the grimoire she’d unearthed there in the Faroe Islands, the final piece she’d needed to make everything right after all this time. For centuries, she’d been searching for a way to unbind Klaus’ life from Mikael’s, traveling to the hidden places of magic so powerful, it was neither light nor dark. Countless shamans, priestesses, and sorcerers had been unable to break the Original Witch’s spell, but Caroline refused to give up her quest. Eventually, bits and pieces of magical knowledge were scraped together until everything fell into place.

The bay window showcased the breathtaking waterfalls just footsteps from her cottage, and
she felt a tightness in her chest as she recalled another waterfall, long ago.

“The air was crisp with the promise of harvest after the next moon. The roar of the falls behind her was a welcome distraction as she finished the day’s wash. She’d just finished piling the heavy, wet linens back into her large basket when the arrow rushed past her. Letting out an undignified yelp, she whipped her head around to see a deer collapse into a pile of leaves, the arrow buried deep in its neck. Disoriented, she stepped forward, her foot tangling with the handle of her basket and spilling her freshly cleaned linens on the muddy riverbank.

“Are you unharmed, Caroline,” the young man’s voice called out, blood draining from his face as he seemed to take in how narrowly his arrow had missed Caroline’s head. “I didn’t realize anyone was near.”

Caroline could feel the blood rushing to her face as her temper flared. Narrowing her eyes, she took in the dirty blonde curls and dimpled cheeks and immediately recognized the boastful son of Mikael. Klaus and his pleasing form had turned many a pretty maiden’s head in their village, but she knew better than to fall for such a changeable heart. “Only the laziest of buffoons would hunt for prey at the nearest watering hole. A true warrior would pursue more challenging prey, Klaus.”

His gray eyes darkened, fists clenched in anger as he growled, “And maidens shouldn’t foolishly venture so far from the village unescorted. There are many dangerous predators that lurk in the woods.”

Caroline scoffed, removing her curved iron dagger from her leather boot and hurling it at Klaus’ head, the force of her throw burying the blade into the thick tree trunk just inches above his curls. “I am far from prey,” she told him proudly.

“Only a fool would willingly part with their only blade,” he said, his handsome face breaking into a knowing smirk.

“That you would think that my only blade is a testament to your gullibility,” she retorted with an arched brow, scooping her muddied linens to rewash later when her temper had settled. With an indignant flip of her long blonde braid, she told him, “I’ll expect that deer hide as compensation for your carelessness, Klaus. And don’t you dare bring it to my threshold without properly scraping and curing it!”

After that day, their lively exchanges became more frequent, the teasing somehow turning to kisses and then feverish passion and finally a whispered commitment so tender it took her breath away. She still recalled the innocent trembling of his hands as he presented her with the bracelet, strung with wooden beads he’d painstakingly carved. With that simple gesture, she was his as much as he was hers.

Until he wasn’t. Angrily wiping away the tears that had formed when she became lost in her bittersweet memories, she locked up her cottage and drove to the small airstrip where the private plane was waiting.

The final battle was almost upon her. But would her plan be enough?
The quiet was her enemy. Caroline leaned her head against the window, the whisper of the jet’s engines spectacularly failing at drowning out her racing thoughts. She kept glancing at the coordinates her resources had sent, pinpointing the exact locations of Klaus and his siblings, with Mikael clearly lying in wait to ambush them. Centuries later and Mikael was the same sadistic bastard he’d been in their village. While Mikael had no interest in killing Klaus as it would end his own life, he clearly reveled in the fear he instilled.

Fortunately, she’d cultivated an extensive network of spies over the years, invaluable not only to her survival but also to covertly tip off Klaus and his siblings whenever Mikael was closing in. Ages ago, she’d had a powerful shaman place a protection spell on Klaus, but experience had taught her that nothing was foolproof. It was one of the reasons why she’d sought out and compelled some of the greatest warriors and generals to learn everything she could of war — from William the Conqueror to Shaka Zulu to Douglas MacArthur. That knowledge had kept her and Klaus and the rest of his siblings alive.

And it almost cost her everything.

It was the heat that woke her. Nearly 800 years as a vampire and her bed remained cold. As she sat up with a start, her lungs were filled with smoke, orange and red flames climbed the sides of the carved walnut, surrounding her. She dumbly sat there, fine linen sheets knotted in her hands as adrenaline kicked in at the figure in her doorway.

Klaus had found her.

Somehow, he was in her farmhouse in Kent, looking just as beautiful and terrible as she remembered. Nearly eight hundred years since she’d seen him face-to-face, and it was still a knife to the chest. His curls were shorter, and she allowed herself a moment of girlish fantasy where she imagined what it would be like to run her fingers through them — would it feel the same?

Of course not — nothing would ever be the same.
His predatory strut toward her bed did nothing to dispel the way her heart sped up at having him near once more. The intensity of his glare burned more than the flames as he sneered, “I regret my arrow hit its mark that day. Had it drifted, I could’ve spared us this moment.”

A flame licked across her forearm, but she didn’t feel it — the pain in her heart was far worse. Klaus wanted her dead; she’d known it since the day she started running. But to hear that same vitriol all these centuries later, reaffirmed every insecurity, every doubt.

Caroline leveled her piercing blue gaze to her lover, inwardly thankful that despite her fear and heartbreak, she’d managed to hold back her tears. He possessed every part of her — but she refused to give him her pain. “And I would change nothing,” she said simply, her voice a bit more broken than she would’ve liked.

They stared at each other, framed in the fire as it raged across her bedroom, and she briefly considered taking the coward’s way out — remaining frozen in this wretched moment until either she was set free by Klaus’ vengeful hands or the flames. The stench of burning fabric filled the air, and she let out a small gasp as the bottom of her long nightgown began to smoke as it caught fire. Flames attacked the tall headboard, and suddenly she felt the searing heat across her chest as her skin boiled.

With a pained cry, she leapt from the bed, a renewed sense of self-preservation coming over her. She would not be cut down in this manner. She was surprised to see that while Klaus had flashed toward her, his claws shredding her burned skin as he clutched her, the warring emotions on his face betrayed an uncertainty that was unexpected.

Caroline hated how her flesh reacted to the press of him, desperate for his touch after all this time. Her stubbornness was her salvation though, and she reminded herself that he and his siblings had hunted her across the world for centuries. He set fire to her home. He would always view her as the enemy. Making up her mind, she ignored the pain in her heart and her burned flesh, and grappled with Klaus with renewed ferocity.

Klaus responded in kind, the feral gold of his wolf rising in his gaze as he gripped her neck. She could feel his fingertips strategically align at her upper spinal cord, and fear flooded her thoughts as she realized he intended to break her neck. Probably so he could make her death last as long as he chose. Even without her network of spies, she was certain tales of his penchant for torture would’ve reached her.

Decades earlier, she learned several hand-to-hand combat maneuvers from the Zulu, and it was immensely gratifying to knock Klaus on his ass before he could draw breath. Realizing the flames had all but consumed the upper story of the farmhouse, she flashed toward the window. Just before she jumped, he grabbed her arm, his fingertips catching her bracelet. It held the same beads he’d given her when they were human, and she felt indescribable panic as the leather snapped and the wooden beads scattered. It was all she had left of the innocent boy whose hands had trembled as he gave her the bracelet. And now another piece of her soul had been lost. She’d already given up so much of her soul — how much was even left?

She took advantage of the shock she saw on Klaus’ face and leapt out the window, his threat carrying over the sound of shattered glass. “I will find you.”

“No until I want you to.”

Caroline fled England that night, plagued by thoughts of whether he’d allowed her to escape.
Once her plane landed, she met with her most trusted coven, a powerful group whom owed her a life debt as she saved their bloodline from the Inquisition and subsequent persecutions. The high priestess studied the ancient parchment of the grimoire intently, her green eyes alight with wonder as she said in a hushed tone, “After all this time, I can’t believe you found Esther’s grimoire. You’re playing with deep magic, you know?”

Caroline didn’t miss the warning in her voice. It was a well-worn argument, one that she’d had with most of the coven’s members over the centuries. “Yes, Bonnie. I know.”

Bonnie shot her a completely unimpressed look, displaying that sass which most of the Bennett line seemed to possess. “All this trouble for a Viking jackass.”

“It would seem so.”

Bonnie shook her head, tapping her nails on the grimoire’s thick cover as she ordered around her coven to make the final preparations. As Caroline waited for the ritual to be complete, she found herself thinking back to the day she’d first learned of Esther’s grimoire that eventually would bring an end to this madness.

It had been foolish to seek out witches known to be allies of Kol. Whispers from her spies had informed her of the youngest Original’s fondness for witches and their magic, but thus far, Caroline had been able to steer clear of him during her quest to break Esther’s spell. But now she had to risk their paths crossing; these witches were too well-informed about Esther’s grimoire to miss the opportunity to discover what they knew. It had been a fruitful exchange, and she now had enough clues to start her search in earnest.

Unfortunately, Kol appeared inside the church in San Francisco before she could make her escape. “You met them in a church? How quaint,” he mocked, taking a dangerous step toward her. “It made them more comfortable. I’m in no position to judge another’s faith.”

He casually unbuttoned his tailored morning coat, eyebrow wriggling slightly as he noticed her rapt attention. He shrugged it off, lightly tossing it on one of the pews off to the side. “I’m curious to know more about this faith of yours, pet. Does it provide you with comfort whilst running from us?” Black veins crawled along his boyish face as he spitefully told her, “You’re certainly no predator, just a meek little rabbit.”

With a practiced eye, she noted the muscles in his trim body flex, alerting her to his attack. Fighting in a corset wasn’t ideal, but she’d had the foresight to wear one with flexible rope inserts to her meeting with the witches — it had been her experience that these types of meetings could become contentious. When her fist glanced off of his cheekbone, his brown eyes widened in surprise.

His answering crouched form spoke of time spent on the Indian subcontinent learning wrestling, but from his sloppy lines, she was confident he wasn’t well-versed in pehlwani. Firmly planting the pointed toes of her boots, she delivered a powerful uppercut and elbow strike combination she’d learned from observing battles in Southeast Asia. She delighted in watching Kol fall to the pine floor, sputtering indignantly.

“What’s this then? You’ve always run from us rather than fight.” He narrowed his eyes suspiciously, body relaxing somewhat despite remaining on his back. “We thought you weak. But there’s something else at work here.”
Caroline huffed impatiently, keeping her knees bent in case Klaus’ brother attempted to lure her into a false sense of security. “A desire to avoid battle isn’t a sign of weakness.”

“You’re capable of terrible deeds, pet, just like the rest of us. Delicious tales have reached our ears about the viciousness of your monster.” Kol slowly rose to his feet, his face suddenly serious as though working through a complex problem. “When Klaus found you a century ago, you sought out the spy who’d betrayed you. You beheaded the traitorous bloke slowly, taking tiny slivers at a time.”

Her smile was bitter. “But first, I peeled his skin into long strips and forced him to eat them. What’s your point, Kol?”

“That you’re a clever, formidable creature, Caroline. You always have been. If you don’t wish us harm, then what are you after? You’ve spent all these centuries running, but you could’ve hidden yourself away and it’s doubtful we’d have found you for ages, if ever.” His eyes widened as he suddenly said, “You’re searching for something, are you? What magic are you trying to obtain, pet?”

Startled by the mischievous brother’s perceptiveness, Caroline was struck speechless. She felt the first stirrings of fear that someone might discover her secrets. Esther’s secrets. If Mikael believed that she’d revealed Esther’s crimes against Klaus, he’d kill himself just to ensure Klaus’ death. At a loss for what to do, she flashed away before Kol could ask more questions she refused to answer.

At first, she’d lived in terror that Kol would tell Klaus of his suspicions, but she soon learned from her spies that Klaus had daggered his brother in a fit of rage for letting her escape.

“The ritual is complete.”

Caroline pulled herself from the memory, realizing that Bonnie had spoken. “It’s done?”

“Yes,” Bonnie asked briskly, a worried furrow appearing on her forehead. “But just say the word, and I’ll gladly undo that shit.”

Embracing her warmly, she said, “Thank you for your loyalty, your strength and your spirit over the years. Live well, Bonnie.”

Her preference had been to confront Mikael alone, but it was not meant to be. He’d cornered Klaus and his siblings in Mystic Falls, flaunting his sadistic need to torment his children. *Fitting that it would end where it began.* She arrived just as Mikael had set fire to the beautifully restored mansion that she knew Klaus had built for his siblings. What is it with this family and fire?

“Mikael!” Her war cry was filled with the centuries of pent-up rage and fear. The slight twitch of his shoulders was the only sign that he’d been surprised by her appearance. It pleased her to no end to realize she’d managed to unsettle the mighty hunter.

“Ah, it’s Niklaus’ little whore. Finally ready to face me after all these years of running like a coward?”

“No more running,” Caroline swore, struggling to keep her face impassive. *Give nothing away.* She was no stranger to the Mikaelson patriarch’s cruel smile, but it still made her shudder like the naive mortal she once was.
“It’s utterly confounding how such a shrewish woman could also be a whore,” he commented, a wicked gleam in his eye as he added, “I once caught you rutting on top of Niklaus in the apple orchard. Or, was it near the strawberry patch?” He called out, “Niklaus, do you happen to recall which it was?”

Caroline felt her face redden, cursing herself for being so distracted by Mikael’s viciousness that she failed to notice Klaus and his siblings had flashed from the house and looked on with both disdain and confusion at her presence.

It was Klaus’ face she studied the longest, searching for a sign that Mikael’s words had affected him just as deeply.

Of course she remembered that day. It was in the apple orchard where they used to sneak away for precious stolen moments. His kisses always left her in a marvelous fever, but she felt something new in his attentions today. A tension, a nervousness that made her heart pound. He pulled away just enough to stare into her eyes, his breath ragged as he smoothed back the wild curls that had torn free from her braid.

“There’s a light that surrounds you, golden one. I wish to bask in it always. Marry me, my Caroline?”

Her heart was too full, her smile too wide, and she didn’t care if Ymir himself attempted to drag her away — she easily could best the frost giant of her people’s legends on the strength of her love. “Yes,” she whispered, tenderly cupping his face, “I am yours as you are mine, Klaus.” She watched in awe as he tied upon her wrist a bracelet strung with beads that only his practiced hand could have carved so artfully.

Their lips joined, a joyous harmony that grew in passion as her hands roamed, exploring the smooth muscle hidden beneath his rough tunic. She bent to kiss down his chest, boldly taking his nipple in her mouth as he let out a low moan.

Spurred on by her actions, Klaus grabbed at her hips, the blazing heat of his touch reaching her even through the layers of overdress and shift. She spread her legs wide as she straddled him, the brush of his hard length making them both gasp and writhe. His fingers danced to her core with only the slightest hesitation.

“There’s a light that surrounds you, golden one. I wish to bask in it always. Marry me, my Caroline?”

She grew wild from his ministrations, finally understanding the ache she always felt when she was with him. The illicit feel of his fingers was maddening, and he swallowed her groan of frustration with his lips. “Must you tease me so? You feel my need just as I feel yours.”

His gray eyes widened at her brashness, quickly fumbling with his trousers as she guided him inside her eager warmth. The press of him awakened something primal within her, and she began to rut her hips in time to his with a ferocity that left them both flushed and gasping for air.

“My love is yours, Klaus.”

“And mine is yours, my lady. Everything I am has been bettered by your beautiful light,” Klaus told her tenderly.

Mikael’s cruel voice shattered the fragile peace of the orchard. “That you call your worthless whore a lady is an affront to our family and a testament to your foolishness.”

Caroline wrenched herself out of the memory in disgust, hating how Mikael had tainted that
beautiful day. From the conflicted expression on Klaus’ face, it seemed as though he’d just relived the same bittersweet memory.

Klaus narrowed his eyes at her, suspicion heavy in his tone as he asked, “Why are you here?”

“To set things right.”

Mikael scoffed, telling his children, “Or, perhaps the coward is here to watch me finally end your miserable existence.”

“Caroline has no interest in killing us,” Kol spoke up unexpectedly, while Klaus, Rebekah and Elijah stared at him in surprise.

Klaus shook his head, his familiar, anger-filled voice carrying the tiniest note of uncertainty as he protested, “Caroline slaughtered our mother and then showed her cowardice by running from us for centuries, hell-bent on finding a spell to destroy our family.”

“She’s not using magic against us,” Kol revealed, “she’s using it for us.” His boyish face was unexpectedly serious and he seemed to be thinking very hard. “That day, you stopped our mother from doing magic. Dark magic.”

“What was Esther trying to do,” Klaus asked her, waving off the protests of Rebekah and Elijah.

She was surprised by the urgency she heard in her lover’s voice. He must have seen the flicker of fear on Mikael’s face along with her quiet resolve. As he took a step toward her, she was startled to see the beads from her bracelet were strung from a leather cord around his neck. The bracelet she thought he’d destroyed with his claws when he came to kill her two centuries ago.

She couldn’t get distracted by the what ifs and whys of his actions. “After we turned, I found Esther plotting with Mikael to bind your wolf.” She hated the slight tremor in her voice as she told Klaus, “I couldn’t bear the thought of you being forced to be less than what you are. You couldn’t lose your connection to your heritage, to your true father.” She glared at Mikael for the last bit, daring him to call her a liar.

The shocked gasps from Klaus and his siblings were overshadowed by Mikael’s angry snarl. “You supposedly care so much for Niklaus the bastard, and yet you foolishly jeopardize his life.”

His ominous threat still gave her pause, despite her plan. Confused, Klaus shook his head, asking hoarsely, “But then why did you run? Why not tell us of Esther’s cruel plan?”

Before the furious patriarch could answer, Caroline spat, “Because Esther bound Klaus’ life to Mikael’s. He vowed to take his own life in order to kill Klaus if I ever spoke of Esther’s misdeeds. It was the perfect punishment for killing that deceitful bitch — he took me away from you and destroyed your love for me.”

The emotions that raged across her lover’s handsome face were almost too rapid to catalogue. Fury, disbelief, indescribable pain, and crippling regret — they tore at her heart as she watched them overtake him. When he finally was able to look at her once more, she briefly caught a glimpse of the young man whose hands had trembled so innocently when he gave her the bracelet. “No,” he told her brokenly, “not destroyed. Never destroyed.”

Time stopped for them both as they stood before one another in the shadows of the
enormous fire that engulfed the mansion behind them. *After all this time, did he mean...could he still love her?*

“There are no words to take back my wrongs.”

Heart pounding, she readily agreed, “No, there aren’t.” She swallowed back the overwhelming urge to burst into tears. “But I’m not here for apologies.”

Klaus ducked his head, eyes glassy when he looked up again. “Have you found a way to unbind my life from Mikael’s?”

“No.”

At Mikael’s triumphant smile, Caroline added confidently, “But I finally discovered how to *shift* the binding. Esther’s spell requires a life to be bound to Mikael’s. So, I chose mine.”

The absolute horror on Mikael’s face was a sight she knew she’d treasure for eternity on the other side. She tried not to look too deeply into the anguish she saw within Klaus. *In other time, and another place, perhaps they could’ve found their way back to each other.*

She quickly removed the concealed white oak stake, plunging it into her heart without hesitation. She welcomed the punishing fire and ice that shattered her soul. *Because she knew it meant that Klaus would be safe.*

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A raging red haze of blood and anger and grief dogged Bonnie’s steps as she made her way to the useless, broken Original who’d collapsed inside a mostly destroyed bar. Klaus had rampaged through Mystic Falls, decimating its population and nearly leveling the town, driving away his shell-shocked siblings as he sunk into madness and despair.

He didn’t bother lifting his head from the blood-soaked floor when she pointedly kicked several empty liquor bottles out of her way. From the shredded, muddy state of his clothes, it appeared that he’d at least partially changed into his wolf during his frenzied delirium.

She crossed her arms in front of her chest, not bothering to hide her disgust and anger at the creature before her. “I’m here for Caroline.”

Klaus rolled over on his back, his face an ugly mask of sorrow. Both hands tore at disheveled, bloody curls as his deranged laughter choked in his throat. “Caroline is dead.”

“Yes, she is. She sacrificed a millennium for you. And it’s about time you start doing some sacrificing of your own, you Viking jackass.” Bonnie slammed Esther’s heavy grimoire onto a gore-streaked table. “Now, let’s get her back.”
In Charming Blood

Chapter Summary

There’s a serial killer on the loose and Detective Klaus Mikaelson goes undercover at a luxury rehab to discover the victims’ connection. Can he catch the killer before the sassy blonde director is next?

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some angst.

“It has not been in the pursuit of pleasure that I have periled life and reputation and reason.”
— Edgar Allan Poe

Was today the day he’d catch the killer? Klaus rolled out of bed with a groan, cursing when he saw the time. He’d overslept again and was fairly certain that a vexing blonde director would be irate if he was late again. He raced around his apartment, finding it difficult to focus as his mind kept conjuring horrific images of the restless dreams he’d had the night before. It was no wonder he was having nightmares, though...

After all, it takes a special kind of monster to drain bodies and rip out hearts. He’d seen some gruesome acts during his time as a detective, but the serial killer he’d been tracking over the past few months was unlike anything he’d ever seen and had him questioning whether humanity was even worth saving if this is what was left. It was a peculiar case, one he suspected would be studied and referenced by criminologists for years to come. The killer had started off with just draining the bodies through twin holes at the neck (law enforcement officials argued over the specific instruments used), but lately they’d escalated to include heart removal — possibly as a cult ritual?

So far, the only connection the male victims had was that they were patients at Expressions, a posh rehab treatment facility that seemingly catered to wealthy, often famous clientele. That was how Klaus found himself working undercover as an art therapist, hoping to stop the serial killer before they could strike again.
It was supposed to be ambiguous lines. But from the moment Klaus decided to take part in the ‘draw your feelings’ exercise he’d designed for class, the lines came together of their own volition, the familiar curve of a cheek and enigmatic smile taking shape. *Damn it.* He needed to concentrate. But rather than focus on his job, he kept getting distracted by Caroline, the inconveniently gorgeous blonde director who’d hired him. Emitting a low growl of frustration, he quickly stood up to circle the students once more so he didn’t have to think about the other, more urgent reason why he was there. “The line assignment is about what you feel — not necessarily what you see.”

“And I see an incredibly talented group,” Caroline’s musical voice floated into the sunlit classroom, catching him by surprise as he fought to keep his expression neutral. What was it about her? He swore he could detect her signature fragrance of vanilla and honey everywhere he went in the facility, and it prickled his skin in the most pleasantly distracting manner.

She was lovely to behold, but there was something — *more.* She moved with confidence, a quiet grace that commanded the attention of everyone in the room. *She was a stunning creature.* He’d never had such a difficult time staying focused while undercover, and he’d certainly never been tempted to behave unprofessionally — until now. Sometimes he’d catch her lingering gaze, and he swore she felt the same electricity between them. Unfortunately, now wasn’t the time for romance, no matter how much he longed to indulge his curiosity.

Besides, once he discovered the killer’s identity, he’d have to reveal who he really was and something told him Caroline who be less than pleased with his deceit. *She seemed like the type to hold a grudge.* He dismissed the patients to move onto their various group therapy sessions, his tone teasing as he asked, “Caroline, what a pleasant surprise. Are you here to unleash your inner feelings through art?”

She grinned, her voice oddly rueful as she replied, “My inner everything gets unleashed a bit more than I’d like these days.” She sat down on the plush teal couch in the corner, the soft rustle of her skirt hem swished a tantalizing bit above her knees, making his teeth clench as he did his best not to stare at quite possibly the most perfect pair of legs in all of creation.

“Is something on your mind,” Klaus asked, noting the crease in her brow that appeared whenever she wanted to talk about something serious.

Caroline bit her lip, seemingly thinking hard about something. “I just...wanted to make sure you were settling in okay...at the facility, I mean.” She handed him one of the tall ceramic mugs she was carrying and explained, “On today’s menu is a special dark roast Sumatran blend with cardamom and Aleppo pepper.”

He eagerly took a sip, enjoying the delicious, heady warmth. Expressions boasted fine dining for its guests and staff, and lately Caroline had been stopping by for coffee. He tried not read too much into the fact that she didn’t seem to do this with anyone else on her staff. *It certainly wasn’t helping his inconvenient crush.* “Delicious,” he murmured, immediately feeling more energized as he hurriedly downed the rest.

“So, I know you’ve been curious about some of our previous patients, and I wanted to see if you had any other questions for me.”

*Damn.* He hadn’t realized he’d been that obvious during their discussions. “I’m just curious about the tragedies that took place. It was just so shocking and in stark contrast to the sterling reputation this place has cultivated — your holistic rehab has the highest success rate in the
country.” Prior to beginning his undercover assignment, Klaus had thoroughly researched the facility, and was impressed by its stats. Former patients willing to provide testimonials once had bodies so thoroughly riddled by addiction that it was assumed they’d never be productive members of society again, but after they completed treatment, it was almost as though they’d never had a substance abuse problem. Numerous clinics had attempted to duplicate their program, but somehow always fell short. Caroline was special.

“The tragedies,” she nervously asked, turning the ring on her finger, the flecks of blue in the purple stone bringing out her eyes.

“Yes, I must admit I follow the news and heard about the poor chaps who were patients here. That must have been difficult for you; did you know them well?”

She shrugged her shoulders, and he suddenly was struck with the image of tracing the dip along her collarbone with his tongue, inhaling her creamy skin as she let out a breathy sigh. What the bloody hell kind of daydream was that?

Caroline sighed, her gaze clouded with unpleasant memories. “Well enough that our staff gave them nicknames. There was Matty Blue Blue, who used that baby face of his to hide some violent tendencies. And Entitled Assface Car Guy, who thought his stupid racecar movie franchise gave him blanket consent. Oh, and my favorite was Brother-Banger, the one whose creepy codependent brother kept trying to smuggle him drugs and when we banned his brother’s visits, he tried to stab me with a fork.”

Klaus felt his blood boil at the thought of these men threatening Caroline. Damn it. Focus. It was odd to just now hear about the victims’ infractions at the facility. Why didn’t Caroline file reports with the police? It raised some interesting questions — and possibly more suspects. “You didn’t go to the police? Was it to avoid bad press for your clinic?”

An angry flush colored her cheeks and she snarled, “I didn’t go to the police because I was protecting my people and the patients! Law enforcement and the media would do far more harm than good in such a delicate environment!” She stood up, her petite frame suddenly filling the room in her fury as she stormed away, leaving Klaus in a bemused, if somewhat awkwardly aroused state as he admired the ferocious blonde demon. She was glorious.

Needing to clear his head, he wandered toward one of the nature trails he’d grown to think of as his own, breathing in the pine trees that grew so thick they almost blocked out the sky in places. In the distance, he could just make out the rustic patient cabins that dotted the horizon. Rustic. Bollocks — each patient resided in a private cabin complete with stone fireplaces and Jacuzzis. Caroline definitely spared no expense when it came to her patients. Caroline. With a groan of frustration, he realized he should figure out a way to apologize to her. He wondered what kind of flowers she liked...

“Shouldn’t you be teaching whiny addicts how to finger paint or something?”

He inwardly groaned at the familiar rude voice that seemed to have haunted his steps ever since he began his assignment there. He turned to face Katherine Pierce, or ‘Kat’ as Caroline affectionately called her. “My morning patient group just finished their art therapy and are off to sports therapy.”

“Boxing, football, rock climbing — all activities designed to coddle the fragile male ego
into feeling better about themselves when they’ve done absolutely nothing to earn it.”

He resisted the urge to argue with her — she always was hostile toward men and seemed especially irritated that Caroline had hired him. As Caroline’s personal assistant, she bizarrely seemed to think that all staff decisions should be discussed with her first. “Right. So, I’m just taking a quick walk before my afternoon group’s session...” he trailed off, awkwardly rubbing his neck.

Her brown eyes followed his movement, narrowing angrily as she focused on the stone around his neck. “Caroline gave you that. It’s very personal to her. She’s awesome and you’d better respect her.” Out of habit, he lightly touched the purple stone, still recalling with boyish glee when Caroline gave him the necklace, telling him that she felt like they shared a connection and that it would mean a lot to her if he wore it. *Feverish kisses, a long, slow slide of lips and tongues across wide expanses of flesh.*

What the hell was that? He quickly pulled himself out of his fantasy with a twinge of regret, wondering if Caroline would be willing to explore whatever this was between them once he caught the killer and finally could reveal the truth about who he was.

He told Katherine solemnly, “I’ve no interest in hurting Caroline. I know how special she is.”

Katherine gave him a final angry glare as she warned, “That’s what they all say. Just know I’m watching you. Screw things up with her and you’ll regret it.”

He studied her quietly as she disappeared down the trail, considering his options. He’d had his department perform a rudimentary background check on the entire staff at Expressions when he first started his assignment and nothing unusual had turned up, but Katherine’s increasingly odd behavior warranted a closer look.

*Terrified screams. Vacant stares.* Klaus jolted awake, cursing his carelessness at staring at the victims’ files until he was too tired to keep his eyes open. The crime scenes were horrifically gruesome — and his nightmares seemed to get worse each time he studied the evidence. His phone rang and he immediately answered when he saw it was Enzo, his new handler. He’d done his best to tamp down his irritation at being assigned a new handler in the middle of his undercover operation, but there was something about the too-quiet man that set his teeth on edge. He had secrets.

The few times they’d met in person, he hadn’t cared for the way Enzo had looked at him with pity in his eyes, as though he’d already written off Klaus’ assignment as a failure. But Klaus was determined to prove him wrong — it was only a matter of time before he found the killer. *The answers were in front of him; he just needed to follow the evidence.*

“How you holding up, mate? That whirling dervish of blonde micromanagement still got your knickers in a bunch?”

Klaus growled, not liking how Enzo’s casual teasing reminded him of Caroline’s earlier annoyance with him. He still wasn’t sure how to fix things between them. “Everything’s fine. I’ve finished accessing the rest of the patient files and have identified possible targets the killer may go after. You’ll want to add some plainclothes to keep watch on them — there’s only so much I can do without raising suspicion and Caroline’s very protective of her patients and staff.”
“You have no idea,” Enzo muttered under his breath.

His skin prickled unpleasantly at his handler’s comment, not liking the implication that Enzo knew Caroline better than he. **Caroline was his.** Or, at least she could be, some day, he amended, if he could ever get this case in order and finally stop the killer. “What do you have for me,” he barked out, not caring that his tone was more hostile than the situation warranted.

“You had me pull everything I could find on Caroline’s clingy little assistant. It wasn’t much. And by that, I mean what you have now is all we’ve got on her. According to every database in this country, Katherine Pierce didn’t exist two years ago.” Enzo paused, his tone a bit more careful as he asked, “What do you want to do?”

“I’ll handle it,” Klaus swore, disconnecting the call as his heart raced. **Caroline’s assistant didn’t exist.** Innocent people didn’t hide their identity. Could she be the killer? She had access to the victims and her hostility against men was obvious. **Given the depth of violence against the victims, it was clear that the killer had been in a blind rage when they attacked.** Caroline had revealed the victims had threatened her or the other staff in some manner, and Katherine was incredibly loyal to Caroline. If she felt that Caroline was in danger, it was possible she could act out, violently if necessary.

He quickly dialed Caroline’s number, heart racing as he tried to figure out what he could say without ruining his cover. **Bollocks. Caroline’s safety was worth more than his career.** When she didn’t answer, he checked the time, recalling that this was the day she stayed late at the facility to review staffing schedules and patient progress charts. Hastily throwing on clothes, he drove back there, still unsure of what he would tell her.

Breathing a sigh of relief when he saw that Katherine’s car wasn’t in the parking lot, he used his staff badge to access the main office. His breath caught in his throat when he looked through the tall glass windows and saw familiar blonde curls glowing in the soft lamplight. **She was the loveliest creature.**

Not bothering to glance up from her desk, she waved him inside, her tone mild as she said, “I assumed your stubbornness would win and it would be tomorrow before I received an apology.”

“That’s not...I mean, yes, of course, I didn’t mean to imply...” he stumbled over his words, irritated that she somehow always made him feel like a fumbling schoolboy nursing his first crush.

Caroline’s blue eyes went wide with concern as she studied him. “Klaus, what’s wrong?”

“I’ve learned something and it’s difficult to explain to you without revealing certain truths.”

She nodded slowly, her mouth opening and closing as though she was carefully weighing each word. “Alright. Is it something that could wait until tomorrow? Kat’s asked me to stop by her place tonight. She’s having a tough time and needs a friend.”

“No! Don’t go,” he pleaded, vehemently adding, “Kat may not be safe for you.”

Caroline shrewdly said, “Because you’ve found something out about her from your other job.”

He inwardly groaned at his stupidity — how could he have underestimated her? Her cleverness had been one of the first things that had captured his interest. “You know about me,” he awkwardly asked, wondering what happened now.

“More than I’d like sometimes,” she said in a tone of resignation, abruptly adding, “So,
where am I safe?”

Scarcely believing his good fortune that Caroline wasn’t furious that he’d lied about being an art therapist, he blurted out, “With me.”

Nails nervously traced over the abstract pattern of the throw pillow that Caroline clutched in her lap. She sat primly on his couch, body coiled so tightly that the slightest noise might make her shatter. He had an impossible flash of her sprawled across the cushions, blonde curls in passionate disarray wearing nothing but his favorite navy Henley. Bloody hell, get it together, mate!

“Caroline, it brings me no pleasure to tell you that I’ve been working undercover at your facility, investigating the murders. I’ve just uncovered information about Kat that leads me to believe she could be the killer.” While her blank stare alarmed him, he pressed on, needing her to understand. “She’s living under an assumed identity. Records for Katherine Pierce only go back two years — if she’s willing to lie about that, there’s no telling what else she’s lied about. Given her odd behavior, obvious vendetta against men, and access to the victims, we’d be foolish not to consider her a viable suspect.”

She appeared to be lost in thought, but before he could offer her words of comfort, she nodded to herself, her voice a bit hollow as she told him, “Kat’s not the killer. She’s a harmless human who’s been hiding from an abusive boyfriend. I’m the one who helped her set up a false identity — it’s why she’s so loyal.”

“Sweetheart, I respect that you want to protect your friend, but that doesn’t mean—”

“Klaus, I know who the killer is,” she interrupted, the pillow tumbling to the floor as she stood up. “It’s...complicated.” Not bothering to wait for an answer, she walked past him, her stride full of purpose. Odd. She opened a narrow closet, reaching inside to access the upright freezer. Caroline had been in his home before.

It was when she pulled out several plastic bags full of human hearts that he felt his knees buckle. Gripping the edge of his dining room table for support, he stared disbelievingly at the hearts. Three of them. Matt Donovan, Tyler Lockwood, and Stefan Salvatore.

“So, here’s the thing,” she began, biting her lip as she searched his face, clearly trying to assess his reaction. “Technically, there’s two serial killers, I guess. Um, with the first few bodies, I may have gotten a bit sloppy with my meals — but they totally had it coming!”

The way she scrunched up her nose was adorable, he thought fuzzily, pleased by the brief distraction from his chaotic thoughts of why the victims’ missing hearts were in his possession.

Her voice had grown high-pitched as she nervously continued, “Anyway, you went undercover to start investigating those murders and that’s when we met. The first time, I mean.”

“Meals?” There was a dull roar in his ears, and that was the only coherent question he could form at the moment.

Caroline briefly closed her eyes in concentration, a delicate web of black veins crawling across her cheeks as a pair of curved fangs unsheathed from her lips. “So...there’s that.” At his gobsmacked expression, she revealed, “We started spending time together and I really liked you, and when you figured out what I was, you asked me to turn you.”
There was a deep-rooted ache in his chest as images suddenly seared into his brain. *Sweet, sweet blood. A clash of fangs as they collided into each other, all passionate fury and fire.*

“Caroline, love,” he gasped, his senses awakened as he felt the hum of his power and a prick of fangs against his lips. *How could he have forgotten what he was? “But it went wrong, didn’t it?”*

“Yes.” Her voice was little more than a choked cry. “I was careless and didn’t think...somewhere in your recent lineage are wolves. As an untriggered werewolf, it’s a miracle you even survived the transition to vampire. But...then it went *bad.* You started having blackouts and memory loss and when Matt, Tyler and Stefan threatened me, your wolf reacted and killed them.” She helplessly gestured toward the frozen hearts. “During one of the times we’ve had this conversation, you told me your wolf demands you keep the trophies nearby.”

*All of the fantasies he’d been having about Caroline had been actual memories?* He raised a trembling hand to her blonde curls, savoring the silky feel as the strands tangled in his fingers. *How could he have forgotten her?* There was no mistaking the heat in her gaze and the way the tip of her tongue lightly touched her lips was his undoing.

He was on her in an instant, breaking away from their passionate embrace to trail fierce kisses down her throat until she whimpered. *That* he remembered. *The helpless little noises she made and his answering possessive growls.*

Unfortunately, his brain caught up to Caroline’s words and he couldn’t just ignore what she’d revealed. *During one of the times we’ve had this conversation.* “Wait — all of this has happened before? This isn’t the first time you’ve told me everything?”

Her lips lightly brushed against his, voice filled with regret as she confessed, “This is the fourth time we’ve done this now. There’s always slight variations though — once you thought Enzo was the killer; other times you suspected a member of my staff. So far, I haven’t been able to pinpoint when your memories will bleed through and we start all over again.”

She sniffed, tears welling up in her eyes as she begged, “Klaus, this is all my fault and I’m so sorry I did this to you. Please, please forgive me. I swear I’m working on it — my best friend is part of a powerful bloodline of witches who are looking into how to fix this mess. And in the meantime, I’m doing everything I can to look after you during the times that you don’t know what you are — I gave you your daylight amulet so you can walk in the sun and I make sure to slip blood into your coffee and other meals you have at Expressions to stave off the hunger. Also, I placed Enzo in your department to help you out whenever I can’t.”

“Sweetheart,” he gasped, shocked by the lengths she’d gone to save him from himself. “You’ve done all of that for me? I don’t know what to say.” He traced the outline of her cheek with his thumb, feeling a tear as it rolled down her skin. “In case I don’t remember this moment — thank you. You have my gratitude, my heart, *my everything.*”

Caroline smiled through her tears, kissing him over and over as she murmured against his lips, “Just keep fighting, Klaus. We’ll find a way through this.”

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*Was today the day he’d catch the killer?* Klaus rolled out of bed with a groan, cursing when he saw the time. He’d overslept again and was fairly certain that a vexing blonde director would be irate if he was late again. He raced around his apartment, finding it difficult to focus as his mind
kept conjuring horrific images of the restless dreams he’d had the night before. It was no wonder he was having nightmares, though...
Rocinante Holiday

Chapter Summary

This is a Klaroline fusion with Predator movies. Caroline is a fierce galactic warrior on her way back from a scouting mission and decides to stop by her favorite New Orleans bar that happens to be a certain hybrid’s favorite haunt...

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: Congratulations to Eliliyah for being my 800th review! I appreciate everyone’s support in making this collection my most reviewed work! Also, those of you who are interested, I’ve posted the final chapter of another Klaroline multi-chap, A Killer Kink. I hope you’ll check it out! Happy reading! :) 

Warning: This one gets us back to our signature brand of funny and also much-needed sexytimes.

“I want to eat the sunbeams flaring in your beauty.”
— Pablo Neruda

It never failed to amuse Caroline how the humans walked right by a spaceship without noticing. Such odd, self-absorbed creatures. Granted, she’d activated her transport’s camouflage sequencing, which synthesized a typical Creole cottage, but still that telltale shimmer should’ve at least given them pause. Such easy prey. She was expected back at HD 160691 d, the extrasolar planet Rocinante, now that she’d completed her scouting mission, but she refused to wormhole leap without enjoying a dish from this primitive planet called crawfish etouffee. Not to mention her weakness for other delicacies.

She didn’t both trying to muffle the deep purr that she trilled at the thought of Klaus. She’d spotted him during her first impulsive detour from her mission, and his enigmatic personality had kept her intrigued. She’d quietly observed him, seeing great promise in this unconventional warrior. While still a youngling (a paltry thousand solar revolutions on this primitive planet), there was still something about this boastful ‘hybrid king’ that made her claws ache to sink into him.

The scuffing of rubber soles on the filthy asphalt caught her attention, and she smoothly sidestepped a trio of younglings who blissfully stumbled to and fro, clearly having imbibed past the limits of their fragile physiology. From their appreciative glances, she ascertained that her attire was appropriate, a mild concern she’d indulged while on her initial scouting mission. While necessary to seamlessly blend with the planetary natives, she’d learned from her last visit that this region’s population seemed to believe her traditional hunting breastplate and ouroboros-skin...
breeches were part of a parade costume, which she understood to be some sort of revelry-related function.

Therefore, it was unlikely her formal hunting attire would arouse suspicions. *Although it certainly seemed to arouse the planetary natives’ heat.* Foolish humans — her kind required a much sturdier form for mating.

*Perhaps like Klaus.*

As a hybrid creature, he certainly could prove less frail during the mating act. *Something she found herself thinking about to a frustrating degree.* Caroline’s people had studied this primitive planet for tens of thousands of years, and knew of the curious balance of human and supernatural inhabitants. As a fierce warrior race, her kind found the immense variety quite appealing, often hotly debating the merits of hunting the various species in the quest to select the worthiest prey.

However, she and her sister-warriors lived by a strict code of honor: hunt the strong; spare the weak. It was the code that all advanced galactic races lived by. She snorted, recalling the intergalactic wager many extrasolar planets and exoplanets had indulged, placing bets on when this primitive planet finally would evolve to embrace similar ethics.

Her careful observations of Klaus revealed that while he was of volatile temperament, he appeared to live by a primitive honor code, one worthy of her respect. She recalled watching Klaus challenge the youngling king of this region as inept followers of the false king cowardly bound the hybrid with chains. Using his superior strength, Klaus easily bested them, but also proved himself to be honorable by granting clemency to the one who picked up the coin he tossed to the ground. It was an odd custom, but one that Caroline thoroughly enjoyed researching for her scouting mission report to her home planet’s elders.

The marvelous scent of crawfish being sautéed in preparation of her favorite dish made her glands swell in anticipation, and she broke into a light jog toward the aroma, only to stop short when she caught sight of curls and a familiar dimpled smirk as Klaus went inside the structure he frequented to imbibe libations. Tossing back her long waves threaded with iridescent scales, she decided her snack could wait — *she craved a full meal.*

Caroline took a calming breath, verifying that her anatomical parts the planetary natives would deem as ‘alien’ were hidden as she stepped inside the raucous structure. Her flesh tingled with awareness as it soaked in the pheromone-laced air, and she sniffed appreciatively in the direction of multiple bodies whose obvious warmth indicated their brain chemistry was urging them to mate.

“Well, well. I love it when my dinner delivers itself,” a leering dark-haired man observed, eyes raking her form as he seemed to be waiting for her to respond.

Quickly analyzing brainwaves and his production of pheromones, she understood that this was a supernatural creature known as *vampire,* and his intent was to both hunt and mate her. “Not your dinner, sub-creature,” she told him, allowing a hint of her innate violence to enter her tone, assuming he would recognize a superior predator and flee.

However, stupidity was an affliction of both humans and supernatural creatures on this primitive planet, and he beautifully illustrated that fact as he gripped her forearm and spoke with a lilting, commanding tone. “You were just going to be a quick feed and fuck, but now you’ve earned yourself some *extra* attention. Outside *now,* bitch.”
Caroline’s blue eyes briefly glowed as she felt the four points of her curved fangs itch to release, especially as she felt him use his paltry vampiric strength to try to bruise her flesh. Her arms proudly bore the ritual scarring of battle victories, signaling to others her prowess as a fierce warrior, and this sub-creature foolishly sought to place his mark upon her? She wordlessly slammed his head upon the gleaming wooden surface where libations were placed, breaking his nose. Using the tip of one claw, she jammed a neural tracking implant into his temple, softly whispering, “I suggest you run, puny meat. I’ll reclaim you later.”

Dazed and alarmed, he shuffled away, and she offered him a final vicious smile, thinking that he could be used to flush out more worthy prey (or be fed to the foraging beasts who don’t mind stringy, pungent gristle) on one of her hunting preserves near the Centaurus constellation.

A loud guffaw caught her attention, and she was pleased to see Klaus and his companion were watching her, his companion continuing to make odd braying noises of mirth as he elbowed the hybrid. Letting out a rumbling purr, she walked toward them, adding a purposeful sway to her gait to signal Klaus of her availability for mating. She noticed similar bone structures and a cursory scan of their DNA revealed that they shared a maternal sire. Half-siblings was the planetary natives’ term. While Klaus was a hybrid creature, his sibling seemed to be a vampire, similar to the puny meat she just tagged, albeit older and infinitely more interesting.

“I love a tasty bit with a hint of violence to her,” Klaus’ brother confessed, wiggling his eyebrows in a peculiar manner. Perhaps he had a sickness with pronounced muscle spasms? It was a well-documented fact among the galaxies that this primitive planet was riddled with disease. “Kol Mikaelson,” he said with a flourish, taking her hand and kissing her open palm. “What’s your name, tasty bit?”

Ah — his upper facial spasms must be a precursor to mating. She scrunched her nose in distaste, fervently hoping that Klaus’ pre-mating rituals were considerably less garish. “Caroline,” she answered, telling him firmly, “And you will not become acquainted with my taste.”

Klaus snorted derisively at Kol, reaching out to shake her hand. “Klaus Mikaelson,” he told her, the firm grip of his hand quite pleasant against her flesh. He allowed the slightest caress of fingertips to her wrist, making her flesh shiver with pleasure.

Caroline found that she enjoyed the knowing smirk the boastful hybrid flashed at her. She grew more pleased as he demonstrated his powerful station and skillset as a provider when he employed the simplest of gestures and fresh libations were hurriedly brought to the table. Based on the way her glands grew thick with mating hormones, his pre-mating rituals were quite effective. She gamely joined the brothers in clinking their glasses, a whimsical ceremony she understood to be an integral part of imbibing libations on this planet.

“You willingly imbibe libations with your subjects,” she noted with an approving eye, human and supernatural creatures alike mingling together within the same space as their ruler. “It’s the mark of a true leader to balance the delicate line between instilling fear and commanding respect among your people.”

“You’ve heard of me then,” he asked, a hopeful note in his voice that she found endearing in its eagerness.

“Of course. It’s my understanding that the hybrid king is an intriguing curiosity that has drawn the attention of many. Even my people.” She took another sip of the amber liquid, the mild taste reminding her of libations her people gave to their litters upon weaning.

Gray eyes assessed her hotly. “Consider me flattered that word has spread to even lovely
demons such as you, love. I must admit, I’ve never had the pleasure of meeting one of your kind.”

As Kol emptied the tall bottle into her glass and servers promptly brought them two more bottles, she choked back a laugh. *He thought her a demon?* What an amusing creature.

“Pathetic, Nik. Surely you can chat up a tasty bit better than that,” Kol gleefully admonished, snatching an empty glass from a server’s tray and setting it in the middle of their table, filling it nearly to the brim. “Perhaps an icebreaker to help you along, eh?”

Rolling his eyes, Klaus produced a bit of rounded metal, twirling it along his fingers as he asked, “Have you ever played quarters, sweetheart?”

Caroline searched her data banks, learning that quarters was a game of chance involving the planet’s currency and libations. Intensely competitive, she eagerly leaned forward to glean tactical maneuvers from her opponents. In a rapid-fire movement, Klaus flicked his wrist, expertly bouncing the currency upon the table before it arced gracefully into the glass. She also caught the fleeting look of amusement Klaus exchanged with his brother. *He used his supernatural agility to gain an unfair advantage.*

He pointed to her with a teasing smirk, and she understood that it meant she was expected to drink the full glass. *Mischiefous creature.* She wrinkled her nose in disgust as her bio-readouts revealed the various bacteria attached to the bit of metal currency in the bottom of the glass. While the multiple microorganisms she identified wouldn’t harm their robust physiologies, it was incredibly unsanitary. *Much like the rest of this primitive planet.* With an irritated grumble, she downed the libation, pushing the metal out of her mouth with a grimace.

After refilling the glass, she eyed the distance, using her wristlet to factor the combinatorial geometry of weight ratios versus the subtle shaking of their wobbly table. She reasoned if Klaus altered the parameters of the game with his heightened abilities, it only was sporting that she do the same. She relished the look of surprise on their faces when she easily landed the metal into the glass, and pointed to Klaus to drink.

Naturally, he retaliated, but then increased the stakes by sending the currency sailing onto the top of the bottle with a merry clink. She found she quite liked the cocky challenge of his quirked eyebrow, and readily drank down the rest of the bottle before their eyes.

She easily copied his successful maneuver (with a slight tweaking of the equations within her wristlet), and as the coin gave a graceful spin before settling on top of the lid, she pointed to Kol with a pleased grin. “You have hidden talents,” he said, clearly impressed as he downed the bottle.

Caroline lost count of the bottles the servers brought after that, but it was obvious from the subtle sway of the siblings’ bodies that even their hearty constitutions were starting to feel the effects of the libations. Klaus’s dimpled smirk had become more pronounced, his stare heated as his compliments flowed as freely as the libations. “Brilliant blue eyes. But more than blue — azure, sapphire, cobalt. All the shades of the universe could be found within that gaze of yours, sweetheart,” he purred.

Amusing creature. She leaned close, raising a hand to lightly toy with his curls, her purr a soft trill in her chest as she watched him briefly close his eyes in contentment. “You’ve never seen the universe. But if you please me, I might be inclined to show it to you.”

A snorting, choking sound distracted her, and she glanced back at Kol, who suddenly was staring at the ritual scarring along her arms, blinking rapidly as though trying to recall a memory.
As his brown eyes widened in alarm, she tapped into his frantically firing neurons and discovered that he’d encountered one of her sister-warriors a few decades ago. He’d approached Davina at one of this planet’s mating dens, where libations and loud music compelled the attendees to gyrate their bodies as a pre-mating ritual. Davina had viewed his preening as a proposition to mate, and was quite agreeable as she found him to be of sturdy form and stamina compared to the typical planetary natives.

Unfortunately, her sister-warrior had misinterpreted his surging pheromones to mean that he wished to procreate, and while in the throes of their vigorous mating, she’d eagerly commanded him to “present his seed and she would bear him the finest of litters.” Based on the images Caroline accessed, Kol apparently was quite protective of his seed and fled quickly, leaving Davina confused and angry enough that the elders had revoked her credentials to travel to this planet lest she kidnap Kol and cause a galactic incident.

“Bloody hell.”

At Kol’s high-pitched squeaking, Klaus and Caroline briefly glanced at him in amusement before returning to trading heated gazes and sly touches. “So, if I please you, you’ll show me the universe? Challenge accepted, love,” he purred, leaning across the table, “I can be quite pleasing.”

“I look forward to testing your prowess.” She’d barely growled out her words when he surged forward, tackling her lips with his is a fiery display of passion that seemed to make her cellular structure itch in a most pleasing manner. She leapt to her feet, impatiently jerking him to her, intent upon exploring this curious connection further within the privacy of her spaceship.

His brother furiously shook his head, tugging on Klaus’ other arm, whisper-shouting, “Nik, that tasty bit is after your tasty bits! You don’t know what you’re getting into!”

Klaus scoffed, waiving him away, as he allowed Caroline to lead him out of the bar. He amused her when he scooped her up in his arms, clearly eager to demonstrate his supernatural abilities as he flashed them to the coordinates she relayed.

Despite being a youngling, he managed to exert minimal energy in delivering them promptly to their destination. He carefully set her down, squinting a bit at the shimmering effect of her ship’s camouflage sequence. “I don’t remember a cottage here.” He carefully touched the sturdy wooden bannister of her cloaked ship, adding brightly, “I admire the old Creole cottages in this neighborhood. Sturdy architecture.”

She grinned, pulling him inside. “You’ve no idea.” The crisp snick of the portal closing behind them was the first indication that the ‘house’ was masquerading as something else, but Klaus was far too busy pushing her against a wall to notice. She let out a small, trilling purr of satisfaction at his forcefulness, allowing him to keep her back pressed against the spongy texture of her ship’s wall. His fingers trapped her wrists over her head, and she was surprised by how much she enjoyed the hybrid’s attempts at dominance, allowing him to control the sensual fluidity of their movements — for now.

Klaus ran his nose along her neck, inhaling deeply. She carelessly plucked at his brainwaves, his urgent desire to mate causing a surge in his pheromone production. Coiling the edge of his gray Henley in her fingers, she kissed him with achingly slow strokes of her tongue. She pulled back slightly to lick her lip, observing, “You warm to me. Your scent indicates you wish to mate. Do you consent to mating?”

His smirk was topped with those dimples she’d come to adore. “Most definitely.”
Emitting another trilling purr, Caroline yanked him toward her sleeping bay, eager to strip him bare and ravage all of the firm flesh she could feel beneath her hands. However, she recalled Davina’s vexing misunderstanding and thought it best to clarify her intent. “My cycle will not be fertile for another rotation of the eighth planet in the Cygnus A galaxy, or approximately 165 of your planet’s solar years. Is copulation without impregnation acceptable?”

She was fascinated by the thoughts that flashed through his mind, his neurons firing with a heightened speed atypical for the majority of this primitive planet’s creatures. Ah, there it was — he was starting to understand her true origins. “It seems your journey to my kingdom was further away than I assumed, sweetheart. I look forward to learning more about your otherworldly travels.” He took her lips in another furious kiss, panting slightly as he broke away to favor her with a naughty grin. “And consider this my enthusiastic consent.”

Letting out a delighted roar, she tossed him onto the enormous bionic polymer gel, blue eyes glowing as she roughly mounted him. Before he could take a breath, her claws emerged as she shredded his clothes.

He moved sensually below her, clearly noticing the possessive glow in her blue gaze as he teased, “I admire a predator who plays with her food.” His hand shot up, his beautiful hybrid face on display as he raked a claw across the belly of her ornate breastplate. “Off,” he commanded, his wolf’s gold bleeding into his stare as he once again tried to dominate her.

Impertinent creature.

And yet she couldn’t deny the thrill of excitement that flew down her spine as she activated the release mechanism, the thermal plates contracting back into her wristlet. Impatient with his stunned expression, she grabbed his hands, boldly molding them to her freed breasts. With a coy smile, she firmly pressed his claws into her flesh, breaking the skin until her blood flowed freely.

Klaus angled his head below her, catching every drop upon his greedy tongue. “The gods tremble before your glorious feast.” While he was lost in her taste, she slid down his body, taking his twitching cock between her lips. The intense buildup of caresses always filled her with an almost painful ache, and she longed to see the hybrid king unravel before her. The salty bite of him made her moan, and she unhinged her jaw, applying just the right amount of pressure that had him shouting her name.

Furiously pumping his hips, his cock slid along her eager tongue and throat, and she dug her claws into his flesh, spurring him on. His back arched as he came, and she tightened her lips around the tip, capturing it all.

With a covetous growl, he flipped her over, ripping apart the thick hide of her breeches with furious swipes of his claws. He spread her thighs to attack her core with fangs and tongue, groaning as her taste overwhelmed his senses. Soon, the fierce little nips he gave her pleasure center made her triple hearts beat a rapid tattoo within her chest, and she reached down to claw at his curls, pressing him deep inside. Fuck. Nothing on this primitive planet had made her skin feel this tight. That made her feel this ache. Those warm, wet licks teased her walls and made her shudder, and she commanded, “Take me, hybrid. Now.”

The air trembled with Klaus’ primal roar, and Caroline felt her body clench in a desperation she hadn’t felt in decades. All teasing was cast aside as he shoved in his cock with a string of curses that dripped off his tongue like a coarse melody, soundly filling her as she violently rutted against him. As tremors of pleasure wracked her body, she reached down to grasp her ankles, pulling them over her head.

The startled expression on his face revealed his surprise at the fluidity of her movement (plus the fact that her knees clearly bent in all directions might have been a bit alarming). Glancing
at her feet now resting comfortably on either side of her neck, she panted, “To provide you unfettered access to my...pussy,” she finished with a slight hesitation in her voice, not entirely certain that was the colloquial term used on this planet.

“I want every inch of you and your divine pussy open to me, sweetheart,” he rumbled, that naughty smirk of his making her core contract around the exquisite feel of him. His thrusts became an explosion of chaotic violence, their flesh merging over and over as he brought them to another satisfying release.

As Klaus fell back to the polymer gel, she languidly stretched beside him, tracing teasing circles along his glistening skin. She eyed his thick member in fascination, impressed by his stamina considering she knew of beings with double-pronged sex organs that already would’ve passed out from their exertions. “You are an exceptional creature,” her trilling purr low and sexy as she massaged his strong thighs.

“And you clearly are extraordinary even among your kind,” he responded, brushing aside her tangled blonde waves to reverently kiss along her scars.

Caroline slyly slid her hand underneath his ass, grinning as she felt his crevice clench along the delicate brush of her fingers. She watched Klaus’ heavy-lidded gaze, noting his wolf’s gold signaling the height of his arousal. At the light press of her finger, he moaned, encouraging her explorations. She carefully felt along his tight channel, dipping further only to ease back, getting him used to the sensation. Soon, she lightly pinched that bit of tissue that had him shouting until he was hoarse, his muscles contracting as his cock began to spurt once more. Quickly climbing on top of him, she drew his throbbing head to her folds, rubbing their combined slickness in a wicked game that left them both a quivering mess of desire. Back and forth she rocked, milking him until their monsters were sated. Her fangs itched to sink into the miles of smooth muscle working so vigorously to bring her bliss, and he seemed to sense her need as he presented his neck. With a sigh of satisfaction, she dug into his flesh, his blood spicy and sweet and flooding her senses with a beautiful, terrible longing. *He felt like home.*

As Klaus settled into a contented slumber against Caroline, she rose slightly to consider him. The purple bionic polymer instinctively arched to cradle his powerful frame, and she wistfully imagined him bathing in the soothing violet seas of her home planet. *He would know peace there.*

A pleased grunt escaped her lips as she stretched, wondering if she had time to fetch the crawfish etouffee she’d been craving earlier. It was best to make important decisions without the distraction of hunger. After all, petitioning the elders for permission to relocate Klaus from this primitive planet as a potential mate would be an involved process.

Klaus turned, a cheerful rumble from his chest as he tossed an arm around her waist, pulling her against him.

Perhaps those dimples would be worth the paperwork.
Part 1 - Klaroline AU Week 2019

Chapter Summary

These one-shots were written for Klaroline AU Week 2019.
Day One: Mythological Creatures and Day Two: Crossovers and Fusions

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy them and please let me know if any strike your fancy and you’d like to see more!

Day One: Mythological Creatures

Shrieky Clean

The familiar sizzle and hiss of the solvent normally would perk Caroline right up, but as she watched the toxic fumes rise from the wide, greasy stain where viscera had spilled on the concrete, her bad mood only got worse. Only a clueless hybrid asshat would think this was an appropriate form of flirting. When she arrived at the crime scene, she couldn’t help but wonder if Klaus’ volatile temper was the cause of the carnage, and when she saw the disgusting room, she knew for sure. He’d arranged the victim’s intestines into the shape of a heart.

Caroline ran the foremost supernatural crime scene cleanup service in New Orleans, and had enjoyed a symbiotic (and lucrative) relationship with Marcel for decades. However, in the aftermath of the power struggle with the Originals, Marcel was a pariah and Klaus had declared himself king. While she’d assumed her business would be affected by the hostile takeover, she never would’ve predicted this.

One month ago

The high-pitched, bordering-on-terrified voice of a young vampire named Josh roused her fifteen minutes into her first decent nap after a grueling 12-hour shift. “The hybrid king requests your agency to sanitize Rousseau’s on Esplanade Avenue.”

“I’m booked until next Tuesday. Rougarou got loose and shredded through most of the residents in a two-block radius bordering Jackson Square.”
“Klaus expects you there within the hour.”

She let out a bark of laughter, not bothering to keep a civil tongue when she was this sleep-deprived. “And I expect Klaus to pull his head out of his ass and have some of his spineless minions do it instead. If this bullshit hybrid king can’t properly delegate menial tasks, I suspect his reign will last about as long as a werewolf in a silver mine.” With an irritated huff, she disconnected the call and quickly blocked the number, tossing her phone back on the nightstand as she settled more comfortably against her pillows.

She wasn’t sure how much time had passed when her doorbell woke her, refusing to glance at the clock as she irritably started shuffling toward the door. She fuzzily recalled her monthly delivery of hypothalami was set to arrive today, and suddenly there was a skip in her step as she eagerly opened her door. If her delivery had been late, all that was left in her fridge was ingredients for a pineal gland smoothie. *She’d rather chow down on frontal lobes.* Ick. She just didn’t get fad diets.

Her excited grin turned into a grimace as she realized there was a hybrid asshat holding her delivery. “Mail theft carries a mandatory fine and a potential prison sentence of up to five years,” she flatly told him, snatching the box from his hands. *That he let her take from him.* Stupid Original strength.

“You’re Caroline Forbes,” he asked, his gaze sliding up and down in a manner that she absolutely did not find appealing. Of course, if she did, it easily could be explained as misplaced hunger pains. Her kind weren’t known for subtlety once hunger set in.

“Yes,” she answered defensively. She refused to be embarrassed by her Pinky and the Brain pajamas and glared at him, daring him to say something when he was dressed like a figure skater who desperately wanted to be a biker but didn’t have the street cred. *Although, he was wearing the hell out of those skinny jeans.*

“The Caroline Forbes whose company performs supernatural cleanup services; the one that Marcel won’t stop blathering on about and insisted your continued employment be a cornerstone of our negotiations?”

Caroline was taken aback; Marcel hadn’t mentioned what he’d done for her business before he’d retired to the old Algiers neighborhood to avoid further political fallout. She’d foolishly assumed that word-of-mouth had kept her business afloat since the regime change. She owed him a beer. *Or possibly a bar.*

Klaus seemed to take her silence as agreement, his eyebrow raised as he sputtered, “But the Caroline Forbes I’m speaking of is a zombie.” Cocking his head, he frowned slightly, adding, “You can’t possibly be a zombie, sweetheart.”

“Seriously?!” She shrieked, “So, zombies are just decaying corpses who are mindless eating machines, right? Well, hybrid asshat, you and your ignorant prejudices can get the hell off my porch, and if you think for a minute I’d *ever* work for you, you’ve lost your goddamn mind!”

She stormed back into her house, slamming the box on the kitchen counter, and whirled around in shock when she realized Klaus had followed her. His gray eyes darkened, tone turning menacing as he told her, “I can count on one hand the number of times someone was foolish enough to raise their voice to me. I suggest you don’t do it again, love.”

As a scary supernatural creature, it had been ages since Caroline had been afraid, and she’d be damned if she’d let Klaus make her afraid in her own home. Organized to a fault, she knew the
location of every item she owned. *Especially her industrial-strength cleaning products.* Typically, she used less-abrasive solvents for sanitation and disinfection of supernatural crime scenes — blood, brain matter and other tissues were surprisingly easy to remove when she used her specially formulated products.

However, sometimes crime scenes presented unique cleanup challenges and required halogenated solvents that were so toxic it was fortunate she no longer used her lungs for breathing because even with her biohazard suit, it felt like her bones were on fire. It was that spray bottle she reached for, inwardly hoping the nozzle wasn’t clogged as she rapidly pulled the trigger and liberally sprayed down the furious Original until his skin began to blister and boil off of his face. Hissing and emitting guttural noises, he flashed out of her home, leaving her shaken but feeling immensely pleased that she’d managed to surprise the overconfident hybrid king.

After that, she’d enlisted the help of a friendly bokor to set up the right protection spells around her house, and thoroughly researched her jobs to ensure they weren’t connected to any of Klaus’ kills, but she knew sooner or later she’d have to face him.

*And that’s when life got weird.* It started with little things at first — a client who tipped a little too generously, extra bookings that finally allowed her to hire more employees — and then flowers started appearing at the crime scenes. They were stunningly beautiful, rare Himalayan blue poppies that perfectly matched her eyes, presented in exquisitely cut crystal vases that were lovingly displayed so that she’d notice them the minute she crossed a threshold.

After that, rumors spread throughout the Quarter about how the hybrid king was wooing Caroline, the perky little zombie who helped their community keep their supernatural secrets from the humans. Apparently, he was enamored with the fearless blonde who’d been the first adversary in centuries to leave her mark. *Literally — neighborhood gossips swore he had a wavy line near his temple where the brunt of her cleaning solvent had landed.*

Caroline did her best to ignore these things, having no inclination to cater to the psychotic whims of the hybrid king. However, she couldn’t deny that it was the first time someone had tried to woo her in such a unique manner. Plus, he apparently had started stalking her food deliveries and learned her snacking preferences and now she received triple shipments of hypothalami that were several grades above the cuts she used to order. *The way to a zombie’s heart was definitely through her stomach.*

She was still glaring at the heart-shaped intestine stain when Klaus entered the warehouse. “If this is your A-game, I’m going to assume you normally just let your dimples do all the work,” she told him with an angry huff, checking to ensure her trusty spray bottle of halogenated solvent was within reach just in case.

He chuckled lightly, absently running a finger across a thin scar at his temple. *The scar she gave him.* “You caught my fancy the moment your lovely, grumpy face greeted me on your doorstep. No one has left their mark upon me before.” His expression turned almost shy as he confessed, “I’m a bit out of practice when it comes to courting practices, sweetheart, but I believe this is the moment when I ask you to dinner.”

“You displayed your victim’s viscera as a heart for me to find,” she said, rolling her eyes at the hopeful hybrid. *How was this her life?*

He looked at her from under his lashes, his dimples on display as he offered, “I could spell
out your name if you prefer.”

“Fine, we can go to dinner. But I’m bringing my spray bottle.”

Day two: Crossovers and Fusions. This story is a fusion with Revenge.

Best Served Bold

She patted the brawny, beautiful horseflesh, cooing gently as the magnificent Criollo neighed softly in reply. “You chose the perfect polo pony. Strong body with a broad chest and endurance to spare — I’m guessing around 15 hands?”

“Impressive, love. First art, then sailing, and now horses — is there anything you don’t know,” Klaus teased, favoring her with a dimpled smirk that definitely left Caroline a bit more flushed than she’d like.

The passwords and key codes to Mikaelson Global’s internal systems. Her smile almost was genuine as she took in his lightly tousled curls and the enticing way his polo jersey stretched across his muscular chest, thinking that any girl would appreciate the sexy specimen before her. Unfortunately, Caroline wasn’t any girl. Hell, she wasn’t even Caroline.

Before she went underground, she’d been Lexi Forbes, only child of Bill Forbes, a gifted computer programmer at Mikaelson Global. She and her father had lived in a beach cottage in the Hamptons, just down the bluffs from the Mikaelsons’ stately mansion. It had been a simple, wonderful life — what she could remember of it. She’d been eight when the police came for her father, dragging him from their home and out of her life forever.

The world knew her father as a terrorist who bombed a transatlantic flight. But she knew who the real terrorists were. Every move she’d made since coming back here was to prove her father’s innocence and bring down Mikael and Esther for their crimes.

Her first step had been to carefully orchestrate several chance meetings with their newly single son. It had been laughably easy to catch his eye, already aware of his secret desire to leave the family business and become an artist. Her own background in art history had paved the way for flirtatious conversations that she knew had a bit more depth than his typical socialite flatterer could attempt. Smug? Of course. But she was on a mission, and refused to fail her father.

“Well, I haven’t guessed where you’re taking me tonight,” she coyly replied, straightening his collar and shivering a bit as she took in the seductive fire in his gray eyes. He’s getting to you. What are you going to do about it?

Klaus leaned forward, placing the softest of kisses to her lips before pulling back to lightly tap her nose. “I know you aren’t a fan of surprises, sweetheart, but indulge me, just this once.”

“Fine,” she pouted with a small grin, unable to stop herself from watching the sensual lines of his snug riding breeches as he mounted his horse.
The match was underway by the time she’d made her way to the billowing white silk of the VIP tents. Mikael and Esther were holding court as usual, with desperate sycophants frequently stopping by to fawn over them. She took advantage of Mikael stepping away to take a phone call, keeping him in her line of sight as she engaged Marcel Gerard in teasing banter. An eager young senator, Gerard was said to be above reproach. *Give him time,* she thought derisively, her sources keeping her apprised of how Mikael and his cronies had been sniffing around Gerard’s campaign offices.

Caroline subtly wrapped up their conversation just as Mikael strolled by, skillfully moving into his path and flashing him her warmest smile. “I was hoping I’d run into you, Mr. Mikaelson.”

“A desire that I’m all too happy to indulge, sweet Caroline,” he purred, not bothering to hide his lecherous stare.

*Must resist the urge to puncture his throat with my diamond statement ring.* “Klaus and I were discussing my portfolio and he suggested that I consider coming onboard with your advisor. I know he’s quite exclusive, but would you be willing to part with his contact information?” *Disgusting old man, I’m seeing your son, remember?* She pointedly glanced across the field where Klaus rode past them, making sure to let her gaze linger appreciatively.

“Anything for the woman who’s brought about such a positive change in my wayward son’s behavior,” Mikael heartily told her, unexpectedly pulling her in for a hug that was awkwardly clingy. She ignored her gag reflex that wanted to kick in at the smell of his overdone cedar and orange cologne and deftly slipped the bug inside his phone case. Now she would be privy to every communication he received, not to mention his every movement. Finally, her face broke into something that felt like genuine happiness. *One step closer.*

“You certainly seem adept at capturing the attention of Mikaelson men,” Esther’s cunning voice sliced the air just as Caroline stepped out of Mikael’s embrace.

There was no denying that the matriarch was a stunning woman, whose stylish clothing accented an enviable figure. But it was the hardness in her blue eyes that kept her from being truly beautiful. There was no vulnerability or humanity to be had in her demeanor, and people wisely chose to flatter and scampers off lest they find themselves going to battle with a formidable, vicious harpy.

But Caroline had been to hell and back and refused to cower before this heartless shrew. “Your family has been quite accommodating. It’s lovely to feel so wanted.”

“Yes, for now. What a pity that Niklaus’ interest only can be held for so long. That pesky artistic temperament...” Esther trailed off with faux sympathy.

Caroline was indescribably pleased when Klaus suddenly paused mid-play to give her a friendly wave, one that she returned all too gladly while his mother fumed beside her. She thought of all the plans she had for Klaus and then turned to Esther, her smile nothing but sweetness and light as she vindictively asked, “Want to bet?”
Part 2 - Klaroline AU Week 2019

Chapter Summary

These one-shots were written for Klaroline AU Week 2019. Day Three: All Human and Day Four: Mates.

Chapter Notes

I hope you enjoy them and please let me know if any strike your fancy and you’d like to see more!

Day Three: All Human

Author’s note: By popular request, this one-shot is a continuation from Chapter 77: Part 4 - Klarosummer Bingo prompt: Baseball, found in my Klaroline series A Beautiful Symmetry.

Curve Ball

Was it possible to drill a hole in solid Bubinga wood with just her manicure? Caroline huffed, the glare from the highly polished conference table nearly blinding her as she impatiently waited for Klaus to finish reviewing the latest contracting language she’d revised. He’d been calling her in his office every day with increasingly ridiculous requests for contract revisions. Ever since last week’s baseball game.

“Seriously?! You can’t expect to completely overhaul this corporation’s policy on limited liability without repercussions,” she snarled, aggressively highlighting several key phrases on her laptop.

Klaus raised an eyebrow, not bothering to hide that patronizing grin of his as he replied, “Perhaps if your earlier drafts hadn’t been quite so ambiguous, love, we could’ve finalized the contracting language sooner.”

“Ambiguous?! You know damn well I crafted that language per your instructions and you gave me a ridiculously exorbitant bonus after you signed off on my work!” She tossed back her hair, no longer caring that her pristine bun had become an angry ball of frizzy curls. She realized
her frustration mostly stemmed from Klaus’ bizarre behavior — not only the bizarre requests regarding work projects, but also his overall demeanor.

During meetings, she could feel his steel gaze boring into her, but anytime she caught him looking at her, his handsome face was an unreadable mask. Or, how he awkwardly ducked into various offices that she happened to be in, delivering rambling requests to subordinates as though he was scrambling for excuses to be in the room. She’d done her best to ignore her growing feelings for him, and his recent behavior definitely had her rethinking why she’d been drawn to him in the first place. He’d been weird ever since he found out her childhood best friend was Enzo St. John, his favorite baseball player. She’d heard of sports hero worship, but his childish possessiveness over his idol was getting ridiculous.

The tips of his ears reddened as he quickly said, “Yes, well, clearly I need to take a closer look at your work if this is the subpar quality that I’ve been financing.”

“So much for the inconvenient crush she’d developed.” She couldn’t recall the last time he’d pissed her off this much. Caroline slammed her laptop shut, leaping to her feet as she shouted, “The quality of my work was never an issue until this past week when something suddenly jumped up your ass and died!”

“I should fire you for insubordination.” Klaus growled, slowly rising to lean across his desk, the steel in his gray eyes flashing.

“Good luck with that — my employment agreement is impenetrable — I designed it,” she smugly told him, slightly taken aback by how close their faces had become. Was he seriously trying to intimidate her by staring at her like that?

A shrill knock on the door to his office startled them, both jumping back from each other as though an electric current had passed between them. Klaus’ assistant burst in, excitedly telling them, “He’s here! He’s in the lobby and oh my god, he’s just as hot as I remember from the game!”

The young brunette did a cute little wiggle at the threshold, clearly not picking up on the tension in the room.

“April, kindly explain why you deemed it appropriate to interrupt our meeting.”

Caroline rolled her eyes, not interested in listening to Klaus take his bad mood out on his terrified assistant. “I have a thing. Looks like he’s a bit early.”

“Who,” Klaus asked, eyes narrowing dangerously.

“Enzo St. John,” April said breathlessly, practically bouncing on her tiptoes.

Caroline slipped her laptop in her bag, nodding to the starstruck girl, “Thank you, April. Please let him know I’ll be down in a minute.”

After his assistant left, Klaus leaned against his desk, his voice dry as he remarked. “So, a thing. With Enzo.”

“Yes, we’re going to dinner,” she said breezily, feeling her irritation flare at his tone. Was he seriously pissed that she was leaving work a few minutes early? Controlling asshat.

He scoffed, folding his arms in front of his chest. “He’s no doubt taking you to Grayson’s, possibly the most unimaginative fine dining experience in town.”

“Actually, I suggested Sybil’s Lair,” she snapped, adding, “they have the best brie and
honey figs.”

“Not to mention a rather saucy dinner show.”

“Seriously?! So what if it’s a burlesque club? It’s fun and one of my favorite hangouts.” She stomped out of his office, not bothering to turn around as she barked, “And feel free to shove your Puritan hang-ups up your ass!”

Later that night, Caroline was impressed by how quickly Enzo had made her forget all about Klaus’ odd fixation with his baseball idol. She and Enzo easily had slipped back into their snarky friendship that she hadn’t even realized she’d been missing all these years. It was hilarious to watch the staff and other customers fawn over the guy who used to get detention for making fart noises with his armpit.

He wriggled his eyebrows, lightly tapping the rim of his Dr Pepper martini with hers. She rolled her eyes, but took another sip, still chuckling that he’d charmed the waitress into going across the street to buy their favorite soda they used to drink every day after school. However, the moonshine-soaked cherries the bartender had sent over with a flirty wink was a new and delicious surprise. “I always knew you would be a smashing success at whatever you set out to do, but I’m still so proud of all you’ve accomplished, gorgeous.”

“She mentioned a rather saucy dinner show.”

“Says the mega-famous baseball star.”

He waved her off, settling more comfortably against the plush red velvet corner booth. “It was mostly luck plus me being a pain in the ass.”

“Comforting to know some things never change,” she answered dryly, dipping another parmesan breadstick in the honey-balsamic dressing and savoring the tart sweetness on her tongue. “Like the time you didn’t study for that geography test, but made all of your answers into a bunch of haikus about how great Mr. Donovan was and you ended up with the second-highest grade.”

“Like you didn’t do the same thing to get out of doing that stupid book report with Miss Sommers when you told her you were having boy trouble because everyone knew she’d been dumped.”

Giggling, they signaled a waitress wearing a fluffy red and black feather boa and little else to bring them another round.

“Ah, memories. So nice to see you two getting reacquainted,” Klaus’ biting voice rang out, startling them both as they realized he was standing at their table, an attractive redhead clinging to his side.

Caroline was taken aback by how all the breath seemed to leave her body as she noticed the way Klaus threw his date a sexy grin, not bothering to look at Caroline as he openly admired the woman’s halter dress whose every dip and slit of fabric revealed toned expanses of creamy skin. At least she knew what Klaus’ type looked like — gorgeous in an unapproachable way, tall, angular, and quite vicious if that predatory gleam in her green eyes was anything to go by. And she was none of those things. Not that she cared.

“Yup, it feels like we were never apart — gorgeous and I have quite the bond, mate,” Enzo lazily answered, lightly patting Caroline’s hand. He squinted up at Klaus, a mischievous twinkle in his dark eyes as he added, “Don’t I know you from somewhere?”
Caroline noted an angry red flush creeping up Klaus’ neck (which unfortunately did nothing to detract from how unfairly attractive he looked in his crisp blue dress shirt). She hurriedly explained, “Klaus and I work together; he was at your game last week.”

Enzo snapped his fingers, telling him, “That’s right! I signed a bunch of Augustine Tigers merchandise for you. It was great for the old ego.”

“Those were for my brother,” Klaus snapped, an unfamiliar look of alarm in his eyes.

“But I thought you were Klaus? You and your brother have the same name — must’ve been bloody confusing growing up, eh?”

Klaus sneered, not bothering to acknowledge the redhead dragging her sharp nails teasingly along his arm. “Of course — almost as confusing as a two-time, top-five MVP experiencing a career low batting average right before playoffs.”

Outraged by Klaus’ smug expression, Caroline opened her mouth to defend her friend when Enzo gently squeezed her hand, a movement that Klaus curiously followed with his steely gaze. “Not to worry, gorgeous. I think I understand what has Klaus in a right strop.”

Obviously tired of being ignored, the redhead seemed to take a more direct approach and whispered something in Klaus’ ear that had him stand a bit straighter as he smirked, “Yes, well, enjoy your evening then. I’ll see you around, Caroline.”

Caroline raised an eyebrow, still not entirely sure what happened as she watched his date possessively drag Klaus away from their table. She threw back the rest of her martini in one swallow, secretly pleased that their attentive waitress already was sliding a fresh drink in front of her. “Well, that was...seriously, I have no earthly idea what the hell that was.”

Enzo snorted, pausing briefly to applaud the red sequin and black body paint-speckled dancers that appeared on onstage to start their second show. “Bollocks. Can’t say I’m not a bit disappointed at this development, gorgeous — but it seems you’re smitten with Klaus. And he’s certainly quite taken with you.”

Wait — what?

**Day Four: Mates**

Cellmates

She carried sunshine on her skin and he breathed deeply as she carefully leaned in to
administer the injection. *Caroline wasn’t like the others*. For one, she didn’t insist that he refer to her as ‘Dr. Forbes’. *Not to mention that she looked more like a Botticelli painting than an Augustine scientist.* Klaus longed to commit her image to canvas, instinctively knowing his brushstrokes would be positively inspired by her exquisite form. Unfortunately, he no longer had access to his artist’s atelier. *Not since his murder conviction.*

It was said he’d rot away in jail. After all, Mikael had been a powerful man, his influence shaping both local and state politics, and his brutal murder had made national news. Especially when evidence revealed that Klaus Mikaelson, arguably one of the most famous artists of the past decade, not to mention Mikael’s stepson, was the murderer. But then, Augustine Labs came calling, offering select prisoners a reduced sentence in exchange for volunteers in experimental studies. A few pricks of a needle were nothing, Klaus reasoned. *He was used to pain.*

“I’m sorry,” Caroline murmured quietly, her touch gentle as she pressed sterile cotton against the small droplet of blood that escaped his wound at the injection site.

His nostrils flared at the coppery scent of blood mingling with her sunshine. *Warm. She felt warm.* “Don’t bother yourself, love. All in the name of science, right?”

The blush that stained her cheeks was glorious, and he couldn’t help but wonder how far down it marked her creamy skin. “Yes,” she nodded eagerly, blue eyes briefly flicking to his lips before she hurriedly stepped back to busy herself at the counter. “This latest injection was run through a thermal cycler to amplify targeted cells within the modified DNA sample. I’m excited to see what your latest genetic analysis will tell us,” she told him, her enthusiasm garnering a rare chuckle from him.

She evoked within Klaus a number of uncharacteristic responses — a giddy happiness, hope — even a sense of belonging. He’d never felt that with anyone before, but there was something about Caroline that made him ache to know her. *Hungered for it. For her.*

*At their first meeting, he’d sat quietly on the table, grateful to the lovely blonde who’d given him a tremulous smile as she told security to remove his restraints and wait outside. While she’d been fiddling with an impressive array of test tubes and blinking machines, he’d taken off his shirt, assuming she wanted to perform an exam.*

*She’d whirled around, bright blue eyes widening in alarm “Oh, no, I don’t need to see that!” At his raised eyebrow, she blushed furiously, hastily adding, “Not that there’s anything wrong with it...um, it’s very nice actually. You’re very nice, I mean...” she trailed off, briefly squeezing her eyes shut in embarrassment.*

*“I’m not nice.” His gray eyes appraised her, seductively smirking as he promised, “But for you, sweetheart, I could be.”*

A curious heat came over him, its feverish sensation pulling him from his thoughts. He’d felt something similar during the previous injections, but this one was the most intense. His skin tingled, as though his cells themselves were more sensitive. The air was thick with smells that overwhelmed him, from the chemicals in the labs to the nervous sweat on the guards. There was a scientist stationed six lab rooms over who was wearing a detestable mixture of Old Spice and rancid cigar smoke. *How did he know that?*

Klaus wasn’t a foolish man and knew that Augustine Lab’s true agenda went beyond their altruistic mission statement of working toward the ‘betterment of mankind’. He’d taken careful note of the labels on the various test tubes that had been measured and tested and finally injected into his arm each time. *Canis lupus.* While it wasn’t clear what the scientists hoped to achieve,
injecting genetically modified wolf DNA into carefully screened prisoners seemed to be the first phase of a carefully crafted plan.

*Bloody hell,* he thought, catching an errant whiff of peaches from Caroline’s shampoo as she brushed back several bouncing curls from her face, *she smells delectable.* An urgency flooded his brain, a need that made his chest tight as she leaned close to test his pupil dilation. He studied the graceful arch of her neck, his teeth and tongue aching to touch those soft lines. *Wanting to mark her.*

A strange certainty came over him as he caught the slight hitch of her breath, the tentative sweep of her tongue over pale pink lips. *Mate.* Despite his jumble of confused thoughts, this bizarre knowledge continued to flood his brain along with images. “It was in the small Russian village of Kalach. That’s where you found the wolves.” His nose twitched with the sharp scent of spruce and fir trees lightly dusted in snow.

“What? How did you know...” Caroline trailed off uncertainly, a hint of alarm in her voice as she watched him. “Yes, we wanted the heartiest DNA and Russian wolves are unlike any other pack I’ve ever studied.” She gestured toward a screen behind her, complex equations and graphs constantly updating as new data was fed into the system. “Their genetics were optimal for isolating DNA from cells.”

The warmth continued to spread throughout his body as the injection ran its course, and he nodded in understanding as another image came to him, one of Caroline bundled up in a heavy lilac coat, scrunching her nose adorably as snowflakes drifted down from the heavy branches overhead. “Your connection runs deeper than that of your colleagues,” he observed, “your ancestors settled that region.”

“Um, yeah, I did one of those ancestry tests and discovered that my people had been in that part of Russia for generations. It’s what gave me the idea to test the DNA of the packs there to determine cellular structure and viability.” Caroline cocked her head, a slight furrow appearing as she said carefully, “You’re unusually perceptive. What else can you tell me?”

Klaus stretched languidly, allowing the thrum of new power to sink into his bones. There were a great many things he should tell Caroline — but where to begin?

*After all, there shouldn’t be secrets between mates.*
Part 3 - Klaroline AU Week 2019

Chapter Summary

This one-shot was written for Klaroline AU Week 2019. Day Five: Different Time Period. Enjoy!

Chapter Notes

Quick history lesson: Cartimandua was a lesser-known Celtic warrior queen of the Brigantes whose rule spans approximately 43 to 69AD. She was a shrewd ruler who forged an alliance with the biggest bully in the ancient world at the time — the Romans. Because of her quick thinking and clever negotiations, she saved her people and they became the largest and one of the wealthiest tribes in Britain. Threatened by her power, the Roman senator and historian, Tacitus, called her “treacherous and self-indulgent” in his well-known work, Annals and the Histories.

Treacherous and Self-Indulgent

_Beware the enemy who crosses your threshold with a smile rather than a sword._ She eyed the Roman emissaries suspiciously, noting with distaste that their table manners were even worse than that of the Iceni people. Her spies learned of the Romans’ breach of their tribe’s lands, swiftly sending word to their queen, and as the moon had progressed across the sky, almost completing its cycle, Caroline was confident that she had saved her people.

*Caroline,* she inwardly scoffed, was how the foolish emissaries had butchered her name with their clumsy tongues. She was Cartimandua, Queen of the Brigantes, whose sovereignty had been destined from birth and further secured when she formed strong blood alliances with the warring tribes on the outskirts of her people’s lands. She would be Caroline to the Romans and allow them their ignorance — for now.

*She had great experience in managing foolish men,* she inwardly sighed, scowling as she took note of her dim-witted husband as he drooled into his clay goblet. She’d known her arranged marriage to Alaric had been necessary to strengthen ties to the Saltzman Mountain people, but she’d assumed that his advanced years would provide him with some semblance of discipline. Unfortunately, he was under the thrall of spirits, his overindulgence over the years written in every harsh line and sagging jowl of his ruddy complexion.

She’d bided her time, carefully watching for the moment when she’d no longer require his presence to maintain control of his clan’s territory. *And her moment was drawing near.* She toyed with her bracelet, running a finger along the thick strands of twisted silver, as her skin prickled with a giddy certainty that she was being watched. The bracelet had been a gift from Niklaus
Mikaelson, a legatus for the Romans. He’d given it to her while they’d been concealed among the shadows of her private river stronghold, seductive lips curving as he told her he’d commissioned it to match the circular neckband she wore as a symbol of her royal status.

“My warrior queen,” he’d whispered, trailing blistering kisses from her ear to her collarbone, his touch making her tremble and ache.

She traded fiery gazes with Niklaus across the carved wooden table. His pale skin shone underneath the blanket of stars, his Great Northern tribal heritage apparent. The son of a powerful chieftain, this celebrated warrior of a distant land across icy seas had shrewdly formed a lasting alliance with Rome, preserving his clan’s legacy and bringing wealth and prestige to his people.

Upon their first meeting, he’d foolishly assumed that Caroline didn’t speak the many tongues of the warring Great Northern tribes, and had traded cutting insults about her people with a sharp-eyed general she’d later learn was an elder brother.

“They’d eat naught but worms and earth without our generosity,” they’d joked.

Having recognized the dialect by its harsh, sharp sounds, she’d carefully dropped whispers in their ears, having no interest in alerting the other emissaries of her linguistic abilities. “And your garrison would perish of sweating sickness and festering wounds if not for our hot springs in which we’ve generously allowed you to bathe.”

They’d been taken aback by her words and quickly hung their heads in shame. As their contrition seemed genuine, she’d abandoned her quarrel, eager to begin negotiations afresh to ensure her people’s place in the changing, turbulent world around them. Later, (and yet far sooner than most would deem appropriate), Niklaus would confess to her that it was in that moment he became as taken with her cleverness as he had with her beauty.

Loud guffawing interrupted her reckless thoughts, and she realized that Alaric was attempting to demonstrate his prowess with games of chance, offering one of the generals a token of polished deer bone and eagerly explaining the rules. She only was mildly concerned, having successfully negotiated larger stakes in the spoils of the upcoming war her new allies would wage against the tribes to the south. Let the fool indulge his pitiful vices.

After all, Alaric’s eyelids had become heavy, much like the rest of the emissaries, as Caroline quietly had instructed her priestess to increase the potency of the rare mushroom powder that had been a part of their wine since they’d first supped among Caroline’s people. The taciturn, often condescending Romans were much more pliant once they’d imbibed the strong wine laced with that special concoction. Of course, one had to take care in its harvesting and preparation, as death could come swiftly, she reflected, eyeing Alaric’s flushed skin and sweat-stained tunic.

The wooden platters heaped with berries and honey were passed around, and she nibbled delicately at the tart sweetness, the fruit bursting delightfully against her tongue as she noted how Niklaus’ gray eyes darkened lustfully. Fortunately, everyone else was lost to the spirits, abandoning measured reason to joyful drunkenness as her people brought forth instruments and incited much revelry. Murmuring her excuses, she gracefully stood from the table, bidding her guests farewell as she retired for the night. She carefully held Niklaus’ eye as she left the meetinghouse, knowing that he would slip through the shadows and be at her side without raising suspicion.

The foul, piggish historian Tacitus had marked her as a threat, gleefully spinning hateful tales of Caroline to the Romans, calling her ‘treacherous and self-indulgent’. There was nothing
traitorous in saving her people and she vowed one day to quench a blade with the odious simpleton’s blood. But self-indulgent? Perhaps. Especially when she caught a glimpse of Niklaus’ golden curls among the trees right before she ducked inside her well-guarded stronghold across the river.

She’d barely hung her heavy woolen cloak by its silver clasp when she felt his strong hands span her waist, drawing her firmly against his body.

“My warrior queen,” he seductively growled, lightly biting her neck.

Her breath hitched — curse that man for knowing her body’s every need. She wound her hand into his curls, tugging on them aggressively until she could fuse her lips to his. She loved this give and take of theirs — trading dominance as equals as they sought pleasure. “Your kinsman dither and ramble, whiling away precious hours — are they unaware of more gratifying pursuits with their tongues?”

“Every moment spent at that table was a blessing and a curse,” Niklaus groaned, spinning her in his arms so she could see the hunger apparent in his gaze. “Your words are as sharp as a broadsword, yet as cunning as any statesman. These men will beg you to rule them before they’re aware of what they’ve abandoned.” His words grew sharp as he possessively cupped her cheek, hissing, “The thought of that loathsome sloth still laying claim to you makes my blood rage. My blade will soon make his acquaintance, I promise you.”

Caroline bristled a bit at the implication that he thought her too weak to manage her own affairs. Silly man. “There’s been no laying of claims for ages. Alaric’s sword is as soft as the meadow clover.” Blue eyes darkened, her lilting tone carrying with it the hint of violence so often simmering just below her surface. “In secret places, a rare mushroom grows that brings either pleasant lethargy or swift death.”

She enjoyed the intrigue and wonderment she found in Niklaus’ gaze as she told him confidently, “How unfortunate that Alaric will unexpectedly pass on to the spirit world later this evening after he imbibes his customary goblet of wine before bed.”
Grave Bargain

Chapter Summary

Author’s note: Caroline knew that working as a palliative caregiver for the famously reclusive Esther Mikaelson would be a challenging job, but between the eerie remoteness of the estate and the odd behavior of her sons, it makes her wonder if there’s more to this situation than she realizes.

“Would you think it possible that this ancient rose could ever bloom again?”

“Nonsense!” said the Widow Wycherly with a toss of her head. “You might as well ask if an old woman’s lined face could ever bloom again.”

— “Doctor Heidegger’s Experiment” by Nathaniel Hawthorne

The only thing worse than an inappropriately timed smirk was a condescending jackass and between the two Mikaelson brothers, Caroline was seriously reconsidering her application to provide palliative care to their mother in her final days. The serial smirker was Klaus, a pretty-boy artist type who’d been anything but subtle as he asked her to describe her nurse’s uniforms. The other brother, Finn, was an outright snob and kept inquiring about her family tree as though her social station somehow guaranteed her competence as a medical professional. However, it was clear that despite his shortcomings as a human, Finn was a devoted son whose brow furrowed with every gasping breath Esther took while interviewing her.

“I assure you I’ve reviewed your case files thoroughly and understand the challenges associated with your illness,” Caroline told Esther, doing her best to keep her tone low and reassuring despite wanting to snap like a rabid dog at Finn’s continued looks of doubt and derision.

“You’re barely out of school; what could you possibly understand about the challenges my mother faces?”

Blue eyes flashing dangerously in Finn’s direction, her voice was cold and matter-of-fact as she said, “Esther now suffers from dilated cardiomyopathy, an illness that originated from the high doses of anthracycline chemotherapy medication she was prescribed. This means the left chamber of her heart is enlarged and can’t pump blood properly. It eventually will affect the other chambers and lead to heart failure.”

She appreciated the way that Esther met her gaze without flinching. She was a strong
woman. “You’re already experiencing shortness of breath and fatigue. Other symptoms may include swelling of lower extremities, heart palpitations, blood clots, and fainting. Normally, you would have surgical treatment options. However, given your age and declining health attributed to stage 4 cancer, those aren’t feasible.”

“Well, aren’t you a perky little ray of sunshine, sweetheart,” Klaus drawled, studying her with a look that she almost mistook for respect.

“I’m not here to be perky,” she corrected him, “I’m here to provide Esther’s care and monitor her closely, ensuring she’s comfortable at all times. Her quality of life is my responsibility.”

Ignoring Finn’s patronizing scoff, Klaus lazily studied her, dimples cutting into his cheeks as he smirked, “Perhaps in time I can discover other responsibilities in which you’d be well-suited.”

Fuck this. “Let me stop you right there, Dimples McSmirkypants. I’m a licensed RN certified in hospice and palliative care with more than five years’ hospice experience. Death may pay my rent, but I battle that vengeful fucker on my patients’ behalf every goddamn day. This won’t be some Hallmark movie bullshit where I’m the wide-eyed caregiver whose nauseating optimism magically changes you from a selfish fuckboy into an emotionally competent human. I’m here to help your mother transition through the most difficult stage of life — death.”

Everyone looked stunned by her outburst, but nowhere near as shocked as Caroline herself. Inwardly groaning, she resigned herself to going back home to search more online jobsites when Esther suddenly spoke, her regal voice barely wavering as she decisively, “You’re perfect. When can you start?”

A week later and Caroline still couldn’t shake off her surprise at Esther’s decision to hire her. The Mikaelsons were notoriously reclusive, eccentric in the way that only old money could achieve without being seen as creepy. Their country estate was vast, tucked away in the mountains, with the nearest neighbor hours away. So far, she’d gotten lost every time she’d gone for a walk by herself. And Klaus had managed to find her every time — almost like magic. Smug bastard. While he swore it was coincidence that he’d been out riding one of the gorgeous black Friesians from their stable, the twinkle in his gray eyes told a different story.

“You’re not what I expected, love,” he commented on the third time he’d ‘accidentally’ run into her beside a tall riverbank.

Absentmindedly patting the soft nose of the preening horse, she snorted and replied, “And you’re exactly what I expected — except when you think I’m not watching.”

His handsome face was unreadable as he dismounted. “And what do you think you see?”

As he handed her the reins, she slowly began to lead the Friesian along the thick tree line Klaus had indicated with a small nod. “I saw you selflessly intervene when Finn threatened to fire the gardener for failing to prune the roses along the south gate. And when the stable hand’s granddaughter cut herself climbing in the peach orchard, you hummed a little tune while you bandaged her knee.”

He opened and shut his mouth, clearly not expected Caroline’s words. When he finally
spoke, his tone was softer, as though he’d finally decided to drop all pretense. “You’re made of iron when facing the formidable presence of my mother. And yet, your every word, every gesture is filled with compassion.”

“Oh, um. Right,” she mumbled, not entirely sure why her cheeks flushed bright red under his gaze.

“Not to mention articulate.”

Rolling her eyes, she told him, “Just because I noticed stuff doesn’t mean anything, Dimples McSmirkypants.”

“Doesn’t mean anything yet,” Klaus countered with a sly wink.

The silver of Esther’s antique locket gleamed in the morning light, the raised edges forged in a concentric pattern around a small red stone. Caroline usually asked her questions about it, to help distract her from the momentary prick of needles, noting the poor woman’s obvious attachment to it. While Esther’s trembling fingers touched the stone, she quietly asked about her current pain levels based on their established pain management plan.

“Only moderate pain today, dear,” came the hoarse whisper.

Caroline was both surprised and pleased by her patient’s response. Normally, she was in severe pain, in which only the strongest of opioids and analgesics were administered. “I’m happy to hear that, Esther. You’ll have a good day today.” Nodding toward Finn who was silently observing in the corner as usual, she told him, “There’s a chill to the air today, so make sure she’s properly bundled up when you take her outside.” She glanced out the tall French doors that opened to a wide balcony overlooking the dense forest below. “I know you’re anxious to go read in the sun, but we’re putting on sunscreen first, ok?”

“You have a very nurturing spirit,” Esther observed, patting her hand lightly. “You must have experience caring for a sibling or perhaps your parents?”

She finished the application of sunscreen over the paper-thin skin of her patient, taking care to use a light touch as she was prone to bruising. “It’s just me,” she answered, doing her best to keep her face neutral. “My parents died in a car crash my senior year.”

“Oh, you poor dear,” she soothed, dark eyes filling with tears. “And you didn’t have siblings to share your loss, then?”

Caroline shook her head, desperately wanting to change the subject.

“But surely you have friends. You’re quite vivacious and full of life,” Finn protested in an oddly insistent tone.

“I just moved here, so haven’t really had time to meet people yet,” she answered slowly, trying to figure out why the normally standoffish son was offering her awkward compliments and suddenly taking an interest in her personal life.

“Enough, Finn. We’ve made Caroline uncomfortable with our prying questions,” Esther lightly admonished. “My apologies — it’s just been so long since we’ve had new life in this house and we’re just naturally curious about you, dear.”
A wave of dizziness suddenly came over Caroline, and she had to plant her feet to keep from falling. What the hell was that? Clearing her throat, she smiled brightly, wondering if maybe her symptoms were a result of the minimal sleep she’d had ever since she’d arrived at the Mikaelson estate. Regardless of the luxurious linens, she’d done nothing but toss and turn, finally giving up to wander around until her knees threatened to buckle from exhaustion.

“Are you alright, dear?”

“I’m always alright,” Caroline reassured her. White lies never hurt anyone.

She rolled over with a moan, squinting at the clock as she let out a soft curse. How had she managed to oversleep? Last night was a bit of a blur, but she knew she’d spent time with Klaus once more. Now two weeks into her new job, she’d found herself seeking out his company against her best judgement. When it was just the two of them, he was surprisingly witty and clever and somehow gentle. There was a tentative friendship there, and she was doing her best not to cross the line into something more that she wasn’t ready to handle.

She’d sat in front of the enormous roaring fireplace in the upstairs den last night, engrossed in the flickering flames until she felt almost hypnotized. Klaus had joined her, quietly sketching on the leather couch behind her. Everything felt floaty, and she’d laughed softly, realizing that she didn’t find him nearly as irritating as she once had.

“You’re lovely in any light, sweetheart, but the firelight may be my favorite.”

Caroline’s chuckle turned into a full-fledged yawn, and she quickly tried to stifle it with a cough, embarrassed at being this tired at only 8:00. She couldn’t figure out what was causing it — her diet and exercise regimen was basically the same, and yet it felt as though she’d run a marathon every day on nothing but junk food. “Sorry, I don’t know what’s with me lately.”

“My mother has run you ragged with her demands,” Klaus said, suddenly sitting next to her, his gray eyes full of concern. “Please remember to take care of yourself.”

“It’s my job to provide her the best care possible. I’m probably just coming down with a cold,” she replied stubbornly.

Klaus hadn’t looked convinced, but she was grateful he left it alone, preferring to sit with her until she finally started to nod off. She recalled him helping her back to her room, leaving her at the door with a faint brush of his soft lips against her cheek. A gentleman was hiding underneath his irritating pretty-boy persona, and she looked forward to learning more about him.

Blinking fuzzily at the sun’s rays streaming into her bedroom, she stumbled to her feet, nausea taking over as the fancy crystal pendant lights over the bed seemed to expand and swirl in dizzying patterns. What was wrong with her? She pressed a hand to her sweaty forehead, wincing at the unexpected sight of dark bruises lining both of her arms. They hadn’t been there last night — what had caused them?

The knock on the door pulled her from her thoughts, Klaus’ voice laced with concern. “Caroline? Is everything alright?”

Groaning, she managed to drag herself over to answer, leaning a bit too heavily on the door as she pulled it open. “Klaus,” she whispered, startled at how lifeless she sounded. “I’m so sorry I overslept. I promise I’m heading upstairs now to start Esther’s morning routine.”
“Not today, sweetheart. You’re far too pale for my liking and you have been all week. If you refuse to take care of yourself then I’m doing it for you — starting with taking you to the emergency room.”

“I’m fine, Klaus. Just a little run down, but it’s nothing I can’t handle,” she insisted, heart beating a bit faster at his worry.

He let out an irritated growl, storming over to her closet and yanking out her coat. He commanded through gritted teeth, “This isn’t a negotiation, love. Either you willingly walk beside me or I’m carrying you out of here.”

“Fine,” she grumbled, inwardly appreciating his help getting on her coat. A small jingling sound caught her attention, and her fingers brushed something metal in one of her pockets. Confused, she pulled out a necklace. Esther’s necklace. “I don’t understand — how did your mother’s necklace get in my pocket?”

“It’s not my mother’s. It belonged to my Aunt Dahlia. They both wore the same talisman until my aunt passed away,” Klaus explained, color draining from his face as he stared at the gleaming silver in Caroline’s hand. He snapped out of his stupor, angrily snatching it away to reveal, “They’re used in witchcraft to channel power. Or, I now suspect to siphon your health and transfer it to my selfish mother.”

Before she could fight through her muddled thoughts to form a response, he’d whisked her out of the room, supporting her as he moved quickly up the stairs to Esther’s suite of rooms. “I knew all those intrusive questions about your background were suspicious; that she and Finn’s interest extended far beyond mere politeness. And then, there was her recent miraculous bit of good health. But I never thought they’d go this far.” He paused briefly in the middle of the grand staircase, gray eyes searching hers as he vowed, “Please forgive me for not realizing what they’d done. But I swear I’ll protect you now.”

She rubbed her head tiredly, feeling an ache throughout her body that sank into her bones. “You think your mother and her sister were...are...witches,” she said slowly, the words heavy on her tongue as her brain fought to find reason in this insanity.

“Of course. All of us are witches.”

She closed her eyes briefly, having no idea how to respond to that bit of insanity. Rich, attractive, and crazy — of course she’d find this out after she developed a crush on him.

Not bothering to knock, Klaus burst through the heavy mahogany doors of Esther’s rooms, bellowing, “What have you done, you selfish cow?!” The heavy drapes had been drawn, and in the dim light of the room, Caroline could just make out the thin form of Esther propped up against a wide expanse of pillows.

However, before she could peer more closely, a figure suddenly attacked from the shadows, hurling itself at Klaus and knocking him over. Finn’s sneering face glared down at Klaus, clawing and punching with such fury that Klaus was momentarily stunned. Everything happened so fast that she almost missed the red glow that seemed to emanate from Finn’s hands to sinisterly wind around Klaus’ neck. What the hell was that?

An invisible heat flooded the room, nearly making her faint. She watched in shock as Klaus seemed to use that energy to get the better of his brother, pushing it toward him until he began to choke. Ok then. The Mikaelsons were witches.
With a guttural roar, Finn summoned more of that insidious red glow, this time slashing into Klaus’ forearms, causing Caroline to cry out in alarm as she tried to make her way to him. Unfortunately, a severe chill made its way through her, rooting her feet to the floor, so that she could do no more than shiver where she stood. Klaus seemed to channel his rage, that powerful heat flooding the room once more and tossing Finn through the doors and off the balcony, jagged bits of glass raining down in the terrible silence that followed.

Taking a shaky breath, Caroline was relieved to realize she could move once more, carefully stepping around the sprays of glass shards to observe Klaus looking over the balcony’s edge, his face an unreadable mask. “Is he...” she trailed off uncertainly, unable to put into words the violence she’d just witnessed.

“Yes,” he replied, searching her face as though mentally cataloguing her potential injuries.

They’d been so distracted by Finn’s attack that they’d forgotten about Esther until Klaus suddenly clutched his skull with both hands, unwillingly sinking to his knees with a groan. “Klaus,” she shouted, but before she could run to him, Esther tackled her to the floor, cruelly grinding the glass shards into her back and legs.

“Your vitality is mine,” Esther hissed, sharp nails cutting into Caroline’s flesh. “Every drop of youth, every sliver of good health has abandoned you, dear.”

Caroline gasped as she was confronted by Esther’s true face, the one she’d carefully hidden from her until now. The deep wrinkles that once had marred her beauty were now barely more than a faint etching of lines. Caroline wondered if they’d be gone within the hour if Esther succeeded in her plans. “Not all of it,” she wheezed, fighting with everything she had to stay conscious.

In her arrogance, Esther made the mistake of leaning over her to gloat, the long chain of her talisman brushing against Caroline’s fingers. Despite her weakened grip, she still managed to yank it from Esther’s neck, letting out a gasp of surprise at how much better she suddenly felt.

She managed to toss Esther off of her, glancing up as Klaus yelled her name. He seemed to have recovered from whatever magic his mother has hurled at him. He still had the talisman they’d found in Caroline’s pocket, and seemed to summon that same invisible heat to sweep across the room and melt it down to a misshapen silver lump.

Caroline always had been a woman of reason, taking comfort in putting her faith in science. However, that initial shrieking wail of Esther’s helped solidify the theory that there was more going on in the universe than she knew. *Like witches.* She grabbed a heavy crystal vase from a small table, pleased to see she almost was back to full strength. *Screw science,* she inwardly thought, bringing it crashing down on top of Esther’s talisman.

“No,” Esther called out weakly, a loud crack like the sound of thunder echoing through her chambers and causing the mansion to violently shake. Her frail form was sprawled across the floor, dark eyes perfectly blank before finally closing.

In the heavy silence that followed, Caroline asked, “So, is she dead?” She rubbed her head tiredly, trying to understand how she’d landed herself in a situation where in less than five minutes she’s had to ask that same question twice. She swayed a bit, still unsteady on her feet. She was relieved when she felt Klaus’ hand in hers.

“You’re the professional, sweetheart,” he said dryly, his casual tone infuriating her to no end.
If she wasn’t still shaking from fright, she would’ve given him a proper eye-roll. Instead, she settled for numbly staring at Esther. *Who was a witch. Like Klaus.* “Right. Because my palliative care training prepared me for a life-sucking witch and her son who’s so hot he summons literal heat at will.”

“You think I’m hot,” Klaus asked in an absurdly pleased tone.

Caroline’s cheeks flushed at that, an indignant noise escaping her as she scoffed, “Seriously?! *That’s* what you want to talk about right now?”

He shrugged, flashing her a dimpled smirk. “I can multitask.”

When the doorbell rang, Caroline did her best to ignore her unease. The agency performed rigorous screening and background checks. *Their specific request would be respected.* In the days following the madness of learning that magic existed and nearly losing her life to her maybe-boyfriend’s literal evil witch of a mother, Caroline was proud of the way she’d pulled her shit together and notified the hospice administrators who’d in turn sent out additional medical staff to determine Esther’s condition.

The official diagnosis was that Esther had slipped into a coma, which was not uncommon given her rapidly deteriorating health. Her prognosis was grim — a persistent vegetative state with little chance of regaining consciousness. While Klaus gracefully had sidestepped subtle questions from the medical staff concerning do not resuscitate forms, he revealed to Caroline that there was a sense of urgency that she hadn’t considered.

Esther was a powerful witch and if she crossed over to the other side, she easily could find a way back into this world if given the right opportunity. That’s why she and Klaus were traveling to Esther’s homeland overseas to perform a complicated ritual to ensure that Esther’s spirit was unbound from the remains of the talismans, preventing her from resurrecting after she passed on.

Which is why they had arranged for a new hospice worker to stay on the property and watch over Esther while they were gone. If the agency found their insistence that they only send a retired worker, they kept it to themselves, and Caroline assumed that the Mikaelsons’ notoriety as wealthy eccentrics worked in their favor.

Caroline exchanged a glance with Klaus, her heart fluttering a bit when she recalled how just this morning he’d surprised her by revealing that they’d be staying in a centuries’-old chalet that had been in their family for generations. From his heated look, she knew he was thinking back to their conversation about the hidden mineral hot springs underneath a starry sky.

*And then the door opened to reveal a fresh-faced girl, cheeks flushed with the bloom of youth.*
Part 1 - Klaroline Fanfiction Week

Chapter Summary

Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 1 - All Human Fanfic and Day 2 - Dark Fanfic.

Part 2: Newsflash — seashell bras give me hives

Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 1 - All Human Fanfic Day. This is a follow-up to my work in A Beautiful Symmetry. Chapter 83: Part 10 - Klarosummer Bingo. Thanks for all of the asks and encouragement to write more from this world. Enjoy!

The fake pine scent coupled with musk overwhelmed her senses and made her gag. She blinked rapidly, realizing she was waking face-first on the couch. Fuck. It smelled like Damon had rubbed his Paco Rabanne-soaked ass all over it. “Easy sweetheart,” Klaus murmured unexpectedly from above.

She looked up, wincing at the bruises she could feel along the base of her skull. Klaus’ concerned face was a bit fuzzy as she tried to focus, but once she took in the severity of his own injuries, she snapped back to reality.

At least one black eye, cuts along his cheeks and forehead that looked suspiciously like the gaudy rings that bore the Salvatores’ family crest. “Klaus? Oh, my god — what did those bastards do to you?!”

“Nothing I don’t intend to return in kind,” he answered, the coldness of his voice making her shiver.

The Salvatores had first introduced Klaus as ‘new money business’, which Caroline had assumed meant that he was a high-level dealer, or maybe even a drug lord. She’d been careful around him, doing her best to check her curiosity whenever she saw him at the club, but she couldn’t help but wonder if he had information she could use. Especially now that it seemed the badge lying on the coffee table belonged to him.

She was pissed at him for keeping secrets, but realized she was being a hypocrite. After all, she’d weaseled her way into Salvatore Sirens, the mermaid-themed burlesque club, under false pretenses too. It was all Bonnie’s stupid fault — her loser boyfriend got in too deep with the Salvatores and couldn’t pay them back — so she begged Caroline to get a job there and spy on the Salvatores and get evidence of their drug trafficking.

All this time, she’d felt conflicted about her growing feelings for Klaus, worried about how to keep him out of this mess when she finally had evidence to take to the police. And it turned out that Klaus was the police. She nodded to his badge, her voice barely above a whisper as she said, “Of all the things I would’ve guessed about you, this was not one of them.”
“You wondered about me,” he asked in an oddly hopeful tone. “I wasn’t sure how much of what you’d shown me was real.” At her affronted expression, he hastily explained, “Not that I assumed anything untoward about you or your...assets. They’re lovely.” Gray eyes widened in horror as he quickly corrected his wandering gaze, adding, “I meant that you’re lovely! All of you, that is.”

She raised an eyebrow, not really sure what to say. Klaus rambled when he was nervous. And he wasn’t nearly as smooth as his drug lord persona he’d adopted for his undercover work. She liked this Klaus better. “You’re lovely as well.” With a teasing wink, she added, “All of you.” The throbbing of her head reminded her that this definitely was the wrong time to flirt. “Tell me you have a plan,” she muttered, careful to keep her voice low in case the Salvatores were watching them.

“All will be fine, Caroline. I promise.”

“Well, this is just awkward. Because I’m pretty sure nothing will be fine for either of you ever again,” Damon sneered, straddling a chair off to the side while Stefan creepily sat so close to Caroline he almost was in her lap. Both brothers had dark eyes, but it was Stefan’s that she found the most disturbing. They were perfectly blank — devoid of emotion — but yet they glittered with an eerie awareness. And right now, it was directed at her.

When Stefan began running his fingers along the top of her hand, she immediately tried to jerk it away, her flesh crawling from his touch. However, his grip was iron and she had no choice but to let him continue his silent exploration.

“Let go of her,” Klaus snarled, struggling to break free of his bonds.

Damon watched him struggle, an amused grin on his pale face as he said, “We’re going to play a game. I’ll ask you questions, and each time you lie, my brother with touch another part of Caroline he almost was in her lap. Both brothers had dark eyes, but it was Stefan’s that she found the most disturbing. They were perfectly blank — devoid of emotion — but yet they glittered with an eerie awareness. And right now, it was directed at her.

Caroline sucked in a gasp, looking away from Stefan’s blank stare as he continued to weirdly massage her knuckles. Fuck — why was he licking his lips?

Clearly noticing Stefan’s disconcerting behavior, Klaus ground out through clenched teeth, “What do you want to know?”

“Your badge says ‘narcotics’. So, what are you? Cop? DEA?”

“Narcotics agent. With the DEA,” He replied tersely. His steely gaze flicked over to Stefan, who paid him no mind as he continued to toy with Caroline’s hand, running a blunt nail across her cuticles. “I answered your question — let go of her,” he seethed.

Damon shook his head, dark eyes full of mirth as he taunted, “You answered one question. And Stefan is still only touching one of Caroline’s parts. We need to give him a freebie — trust me, you don’t want Stefan to have idle hands.”

She hated that she shivered at Damon’s threatening words, the weight of Stefan’s empty stare making her want to scream. Her thoughts raced at what Klaus had revealed. He wasn’t a local police officer — he worked at the federal level. This meant he was even more useful to her cause than she’d realized. Plus, it meant the Feds already were onto the Salvatores’ drug operation.
With a start, she remembered the tiny camera hidden among the gaudy pearls of her ridiculous seashell bra. She needed to make sure everything that happened here was caught on camera.

She subtly shifted, arching her back to get the best possible angle. She sat very still as she focused on Damon to ensure several frames were captured before moving onto Klaus, hoping she properly catalogued all of his injuries. It was when she turned her attention to Stefan that Damon called her out with a sharp laugh, “What’s with you pointing your tits at my brother? Yeah, your rack’s pretty awesome, but you’re one crazy bitch if you think it’s going to save you.”

“Leave her alone,” Klaus demanded, mercifully pulling focus away from her for the moment.

His face cleared as he nodded in agreement. “Right — back to my questions. So how long have the Feds been onto us and what evidence do you guys have?”

Stefan briefly looked away from her, seemingly interested in Klaus’ response, and she quickly considered her options. What could she use as a weapon? She couldn’t risk damaging the camera in her ridiculous bra and the sequins of her mermaid costume only would scrape skin, not break it. Her Salvatore Sirens’ outfit was just as useless as it was uncomfortable. As she shifted her hips, she jumped slightly at the press of the steel boning that was poking its way through a hole in the lining. Of course! She’d accidentally ripped a seam climbing out of the giant clamshell during her act, and there hadn’t been time to see the stage manager before she was expected to mingle with the crowd.

With a slight nudge of her free hand, she caressed the sharp tip of the metal, slowly inching it out of the small tear in the fabric. Once it was out, she hugged it tightly between her palm and her thigh, weighing her options. While she wished she could use it to cut through Klaus’ bonds, Stefan or Damon would stop her first. She had no choice — she’d need to injure Stefan before doing anything else. Feeling slightly queasy, she sucked in a breath and then took advantage of Stefan’s uncomfortably close proximity to lean into him just enough to hide her weapon. Her unexpected move distracted him and she managed to put all of her weight behind the first blow, jamming the rigid piece of metal into his neck. He immediately bellowed, instinctively grabbing at it to yank it out, spraying blood while Damon cursed and reached for her.

She barely avoided Damon’s clutches, shoving a still-screaming Stefan away from her to get to Klaus. However, Klaus surprised her by leaping to his feet, hands already free. He’d silently freed himself and had been biding his time. In a blinding burst of speed, he’d managed to strike down Damon with some sort of downward-slashing movement with his elbow, and delivered a powerful punch to Stefan’s jaw, causing him to crumple to the ground with a pitiful moan, his neck wound continuing to bleed.

A fine spray of blood had splattered across them both and the air stank of sweat; however, Caroline was certain she’d never been more turned on in her life as she stared in wonder at Klaus. Returning her heated gaze, he told her, “You jumped the gun a bit, but I do enjoy a woman who takes charge, love.”

Before she could reply, the room suddenly swarmed with agents who secured the Salvatores and began checking Caroline and Klaus’ injuries. He grimaced a bit when one of the agents poked a bit too hard at his ribs, but continued his debriefing, glancing over at Caroline to say, “While the Salvatores destroyed the bugs I’d planted in here, at least you’ll be able to corroborate what happened.”

Caroline nodded, blue eyes lighting up excitedly as she answered, “Plus, there’s my boob camera!”
From the quirk of his brow and flash of his dimples, it seemed Klaus was anxious to give her evidence a thorough examination.

Hands-Off Policy

Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 2 - Dark Fanfic Day.

Warning: Slight violence.

It was the sensual purr of flesh as it slid against suspended fabric that caught Klaus’ attention. His hybrid senses always alerted him to a number of subtle sounds beyond a mortal’s capabilities, and yet he found himself intrigued as he searched through the club lit only by synthetic torches along the walls for the source of the noise. When he flicked his gaze to the ceiling, his breath caught in his throat and he found he couldn’t look away from the stunning blonde that floated high overhead, seemingly fearless despite the very human heartbeat his hybrid hearing detected.

The glittering leotard outlined every sensual dip and curve, with iridescent feathers strategically placed in a manner that made his wolf claw at his skin in interest. She effortlessly looped a bare foot into the crimson aerial silk, twirling her beautifully sculpted body in dizzying circles as she hung upside-down. The crowd far below her let out a collective gasp as two other acrobats flung her several feet where she gracefully arched her back to capture the edge of the aerial silk behind her. He mindlessly clapped with the others, completely under the spell of the captivating creature.

“That blonde’s a choice piece of ass,” Tyler quipped, rudely interrupting his daydream of charming the blonde after he wrapped up his business meeting.

With an irritated grunt, he jerked his chin toward the signs perched at the center of each table. Red lettering warned, ‘Hands off the acrobats.’ While some might consider it more of a suggestion than a rule, Klaus was privy to the club owner’s dangerous reputation in select circles, and knew it was an edict one ignored at their own peril. “I suggest you mind your tongue around Enzo, mate. He has a strict, hands-off policy concerning his employees.”

His impertinent hybrid scoffed, puffing out his chest like a peacock, and Klaus allowed his hybrid gold to flare as a warning. “We’re here to discuss business. I won’t remind you again.” He began threading his way through the packed crowd, noting the throng of people outside still hoping to gain entrance. Lost Maggie’s was the most exciting venue to hit New Orleans in decades, and Enzo St. John had built an impressive reputation as an entrepreneur that served him well as he operated his criminal empire among the shadows. Klaus was displeased at having to involve a human with his request, but his supernatural contacts had failed to deliver results. And then were promptly beheaded. Klaus didn’t tolerate incompetence.

A hostess bedecked in crimson ribbons similar to the aerial silks overhead quickly
appeared, leading him to the VIP section discreetly tucked away from the crowd, where Enzo greeted him with a handshake and a glass of Macallan. His esteem for the underworld kingpin went up a notch as he took an appreciative sip of the golden whisky.

“Cheers, mate,” Enzo said, pouring another round for himself. He noted Tyler standing at Klaus’ back, surly and petulant as he surveyed the crowd. “Is your guard dog thirsty?”

Klaus grinned, appreciating the inside joke that Enzo was oblivious to. For all his powerful underworld connections, the fact that he was ignorant of the supernatural was incredibly amusing. “Tyler likes to stay sharp. I’m a bit surprised that someone in your line of work isn’t flanked by guards of your own.”

Taking another sip, Enzo flashed an enigmatic smile, replying, “I have all the muscle I need.”

Suddenly, a long crimson silk floated over their table, the stunning blonde acrobat soundlessly descended into an intricate flip and landed behind Enzo. She inclined her head respectfully at the crime boss, blue eyes sweeping over Klaus and Tyler as though carefully assessing them.

“This is Caroline.”

She was a luminescent shadow, gleaming blonde waves cascading over her costume’s iridescent feathers. He was intrigued to catch the edges of a tattoo emblazoned along her well-toned bicep, the girlish script somehow intimidating as it spelled out ‘loyalty’. *He vowed to learn the story she’d willingly had carved into her body.*

Clearly not intending for Klaus to interact with his bodyguard, Enzo directed the conversation back to business. “You’re here for information.”

“Katerina Petrova.”

Enzo nodded, his voice matter-of-fact as he said, “There’s a blood price on her head.”

“She betrayed my brother,” Klaus ground out, his anger sending a golden flare across his gaze.

Before Enzo could dictate his terms, Tyler unexpectedly reached out and grabbed Caroline’s ass, artlessly squeezing her flesh while leering at her. Klaus’ wolf rose to the surface, teeth gnashing at his hybrid’s crudeness. However, it seemed Caroline didn’t need his assistance as she took both him and his hybrid by surprise, effortlessly executing a combination throat punch-roundhouse kick maneuver. *That was a special forces technique.* Klaus became further enamored as he watched her slam Tyler’s hand on the table, pulling out a razor-sharp knife and cleanly slicing off his thumbnail.

As Caroline stood over the howling Tyler, Enzo coldly informed them, “We expect our customers to respect our hands-off policy regarding staff.”

*There was no mistaking the gleam of pleasure in her gaze as she watched the suffering hybrid clutch his bloody hand and Klaus could have sworn he felt himself fall a bit in love.*
Part 2 - Klaroline Fanfiction Week

Chapter Summary

A collection of random AU one-shots featuring Klaroline. Chapter 93: Part 2 -
Klaroline Fanfiction Week: Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 3 - Historical
Fanfic and Day 4 - Humor/Comedy Fanfic

Part 2: Treacherous and Self-Indulgent

Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 3 - Historical Fanfic Day. This is a follow-up to my work in A Beautiful Symmetry. Chapter 90: Part 3 – Klaroline AU Week. Thanks for all of the asks and encouragement to write more from this world. Enjoy!

Warning: Some sexytimes. :)

Flames raged across the slain oxen, making the pools of blood sizzle while the hides blackened and curled. Alaric’s body had been prepared with perfumed animal fat, sacred spices and honey. He’d been denied a true warrior’s battle as he’d succumbed to death in his bed rather than during glorious battle. Caroline barely contained her glee as she noted the absence of his cherished weapons and shield.

The mighty tribes that Caroline ruled had flooded the valley in an outpouring of solidarity, raising their torches to the night sky while the ancient death rites commenced. As Queen of the Brigantes, her sovereignty had been destined from birth and over the years, she’d increased her people’s territory through clever blood alliances and ruthless battle strategies. Her union with the dim-witted Alaric had been an important political alliance to strengthen ties with the Saltzman Mountain people. She’d had their allegiance for a time, but she’d foreseen a day when their changeable spirits would turn from her.

It often was said that Caroline was a brash, impulsive woman. But she could be patient. She’d bided her time, enduring the union with that repulsive old man for the sake of her people. However, when the Romans invaded, she saw her chance to further her ambitions. While her new Roman allies believed her assertion that the Iceni people had poisoned Alaric, it was clear that the Saltzman Mountain people disagreed. Their pointed absence from the burial ritual showed her that they knew the truth.

The curl of the flame along Alaric’s sagging jowls nearly matched the curl of her smile as she recalled the serving girl’s distressed scream upon finding his carcass bloated from the poisonous rare mushroom powder, discretely slipped into his wine. Niklaus caught her eye from across the pyre, the heat in his gaze almost rivaling the flames that charred her former husband’s flesh. Upon confessing to Niklaus the dark deeds she’d set in motion, she’d been elated to discover that her lover shared her thirst for violence and welcomed her clever scheming.

In the aftermath of her revelation, their coupling had been quite vigorous. She’d led him from her private river stronghold down to the hot springs. There was a giddiness to her step that
she’d only ever felt when they were together. From the way Niklaus eagerly had clawed at her back whispering lusty promises, he felt the same.

They littered the stone path to the springs with their garments, panting against each other’s lips as they descended into the delicious warmth of the water. She clenched his curls in her fist, holding him to her breasts as he lapped at her flesh. “Elskan mín,” she whispered, slipping into his mother tongue to call him her love. It fueled his ardor to hear her speak the languages of the Great Northern tribes.

He raised his head, a carnal gleam in his gaze as he hoarsely replied, “Kærasta,” his affectionate way of calling her his darling. She loved the feel of his hands molding her body to his, savoring every curve. She pushed him back against the limestone, eagerly straddling him. His kisses became desperate as he grabbed her hips, settling her more firmly against him.

She grasped his stiffening length between them, her strokes urgent as she craved his moans at her throat. He bucked against her, writhing under her clever fingers. The heat that surrounded them became too much to bear and she finally eased him inside, breathing in his familiar scent with a gasp.

He rutted his hips, moving her in a sensual rhythm that made her blood pound like she was riding into battle. The water churned and swirled around their thrashing bodies and she began to chase her pleasurable release. He worshipped her body like a man possessed, the press of him driving her to madness. Every touch, every whimper and moan passed between them, growing until their ecstasy washed over them.

As they floated together in the springs, passion gave way to peaceful contentment, and they finished making their plans.

The sharp crack of the flames pulled Caroline from the memory, reminding her of the unpleasantness still to come. Her spies had sent word that the Saltzman Mountain people were gathering their forces, planning to march against her. Just as she’d anticipated, the Romans had fallen in line and already positioned their forces to defend her territories. Once Alaric’s people were soundly defeated, she’d command the Roman army to sweep across the Iceni lands as well, claiming her enemy’s lands for her people.

Niklaus was careful to maintain a respectful distance across the pyre for appearance’s sake, and she anxiously awaited the day when she could cast aside her false mourning so that he could proudly stand at her side as a proper consort. However, she knew the Romans would support and even encourage their union after the traditional mourning period had passed. They would assume that such a union would bind Caroline to their cause, along with all the tribes she ruled.

However, Niklaus was the son of a powerful chieftain, and regardless of the alliance he’d struck with Romans, his loyalty always would belong to the Great Northern tribes who’d forged his body and spirit. Like the turbulent sea, the Romans’ rule would ebb and Caroline and Niklaus’ people would be free once more.

Caroline could be patient.

Part 2: The Ghoul Next Door
Written for Klaroline Fanfiction Week Day 4 - Humor/Comedy Fanfic Day. This is a follow-up to my work in A Beautiful Symmetry, Chapter 55: Part 1 – Klaroween Bingo. Thanks for all of the asks to write more from this world. Enjoy!

“I didn’t think it would be so big.”

“Surely you’ve handled bigger, love.”

“Yeah, but it’s been a while,” Caroline panted, feeling a slight twinge in her arms from holding the same position for so long. Coffins were heavier than she realized.

A chance meeting in the woods where two strangers happened to be burying their kills at the same time somehow led to inappropriate flirting and now Caroline was helping Klaus carry coffins into her house because he suggested they might prevent freezer burn better than the body bags she’d been using. And once they finished unloading the coffins, she fully intended to explore those heated glances the cocky Original kept sending her way.

Her skin felt too tight; a sure sign that it had been far too long since she’d taken a lover. Her people weren’t known for their gentleness, and she’d broken an inconvenient number of pelvises over the years before she finally gave up on humans and indulged in the carnal pleasures other supernatural creatures could offer. The Original Hybrid appeared to be quite sturdy, she inwardly thought, allowing her assessing gaze to trail over the powerful lines of his well-formed body.

She had just started visualizing the exquisite cabernet she’d pour for them — maybe set out some tangy gorgonzola-stuffed tonsils and put on some music — when a voice startled them both.

“Care!”

Temporarily forgetting they were ancient, powerful supernatural creatures, they both froze, the two coffins they were carrying awkwardly caught between them as they exchanged twin looks of panic.

Caroline put on an overly bright smile as she slightly turned to face Matt, one of her very human employees at the wine bar. “Matt! Hi! Umm, what are you doing here?”

“I brought over those oak-aged merlot cases the distributor had screwed up during last week’s supply run.” He ducked his head shyly, adding in an endearingly hopeful tone, “I knew you were stressed about it, so I picked them up myself rather than risking another late delivery.”

She was stunned. “You drove more than three hours to secure tomorrow night’s shipment? Wow, someone’s after a raise.”

“Someone’s after a bit more than a raise,” Klaus muttered, throwing a completely unnecessary glare at Matt.

The uncomfortable silence deepened, and Caroline followed Matt’s curious gaze and nearly dropped the coffins. “Oh! These are...umm...well, coffins, obviously,” she said, wincing at her high-pitched voice — like the screech of a freshly castrated ‘Nice Guy’. “And we’re using them to...” she trailed off helplessly, looking over the curved tops of the coffins to see if Klaus had any ideas.

Klaus quirked his eyebrow, an amused expression on his face, but otherwise seemed content to watch her flounder for an excuse. Asshat. And here she’d been planning on seducing
him with the fancy appetizers. *Now, he’d be lucky if she offered him a stale Funyun.*

“To...help decorate for some theme nights we’re doing at the wine bar,” she finally blurted out, hastily adding, “You know, like instead of Christmas in July, we’re hosting Halloween in...March,” she finished lamely.

As the weird silence stretched out, she finally nodded at Klaus, stupidly expecting him to say something helpful, but of course, he was content to just flash that dimpled smirk of his. Thinking fast, she continued with, “And there will be drink specials like ‘shrieks and shiraz’, and ‘merlot massacre’.”

Matt eagerly stepped forward to help her carry her end of the coffins. “Or how about ‘sauvignon boo’?”

After another uncomfortable silence, Klaus flatly said, “Well, clearly Caroline uses the gold standard in her hiring practices.”

“Yes, I do,” She quickly answered, giving Matt a reassuring smile. As the three of them managed to shuffle into the dining room, she said in an overly cheerful voice, “Okay, let’s just set these down over here and then we’re done!”

She hoped Matt didn’t notice the way she and Klaus instinctively relaxed as he started toward the door, and then immediately tensed when he stopped midway to ask, “Hey, mind if I use your bathroom first?”

“Sure,” she chirped, fervently hoping that she’d remembered to put away the floor sander she’d been using on her extra-curly toenails. *That one would be hard to explain.*

The moment he left them alone, Klaus asked in irritation, “Why can’t we just compel your idiot human?”

Caroline wildly waved her arms at him, hissing, “Keep your voice down! I put vervain in my employees’ drinks.” At his incredulous expression, she shrugged defensively. “What? I like to level the playing field for humans. It’s only fair since most of them have no idea what’s really out there.”

He crossed his arms in front of his chest, grumbling, “Or, you have a fondness for humans who are trying to get in your knickers.”

“Seriously?! That’s not even...that’s ridiculous...I mean, my people don’t even wear knickers.” She blushed at his intrigued expression, awkwardly explaining, “There’s umm...extra chafing that happens because our skin is very sensitive.”

It was clear from his sexy smirk that they’d be exploring her particular sensitivities soon, but then Matt’s uncertain voice interrupted as he called out, “Uh, Care?”

*He’s in the living room. Fuck! That’s where they put the other coffins and tested out some of the corpses to find the right fit.* She forced herself to move at a more human speed, grateful that Klaus did the same. As they rounded the corner, she felt panic start to sink in at the sight of Matt kneeling beside one of the corpses hanging halfway out of a coffin. Would he assume the bodies were part of the wine bar’s theme night decor?

Matt unexpectedly started poking a corpse, shuddering. “Wow, they’re really cold. What did you make the corpses out of? Frozen turkeys?”
“Among other things,” Klaus lied smoothly.

Caroline hurriedly explained, “Klaus is my...body expert.” At her hasty explanation, Klaus made a choking noise, looking ridiculously pleased with himself.

Matt nodded in understanding, picking up what appeared to be a bit of ear that had broken off when they moved the corpse from the freezer. He sniffed it, causing both Caroline and Klaus to recoil slightly. He helpfully told Klaus, “It still kinda smells like lunchmeat though, so you might want to rethink your ingredients.”
In the village long ago, Caroline loved Niklaus. But Rebekah refused to allow her brother to marry a woman of inferior birth as it would ruin her own chances for a favorable match...

Also, I’ve been re-editing and posting Conjuring a Heart – would love for you guys to check it out!

Warning: Angsty angst.

“It was a pleasure to burn.”
— Ray Bradbury, Fahrenheit 451

Late 1800s

“Won’t you share your fire?” Her delicate pink lips curved into a hopeful smile as Caroline waited for the man to answer.

He seemed speechless as he gazed up at her long blonde curls framing delicate features. She took advantage of her threadbare clothes, exaggerating shivers against the chill in the night air. “Please,” she asked anxiously, “I’m so very cold.”

“Of course, little lamb, please sit down,” he invited, removing his heavy wool coat and draping it around her shoulders as she sat on the edge of his rough blanket by the fire. “I’m Stefan. May I know your name?”

Caroline looked at him gratefully, nervously fiddling with the gold buttons on his coat. The heft and scrollwork underneath her fingers indicated a gentleman of means. “Caroline,” she shyly replied.

His brown eyes were warm in the firelight as he gently patted her hand, his tone dissolving into a gentle coo as he observed, “Such rough hands for a gentle lamb. Your beauty is being squandered as a farm maid; it’s a shame.”

“A shame,” she solemnly agreed.

So much in this world was a shame.
Late 10th century

The son of Mikael was staring again. Caroline felt the place between her shoulder blades itch as she stubbornly ignored the weight of Niklaus’ stare. Normally, she did the milking within the stalls, but the summer heat made the stone enclosures seem even more confining, and the malodorous smell made her retch. It hadn’t occurred to her that he would bother to follow her out here. Especially at the risk of muddying his fine vestments.

She rolled her eyes, recalling how she’d glimpsed his pristine garments just that morning on her way to fetch water, wondering if the luxurious fabrics were as soft as they appeared. Her own garments were stiff and scratched her skin no matter how many times she scrubbed them with strongest lye soap she could make.

“You know, love, it’s customary to greet a visitor. Or at least acknowledge their presence.”

Muttering under her breath, she let go of the teat, inwardly hoping the temperamental cow would kick this arrogant son of Mikael. She stood slowly, not wanting to spook the beast with sudden movements. “I bowed when I saw you this morning.” The way his dimpled smirk deepened at her irritated tone only vexed her further, and she couldn’t stop herself from adding, “And I waited patiently for you to move from the path so I could fetch the day’s water rather than beat you soundly with my buckets as I sorely desired.”

When Niklaus stiffened at her words, she felt a sliver of fear — her sharp tongue had earned her strong rebukes and the occasional lashing from Master Alaric, and he was merely a karl, a landowner. However, a son of Mikael, a jarl, was considerably more powerful as a noble, and could cause her great harm if he chose. He must have noticed the flicker of fear before she hastily lowered her gaze, because he murmured lowly, almost as though soothing a wild animal. “I mean you no harm, Caroline.”

“You know my name,” she blurted out in surprise. No one in the village bothered to learn her name. It had been a few years since her father’s passing, reducing their family to the life of bondsmen, working for Master Alaric until their debts were paid, and she’d resigned herself to this lonely existence, wondering if she’d ever feel like herself again.

“Of course I know the name of the girl who can cut with a single glance. Whose beautiful face reveals all before she ever speaks a word.” There was something akin to reverence in his voice as he spoke, and the sincerity she saw reflected in his gaze was something she’d never thought she’d see from a son of Mikael.

A huff of annoyance startled them both, and they turned to see Rebekah glaring at them. “You’ll bring shame to our family if father learns you’re sporting with this slave, Nik.”

Caroline sucked in a breath, hating how Rebekah’s hurtful words reminded her of her place. For a blissful moment, she’d let herself pretend that Niklaus could be an actual suitor, that she had found someone who would treat her with respect.

“Mind your manners, Bekah,” he said through clenched teeth, “Caroline is not a slave. She’s of the bondsmen whose freedom may be secured.”

Rebekah tossed back her thick plait, shrugging indifferently as she answered her brother. “Then you’re a fool to believe father will see a difference. I wonder what he’ll see as more disgraceful — the sordid company you keep or the fact that you’re late to the elders’ council meeting.”
Coloring at his sister’s taunt, Niklaus gave a brief nod to Caroline, telling her somberly, “My apologies, sweetheart. It appears I’m expected elsewhere at the moment.”

As Caroline watched the Mikaelsons depart, she attempted to ignore the way her chest burned. It was prudent to be reminded that she wasn’t permitted to care for a son of Mikael. And she wouldn’t care. Ever.

Except the son of Mikael was an obstinate man, clearly putting himself in her path at every turn until she had no choice but to acknowledge him. He was most vexing with that knowing smirk and arrogant insistence that he knew superior methods for her duties better than she. As though a son of Mikael would know the first thing about working the land.

*And then everything changed that day in the woods.*

She’d been scrounging for sturdy willow sticks to whisk cream into butter in preparation for the chieftain’s midsummer celebration. It was a days’-long feast that the noble families attended to curry favor with their people’s leader, dining on sumptuous meats and the finest selection of fruits, breads and cheeses in the surrounding villages. Caroline hated how Master Alaric would force her to stay in the shadows during these rare events, summoning her with a rude gesture to refill his mead and wipe off his greasy hands.

A soft groan caught her attention, and she clutched her small ax tightly, wary of dangerous outlaws who lived in the woods. She quietly crept behind a wide tree trunk, surprised to see Niklaus huddled there, soaked in sweat and coppery traces of blood worrying the air. As she knelt before him, her heart sank at the way he shrank from her touch. “Niklaus, are you ill,” she questioned, quickly removing her palm from his chest at his sharp cry of pain.

“Caroline,” he panted, his face flushed, but whether from pain or shame she could not say. “It’s nothing, a mere trifle.”

She frowned, refusing to leave him be when he obviously was in great pain. She tentatively lifted the hem of his tunic, her blue eyes widening when she realized that much of the spotting on the dark fabric was from blood trails rather than sweat. As the protests died in his throat, she continued her explorations, carefully removing the ruined fabric to examine the damage. His wounds had been torn rather than carved, and she recognized at once the work of an iron ring forged with a sharp spike that their people often wore in battle. “You took part in a raid,” she questioned, wondering if there were more wounded that needed tending.

“No,” Niklaus bit out, gray eyes lowered in shame. “This was a reminder of my place.”

“Your place,” Caroline said slowly, trying to understand what he meant. Master Alaric’s reminders of her place were swift and brutish; fortunately, she’d discovered the powdered yellow flowers that could be made into a healing salve. But she couldn’t imagine that a son of Mikael would feel the weight of an unforgiving hand as she often experienced.

Frowning as she realized some of his deeper gashes were still bleeding, she tore off strips of her stiff underdress, quickly binding them. “A patch of yarrow grows not too far from here. A quick poultice mixed with the red clay from the creek bed will help staunch the bleeding until we can get you back to Ayana for proper healing.”

He seemed taken aback by her words, his expression softening even as he shook with pain.
“Mikael,” he finally offered through clenched teeth. “My father does not tolerate defiance.”

She let out a small gasp of surprise. Mikael’s cruelty was common knowledge, but his temper in the village square only extended to servants and the slaves. To learn that he would turn his anger on his family, on Niklaus, was inconceivable. She tentatively brushed his chest, paying no mind to the streaks of blood as she placed her fingertips above his heart. “A child should never feel the sting of a father’s rebuke quite so harshly. You do not deserve such anger.”

The stricken look on Niklaus’ handsome face spoke volumes. Even though he was part of the esteemed jarls, he believed he was worthless. How he must suffer. “And you do not deserve you plight, love.” He impulsively leaned forward, pressing his lips to hers, a curious warmth spreading throughout her body as she surrendered to this impossible, gentle moment between them.

Caroline foolishly assumed that their brief encounter in the woods was an anomaly, and now that Niklaus had satisfied his curiosity about her, he’d bestow his affections to a maiden more befitting his station in their village. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Suddenly, he was everywhere — whispering outrageous compliments as she tended the vegetable gardens and murmuring promises as she fed the chickens. There’d been little joy in her life for so long; she relished their brief time together, cautiously allowing her heart to believe it might last. Sneaking off to the woods for feverish kisses, led to sharing secrets, then passionate confessions, until finally, a dangerous plan began to form.

Niklaus had been secreting away a store of silver coins along with parcels of dried meats, garments and weapons they could carry. They would head west, as far away from Mikael and Master Alaric as they dared to go, starting a new life together where they wouldn’t be shamed for their love. They thought themselves so clever, keeping their romance hidden, arrogant to believe that no one knew of their plans.

Caroline was at the river fetching water, exuberant to know that in another moon’s time, she and Niklaus would leave this place, never having to fear the wrath of his father or her master again. Completely lost in her pleasant daydreams, she didn’t hear the careful footsteps and rustling of skirts until it was too late. When the blow came, she fell to her knees, registering an angry flash of green eyes before she faded away.

She awakened to knotted leather cords cutting into her flesh. At first, she was confused by the complicated patterns that crisscrossed her arms and legs, but then she saw the distaff, a spiked tool her people used with spinning wool and flax and she understood.

“You practice seiðr,” she said harshly, only the widening of her blue eyes betraying her surprise to see Niklaus’ sister before her. A sorcery only a rare few among her people wielded, it was used to shape one’s own future. But when used with a bloodied distaff, it could bind another’s future.

Rebekah pushed away the hood of her lambskin cloak, her blonde hair a severe plait that cascaded down to her waist. “I’ve kept my secrets far better than you and my brother,” she harshly replied, scattering a handful of glass beads across the rotting tree stump between them. “My brother may overlook your inferior birth, but the rest of our family and our village will not. If Niklaus runs away with a slave, it will forever stain our reputation.” Her voice turned into a venomous hiss. “You will not harm my chances of a proper marriage.”

Caroline felt her heart beat wildly in her chest as she watched the furious woman pour blood
from a wooden chalice into a series of powerful symbols. Eyeing the sacred wheel of the sun symbol warily, she spat, “Whatever you do to me, Niklaus will know. He’ll find me and we’ll be together and there’s no sorcery that will stop us.”

“What will Niklaus know,” she asked in amusement, suddenly reaching forward to cruelly rip out a handful of Caroline’s hair. “You lost your way in the woods, and perhaps came across wolves. Many never return, and our village mourns them. And then they’re forgotten.” She tossed Caroline’s hair onto the blood-soaked tree stump, stirring it with the tip of the distaff.

Caroline’s head ached from losing so much hair, but the pain was dulled by her growing fear as she realized Rebekah was forging a spinning charm like the ones the Nornir use to measure fate. Niklaus’ sister chanted lowly, calling out to Freyja as she cast her curse. Caroline caught one word — huldra — and immediately cried out in horror. “No, please!” She couldn’t become such a monster. It was a creature of her people’s myths; a foul thing that dwelled in the forest and preyed on unsuspecting travelers.

Rebekah’s smile was a deadly blade, never once wavering even as she mercilessly stabbed her own palm with the distaff, letting the blood trickle down her arm. “You are reborn a huldra; your love for Niklaus dead and forgotten.”

_for decades, the only memory Caroline recalled was the searing fire of cursed symbols painted in drying blood upon her flesh._

Late 1800s

But Rebekah had been mistaken. Her magic wasn’t powerful enough to separate Caroline from herself forever. Caroline succumbed to her monster, relishing in the hunt as she tore apart those who strayed too far into the woods. _But every so often, there was a flash, a glimmer of a dimpled smirk and soft words._ And she tried with all her might to hang onto those pieces, not fully understanding their worth, but feeling they were important.

Eventually, Caroline reclaimed part of herself, willingly sharing her soul with her monster. _Her love for Niklaus. The vengeance she swore against Rebekah._ The unnatural world whispered and she listened, learning that Niklaus and his siblings were cursed into monsters as well, and they fled from the terrible wrath of Mikael to this day. _Originals_, the whispers trembled fearfully, but both the woman and the monster purred at the thought of her eventual reunion with Niklaus. She yearned to find her love and reveal Rebekah’s treachery. _She would find her love._

She studied Stefan in the firelight, the warmth of the flames echoed in his gaze as he unabashedly stared at her. Over the centuries, her monster had relished in the hunt, taking what it wanted, feeding an endless urge that could never be satisfied. However, as the woman within her slowly awakened, reclaiming the memories that had been stolen, she reached an uneasy truce with the beast who hid in her bones. _Punish the guilty._

Her monster sensed Stefan’s secrets. _The way his smile was a touch too sharp. How he reeked of death._ If she was a mortal, his monster would claim her screams. _But Caroline’s monster was stronger._ Not bothering to hide her cunning smile, she slid off his coat, seductively rising to her feet. She knew how to appeal to the predator that peered at her hungrily. “Come find me, Stefan,” she entreated, running off into the night.

She could feel the surge in his blood at the thrill of a merry chase, not bothering to hide his unnatural speed as he tore through the prickly underbrush and thick trees. Slipping into the crevice of a small cave, she began to sing softly, knowing the mossy stones would carry her voice
throughout the forest.

“Such spirit for a little lamb.”

When he grasped her by the waist and pulled her close, she allowed her features to grow frightened while he unsheathed sharp fangs and brandished them menacingly. As she stared at the delicate web of black veins underneath his eyes, she couldn’t help but wonder if this was the face Niklaus’ monster wore. *Except he would be more handsome,* she thought fiercely.

“You will be a fine meal. But first, I’ll indulge in a bit of sport,” he rasped, possessively running a hand along her neck.

“The stench of death surrounds you,” she observed, her calm voice confusing him. “No amount of blood will ever slake your thirst.” Before he could reply, she swiftly grasped his wrist, knowing he could feel the unexpected roughness of her flesh as her monster eagerly emerged. Stefan’s eyes widened in fear as she revealed her unnatural strength, and he choked on his blood as Caroline bent her head to feast.

Later, she would wipe her bloodied hands and lips on his discarded coat, warming herself at the fire before continuing her journey. She vowed to roam the earth however long it took to find her Niklaus.

*But her search often left her ravenous.* There was a fire in the distance that roused her curiosity, and her monster smiled in pleasure when she sensed the ruthless, vicious men who rested there, knowing they couldn’t resist a helpless maiden.

Caroline approached, asking them hopefully, “Won’t you share your fire?”
Chapter Summary

This is a sequel to Chapter 76: Part 3 - Klarosummer Bingo - Just Drive Until You See Water. The war between the vampires and witches has started up again in New Orleans. Caroline is fighting for her coven’s freedom and to save her fellow sister witch, Bonnie, while Klaus has stubbornly refused to pick a side.

Chapter Notes

Warning: Some sexytimes!

And thank you so much for supporting my writing; I was nominated for multiple KC Awards for this series!
- Best AU supernatural one-shot: Summer of Salvatore - Chapter 70
- Best AU human one-shot: Brewery weekend - Chapter 74
- Best smut one-shot: Rocinante Holiday - Chapter 87
- Best comedy one-shot: Shrieky Clean - Chapter 88
- Best one-shot series: A Beautiful Symmetry
- Best comedy author

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Pure human terror stank. It leeched from their pores in nauseating waves and made them almost unpalatable to all but the most famished of predators. Centuries ago, he bore witness to the permeating fear of humans in a hidden bayou just outside of New Orleans as they foolishly traded pieces of their souls to Bosou Koblaminin; their eyes turning empty and black once possessed. This violent voodoo loa often was invoked during times of war, imbuing those he deemed worthy with the power to defeat their enemies. He’d watched in fascination as the humans became mere shells the voodoo loa inhabited, the stench of their terror instantly melting away.

As Klaus stood among the jeering crowd of Marcel’s vampire army, he couldn’t help but think back to that night. Something felt off. He’d foolishly assumed that Caroline’s coven, no matter how carefully hidden, would give away their strategic positions because of the human body’s natural reaction to fear. Frowning, he reached out with his original hybrid senses, surprised to detect...nothing. They showed no fear.

Something had caused the witches to be unusually confident in this war. It was especially odd considering their dark history of servitude and often death under Marcel’s rule for the past decade. Not to mention the witch was only moments away from execution. For the hundredth time, Klaus questioned why he was here — the Bennett witch’s execution neither hindered nor helped his own cause. And yet you came.
Grumbling under his breath, he allowed his hybrid gold to bleed into his gaze, unable to lie to himself about his true purpose. There was a particularly vexing blonde who was determined to rescue her fellow sister witch even if it was against Marcel’s formidable army. Despite her stubborn refusal to acknowledge the connection they shared, he wouldn’t allow her to be harmed in this ill-advised battle.

Marcel’s cruel smile was all the signal his nightwalkers needed before a handful leapt into the binding circle where Bonnie was being held. However, before they could tear her to pieces, a wall of flame erupted, flinging the vampires around the courtyard. An unearthly shriek tore the air, and Klaus was startled to see Caroline emerge from a sinister red mist and decapitate two vampires with her nails. He wasn’t aware she could do that.

She tossed back her long blonde waves, leaving behind streaks of blood and gore that made his monster rumble in pleasure. “Did you pick a side yet,” she taunted him with blue eyes full of mirth, the dominance in her tone strangely arousing. Not bothering to wait for his reply, she turned to charge another vampire, her attack swift and brutal.

Klaus quickly broke the neck of a foolish nightwalker who attempted to challenge him, peering over the crumpled body to answer Caroline. “At the moment, I’m firmly on my side, sweetheart.” When another vampire lunged at the fierce little witch, Klaus plucked out the heart, offering it to Caroline with a dimpled smirk. “But there’s always room for a feisty blonde to join my side.”

She rolled her eyes at him, disappearing in that same peculiar red mist. He looked wildly around the courtyard of the abandoned hotel to find her, noting that despite the ferocity of Marcel’s nightwalker army, Caroline’s coven was faring quite well. In fact, the few that had been harmed seemed to have suffered only mild injuries while the vampires had been decimated. The few that still clung to life were broken, bloody shells that writhed at the witches’ feet. Given the age and nearly feral natures of Marcel’s nightwalkers, this was quite surprising. Caroline’s coven had been fortunate. Almost too fortunate.

A pained cry drew his attention, and he spied Marcel wrenching Bonnie’s neck to side, digging his fangs into her flesh. It was a waste of a perfectly good witch. And Caroline will be displeased. He flashed to the binding circle, stopping short when the foreboding red mist curled around Marcel’s incensed form. Bonnie was pushed out of Marcel’s clutches, and Caroline effortlessly lifted him off his feet, her nails digging into his throat as she raged, “You enslaved my people. And slaughtered us on a whim.”

“No,” Klaus interjected, delighting in the ferocity of his blonde witch’s gaze. “Marcel is still of use to me.”

Caroline increased the pressure of her grip; Marcel’s blood running down her forearm. She released him with a chuckle, playfully telling Klaus, “Play your games for now, hybrid. But remember — Marcel owes me a death.” She stroked Klaus’ jaw, favoring him with an impish wink as her fingers left smears of blood behind. Minx.

He shouldn’t have allowed his little blonde witch to distract him. He recognized the pull of old magic. Just like that night in the bayou centuries ago. The signs were all around him during the battle yesterday between the witches and the vampires — the fearlessness of the coven, their inexplicable ability to come out of the battle almost completely unscathed, and finally, Caroline’s unexpected powers. Clearly something had happened between the time he’d left her shop yesterday and when she’d supposedly gone to the bayou to gather burdock root before the battle. No burdock root protection spell could explain what he saw during the battle.
When Caroline opened the door, he expected her to slam it shut once again, but instead, her blue eyes lit up in excitement and she eagerly pulled him inside. “With rescuing Bonnie last night, I didn’t get a chance to properly thank you.”

“Thank me,” he asked in mild surprise, “given our ongoing amusing banter, this welcome was considerably warmer than I anticipated, love.”

She seductively ran her hand up his chest, making his blood thrum in anticipation. As she peeked at him coyly from underneath her lashes, he impatiently batted away the small voice that told him to remember why he was there. “I’m in the mood to celebrate. Join me?”

The crash of his lips to hers made his wolf growl; the desperate clutching at his back igniting those familiar flames between them. He’d been aching for this ever since that first night with her, and he fully intended to prove to her their connection. They stumbled into the living room, bumping against furniture with muffled laughter. With a devilish smirk, he toppled her to the cushioned ottoman, nibbling along her neck as she shivered beneath him.

Caroline impatiently pushed down her colorful lounge pants, sending him reeling when he realized she was bare underneath. With an appreciative eye, he growled, “Your pretty pussy trembles, sweetheart.”

She gracefully arched her body, sliding her calf along his side as she teased, “But can you make it tremble for you?”

“Challenge accepted.”

Hybrid gold flashed in his heated gaze as he shredded her flimsy tank top, capturing a rosy nipple between his teeth. He was a connoisseur of pleasurable pain, and he tempered his kisses with sharp fangs, pleased to hear Caroline’s frantic gasps of delight. He teased with his tongue, winding his witch up until she grabbed his blonde curls, her voice a harsh whisper as she commanded, “Bite. Now.”

Klaus groaned at the taste of her, fighting tenuous control as his greedy monster bellowed for more. She was exquisite, her essence flooding his senses until his entire world was this writhing blonde creature. She ground her core against him, and with a possessive growl, he pinned her hips using his hybrid strength as he delved into her heated center, overwhelmed once more by Caroline’s delectable taste. Deliciously warm and wet, his tongue worshipped her flesh as he drew out her moans. Her beautiful body tensed, and he eagerly rode her through an explosive orgasm.

The bucking of her hips had barely slowed when Klaus fumbled at his jeans excitedly, freeing his aching cock. Despite his intense need, he took his time to tease her, rubbing his leaking tip against quivering folds. The needy whine in her throat made his wolf howl and claw at his skin, and when he finally thrust home, they both sighed in relief.

He reveled in the press of her heels at his back, pulling his body further into hers with a covetous gleam in her eyes. Smooth, firm strokes ensured he touched every part of her, but soon their desire grew too powerful and their rutting was frantic as they gasped each other’s names. So enraptured, they hardly noticed when two of the legs snapped on the ottoman, shoving them to the floor. The new angle tilted her hips just so and he moaned at the sensual press of their flesh.

“Fuck,” Caroline hummed appreciatively in his ear, nails scratching down his back.

It was that sweet sting that made his blood hum, and he surged within her, letting his climax wash over him. Klaus reached down between them to toy with her clit, panting in his...
accented voice, “Your poor little button is so swollen.” He tweaked it until her thighs quaked, demanding, “Come for me.”

As they came down from their high, he felt a pang of regret as he recalled his purpose for being there. Caroline was very protective of her coven. *What he was about to accuse her of would not go over well.* “Love, there’s something I have to know.”

She lazily stretched, her voice a sexy purr as she curled into his side. “If it’s whether I’d like another orgasm, the answer is an enthusiastic yes.”

*Minx.* Klaus impatiently pushed down his monster that let out a pleased rumble at her blatant invitation. “Our world is a constant struggle to maintain balance. The slightest shift in power is undeniable; especially when you’ve attained a bit of age and know the signs.” With a sigh, he added, “Watching you and your coven during the battle, it’s obvious that power has shifted. Few things can move this the balance so dramatically, especially within a young witch.”

“Seriously?! Quit stalling and ask whatever it is you want to ask.”

Klaus narrowed his eyes, unable to keep the suspicion from his voice as he questioned, “What bargain did you make? What did you do, Caroline?”

Blue eyes suddenly turned empty and black. “What I had to,” she replied.

Before Klaus could respond, Caroline’s arm shot out, choking him. Sinister red mist swirled around him, pushing against his body with an insistence that was alarming. His last muddled thought was that he was the original hybrid and had nothing to fear from an upstart voodoo loa.

*And then his mind went as empty and black as his eyes.*
Artful Dodger

Chapter Summary

Caroline was just assigned her auction house’s most esteemed client. And now she has the unfortunate task of telling the cocky bastard his family heirloom is a forgery...

Chapter Notes

Author’s note: Thank you so much for supporting my writing; I won the following KC Awards!
• Best AU supernatural one-shot: Summer of Salvatore - Chapter 70 (in A Beautiful Symmetry)
• Best AU supernatural multi-chapter: Ghostly Secrets
• Best comedy multi-chapter: A Pregnant Pause
• Best one-shot series: A Beautiful Symmetry
• Best comedy author

Written for the fabulous Austennerdita2533 for Klaroline Gift Exchange — New Year's Day.

“Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken.”

— Jane Austen, Emma

I will not smash my magnifying glass over his head. I really need this job. Her grip on the handle tightened, knuckles turning white even as Caroline flashed Klaus a blinding smile and said in a saccharine-sweet voice, “While it’s always a pleasure to hear about your family’s extensive collection of 19th century artwork from the romanticism movement — again — that doesn’t necessarily mean that you’re an expert in authenticating historical paintings.”

Caroline recently had started her new job as senior appraiser for Maxfield Auction House, and Klaus Mikaelson was a valuable client always used to getting his way. The first time they spoke had been disastrous and none of their interactions since then had improved her opinion of him.

“Pardon me, sweetheart. Is Carol Lockwood in?”

Caroline had looked up from Tyler’s desk outside their director’s office where she’d stopped to leave him a quick note about her laptop constantly disconnecting from the network. “I
think she’s still in a meeting, but should be out just any time.” Woah. That jawline with those cheekbones should be illegal.

“No matter — I suspect you’re quite the lovely distraction in the interim.” Gray eyes twinkling, he smoothly reached out for her hand, planting a kiss on her open palm as he introduced himself. “Klaus Mikaelson — perhaps you’ve heard of me?”

“Of course, Mr. Mikaelson. How can I help you?”

“It must be quite the chore to constantly assist others,” he commiserated, glancing at the unkempt bills of lading stacked on Tyler’s desk.

Tyler was a terrible administrative assistant, but a devoted son, which apparently balanced out in Carol’s mind, Caroline silently thought. Blue eyes narrowed as she realized Klaus assumed she was the assistant. Based on what? Blonde hair? Boobs?

Apparently misinterpreting her irritated silence for interest, he purred, “I must admit, I have a weakness for assistants. Perhaps I can convince you to take a longer lunchbreak and I can demonstrate how I can ‘assist’ you?”

“I’m not sure Tyler’s your type, but I’m happy to put in a good word,” she said with a shark’s grin as Tyler and Carol emerged from the conference room.

Confusion gave way to awkward understanding on Klaus’ handsome face as Carol greeted Klaus. “Mr. Mikaelson, welcome! I see you’ve already met Caroline, our senior appraiser. She’ll be handling all of your family’s estate authentications from now on.”

“I suppose not. But my family has collected fine art for generations, and the sizeable fortune I’ve spent at your auction house grants me a certain level of experience, don’t you agree, love,” Klaus cheekily asked, pulling her from the irritating memory.

She took a breath, reminding herself to reign in her temper. For now, she needed this job, and insulting a frequent buyer and seller of rare pieces with Maxfield Auction House would definitely get her fired. “Fine. Beginner level,” she grumbled, using the remote to turn up the recessed halogen lighting overhead to properly illuminate the canvas. Gesturing toward the wooden framework on the underside, she explained, “And even a beginner would realize this canvas style is completely wrong for the 19th century.”

He raised an eyebrow, his tone a bit stiff as he questioned, “Off? It’s a Paul Delaroche, an exceptional classical history painter.”

“Celebrated for his melodramatic history scenes, I know,” Caroline replied, barely refraining from rolling her eyes. “Although many consider Daniel Maclise to produce more impactful historical themes, balancing a whimsical technique with the serious historical overtones.” She shook her head, realizing she was getting off track. “The point is a plain weave-style canvas was mostly used during this time period. As you can see from the magnified edges along here, this is finely woven linen, most likely flax. Whoever put this together went to a lot of trouble — the highest-quality flax is harvested in Western Europe and is obscenely expensive to import.”

His prolonged silence started to concern her — she knew how touchy rich people could get when it came to the provenance of their family heirlooms. There was a faint blush coloring his cheeks now, and she couldn’t help but admire those perfectly sculpted cheekbones. Too bad he was such an ass hat. “This piece has been a part of my family’s estate for years. Let’s table your theory about the canvas for now until your lab can thoroughly test the fibers. What were your other
findings?"

Caroline didn’t miss the obvious challenge in his tone. Did he seriously think she was going to just let this go? There was no way she’d risk her job or the auction’s reputation to sell this forgery just because their high-maintenance client demanded it. “For a high-profile piece like this one, our lab results will be cross-referenced with an independent lab’s findings. That will take an additional week, and the records will be made public,” she told him matter-of-factly, allowing a hint of warning to enter her voice in case Klaus thought he could take his forged art to another auction house to save face.

“And I will look forward to the results as they’ll alleviate any concerns among the experts,” he confidently said, a slight twitch of his mouth as though he realized how close she was to smacking the dimples off of his face with her magnifying glass.

Putting a hand on her hip, she replied, “There’s also the matter of technique — those familiar with Delaroche’s work know that he used encaustic mixtures — pigments combined with hot wax to create exceptionally smooth surfaces.”

He leaned forward, tilting his head until the light glinted off of his dirty blonde curls. There was a teasing lilt to his accented voice as he observed, “The surface looks smooth to me. And, if I’m not mistaken, was sealed with an encaustic mixture.”

Her fingers flexed as she briefly wondered what his close-cropped curls would feel like. Damn it. Focus. “Delaroche used beeswax. However, this work appears to have been sealed with paraffin, which didn’t come into common usage until decades after Delaroche would’ve painted this.”

Klaus turned his head in surprise, and she felt her skin grow warm underneath his obvious perusal. “Your attention to detail is impressive, sweetheart.” His dimples cut into his cheeks as he added, “At the risk of earning your ire once more, I suggest we withhold judgment until the lab results are complete.”

Caroline was startled to realize how close she’d gotten to him. Just a slight tilt of her jaw and she’d brush his cheek with her lips. She quickly put some space between them, irritated that he seemed amused by her reaction. Focus on your job; not self-entitled dimples. Scrambling for something to say, her eyes flicked back to the painting and said, “Delaroche certainly seemed fixated on Napoleon. This is one of two featuring Napoleon crossing the Alps. Plus, his well-known Napoleon Abdicated in Fontainbleau.”

“It’s to be expected — Napoleon was a complex man.”

She scoffed, “He was a power-hungry dictator.”

“He made his siblings monarchs of the countries he conquered,” Klaus challenged, casually leaning against her desk.

Damn it. She did not need to know how sexy he looked pressed against her office furniture. “Seriously?! Lucien Bonaparte abused his position as Minister to spread fake information to give Napoleon’s regime the appearance of legitimacy. And his idiot brother Jerome bankrupted his country by endlessly renovating the palace and appointing councilmen who were as inept as they were corrupt.”

“He had great passion for his wife, Josephine.”
“And then left her for a younger royal who could bear him a son. Plus, he threatened to kidnap his second wife when she refused to join him in exile. Some great passion,” she rebuked, feeling oddly energized (and more than a little turned on) from the verbal sparring with Klaus. He obviously was well educated, and it had been a long time since she’d been so entertained by a simple conversation. *It was a shame she didn’t have time to explore this spark between them. She had other responsibilities.* “We’re getting sidetracked. Let’s focus on the painting.”

“Now, that’s disappointing. I have a rather amusing anecdote about a reclusive baron who once convinced Napoleon to sell the territories that became known as the Louisiana Purchase. Of course, it was more for the baron’s benefit than Napoleon’s. You see, the baron had a particularly irksome baby brother who’d wagered him two castles that he couldn’t do it.”

Shaking her head at Klaus’ silly antics, she gestured toward the canvas once more. “Even if you set aside the more modern materials that point to a forgery, the brushstrokes are a clear indicator of someone else’s work. Delaroche’s brushwork favored clean, precise movements that give an impression of severity.”

“And these brushstrokes don’t convey that,” he asked, sounding oddly offended.

She bit her lip, not missing the way his eyes briefly darkened at the movement. “I’m sure whoever the forger was, they possessed enough talent to make a passable replica of Delaroche’s work. There’s just some out-of-place feathering and whorls along the edges that point to an amateur.”

There was a brief flash of something in his gaze, but whatever it was passed too quickly for her to register. Realizing that her raised voice may have carried down the hall, she put on her best customer service smile, hoping her boss wouldn’t think she’d offended their beloved client. “Obviously, the lab results will give us a definitive answer, so perhaps you’re right we should table further discussions of your Delaroche going to auction for now.”

Lowering her lashes, she added, “No one can deny your discerning taste.” At his curious expression, she shyly admitted, “I may have familiarized myself with the impressive pieces you’ve acquired from our auction house —Matisse’s *Odalisque couchée aux magnolias*, Picasso’s *Women of Algiers*, Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Flexible* — no doubt remarkable additions to what I assume is a very eclectic collection. *Not to mention outrageously expensive. But the return on investment would be astronomical — especially in certain ‘alternative’ markets.*

Klaus’ accented voice dipped lower, causing her to shiver pleasurably. “We should mark this momentous occasion, love — it’s the first compliment you’ve paid me.” With a seductive smirk, he asked, “Dare I press my luck and invite you home for a tour of my acquisitions? I suspect we’re kindred spirits when it comes to an appreciation of the arts.”

Caroline felt her pulse quicken. *Be professional. Remember why you’re here.* Fighting the blush that she could feel creeping up her neck, she adopted a businesslike tone as she said, “I’m flattered, but I don’t socialize with our clients. The auction house has certain expectations of its staff and I enjoy my position here.”

He looked thoughtful as he pushed off from her desk, hands clasped behind his back as he slyly replied, “Then it’s fortunate I was just on my way to meet with your director concerning some private appraisals I require immediately.” He kept his tone light as he tempted, “Did I mention that I happen to count among my possessions Maclise’s *Alfred the Saxon King*?”

She gasped, a giddy warmth flowing over her at the thought of getting to see the work of one of her favorite romantic historical artists. She gave him an indulgent smile, finding his
persistence charming. Stop it, Caroline. The job is what matters. “As long as you go through the proper channels and can get Carol’s approval, I’d love to see your collection.”

Velvet flocked wallpaper. Caroline was standing in a room larger than her apartment and it was drowning in gaudy, blood-red wallpaper that looked like Poe’s wet dream. Money really could buy everything except taste. “It’s a bit garish, but my older brother insisted we restore the estate to its original decor.” Klaus’ grin was peculiar, almost as though he was enjoying a private joke as he added, “we’re quite fond of originals.”

The brush of his fingertips as he handed her the crystal champagne flute was electric, and she quickly took a sip to hide her body’s inconvenient reaction. Delicious. The auction house’s celebrations only featured mid-range champagne; whatever Klaus had served her tasted like sun-ripened strawberries wrapped in silk. “Clearly,” she wryly commented, nodding her head at the millions of dollars of art displayed along the walls.

She crossed the room until she stood before Maclise’s Alfred the Saxon King, unable to muffle the appreciative sigh that escaped her as she gazed at the brilliant colors. “I attended the pre-bid viewing Maxfield Auction House hosted last spring and couldn’t tear my eyes away from this piece. I just stood there, letting the warmth of the crimson and copper brushstrokes settle over me. The idle chatter of the other attendees faded away until I swear I could hear Maclise’s feelings flowing through this work.”

At the stunned look on his handsome face, she was embarrassed and hastily told him, “That probably sounds stupid. I didn’t mean...actually, I don’t know what I meant. Certain pieces just resonate, you know?”

Klaus moved with an easy, confident grace that marked him as a man of both privilege and power. He set their champagne flutes on the antique sideboard and took her hands in his, grazing a thumb across her knuckles. “What extraordinary passion you have, sweetheart. You breathe new life into my collection and it feels as though I’m experiencing them for the first time.”

He tilted his curly head at the painting, whispering conspiratorially, “Actually, it was out of spite that I purchased this work. I was raised on a bitter father’s stories of how Alfred the Great was a cowardly ruler who bribed and bartered rather than properly waged war against the Viking invasion.” He winked at her, his tone impish as he revealed, “I always did enjoy overt displays of rebellion against my late father.”

**Being emotionally invested in centuries'-old history? Old money was so eccentric.** “It’s possibly Maclise’s most stunning achievements. I’m glad spite worked out so well for you,” she teased, handing him his glass and impulsively clinking the rims before taking another drink.

“Thus far, your private appraisal seems weighted in my favor. May I assume my collection is authentic then?”

With effort, Caroline tore her gaze away from that piercing stare of his, his closeness keeping her off-balance. “My cursory on-site examination indicates your pieces are authentic.” She lightly teased, “Although I spy a Klimt and a Cézanne over there that look a little shady.”

Gray eyes sparkled with mirth as he let out a surprised bark of laughter. “You are quite the firebrand, love.” He leaned in, his accented voice suddenly husky as he confessed, “Is it any wonder why I fancy you?”

Too stunned to reply, she let herself get swept up in the moment as he kissed her, a slow,
delicious flirtation with his lips that soothed her deep-rooted loneliness. It would be so easy to sink into his seduction, casting aside her worries...forgetting her mission. With a twinge of regret, she pulled back, impulsively kissing a dimpled cheek. “I wish we’d met under different circumstances.”

He sighed, “You’re awfully young to be so serious.”

She was wistful as she plucked his empty glass from his hand, busying herself across the room where he’d left the silver champagne bucket. “For now, I have to focus on the job.” She refilled their glasses, joining him in a final toast.

Caroline kept her face impassive as she watched Klaus finish the rest of his drink, waiting for the telltale drooping of his eyelids and long, even breathing that indicated the sleeping pill had taken effect. It had been a shame to drug such an expensive rosé, but she couldn’t very well have told Klaus to serve the cheap stuff. She felt a pang of regret as she saw him start to fall, and she quickly grabbed his torso to help him gently land on the enormous Persian rug.

She’d first seen Klaus Mikaelson at the auction house’s pre-bid viewing, but was careful not to draw his attention — yet. Maxfield Auction House had been on her radar for awhile, and she’d carefully maneuvered herself into the senior appraiser position, knowing a score this big would mean she’d be set for life. From her research, she’d learned that the Mikaelson estate had been patrons for years, buying and selling rare artwork for more money than several countries’ net worth.

She’d meant to quietly immerse herself into the auction house’s business, occasionally lifting a few lesser-valued items to get a feel for their security protocols, but then Klaus unexpectedly sought her out for appraisals, and then kept insisting she be brought in on all of his transactions with Maxfield Auction House. The Mikaelson account was too high-profile for Caroline’s initial strategy, so she’d had to come up with a new plan.

And then, like a total amateur, she caught feelings. On the surface, Klaus was exactly what he appeared to be — a rich, handsome, entitled asshat. But in her line of work, knowing how to read people was a crucial skillset, and it was clear that the face Klaus showed the world was only part of the story. She truly regretted that they hadn’t met under different circumstances. She heaved a forlorn sigh as she placed a gentle kiss to his relaxed forehead. Focus on the job.

The soft shuffle of footsteps as Caroline moved from the delicately woven textile of the rug to the maple floors was imperceptible to human ears — which is why Klaus knew the minute she’d moved across the room once more. He casually opened one eye, lazily observing how she was snatching the authentic pieces — like the Maclise — and not his forgeries — like the Klimt and Cézanne. Clever girl.

He first saw her at the Maxfield Auction House’s pre-bid viewing. Fresh from replenishing his hybrid army, he’d stopped by to indulge his artistic temperament and instead became instantly enthralled by the stunning blonde with a fierce gaze she couldn’t disguise no matter how hard she tried. She had the sensitive heart of an art lover and a thief’s calculating mind and he delighted in watching how she meticulously assessed security measures, escape routes and overall risk against the value of the pieces.

It was amusing how carefully she’d watched him, not wanting to draw his attention. Too late — he had no intention of letting such an enigmatic little human get away. There. That satisfied little smile tugging at the corners of her lips as she gazed in wonder at the Matisse. He committed it to memory, fully intending to capture it on canvas later. He wondered which of her lovely smiles
she’d give him when he showed her Matisse’s cottage he’d purchased in Cudillero, complete with the artist’s studio and its remarkable views of the Bay of Biscay left untouched along with several sketches he’d never made public.

Already planning their inevitable reunion, Klaus decided to give Caroline a generous head start. After all, she was the most intriguing little art thief he’d come across in centuries.

*What a merry chase this will be.*

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