What Lies Within
by Theemeadelis

Summary

*The Demons That Hide Within Us* - Part 2 of 3.

An "Originals" Fan Fiction Tale

****The Hollow is gone - for now - and a peaceful respite seems to have fallen over the city of New Orleans. That is until the new Biker Gang rolls into town, and the murder rate within the Quarter seems to rocket sky high. Is the new gang in town responsible for all of the blood-drained bodies that are showing up on every street corner. Or is there someone....something....more sinistar at work?****

TRIGGER WARNING - please take note of the tags associated with this story and proceed with caution.

Notes

Finally…. I have managed to get the sequel to The Evil Within started! Apologies for the loooong delay on this being delivered to you. Its been a very long & rough case of writers block, coupled with a complete lack of time to fit any writing in whatsoever. But here it now is – with the Prologue and 1st chapter up for grabs.

So a few points for folks who want to read this, to take note of:

• If you have not read the first installement of this tale – The Evil Within – I would strongly recommend reading that first. Otherwise a whole lot of this 2nd part will not make sense to
you.

• As per the Evil Within, this 2nd installement takes place after season 4 of the TV show "The Originals" left off. Yes, I know we now have Season 5 on our screens, but for the purposes of my fan-fic piece, imagine Season 5 doesn’t exist. And to be honest, a small part of me wishes it actually didn’t too, as I’ve not been a huge fan of what’s happened in it so far. But hey – that’s a gripe for another day :-(

• This second installement is darker – a lot darker. I make no apologies for this, as without the dark there can be no light. BUT – you have been warned! If it is solely fluff & happiness that you look for in a fanfic piece, then this tale is not going to be for you.

• TRIGGER WARNINGS – as per the above point, parts of this installment will be pretty grim. Right from the very start (prologue). So if you are easily triggered by scenes of violence (emotional & physical) and abuse, please do not read. Again, you have been warned!

• Taking all of the above into account – please persevere with me. There are still scenes of fluff and happiness in this installement too, and also keep in mind, this is eventually going to be a trilogy. And as they say, the good guys always win in the end….right?! Hehe.

Let me know your thoughts as always guys, comments are what keep us fan-fic writers motivated, and often help us shape the tone of the chapters to come too ;-

So, if you are still with me after all of that, all that’s left to say is….enjoy!
Livid dark clouds clustered together in the night sky, as a fierce storm cruelly enforced its domineering presence over the far outskirts of New Orleans. Torrential rain pounded down from the sky in thick sheets - its thick pregnant droplets bouncing high up off the barren waste-land floor as they violently connected with the ground like rapid gunfire bullets.

Thunder rumbled menacingly high above the horizon, with regular bolts of lightning dramatically cracking the midnight blue sky into two, as their electric shards crawled rapidly across thick clouds like spiders that had been disturbed out of their hidden nests.

The land that lay across the large Mississippi River on the southern outskirts of the great Big Easy, was for the most part a desolate barren wasteland - devoid of the numerous buildings and human clusters that could be found in abundance just a few miles north in the heart of the great city. Very few roads ran through the semi-desert terrain that spread out like a virulent disease from the great rivers edge, and even fewer of those roads actually led to anywhere that most rational, well-balanced humans would want to venture.

But the bulking figure that currently sped along at high speed on one of those well weathered desert trails, had lost what little sanity he had possessed many years ago – along with the small amount of humanity that he had originally be born with.

Water sprayed up high off the dirt track as two large wheels of a customized Harley Davidson roadster motorcycle cut through the viscous rain, like it was a mere illusion that filled the air around it. The notorious roar of the v-twin cylinder engines belonging to the classic bike was somewhat diminished as it competed with the load rumbling of thunder and the monotonous drumming of the storms heavy rain - but the power emitting from the feral ride still throbbed violently between the rider’s legs, as he threw back his helmet-free head and let out an exhilarated, euphoric laugh into the night.

Colborn lived for nights like this.

As the screaming howl of strong, bellowing winds assaulted his ears and unyielding rain battered against the scarred tough skin of his rugged face, the biker opened his beard covered mouth in a large wide smile and let the ionised water wash over his rough tongue and yellowing teeth. Anyone witnessing the sight may have claimed that the biker was attempting to cleanse his soul by letting the falling water completely wash away all of the day’s anger and stress – leaving behind only a purified version of his usual self.

But for Colborn, the night’s storm was having the complete opposite effect on his slightly overweight, bulky frame. He could feel the raw power of the turbulent thunder, and the fierce rapid fire of the rain hitting his skin, filling his very essence with the only human emotion that he would ever let rush through his body. The one feeling that he strived to cultivate and harvest on a near daily basis - passionate about its presence running through his veins.

Hate.
The biker let the storm’s hate completely submerge him in its hostile embrace as he raced along the barren wasteland – the power of the steed between his legs arousing more than just a lust for speed deep within.

Eventually, and not without some resentment, Colborn began to reign in the hurried advance of his motorised ride, as a building shaped silhouette slowly started to come into view on the desolate land’s horizon. From a distance, the lone structure on the otherwise blank desert canvas would appear to the average naked eye as a run down and derelict edifice that had somehow survived from a time long ago forgotten. One which could be easily overlooked and ignored should strangers accidently find themselves lost all the way out here in the middle of nowhere.

But not to the storm-battered burly framed biker, who pointed his motorcycle in the old building’s direction, steering it off the rough dirt track and onto the even bumpier rocky desert terrain.

Rocks and sodden dirt kicked up and sprayed into the rain filled air in the wake of the motorcycles advance, as it blazed a trail across the uneven landscape being battered by the fierce storm. Only when the numerous other motorcycles lined up outside of the wooden structure came into focus, did Colborn begin to cut power to his mount’s wheels - bringing the bike to an eventual stop outside of the entrance to the rain-soaked building.

Slowly removing the keys from the ignition slot on his ride, Colborn lifted his face up to the raging night sky, and let the thick droplets of rain roughly fire down onto his naked face – relishing the quick sting of pain each one of the water beads inflicted onto his flesh.

Whilst most humans and animals alike tended to shy away from the more aggressive and violent tendencies of mother-nature’s unpredictable will, Colborn had always rushed towards storms and hurricanes, eager to embrace the raw and dangerous power contained within them. He never felt more alive than when he was riding out in the midst of gale force winds, manically chasing the powerful cores at the centre of the natural tempests, on his two wheeled speed machine.

Which is what the biker had been doing that very evening, before he had felt the unmistakable call of his brethren – demanding his presence back amongst them.

_Damned blood bond, commanding his unquestioning loyalty and compliance. Oh, what he wouldn’t give to be able to rip that part of his black, rotting heart out, and finally be free to rain down his own brand of havoc onto the world._

As if his perfidious thoughts had not only been sensed, but correctly deciphered into the disobedient desire they represented - Colborn felt a ripple of pain rush through his veins as the presence of a commanding word took form within his mind.

_“Now!”_ 

The biker’s top lip curled into a snarl over rotting teeth, as he shook his head in a futile attempt to rid himself of the unwanted wave of submission that was now demanding the compliance of his muscles. He knew it was useless to fight against the all-consuming power of the blood bond - but it didn’t stop him trying each time he felt the power exerting its dominance over his actions. “A futile waste of energy”, the other Jarls would often remind Colborn when he would let out a tell-tale pained growl of frustration that often associated itself with his attempt to go against the will of the bond.

Not that it ever stopped him trying.

_And not that it would ever stop him trying either, until the day he either claimed his own will back,
or his unnaturally long life finally came to its overdue end.

Another wave of discomfort coursed through his body, this time accumulating with a sharp, agonising jolt in his head - forcing an involuntary cry of distress to leave his cracked lips.

Huffing out a hot breath of resignation, the biker tucked the Harley’s ignition keys into one of the many pockets adorning his well-worn leather jacket, and swung his leg over the bike’s frame to come to a stand in front of the old building’s entrance. Despite the constant roar of rain lashing down from sky above, garish brash music could be heard emitting from within the large wooden structure, mixed in harshly with waves of raucous laughter and boisterous shouting.

Also competing to be heard above the booming timbre of the evening’s storm was the resonating electrical pulse vibrating out from the garishly bright neon sign that hung over the establishment’s doorway. The bright red illumination provided by the flickering name, highlighted a tight-lipped smile that formed upon Colborn’s face, as he processed the familiar sounds that radiated out from Baracuda – the Clan’s less than welcoming place of dwelling.

Despite his hatred of the blood-bonds hold upon his rotting soul, the biker still always felt a sense of belonging each time he returned back to this estranged drinking establishment out in the middle of the Mississippi waste-lands. It was - he guessed - the closest thing to a home that any of the original Clan members had had in many, many years.

Running a large calloused hand through his soaking long black hair, the biker stepped up to the bars entrance and shoved the door open with far more force than was necessary. A gust of hot, sweat filled air instantly rushed out from inside of the bar to assault Colburn’s nose, as the previously muffled music and shouting increased in volume tenfold. From his current position standing upon the establishment’s threshold, the biker could see that the place was already heaving in capacity, full of gang members drunkenly enjoying their Saturday evenings merriment whilst having their fill of beer and liquor. An air of violence also twirled and danced in the atmosphere of the saloon - Colborn almost being able to taste its promise of carnage and destruction that could at any moment be unleashed by the many drunken patrons littering the room.

It made the blood running through his veins hum slightly with engorged anticipation and excitement.

Slamming the entrance door behind him to regretfully cut off the raging storm outside, the biker steadily made his way into the large open-plan saloon, weaving in and out of the numerous occupied tables and chairs that littered Baracuda’s floor. Though the room was only dimly lit by a few sparse light-fittings dotted here and there, Colburn confidently made his way without any hindrance to the bar situated at the centre of the lively establishment, having walked the same path countless times before. As he reached the busy serving station, the robust biker wasted no time in gruffly shoving aside another bearded man who had been stood leaning against the wooden bar and chatting animatedly to the bartender on the other side of the structure.

After quickly regaining his balance, the offended gang member whipped his body around to face his assailant, and sought to grab Colborn by the lapels of his soaked leather jacket - only to come face-to-face with fierce livid eyes that burnt bright with a fiery red hue. A deep threatening growl emitted from Colborn’s throat, as the expression on the face of the drunken gang member holding onto his jacket rapidly switched from anger, to grim recognition.

Quickly dropping his hands away from the bikers clothing, the smaller man attempted to back up a pace or two, only to collide into another reveller who was also stood at the bar, waiting to order his next drink.
“I… I’m sorry Jarl Colborn… I did not realise it was you. Please, forgive my ignorance.”

Colborn snarled and flashed his rotting teeth at the retreating gang member, before turning his attention towards the man behind the bar, who was stood watching the brief exchange with a look of somewhat bored indifference lounging upon his face.

The biker’s eyes slowly bled back into their usual murky brown colour, as he nodded a terse greeting to Baracuda’s manager.

“You’re late Colborn - Halvar is likely to have your pink slips for missing the start of the ceremony. You know its significance!”

The burly biker huffed to himself in response to the bar manager’s words, before replying in the deep tones of his harsh gravelly voice.

“I’d have the self-important fools head on a spike should he so much as look at my bike wrongly… Jarl leader or not! Now pour me a damn beer man, before I run your head through this pathetic excuse of a bar-top.”

The bar manager scowled at Colborn as he shook his head lightly in annoyance - but still moved to pour the biker his beer. The overweight man in front of him might have been the clan Jarl that he loathed the most, but he knew his place when it came to the power struggles that constantly raged within the biker gang.

Colborn was one of the clan’s seven Jarls – and no one in their right mind messed with them. Certainly not if they wanted to live to tell the tale.

The manager placed a freshly poured tanker of ale down on the wooden bar-top and watched as Colborn instantly snatched it up, draining its contents whole in a few loud gulps. As the biker slammed the now empty container back down onto the wood, and roughly wiped a sleeve of his leather jacket across the froth coated beard surrounding his mouth, he jerked his head towards the rear of the room - indicating a small wooden door that was set into the wall there.

“The others all gathered in the catacombs?”

“Yes, your brothers all descended into the sanctuary just over an hour ago. Just after the woman arrived.” A slight condescending sneer formed on the supervisor’s lips as he continued. “I imagine they await you with bated breath, Jarl Colborn.”

Colborn dropped his head slightly and glowered at the bar manager through thick bushy eyebrows, as he silently admonished the insubordinate gang member for the tone of insolence that laced voice. The arrogant manager may have won Halvar’s approval throughout the years for his longstanding service to the clan, but Colborn still fancied the idea of ripping the man’s tongue out of his foul-smelling mouth later that evening - once the impending ceremony was over of course.

Sniffing up loudly through his nostrils, Colborn spat out a large goblet of green tinged phlegm onto the wooden bar-top that separated him from the bar manager - narrowly missing the man’s hand as it closed around the empty beer tankard to clear it away. The biker grinned cruelly he watched the manager pull back his lips in disgust, before he turned and began to make his way across the tavern towards the far cellar door.

As he drew closer to his destination, Colborn’s eyes flicked over to the large, 1950’s retro-style Juke Box that stood off to the right of Baracuda’s basement entrance, propped up against the rooms back wall. The unforgiving tones of a heavy metal song blared out from wide speakers that lined
the sides of the colourful machine, managing to completely fill the large saloon with its disjointed harsh rhythm.

It wasn’t however the choice of song emitting out from the Juke Box that caused a menacing grin to slither across Colborn’s weathered face, as he drew closer to the back of the tavern. But more so the two individuals that were currently pressed up against the machine, obscuring the view of the contraption’s neon lit façade.

A young blonde-haired woman, who Colborn guessed from first impressions could be no older than eighteen years in age, currently had her face forcefully squashed down against the glass covering the front of the Juke Box, by a large scarred hand that was holding her head in place. The biker could just see from the angle at which he stood that the woman’s skirt had been hitched up around her waist, exposing the bare skin of her rear as a second marred hand brutally gripped onto the flesh of her right hip. The Juke box itself rocked back and forth, pitching slightly off the floor as one of the gangs many members repeatedly thrusted himself up against the crying woman’s bent over form - his own leather pants and underwear scrunched down haphazardly around his hair covered ankles.

Colborn inhaled deeply, drawing in the musky scent of sex that rose up from between the two figures, as he clapped a rough hand briefly onto the shoulder of the occupied male as he passed by.

“Make sure to save me some!”

No reply reached his ears over the discordant shrill of music filling the tavern, other than the continued sobs of the distressed young woman, which were being punctuated with each thrust of flesh against her own.

Colborn sneered to himself, as he reached the wooden cellar door and pulled it open.

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2.

“Fire Immortals, deres blod kombinert. Fusjonert sammen, deres kraft guddommelige!”

Halvar kept his eyes steadily fixed on the ceremonial slab directly in front of him, as the words of Balder – the clans only practicing Gothi – infused the air around him with a hypnotizing power. As the tongue of their native land flowed out of his fellow Jarl’s mouth, the clan leader found himself filling with an increased sense of purpose and determination. The incantation being recited reminded him of just how long they had all waited for this moment, and how important it was that this final attempt of resurrection did not fail.

Surely this was it - this was finally the moment that their lord would return to them. Nothing could stop the resurrection this time!

He focused his gaze intently upon the desiccated body of his lord and master, as it lay sprawled motionless on a large concrete altar situated in the middle of the spacious cellar, deep beneath the main building of Baracuda bar.

He and four of his clan brothers stood forming a loose circle around the cold grey slab, as Balder continued with his preparation of blood over in the far-right side of the room. Out of the corner of
his eye, Halvar could see that the clan’s Gothi was hunched over a small apothecary desk as he carefully poured the contents of a small glass tumbler into that of a larger, old metal tankard. Numerous jars and test-tubes littered the surface of the well-worn wooden table, most of which contained various colourful potions and solutions of the Gothi’s own making. Those assorted containers however, were currently being ignored by Balder as his attention was fixed solely on the four glass beakers of blood placed directly in front of him, and the medieval stein into which he was pouring their contents into as he chanted out loud.

“Fire Immortals, deres blod kombinert. Fusjonert sammen, deres kraft guddommelige!”

As Balder’s incantation continued to resound around the room, Halvar could also feel the presence of the brooding woman, as she stood with her back leaning against the wall directly behind him. He did not need to turn and lay eyes on her to know that her face, currently shadowed beneath the dark hood of a jacket, would be fixed into a hard and unforgiving scowl as she watched the Jarls’ perform their resurrection ritual. He could practically feel the hate radiating off the girl’s tall frame, as it formed an almost tangible wave of obsidian power that pulsed out from the woman’s core – what was left of her shattered free will desperate to put an end to each of the 6 brothers currently gathered in Baracuda’s cellar.

Not that it bothered him of course – the disgust and loathing that he detected flowing off the woman in droves. Halvar knew without any shadow of a doubt that she would make no move to try and stop the ritual that the Jarls’ were performing. Nor would she act upon the deep rooted, aggressive desire that he also knew coursed through her, to eviscerate each of the men that she currently stood watching with hardened eyes.

*Her hands were tied so to speak – figuratively, if no longer physically*

“It is done!”

Balder’s voice abruptly dragged the clan leader out of his thoughts, as each of the Jarls’ quickly turned their gaze away from the shrivelled body lying on the concrete slab, to focus on their Gothi brother who turned towards them as he held out a full goblet of blood in front of his person. Halvar could see that the hands clasping the ancient container were holding it in a particularly delicate and gentle grip – providing a stark contrast of image to the hard faced, muscular man to which the hands belonged. The clan leader would have let out a hearty laugh at the sight of the seasoned biker practically tip-toing across the cellar towards them, had the seriousness of their current situation not have weighed so heavily on his being.

Just as the circle of Jarls shuffled their stance to allow Balder to take up his position at the head of the concrete altar, a loud clattering sound vibrated through the cellar, as something heavy collided into the other-side of the closed wooden door leading back up to the taverns main room.

A quick succession of muffled, yet colourful swear words diffused their way through the wooden barrier, reaching their ears just before the door was unceremoniously thrown open – giving way to a very angry looking, and very late, Colborn.

Halvar’s eyes narrowed of their own accord, as they focused on the dishevelled form of his tardy brother – quickly taking in the appearance his sodden clothes and dirt laced leather boots, as the Jarl began to shuffle ungracefully into the basement room.

*The damn idiot had clearly been out on his bike indulging in the nights storm again, instead of staying close to the clans haunt, like he had instructed the insufferable fool to do*

As he closed his eyes briefly to try and rein in his frustration and anger at the actions of the
unpredictable Jarl, Halvar could feel the woman behind him tense – all of her muscles having gone rigid the second that Colborn had flung open the cellar’s wooden door.

*At least the overweight buffoon was effective at something!*

Halvar’s eyes remained closed, as he spoke to his brother with an agitated sigh.

“Good of you to finally grace us with your presence, Jarl Colburn.”

His eyes opened and fixed with simmering anger onto the burly biker - who was currently in the process of shoving himself brusquely between two of his brethren circled around the stone altar.

“Decided that the return of our great Lord was something that was worth your precious time after all?!”

Colborn’s attention fixed onto the desiccated body lying on the concrete slab in front of them all, refusing to grace the clan leader with the courtesy of looking at him when he responded.

“Don’t get your damn girly panties into a twist Halvar! I’m here now aren’t I?!”

Halvar could feel the anger that swirled aggressively within his body begin to push itself up, causing his neck and cheeks to flush slightly with a hint of colour. That however, was the only physical sign he would allow to betray the distaste that he felt towards the insubordinate biker he had to call brother. The clan leader knew that now was not the time for resuming their age long squabble about respect and obedience.

*This night – this glorious, magnificent night – belonged to their Lord and Master. And nothing could be allowed to distract from that fact!*

As he quickly shook his head to dismiss the matter until a later time, Halvar noticed Colborn’s attention flick over to the woman still stood leaning silently against the wall behind him. A cruel and malicious smirk pulled at the biker’s lips, as he gave the girl a quick once over with sin filled eyes, before speaking to her.

“Miss me, sweetheart?!”

A few of the other Jarl’s let out throaty laugh’s in response to their brother’s taunt, causing the leer on Colborn’s face to widen even further as his eyes remained on the tense woman.

“Enough!”

Halvar’s voice rose to a level just loud enough to ensure finality of his command could not be mistaken, as he felt the ancient power of the blood-bond suddenly flare up within him.

“We have wasted enough time over the ages waiting for this moment. There will be no further delay!”

Each of the Jarl’s quickly cowed their heads, the smiles instantly wiping clean off their faces - a move that signalled complete submission to the clan leader’s authority. Even Colborn’s eyes left the woman, and dropped to fix upon a point somewhere on the cold ground beneath him – the assertive will of the blood-bond far too powerful to be denied by any of them.

Pausing for a split-second to ensure that each of his brethren was once again focused, Halvar’s eyes fixed back upon Balder, as he spoke to the Gothi.
“Brother, please…. continue.”

The Gothi nodded his head curtly, before bringing the blood filled tankard in his hands to rest just above the withered lips of the body lay in front of them all. Clearing his throat quietly, the Jarl let his eyes slowly close and encouraged the final words of the ancient incantation to flow out from within him.

“Med dette blodet fornyer vi essensen, omfavner det nå og reiser seg igjen blant oss!”

Halvar watched as Balder opened his eyes once more, and slowly – carefully – removed one hand from around the metal container, using it to gently prise open the dry and arid mouth of their desiccated lord.

Complete silence filled the room, as all seven Jarls that surrounded the altar stood completely still and unmoving - waiting with baited breath for any sign that the administered blood would have the desired effect on their lord.

As his eyes swept searchingly up-and-down over the body on the altar, a small part of Halvar’s mind registered that even the woman behind him seemed to have held onto the last breath she had taken – watching and listening almost as intently as his male brethren.

Thirty seconds passed….

Sixty…..

As their wait approached that of the two minute mark, the silence in the room began to falter, as a few of the Jarls started to become restless. Halvar saw anxious looks appearing on more than one of his men’s faces, as the absolute stillness of the body in front of them continued.

Unsurprisingly, Colborn was the first to break rank.

“What the fuck Balder! I thought you said it would work this time?!”

The burly Jarl’s face twisted into anger, as the words left his mouth and he flashed an accusing gaze in Balder’s direction.

“It….It should have worked. This was definitely...definitely the key to breaking our Lord’s imprisonment. I’ve followed the instructions that were written on the Tome to the letter”, the Gothi stammered, his eyes growing wider in puzzlement as the seconds continued to tick by without any change to the desiccated body they surrounded. “The goblet that had wet the lips of Hel. The energy of nature’s wrath. The blood of the first-born Immortals.”

Balder turned his head quickly to lock eyes with Halvar, his expression one of nervous confusion.

“I swear to you Halvar, all the pieces of the puzzle are present and correct. It should have worked!”

The clan leader barely had time to open his mouth to formulate a reply, before Colborn’s gravelly voice filled the room.

“But what if they weren’t?!?”

All eyes locked on to the bearded biker, as he broke the group’s formation and slowly began to stalk towards the woman stood at the back of the room.

“What if the little bitch here has deceived us? Made us think that she was fulfilling her purpose,
when she was in fact cooking up a scheme to make our plight fail?!”

Halvar watched varying expressions of anger develop on his brother’s faces, as they processed what Colborn had insinuated. A few others moved to join the hot-headed Jarl, as he stalked slowly towards the woman, who, Halvar noted, seemed to be pressing her back up against the unyielding wall with increasing force. The clan leader could not see what expression was currently on her face thanks to the hood that she wore pulled down low. But he could practically smell the fear that was now radiating off her in thick, palpable waves.

“Ohhh little girl – by the time I am through with you, you will be begging for me to end your life!”

Colborn’s eyes bled into fierce orbs of swirling reds and black, as he drew nearer to the cowering woman.

Halvar let out a long, frustrated sigh.

“Colborn, by the God’s! Get your sorry excuse for a Jarl’s ass back in formation! There is no way that she could have betrayed us, and you know it! She is…..”

The clan leader’s admonishing was cut short by Balder, who suddenly let out a choked cry of surprise.

“Halvar….look!”

Every set of eyes in the room quickly turned to where the Gothi was pointing - his outstretched hand shaking slightly in the flickering candle light that illuminated the cellar.

The arms of the desiccated corpse that had been lying motionless on the concrete altar, were slowly moving upwards - as the figure brought them towards what remained of its shrivelled face. Halvar’s eyes quickly widened in anticipation, as he watched the dehydrated muscles covering the bones on his lord’s hands slowly start to increase in mass, beginning to flesh out a little as they moved.

It had worked. After all these years, the damn Gothi had finally done it!

All seven Jarl’s quickly crowded back around the stone slab and fixed their gaze upon the face of their Lord, which was now covered by the body’s own hands.

Halvar drew in a deep breath as he cleared his throat and almost whispered out the words that had gathered expectantly in his mouth.

“My Lord? Can you hear me?”

A strange noise began to softly emit from beneath the body’s hands - one which Halvar best likened to that of bubbles being blown rapidly into water. He chanced a quick glance up from his Lord to the observe the faces of the other Jarl’s gathered around - all of whom had a mixture of anticipation and what appeared to be worry painted onto their features.

Dropping his eyes back down to the altar, Halvar made to repeat his initial question.

“My Lord? Can….”

The clan leader was abruptly cut off by the sudden jolt upwards of the shrivelled bodies torso, as its fleshing out hands flew away from its face and gripped tightly onto either side of the concrete altar. Before any of the occupents in the room had time to react to the movement, the dried lips on
the body’s face parted wide, and emitted a deep and very loud hollar into the basement.

“RAAAAARH!”

Halvar barely had chance to register the expressions on his surrounding brethren’s faces mirroring his own in wide-eyed shock, before each one of them was vehemently pulled to the ground into a kneeling position - forced there by the unmistakable oppression of the blood-bond that thrived within their bodies.

Their lord, had returned.

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“Keelin?!”

Freya awoke from her deep slumber with a start – bolting upright into a sitting position as the ghost of her lover’s name escaped from her lips and spirited across the dark bedroom. The thick white quilt that was currently covering the couples bed slowly slid down the blonde’s front, leaving her naked torso exposed to the lightly chilled early-morning air, and causing a wave of taught goose-bumps to swiftly wash over her arms as a small shiver rolled its way down the length of her spine.

The remnants of the dream that she had been having teasingly whispered to her sleep addled mind, mocking her now waking conscious with the hint of a half formed memory – one that the witch was now struggling to grasp onto.

_Had she been having that damned re-occurring nightmare again?_

A soft sigh left Freya’s mouth as she quickly brought her hand up to brush wayward locks of blonde hair out of her face. Waking up in this abrupt confused manner had become something of a regular occurrence for the eldest Mikaelson witch over the past couple weeks.

Freya had initially put the recent sleep disturbances down to the fact that her girlfriend, Keelin, had been away for just over two weeks - staying up in New York City whilst she had been doing a stint as a guest lecturer at the NYMC School of Medicine. Despite her relative in-experience as an actual qualified medical professional working full time in a hospital as a resident, the wolf had still managed to generate quite a name for herself within the specialised field of DNA-Gene Research – mostly thanks to the extensive investigations she had undertaken when trying to alter her own wolf genetic markers.

Of course the supernatural werewolf element of her research had not been what had caught the attention of the board at the prestigious up-state medical school. That particular area of the brunette’s work had been kept securely under wraps, and featured only in Keelin’s personal records and files, that she kept under lock and key at home.

It had instead been the scientific paper that the wolf had had published on Gene Therapy and its use in changing the long-term prognosis for patients with deformities and life altering disabilities, that had gained her notoriety within the medical profession. The discoveries and conclusions that she had made during her research, held great implications for the potential use of genetically altered Ubiquitin within human stem-cell cycles, and consequently her published paper had caused quite the stir in certain scientific circles.

Freya, of course, couldn’t have been prouder of the achievements that her lover had made within her line of work.

In the year that had followed since the Hollow had been banished back to the spirit world, the lives of everyone living within New Orleans French Quarter had been significantly calmer - almost bordering on peaceful.

Almost.

There had of course been the usual minor scuffles and fracases between the various supernatural
factions that lived within the city and its surrounding suburbs. It was near impossible to have so many different mystical beings dwelling in one area and there not be any disagreements or power struggles – it was after all ingrained within their very natures.

But for the most part, the quarrels had been political in nature and thus had fallen to the likes of Marcel, and Vincent’s successor as the Regent witch of New Orleans – Tobias – to resolve and placate.

Leaving Freya and the rest of the Mikaelson family free to enjoy a rather unusual, but welcome respite in their otherwise chaotic lives.

The break from the usual violence and anarchy that came hand-in-hand with being a member of the Mikaelson family, had had a much needed positive effect on both Freya, and her wolf Lover. The witch had been able to immerse herself completely in the task of tutoring the youngest member of her family, Hope, in the field of witchcraft. She had been helping her niece gain a much more solid control of her rapidly growing magical powers, as well as a greater knowledge of the history of their shared gift and its evolution through the ages.

And Keelin had been able to throw herself further into the research which had led to the publishing of her first medical paper.

When the offer had come from the NYMC School of Medicine for the wolf to be a guest speaker in a series of special lectures that they were to host on recent advances in Gene-Therapy, Keelin had been so ecstatic and thrilled by the prospect, that Freya had easily been caught up in the excitement that had radiated out in droves from her girlfriend. The wolf’s happiness had flourished over the months in which she had been finally able to spend time concentrating on her work, and Freya was not ashamed to admit that she had become addicted to seeing her lover re-gain her infectious zest for life.

*Especially after all that had happened during the time of the Nievera pack’s stay within the city*

In the few days leading up to Keelin’s departure for New York, the witch had been an ever present rock for her lover, as both nerves and excitement had jostled for dominance within the wolf’s mind. Freya had reminded the brunette time and time again that the medical school’s offer would not have been extended out to her had her work not been such an important breakthrough in its field - and that she had nothing to worry about in terms of her very few years actually spent practicing medicine as a qualified Doctor.

The witch’s own excitement had in fact been so complete in its supportive manifestation, that it had not once crossed her mind that her lover’s absence during the two week adventure up in New York City would have an effect on her own happiness and well-being. It was something that had simply just not occurred to her.

That was until the second night after Keelin’s departure.

Freya had been sleeping in their shared king size bed after a rather taxing day spent dealing with a tantrum throwing Hope. The young witch’s frustrations at still not being allowed to use her magical abilities to their full, raw powered potential - least she cause unintentional harm to those around her - had come to an emotional head over the course of the afternoons lessons. As such, Freya had spent most of their allotted time together attempting to dampen down a fiery temper which the youngster had most definitely inherited from her father’s contribution to the gene-pool. The blonde had enthusiastically welcomed Hayley’s arrival back to the family compound as twilights embrace had begun to draw in - uncharacteristically happy to hand over the reins of entertaining the young witch back to her mother for the evening.
After feeling herself drifting off to sleep within minutes of her head hitting the soft cotton slip
covering her duck-down pillow, Freya had expected to sleep solidly through the night, exhaustion
from the day’s trails hopefully granting her a one-way ticket on the express train of sleep.

But it had not been the case.

At some point during the evenings dwindling hours, the witch had found herself jolted awake by
the sounds of her own screams hollering out into the still bedroom. Sweat had coated her entire
body and face as she had struggled to gain a solid grip on the waking world – her heart galloping
along with a fevered speed within the tight confines of her chest.

Freya’s first instinct had been to reach out for Keelin, who was normally to be found sleeping
soundly, tucked in close at the witch’s side. But as her clammy hand had stretched out and found
only the cool surface of the undisturbed sheet on the wolf’s side of the bed, she had quickly
remembered that her lover was hundreds of miles away – no doubt sleeping soundly in the plush
hotel that the NYMC School of Medicine had put the Doctor up in for the duration of her stay.

As both her breathing and racing heart had finally begun to settle on that evening from a few weeks
ago, Freya had searched the depths of her mind for any hint of a memory relating to the dream
which had caused her to awaken so abruptly caked in fear. But try as she might, the witch had not
been able to recall any details or image fragments from the rapidly fading night terror. All that she
had known was that it had clearly been traumatic enough to rouse her from her exhaustion fuelled
sleep, filled with a dread and anxiety that had taken most of the following morning to finally
disappear.

A few evenings after that first night terror had occurred, the witch had experienced another
nightmare, played out in an eerily similar fashion to the first – with complete lack of memory of
what had caused the event, and the sheer terror that had been coursing through the blonde’s veins
as she’d awoken.

This had proceeded to happen several times over the course of Keelin’s two week absence from
New Orleans, and had left Freya feeling both despondent and weary during her waking hours.

When the wolf had finally arrived back to their home on the previous afternoon, the two had
wasted no time in making up for the lost days that had been spent apart – Keelin barely having a
chance to slip out of her jacket and put down her suitcase before the witch had rushed over to the
wolf and pulled her into a tight, passionate embrace.

Several hours later, of what Freya could only describe as some of the best love making they had
ever partaken in, the two had fallen asleep in an exhausted pile of limbs and sweat - having at some
point managed to make it from the floor of the open plan living room, to the bed in which Freya
now sat in.

The memory of the evening spent with her lover roused a soft smile on Freya’s face, it slowly
pushing the remnants of her most recent nightmare out of her mind’s eye and leaving only thoughts
of warmth and love in its wake.

She was about to stretch out a hand across the bed - her intention being to pull her girlfriend closer
and possibly wake the wolf to show her once again just how much she’d missed her – when Freya
noticed a beam of light shining out from under the door leading to the bedroom’s en-suite facilities.

Seconds later, the sound of falling water began to reach her ears - signalling that the bathrooms
large walk in shower had been activated.
Rubbing away the sleep from her eyes with one hand, the witch reached over to the small set of
drawers that stood next to her side of the bed, and grabbed her cell phone with the other. She
lightly tapped the glass screen to activate the device, and quickly narrowed her eyes into a squint as
bright light flooded onto her face.

*Four o’clock! Why in the world was Keelin up and showering at four am in the morning?!*

Shaking her head gently, the witch flung the thick duvet off of her legs, and tentatively dropped her
bare feet onto the cold wooden floor of their bedroom. As the chill of early morning air nipped
sharply at her bare flesh, Freya silently cursed the fact that she hadn’t had enough coherent thought
left to slip on a bed t-shirt before she had succumbed to the sex induced exhaustion that had
claimed her, earlier that morning.

Feet padding softly against the floor, the witch quickly made her way over to the closed bathroom
door. She hesitated momentarily as her hand fell onto the barrier’s brass knob, as a fleeting notion
to knock before entering flashed quickly through her mind – despite knowing that Keelin would
probably tease her for the brief indecision.

Freya had moved into the wolf’s apartment just over six months ago now, hauling most of her
meagre belongings over from the Mikaelson Compound and into her girlfriend’s home on a
particularly wet and windy morning in the Quarter. At the time, it had been seen by the couple as
the most logical thing for the blonde to do, since she had been practically living there already –
hardly spending any time within her own bed at the Compound.

In the immediate months following Keelin’s ordeal at the hands of the Neivera wolf pack, the
witch had scarcely left her lover’s side - spending most of her free time at the second floor complex
trying to coax her girlfriend back into a healthy emotional state. It had taken some time for Keelin
to completely open up to Freya about her time spent held prisoner within her own mind, forced to
watch on helplessly whilst the Neivera pack leader, Hatch, had ruthlessly tried to kill Hope
Mikaelson.

In the first few weeks following those events, Keelin had been both withdrawn and
uncharacteristically quiet as she had fought to come to terms with the actions that her wolf body
had been forced to perform by Hatch’s mind. The brunette had blamed herself completely – not
only for the injuries that Hope and her young friends had suffered within the carnival FunHouse on
that eventful evening, but also for the faint silvery scars that now permanently lived on Freya’s
right shoulder. The witch would often catch Keelin gazing sorrowfully at the marks when they
were sat together in the living room, or lay next to each other in bed - eyes glassy and unfocused as
the brunette replayed the horror of feeling her own sharp wolf canines sinking into her girlfriends
flesh.

And despite Freya’s constant reassurances that Keelin could not have fought back against the spell
cast by the Hollow to allow Hatch to take over her wolf instincts - the brunette had continued to
blame herself regardless.

It had taken many weeks of patience on Freya’s part – not something that she was particularly well
known for having – and Keelin’s eventual return back to work at St Theadores Clinic, before the
wolf had finally started to regain some of her normal zest for life.

And even then, her girlfriend’s recovery had been persistently slow in its progression, with the
wolf often seeking out the solace of her own company - becoming lost within her private thoughts.

As such, the witch had half expected Keelin to decline her tentative suggestion, made late one
morning as they had been lay in bed together snuggled in a sleepy embrace that neither one of them
had felt the inclination to break, despite the late hour of the morning. Keelin had been humming contently in Freya’s arms, as the witch had gently run one of her hands up and down the soft skin of her girlfriend thigh.

The idea hadn’t been something that Freya had thought about before that morning, nor had the two of them ever discussed the matter of their living arrangements previous to that day. But as the witch had lay there, her nose pressed up against soft brown curls as she breathed in her girlfriend’s scent, the idea had suddenly crash landed into Freya’s mind – like an excited young puppy tumbling paws over tail into a crowded room, demanding the immediate attention from all those present.

“Move in with me” - the witch had whispered into Keelin’s ear, peppering it with kisses both before and after the words had left her mouth on a heated breath.

Freya had half expected some form of resistance to her impromptu idea, mainly thanks to Keelin’s lack of enthusiasm for almost all of the suggestions and propositions the witch had made over the previous few months, in an attempted to shake her girlfriend out of her funk.

So she had been happily surprised when the wolf had simply melted further into the onslaught of kisses being provided by her girlfriend, and purred the word - “Ok.”

After the rest of the morning – and a good portion of the afternoon – had been spent lost in the need for each-others bodies, the couple had finally succumbed to their annoyingly mortal need for sustenance, and relocated into Keelin’s kitchen to discuss the particulars of moving in together around mouthfuls of Danish Pastries and syrup soaked pancakes.

It had eventually been decided that Freya would move into the wolf’s apartment, instead of Keelin relocating to the Compound. As much as Freya loved her immortal siblings, and adored her talented young niece, she could not bring herself to subject Keelin to the Mikaelson family’s more eccentric – and often deadly – personality traits, on a daily basis.

Plus there had also been the small matter of her brother, Klaus, and his continued weariness and mistrust of Keelin ever since he had witnessed the brunette’s wolf form sinking its sharp claws into his daughter’s back, in an attempt to end the young witch’s life. The handful of times that Keelin had been over to the Compound since that unfortunate evening, Klaus had intensely watched the brunette from afar, suspicious of her every word and movement – much like a predator in the midst of stalking its prey, waiting for just the simplest of mistakes to be made before it struck with lethal killing precision.

To her brother’s credit, Klaus had not actually spoken out of turn to Keelin – at least not directly. Freya herself however, had had to endure several heated exchanges with the ever paranoid hybrid, during the initial weeks following the funhouse incident. But it had been the knowledge that the harsh words directed at her were mostly her brother’s way of trying to come to terms with the fact he that had almost lost his daughter, which had prevented the blonde from putting up much of a resistance whenever the hybrid had needed to lash out.

So long as his harsh words and threats were directed at her, and not Keelin – Freya was happy to let her brother vent his emotions. For she knew that his anger would eventually either burn itself out, or be replaced by whatever new, fresh annoyance-of-the-month came along.

Still, the witch had been reluctant to test her brother’s notoriously paper-thin patience any further than absolutely necessary, by moving her girlfriend into the family compound – a notion that Keelin had wholeheartedly agreed with during the afternoon they had first discussed living together.
Thus an agreement had been reached for her to move into the wolf’s apartment instead, just a few blocks up the road from the Mikaelson’s home.

And now, six months later, as the witch stood in front of the closed en-suite door with her left hand resting lightly upon its bronzed round handle, Freya laughed softly to herself as she realised that she still had the urge to knock and announce her presence whenever entering a room that Keelin was in - despite her lover insisting on the witch treating the apartment as though she had always lived there.

_I guess some habits are harder to break than others_, Freya mused to herself, as she gently twisted the smooth door knob and pushed her way into the bathroom.

A fine mist of steam swirled around the witch as she gently closed the wooden door behind her, and began to make her way across damp floor-tiles towards the shower. Despite the reduced visibility caused by the churning vapour, Freya could still make out the outline of her lover’s body, stood motionless on the other side of the shower’s frosted glass partition.

Keelin looked to have her head dipped forward - resting it against the tiles of the room’s back wall as she let droplets of water rain down over her slender neck and back from overhead. Freya had often seen the wolf stand under the showers volley of water in that same manner, usually on evenings when Keelin had returned home from a particularly long and taxing day’s work at the clinic. On those occasions, the brunette would usually greet her girlfriend with a quick kiss to the cheek, before wordlessly slipping away to remove her dishevelled scrubs, and shuffle into a hot shower to wash away the day.

The witch briefly wondered what could be on her lover’s mind on this particular early morning, as she slowly sidled up behind her, and gently ran her hands down the side of Keelin’s wet torso.

She immediately felt the tension in the wolf’s muscles bleed away, as her girlfriend raised her forehead off the tiled wall, and leant back into Freya’s embrace – pushing their bodies flush together under the watery stream of the shower.

“Mmmm, morning you,” hummed the wolf, as Freya pulled her head back just far enough to be able to place a few light kisses along the back of Keelin’s neck.

The witch smiled against her lover’s skin, as the brunette let out a quiet, appreciative moan in reaction to the attention of her girlfriend’s lips.

“Not that I’m complaining”, Freya murmured as she continued with the trail of kisses down Keelin’s neck and along the back of her lean shoulders, “but why are we in the shower at 4am in the morning?”

The witch could practically hear the smile that formed on her girlfriend’s face, as the wolf arched her back further against Freya’s body, causing the blonde’s nipples to begin to harden in reaction to the sensual feeling.

“Well, I personally am up this early because I’m back working at the clinic this morning, on the early shift.”

Keelin slowly twisted her head to the side and cast Freya a seductively teasing look over her shoulder as she continued.

“You however, Miss Mikaelson, are up because you can’t resist the chance to see my fine ass all naked and wet, no matter what time of day it is!”
Freya let out a muffled chuckle against her lover’s skin, as she slowly kissed and nibbled her way back up the wolf’s neck and along her defined jawline – her hands slipping from their position on Keelin’s waist to begin feeling their way up along the defined muscles of the brunette’s wet stomach.

“Guilty as charged!”

Freya raised her left hand higher up Keelin’s water-kissed body, and gently cupped the soft flesh of one of her lover’s breasts within her fingers. Applying a little pressure to the area, she continued to kiss along the wolf’s jawline – slowly trailing a path towards an ear with her lips. Keelin let out a low appreciative moan of pleasure, as she closed her eyes and leant her head back against Freya’s shoulder. The witch took the lobe of Keelin’s ear into her mouth, gently nipping it with her teeth before soothing the area over with her tongue.

Trying her best to stifle yet another moan that threatened to rumble up through her throat, the wolf sighed reluctantly as Freya continued with her ministrations.

“Whatsoever it is you’re thinking of doing honey, it’s going to have to be put on pause. I can’t be late for my shift - not on my first day back after New York.”

Freya let the hand that was not currently busy teasing the wolf’s hardened nipple between two fingers, trail down to Keelin’s slightly protruding hip bone – where she gripped on with a solid, yet tender hold, pulling her girlfriend’s body impossible closer against her own. Still littering her ear with kisses, the witch whispered seductively to the brunette, as her warm breath caressed the skin beneath her lips.

“And just how exactly, do you know what I’m thinking?”

A small gasp escaped from Keelin’s mouth as Freya dropped her head down and lightly pressed her teeth into the pulse point on the wolf’s neck. Smiling to herself at the brunette’s reaction, she swirled her tongue over the area before continuing her mouths expedition across her girlfriend’s shoulder.

“Well I….mmmm….I know that you’re not thinking…..thinking about the large pile of laundry that…..that still needs doing!”

Freya smirked against the wolf’s shoulder as she heard the panted breaks in her voice – a sure sign that the witch was eventually going to get her own way, despite Keelin’s insistence that she currently had no time for play.

She released her grip on Keelin’s hip and slowly trailed the free hand down over the wolf’s stomach and through the soft, wet curls that sat just above her lover’s apex. Bringing her hands advance to a halt just at the exact point where the soaked hair met the wolf’s core, she teasingly stretched out a slender finger and dipped it lightly into the warm, slick folds that awaited her.

Keelin’s breath hitched as her hips canted forward slightly, seemingly of their own will as the wolf’s body sought to make a stronger claim on her lover’s touch. Freya lightly stroked her finger up through Keelin’s wet folds and began to slowly circle the swollen clit that she found eagerly awaiting her attention.

The action brought forth another deep moan from the brunette.

“Uh…..that feels….good”

Freya brought her lips back up to her girlfriend’s ear, her tongue darting out briefly to taste the skin
there, before she crooned to the wolf in a slightly smug manner.

“I thought you said that you didn’t have time….”

Water from the shower-head continued to rain down over the front of Keelin’s body - its drops rapidly trickling down the mocha skin of the wolf’s torso, and mixing with the brunettes own wetness that was now glibly coating Freya’s circling finger. Feeling the desire radiating off her girlfriend begin to increase in its intensity, Freya pushed her hand further down, adding a second finger to the first as she encircled Keelin’s warm entrance in a firm, but restrained manner.

She felt a gentle shudder run down the length of the wolf’s body as it remained pressed up against her own, no doubt a response to the promise held within the fingers poised just above where she suspected Keelin needed her the most.

“Freya…..please…."

A wicked smile spread across the witch’s lips, as she whispered quietly into Keelin’s ear in response.

“You know….. I think you were right – I wouldn’t want to make you late on your first morning back”

Before Keelin even had chance to register the blondes words filtering through her haze of pleasure, Freya quickly withdrew both of her hands from the wolf’s body and took a small step back on the wet floor of the shower – putting a little space between them both.

She watched on as Keelin’s eyes prised open in a delayed response to the loss of contact between them. The wolf, still panting faintly, twisted around to face her lover as a look of confusion and surprise contorted her features.

“What?!"

Trying her hardest not to burst into laughter at the incredulous expression on her girlfriend’s face, Freya kept a smug grin playing on her lips as she held up her hands in front of her, and took another step backwards.

“You were right, definitely no time for any funny business in the shower. I’ll leave you to finish washing up.”

Keelin’s head lowered in a mock-threatening manner, her plump top lip curling up slightly in one corner as her eye’s flashed playfully with tones of yellow and amber.

“Miss Mikaelson, get back here and finish what you started!”

Unable to contain her amusement any longer, Freya let out a warm chuckle - her emerald eyes sparkling with mischief as she winked at the clearly frustrated wolf, and stepped out of the shower’s semi-enclosed space.

“I’ll make a start on breakfast hey!”

The witch sauntered her way over to the closed bathroom door, putting extra swagger into the swaying of her hips as she felt Keelin’s wolf eyes glaring at her from over by the shower.

As she placed her hand on the door-knob and twisted it open, Freya threw the exasperated brunette a mischievous glance over her naked shoulder, smiling as she spoke.
“Try not to miss me too much!”

Even though she had closed the en-suite door behind her after exiting, the witch clearly heard the low growl emitting from within the bathroom, closely followed by her lover’s voice.

“You’re going to pay for that, Freya!”

She knew that the wolf wasn’t lying either. Keelin would no doubt formulate some devious plan to get back at her for having teased her girlfriend so badly in the shower. The wolf would probably be scheming all throughout her shift at the hospital, and Freya knew that the brunette would make the payback twice as bad as her own provocation had been.

The witch smiled to herself again as she threw an oversized t-shirt over her top, and pulled on some small cotton briefs before heading out into the main living area of their apartment to rustle up some breakfast.

Yes, her wolf lover’s revenge would no doubt be truly wicked ……and she couldn’t wait!

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Chapter End Notes

Well…I did promise at least some fluff ;-)  
Feel free to let me know what you think ya'll
Chapter 2.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 2 up for grabs - hope everyone is enjoying so far.

Let me know your thoughts as always guys, as at this point in the game, there’s still room for a few small ideas to be inserted into the upcoming chapters should you think of anything you would like to see. I won’t lie, there are already a couple of things coming up that are thanks to comments and notes made by people on the 1st installment of this story arc - The Evil Within.

I’ll always listen - I might not always act, haha, but I’ll always listen ;-) Oh and I hope everyone enjoys the final ever official episode of The Originals tomorrow evening on the tele-box. Fingers crossed we get the ending that we deserve!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 2.

1.

“OW! ….that one hurt!”

“Well if you concentrated harder, they wouldn’t hit you! Focus, Hope!”

Freya watched on as her young niece rolled her eyes in her direction, either from exasperation, or boredom – with the way the morning had been going, she was not quite sure which. The look on the young girl’s face certainly wasn’t that of a keen student eager to learn all that she could from an older, more experienced witch. Rather it would have been better placed on a disgruntled and hormonal teenager who was tired of not getting her own way.

And this is her attitude at 9 years old? Freya thought to herself as she watched the youngest Mikaelson rub her hand over the area on her arm where she had just been hit, as a deep scowl creased her small brow. God help us all when she truly is a teenager!

“I really don’t see why we can’t use the soft foam balls anymore? These plastic ones really hurt!”

“Exactly…that’s the point! You had no motivation to stop their advance when you knew that they weren’t going to hurt if they hit.”

Freya waved a hand in her niece’s direction, gesturing to the several patches of red blotchy skin on the young witch’s arms, that were steadily growing in number as the morning progressed.

“If you want to stop the pain, start concentrating!”

The older witch had to stifle a laugh and attempt to steel her lips into a thin line - instead of the bemused smile they wanted to spread into - as she watched Hope’s lower lip slowly begin to
protrude out, forming the girl’s best impression of an indignant pout.

The two of them had been in the Mikelson Compound’s courtyard for a little over 2 hours now, engaged in Hope’s magic tutorial – something that Freya had been hosting for the young girl on most days when she got the chance. The lessons had been the girl’s own idea, after she had requested – or rather demanded, if Freya recalled rightly – to be shown how to control her core magic in a more disciplined manner.

It had been a late Autumn evening not too long after the fateful FunHouse incident, when Freya had been surprised to find the youngest Mikaelson stood in the Bell-Tower’s attic, silently watching the older witch work from afar. The shock of suddenly noticing her niece’s small frame across the old dusty room had caused a yelp of surprise to escape from Freya’s lips - one which she had secretly been glad that no one else had been around to hear, other than the small girl.

Keelin would have goaded her endlessly for days if she had witnessed the high pitched noise that had peeled forth from her throat – no doubt claiming that the witch’s hard-faced image was slipping, only to be replaced with a soft, gooey one. Something the wolf often liked to tease her about - usually when they were lay in bed together!

After getting over her initial shock, Freya had enquired as to what her niece was doing up in the Bell-Tower at such a late hour, seemingly unaccompanied by any of her other family members.

Hope’s eyes had lowered to the ground, as she had explained to her Aunt that having so much power churning within her, but not knowing how to use it safely, or how to harness its potential properly, was beginning to really frustrate her. And that whilst she had known coming over to the Bell-Tower alone without telling her parents where she had disappeared to was wrong, she had felt that her Aunt Freya was the only one who would understand what it felt like to have magic running through her body. And that she knew that her parents would not be able to hear their conversation all the way up in the tower, even with their supernatural abilities.

Freya had of course admonished the girl for making her way over to the Bell-Tower alone and without telling anyone where she was going - but she could not find it within herself to deny the request for an ear to bend, after seeing the look of despiration that had swirled in the young girl’s eyes.

Instead of marching her niece straight back over to the Compound, she had fired a quick text over to Hayley to let her know that Hope was with her Aunt, and then proceeded to make some hot coco for the both of them using the few basic facilities that were left in the attic room from the days when Keelin had been using the place as a temporary home. As the two of them had sat cross legged on the small cot that lay in the back of the attic room, surrounded by flickering candle light, Freya had listened patiently as Hope had slowly opened up and confided in her.

The youngest Mikaelson told her all about how it felt like the magic that lived deep within her was steadily growing in power. And that how, despite the gold bracelet hanging around her wrist – designed to try and control the fierce magic that ran through her veins – there were moments when the magic simply grew too strong to be contained, and had expressed itself a few times in the physical world despite Hope’s best attempts to contain it.

Freya had suggested that she could attempt to strengthen the containment spell that her niece’s gold bracelet was enchanted with, to see if that would dampen down the magical energy’s hunger for release. But Hope had nearly defened her Aunt with the bellowed “No!” response that had peeled forth from her mouth - insisting that Freya help her learn how to control her powers herself, instead of having to rely on a bracelet to trap them deep inside of her.
And insisted she had. For the several days it had taken to finally wear the elder witch down into agreeing to tutor her.

Freya had of course cleared it with the girls mother first – there had not been a chance that she was going to risk getting on the wrong side of Hayley when it came to the youngest Mikaelson. She the and Hybrid had developed quite a good friendship over the past year, and Freya had no intention of intentionally jeopardising that by incurring the Wolf-Queen’s wrath for hiding something from her. Especially when that something had the possibility of seeing Hayleys daughter develop into quite the force to be reckoned with - even at her young age.

The hybrid had been sceptical at first, unsure if she wanted her daughter actively messing with the dark arts so early on in her life. But Freya had been quick to reassure her friend that she had no intention of introducing the youngest Mikaelson member to any powerful spells or dangerous incantations. Her aim was just to try and help Hope remain in control whenever she felt a surge of power rising up within her, without the need for her to be wearing her enchanted bracelet at all times. And also to try and help cultivate the restoration magic that they knew she had access to.

Freya had added that last bit of information in an attempt to seal the deal with the hybrid – knowing that Hayley secretly hoped that her daughter would grow to be some form of healer when she was older, using her magic to aid people from all walks of life. And who could blame the hybrid for wanting a better life for her child, instead of the doom and destruction that usually marred the existence of anyone with the name Mikaelson associated with them.

The witch certainly wished that she had had a mother who had wanted a better life for her!

And so, their training had begun.

They had started by setting aside one hour a day, when Freya would teach Hope the basics of meditation and how to focus her mind, regardless of whatever noises or commotion was happening around her. The young witch had of course immediately been petured that they would not be jumping straight into the control of moving large objects with her mind, or learning how to throw large protection barriers around whole buildings in the blink of an eye. But Freya had explained to the girl that all those types of spells demanded a great amount of concentration from the witch that was casting them. And that even she - a young prodigy who had access to a great deal of power without the need for any kind of incantation or summons – would still need to be able to completely zone out all distractions in her immediate surroundings, and focus, if she wanted to have some semblance of control on how that power was expressed.

Freya had quickly discovered that when Hope actually focused her mind and concentrated, she was a very quick learner.

The youngster had mastered most of the relaxation and meditation methods that Freya had show her within a matter of days, becoming adept at zoning out almost all of the distractions that the Witch could muster to try and cause the youngster to lose concentration. Hope had even managed to ignore one of her own fathers fierce temper tantrums, that he had thrown at Marcel one morning in the Compound’s courtyard - unaware that his daughter was trying to meditate just a few yards away. Freya had been about to ask her brother and the King Of New Orleans to take their quarrel elsewhere, until she had realised that the loud shouting and vicious threats of death had not even registered with her deeply trance nick.

It was after that incident that Freya had decided to move onto the next stage her training with Hope, having been impressed with the youngsters control of her own mind.

Now however, as she stood listening to her niece complain yet again about the unfairness of using
hard objects as missiles to be hurled at her at high speeds, Freya could not rule out the possibility that the girls apparent focus beyond her years had simply been a clever and cunning act, aimed to deceive her Aunt into progressing their lessons faster.

*She’s becoming more like a Mikaelson every day!* Freya mused.

“Listen Hope, it’s all very well being able to throw up a protection barrier when you have the luxury of time to think about it, and are in a safe, calm environment. But it’s a whole lot harder when you have only seconds to act and your life is in danger!”

Freya moved to pick up the three smooth red plastic balls, that had landed close to Hope’s feet after colliding with her body once again.

“But if you can’t focus enough to stop these harmless balls from hitting you whilst stood in the safety of your home, what hope do you have of stopping someone wanting to seriously harm you out in the real world?”

The witch watched as her niece’s arms dropped loosely to her side - all the fire and frustration suddenly appearing to bleed out of her small body. The girl’s head bowed down slightly as her eyes closed, and when she spoke, it was so quietly that Freya could only just make out the words that floated through the courtyard’s air.

“I managed to stop the wolf that night. When it….when it tried to kill my friends.”

Freya’s mouth slackened slightly at the words, as the frustration that she had been feeling towards the mornings lesson quickly drained away. She watched on quietly as Hope’s eyes opened and focused onto the floor ahead of her, tears glistening in the morning sun that was beaming into the courtyard.

“I threw up a barrier with my magic as it lept for us, and stopped it from hurting them….most of them anyways. It wanted to kill us all, and I stopped it.”

“Hope, I….”

Freya was cut off as the youngster whirled around to face her Aunt - tears of frustration and anger falling down her flushed cheeks as she shouted.

“And I could have killed it too! If I’d have been able to focus on my destructive magic instead of stupidly trying to heal Johnny’s arm, I could have killed it Aunt Freya. I wanted to! It was hurting my friends and I wanted to hurt it back! I WANTED TO KILL IT!”

Tears began to fall from Hope’s eyes in earnest, as the echo of her shouted words reverberated back and forth around the Compound’s courtyard. The girls body appeared to shake slightly as her hands, which were now balled into fists at her side, began to glow faintly with a dark red aura. A thick tangible tension began to saturate the area immediately around them, as the pressure of the air in the room seemed to increase ten-fold.

Understanding that her nieces raw power was suddenly in danger of manifesting itself in some form of destructive manner, Freya swiftly grabbed the small gold chain that had been resting on an antique cabinet just to the left of the duo, and made quick work of fastening it around Hope’s shaking wrist. As the clasp of the jewelry fixed into place, Hope’s legs gave way from under her, and youngster collapsed into a kneeling position on the cold stone floor – tears still liberally falling down her face.

Freya dropped down to her own knees in front of the girl and wrapped long arms around her -
pulling her niece into a tight embrace.

“Shhh, its ok. You’re ok, Hope!”

She pulled back slightly after a minute had passed, to look at her niece. The girl seemed to have calmed enough to have stopped shaking in Freya’s arms, but tears still glistened liberally in her red, puffy eyes - threatening to start falling again at any given moment.

“Hey, listen to me Hope. What you did that night to protect your friends was amazing! Ok? They are all still alive because of you and your quick thinking. And you did the right thing trying to heal that boys arm. He probably would have lost too much blood to survive had you not.”

Hope’s eyes dropped from Freya’s, as she shook her head slightly.

“But if I had of been able to control my magic better, I could have done both! I could have helped Johnny AND killed the wolf!”

Freyas own eyes closed briefly, as she let out a deep sigh – her thoughts turning to Keelin.

_Thank the gods that you didn’t have full control kid, as you would have killed Keelin in her wolf form. I would have lost her……_

“What?”

Freya opened her eyes - pulled out of her thoughts by Hope’s sudden question.

“The wolf in the Funhouse was…..that was Aunty Keelin?”

She stared at Hope in surprise, not understanding where her question had suddenly arisen from. And the young witch stared back at her with seemingly equal wide eye’d confusion.

“Hope, what….what makes you ask that?”

The youngster pulled away slowly from her Aunt’s embrace, backing up a few paces as she gently shook her head.

“You just said so then - that I would have killed Aunty Keelin in her wolf form if I had attacked her with my magic! She was the wolf that tried to kill me and my friends?”

Freya’s eyes widened further, as the realisation of what might had just have happened began to sink in.

“Hope, honey, I didn’t actually say those words.”

The young witches eyes were now wide swirling with emotion, darting left to right as she began to shake her head slowly – aparently having not registered Freya’s words.

“But Mom said that the wolf had been part of a rogue pack?! That it had been evil! Why would she say that if….”

Hope’s teary eyes ceased their roaming and locked onto Freya’s.

“Why would Aunty Keelin try to kill me?”

Freya’s mouth dropped open slightly, as the pain of her niece’s wounded question hit her with full force. She slowly extended out her hand to the youngster, in an attempt to bring her closer.
“Hope, she….it wasn’t her. It was…."

“DON’T LIE TO ME!”

Hope’s face and neck reddened as she shouted at the top of her voice, flushing with the anger and pain of betrayal. Before Freya had chance to react, the girl shook her head in defiance then darted off across the courtyard - taking the to the grand-staircases steps with a determined speed as she fled in the direction of her bedroom.

She watched her niece flee through a blurry mist - tears welling up in her eyes. As the youngster disappeared around a corner at the top of the stairs, Freya lowered her head and pinched the bridge of her nose between her thumb and forefinger.

*Shit. SHIT! Hayley is going to have my hide!* , the witch thought to herself as she furiously wiped away a tear that had fallen from her eyes.

*Hope had heard her thoughts. Heard them! There was no other way the girl could have known the exact words that had run through her mind as she had been hugging her.*

Freya’s glassy stare returned to the now empty staircase, her mouth faintly ajar as the implications of what had just happened began to sink in.

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2.

It was being hunted.

All four of its powerful legs bent slightly, as it carefully stalked forward through the thick undergrowth of the surrounding foliage in a hunched down, crouched posture. It could feel the tension building within in its muscles, making them taught and ready to respond in a split-second if need be.

Fur covered ears twisted and stretched, trying to monitor all of the noises and sounds that surrounded its position, as it listened intently for rustling leaves or snapping of twigs – any sign to indicate where the beast that was stalking it might strike from.

It raised its head up to the sky and inhaled deeply through moist nostrils, tasting the air as it flowed down the back of its throat.

Pollen, damp leaves, dried faeces belonging to a raccoon now long since gone, the acrid tang of fear mixed with the saline in the sweat of a rabbit, and numerous clumps of fur clinging to the various trees and bushes surrounding the area. All scents that stroked and caressed its heightened senses, painting a far clearer picture of the creature’s surroundings than that of sight alone.

But no hint of its pursuer.

A deep growl threatened to peel forth from its throat, desperate to be let free into the world to make clear it’s warning. To deliver its vicious promise - that if the predator currently stalking it made a move to strike, it was ready! And it would not go down without a fight.
But it kept the snarl leashed within.

Some part of its mind – a part that was not quite as feral and savage as the rest of its being – told it to be quiet.

To wait.

To listen.

The beast stalking it was powerful. That much it knew from instinct alone. And the predator was cunning. Not content to just make a violent show of bringing its prey down. Instead the hunter wanted it to know that it was being followed, that it was being pursued.

A game of cat and mouse.

Of predator and prey.

Of life and death.

**THWWWWWK**

There! Its ears instantly twisted round to the left, quickly followed by its head, as the dull thud of stone hitting wood vibrated through the air from just a few yards away.

Its lips drew back, revealing a mouth full of razor sharp teeth. Lowering its head closer to the ground, it prepared to leap in the direction that the noise had come from. Its eyes focused into pin point accuracy as….

**GGRAAARRRRRHH**

A heavy force collided with it from behind, knocking its legs out from beneath it, and causing its large body to collapse against the ground.

It made to twist its head around, snarling with teeth bared - but it was far too slow as a large vice like jaw clamped down around its throat, with long sharp teeth pressing definitively against the skin under its fur.

It could feel its own pulse throbbing against the tongue of the beast, as the predator continued applying pressure to the death grip around its jugular.

It was trapped.

It was half a heartbeat away from death.

……and then, the beast was gone.

The hulking weight that had been pinning it to the ground disappeared suddenly, freeing up its limbs and body to move once more.

As it pushed itself up off the ground and shook out its fur, it detected the air around it filling rapidly with the distinctive scent of human flesh.

And laughter. The sound of human laughter.

Female laughter.
“My god Keelin, I swear that was worse than the very first time trained together!!”

Recognition sparked somewhere within the depths of its animal mind, triggering a chain reaction throughout its body.

Her body.

Her human body.

Pain flashed through her core, as the final broken bone slid back into place, instantly connecting with its neighbouring socket and completing her transformation, a mere few seconds after it had been initiated.

Well, at least that part was getting quicker

Panting lightly, Keelin raised her head from where she lay on the sodden floor of the New Orleans Bayou and locked eyes with Hayley - who was standing only a few paces away to her left.

The hybrid had her hands on her hips, staring back at the brunette with a mixture of amusement and smug satisfaction dancing upon her face. Her eyes practically glistened with the triumph of her victory, and Keelin could see that her friend was trying her best to hold back a large smile from stretching across her lips.

Hayley was also naked. They both were – a fact that suddenly registered with Keelin and caused the wolf’s eyes to immediately drop back down to the ground out of respect for the woman’s modesty.

Not that the lack of clothes seemed to be bothering her sparring partner in the slightest.

“Oh come on Keelin, we’ve seen each other naked plenty of times now. It’s really is something that you are going to have to get used to, if we are to continue with these sessions!”

The wolf laughed lightly, as she shook her head and sighed. Hayley was right, they had now been seen each other several times without a stitch of clothing on. An unavoidable side-effect of transforming between their human and wolf forms during their time spent together training. And if she was to be completely honest with herself, it wasn’t something that bothered her too much. She was used to seeing people from all walks of life in their birthday suits, thanks to her job as a medical doctor working in an Emergency Room environment. More often than not her patients’ clothes would have to be removed – either by hands or scissors – to allow her and the medical team better access to assess whatever injuries had brought the poor soul into their care.

So, seeing a strangers naked flesh was not something she was unused to. It was mundane even.

But the woman currently stood in front of her – still smug in her victory – wasn’t just anyone. It was Hayley - her friend. But more importantly, it was Hayley – the mother of her girlfriend’s niece.

And she wasn’t too sure how the sometimes jealous - often territorial - girlfriend of hers would react to knowing that the two of them spent time hanging out in the Bayou, naked!

As if sensing Keelin’s thoughts, Hayley chuffed to herself as she held out a hand to the brunette to help her up off the floor.

“You know, I think you’ll find that Freya is going to be more annoyed to discover that you’ve been training with me for months now without telling her – than she is over a little naked flesh!”
Accepting the outstretched hand, Keelin hauled herself up to her feet, and quickly brushed her legs and torso down with her hands, to remove the few leaves and twigs that had stuck to her skin.

“Yeah, well I don’t plan on her finding out!”

She caught the disapproving look that shot from Hayley’s eyes, before the hybrid turned and started to make her way through the Bayou, back to their base camp – and clothing.

Keelin shook her head and sighed, before pushing forward and stepping into pace with her friend.

“Hey, don’t be flashing me that look missy. You know why I’m doing this!”

Hayley’s brow raised in amusement as she continued to scan the marsh-land in front of them - making sure that their way back was clear and safe.

“You don’t have to justify yourself to me Keelin, I told you from the start that I agree with your reasoning. After what you went through, it’s only natural for you to want to gain better control over your wolf abilities and instincts.”

The hybrid turned her head and shot Keelin an understanding smile, before resuming her surveying of the path ahead.

“I just think that maybe you aren’t giving Freya enough credit.”

Keelin huffed out a short laugh, fighting the urge to roll her eyes at the comment.

“You’ve met my girlfriend, right?! Little miss - “I can protect you and my whole family all on my own, against all of the monsters and evil in the world - no questions asked!”

A light chuckle from Hayley indicated to the wolf that the hybrid did indeed know the side to Freya’s personality that she was referring to.

“And don’t get me wrong Hayley, I love that fierce protective side to her. I really do! But I am far from helpless, and I refuse to have to rely on those around me to always be the ones stepping in to save the day.”

The two of them began to slow in their advance as they broke through the thick Bayou foliage, to emerge into a small clearing where they had left their clothing and supplies earlier that afternoon. Hayley reached down and grabbed a pair of well-worn looking skinny jeans – throwing them over to Keelin, who caught them instinctively without paying much attention.

“And since, thanks to the Hollows damned spell, I can now shift my form regardless of whether there is a full moon or not, I have the potential to be even more of a threat than before.”

Hayley must have picked up on the hint of fear and ambiguity in the wolf’s last words, as she cast Keelin a thoughtful look over her shoulder whilst pulling up her own jeans over long, slender legs.

“Keelin you know as well as I do that you are not a threat to those around you. Yes, you have been freed from the cycle of the moon, but that doesn’t suddenly make you any less of the kind hearted, caring person that you’ve always been. Your self-control is extraordinary considering the wolf hormones that rage through you. That hasn’t changed.”

The wolf finished pulling a light pink t-shirt over her head, before fishing a hand into her jeans pocket and pulling out a small platinum ring to place onto the fourth digit of her right hand. The deep blue kyanite stone that was set into the band glistened brightly, as a ray of sunlight piercing
through the Bayou’s thick canopy bounced off its jagged surface.

“Besides,” the hybrid continued as she walked slowly over to her friend and nodded her head towards the jewellery on Keelin’s hand, “didn’t you say that Freya has spelled that new ring with extra enchantments designed to give you an even stronger control over your wolf traits.”

Keelin twirled the ring on her finger around a few times, subconsciously biting her lower lip between her teeth as she studied the band.

After her original Kyanite ring had been lost on the night of the New Orleans carnival, Freya had wasted no time in purchasing a new one for her – casting various spells upon it one evening up in the bell-tower. Keelin had still been struggling to come to terms with her guilt over the funhouse incident at the time, spending most of her days sat brooding within her apartment, and refusing to venture out into the outside world for fear of losing control and hurting someone. Freya – who had been an ever-present rock over those initial few weeks – had suddenly left the apartment one morning, claiming that she had a few errands to run, and would be back later that evening.

Her girlfriend had eventually returned at an ungodly late hour, slipping quietly into Keelin’s bed, and wrapping a protective arm around her whilst whispering a short but sweet declaration of love. The wolf had barely stirred, murmuring softly to acknowledge her lover’s presence before falling back into a deep, dreamless slumber.

When she had awoken the next morning, Keelin had been pleasantly surprised to find a new, shiny ring adorning a finger on her right hand, and a deep sense of calm flowing through her veins.

Hayley’s voice suddenly broke through her thoughts, bringing the wolf back into the present.

“So, in reality, considering the upgraded ring on your hand, and your reclaimed independence from the moons cycle – don’t you think you should be lasting longer than just a few minutes before having your furry ass kicked by me?!"

A playful spark glistened in the hybrids eyes, as she winked towards the brunette.

Keelin huffed, swatting her friend lightly on the shoulder with a hand.

“Hey, that’s unfair! I’ve been away for two weeks – too busy and too shattered after each day to train. Besides, you Hayley, are a powerful hybrid alpha, AND a wolf-queen non-the-less. I have no hope of ever being as good at you at this!”

The two women gathered up their remaining belongings and started to make their way back along the well-worn trail that led to Hayley’s car, as they continued with their light-hearted banter.

“You shouldn’t sell yourself short you know,” Hayley commented as they walked side-by-side. “Yes, you might have let your training slip whilst in New York - but I’ve witnessed you come on leaps and bounds over the past few months that we’ve been sparing together. I certainly pity the next unfortunate fool who attempts to get the upper hand on you in a fight!”

The wolf laughed, flashing her friend an appreciative look.

“All thanks to you of course, and your relentless kicking of my ass!”

A comfortable silence soon fell between the duo, as they continued with their trek through the humid marsh-land - both content to get lost within their own thoughts as they progressed. The pair were only a few yards away from the rough road-track and Hayley’s vehicle, when a high pitched pinging noise vibrated out from Keelin’s back pocket, signifying that she had received a text
message on her cell.

She fished the device out and opened up the text, just as they came to a halt next to the large black SUV stood waiting for them on the road-side.

*Hey old timer – are we still on for a catch-up coffee later?
I have exciting news that I can’t wait to share with you!! :-)*

Keelin could feel Hayley peering over her shoulder at the mobile’s screen, a reproachful frown creasing the hybrids brow as she read the words on display.

The wolf let out a small sigh, as she tucked the cell back into her pocket without bothering to type out a reply to the message.

“Hayley, don’t!”

Hands raising up quickly in a placative manner, the hybrid shook her head as she replied.

“Hey I didn’t say a word. But if you want my honest advice….”

“I don’t,” the wolf quickly interjected, trying – and failing – to stop the next words leaving her friend’s mouth.

“…..that, is one matter that you should definitely be discussing with your girlfriend! If Freya finds it out from someone other than yourself, it will be far worse than her learning about our innocent sparing sessions in the Bayou!”

Keelin closed her eyes, as she began to rub both of her temples in a circular motion with her hands.

“I wish I could tell her, I really do. But she would never understand Hayley, not in a million years. And you know damn well that if I mentioned anything about it, she would be out for blood. Lots of blood. Scary, hell raining down on the earth kind of blood!”

Hayley huffed as she shook her head.

“Well, she certainly isn’t one to hold back when it comes to punishing the people who have hurt her family! But could you really blame her if she did?”

The brunette shot a slightly exasperated look towards her friend, who’s brows raised in response.

“Hey, look, I promised I would try my best to understand your reasoning behind remaining in contact with the wolf - despite her involvement with the events that lead to the attempt on my daughter’s life!”

Keelin’s defensive demeanour visibly deflated at Hayley’s words, as guilt threatened to rear its familiar head within her.

“But you are treading dangerous ground here, Keelin – surely you must know that? Is this girl worth risking your relationship with Freya? Because you know it won’t end well if she finds out.”

“I know, Hayley! Ok, I know!”

Her words came out harsher than she had originally intended, causing the Keelin to flash an apologetic wince in the hybrid’s direction.

“But she had no one left after the Hollow slaughtered what remained of her family in that run-down
church. No one! And despite everything, I just couldn’t bring myself to let someone’s life be totally destroyed just because they were blackmailed into doing desperate things. The kid needed someone to show her that life was worth embracing again. Worth turning over a new leaf and trying to be a better person for.”

She sighed heavily, lowering her eyes down to the floor between them.

“Because I wish someone had been there to do that for me, when I lost my way so badly”

Hayley closed the small distance between them both, placing a gentle hand upon the wolf’s shoulder as she spoke.

“I’m not saying that you’re in the wrong for wanting to help her, Keelin. God only knows you’re practically a saint for taking the girl under your wing – I certainly know that I probably couldn’t have been that selfless if put in the same position.”

The hybrid turned and opened the rear passenger door to the vehicle that they stood next to, flinging her ruck-sack onto the long seat, and then taking Keelin’s from her to throw in alongside of her own.

“I just think that you need to seriously consider coming clean to Freya about it. Secrets like that – they have the potential to completely destroy the trust in a relationship. And I know how much you love her. Don’t let your need to do the right thing ruin what you guys have!”

Keelin nodded ruefully in the hybrid’s direction, as the two of them climbed into the front of the SUV.

She knew that Hayley was right. Had known that she was right from the moment the Wolf Queen had discovered one morning that Keelin had been meeting up with Alanna on a regular basis - and immediately voiced her worried concerns.

The two had only just started their training regime at the time – had barely got a few sparring sessions under their belt – when Hayley had called the brunette out on the matter. Keelin had been to see Alanna earlier in the day, taking younger wolf to meet one of her work colleagues from St Theodore’s, who had been looking for someone to rent out a room within their apartment. The brunette had instantly thought of Alanna when Joel, one of the male nurses who often had the same shift rotation as Keelin, had mentioned that he was looking for a new housemate to help pay for bills and generally provide some company. The nurse and young wolf had hit it off instantaneously when Keelin had introduced them at a coffee-shop in the centre of the city – quickly bonding over a shared interest of wanting to travel the world and visit different countries. Keelin had actually felt like a third wheel by the time they had all finished their drinks – neither Joel nor Alanna having spoken directly to her for over a good twenty minutes, as the two’s excitement over foreign cultures had continued to grow.

When the time had come for her and Alanna to part ways with Joel, the nurse had gained himself a new housemate, and Alanna had gained herself another person, besides Keelin, whom she could call friend.

Keelin had briefly hugged Alanna, and then left the young wolf to begin organising her affairs in preparation to the move into Joel’s flat, whilst she herself had headed straight to the Bayou, to meet Hayley for that day’s sparring session.

She had only been in the Hybrid’s company a matter of seconds before her friend had suddenly placed a firm hand on her shoulder, leaned in to draw a deep breath, and then pulled back with a
look of confusion as she inquired, “Keelin, why do you reek of those damned Neivera wolves?!”

Caught off guard, Keelin had stuttered out a few random nonsensical words, before sighing, and then spilling the whole sordid tale to her shocked friend.

In truth, she had been thankful to finally be able to tell someone about her growing secret, as it had been weighing down heavily on her shoulders for months. It was a relief to have someone else to discuss the matter with.

Hayley of course had initially reacted with shock and scepticism. As far as the hybrid had known, the Neivera wolf Alanna had fled the city on the night of the funhouse incident - wisely running for her life after viciously relieving Vincent Griffith of his head in a seemingly successful attempt to be rid of the Hollow’s spirit which had been dwelling within the ex-regent’s body.

It was what all the members of the Mikaelson clan had believed, including Freya.

When Hayley had questioned Keelin’s reasoning and rationale, and reminded her just how deeply Freya’s hate for the young wolf ran, the brunette had begged her friend to keep the information to herself – would have got down onto her knees and pleaded, had Hayley not eventually agreed to uphold the secret in favour of Keelin helping out one of their own kind who had lost her way.

But the hybrid had proceeded to remind her often over the months that had followed, as to just how much worse it would be when Freya eventually did find out the truth, the longer Keelin kept it from her.

And she knew the hybrid was right. She had to tell Freya and come clean to her about it. Tell the witch about Alanna, and her secretive efforts to get the girl back on her feet.

Sighing heavily, Keelin’s eyes drifted over the passing marshlands as they whizzed by the speeding SUV’s passenger window. Almost absentmindedly, she spoke softly over the humming of the vehicle’s engine.

“I know you’re right Hayley. And I am going to tell Freya soon, I swear. Just….just not right now.”

Keelin pulled out the hand that had been resting within her jackets pocket, and brought both it and the small wooden box that was held within it into her line of sight. Smiling softly at the mahogany coloured container, she raised her eyes to the hybrid who glanced down quickly at the box, before breaking into a light smile of her own as her eyes retuned to the road ahead.

“I have an important question to ask her first.”

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3.

A mixture of laughter and music filled Rousseau’s with an infective rhythm, as it rode through the air on an invisible wave of lively ambience on this particularly buoyant Friday afternoon. As the suns light filtered inside through frosted glass windows, various patrons littered the bar’s tables and chairs – their conversations only just managing to carry over the steady beat belonging to a particularly lively song that currently belted out of several speakers placed around the interior of the building.

Rebekah Mikaelson smiled gently to herself as she sat on one of the establishment’s high-stools
stood flanking the length of the long wooden bar in the centre of the room. Her eyes lay unfocused on the tumbler of bourbon in her hand, as she gently rotated the container back and forth, causing the golden liquid within it to swirl around in a tiny whirlpool of motion. Her mind was no longer in the familiar surroundings of the French Quarter bar, but instead over a thousand miles away, stood in a small dressing room of the Stephen Sondheim Theatre in New York. To any casual observer, the Original vampire might have looked to be lost in the depths a fond memory - grinning absentmindedly as an enjoyable memory played out its symphony in her minds-eye. But to a keen onlooker who knew a little about the blonde enigma, they would notice the fine thread of sadness that wove its way in and out of the gentle grin that didn’t quite reach the woman’s eyes.

“Come now dear Sister, you can’t actually tell me that you had feelings for this insignificant mortal fool you speak of?”

The thick ancient tones of her brother’s voice cut through Rebekah’s memories like a serrated knife roughly carving through a loaf of bread. The vampire’s focus crash landed back into the bar, with a sigh of frustration breathing out of her slightly open mouth.

“Niklaus, let us try and not agitate our sister too fiercely on her first day back within our midst’s. Whilst I am sure that dear Rebekah had her fun during her time spent living away from us, I imagine her thoughts always lie with the family she has back here in New Orleans on a permanent basis. Isn’t that right, dear?”

Rebekah rolled her eyes towards the two immortals sat beside her, and quickly downed the full contents of the tumbler within her hand. Rising slightly off her stool, she leant forwards over the wooden bar in an attempt to capture the attention of Josh, the venue’s manager.

She was going to need far more than just the one drink to get through this “welcome home” gathering with her brothers in one piece.

“Nik, it would be truly wonderful if you could just for once, try and remember that not every waking moment of my existence is spent thinking about you and your nefarious shenanigans!”

“Nefarious!?” laughed out her hybrid brother, as he nudged Elijah gently in the ribs in amusement. “Why Elijah, I do believe our sister here has managed to expanded her vocabulary whilst spending time having her way with that – who was it again – ah yes, having her way with that second rate back-up dancer from the Bronx!”

Rebekah watched as Elijah eye’s glistened in amusement at their brother’s words, despite the well-dressed immortals face remaining its ever stoic picture of contemplative calm.

Klaus’s whole appearance however, practically glowed with impish amusement at his dig towards her recent choice of male suitor.

She rolled her eyes towards them both, resuming her efforts to catch Josh’s eye as she replied.

“He was an award winning ballet dancer Nik, and he could certainly have taught you a thing or two about the meaning of culture!”

Her younger brother huffed to himself, just as Josh finally arrived in front of the trio with his brows raised expectantly. The familiar face of Rousseau’s bar manager was somewhat guarded as he observed the three Original immortals sat drinking together – his distaste for their family not quite being hidden by the ever present smile upon the vampires face.

“Another already? Look, if you three are planning on drinking my bar dry today, could you at least
give me some pre-warning. The last time a Mikaelson drinking session happened here, I had to replace all of my bourbon stock – twice – over the course of 2 days! I do have other customers to cater for as well you know!"

Ignoring the manager’s complaint, Rebekah cocked her head to the side as she observed him for a second or two – her lips pouting faintly just before she spoke.

“Josh - I’d imagine you are someone who could appreciate the finer details when it comes to the arts, and courting male dancers! Would you kindly aid me in educating my Neanderthal brothers here on just how prestige an honour it is to be named winner of IBC Ballet award three years in a row!”

The bar manager looked to be about to dismiss the blonde vampire’s question with an irritated sigh, before his body suddenly tensed. Widening his eyes to what seemed to be double their normal width, Josh placed both of his hands on the wooden bar top and lent forward slightly in Rebekah’s direction.

“Tell me you are not talking about the one and only Eirik Hansen - who is like, the best male ballet dancer to have ever graced Broadway in the past decade?! Some even say the past century!”

Rebekah’s face lit up in a brilliant smile, her white teeth gleaming towards the young male vampire.

“Yes, that’s him!” she exclaimed in delight, before turning her attention back to her siblings. “See, even Josh who is still stuck in his adolescence puberty, has a more cultivated grasp on society than you two sorry fellows!”

“Hey! I’m 25 years old…. Or at least I was when I stopped aging!”

All three of the Original immortals sat at the bar ignored the manager’s indignant protest, as Klaus began to laugh.

“Ah sister, always trying to out-do yourself! And prey do tell my dear, is our city’s illustrious self-proclaimed King aware of your attempts to be rid of his lingering scent by bedding this dancing ruffian?!”

Rebekah sniffed the air indignantly in response to the hybrid’s question, and began to idly twirl a square shaped beer mat upon the liquor stained bar-top.

“The particulars of my love life, brother, are no longer any of Marcel’s concern!”

Another impish smile stretched across Klaus’s face as he leaned his head towards Josh, who was still stood listening to the trio’s exchange.

“Oh come now Rebekah, I happen to think our dear Marcellus would be extremely interested to hear who the object of his affections has been dallying with, during her year spent living in New York – wouldn’t you agree, Josh?”

All three pairs of immortal eyes flicked over to the bar manager, who’s own were now rapidly moving between the Mikaelson siblings as they watched him expectantly. As his gaze finally settled upon Rebekah - who was glaring at him with a promise full of pain and violence - the vampire raised both of his hands up in a mock motion of surrender before taking a step back from the counter-top.

“Hey, what happens on tour, stays on tour. Am I right!?”
A nervous chuckle left Josh’s mouth, as his eyes remained fixed on the blonde vampire - apparently searching for any hint of retribution for his comment. His tense posture finally relaxed however, when Rebekah flashed him the briefest of smiles signalling her gratitude.

“Besides,” the young vampire continued, re-finding his confidence as he resumed filling the immortals’ empty glass tumblers with liquor, “at least Rebekah has a love life. Which is more than can be said for the rest of us low-life’s, right gentlemen?”

Simultaneous glares thrown at him from both Elijah and Klaus, resulted in the bar manager quickly leaving the half empty bottle of bourbon on the bar in front of the immortals, before speedily walking off to busy himself elsewhere.

Rebekah chuckled to herself, as she downed the contents of her glass once more before reaching an arm across Klaus to grab the bottle that had been left by Josh.

“The young whelp has a point, loves. I assume that our dear eldest sister is still the only other Mikaelson in New Orleans managing to maintain a healthy relationship at present?”

The blonde vampire watched with bemusement as Klaus’s face quickly darkened with an air of contempt - twisting his body away from his sister, to stoically stare down at his own tumbler of alcohol. Leaning away from the bar so that she could clearly see past the hybrids brooding form, Rebekah raised an eyebrow in Elijah’s direction, silently enquiring with the suited vampire as to what was irking their brother now.

Elijah rolled his eyes, before picking up his drink and slowly swirling its contents around in the glass.

“It would appear sister, that Niklaus is still brooding over Freya’s continued choice of partner. Though the reason as to why he cannot just let her be content in her happiness….I am afraid eludes me.”

Klaus quickly span around on his stool, flinging his arms out in a wild gesture between his siblings, as he raised his voice in response.

“You both know all too well what my quarrel is with our sister’s choice of mate! That damned rabid beast tried to end my daughter’s life with its bare claws! Or have we all now conveniently forgotten that small fact?!?”

Rebekah watched as Elijah shook his head lightly before returning to stare at his drink, clearly having heard their younger brother’s rant on more than one occasion over the 12 months since she had last been in their company.

“Oh don’t be so bloody dramatic, Nik!” she fired in response to the hybrid, annoyance lacing her words with bite. “We all know that it wasn’t Keelin who attacked my darling niece, but rather the leader of that treacherous wolf pack.”

“Do we?!” the hybrid countered, his eyes no less wild in their accusation. “Because I think that it is all rather a little convenient that Freya’s bit on the side just happened to have a mystical get-out-of-jail-free card to play in her favour, whilst my daughter lay bleeding to death on the floor!”

“Nik, just stop!”

Rebekah’s voice vibrated loudly across the open space of Rousseau’s, as she slammed the glass tumbler in her hand down onto the wooden bar beside her. She fixed her younger brother with a stare so stern, that it made even him, the great Klaus Mikaelson, raise a surprised eyebrow as the
flame of his ire stuttered in her wake.

“Our sister is happy for the first time in god only knows how many centuries. Possibly for the first time in her life! And it is Keelin who is putting that smile on her face. So for once, can’t you bloody well just be pleased for one of us, instead of fabricating these false accusations of treachery and deceit in an attempt to sabotage our happiness!”

The hybrids eyes remained fixed on Rebekah as she finished her outburst and sighed - lowering her voice back down to its normal, harmonious level.

“Besides, from what Freya told me in the letters we were exchanging weekly, I wouldn’t be surprised if the two love birds take their relationship to the next level pretty soon! So do try and pull your head out of your ass Nik, before you drive away yet another family member for good!”

A smile graced her lips as she recalled reading a particularly gushing letter from her older sister that had arrived one stormy winter afternoon to her flat in New York. Freya had written several pages of eloquently scripted text detailing just how happy and content she was to now be living under the same roof as her wolf lover, and that if things continued to progress as well as they were, she would need to be meeting her younger sister to have an afternoon spent drinking champagne and shopping for a new - non-magical - ring to place on her girlfriends hand.

*She couldn’t be happier for her sibling. Despite Klaus’s harsh words about the wolf, she had come to like Keelin a lot*

The blonde vampire was pulled out of her thoughts once again, by her brother’s loud and boisterous voice.

“Marcellus! We were just talking about your good self, weren’t we sister?! Were your ears burning away?”

Rebekah swivelled around on her stool just in time to see Marcel enter into Rousseau’s through the main door, accompanied by a tall, fair skinned man that she had never seen before. The vampire formed a tight-lipped smile in response to Klaus’s greeting, before gesturing to his companion to join him in approaching the three Original immortals.

As they made their way over - seemingly comfortable and at ease in each-others company - Rebekah studied the unfamiliar fellow, that was walking just slightly behind her ex-lover, a little closer. She assessed quickly that he wasn’t particularly remarkable in any of his features – tall, but not overly so, with sandy-brown hair tousled atop his head, and soft green eyes that remained focused upon the floor just ahead of feet as he walked towards them – as though the man was lost in thought and moving more out of reflex than actual conviction of purpose.

Just as the two came to a halt in front of the Mikaelson siblings, Rebekah quickly corrected her first assessment of marking the newcomer as completely mundane – as she noticed what looked to be the edges of a dark tattoo, just peaking over the collar of his tightly buttoned down shirt.

A small flame of intrigue flickered somewhere within her, as the man spotted her looking in the direction of his neck and moved quickly to re-adjust the neckline of his top.

“Klaus, Elijah! Tobias and I need a word with you both if you will!” Marcel spoke in way of greeting.

“And what exactly am I love, invisible!?” she huffed out, annoyed at how exasperated her ex-lover managed to make her with just a few simple spoken words.
Sighing loudly, Marcel turned his gaze towards Rebekah, as though only just noticing her sat next to her brothers.

“Rebekah! How could anyone ever be allowed to overlook your presence?! You are back from New York I see – and looking as deadly as ever.”

She scoffed at his words, taking a sip of bourbon from her tumbler before replying.

“Oh please, I’m a delightful pussycat and you know it! Aren’t you going to introduce me to your new friend here?”

Her eyes fell back onto the human stood next to Marcel, who seemed to still be lost in his thoughts - despite the deadly immortals surrounding him.

*Well he certainly appears not to be disturbed by our kind,* Rebekah mused to herself, as she waited on Marcel’s introduction.

“Right…”, Marcel drawled, a small smirk forming across his lips, “I forgot that you fled from the city before Vincent’s body had even grown cold!”

Rebekah narrowed her eyes at the vampire in a quick scowl, before returning them back to focus on the stranger. Marcel clapped a hand onto the back of the sandy haired man, effectively pulling the fellow out of his thoughts, as he continued with his introduction.

“This here is the new Regent Witch of New Orleans, sworn into position a few days after the funeral parade that was held for Vincent – which if I recall correctly Rebekah, you missed!”

The King of New Orleans sneer grew in size as she sighed loudly in response to his not so concealed jibe.

“And this,” the vampire gestured towards her with a lazy hand, “is Rebekah Mikaelson. Original immortal, and more often than not a royal pain in my….”

“And this,” the vampire gestured towards her with a lazy hand, “is Rebekah Mikaelson. Original immortal, and more often than not a royal pain in my….”

“The pleasure is all mine, love”, she quickly interjected before Marcel could finish his sentence – reaching out her hand towards the new Regent witch in a fluid motion full of grace and elegance.

Tobias finally locked his gaze onto hers, as he smiled and took Rebekah’s hand into his own without hesitation. As the witch bent forward slightly, bringing his lips down towards her skin with a notion to execute a well-placed kiss, she noticed several flecks of gold glistening within his emerald eyes, giving them a greater depth than she had first perceived.

A small smile played across her lips as the man connected his kiss to her hand, unable to resist the charm of the old-fashioned greeting.

“I had heard talk of a Mikaelson sister who’s beauty was fierce enough to rival the ruthlessness of her brothers. It appears the rumours were not without merit.”

Despite herself, Rebekah felt her cheeks flush faintly in response to the compliment bestowed by the Regent witch, as she slowly reclaimed her hand back from his grasp.

Marcel glanced back and forth between the two of them with a frown upon his face, before clearing his through loudly.

“So, now that we are all introduced and up to speed …..Gentlemen if you will?”
The King of New Orleans gestured towards the bars entrance, signalling for Klaus and Elijah to depart with him and the Regent witch.

“Come now Marcellus, whatever news it is you wish to enlighten us with, I am sure my dear sister can be present for its unveiling!”

Klaus flashed the vampire a wolf-like grin – one that, Rebekah could tell, dared Marcel to disagree with him on the matter.

Marcel appeared to quickly run through the pros and cons of standing up to the hybrid within his head, before sighing once more, and placing his hands upon his hips.

“Fine, as you wish! I am sure that you are both aware of the increased number of….” the vampire glanced around quickly, before lowering his voice to continue, “…bodies, that have been cropping up all over the city!”

Rebekah watched on as her younger brother rolled his eyes at Marcel.

“This is New Orleans, Marcel, not Disneyland. We have bodies turning up nearly every other day! If it is irking you that much, I would suggest having the rabble of vampires who follow you around like lost puppies, travel a little further from home when they feed!”

The vampire’s lips tightened into a thin line, before he continued.

“My boys do not feed on the locals Klaus, and nor do they drain their food completely when they do find outsiders to feed upon. Besides, if you’d have let me finish before jumping in with your pointless wise-ass remarks, I would have continued on to say that it is no longer just humans whom seem to be falling victim to this recent wave of killings!”

Marcel paused briefly as his attention flitted over to Tobias - who stood listening gravely to the vampire speak.

“There were two found this week – one on Tuesday, and another last night – that had been part of my security detail, Klaus. Vampires!”

Rebekah actually thought that Klaus looked to be pondering his protégés words for a few seconds - but soon dismissed that misled observation when the hybrid made to respond.

“So someone finally got tired of listening to your men boast about working for the almighty King of New Orleans, and decided to put them out of their misery. You can hardly blame them really, Marcellus – I’m just upset that someone actually beat me to the idea of taking up a wooden steak and culling the number of buffoons roaming our streets!”

She could see that Marcel was about to lose his patience with her wise-cracking brother, and was about to step in herself to try and dampen the raging testosterone flying between the two immortals, when Tobias quickly raised his hand and placed it on her hybrid brothers shoulder.

“Ah but you see”, the Regent witch ventured, locking eyes with Klaus, “that’s the thing! The vampires hadn’t been killed with a steak through the heart as you would expect, or even by having their hearts removed from their bodies – a wonderful delight that I know you blood suckers like to inflict on your enemies. “

Klaus raised an eyebrow as he pointedly looked down at the hand resting on his shoulder, causing the Regent witch to quickly remove the appendage and drop it down to his side before continuing.
“All the bodies were found with their heads completely severed, both human and vampire alike - which you would of course naturally conclude was the be all and end all of the tale of their deaths. But on inspection it became clear that all the bodies that have been found over the past few weeks completely drained of blood, before being relieved of their heads.”

The witch’s gaze fell onto Rebekah again, their eyes locking as he continued.

“Even the vampires!”

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Chapter End Notes

What was that you say....more Freya and Keelin fluff and interaction required??! Best stay stuned for the upcoming chapter then hey ;-)
Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Finally, Chapter 3 is finished and up for Grabs.

Apologies on the slightly longer than normal wait for its arrival - but when you see the length of it, you will understand why! At over 20,000 words long, it’s fair to say it ran away with me a little. But as with all good story telling, the chapter took on a life of its own whilst I was writing it, and I realised there was quite a bit of detail and background info I needed to get out of the way at this early stage of the tale.

So apologies for it not quite being the Freelin centric installment that I originally promised, but trust me when I say all the details contained in it are important - and full of small hints as to where this sequel to The Evil Within will take you ;-) 

As always, please let me know your thoughts and feelings.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 3.

1.

The old wooden building that claimed its home deep within the barren outlands lying south of the Mississippi river, had worn many skins during the numerous centuries it had existed. To the outside world, the structure had always appeared as a dreary and run down, single storied edifice – remarkable only in its ability to have remained completely un-remarkable over the years.

Yet despite its never changing exterior façade, the inside of the building had had many different purposes throughout the years.

One of its more recent uses, during in the mid 1960’s, had been as a hash-den for a group of recluse Hippies, driven out of their homes in the Big Easy by war sympathising parents disgusted by their lack of patriotism. The fragmented peace-rebels had spent several months holed up in the building, claiming it was their haven away from the power grabbing government and its evil corruption of society. A refuge where they could live a peaceful and free life, unburdened by the fascist demands of their family’s dictatorships, and a place where their revolution against the radical authoritarian powers could begin. The far more mundane truth however, had been that each of those squatting within the building had been called up for conscription to fight with President Johnson’s army in the Vietnam War. Refusing to enlist and thus incurring the wrath of their parents, each of them had fled their homes on different evenings, and due to one unassuming coincidence after another, had eventually ended up coming across the unassuming structure deep in the Louisiana wastelands.

One particularly stormy October night during the fall of 1966, a small group of US soldiers whom
were stationed at the notorious Fort Polk’s army training barracks, had travelled to spend a night of their hard-earned leave within the infamous lively bars and haunts of the New Orleans Port. The six troopers - all members of the 70th Flying Training “Ride-Or-Die” squadron - had all been liberally knocking back shots of absinthe in one of the port’s more disreputable establishments, when they had overheard a crowd of local men discussing a group of army-draft evaders that had been seen in and around the port - stealing food and other supplies from local business. The raucous laughter and swearing that had been flowing freely from the drunken troopers, had eventually died down as the soldiers listened more closely to the residents describe a run-down, abandoned shack – a place which was rumoured to located across the Mississippi river, and the location as to where the thieving hippies were believed to be holed up.

What followed had started as harmless cussing and grumbling flowing freely from the soldiers mouths, as they had all glibly expressed their hatred for conscription deserters and their refusal to fight for their country.

A few more rounds of liquor later, and the groups anger had rapidly escalated - resulting in a half-hatched plan being formed to venture out into the southern wastelands and give the peace-loving hippies a fright and wake-up call. To the deserters what real men looked like, and how real men fought for the flag they proudly wore upon their uniforms.

When later cross-examined by army court martial officials, back within Fort Polk’s barracks, Lt. Pete Fisher of the 70th Flying Training squadron had sworn on both the bible and on the life of his god fearing mother, that there had been something other than just liquor guiding the soldiers way that fateful night.

Something other than just liquor that had caused the men to just happen upon an abandoned jeep - engine left running - as soon as they had stumbled out of that New Orleans bar onto the rain battered street outside. Something other than just liquor that had guided the vehicles way as Turner, the squadron’s communications and radio technician, had driven hell for leather down Route 46, with no knowledge of the local area or of the wastelands that expanded far out from the, and almost zero visibility in the storms torrential rain. Something other than just liquor that had fanned the flames of hate sparking deep within their cores as the old wooden structure had eventually come into view across the rough rocky terrain – secluded in its bleak setting with no other buildings for many miles around. Something other than just liquor that had spurred the six trained soldiers to all silently agree on making the Molotov cocktails using various half-drunk bottles of spirit that they had brought with them from the bar – all tearing off pieces of Pete’s jacket to use as the fabric wicks that dipped down into the alcohol.

And something other than just Liquor that had caused the flame of Fisher’s lighter to still burn high and bright despite the howling winds and torrential rain of the storm, as they had one-by-one lit their flammable cocktails, and thrown them through the two murky windows that had then adorned the large wooden shack whilst Turner held fast onto the buildings only door - ensuring that no one from the inside could escape as the soldiers had hollered and whooped their vicious glee into the night, drowning out the screams of pain and death that had begun the minute the first flames had hit.

All six of the troopers from the “Ride-Or-Die” squadron, that had gone to into New Orleans looking for a good time on that fateful storm battered night, were found guilty by court martial of first degree murder under article 118 of the US military law. Neither the defence lawyer who had been assigned to the soldiers, nor the prosecuting team who had acted on behalf of the deceased individuals’ families, had believed or given credence to the instance of Lieutenant Fisher that some otherworldly force had been guiding the troopers actions as they had set alight to the old wooden structure - burning alive all nineteen individuals who had been sleeping inside at the time.
It had been a good few weeks later, during the course of a particularly delightful Sunday evening meal prepared by his doting wife Cheryl, that local Fire Chief, Dudley Henderson, had become the only person in the state of Louisiana to believe that there might have been more to Lt. Pete Fisher’s claim than the military court had perceived.

His wife had been good friends with the spouse of Lt. Major Briskall for several years, and the two women had often spent time shopping together within the big city - talking about the up’s and downs of their respective lives. That particular Sunday mealtime, Cheryl had gushed to her husband about the latest gossip to come out of the military base over in Fort Polk – glibly supplied by Mrs Briskall and her infamously loose tongue.

According to the Major’s wife, she had been told by Joanne - the girlfriend a young MP Officer whose station was to guard the barracks glasshouse – that the six condemned members of the “Ride-Or-Die” squadron had had to be dragged away from the Court Martial room after the verdict of their case had been delivered, kicking and screaming for all to hear about the voices they had heard in their heads on the fateful night of the fire. Voices that – according to what Joanne’s fella had overheard the soldiers claim – had whispered promises of wealth and glory if they ventured out to the wastelands to kill the Hippies hiding out there. And voices that had whispered promises of death and torment, if they did not.

Cheryl and the Major’s wife had of course laughed at ludicrous idea of “spooky voices” telling the disgraced soldiers to viciously burn to death a group of new-age drop outs, and, like the rest of the men stationed at Fort Polk who had heard the wails and cries of the court martialed men, had paid no heed to the tall-tale they had tried to spin.

Fire Chief Henderson had made a show of laughing along with his wife as they finished off their plates of food, thankful that the woman had not noticed when most of the colour had drained from his face as she had shared her weekly “gossip” with him.

As the meal had drawn to a close, he had dismissed himself from the table and told his spouse that he was heading into his office to finish up a report that needed to be handed in to the City Mayor the next morning – and that she should start heading up to bed without him. Once within the seclusion of his private room, the Fire Chief had opened up the statement that he had been working upon detailing both his and his teams finding’s on the morning they had been called out to the abandoned wooden building that stood around 10 miles off Route 46.

Dudley Henderson’s palms had begun to sweat slightly as he re-read the words upon the pages in front of him that had been written by his own hand less than 24 hours earlier. The text had described how the Fire Chief and his team had simply just followed the thick plumes of white smoke that had been visible for miles around, to be able to find the old wooden structure once their truck had left the familiar path of Route 46.

First on the scene, the team had dismounted from their wagon and immediately stumbled across the now convicted army soldiers - all six of whom were either seated or lay on the rocky ground in front of the smouldering structure, whilst displaying varying degrees of lucidity.

A few of the uniformed men had been sat gently rocking back and forth, muttering incoherently to themselves - their eyes glazed over and unfocused as they faced the wooden structure ahead of them. One of the troopers had been lay in what had appeared to be a puddle of the man’s own urine, violently shaking his head back and forth, as though trying to dislodge some unwanted thought or intrusion within his own mind. Another soldier had been found to be unconscious, dried slithers of crimson blood clotting on both his mouth and chin, in what had looked to of been the aftermath of a particularly intense noise bleed.
Lt. Pete Fisher, the highest ranking member of the group found outside of the wooden structure on that surprisingly clear sunny morning back in 1966, had been by far the most coherent of the pitiful looking soldiers. As Fire Chief Henderson had slowly walked over to the man - his own face growing graver with each passing second spent at the bizarre scene – the Lieutenant had pushed himself up off the ground and grabbed onto the lapels of Henderson’s oversized Bunker jacket, pulling the Chief roughly towards him. Dudley had struggled to maintain his balance as the soldier has locked wide red-rimmed eyes onto his own and choked out the words “Their dead. Their all dead!” before releasing his jacket’s lapels to fall back down to the ground.

The Chief had written his report on the events of that morning to be as factual and straightforward as possible – just the plain and simple details of what he and his men had found upon during their time spent at the scene. The six despondent and incoherent soldiers, none of whom appeared able to string together enough words to tell his team what had happened. The building which only had the one entrance doorway that had been closed and locked from the inside (two of the fire crew had had to take their axes to the door to enable them all access into the structure). The intense smell of burnt flesh that had assaulted his nose as he, the Chief of the unit, had been the first to cross the building’s threshold and step into its gloomy interior. The charred remains of 19 individuals, all of whom had been burnt so badly and absolute, that the coroner had had to use old dental records to be able to ascertain the identity of the men and women that the bodies had once belonged to, before notification could be sent out to the families concerned. The glass shard remains of the Molotov cocktails that the soldiers had later confessed to throwing into the building after constructing the crude missiles in the Jeep on their drive over from the Port.

Everything else that may or may not have been in the large cabin before the fire had erupted, had been burnt to complete ash, leaving the fire crew with nothing else to collect or study.

It was a straightforward enough report that had not taken the Chief very long to write considering the number of lives that had been lost on that stormy October evening. But as he had sat staring at its words - a plate full of food churning within his stomach, whilst his wife’s words had churned within his head – Dudley Henderson’s hands had begun to shake.

Picking up his well-used fountain pen, his hand had hovered unsteadily over those papers, as his conscience had fought an internal battle with itself over whether to add the two, far more bizarre discoveries that he had made that morning.

The wooden building that had housed the Hippies doomed to a fate of burning alive, had been completely decimated inside – every inch of its interior intensely charred and scorched, the flames having left no surface or object untouched. But what had utterly dumbfounded the Fire Chief about the scene, was that not one lick of the structures exterior had been touched by the flames. From the outside, there was not a scrap of evidence on the surface on the wooden planks to suggest that a fire had even broken out within the confines of the cabin’s walls. The building, which had been constructed entirely from local timbre long before Henderson’s great-great-grandfather had even been born, had remained standing bold and sturdy on the wastelands horizon, despite the fire which should have destroyed it entirely – right down to the very last splinter.

And lastly, was the observation that the Chief knew could possibly spell the end of his career, if he included it in the pages of the report he was compiling. The one that still had chills running down his back on that early Sunday evening, weeks after the event itself.

As Henderson had finished dishing out his instructions to the fire-crew in that burnt out husk of a building, he had headed back towards the structures sole entrance with the intention of drawing in several large deep breaths of fresh air to rid his nose of the stench of burnt flesh. Leaning his arm upon the charred doorframe, the chief had been about to eyes let his eyes fall shut to appreciate the
light cleansing breeze passing over his skin from outside, when a very faint whisper of a voice had caressed at his ears - almost too quiet to have been detected at all. Thinking he had probably mistaken the faint howling of the wind outside to be something more than it was, the Chief had closed his eyes once more, and angled his face up towards the beaming sun, that had begun its early morning climb into the clear Louisiana sky. The smile that had tugged at his lips however, had been clean wiped off his face, when the whispering breeze returned once more – its words far too clear that second time around to have been mistaken for anything other than what they were.

“Burn them, Henderson. Burn them all!”

Sat at his desk on that early Sunday afternoon in the fall of 1966, two weeks after he and his team had finished their clean-up operation of the wooden building out in the barren lands off Route 46 – Chief Dudley Henderson placed his pen down without adding either of the two extra observations he had made on that clear sunny morning.

Instead he had signed the report, and closed its binder. Leaving it on his desk with those two small facts omitted, for him to personally hand it in to the Chief of Police the very next morning, as he made his way to the fire station.

Leaving it on his desk with those two small facts omitted – effectively signing the death warrant of all six soldiers who had travelled into the port of New Orleans on one random Friday evening, looking to enjoy a night of drinking and merriment away from the death and destruction of their army’s Vietnam War.

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2.

Halvar sat running a hand absentmindedly through his thick coarse beard, as he half listened to the youngest of his brethren, Fiske, drone on about his latest successful attempt at seducing one of the local women that dwelled within the city of New Orleans.

The youthful looking biker was well renowned amongst the clan to be the undisputed lothario of their ranks. With his clean-shaven face, that had relatively few nicks and scars marring its skin considering the action they had all seen on the battlefield, and his wide brown doe-eyes that had been a gift from his kind hearted and angelic mother - the Jarl had a deceptively innocent and trustworthy appearance. One which often earned him the trust of many a woman within mere minutes of making her acquaintance.

Of course that was often the last mistake the unsuspecting woman would make in her pathetic mortal life, as she followed the seasoned biker out of whatever bar or club he’d found her in, all the way back to his bed - where the true nature of which Fiske had been born with would make a cruel and merciless appearance.

_The gift from received the Jarl’s tyrant father, who had enslaved his mother and subjected her to months of torture and abuse, before finally ripping her apart in a frenzied blood lust after she had borne him a son_.

On this particular occasion, Fiske had apparently bagged himself not just one, but two naïve female revellers, as he had been scouting one of the many bars that thrived within the New Orleans French Quarter, on the previous evening..

Or at least that was what Halvar thought the young Jarl may have been saying – as in truth the Clan leader’s mind was drifting far away from the inside of the familiar Baracuda bar in which he
currently sat. The sound of his fellow Jarl’s banter, as they took turns to clap young Fiske on his back and raise their beer tankards in a toast to the biker’s latest conquest - gradually faded into nonsensical background noise, as Halvar once again began to run over the gang’s latest failure within his head.

Balder – his trusted second in command and right hand Jarl, not to mention the only one of the original seven who had been blessed with the gift of magic running through his veins – had been so sure that they would be successful in their centuries old quest this time around. The Gothi had declared that the world had changed and developed so much over the past century during which they had slumbered, there had never been a greater opportunity to resurrect their lord and master than what was available to them right now.

Despite his renowned ability to remain pragmatic and realistic when it came to their plight, Halvar certainly could not deny Balder’s claims - the world certainly had transformed a great deal since he had last walked its lands. Slavery had for the most part ended; wars were no longer fought on a battle field with just might & metal as an ally; fire was no longer the greatest power-source known to man, having been trumped by something they had come to learn was called Electricity; and the magical powers and wondrous beasts that had so freely roamed the land back in the days when the Jarl’s had been born, were now so few and far between that mankind had for the most part forgotten they have ever existed in the first place.

All of these factors had only served to work in their favour. The ruthless legacy of the fierce and brutal Blood-Bound Clan had appeared to have been all but forgotten by both humans and immortals alike, over the past centuries advance in civilisation.

There had been a time when men all over the world had known of the seven Jarls and the merciless Lord that they served. Their legacy had struck terror into the hearts of even the most vicious of killers and monsters that had stalked the lands - none being able to stand in the way of their quest to both serve and resurrect their fallen master. And none even daring to try, during the periods when the Jarls’ were awake from their eternal curse.

This time however, as the seven Jarls had risen from their dreamless slumber and resumed their quest anew, it had rapidly become apparent that not only had the world moved on with its technology and priorities, but the legacy of the Blood-Bound Clan had long since been forgotten.

Giving he and his brethren an unexpected advantage in their long-lived plight – anonymity!

“HA! My money is on the fat ugly bastard – that youngster doesn’t stand a chance!”

Halvar was quickly pulled out of his thoughts by the gravelly voice of Vidar - the Jarl sat closet to him around the large round table that they currently occupied. A split second later, the loud jeers and hollers of drunken men filled his ears, accompanied by the unmistakable sound of glass shattering, and wood splintering.

Focusing his eyes, the clan leader quickly located the source of the loud ruckus that was now filling the whole of Baracuda bar and easily drowning out the music that blared out of the joints well used Juke Box. A rough semi-circle of men had formed a space around two well inebriated gang members, currently locked in an intense looking bar-brawl. Tables and chairs were sprawled across the sticky wooden floor of the tavern, upturned onto their sides after being kicked and thrown aside when the fight broke out.

Halvar didn’t particularly recognise the two bikers whose bodies were currently locked together – an overweight burly man wedging the head of a smaller bearded gang member within the crook of his fleshy arm. Not that that surprised him in the slightest. Each century that the seven Jarls arose
from their magic induced slumber, they would rapidly recruit a small group of mortals to aid them in their cause – enlisting only those men with the darkest souls to be turned into Vampires and do their bidding.

_He had no interest in committing any of their faces or names to memory. All of them would dead within the briefest heartbeat of time – most being at the Jarls’ own hands. Whereas they - the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan - would live forever._

“You’re a fool Vidar!” chuffed Leif, the Jarl sat just to the left of Fiske. “The man’s excessive gluttony will be his downfall – look!”

Leif threw his muscular leather clad arm up to point in the direction of the brawling bikers, gulping down two thirds of the tankard of beer held in his other hand as he did. Sure enough, as Halvar continued to watch the fighting gang members, the slimmer man managed to twist his self out of the head-lock he had been entrapped within, and use the momentum of the move to tackle the overweight biker down onto the ground with a loud, unforgiving thud.

A thunderous roar of jeers and goading rose up from the on-looking crowd, almost drowning out Fiske and Leif’s own bellows of laughter at the sight of the large biker breaking his nose as he hit the floor face first.

“It is as I’m always telling you Vidar”, continued Leif once he had managed to get his own laughter into check, “skill and cunning will always overcome mindless brawn and might!”

Halvar turned his attention back to his brethren and the table around which they sat, just in time to see Vidar flash Leif a vicious snarl full of metallic teeth. The blood thirsty Jarl - who a few centuries ago had meticulously pulled every one of his own teeth out from his gums, only to then replace them with sharp metallic shards that he had fashioned to resemble iron replicas of a wolf’s canines – had always been one to fight first, think later. A trait that Leif often like to goad his fellow Jarl about, whenever it landed him in a sticky situation.

Which was far too often! Halvar thought to himself as he internally shook his head – a wave of irritation washing over him.

“Enough!” the clan leader exclaimed, his voice booming for everyone within Baracuda to hear, despite the loud chanting and jeers radiating from the unruly crowd that watched the bar-brawl. A muted silence fell over the tavern, as the bikers that had been clustered together amongst the broken chairs and uprooted tables, all dispersed to quickly find somewhere else within the bar to be. The smaller of the two men who had been brawling, slowly wiped a smear of blood from his face as he stepped over his fallen opponent – not giving the snarling biker another glance as he walked over to the bar at the centre of the room and resumed drinking his beer.

Pinching the bridge of his nose between two calloused fingers, Halvar let his authoritative posture deflate slightly, as he sighed and allowed his eyes wander over each of the four Jarls sat with him.

“Someone please tell me that Fiske’s conquests between the sheets aren’t the only progress currently being made in the city?!”

Fiske chuffed at the reference to his recent triumphs, a smirk fleetingly tugging at the Jarl’s lips, before quickly disappearing in response to the violent warning that swirled in the glance which Halvar shot his way.

It was Leif who eventually cleared his throat and straightened his back against the back of the chair
in which he sat – the furniture’s wood creaking loudly in response to the sudden extra pressure being exerted by the biker’s solid frame.

“Progress has been….slow, Halvar”, the Jarl stated slowly, as though choosing each of his words carefully. “We have obtained the life-blood of various different humans within the city – male, female, child, and of all different creeds and race. Balder, however, has failed to make any advancements despite his assurance that the answer to our Lords resurrection lies here, in New Orleans!”

The Clan leader noted the disdain that had laced his fellow Jarl’s voice when referring to Balder, but chose to ignore the not so subtle slur for the time being. It was no secret that most of the other Jarl’s had grown tired of the Gothi’s continued failed attempts to resurrect their Lord using the blood which they had been acquiring since their awakening just over 2 months ago.

“And the recent blood obtained from the Vampire’s that roam this city’s streets?” Halvar continued to probe.

It was Vidar who leaned forward to answer him this time, his face morphing into a dangerous mosaic of frustration and annoyance as the Jarl exerted even less restraint than Leif had when expressing his distaste for their Clan’s Gothi.

“The same damned lack of results, Halvar! Nothing! Does the useless fool even know what he is doing?! Or are we all now demoted to being nothing more than his well-trained mutts, fetching him useless toys to play with?!”

Halvar sighed, as his own frustrations began to bubble just under the surface of the stony composure he was attempting to portray.

Tensions amongst the seven Jarl’s had been steadily increasing over the past few weeks - the already fragile veil of order and restraint straining thinner with each passing failed attempt to resurrect their Lord. He and his brethren, each bound by the blood-bond that they had so eagerly given themselves over to all those centuries ago, had spent numerous eras looking for a solution to bring back their lord and master, without having come any closer to achieving that goal. Cycle after cycle, they had spent their waking months roaming across the world in search of anything which might aid their plight - witnessing all manners of civilisations and cultures change and evolve as time exerted its ever present influence upon them.

And century after century they had failed to achieve any tangible progress – despite leaving a legacy of pain and destruction in their wake, as they took out their frustrations upon any creature unfortunate enough to have crossed their path.

That had all changed however, when the Clan had awoken for this latest century’s cycle.

“Look”, Fiske suddenly exclaimed, “I’m sure Balder knows what he’s doing! He seemed pretty convinced about that weird tombs inscription, and what it foretold.”

The corner of Halvar’s lips twitched into the hint of a smile, as he listened to Fiske’s attempt to soothe the growing tension at the table of Jarls. The baby-faced biker’s defence of the Clan’s Gothi was as predictable as it was ineffective. Besides himself, Fiske was the only other member of their ranks who continued to cultivate a respectful admiration for the magic wielder of the Clan, and would often come to the Balder’s defence when the Gothi wasn’t there to fight his own battles.

“Why don’t you shut your pussy-eating face, cub!” Vidar sneered across the table. “No one asked for your kiss-ass opinion!”
Halvar watched as red hues of rage rapidly swathed across the youngest Jarls face, its wicked tendrils contorting his boyish features into a much crueller, severe façade.

*Revealing a glimpse of the Biker’s true sadistic nature Halvar mused, that he so deftly hid beneath many layers of charm and charisma crafted over several centuries of practice*

Just as the muscles and tendons in Fiske’s neck visibly tensed - no doubt an indication that the Jarl was about to make a lunge across the table for Vidar - the main door of the Baracuda tavern swung open, sending out a clattering crack as it collided with the buildings inner wall.

The loud commotion commanded the attention of all the revellers in the tavern.

Halvar watched on as two of the Jarl’s whom had so far been absent from their ranks that evening, stalked through the entrance. Ake’s tall hulking frame pushed forward down the two small steps leading into the bar, giving way to Colborn’s wide, overweight figure. Halvar noted that the latter of the new arrivals looked to have an unconscious females body slung over his left shoulder – the petite lifeless figure proving to be of little hindrance to the biker as both he and Ake stalked their way over to where their brethren sat.

“Where the hell have you two heaps of shit been!?” questioned Vidar, by way of greeting.

Ake appeared to ignore his fellow Jarl’s coarse words, as Halvar watched the biker drag one of the unoccupied chairs out from under the large table, and brusquely slump his bulky form down into it. Grabbing the half full tankard of ale that had been sat in front of Fiske, Ake slowly brought the drink up to his mouth as he addressed the Clan leader directly.

“Balder asked for the blood of a Witch. So that’s what we’ve brought him.” the Jarl said, pointing to the unmoving body still slumped over Colborn’s shoulder. “A Witch!”

Halvar felt the control that he constantly had to exert over the rage roaring within him, begin to waver. Lowering his head, the Clan leader locked eyes with Ake from under a furrowing brow.

“And...you...brought...her...body...here?”

He punctuated each word as it left his mouth, allowing a small slither of the violent anger swirling within his core to leak into the loaded question.

Ake opened his mouth to answer, but was swiftly cut off by Colborn as he effortlessly removed the unconscious Witch from his shoulder – lying her unmoving form across the table in front of them.

“No need to have a hissy fit, Halvar! We haven’t drained her as of yet. She’s still alive, see…..”

Colborn stretched out a thick-hair covered arm and prodded the sprawled out woman with a chubby finger, just below her collar-bone - drawing the other Jarl’s attention to the faint rise and fall of her chest. The Clan leader noted that although the witch’s breaths were both shallow and uneven, they were still definitely present despite the girl’s lifeless appearance.

“No, Colborn”, the Clan leader snarled, his voice shaking faintly due to the effort he exerted in trying to control his rage, ”I couldn’t care less if the woman waltzed in here singing and dancing to a string quartet! You know the rules – drain and leave the bodies in the city! There can be no evidence leading back to our place of dwelling. No evidence leading back to our Lord!”

The overweight biker huffed at Halvar, a mocking sneer forming upon his face.

“They sound like the words of a snivelling coward to me!”
Colborn gestured with a jerk of his chin, to the other Jarls sat around the table as he continued.

“Are we not the Seven Immortal Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan?! Is it not warriors blood that flows through us?! Or have the past ten centuries turned you all into useless sacks of meat?! ”

“Colborn, I hardly think being pragmatic about keeping our existence a secret until the Lord and Master is back among us, constitutes us as useless!” Fiske cut in, before Halvar had chance to respond.

The large biker rounded on his fellow clan member.

“And are you working hard to keep our existence a secret when you are bedding all those women back in the city, Fiske? Is it helping to keep the knowledge of our mission private when the screams of their pain fill the streets as you gut them afterwards?!”

Fiske’s eyes darkened, as he met Colborn’s accusations with a simmering stony silence.

“The only difference between you and me, brother”, Colborn continued, “is that I prefer to do my killing and feeding in the comfort of my own dwellings!”

Halvar had heard enough.

“Stop your damned bickering, both of you! Our Lord requires that…”

“Our Lord”, Colborn interrupted, “is lying in a crypt decimated and rotting! And we’ve foolishly spent the last thousand years dedicating every last second to serving a corpse! It’s time we abandoned this stupid blind loyalty and….”

“ENOUGH!”

Halvar felt the unmistakable burning of the blood-bond flare up within his veins as he stood up and took a step towards Colborn – rising to his full height as he moved. He sensed the old ancient power surging throughout his body - amplifying his already intimidating presence and hardening already solid muscles, as his eyes rapidly bled into a crimson hue.

“You…will…not….break the oath of our bond!”

The clan leader could not only hear the powerful tremors embedded within words that left his mouth, but also feel the crackling of primal power that weaved its way around them as they vibrated towards the bearded Jarl in front of him.

Colborn’s face paled instantly, defiance beginning to drain out of him as the biker was forced down onto his knees by the weight of Halvar’s words alone. A tight grimace stretched his lips, as sweat began to bead on the bikers forehead – his body shaking faintly as it appeared to still struggle against the will of the Blood-Bond. Halvar took another step closer to the cowed Jarl, raising himself up impossibly higher to completely fill the view of the biker.

“You will rein yourself in, Jarl Colborn! Do you forget the reason why we are all still breathing. To whom we owe our Immortality to!”

The overweight biker’s head dropped down even further as he remained bowing upon his knees. Halvar could feel the weight of the stare from every being within the walls of Baracuda bar - all sounds of shameless indulgence and drunken banter having instantly melted away as soon as the clan leader had invoked the ancient power within him.
Halvar, however, ignored the rapt attention of the tavern’s unruly patrons, as he raised his chin slightly and looked down the bridge of his nose at his fellow Jarl.

“Say it Colborn! Say what our sole purpose for existence is!”

The Jarl’s jaw tightened and his mouth tensed into a rigid line, as an internal battle appeared to rage within him – his own stubborn defiance locked in confrontation against the domineering presence of the bond that ran deep throughout within his soul. Halvar watched on as the bikers whole body began to shake, his face turning a deep shade of red that rivalled the colour currently burning bright in Clan leader’s own eyes.

Halvar tugged harder on the tendrils of power that throbbed through him, pushing out the resulting energy towards his cowed brother.

“NOW!”

A loud grunt of pain escaped from Colborn’s mouth, before all tension and stiffness suddenly left his body – the Jarl’s posture visibly deflating as he quickly sank further down onto his knees. When he spoke, the defiance and disdain that had so completely saturated his voice was gone, leaving behind only a whisper lined with defeat and servitude.

“Our sole purpose is to serve our Lord’s will. To do as he commands. To protect him with our lives.”

Halvar’s eyes did not leave the top of the defeated Jarl’s head, nor did the fire burning within them lessen in its ferocity as he demanded to hear the final part of their blood-bond’s oath.

“And?”

Barely half a beat passed before Colborn finished the vow.

“And to ensure his return, no matter what the cost.”

Halvar did not lessen his grip on the Jarl, despite the biker’s completion of the vow. He wanted the insubordinate fool to feel all of the weight and dominance of their responsibilities – the commanding pull of the unquestionable obedience and submission that each of them had given their lives over to in exchange for the gift of immortality. It flowed through all of the Seven, himself included - and it would not be denied. Could not be refused.

Not even by rebellious, strong willed fools such as Colborn!

The heavy silence that had been blanketing the bar was abruptly shattered by the sound of a door clattering open behind Halvar, far on the other side of the large tavern. The Clan leader did not need to turn his head away from Colborn to know who had suddenly appeared, up from the depths of the buildings cellar rooms.

Balder’s voice echoed across the room, breaking through the muted stupor that had been holding all of the drinker’s tongues in place.

“Is someone going to bring me that damned Witch to bleed, or do I have to do everything myself in this godforsaken shithole?!”

Sighing heavily through his nose, Halvar closed his eyes as he loosened his grip on the ancient power flowing within his veins – the load roar of its dominance dying down to a far calmer, purred whisper. When he eventually returned his gaze to the kneeling Jarl in front of him, the irises of his
eyes had returned back to their usual light blue colour, gleaming in the muted light of the tavern.

“Get off the floor you obese ludicrous fool, and remove that damned Witch from my drinking table!”

Colborn lifted his head to meet the Clan leaders glare, his eyes swirling with hatred - and for one fleeting heartbeat, Halvar thought that the Jarl was actually going to be foolish enough to attempt to challenge the Blood-bond’s will once more. But Colborn simply pushed himself up off his knees, huffed a deep breath out of his nose, and then turned to pick up the unconscious woman – flinging her limp body back over his wide shoulder. Without another word, the biker began to stride across the wooden floor, making his way over to join the Clan’s Gothi at the back of the tavern.

“And by the God’s, damn well make sure you dump her body back in the city when Balder is done with her!” the Clan leader shouted over his shoulder, just as Colborn was about to disappear down into the cellar with the Gothi.

Halvar turned back and stared in turn at each of the Jarls that remained seated at the table, silently challenging them to dare and say a word against his actions. But he was met only with submission as they nodded their heads, and turned their attentions back to the drinks in front of them.

As the boisterous shouting and raucous laughter belonging to Baracuda’s drunken revellers resumed once more, Halvar re-took his seat at the Jarl’s table and shot a look over to the busy manager currently working behind the taverns bar. Gaining the man’s attention, the Clan leader signalled for another round of Ales to be brought over to them all. He had a feeling it was going to be a long night, taxing night – one that he would need to be far more inebriated for to endure.

*He just preyed to the gods that the blood of Colborn’s witch would be the key to finally bringing their Lord back amongst their midst*

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3.

“Hasn’t your shift now finished, Doctor?”

Keelin smiled and nodded faintly in response to her patient’s question, as she continued to concentrate on suturing the long laceration along the woman’s slender arm. A few more stitches and her work to close the relatively shallow wound would be complete – hopefully ensuring that the kind old lady would eventually just be left with a faint white scar as a reminder of the argument that she had lost earlier that morning with her hedge trimmers.

Carefully snipping off the last of the sutures, Keelin remained sat on the hospital issue stool as she wheeled herself over to the side of the curtain shrouded trauma-bay and placed the expended kit into a bright yellow sharps bin - closely following it with her gloves. Rolling the stool back to the bed again, the brunette placed her hands on top of her thighs as she watched her patient briefly study her work.

“Now Mrs Kunkle, remember what I told you…”

“I know dear”, the old woman cut in, smiling at her doctor as she continued, “Try to keep the sutures dry for the first few days, and no strenuous lifting with my arm whilst it heals.”

The old woman smiled, as she reached out and took one of Keelin’s hands into her own.
“I might be reaching my twilight years, Doctor, but I can assure you that my mind is still as sharp as those darned trimmers!”

Laughing, Keelin raised herself up off the small stool and picked up her patients chart from the bed using her free hand, whilst gently squeezing her patient’s own hand with the other.

“Oh I have no doubt you are as quick witted as they come, Mrs Kunkle! But maybe next time you might want to leave the hedge trimming to your son, when he visits from up state. As much as I have enjoyed our little chat, I don’t want to be seeing you in here again anytime soon, ok!”

The old woman laughed and nodded in agreement with her.

“I’ll send through one of the nurses to help you gather your things and call a cab for your journey home. Stay safe now Mrs Kunkle!”

Keelin held a hand up briefly in goodbye, before drawing back one of the blue hospital curtains surrounding the small minor-trauma unit, and making her way back over to the admin desk situated in the centre of the clinic. Quickly briefing the nurse that was sat behind one of the numerous computers littering the desk, she handed over the old woman’s chart, before starting to make her way across to the small staff room.

It had been a relatively quiet Wednesday morning in St Theadores Emergency Clinic – or as quiet as a Trauma department situated in the centre of the supernatural city of New Orleans was ever going to get. The wolf had only had two major cases roll through the doors during the course of her shift, which as far as she could remember, was a record low since she had begun working there just over a year ago.

The first had been an RTA in which a young school girl had been knocked over as she had been walking to school with her friends by a careless driver. Luckily enough for the child, the driver had only just pulled away from a standstill at a red light, so hadn’t managed to build up much speed before clipping the curb and veering onto the pavement where the group of kids had been walking. She had suffered a broken collar bone and dislocated shoulder, along with several other minor cuts and bruises. It had been a traumatic ordeal for the girl, but thankfully one that she would completely recover from, given enough love and rest.

The second major case that Keelin had taken point on, had sadly resulted in a far bleaker prognosis than the first. A robbery at one of the local 7-11 stores in the 9th Ward had turned deadly when the store owner had tried to chase the thief out of the building with a baseball bat he kept hidden behind the shop counter - in case of such emergencies. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to the shopkeeper the young man attempting to take his hard earned money had concealed a Smith & Wesson 500 retriever in the pocket of his hooded top, and had pulled it out in defence as the owner had approached him with the bat. Nerves had got the better of the teen, and he had fired off a shot when the bell above the stores entranceway had suddenly rung out, signalling the arrival of an unaware shopper after their morning pint of milk and newspaper.

The bullet had hit the shopkeeper just a few centimetres to the left of his heart, nicking an artery as it had passed through his chest, before exiting clean out of his back. Luckily for the man, the customer who had entered into the store had been an off-duty paramedic, and had managed to apply enough pressure and expertise to the wound to keep the storekeeper alive until his on-duty colleagues had arrived and taken over.

The thief himself had quickly fled the scene, using the chaos and distraction of the bleeding out victim to his advantage.
By the time the shop-owner had ended up on Keelin’s Trauma table, he had already lost over 4 pints of blood and endured two seizures as a result of the reduced level of oxygen reaching his brain. She and her team had stabilised the patient as best they could – carrying out an immediate blood transfusion and administering drugs to momentarily calm the seizures. She had also applied a temporary clamp over the man’s damage artery after opening up the bullet wound further to allow her sufficient access to the blood vessel.

Keelin’s scrubs and gloves had been liberally coated in the store-keeper’s blood, as she had watched the gurney that he was lay upon be rushed out of the major-trauma room, and into the lift that lead up to the operating theatres a few floors above.

As Keelin now entered into the small staffroom where each of the clinic’s doctors and nurses were assigned a locker, her mind wondered back up to emergency theatre no.2 - where she knew one of the hospital’s top cardiac surgeons was still battling to save the poor storekeeper’s life. The prognosis hadn’t been too optimistic the last time she had checked in with the operating team.

“Hey Keelin – are you only just clocking off your shift? Didn’t you finish like an hour ago?”

The sudden sound of a familiar male voice brought the wolf out of her thoughts, as she looked up to see Joel lounging on one of the old and worn armchairs that stood in the centre of the staffroom encircling a small coffee table. The emergency room nurse looked to be half-way through the lunch he had brought in for himself that day, as he took a sip of hot black coffee from a white mug that had the words “I’m A Nurse, What’s Your Superpower!!” scrawled across it in thick rainbow coloured lettering.

She smiled as she remembered her friend’s face when she herself had presented him with that mug, as a tongue-in-cheek gesture of appreciation after he had aided her through a particularly gruelling 13 hour shift during her first few weeks on the job.

The two had become good friends after that day - gaining even more of a connection after the Neivera wolf Alanna had taken on the nurse’s spare room in his apartment based in the Lower Garden district of the city.

Sighing softly, Keelin nodded towards her friend in acknowledgement as she headed to her designated locker. Punching in a four digit number combination, she unclicked the padlock around the metal doors latch, and opened it up to grab her clothes.

“Two hours actually,” she chuffed in response to Joel’s query as she had entered. “But what’s 120 minutes and several minor cases that could have been handled by a local family physician, between friends!!”

She heard Joel laugh behind her, as he continued to eat into his large salami sandwich.

Stripping out of her blue hospital scrubs, Keelin began to pull on the pair of dungarees that she had brought to work with her that morning, not giving her male company a second thought. None of the doctors or nurses that worked in the Emergency Department were particularly prudish when it came to changing in front of each other, but she was even less concerned about Joel seeing her body than she would have been most. The male nurse was as gay as she was, and his eyes never even flickered when he was around his female colleagues as they changed – unless of course he was appraising a particular outfit that they had swapped their scrubs for, as proceeded to do on this occasion.

“Damn girl, you sure do know how to make a pair of shabby-chic dungarees look good!”
Keelin laughed, and shot the nurse a flirty look over her shoulder as she continued to fasten the clasps on the denim attire.

“Like what you see Joel? Could I tempt you over to the other-side?!”

The nurse’s loud chortle filled the small staffroom, as bits of half-chewed sandwich fell from his mouth and onto the tiled floor.

“Sadly I fear I am far too gone to be saved! But Freya must consider herself one hell of a lucky girl to get to tap that fine ass of yours!”

Keelin grabbed the remainder of her things out of the locker, before relocking its door and turning to face her smiling friend with a playful twinkle in her eyes.

“Damn right she does! Every….single….night!”

Her remark peeled forth another loud chuckle from the seated nurse, as he shook his head in amusement.

“Speaking of the blonde enigma that is your girlfriend - will she be joining us for drinks next Friday evening?”

The wolf slowly began to make her way over to the staff-room’s exit as she replied to her friend.

“Sadly not – it’s her niece’s birthday on the Saturday, and Freya has promised Hope’s mother that she will help decorate the family home with balloons and banners on Friday evening, once the girl has gone to bed.”

Joel nodded in understanding, before a slightly guilty look pulled at his features.

“Well it sure is a shame that she can’t come and mingle with all of us medical types - but it’s er…..probably for the best!”

Her friend’s unusual remark made Keelin stop in her tracks, just as she was about to pull open the staff-rooms door to leave.

Joel and Freya had only met a handful of times - and each occasion had only consisted of fleeting “hello’s” and “How are you’s” whenever her girlfriend had stopped by the clinic to either walk Keelin home, or drop off some food for her shift. Their brief conversations had always seemed pleasant however - both of them always full of smiles and politeness for each other.

As such, the wolf couldn’t immediately think of a reason why Joel would think it would be better for Freya not to join them for the after-work drinks, that had been arranged by the clinic’s ER staff.

Twisting around, she cocked her head slightly to the side in a questioning manner.

“For the best? Why do you say that?”

A faint blush of red spread across the nurse’s cheeks, as he began rubbing the back of his neck with a hand.

“Oh….well I didn’t mean it like…..it’s not that she wouldn’t be welcome….you know….because of course she would!” he rambled quickly, in a somewhat nervous manner. “I for one would love to get to know her better…and find out what makes her tick. And you know….if she makes you happy… then that’s what is important….!”
“Joel!” Keelin interrupted, as her brows knitted together slightly in confusion. “Just spit it out – what’s wrong?”

Her friend let out a heavy sigh, as he quickly tried to regain his composure. Moving the remains of the sandwich off his lap and onto the coffee table, the nurse stood slowly and gestured to her in means of an apology.

“Right. Ok. So nothing is exactly wrong, so to speak!”

Keelin raised an eyebrow, and waited for him to continue.

“It’s just that….well you know how Alanna has been on a few dates recently, with that girl who she’s been refusing to tell us much about?”

Keelin’s brow furrowed further, confused as to where the nurse was going with this conversation.

Alanna had indeed told her that she had started dating someone recently, when they had met for a catch-up coffee on the day after she had returned from New York. The younger wolf had entered into the coffee-shop with a huge smile beaming upon her face, and had nearly squeezed the air from Keelin’s lungs in excitement when they had hugged in greeting. Keelin had barely managed sit down after fetching their orders from the counter, when Alanna had blurted out “So I’m totally banging a hottie!’ - causing the brunette to suddenly cough mid-drink, and splutter coffee all over herself. After a quick dash back to the counter to retrieve some napkins, Alanna had proceeded to tell her that whilst the initial few dates – and subsequent sleep overs – had progressed exceptionally well with this new girl on the scene, she didn’t want to divulge too many details about the “hottie” until she knew if it was going to stick.

Keelin hadn’t really thought too much about it at the time, putting Alanna’s reluctance to share any details about her date’s name and origins down to the young wolf’s recent ordeal at the hands of the Hollow, and subsequent loss of her entire family. A huge trauma like that, had the tendency to make a person cautious when it came to opening up and letting others in.

Truth be told, Keelin had actually forgotten all about her friend’s “date” news in the few days since she had last seen the wolf – her return to shifts at the clinic, coupled with catching up on lost time with Freya taking up most of her time and energy.

That was, until now.

She motioned for Joel to continue, when his pause had lasted more than just a few seconds long.

“Well, I finally managed to get some details off her last night, after plying her with a few cheeky glasses of wine. You know how quickly she gets tipsy on wine right? I’ve never known such a light weight…”

“Joel!”

“Right!” the male nurse laughed nervously, “Stick to the facts. Gotcha! So it turns out the “hottie” that she has been seeing, is no other than our Holly!”

Keelin blinked twice, as her brain caught up with what Joel had said.

“Holly…..as in Holly Martins, the Junior Doctor who works in this department? That Holly?!”

She kept her eyes locked on the nurse - eyebrows raised expectantly.
“The one and only!”

Another brief pause passed between them.

“Well… I mean….well, that’s great! Holly seems like a lovely girl, and definitely has her head screwed right on when it comes to her patients. I mean….sure, I wouldn’t necessarily have placed them together. I hadn’t even realised that Holly was into women.”

It took a few seconds for the information to sink in, but eventually Keelin remembered as to why the subject of who Alanna was dating had been brought up in the first place.

“Hold up, what has any of this got to do with Freya, and next Friday’s drinks after work?”

Joel’s mouth twisted to the left, as he looked to briefly contemplate how his next few words would be taken.

“Well… it seems that Holly must think that Alanna is potential girlfriend material, as she’s invited her to come and join us for drinks on that Friday evening. Apparently she wants to introduce the girl that she’s been dating to her work friends.”

Keelin’s eyes widened briefly, before she lowered her chin and brought a hand up to rub at her temple.

“Joel, please tell me that the next words out of your mouth are going to be that Alanna has of course kindly refused the offer to be seen drinking in a bar that’s only two blocks away from mine and Freya’s apartment?!?”

The male nurse remained silent, suddenly finding great interest in removing a large crumb of sandwich that was stuck to the top half of his pale red scrubs.

“For Christ sakes!” Keelin swore, throwing her hands up in frustration. “I swear that girl is going be the death of me!”

Joel looked up from his scrubs, and grimaced at the exasperated expression that he saw upon her face.

“Surely it’s not going to be an issue though?” the nurse attempted to reason. “As like you said, Freya isn’t going to be joining us now for the evening. Besides, I know that you have said in the past that Alanna and Freya don’t get along – a fact that she’s mentioned herself too – but how bad can it really be? Ok, so they aren’t going to be braiding each-others hair anytime soon, but they are both grown adults after all! Surely they can just ignore each other if they cross paths, and then bitch about the other when they get home - like any normal, well rounded woman would do!”

An incredulous guffaw escaped from the wolf’s mouth, as she listened to her friend’s words.

Keelin knew that over the six months that Alanna had been living with Joel, the two had grown very close as friends. That initial spark she that had seen ignite between them both on the morning of their first meeting, had only grown in size over their time spent cooking meals and watching box-sets together on Joel’s big comfy sofa. The two shared a very similar sense of humour - not to mention an almost identical taste in music and food. Had both of them not preferred members of the same sex to warm their respective beds at night, Keelin would have placed good money on the wolf and nurse ending up entangled in a romantic relationship, instead of just the platonic one they currently enjoyed.

So it had been no surprise to the brunette when, during one particularly quiet shift at the clinic a
few months earlier, Joel had mentioned that his flat mate had admitted to not seeing eye-to-eye with Keelin’s girlfriend, Freya – after he had suggested to Alanna that they should invite the couple round to his flat, for an evening of nachos and wine.

To the wolfs relief, Alanna had had enough common sense to omit the genuine reasons behind her and Freya’s animosity, instead telling Joel a very diluted slither of truth – that she had been attracted to Keelin when they had first met, and that Freya had not taken kindly to that fact.

Keelin had nearly burst out into laughter when the nurse had related what the young wolf had said in relation to Freya, but she had managed to keep it together long enough to confirm that what Alanna had told him was true, and then add that Freya got jealous whenever Alanna’s name was even mentioned, so it was best he not bring up his flatmate should he and the witch ever speak at length.

It had been just another dark thread added to the tangled web of lies and deception that she had found herself having to weave since welcoming Alanna back into her life - and she had to admit, there were times when she wished that the younger wolf had just disappeared into the night after the events of the Carnival all those months ago, never to be seen in New Orleans again.

But would she have been able to live with herself, had she just left the girl to fend for herself?

“Freya is going to meet me at the bar Joel, to walk me home once the night is over. If they…..”

She trailed off, realising that there was no way of her continuing that sentence without her friend becoming suspicious over just how deep the animosity between her girlfriend and Alanna ran.

Sighing heavily, she forced a faint smile to stretch across her lips as she placed a hand briefly onto the nurse’s arm, giving it a light squeeze in a gesture of both gratitude and farewell.

“Thank you for the heads-up. I hope the rest of your shift is quiet for you.”

As she let her hand fall away from her friend’s arm and turned to open the staff-room door, Joel spoke up once more.

“What are you going to do?”

Keelin remained facing away from Joel as she quietly replied - a steeled look of determination flashing through her eyes.

“I’m going to go and have a little chat with your flatmate!”

***************************************************************************

4.

Freya steadily climbed up the long sweeping stairs of the Mikaelson compound, her heart feeling gradually heavier with each step she took.

It had been just over 24 hours since her last tutoring session with Hope had ended in both tears and confusion, and this was the first chance that had arisen for her to return to the family home since the event.
She had felt it best to give Hope some space immediately after the young witch had stormed up to her room in floods of tears on the previous morning. Her niece was very much a Mikaelson when it came to her temper, and if there was one thing that Freya had learned over the many years of her supernaturally extended life, was that her family members were always best left to cool down a little, before you approached them for round two!

So she had left her brooding niece to the solace of her bedroom, and instead located Hayley who had been out front of the family home, picking out an assortment of home-grown flowers to later place in her daughter’s room.

The witch had quickly explained what had happened at the end of her training session with her niece – though some small inner voice in the back of her mind had cautioned her from revealing exactly how Hope had come to learn of Keelin’s involvement in funhouse wolf attack just over a year ago. Yes, Hayley was Hope’s mother, and as such would naturally want to know every little detail there was about her daughter and the magic that ran through the girl’s veins. But there had been a tiny knot deep within Freya’s gut that had seemed to tighten slightly, when she got to the part of her explanation regarding how Hope had learned about Keelin’s wolf. It had tugged at her conscious, and caused her magic to flare faintly deep within her veins, as though the answer to a question she did not know had been asked was advising her to keep certain details a secret for now.

So the witch had made a split second decision, and said that it was she herself that had let slip to the youngster whom the body of the wolf had belonged to on that fateful night, and that the words had left her mouth in mistake during a heated moment in their training.

It had not been a complete lie, so to speak. After all, it had been her own thoughts that had alerted the young witch to the truth of that night in the funhouse. The information had indeed come from Hope’s Aunt.

*Just not in the way that she had lead Hayley to believe*

The hybrid had flashed Freya a brief reproachful look – one that the witch knew she deserved, and more – before quickly heading back into the Compound to find her daughter and console her.

Freya had gone home that afternoon with a head full of confusion, and anger.

Confusion as to how Hope had developed the skill of mind-reading, when such a power had never previously presented itself in the long line of witches in her family. Neither Freya, her mother Esther, nor her grandmother - whom she had never met, but had researched all about many years ago – had been gifted with the magic of telepathy. Its presentation in Hope was a first in their bloodline.

And anger at herself, for not having told her niece earlier about Keelin’s involvement in the wolf attack on her and her friends.

Hayley had actually suggested a few weeks after the incident that they should broach the subject with her daughter, in the interest of being as open and honest as possible with the youngest Mikaelson. But it had been Freya who had shot down the idea at the time. Keelin had still been drowning in a deep well of guilt and shame at that point - the wolf finding it hard to drag herself out of bed every morning, let alone function in the outside world. Freya had worried about what effect Hope taking the news of Keelin’s involvement badly would have on the recovery of her girlfriends mental health, and thus had convinced Hayley that they should continue to hide the finer details from the young witch.

*A decision she was now regretting!*
When Keelin had returned home from her shift at the hospital, Freya knew that her girlfriend had detected that something was on her mind and bothering her. But she had brushed the wolf off as best as possible, saying that the days tutoring session with Hope had just been particularly frustrating, and that she had a headache resulting from the associated stress. Her wolf lover had made a quip about how their own future child would probably even more of a handful than Hope – and that had been the swift end of the conversation, Freya quickly changing the subject to what take-out they should order and if it would be too messy to eat the food off each other, instead of off a plate. The distraction had worked well.

*A child of their own! Was that what Keelin wanted?*

After walking Keelin to work that morning, Freya had immediately taken herself off to the Bell-Tower, instead of heading to the Compound for her and Hope’s usual pre-lessons breakfast. It wasn’t that she had wanted to avoid her niece per-say – she had after all promised Tobias, the new Witch Regent, that she would help with his recent research into all of the decapitated human and vampire bodies that had been appearing across the city over the past couple of months. But she would have been lying if she’d have claimed that the research wasn’t also a convenient way to distract her mind from the guilt and anger that she currently associated with the youngest Mikaelson.

It had been late afternoon by the time a shrill beeping sound from her cell phone had dragged Freya’s head out of Esther’s grimoires. Rubbing her eyes and internally berating herself for having not stopped for food or water since arriving at the Bell Tower that morning, the witch had read the message received from Hayley, asking if she could come over to the Compound as Hope had been asking for her.

And now, as she reached the top of the Compound’s staircase, Freya couldn’t help but wonder if her niece was already in the process of reading her thoughts, and picking up on how conflicted she was over the development of the girls power.

“Freya!”, Hayley exclaimed from where she stood in the Mikaelson’s drawing room doorway. “Thank you for coming over. You were missed this morning at breakfast.”

The witch’s eyebrows rose, as she tried not to let too much surprise leak onto her face.

“I would have thought after yesterdays….turn of events, that I would be the last person who Hope would want to spend time with!”

The hybrid smiled ruefully at her as she replied.

“I won’t lie, it took some time to get her to calm down enough so that I could explain why we hadn’t told her about Keelin. But I think I managed to get her to understand in the end”

“Really?” Freya asked, surprise definitely evident in her voice this time.

“Well she asked for you this morning, when you didn’t arrive at your usual time for your lessons together. And then later asked if she could be allowed to go visit you at the Bell Tower. I figured however, it would be better if you came here – I’m still not sure how I feel about my little girl being surrounded by all the grimoires and magical totems that you have hoarded up there!”

The hybrids words elicited a laugh from Freya, despite her current mood. She could not deny that her magical haven was probably not the best place for a young child to play. Especially one who had the potential to invoke most of those spells and dark-art totems without even realising she was doing it.
“Probably a wise choice”, she chuckled quietly towards Hayley. “Is she in her room?”

“Yes. We’ve just finished bedding some new plants and flower bulbs in the balcony pots, so she’s freshening up and changing for dinner.”

Freya just nodded in response, and turned in the direction of Hope’s bedroom. She had only taken a few steps when Hayley’s voice trailed after her.

“Try not to forget Freya - underneath all the witchcraft and burden of being a magical hybrid – she’s still just a 9 year old little girl who loves her Aunties!”

5.

Placing a hand upon the handle of Hope’s bedroom door, Freya gradually opened it a small way and stuck her head through the gap. Her eyes immediately landed on her niece, who was sat cross-legged on her bed and dressed in her favourite large white fluffy dressing-gown. The girl had both of her hands outstretched in front of her body, as her green eyes concentrated on 3 small plastic balls that were hovering in mid-air just above her splayed palms.

A quick glance to the bed-side table confirmed to the witch that Hope had removed her small golden bracelet to enable her to call upon her magic freely whilst practicing.

Without breaking eye contact with the balls, Hope spoke up to acknowledge the presence of her Aunt.

“Mama said I could practice for a while, so long as I promised to not try anything too ambitious.”

The witch smiled - the sight of her niece masterfully levitating the balls in a perfect rotating formation, filling her with a warm sense of pride.

“Can I come in?”

The youngest Mikaelson nodded gently without taking her eyes off the objects of her spell.

Pushing the door open fully, Freya only managed to take half a step into the room, when the three balls that had been levitating just above Hope’s hands suddenly shot out in her direction - moving at a vision-blurring speed towards her head.

Her hand was up a split second after her eyes had registered the movement as a single word incantation whispered softly over her lips out of pure instinct.

“Prohibere!”

The red balls came to an abrupt halt, less than half a metre away from where she stood in the young girl’s doorway. Freya locked eyes with Hope and smirked - winking at her, before a quick flick of her hand caused each of the three missiles to quickly shatter into tiny pieces of plastic that hung suspended in the air for a heartbeat, before crumbling down onto the wooden floor.

Admiration flickered temporarily in her nieces eyes, before the girl let out a small huff and leaned across to the bedside table to retrieve her bracelet.

“It’s not like you haven’t had a thousand more years than me to practice, Aunt Freya!”
Freya laughed, and nodded her head as she started to make her way over. As she reached the foot of the bed, she gestured with a hand to the furniture in a silent request to sit next to her niece – which was met with quick consent. Sitting down, she cocked her head slightly and looked at the bracelet now fixed back around the young witch’s arm.

“You know, if you keep mastering control as well as you were exhibiting just then, I doubt it will be too long before you no longer need that bracelet!”

Hopes eyes shot up and locked with her own, a glistening sparkle of optimism weaving its way through her irises.

“Really? Do you really think that?”

Smiling, Freya nodded.

“I really do!

Her niece’s own smile widened, as her attention shifted back down to the jewellery around her arm.

“Listen Hope, I need to apologise to you,” Freya started, her expression shifting slightly into one of regret as she focused on her own hands, now twisting in her lap. “It wasn’t right of me to ask your mum to keep information from you, about the night of the wolf attack on you and your friends.”

She looked up again in time to see Hope’s mouth twisting to the side in confusion, as a small frown formed upon her face.

“Then why did you?” the girl asked softly, her eyes not quite meeting Freya’s own.

She sighed.

“Honestly….I was worried. Worried that it would only upset you further, if you knew exactly who the wolf’s body had belonged to. And also worried for your Aunty Keelin too, as she was already really upset about being forced to hurt someone who she loves very much.”

Hope’s eyes met her own, as the youngsters expression softened slightly.

“Aunty Keelin loves me?”

“Of course she does, honey! Just as much as I do!”

Freya lent forward and took both of her niece’s hands into her own.

“And she would never… ever…hurt you on purpose. What happened on that night - it might have been Keelin’s wolf form that was in the fun-house with you, but it wasn’t Keelin who was in control of her body. Your mom’s now explained to you how the Neivera wolf pack had taken control over her, right?”

The young witch nodded softly, as her gaze fell back down to rest on the hands grasped in Freya’s.

A beat or two passed, before the girl’s voice dropped to barely a whisper - causing Freya to almost miss what she said.

“Could that happen to my mom?”

Shaking her head definitively, Freya squeezed lightly on her nieces hands to make the girl meet her gaze.
“No! Your mom is a hybrid - the spell that was cast onto Keelin wouldn’t have worked on her. Plus, the Hollow is gone honey, and it is the only being in existence that can use that particular incantation!”

The girl seemed to be placated by that answer, as Freya felt the tension in her small hands ease away.

Silence filled the room again, as she considered how to word the question that she knew she needed to ask the young witch.

“Honey…. can we talk about your new ability?”

Freya watched on as the colour quickly blanched out of her nieces face – the girls eyes widening a little with what seemed to be fear.

“Hey, I’m not angry, ok! You can talk to me about it, Hope - I promise.”

Her niece remained silent - eyes refusing to meet Freya as she pulled her hands away from her Aunts and began fidgeting with them in her lap.

“Are you worried about what your mom and dad will think? Is that why you don’t want to talk about it?”

Hope gave the faintest of nods, and began chewing softly on her lower lip.

“Ok, well how about I make you a promise? You agree to talk to me about what’s going on with this new part of your magic, and in return, I promise to keep it just between us. It can be our witchy secret, until you are ready to share it with your parents. Does that sound ok?”

It took a good minute of Hope continuing to chew on her lower lip whilst watching her hands twist in her lap, before her gaze finally rose up and met with Freya’s.

“Ok.”

Freya smiled at the youngster, and edged a little closer to her on the bed.

“So, when did it start happening?”

Hope drew in a deep breath, and then let it out steadily again through her nose – as though steeling herself to find the correct words.

“Only a couple of weeks ago, I think. I’m not exactly sure, it kinda…. just happened one day.”

“Want to tell me about that day?” Freya prompted, making sure to keep her face calm and wearing a soft smile.

And so Hope proceeded to describe to her Aunt how one Saturday afternoon, she had been playing a game of Hide-And-Seek with her friends in the local park, when their voices had started appearing in her head. The young witch had been the one searching for the others whilst they hid, and as she was walking around the park looking for them, she had started to hear faint murmurings - as though her friends had been whispering to her from afar.

It had been Nieve’s voice to begin, soft and timid, as the girl had wondered if her hiding place behind the park bench had been a good idea, as her older brother had always found her easily when she had hidden there in the past. Confused as to why her friend would be giving away her position
by whispering out loud about it, Hope had walked around the bench to find Nieve crouched on the floor, with her eyes scrunched shut. The young witch had tagged her friend, and told her that she actually thought it was a good place to hide, and that her brother had probably just been lucky.

Nieve had looked at Hope in confusion, asking her what she was talking about. But before Hope had been able to answer, she had started to hear another of her friends whispering to themselves, giving away their position lying down on the top of the park's tall slide. As Hope had been walking over to the playground attraction to climb its steps and “tag” Johnny, another small voice had ringed inside her head, this time belonging to her friend Paige, who was wondering how long she would need to remain hidden, because she had really needed to pee.

Confusion and alarm had started to build up within the small witch, as she had realised Nieve was not hearing their friends murmurings in the same way that she herself was.

“Did they suspect that you were hearing their thoughts?” Freya asked, as her niece paused her tale long enough to reach for the glass of water sat on her bedside table.

The young witch shook her head.

“No, I don’t think they did. I didn’t really….well, I didn’t really understand it myself either. Not at that point.”

Freya nodded her head in an understanding gesture.

“When did it next happen?”

“Later that weekend, when we were all sat having breakfast. You and Aunty Keelin had come to eat pancakes with me and Mom. I remember that Mom asked you if you wanted to go for drinks that evening with her, and you both looked at each other, and….”

Freya’s eyes widened, as the memory of the conversation that Hope was referring to crashed into her head.

“…..you said to Aunty Keelin that you already had plans to spend the evening underneath her. Only….well, your mouth didn’t move when you said it to her, and Aunty Keelin’s didn’t move either when she replied…..”

“OK!” Freya exclaimed a little too loudly. “Ok! I erm…..well we, um….”

The witch let out a breath, and attempted to smooth out a non-existent crease from her top as she quickly composed herself before continuing.

“So, has it continued to just occur randomly in that way?”

Hope nodded her head.

“When I realised what was happening, I started trying to hear what people were thinking on purpose. Trying to listen to mom’s thoughts when she was sat reading one of her favourite books, and then dad’s when he was sat with me painting. But I couldn’t get it to work – I don’t know what flavour of magic to call upon. It just seems to happen when I’m least expecting it, or when I’m upset or angry.”

“Like yesterday morning when you were upset about the night of the carnival attack?”

Hope nodded her head.
“Yes.” The young witch looked to her Aunt with wide eyes, tears beginning to glisten in them. “I swear Aunty Freya I wasn’t trying to hear your thoughts about the wolf. I was upset, and I wasn’t paying attention…”

“And you thought that I had said the words about Keelin out loud?”

The young girl’s lip began to quiver faintly as she nodded again.

“Hey….come here!”

Freya opened her arms out wide, in invitation – with Hope leaning forward and accepting the hug almost instantly. She began to rub the young witch’s back softly, resting her head on top of the girls.

“We’ll figure this out together ok? You and me! We’re our own little coven, remember?!”

Hope’s head bobbed slightly as it rested against Freya’s chest.

“And we’ll keep it just between ourselves ok. At least until you feel confident enough to tell your mom and dad. Deal?”

The young witch pulled away from her Aunt, and wiped a hand quickly across her eyes to clear the tears that had formed there. Sniffling loudly, Hope smiled faintly at Freya.

“Ok.”

Freya was just about to reach out and ruffle her niece’s hair, when a loud beep chimed from her back pocket, signalling that a message had been received on her cell. Smiling at Hope, she fished out her phone and opened the text from Keelin:

“Hey gorgeous - it’s been one hell of a day and I desperately need the feel of a good bourbon sliding down my throat, and the love of a good woman on my arm! Want to meet me in Rousseau’s for a drink? I should be there in 20 minutes. x”

She typed out a quick reply agreeing to the drinks, before re-pocketing the phone and turning back to her niece.

“Listen, I’m going to go and meet Keelin in a few minutes, but what do you say me and you have breakfast together tomorrow morning, and then head to the park. We can talk a bit more about this new ability of yours, and maybe see if we can figure out exactly what the trigger for it is. Sound like a plan?”

Hope’s smile widened as she nodded her agreement.

“I’d like that. Thank you Aunty Freya, for not….for not thinking I’m a freak, or whatever.”

“Hey, I would never think of you in that way! We wicca’s have got to stick together – right?!”

Freya held her hand up in a “High-Five” gesture, prompting her niece to quickly reach out and slap her own small hand against it.

“Right!”

*********************************************************************************
A heavy haze of swirling smoke pushed against Keelin’s senses as she opened the inner door to Scores West – one of the many notorious strip-joints that graced the city of New Orleans with its seedy presence. It took a few seconds for her eyes to adjust to the darkened room, as she quickly attempted to gain her bearings in the unfamiliar place.

Straight ahead of her, sitting on a large raised circular platform, stood a long metal pole that stretched all the way up to the ceiling from the stage that it was secured into. Spot lights from all directions fired down their intrusive beams of light onto the long post, reflecting off the polished metallic surface of its shaft and chasing away any shadows that could potentially obscure the view of the club’s select clientele. Well-worn looking chairs and tables spiralled out around the raised stage in a large circle, many of which were already housing men of various shapes and sizes despite the relatively early hour of the evening. The platform itself was currently unoccupied, meaning that most of the patrons sat facing in the direction of its gleaming pole were either chatting amongst themselves or entranced by the softly glowing screens of their cell phones.

Moving her gaze from the centre of the club, Keelin spotted a long sweeping bar running the length of the buildings far left wall – bottles of all shapes and sizes hung up on optics above the counter, with various taps adorning the surface of the bar itself, displaying bright labels that advertised the particular brand of ale housed within their caskets. Even from the distance at which she stood, the wolf could clearly tell that none of the alcohol being sold in the gentleman’s club had come from a recognized source – the various trademarks and tags being obscure and unclear in their marketing.

She dreaded to think what back alley illegal source had been tapped by the club’s owners to acquire the cheap alcohol that they were peddling to the lust-blinded patrons frequenting the place.

Stealing herself against the churning scent of male sweat and degradation that gratied against her enhanced wolf senses, Keelin began to make her way over to the busy bar – determined to conduct the business for which she had come to the Strip Club swiftly, so that she could promptly be on her way.

Strip joints, and the people who frequented them, had always given her the heebie-jeebies

As she neared the beer-stained counter, the reason for her visit to Scores West quickly came into view. Alanna was currently bent over the bar-top, leaning from her waist towards a customer that appeared to be trying to convey his order to the barmaid loudly enough to be heard over the loud blaring music that filled the gloomy building. Keelin watched as the smartly dressed man’s face appeared to transform into a sneer as he grabbed onto one of the young wolf’s wrists to keep her in place, seemingly in response to Alanna attempting straighten up and return to her normal position behind the bar.

Keelin frowned as she watched the younger wolf gave a small tug on her ensnared arm – the clearly fake smile that had been fixed upon her face beginning to falter as she said something to the suited patron – no doubt asking for him to release his grip. Keelin felt a small ball of anger begin to spark into life within her chest at the sight of the man leering up and down Alanna’s body as he continued to grip onto the girl’s wrist- his arrogant smile turning more predatory as each second ticked by.

She quickly changed the projection of her stride, starting to walk towards the sleaze-bag pestering her friend, as the wolf deep within her itched to be let out of its cage. Keelin was just about to shout out and announce her presence to the man, when she witnessed Alanna’s own inner wolf flash a warning to the overbearing customer, in the form her eyes fleetingly flashing bright with intense
hues of amber. Her friend’s wrist was immediately released, as the offending customer quickly staggered a couple of steps back from the bar – shock quickly wiping away the smirk that had been on his face.

“What the fuck are you?!” the man spat out in disgust, as he studied the woman in front of him from a new perspective.

Alanna simply smiled in response – a genuine grin representing her triumph, Keelin noted – as she presented her middle finger to the clearly agitated patron.

A cruel smirk tugged at the man’s lips as he slightly leant forward again, gesturing up and down towards Alanna’s body.

“You won’t be smiling in a minute girly, when I get your manager out here and tell him all about the freak show that he’s hired as a barmaid!”

Keelin quickly stepped up behind the suited male, just as he swivelled around to storm off in whichever direction he must have thought the owner of the club was located. Not missing a beat, she met his gaze with amber glowing eyes of her own, and flashed him a wide grin full of razor sharp teeth. The balding man only just managed to reign in his forward projection to prevent himself colliding into her, as his eyes registered the sight of her contorted features and widened in fear.

“What…”

“I’d be careful who you went around calling a freak, if I was you!”, Keelin snapped, not bothering to hide the contempt she felt towards the stranger from her voice.

The customer blinked rapidly, his eyes never leaving the canines that glistened within in her mouth as he took a small step back.

“I was just…”

“I think what you’ll find you were just about to do”, she hummed, trying not to snort at the retreating man’s complete change in demeanour, “is leave this poor excuse for a club whilst counting yourself lucky that you still have all four of your limbs attached to your body. Am I Right?!?”

Seeing a small slither of hesitation still lingering in the customers eyes – no doubt the residue of the man’s ill placed pride protesting at being given orders by a woman - Keelin allowed a growl to vibrate deep within her throat, as narrowed her gaze towards him. The animalistic rumbling appeared to have the desired effect, as the paling man gave the briefest of nods in her direction, before turning to hurry out of the establishments exit.

She twisted her head briefly, following the retreating man’s form for a few seconds to ensure that he did not suddenly think fit to change his mind – before returning her attention back to the bar, and the friend who was now stood glaring in her direction. Keelin’s eyes and teeth had already returned back to their human appearance by the time Alanna spoke to her.

“I had that all under control you know, you didn’t have to butt in!”

Keelin raised an eyebrow, as she sauntered up to the bar’s counter top and sat down on the nearest tall-stool.

“And if he had scurried off like a rat to find your manager? Would you have had that under control
Alanna sighed, and shook her head.

“Then I would have told dickhead Dave exactly where he could shove his underpaid, crappy job!”

The pair stared at each other for a few heartbeats longer, before Keelin laughed and raised her hands up in front of her.

“Ok, ok. I promise never to come to your aid ever again!”

A small smile threatened to tug at the corner of Alanna’s mouth, as she began the task of washing the dirty glasses that were stacked under the bar’s counter.

“I assume that the reason that you’ve come to grace Scores with your presence isn’t just to watch Tulula Candy’s renowned adaptation of Flash Dance – al la pole!”

Alanna motioned with her chin over to the raised platform in the centre of the room.

Keelin twisted her neck to look over her shoulder at the stage - where there was now a very scantily clad brunette lady twisting and sliding around the long metallic pole in time to the titular theme tune of the well-known 80’s film, as several of the gentleman patrons sat around the stage whooped and cheered her on. Wincing slightly at the sight, the wolf turned her head back to Alanna and scowled.

Her friend let out a small laugh.

“That’s good then, since I would hate word to get back to your girlfriend that you spend your free time watching bikini clad girls gyrate to music whilst sliding down poles upside-down!”

Keelin huffed, and shook her head.

“Alanna, we need to talk!”

The younger wolf walked over to another customer who had approached the bar, and quickly took his drink order. As she picked a clean glass off one of the shelves behind her and began to pour a pale ale into it from one a beer-tap next to Keelin, she spoke to the brunette without meeting her gaze.

“I’m guessing that since you came all the way here to my esteemed place of work – a place I know for a fact that you would rather not be seen dead in – that you don’t just want to discuss the latest trend of oversized culottes hitting the shops of New Orleans?!”

Ignoring the girl’s comment, Keelin pushed on with her reason for venturing to the dark and dingy strip-joint.

“I was talking with Joel earlier at work, and he told me that you are thinking of meeting up with Holly at the ER department’s gathering next Friday!”

Alanna’s eyes flicked over to hers briefly, before she resumed concentrating on the order she was fulfilling for her customer.

“Guess I should have known that he would tell you that it’s Holly I’ve been seeing!” the younger wolf mused, before turning to hand the freshly poured beer over to her customer.

Once he had paid for his purchase and began shuffling his way back towards the chairs
surrounding the podium, Alanna came to stand in front of Keelin once more.

“Still, I don’t see why that would warrant a visit from your good self?! I’m free to date whomever I want!”

Her friend cast her a look full of challenge - daring Keelin to contradict the point she had made.

“Alanna I’m not bothered about who it is that you are dating – you could start romancing the Major of New Orleans for all I care.”

“Now there’s a woman who knows how to work her sexy curves in power-suit!” Alanna quipped, wriggling her eyebrows in a suggestive manner.

Pointedly ignoring the off-hand remark, Keelin continued.

“What does concern me is the fact that you seem to think it’s ok to be seen in Lafitte's bar! In the French Quarter! You know - where my extremely powerful and short tempered witch girlfriend, and the rest of the Mikaelson family all live!”

Alanna rolled her eyes, before turning to acknowledge a young man who had called out for “service” from his seat at the opposite end of the bar. Just as the young wolf was about to walk off towards him, Keelin leaned over the counter and grabbed her arm gently, in an attempt to halt the girl in her tracks. Seeing her friend glower towards the hand now resting on her appendage, Keelin quickly withdrew her grasp as she recognised the similarity between her actions and that of the douche-bag whom she had seen off only minutes ago.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to….”

“Look, Keelin,” Alanna snapped, rounding on Keelin and cutting her off mid-sentence. “I can’t keep living my life having to constantly look over my shoulder! It’s been almost a year now, and I’ve done everything that you’ve demanded of me. I’ve stayed out of the Quarter. I’ve stayed out of the Bayou. I left the bodies of my family in that godforsaken church for the authorities to dispose of, instead of giving them the proper pack burial they deserved. I got a job in this hell-hole of a place - the only one I was able to find that is off the books so that my name can’t be traced by anyone interested in finishing the complete extermination of my lineage!”

The girl paused briefly, catching her breath.

“Don’t you think it’s time that I was allowed just a little bit of freedom off the leash?!”

Keelin fixed her friend with a stern, yet not unsympathetic look.

“Alanna I know it might seem like I’ve been insistent on a few things over the past 12 months….”

The younger wolf huffed in reaction to her words, as she folded her arms in front of her.

The defiance on the young wolf’s face remained in place as she continued her reasoning.

“Yes, of course I knew my choice would bring limitations with it. But it’s been a year Keelin! I hardly think anyone will notice one small girl amongst the hundred revellers that will no doubt be crammed into Lafitte's on a random Friday night! Besides, it’s not like I plan on staying for long. If I get my way, Holly and I will be leaving after just a couple of drinks, to head home for far more interesting activities than mingling with work colleagues!”

Keelin steeled her face into a picture of disinterest as the younger wolf flashed her a suggestively
playful look to emphasize her meaning.

“Alanna, it would make no difference if ten years had passed since that night at the carnival – you helped the Hollow with its plan to try and kill Hope Mikaelson. And you manipulated me in the process! The Mikaelson’s are immortal, and have been known to hold a grudge for well over a hundred years. If anyone of them sees you, they’ll make your life a living hell. Christ if Freya saw you, I…. I don’t think I’d be able to stop her from….”

Keelin’s voice trailed off as she watched her friend’s eyes hardened at the mention of her witch lover.

“That’s what’s really the issue here, isn’t it Keelin!? The fact that you’re scared of Freya discovering that you’ve been lying to her all this time. That she’ll find out that you chose a friendship with me, over being loyal and supportive to her blind hatred of my blood-line.”

Keelin felt anger begin to flare up within her core, in reaction to the girl’s words. Lowering her head a fraction, she glowered at the younger wolf stood defiantly behind the bar – her voice dangerously dropping in tone by a fraction.

“You know nothing about how deep my loyalties to Freya run, Alanna!”

Perhaps realising that she was close to stepping over the invisible line that had drawn between them both on the night of the fun-house incident, Alanna slowly bowed her head and closed her eyes whilst letting out a small sigh. When she eventually looked back up to meet Keelin’s steely glare, some of the fire that had been present in her eyes moments before, had now been extinguished.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to infer that your commitment to Freya was anything other than absolute. I know how much she means to you.”

“Good!” Keelin exclaimed, anger still churning within her gut. “And you would do well to remember that the only reason I haven’t told Freya of your whereabouts so that she can painfully end your life, is that I thought I saw some slither of redeemable quality within you - despite your betrayal of my trust and friendship that night!”

Alanna’s eyes dropped to the floor, as she nodded her head softly in acknowledgement of her friend’s leniency.

After scowling at the younger wolf’s deflated form for a few seconds longer, Keelin raised herself up off the barstool and turned to make her exit.

_She had had enough of the seedy establishment and the less than wholesome cliental that lined its tills with money. She to needed get out, and feel fresh air being drawn into her lungs!_

Glancing back over her shoulder briefly, Keelin barked another demand for the younger wolf to no doubt add to her apparent list of grievances.

“Stay out of the damned Quarter, Alanna! Because if Freya or her family get even the slightest whiff of your presence in this city, and come looking to exact their revenge – which rest assured, they will – I can promise that you will discover exactly where my true loyalties lie!”

Without waiting for a response, Keelin promptly left the bar - slamming the exterior door shut behind her in a show of frustration.

_Heavens above! The young wolf could be so damn infuriating with her complete lack of regard for_
Feeling the beginnings of a headache start to dig in its claws, Keelin deftly released the tie that had been holding her hair in a loose curled messy bun all day, and shook out her mane whilst reaching for the cell phone in her purse. She suddenly felt the need to be in her girlfriend’s company, and preferably whilst drowning out the stresses of the day with a large tumbler of expensive bourbon.

Her thumb deftly typed out a message to Freya, as she began the walk back to her car that was parked two blocks down from the sleezy Strip Club. A precaution she always took when visiting Alanna, no matter where in the city they met.

“Hey gorgeous - it’s been one hell of a day and I desperately need the feel of good bourbon sliding down my throat, and the love of a good woman on my arm! Want to meet me in Rousseau’s for a drink? I should be there in 20 minutes. x”

She hadn’t even managed to re-pocket her cell back in her bag, before the chime of Freya’s response rang out of the device’s speakers.

"I’ll be there. x"

-------------------------------------------------------------

6.

Freya entered into the familiar surroundings of Rousseau’s, with a faint smile languishing upon her face, and a carefree lightness to her step. Smooth and charming notes of jazz music flowed out of the venue’s speakers, caressing and tugging at her ancient soul, as it beckoned her to stay and relax in its deft hands.

The witch felt like a weight had been lifted off her chest after the chat with her niece had ended on a positive note. Sure, the origins and nature of the young girl’s new power were still a mystery, and the reasons behind its manifestation certainly remained ambiguous in their disposition. But after speaking with Hope about the phenomenon, she was quietly confident that they could eventually get to the bottom of where the power originated from within the young witch, and what means that she could use to trigger it.

Finding the spark that ignites the power, will lead to finding the means to control it

Of-course the fact that Hope didn’t blame Keelin for the part she had played in the attack against the youngest Mikaelson and her group of friends, was also helping to lift the blonde’s mood. It had been taxing enough having to deal with Klaus and his frequent outbursts about her choice in lover since the incident. Had her niece of held a grudge against the woman she loved as well – she was not quite sure how she would have handled it.

The smile on her face only widened as she spotted two of her siblings sat alongside the bar’s counter, deep in conversation as they nurtured what appeared to be half empty tumblers of bourbon.

Neither Rebecca nor Elijah seemed to have noticed her presence in the bar – that was until she sidled up beside them both and quickly swiped her sister’s drink from the vampire’s hand and took
a swig of the golden fluid - winking towards the blonde.

“Hey!” Rebecca protested, a small indignant pout pursing her lips together. “Be thankful that I love you dear sister! Many men have died at my hands for lesser crimes!”

Freya laughed after taking a sip from the tumbler - she didn’t doubt her siblings claim for one second!

“Dearest Freya, to what do we owe the pleasure of your company?” Elijah asked, as he gestured across the bar with an immaculate hand to gain Josh’s attention. “I thought that you were meant to be joining our beloved niece and her mother tonight for dinner?”

She quickly placed an order with Josh when he appeared in front of the trio, asking for three more of his finest bourbon, before refocusing her attention on her two siblings.

“That was originally the plan yes. But Keelin text me around ten minutes ago sounding like she’s had a stressful day, so I’ve agreed to meet her here for a few drinks.”

“Ah!”, exclaimed Rebecca, plucking her glass back out of Freya’s hand with a smile. “Its hard to resist the booty call of one’s lover when its melodic tones reach out to you - hey love!”

Freya flashed her sister a narrowed eyed glare, before letting out a small laugh.

*Her sister certainly had her number there!*

Just as Josh returned to place the freshly poured drinks in front of the trio, a loud ruckus erupted from one of the tables situated at the far rear of the bar – the raised voices of several men jeering and taunting over the top of the venue’s enjoyable music. Freya glanced around to look in the direction of the commotion, and saw what looked to be a group of male bikers – mixed in age – all of whom were making brash lewd comments towards a young woman who was passing their table as she made her way out of the bar’s toilets. The girl was clearly disturbed by their crass attention, hurrying her stride along in an attempt to be out of their range and back to the safety of her own table as soon as possible.

As Freya watched the group of unruly gang-members seemingly congratulate each other on their successful unnerving of the passing woman – dishing out slaps to each-others backs and bumping their fists - Josh began to share his thoughts on the matter.

“They’ve been in here causing trouble all day!”

“Trouble?” Elijah enquired as he eyed the leather clad group whilst picking up his refilled tumbler to sip at its contents.

“Yes,” the bar manager continued, “mouthing off to anyone who dares to pass close to their table, and demanding table service for their drinks – despite my telling them several times that they were being cut off for having had too much!”

Freya raised an eyebrow as she turned to face the bar manager.

“If they’ve been disrupting your service all day, why haven’t you just had some of your vampire heavies escort them off the premises?”

“I tried!”, Josh explained, a look of exasperation crossing his features. “But when my boys went to confront them, the particularly mean looking bearded one – he gestured towards the largest of the rowdy group, whom was currently sat glaring at the four of them with a vicious wolf-like smile
stretching out his lips “– simply stared them down until they turned and returned to the bar!”

Rebekah frowned as she looked towards Josh.

“Stared them down? What are they, school children in a playground?! I thought that you and Marcel employed actual vampires, not prissy frat boys who get spooked by mean men in biker jackets?!”

Freya had to hold back a laugh, as she waited on the bar manager’s response.

“The vamps that we have on security detail here are some of the toughest bad asses I know!” he exclaimed, before letting out a deep sigh and rubbing at the back of his neck with a hand. “But yeah – they just turned around and walked away. When I confronted them as they returned to the bar, Mitch just said that there was something “unworldly wrong” about the guy who had stared him down.”

“Unworldly wrong?!” Elijah repeated, raising an eye brow at the bar manager in amusement.

“Those were his exact words. Strange right?! But…”

Josh trailed off, his eyes still fixed on the table of bikers at the back of the venue as he appeared to get lost in his own thoughts for a few seconds.

“….well every-time I go near their table I kinda get a feel of what Mitch was talking about! It’s odd, as it’s not radiating off all off them, just the one that seems to be in charge. The big bearded fella, with that damn feral grin!”

Freya knew which gang member out of the disruptive group that Josh was referring it to – it was hard to miss him. Whilst the rest of the table’s occupants openly jeered and hollered as they drank their beers and heckled the surrounding customers, the owner of the wide wolfish grin simply sat quietly amongst them – an air of confidence and malice radiating off him in droves. Since her attention had been drawn to the table full of Bikers, Freya had noted that the quiet man’s focus had solely been on the Mikaelson’s sat at the bar – that wide feral grin never faltering from his face.

No, not all of them! Just her – he had been staring directly at just her since the moment she had made eye contact with him.

“He makes my skin crawl anytime I get near him!” Josh continued. “And well, without my security detail to back me up, there’s not a chance I’d take them all on my own. So here they still are, drinking away.”

“Are they Vampires?” Rebekah asked the bar manager in a nonchalant tone, indicating to Freya that the conversation had already started to bore her sister.

“The vast majority of them are. Or at least they smell like vampires. That big one though – I’m not sure what he is. He doesn’t smell like a vampire, or a human, and I couldn’t detect any blood pumping through his veins. He just…well he’s just wrong!”

Freya turned back to face her siblings, no longer wishing to stare into the face of the grinning biker. Even with her back to him however, she could still feel his eyes burning into her back – unmoving and unnervingly intense. She had had the dis-pleasure of being on the end of one of Klaus Mikaelson’s violent death-stares, as she called them, once or twice over the course of her life. Her brother was renowned for making many of his enemies wither with just the glare of his hybrid eyes. But even his vicious glower with all its murderous intent, had never made her quite as uneasy as the one currently boring into the back of her head.
Mitch hadn’t been far wrong with his assessment to Josh – she too was getting an “unworldly” vibe from the man

“Well, they don’t seem to be causing too much harm,” Rebecca drawled, as she held her empty tumbler up to Josh for another refill. “Boys will be Boys, as they say love! Let sleeping lions be, and focus on more important things – like the fact that my glass is now empty!”

Josh rolled his eyes at Freya’s younger sister - yet still took her glass and moved to replenish it with Bourbon.

Despite herself, the witch was just about to turn around and check if the bearded biker was still staring in her direction, when she felt an arm suddenly slip around her torso, quickly followed by the feel of another’s body pressing against her back.

Freya didn’t need to see the tell-tale grins of her brother and sister, to know that the arm and torso now warming her body belonged to her girlfriend.

“Hey you!” Keelin whispered as she nuzzled her nose and mouth briefly against the back of the witch’s neck. “Miss me?”

A broad grin erupted across her face, as Freya twisted around to come face-to-face with her lover - only for it to falter slightly when she saw the barley hidden tension that pulled at the wolfs face, causing Keelin’s own smile to not quite reach her eyes. Cocking her head faintly to the side, Freya brought a hand up to stroke her girlfriend face as she responded.

“Everything ok? You seem a little tense.”

Keelin nodded dismissively, not quite meeting the witch’s eyes as she replied.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just a stressful day at work, that’s all. Nothing that a few drinks and good company can’t fix.”

The wolf lent in to place a quick kiss on Freya’s lips - which she inclined forward to accept, despite the feeling that there was more to Keelin’s strained appearance than the brunette was currently letting on.

“Well isn’t this just bloody adorable!” Rebekah exclaimed from just behind the embracing couple. “It good to see that true love is still alive and well, despite its insistence on avoiding this particular innocent fair maiden like the plague!”

Freya and Keelin pulled apart slightly - the wolf keeping her arm hung loosely around her girlfriend’s waist as they both turned to face the Original Vampires.

“I think your problem, dear Rebekah, lies within the foolhardy belief that you are innocent!” Elijah chimed in, a half smile forming as he held his glass up in the younger Mikaelson’s direction.

Rebekah scowled at her brother, before raising her own glass in response.

Freya watched her girlfriend’s face relax a little, as the wolf observed the Mikaelson sibling’s bickering with amusement in her eyes.

“Rebekah – good to see that you have returned from New York in good spirits,” Keelin quipped, as the two women hugged in greeting. “You must tell me all about your adventures in the Big Apple - since Freya here was a woman of very few words when it came to sharing what news your weekly letters brought with them!”
The wolf glared at her girlfriend as she finished her sentence, to emphasise her point.

“That’s my older sister for you, love” Rebekah chimed in, before Freya had time to open her mouth in protest. “An impenetrable wall of steel and ice. Quite frankly I’m surprised she doesn’t burn your lips with frost-bite every time you two love birds share a kiss!”

“Why do I get the feeling I’m going to be the brunt of everyone’s jibes this evening!” Freya exclaimed, her eyes flicking over to her brother in the hope of some form of support.

“Ah, do not look to me, sister!” Elijah laughed, as he absentmindedly straightened the tie that he was still wearing despite the relaxed atmosphere in the bar. “I know better than to contradict two formidable ladies when they have a bone to pick!”

Freya rolled her eyes as lover and sister both laughed.

“Well, how about you buy me a drink whilst I go powder my nose,” Keelin said to her, as she rubbed her hand lightly up and down Freya’s side. “Then I might consider going easy on you when I return!”

The wolf flashed a conspirator’s grin towards Rebekah, before turning to peck a kiss lightly onto Freya’s cheek.

As Keelin began to make her way to the ladies room - walking casually across the main floor of Rousseau’s - Freya couldn’t help but smile as she watched her move. Knowing that her younger sister and the wolf got along so well warmed the witch’s heart – even if it was often at her own expense, when the two women would team up to point out as many of Freya’s flaws as possible.

There were countless reasons after all, as to why a healthy relationship between her siblings and Keelin should not be possible. The circumstances under which they had all first met the Malraux wolf had been far from ideal, and at a time when their family bonds had been strained to say the least. Keelin was a wolf – and from little Freya knew, her whole family had been slaughtered by vampires. It was in her nature to hate all things connected to the monsters that her family had been turned into. And then of course there was the fact that Keelin was an outsider – something that the Mikaelson siblings never took too kindly too. Not to mention the Funhouse incident twelve months earlier – which she knew Klaus still hadn’t fully forgiven the wolf for, despite the circumstances that had been involved.

When all was said and done – a positive bond between Keelin and her siblings should not have been possible.

But here they were laughing and joking in each-others company, as though fate hadn’t already labelled them mortal enemies

A loud chorus of cat-calling jeers abruptly roused Freya out of her thoughts, causing her to look up just in time to see a few of the bikers sat in the rear of the bar making obscene gestures towards Keelin, as she passed them by on her way to the rest-room. To her credit, the wolf hardly gave the group a fleeting glance before disappearing into the ladies – but the sight of the gang members laughing as they continued to make crude remarks and motions about her girlfriend’s body, made Freya’s blood instantly boil. She felt Rebekah’s posture quickly tense behind her, as a thick static charge began to fill the air immediately surrounding the witch.

She would burn each and every one of them to the ground if they so much as….

“Freya! Girl, is that you?!”
The witch whipped her head around quickly in reaction to the sound of her name being called out – her eyes still narrowed in a deep livid scowl as she quickly focused on the owner of the voice.

Walking towards her with apparent enthusiasm was a tall, slender, dark haired woman, whose blue eyes glistened with recognition as she quickly approached the three Mikaelson’s siblings. Freya felt the magic that had been sizzling within her fingertips only seconds ago, reabsorb back into her internal well of power, as the face of the new-comer sparked hazy memories into life within her mind.

“Amelia?!”

The witch was suddenly at a loss for words, as the anger that had been filling her mind quickly dissolved away - leaving in its wake a struggle to reconcile the person whom she watched come to a halt before her, and the year in which it was happening.

“The one and only!” the new comer exclaimed, flashing a large lipstick lined grin at Freya. “By the gods, how long has it been?!”

Freya’s mouth struggled to engage with her brain, as she took in the sight of the familiar woman now stood only inches away. A long flowing main of midnight black hair hung down to just below her chest, with wispy bangs framing her heart shaped face. The piercing bright sapphire blue of her eyes was highlighted in contrast by smoke-effect makeup and dark eyeliner, making their natural light tones stand out in the bars otherwise dimly lit atmosphere. A large thin scar marred the otherwise smooth skin of the woman’s neck, reaching from the corner of her left ear, all the way down - eventually disappearing under the collar of the bright red shirt that she was wearing.

Although the woman’s smile was wide, and no doubt appeared welcoming to all those around who witnessed it, Freya could also see the wicked challenge that writhed deep within those intense blue eyes staring back at her – one that had been born many - many years ago.

A not so discrete cough from behind the witch - no doubt originating from her impatient and curious sister - quickly brought her mind back into focus.

“Well, considering that the last time I saw you, you were throwing yourself at a young soldier who had just one last night in his home town of Lille, before heading off for the trenches of the Western Front – I’d say that it’s probably been around 100 years. Give or take!”

The tall woman feigned a sorrowful sigh, as she looked to think back to that fleeting evening from many eons ago, spent in the arms of a young soul destined to die at the hands of a bullet.

“Ah yes, Lille. What a beautiful city it had been back then.”

Freya’s brow furrowed, as her brain finally caught up with her mouth.

“Forgive me if I seem a little perturbed by your appearance, Amelia, but I am a little confused as to how it is you are actually here – considering the last time we parted ways, you were still enacting your various tricks and schemes upon unsuspecting town locals whilst you fooled them into believing that you were a seer. A very human, mortal, would be seer!”

The new comer appeared to chuckle to herself - however the sound came out as more of a wry snicker, loaded with the promise of mischief and trouble.

“I could say the same of you, my dear Freya. A mortal witch, who hid many a dark and mysterious secret during the time we ran amuck together. Secretes it would seem, that have you looking not a day older than the evening we parted ways.”
A charged silence fell between the two women, as Freya continued to hold Amelia’s provoking gaze – silent challenges, both old and anew, passing on a palpable current between them.

“Have I missed something?”

Keelin’s voice quickly broke through the almost trance like state that the two old acquaintances had slipped into, causing Freya to turn her head in the direction of her girlfriend – an absent look of bewilderment in her eyes. The wolf frowned a little, and seemed to be opening her mouth to pose a further question to her girlfriend, when Rebekah slipped gracefully off the stool just behind them both and placed a hand upon her sister’s shoulder, as she responded to Keelin’s query.

“If you’ve missed something love, then so have the rest of us! I believe Freya was just about to introduce her old friend to us all – am I correct sister?”

“Yes Freya, please do! I am most curious as to who keeps your company in this day and age”, the tall dark haired woman said - not once taking her eyes off the witch.

Her brain stuttered again, flailing to grab onto something tangible in an attempt to ground her mind in the present. She motioned slowly with a hand to both her sister, who had now moved to stand alongside her, and then to Keelin, who was looking at the stranger in front of her with what appeared to be cautious suspicion.

“Amelia - this is my younger sister, Rebekah. And this,” she glanced briefly at the wolf, who continued to survey Amelia with weariness in her eyes “is Keelin.”

Before either the newcomer or Rebekah had a chance to respond, Keelin slipped an arm quickly around Freya’s waist - gently pulling the witch closer to her side as she spoke.

“Her girlfriend!”

Freya could not tell if it was due to the statement that Keelin had made, or the uncharacteristically possessive tone in which she had spoken, but Amelia’s eyes finally shifted away from her own for the first time since she had walked into the bar – moving to instead rest on Keelin. The woman briefly flicked her gaze up and down the wolf’s form, before a dazzling white smile broke across her face.

“Well, the pleasure is all mine, I am sure!” Amelia purred, extending out her hand in Keelin’s direction.

The witch raised an eyebrow at her girlfriend when the wolf simply continued to watch the dark haired woman, without taking up the offer of greeting.

Not letting the cold stare emitting from Freya’s girlfriend deter her, Amelia gracefully arced her outstretched arm towards Rebecca - her eyes lingering upon Keelin for a few seconds longer as she spoke to the Original Vampire.

“And a sister non-the-less!”

The newcomers gaze finally fell upon the blonde vampire.

“One who’s beauty almost rivals that of her sibling!”

Rebecca huffed in amusement as she took the outstretched hand being offered to her – shaking it once in a firm motion, before returning her hand to its previous position on Freya’s shoulder.
“Oh I think you’ll find that my sister and I share a lot more than just our families excellent bone structure and elegance” the vampire hummed, in a charming yet deadly tone. “We both have bites that are far worse than our growls, too!”

Freya raised her eyebrows and glanced sidelong in her sister’s direction, just in time to see the blonde quickly swipe her tongue across long, sharp extended teeth.

Light laughter suddenly burst forth from Amelia – her eyes sparkling with amusement as she bowed her head slightly to acknowledge Rebekah’s not so subtle warning.

“Oh I have no doubt that anyone whom Freya associates with, would be anything less than a force of nature!”

The woman’s eyes locked back onto the witch’s before she continued.

“And taking on a female lover as well….my my, dear Freya, how times have changed! It appears that we met a century too early, you and I!”

She felt rather than heard, the low, almost silent growl that vibrated up through Keelin’s body, as the wolf pulled Freya even closer to her side – her hand gripping tighter onto the witch’s hip.

A thick silence fell between the four women – a mixture of music and revelry flowing around them all, as Freya’s mind continued to struggle with processing the possibility of Amelia’s presence among them. The dark haired woman’s eyes remained locked upon her own, swirling with the challenge of unspoken questions, and also with the promise of much needed answers. One’s, the witch quickly realised, would not be voiced by her old acquaintance until they were in a more private location, and alone.

“Well!”

Elijah’s voice suddenly piped up from where he was sat behind his sisters.

“Whilst this has been most riveting, I fear I must be on my way to check on our dear brother! God only knows what mischief he has been getting himself in our absence!”

The Original vampire effortlessly hopped down off his bar stool and picked up the suit jacket that had been lying on the bar counter next to his bourbon. He promptly moved to kiss the top of both Freya’s and Rebekah’s heads, before placing a hand on Keelin’s shoulder and giving it a quick squeeze. As he turned to leave, the vampire leaned his head towards the dark haired woman - never taking his eyes off the venues exit.

“…..Oh I am Elijah by the way, Freya’s younger brother. One of three that she has actually – and each of us more deadly than the next. Not that you seem to be interested.”

Elijah briefly turned his head back in their direction and charmingly winked towards Keelin, before striding out of the bar without another word said.

Amelia huffed to herself, never once glancing in the exiting male’s direction.

“Well, it appears you have quite the extended family Freya – funny how you failed to mention any of them, all those years ago!”

A wry smile spread across the woman’s lips, as she continued.

“We simply must have a proper catch up my dear!” A suggestive wink was thrown in the witch’s
direction, before Amelia’s lips formed into a lazy attempt at a pout. “But alas, I am afraid I must leave you for now. I have business to attend to this evening, and time is quickly getting away from me.”

The woman inclined her head lazily towards Rebekah, and then Keelin, before locking eyes back onto Freya one last time.

“Until we meet again, old friend!”

Freya could still feel the soundless growl rumbling through her girlfriend, as she nodded in farewell to Amelia. The trio watched on as the woman gracefully flung her long raven dark hair over a shoulder, before striding off towards the double doors that led out of the bar.

“Well, isn’t she a bloody delight!” Rebekah commented wryly, her tone indicating that the vampire thought the newcomer had been anything but. “I think I had better get us girls another round in - whilst you, dear sister, tell us all about this apparent age-defying hundred year old friend of yours!”

Freya raised an eyebrow towards her sister, just before Keelin used the arm that had been gripped around her waist to slowly pivot the witch around - emerald green eyes meeting unnervingly intense brown ones.

“Yes, please do share Freya….who the hell was she?!”

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Chapter End Notes

ok ok, this time I PROMISE theres some Freelin fun in the next chapter. Honest - I should know, since I'm already half way through writing it ;-)
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

Howdy all - here's Chapter 4 up for grabs.

Not quite as long a chapter this time = and thank god too, not sure my wee mind could handle cramming another 20k words into a weeks worth of writing. My university dissertation all those years ago was only 10k, and I had 6 months to write that!!

Anyhoooo, hope you all enjoy. A bit of Freelin fun to start, and then a slight, brief dip into the pool of darkness that will be eventually washing over this tale. So with that in mind, just incase anyone of my readers is sensitive to the suggestions of attack and abuse (only suggestions - no good guys were harmed during the making of this chapter ;-) hehe) take heed - TRIGGER WARNINGS!

Ok, please, dive in - and let me know your thoughts afterwards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 4.

1.

“You are so beautiful! Have I ever told you that before?”

Freya was drunk! Far drunker than Keelin had actually ever seen the witch during the entire time they had known each other. And it was not like they hadn’t partaken in drinking sessions together before. The two had spent many a night downing shots and drinking beer in each-others company, both as a couple, and as one time enemies when Freya had first been using the wolf to extract venom from her.

Annoyingly, the witch had always seemed to be able to handle her liquor a lot better than her, which the blonde had always insisted was due to the high level of wolf hormones that raged through Keelin’s body, reacting with the alcohol as it intoxicated her body. And even more frustratingly, her girlfriend had also never seemed to suffer the burden of a hangover on the mornings after they engaged in a heavy drinking session. Keelin would always wake up to the witch already bright and fresh as the morning sun, and ready to start her day – whilst she herself would feel like she had been run over by a steam roller, and like a marching band had taken up residence in her head.

So to now see the witch so tipsy as they slowly made their way home from Rousseau’s, was both amusing and pleasing to witness.

Even if she knew that her girlfriend’s reasons for downing so many bourbon’s in such a short space of time, had been both sneaky and deliberate!

“Yes baby, you may have mentioned it once or twice already since we left the bar!”
Freya had an arm draped heavily over the back of Keelin’s shoulders as they walked, holding the wolf close in what the witch herself probably would have claimed was a protective manner. But in truth, Keelin knew that without that connection between the two of them, Freya would have stumbled over on the sidewalk within meters of them leaving Rousseau’s.

The blonde’s balance was pretty much non-existent at this point.

“Well it’s true. You are! The most beautiful woman I have ever seen in all my life - and I’ve lived over a thousand years don’t you know!”

Keelin couldn’t help but smile at the witch’s slightly slurred words. It appeared that her girlfriend was at least a cute drunk – which considering how fiery and volatile her lover’s disposition could often be when sober, this adorably endearing tipsy side to Freya was a pleasant surprise.

*It was almost distracting her from the uneasiness that she had been feeling in Rousseau’s earlier that night. Almost!*

“Well after tonight’s little encounter, it would appear that you have associated with more beautiful women over that long lifespan of yours, than you have previously let on!”

She felt Freya’s unfocused gaze sluggishly fall upon her, as they continued to walk along the street to their apartment, which was now only a few yards away. Even without facing the witch, Keelin could practically feel the grin that slowly spread across her lover’s face.

“Is my usually level headed, well rounded girlfriend, jealous?!”

Keelin scoffed at the cocky tone that had wrapped itself around her girlfriend’s words, and fought the urge to roll her eyes at the smugness that was suddenly radiating off the drunken witch. Of course she wasn’t jealous. There was absolutely nothing to be jealous about! And she certainly had not felt at all threatened by the dark-haired beauty, with the long luscious hair and bone white smooth skin, who had seemed to have some mysterious and flirtatious connection with her girlfriend.

HER girlfriend!

*Fine! , she admitted to herself reluctantly. Maybe there was a small slither of jealousy currently knowing away at her insides! But it didn’t mean that she had to concede that fact to the drunken witch, who was now trying her best to focus on placing one foot successfully in front of the other without tripping up!*

The more that she thought about it however, the more confident she became that the distrust which had instantly filled her as soon as she had first laid eyes the mysterious woman, was not misplaced. Rebekah had taken an instant dislike to Amelia too – Keelin’s wolf senses had smelt the aggression scent markers that had suddenly appeared on the blonde vampire’s skin, as she had been introduced to the newcomer. Not to mention the completely overkill statement that Freya’s sister had made by displaying her vampire teeth to the raven haired woman, no doubt to let the newcomer know she was not someone to be trifled with.

*Overkill maybe – but Keelin had still wanted to hug the blonde for it none-the-less!*

But it had not been the woman’s goddess like appearance, or her immaculately expensive clothes which had no doubt hid a well-toned and defined body underneath them, that had roused an almost primal urge within the wolf to make her claim upon Freya known. Nor had it been the clearly flirtatious manner in which Amelia had interacted with the witch – the suggestive winks, and coy
remark about meeting Freya too early on in life – that had resulted in the wolf struggling to rein in the urge to scratch the woman’s eyes out. Not with her nails. No. That possessive action would have been conducted with the long, wickedly sharp talons of her wolf form, that had been itching to be freed the whole time the raven haired beauty had been looking at HER lover with those damned “I want to fuck you” eyes.

It hadn’t been any of that.

The wolf had realised, as they had begun their walk home in the brisk fresh air of the New Orleans evening, that it had been the way Freya herself had reacted to seeing her long-lost friend, that had ruffled her fur so badly. It had been the complete stupor that had been written all over the witch’s face when Keelin had first arrived back from the ladies-room to see the blonde interacting with the tall dark haired woman. The flustered way in which her girlfriend had struggled to find words and form complete sentences when speaking with the newcomer, and the faint flush of colour that had quickly spread across Freya’s cheeks when Amelia had winked at the witch as she said fair-well.

Freya was attracted to the woman. And had clearly been attracted to her all those years ago too!

Keelin had tried – really tried – to hide the feral, possessive growl that had betrayed her normally calm composure, and rumbled throughout her whole body as Freya and Amelia had been talking. And then again after Amelia had departed, and she had immediately asked the witch who the woman had been -- Keelin had fought hard to supress the rumbling deep within her that had felt as though her inner wolf had been snarling “Your mine. Mine. MINE!” over and over again in her mind.

It appeared that the newcomer’s actions, and thus Freya’s subsequent reactions, roused primal animalistic urges within her that Keelin hadn’t even known existed.

Of course, her witch lover had completely denied having any sort of interest in the woman - other than a curiosity as to how she had managed to live such a long, youthful life.

As Keelin and Rebekah had confronted the blonde about the scene that had just unfolded in front of them, Freya had briefly explained how she and Amelia had met, and how they had become friends all those years ago. Although the wolf had gotten the distinct impression that her girlfriend had only given a very brief, edited-for-tv version of what had truly happened between the raven haired woman and herself.

Freya had quickly begun downing tumblers of bourbon as though the liquid within them had been nothing more than colored water – as she had started to divulged the details of her year spent awake from Dahlia’s spell back in the early nineteen hundreds. The last cycle of her cruel Aunt’s spell before it had finally been broken by her siblings in more recent years.

Freya had travelled to the city of Lille in France, after discovering that two of her then estranged siblings – Klaus and Elijah – had been spotted around the area, painting their usual picture of mayhem and bloodshed amongst the locals. As had been the norm for that period of her life, the witch had harboured a great desire to observe her brothers and sisters as much as she possibly could, without actually alerting them to her presence or true identity. A particularly malicious consequence of the curse inflicted upon her by her evil Aunt – to never know what the love shared by her siblings felt like.

To never have them know of her existence at all.

It had been on one particularly emotional evening for the witch, after she had finally given up on trying to locate her brothers within the French province, that she had first come to meet the tall,
blue eyed woman called Amelia. Freya had been drowning her sorrows whilst sat alone on a rocky
bank of the river Deûle, when the raven haired woman had steadily made her way in the witch’s
direction, appearing to have emerged from a small carnival that had set up its stalls a few hundred
yards down the waterway. The stranger – clearly drunk herself as she swayed and stumbled along
the edge of the river – had almost tripped over Freya’s hunched form, apparently not having seen
her in the murky darkness of the evenings moonless sky.

After a few cursed words had been exchanged, the inebriated woman had clumsily dumped herself
down next to the witch, and demanded that blonde share the rum bottled from which she had been
swigging from.

Freya had claimed when relaying the tale to Keelin and Rebekah, that she had protested – telling
the wandering mortal to go and find someone else to bother and steal alcohol from. Had told them
that she had threatened to make the strangers blood boil by using her magic, and turn her into a
particularly ugly toad to throw into the fast running waters of the Deûle.

But there had been something about the look in her girlfriend’s eyes as she had relayed that
particular part of the story, that had made Keelin think it had not necessarily been the whole truth
of what had happened. The wolf had let Freya continue on with the tale however, filing away her
lover’s potential lie for it to be examined at another time.

After eventually giving in to the demands of the drunken stranger, she and Amelia had finished the
bottle of rum between as they had started to put the world to rights, talking way into the early hours
of the morning. Over the course of that drunken first encounter, the two women had come to a
mutual agreement that the world had never shown either of them an ounce of kindness, so why in
turn should they be kind to it.

A plan had been hatched on that morning, as the sun had started its ascent into the gloomy Lille
sky. A plan born from deep within the depths of a cheap bottle of rum, and laced with the spite and
resentment of two oppressed, mistreated women. They – two strangers passing in the night - were
going to do whatever it took to claim back the pride and dignity that had been stolen from them in,
by whatever means it would take. They were going lie and cheat and scam their way across the
province of Hauts-de-France, taking all of its lords and politicians and wealthy aristocrats for every
single penny that they had to their names. And they would take delight in letting the upper class
fools know that it had been two down trodden woman – two souls that the world had turned its
back upon and all but forgotten – that had gotten to have the final laugh!

And so - Freya had gone on to explain to her sister and lover – that is what they had proceeded to
do. Amelia had coupled the experience she had gained working within a small troop of carnival
performers, with the natural god given assets that she had been blessed with as a desirable woman
in the eyes of most the men she met – and re-invented herself as an all seeing, all knowing Seer.
The simple towns folk had loved her – most women left in awe of the convincing promises of love
and healthy children that Amelia always seemed to see in their not too distant futures. And most
men had simply been left in awe of Amelia herself, as she flirted and toyed with their lust and
desires during their “fortune-telling” sessions.

The raven haired woman never went as far as bedding the male customers, Freya had stressed,
when Rebekah had not so subtly muttered the word “hussy” under her breath – much to Keelin’s
amusement. But, the witch had gone on to explain, the Seer always left the gentlemen customers
filled with the hope that if they returned for a second, more expensive session, there was a
possibility that they would get to know what lay under her various petticoats and skirts.

After a few more tumblers of Bourbon, a looser tongued Freya had claimed that she had only ever
known of one patron that Amelia had taken into her bed. A particularly pretty and delicate young
woman, who had gone by the name of Rose. However when Keelin had pressed for further details
about what had made that particular woman so different from all the Seers other cliental that had
apparently wanted to warm her bed, Freya had simply shrugged, and quickly moved on with her
tale.

*Something else the wolf had filed away to ask her girlfriend about at a later date.*

As for the part that Freya had played in the duo’s grand plan to bleed the coffers of Lille’s
population – the witch had been particularly vague. Several drinks worse for wear by that point in
the evening, Keelin’s girlfriend had simply stated that she was the one to ensure Amelia’s safety,
and take care of things should any of the cliental turn malicious or violent.

When Rebekah had pushed for more details – as suspicious of the witch’s sudden unclear and hazy
recollection, as Keelin had been – Freya had simply claimed that there was nothing more to say.
She had been the security detail thanks to her powers and magic – and that, had been that.

It had been at that point in the night - when Freya had nearly fallen off her barstool as she tried to
lean over and plant a kiss on Keelin’s cheek - that the wolf had called time on their evening. The
two had bid farewell to Rebekah and begun the brisk walk home to their flat.

And now, as they finally reached the large double doors that lead into the foyer of the familiar
apartment complex, Freya both trying and then failing to grab the long pole handle of the
entranceway – twice - Keelin realised that she probably should have cut her girlfriend off the
bourbon a lot earlier than she had.

“Damn door needs to stop moving and being so rude!” the witch slurred, a frown creasing her
forehead as she scowled at the metal pole continuing to evade her grip.

Keelin grabbed hold of the handle and pulled the door open, laughing at the adorable sight of her
drunken lover.

“Here, allow me!”

A smile replaced the frown on the witch’s face as the two made their way across the tiled floor of
the foyer, Keelin directing their path towards the small elevator in the far corner of the reception
room. She had not used the cab since originally moving into the building, always preferring to take
the stairs instead, up to the fourth floor where her apartment lay. But given the inebriated state of
the witch currently hanging onto her arm to steady herself, the wolf figured a powered ride
upwards would be the safer option.

As they entered into the elevator – Keelin pressing their floor number on the metallic dial – Freya
lent with her back against the metal bar running across the rear wall of the small cab, observing the
brunette as she turned to face her.

“You know…” the witch drawled in a voice so thick with promise that a pulse involuntarily
throbbed between Keelin’s thighs “…we’ve never actually been alone in an elevator together
before!”

Freya’s eyebrow cocked up, as a wide promising smirk pulled on her lips. Keelin would have
crashed her lips against the witch’s there and then, were it not for the slightly unfocused bloodshot
gaze that accompanied the playful look on her lovers face.

“You, Miss Mikaelson, are drunk!”
Freya pouted faintly in response to her words.

“Besides, I’m still not sure I’ve entirely forgiven you for the way you acted around that dark haired harlot earlier tonight!”

Even before the words had finished leaving her mouth, Keelin was berating herself for saying them out loud. She hadn’t meant to give voice to her concerns, certainly not when the witch in front of her was so drunk that she could hardly keep herself upright.

*But there it was, out in the open and now hanging between them.*

A slither of confusion crept into Freya’s glazed eyes, as the pout that had been pulling on her mouth melted away.

“The way I acted? But I didn’t do anything?!”

Keelin knew that she should just let the matter drop until another, more sober time – say that she hadn’t meant anything by the comment and change the subject to something far safer. But the animalistic wolf inside of her was still prickling with the need to possess – the primal need to mark what was hers and let the whole world know that Freya was off limits.

*To make sure that Amelia knew that Freya was off limits!*

“Oh please!” she huffed. “You were like a blushing schoolgirl – tongue tied every time Amelia looked at you!”

Freya’s posture straightened a little against the metal pole of the elevator’s back wall, and Keelin noticed the glaze that had been shining in witch’s eyes clearing slightly as she focused on her.

“Huh, you really are jealous, aren’t you?!”

The wolf’s only response was to drop her gaze down to the floor, as she tried her best to rein in the bristling beast inside.

“She is an old acquaintance Keelin, nothing else. I was just shocked to see her, that’s all. She was probably just as surprised to see me too!”

Keelin scoffed - words tumbling out of her mouth uncensored as the wolf inside of her snarled.

“That wasn’t surprise in her eyes Freya! She was practically undressing you with her lust filled gaze!”

“And so what if she was?!” the witch retorted quickly.

The animal that she had been trying so hard to keep within the confines of its cage, now growled possessively - but unlike she had in Rousseau’s earlier, Keelin made no attempt to mute its sound.

Amber flared in her eyes fleetingly as she locked them back on to her girlfriend.

To her surprise, Freya simply smiled at the territorial display.

“I didn’t mean it that way!”

Freya leant forward and grabbed onto Keelin’s jacket with a hand, pulling the wolf forward until their feet were touching and she could smell the bourbon on her lover’s breath.
“The point I’m trying to make, is that it wouldn’t matter even if Amelia did find me attractive – I am not interested in her!”

The witch brought her hand up to Keelin’s face and brushed a thumb lightly across her cheek.

“I only have eyes for you!”

Keelin felt the animal within her huff at the remark made by the drunken witch, but the tension that had been filling her veins slowly began to thaw under the blondes caressing touch.

A pout all of her own formed on her mouth.

“Did you used to be interested? Back when you were causing mayhem in Lille – did you two ever….”

The wolf didn’t get chance to finish her sentence, as Freya quickly leant forward and brushed her lips softly over Keelin’s, before tugging on the brunettes bottom lip with her teeth. The possessive growl that had been rumbling away within her quickly melted into a whimper of want, as she felt Freya’s whiskey tasting tongue flick out and caress her plump top lip in a slow, seductive manner. Hot breath mingled with her own, as she finally gave in to the primal need stirring inside and pushed her mouth against her lovers, her own tongue instantly slipping into Freya’s mouth and engaging in a fiery tango with the witch. Scrunching her hand into the front of the pale green shirt that Freya was wearing, the wolf tugged her girlfriend’s frame off the metal bar that she had been leaning on, and pulled the blonde’s body flush against her own as she deepened their kiss.

This time it was Freya’s turn to let a small cry of desire escape into Keelin’s mouth, as the wolf quickly walked them backwards towards the electronic panel next to the elevator’s closed door. Freya broke her mouth away and started to place heated open mouthed kisses down Keelin’s neck, as the brunette threw out the hand not currently scrunched in her girlfriend’s top, and blindly started to search for the raised red button on the panel that would bring the lift to a stop mid ascent.

Keelin gasped as the witch’s teeth nipped roughly at the sensitive spot between her neck and shoulder, the alcohol rushing through her lover’s body making the blonde less gentle than she usually was.

Heat pulsed through her core in immediate response, as she felt the briefs that she was wearing under her denim dungarees quickly begin to flood with a slick wetness.

Damn! – she was going to have to get her girlfriend this drunk more often!

The wolf felt an unwavering hand begin a determined trail up the denim on the inside of her thigh - its fingers solidly cupping over her fabric covered sex as it reached its goal. A moan pealed forth from her mouth as a jolt of pleasure ran through her whole body - just as her hand found the button it had been searching for and eagerly pressed down upon it.

Both wolf and witch jumped, as a loud alarm abruptly began to screech, filling the elevator’s cab with a shrill harsh tone as the couple’s heads accidently collided together. Freya quickly pulled back from Keelin, her eyes scrunching shut as a hand raised up to rub at her forehead, whilst the wolf spun around.

Locating the large red button that she had pressed down upon only seconds earlier, Keelin quickly slammed her hand over it again.

Once…
Twice…

Three times in rapid succession - before the wolf resigned herself to the fact that the action was not going to cease the relentless shrieking ringing through their ears.

“Urgh, make it stop!” Freya called out, having retreated back against the metal pole of the elevator – hands held up covering her ears. Keelin noted that the witch’s skin had taken on a distinct green pallor over the few seconds since they’d parted.

A crackling voice suddenly sounded out from the panel behind her, only just audible over the piercing noise of the alarm. Keelin lent down towards the 5 small holes located near the top of the metal plate where she assumed the elevator two-way speaker was located.

“Hello, is everybody alright in there?” the metallic sounding voice sputtered. “The emergency stop button had been activated!”

No shit-sherlock!

“Yes we’re fine thank you – the button was pressed in error. Are you able to stop the alarm?”

The high pitched siren continued to blare out as she waited for the slightly delayed response.

“Yes, but I will have to come to your building to do so – it appears the remote connection is not working properly. I should be there in ten minutes. Hold tight until then.”

The static crackling emitting from the speaker abruptly ceased, indicating to the wolf that the connection with whomever she had just been speaking with had now been broken.

Sighing loudly, Keelin turned back towards her girlfriend, who now appeared to be bent over from the waist with her hands placed shakily onto her knees. A thin film of sweat sheened on the witch’s face, as she peered up at her girlfriend with heavy lidded eyes.

“I think….I’m going to be sick!”

Keelin raised her eyebrows as a bemused look crossed her face.

Well she thought to herself whilst placing a hand onto Freya’s back and beginning to rub it in soft circular motions I guess we’re not crossing an elevator off our “to do list” quite just yet!

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2.

Feeling just as sober as the minute she had walked into Rousseau’s, she grabbed her floor length jacket from the table in front of her, and set about shrugging it around her shoulders.

Despite the easy listening music which still flowed out of the venue’s speakers, a calm stillness had now settled all across the bar – a stark contrast to the loud shouting and jeering which had been filling the space only a few minutes ago, as the last of the nights revellers had finally departed for their homes. The drink which she had ordered well over an hour ago still sat on its coaster untouched – the amber nectar liquid filling the beer glass all the way to the top, and causing beads of condensation to slowly slide down the outside of the container.
As she scrapped the wooden chair in which she had been sat across the floor of the bar - tucking it under the lip of her table – she became aware of another’s presence, slowly making its way over to her.

“Was there something wrong with the beer tonight, miss?”

The woman looked up to meet the deep brown eyes of the bar manager, who had served her the still untouched drink when she had arrived at the venue. His face was set into a curious yet kind expression, as he gestured to the full glass of beer on the table with his gaze.

She had only engaged in the briefest of interactions with the male earlier - their exchange of words limited to her order, his acknowledgement, and then her subsequent payment. At the most they must have only traded a handful of words. But the woman had already known by the end of their fleeting conversation that the man now stood in front of her was harmless.

He was a vampire of course, that much had been betrayed by the distinct musky smell given off by all the blood suckers who claimed New Orleans as their homes.

Many of the un-dead men and women that she had encountered during her time in the city wore various colognes and perfumes in the interest of keeping up with the human façade that they portrayed. Some even went as far as covering their bodies in essential oils and the various toiletries that one could buy these days to appear clean and sanitary to the outside world. But no amount of applied fragrance ever completely hid the underlying odour that clung to the skin of a vampire – that bitter scent as much a symbol of their immortality as the more well-documented extended sharp teeth and blood-red eyes.

Despite the un-dead aroma that wrapped itself around the bar-managers tall frame, the woman could still tell that he was not like the usual blood thirsty tyrants. He appeared instead more like an unfortunate soul who had been dragged unwillingly into a violent and cruel underworld that he did not really belong in. A victim of the strings of fate having gone awry.

And that, was something that she could definitely relate to

“Oh, no, not at all”, she stammered out, a blush of red filling her cheeks as she met the young vampire’s eyes. “The beer here is of the highest standards I am sure! I am embarrassed to say that I just got lost in my thoughts tonight, and let them run away with me.”

She smiled sweetly at the bar manager, who now looked at her with something akin to bemusement in his eyes.

“I hadn’t even realised that it was closing time, until the noise suddenly died down around me! I can be such a scatterbrain at times - please forgive me.”

The vampire shook his head lightly, as he leant over to claim the untouched drink and clear it from the table stood between them.

“No need to apologise miss. And I am sure that brain of yours is just as beautiful as the face that houses it!”

She made sure to let a slither of embarrassment seep into the bashful smile that she now returned back to the man in front of her. Despite being confident that the bar manager’s carnal interests did not lie with the females that lived in New Orleans, the woman still knew that such a compliment dished out would usually be met with appreciation - regardless of whether its owner was attracted to her or not.
“Your words are too kind, sir.”

The vampire simply laughed, and waved his free hand in dismissal as he turned to take her untouched drink back towards the venue’s bar.

As if suddenly realising that time had managed to run away from her, the woman quickly finished donning her coat and swiftly made her way over to the venue’s exit. As she placed a soft, long fingered hand upon the door’s handle, she once again heard the bar manager’s voice – this time calling out to her from where he now stood behind the bar counter.

“I’d be careful out there, if I was you miss! The unruly customers that you probably heard causing mayhem in here all night – they have only just left the bar themselves.”

She twisted her head in the vampire’s direction, and raised her brows.

“I wouldn’t want you bumping into them on your way home. They don’t exactly strike me as the most gentlemanly sort of fellows!”

Coaxing her features into a timid look of gratitude, the woman nodded her thanks in the man’s direction, before turning back to pull the door open.

The evening’s brisk wind brought a slight chill to the woman’s body as she gradually made her way down the length of Bourbon St, despite the jacket now pulled tight around her frame. The moderate breeze dancing through the air playfully teased the strands of her long hair, as it twisted and wrung its way past her. Glancing skywards, she could see that the stars in the sky were slowly being snuffed out in large groups at a time, indicating that rain could soon be on its way as thick dark clouds rolled in from across the Mississippi river.

The woman cocked her head to the left faintly as she continued to walk away from the bar, and heard whispers of laughter and heckling being carried to her ears by the slowly escalating wind. The rowdy cat calls no doubt belonged to unruly gang member’s that the bar manager had referred to as she had been leaving Rousseau’s – they too now walking the streets of the Quarter as they no doubt made their way back to whichever hole in the ground they had originally crawled out of.

Halting her steps, she now listened intently to the murmurs in the breeze, trying to distinguish which direction the shouts of the drunken men had originated from. The street both ahead and behind her was currently empty – she appearing to be the only soul currently walking its length at that late hour.

But the numerous voices making up the harsh jeers of the leather bound bikers, definitely seemed to be originating from somewhere close by.

The woman pulled the collar of her jacket tighter around her neck and shoulders as she began to walk once more – picking up the pace of her momentum in an attempt to hurry away from the area. The gang members that had been sat within the bar - leering and making crude remarks towards any young woman who had been unfortunate enough to pass by their table - had certainly not escaped her notice as she had been nursing that un-touched glass of beer.

She highly doubted that they were the sort to let a solitary woman like herself - walking alone, along the streets of the Quarter late at night – pass by without any comment or goading.

She had only managed to take a few more steps, when a sudden loud chorus of jeers soared up from behind her. The woman stopped dead in her tracks and quickly twisted her head around, trying to see who had caused the commotion and how close they were to her.
Her eyes immediately fell upon three large individuals that looked to have just stumbled out of one of the small side streets, branching off from the main road upon which she walked. Only a handful of meters away, she could easily see that the men were wearing the same sort of attire as the loud, brutish gang members whom had been drinking in Rousseau’s earlier that evening – and appearing to be just as drunk as well.

Three pairs of leering eyes were trained upon her, accompanying the three harsh smirks stretched across their faces.

“Hey there beautiful,” the tallest of the three called over to her – words slurring considerably. “A rare treasure such as yourself shouldn’t be walking the streets alone you know!”

The bearded man’s two companions laughed at his choice of words.

“Should let us accompany you – make sure you get there in one piece!”

More laughter erupting, this time from all three of the men.

Not bothering to grace the gang members with a response, the woman turned back around and continued ahead - picking up her pace to try and put as much distance between them. She knew that she only had half a mile or so to go before she would reach her intended destination – and with the drunken men behind her clearly quite intoxicated, the woman hoped they would not catch up to her easily.

“Easy there, darlin – what’s the rush!?”

A loud, surprised gasp left her mouth as she collided with a solid figure which had abruptly appeared direct in her path. Rough hands grabbed at her arms in what initially appeared to be an attempt to prevent her from tumbling over as a result of the collision.

But their presence continued to linger, far longer than necessary.

Her eyes shot up and locked onto the bloodshot gaze of the biker whom now held her within his grasp. The man’s long sandy hair was greased back into a ponytail, giving way to a severe unforgiving face littered with various scars and pock-marks. A crooked nose stood front and centre, its bridge bent at such an angle that it was obvious the man had broken the cartilage filled appendage on more than just the one occasion. The sneer now tugging at his face pulled thin split lips taught over mottled brown teeth, and the stench of the hot breath that flowed out of his mouth and over her face, made the women nearly gag on reflex.

“Let me go!”

Her words came out uneven and spiked with a distinct tendril of fear, as she squirmed slightly in the man’s grip.

“Look boys, Randy bagged us a fine treat to play with!”

The mocking jeer came from one of the three that remained behind her – their footsteps falling heavy on the paved floor as they slowly reduced their distance from her.

The man holding her arms leant his face down towards her own, sniffing the air as he moved as though trying to mark her scent. A thick, white film-covered tongue slowly crept across his scabbed bottom lip, as he attempted to pull her body closer to his own.

“That’s it girly, let fear wash over you! The more scared ya are, the better you’ll taste!”
Stifling yet another gag, the woman quickly raised up her foot, and brought a stiletto heeled shoe crashing down hard on top of the bikers own leather boot. A shocked cry of pain escaped from the man’s rot smelling mouth, as she hastily twisted her arms within his grip - pulling them loose from his hands.

Using the bikers brief distraction to her advantage, she quickly sidestepped around his bulking frame and began to run along the paved sidewalk of Bourbon St.

She did not have to glance back over her shoulder to know that the gang members had taken up pursuit – the proximity of their loud rasping breaths indicating that despite their clearly inebriated disposition, they were still managing to keep pace.

A split second decision had her quickly turning left – her adrenaline pumped muscles taking her quickly into a dark, narrow, building-lined alley. Despite the lack of light reaching into the passageway from the streetlamps of Bourbon St, she managed to deftly avoid tripping on various clusters of rubbish bags and crates as she quickly progressed further away from the main road.

“No point running sweetheart,” a gravelly, slightly out-of-breath voice shouted from behind her. “Might as well save your strength – you’re gonna need it!”

Straight ahead she could see a steadily widening strip of light beaming bright, as the open space of Royal St beckoned to her at the end of the alleyway. Just a few more yards and she would be back out into the open.

That plan came crashing down around her only seconds later, when a large hulking shadow stepped into the alley opening ahead of her, effectively blocking her access to Royal St.

She came to an abrupt halt, nearly tumbling over her own feet in an attempt to prevent herself from running headlong into the newcomers form. Callous harsh laughter groped against her ears from both directions - as the four bikers that had been running behind her slowly closed in, and the large bulky newcomer in front took a step into the alley.

Head twisting rapidly from side to side, she slowly backed herself up against the cold damp brick of one of the buildings that lined the passageway – her eyes darting quickly between each of the approaching bikers, looking for any gaps in their ranks.

Not here. Not them!

Just as she focused back onto the newly arrived gang member who was continuing his advance further into the alley, a rough calloused hand gripped around her throat. Powerful, thick fingers pressed hard into her flesh, as a sweat glistening face filled her vision completely. A second hand clasped down painfully onto her upper arm, and she found herself being pushed solidly against the unyielding wall.

A wave of nausea crashed over her as the brute opened his mouth to speak, his foul smelling maw only a few mere millimetres from her own.

“And where exactly did you think you were running to?!” the man snarled – his spittle splattering onto her cheeks as he spoke.

“I do love it when they try and escape,” another male voice jeered just to her left, the others now all caught up to her position.

“Should we take her back to Baracuda, Steiner?” another gang member questioned – the one that had appeared in the alleyways exit just as she had been nearing its release. “Have our fun with her
“Silence!” the biker who had a hold of her shouted out, as his head whipped around in his comrades direction. “We were told never to speak that name!”

“Aww come on Steiner, quit being such an asshole! It’s not like she’s going to live to tell anyone about it!”

The man holding her - the one whose name she now knew - turned his head back to face her, his eyes now burning the deep red hue belonging to the un-dead vampires of the world. His mouth twisted into a smile – lips drawing back to reveal elongated pointed teeth that were sharp enough to pierce through the toughest hides or flesh.

“By the time I’m through with you girly, you’re gonna be begging me for death!”

Steeling herself against the stench that she knew was about to assault her nose, she drew in a quick deep breath – before slowly letting go of it in a loud, drawn-out sigh.

“Boys boys boys….I hate to disappoint you all, but this is not going to end well for you!”

Amusement tickled at her as she saw a wave of confusion rush across the vampire’s scared face – her words both unexpected and out of place for the situation the drunken vampires had truly believed they controlled.

“Sadly it appears that none of you are the ones that I actually seek. But thank you for the name of your clan’s hideout – you’ve saved me some precious time with that small gem of information!”

She could practically smell the confusion now rippling off the gang members, as her words charged their way into the bikers’ intoxicated minds.

Fools!

Locking her bright sapphire eyes onto the raging gaze of the snarling vampire whose hand still remained tightly gripped around her neck, she flashed the biker a wide, wicked, lipstick lined grin.

“Come….let us dance, you and I!”

**************************************************

The cold brisk evening wind began to pick up its pace as it blustered its way across the empty sidewalks that lined both sides of Bourbon Street.

Thick droplets of rain began their descent from dark pregnant clouds high above the city of New Orleans, just as Josh slid a large iron key into the lock adorning the door of Rousseau’s. Twisting the metal handle to secure his bar for the evening, the young vampire shook his head to himself in frustration, before muttering solemnly into the increasing gale.

“Sure, of course the heavens choose now to open up! Just about sums up my day!”

Hunkering down into the warmth of his thick black overcoat, the vampire started off in the direction of his apartment – breaking into a slow, encumbering jog of sorts.
Running was so not his thing. Never had been, and never would be!

His mind briefly wondered to the young woman who had been the last to leave the bar that evening, and he hoped that the good-looking lady had managed to make it home already - safe, sound, and out of the torrential downpour that was getting heavier and more ferocious by the second.

He really needed to discuss alternative transport options with Marcel. See if he could make use of the….

“ARGH!!”

A loud, gut wrenching scream peeled forth and resonated around the empty streets of the French Quarter – abruptly bringing the bar managers jog to a complete stop.

Josh whipped his head around towards the direction from which he assumed the noise had originated, a good block down from his current position.

Had that been…

“AAARRRRRGGG…AAAAARGGGGH!!”

Several more screams followed quickly on the heels of the first, the sound drilling its way through his ears and deep into his core.

As the vampire quickly dug deep into his overcoats pocket and gripped a hand around the cell phone he found there, he became certain of two things.

The screams that had sounded out so loudly were most certainly the last cries of someone that would never see the light of day again. And the tones of the voice making those gut-wrenching noises - had been male in origin.

Chapter End Notes

....anyone else think Josh needs a decent car to drive himself about in? Just me? Huh. ;-)
Chapter 5

Chapter Notes

Chapter 5 is finally here and up for grabs!

So so sorry for the delay - I am finding it increasingly difficult to find time to write recently, due to both work and home commitments. But I have been trying to just do a little each day, even if its only a few sentences at a time. So fear not, even if its not every week I get to post an update, I can assure you I am still writing this particular installment of my tale.

I hope you enjoy - and please, let me know your thoughts once you've read this latest chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chatper 5.

1.

Delicious laughter filled the large familiar courtyard, punctuating voices that were bursting with amusement and delight as the Mikaelson family engaged in a rare family breakfast together.

Sat just to the right of her niece, and directly across from her younger sister Rebekah, Freya watched on as the people she loved more than life itself bantered and joked with each other over plates of syrup drizzled pancakes and various Danish pastries. Despite the absence of Cole due to his continued adventures across the globe with his fiancée Davina, the Mikaelson home felt almost complete again to Freya, now that Rebekah had returned from her year-long stint in New York.

“So tell me daughter,” Klaus’s voice boomed down the table, from his position at its helm. “How are you fairing with your wiccan studies? Is your Aunt Freya teaching you well?”

The hybrid smiled at his daughter as he spoke, before flicking his gaze quickly over to Freya with something, she thought, that resembled a challenge glistening in his eyes.

Frowning slightly at the undecipherable meaning behind her brother’s glance, the witch turned her attention to the youngest member of the Mikaelson family as she replied to her father.

“It’s going ok”, was the girls short and somewhat unengaged answer.

Hope suddenly appeared to be very interested in the piece of pancake that she was lazily pushing around her plate with a fork. If Freya didn’t know better, she’d have said that her niece was quietly nervous about the turn in which the conversation at the table had taken.

“It’s going ok?! My dear Hope, you are a Mikaelson! We excel at every venture we undertake and throw our all into the pursuits we engage in. I am sure that you are faring better than just OK!”

“Klaus!” Haley quickly admonished from her place beside Hope. “Please try and remember that our daughter is still a child, and not a thousand year old immortal like the rest of your family!”
Klaus appeared to be about to provide a retort to the Wolf Queen, but Hope’s small voice piped up before the hybrid had a chance to speak.

“It’s ok Mom, I know what Dad means.”

A small sigh left the young girl’s lips, as she stopped playing with her food and raised her head to look in her father’s direction.

“I’m doing well, I’ve mastered most of the spells that Aunty Freya has shown me so far, and hopefully I shouldn’t need to wear my bracelet for much longer!”

A wide, Cheshire-Cat grin spread across Klaus’s face – his eyes sparkling with pride as he gestured to Hayley.

“See, what did I tell you – the little one is a gifted and brilliant Mikaelson through and through!”

Hayley rolled her eyes towards the hybrid, before turning her head to address Hope.

“I think you might still need your bracelet for a little while yet sweetheart, just until…”

“Honestly Mom,” the youngster cut-in, as her eyes widened with conviction. “I’m totally mastering control over my power. Tell them Aunt Freya.”

Freya felt all eyes around the breakfast table expectantly fall upon her.

Raising a crisp white napkin up to her mouth to dab away any croissant crumbs that may have escaped their intended destination, the witch quickly cleared her throat.

“Well….Hope certainly is a quick learner, I can’t deny her that!”

The comment earned her a flash of pearly white teeth, as a large smile broke across her niece’s face.

“And when it comes to the known ways in which her magic can manifest itself into, I’d say that she has definitely gained a sufficient amount of control to prevent any unexpected outbursts of power.”

A small squeal of delight came from the young witch sat next to her.

“That said,” she continued, before Hope had a chance to use her words as an excuse to be rid of the gold bracelet right there and then at the breakfast table. “We still don’t know if Hope’s power has fully established itself as of yet. A witch’s magic can change and develop often during their younger years, not to mention increase in its intensity”

She looked down at her niece with what she hoped came across as a pointed, yet sympathetic expression.

“I think it would be prudent to keep the bracelet on for now, honey.”

Hope’s whole demeanour quickly deflated – a small pout forming on her lips as she wordlessly returned to chasing her breakfast around her plate with a fork.

Freya watched as Hayley placed a hand upon the young witch’s arm and began to rub it gently up and down, in a motherly attempt to placate her daughter.

“Oh I wouldn’t let it get you down too much, Angel”, Rebekah’s voice called out from across the
“We Mikaelson women are formidable forces of nature! You’ll have that magic of yours completely house trained and performing cute tricks in no time!”

The blonde vampire’s words drew out a small giggle from Hope, as Freya watched the young witch try her best to maintain her pout - despite a smile battling to force its way onto her face.

“Don’t be silly Aunty Bekah, my magic’s not a puppy!”

“Oh, but could you just imagine if it was?! Nik we should get her a….”

A quick stern look from Klaus, full of the promise of death and torture, stopped Rebekah mid-sentence.

“Right, of course - enough furry beasts in the family as it is….got you!” the blonde vampire stammered out, trying to backtrack her words quickly.

“So,” Hayley interjected as she looked pointedly towards Freya - clearly trying to divert the topic of conversation to safer grounds that were less likely to result in her daughter requesting that they go and purchase a small puppy as soon as possible. “Isn’t it your and Keelin’s anniversary today?”

Freya felt a flush of heat quickly begin to creep up her neck as she became acutely aware that all of her family sat around the table now had their eyes on her – including Klaus, who looked less than impressed with the sudden turn in conversation.

“Yes - it is.”

The witch had hoped that her short and to the point answer would deter any of them from continuing on that particular subject, but it seemed that her younger sister had other ideas.

“Ohhhh, you kept that to yourself - you devious devil!” exclaimed Rebekah as a large teeth baring smile spread across her lips. “Has it really been a year for you two love birds already?!”

Freya risked a quick sidelong glance to her hybrid brother, noting how his face had rapidly taken on a cold and hard frown.

“Why couldn’t he just get over it already!

Clearing her throat, she forced a small smile onto her face as she locked eyes with Rebekah.

“Yes, it’s a year ago today that we….” a quick flick of her eyes to Hope sat beside her “…well that we first expressed our romantic interest in each other!”

“You mean since you first kissed and made out?!” Hope quickly chimed in, a large grin lighting up her young features as she looked up at her Aunt.

Freya’s eyebrows raised up as she blinked rapidly at the young witch – suddenly lost for words.

“I….well…”

“Aunty Freya, I’m nearly ten years old – I’m not a kid anymore! I know what adults do with each other when they are in love.”

Surprised glances quickly passed between all of the adults present – Freya noticing that Klaus in particular looked like he had just taken a hefty blow to his nether regions and was now struggling to find his breath as a result.
Hope, however, appeared to have not noticed the effect that her words had had on her audience, as she proceeded to lean across the table and grab the nearest Danish pastry for her plate.

In the end it was Hayley who managed to regain her composure first - twisting in her chair to face her daughter as she spoke.

“And what exactly is it that you know, sweetie?”

Hope continued to concentrate on tearing apart the baked delight in front of her as she spoke - unaware that she now held the rapt attention of everyone sat at the table.

“Well Johnny told me and Paige a few months ago, that his school friend’s older brother has a girlfriend, and that because they are in love, his friend’s brother and his girlfriend would often bump their “uglies” together.”

Freya’s eyes widened in surprise at her niece’s words, whilst out of the corner of her eye she could both see and hear Elijah nearly choking on the piece of toast he had been so gracefully been chewing upon.

Klaus, seemingly having re-discovered motor functions after his initial shock at the turn in conversation, started to rise up out of his chair – until a well-placed hand from Hayley landed on the hybrid’s shoulder, and firmly pushed him back down.

“And what do you think he meant by that, honey?” the Wolf Queen continued, flashing a withering look towards Klaus as she spoke.

The youngest Mikaelson shrugged casually, her attention still upon her food.

“Well, I think Johnny’s friend was telling lies, because I’ve seen his brother’s girlfriend, and she’s not ugly at all! She’s actually really pretty, just like you mom! So, I think Johnny’s friend was lying because he was jealous. I already know that two people in love make out with their tongues, just like Aunty Freya and Aunty Keelin do when they think no one is looking!”

The deep crimson flush that had been creeping up Freya’s neck now quickly spread across her cheeks too, as all eyes once again fell upon her.

“Um…..”

Laughter suddenly filled the courtyard, as Rebekah let her amusement liberally flow free.

“Oh, dearest Freya,” the vampire managed to force out between her fits of mirth, “our precious little niece certainly has your number there!”

Freya continued to look like a rabbit caught in headlights for a few seconds longer, before finally breaking into a light chuckle of her own – her posture relaxing a little.

“Yes, I suppose she does!”

“Are you going to be doing anything to celebrate?” Hayley asked, as she pointedly continued to ignore the distaste radiating off her daughter’s father, who now looked as though he was ready to murder someone.

“Well, Keelin’s unfortunately having to work most of the day at the clinic. With our anniversary being so soon after her return from New York, she didn’t feel it would appear very professional to request a day’s annual leave. So, I think we are probably just going to order in some take out and...”
watch a movie together, when she eventually gets home.

“How utterly human and mundane!” quipped Klaus, earning him a harsh look from both Rebekah and Hayley.

“Some of us can only dream of one day having such a “human and mundane” existence Nik,” Rebekah admonished their brother, “I’d give almost anything to….”

“Yes but our sister isn’t just a mundane human, is she Rebekah!” Klaus interrupted, his voice teeming with barely contained contempt. “She is a powerful witch, and a Mikaelson non-the-less. Her time would be better spent making sure that our family…..”

“Speaking of witches”, Elijah suddenly interposed, cutting off the irate Hybrid mid-flow, “I had the displeasure of running into Marcellus yesterday afternoon, whilst taking in the New Orleans fresh air. He was his usual uncouth self as he proceeded to rant and rave about the latest wave of deceased bodies that have been turning up discarded on the streets of the Quarter.”

Flashing her brother the faintest of smiles in gratitude for the swift change in direction of the table’s conversation, Freya cleared her throat and offered a response.

“So the recent murder spree plaguing the city is still occurring then?”

“It would appear so,” Elijah continued, “and the perpetrator’s preference, it would seem, has now evolved. The headless bodies being so ungraciously discarded on the streets of our city, no longer just belong to humans. There have been reports of witches now meeting a similar gruesome end.”

“Witches?” Freya questioned, her interest suddenly peaked. “Has Tobias been informed?”

Elijah nodded in confirmation, as he began to swill a glass of orange juice around in his hand.

“Yes, it was actually our new Regent who raised the matter with Marcel. It seems the witch faction of the city has been enraged by the latest turn of events, and are now wildly looking to place blame.” He paused, appearing to consider his next words carefully. “Blame, its appears, they have targeted onto the vampires of the Quarter.”

“Oh please!”, exclaimed Rebekah, her hand making a gesture of dismissal. “How ridiculously idiotic must the broomstick riders actually be!”

The blonde vampire instantly grimaced at her own words, as she threw a quick apologetic glance to Freya before continuing.

“Forgive my mouth running away with me, Sister.”

Freya simply shook her head in Rebekah’s direction in a motion of dismissal.

“I just think that it is preposterous that anyone would think that the beheaded bodies being dumped around the city, are the work of vampires! Yes, they have all be drained of blood - but could any of you picture Marcel or his vampire errand boys being so brazen and unseemly with their food?! Beheading is hardly their style!”

“Ah dear Rebekah, always trying to protect your lover’s honour!”

The blonde vampires head whipped around – her anger filled eyes locking onto Klaus, who was sat smirking to himself at the head of the table.
“I couldn’t give a damn about Marcel’s honour Nik! The melodramatic fool could fall off the face of the earth for all I care!”

Freya raised an eyebrow at her sister’s words.

“Actually,” Hayley said, as she fussied over a dribble of jam that had landed onto the front of Hope’s light green dress, “I agree with Rebekah. I don’t think the recent deaths are vampire related. I bumped into Josh earlier this morning whilst out picking up breakfast supplies…..Hope, stay still!”

The small witch quickly ceased wriggling awkwardly in her chair, as Hayley persisted in her attempt to clean away the stain on the girl’s clothes. A look of annoyance was creasing the young girl’s features at the continued pestering of her mother.

“He mentioned that five more bodies were found in the Quarter just two nights ago, a few blocks down from Rousseau’s. Bodies that had belonged to Vampires.”

“Vampires?!” Freya exclaimed. “So there have been victims from all of the city’s factions then – human, witch and vampire!”

“Not all,” Klaus mused, as a look of accusation quickly chasing away the distaste that had been swirling in his eyes only moments ago. “You forget the faction from which your own lover hails from, Sister!”

Sighing loudly, Freya rolled her eyes and bit down lightly on the inside of her cheek in an attempt to rein in her quickly rising anger.

“The wolves are not responsible for the recent murders Klaus!”

“Really? And tell me Freya, how can you be so sure about that!?” The hybrid gestured wildly around the room with his hands. “For wasn’t it the creature that currently warms your bed at night who single-handedly slaughtered several human tourists in the Bayou last year? What’s to say she hasn’t re-kindled that love for the taste of fresh blood…”

“Klaus!” Hayley chided loudly.

“No, it’s fine Hayley!” Freya exclaimed, as she quickly pushed back her seat and stood from her place around the grand table. “I’ve had quite enough “breakfast” for one morning!”

“Freya, please stay”, Rebekah implored, as she watched her sister struggle to keep a leash on the anger burning within her. “I’m sure Nik didn’t mean…”

“Oh I think it’s pretty clear what our brother meant, sister!” Freya practically spat - her emerald eyes alight with ire as they fell upon Klaus once more. “You have done nothing but belittle and demean Keelin over the past year - and I am through putting up with it, brother!”

The witch began to stalk towards the Compounds entranceway as she continued.

“Should hell suddenly freeze over and you actually begin to care about someone other than yourself, you know where to find me, Klaus! But until then…”

The witch twisted her body around as she reached the large wooden doors leading out of the Mikaelson home.

“…stay the hell away from me, and the woman I love!”
And with that, she left her family home.

Flames of a large fire flickered, flared, leapt and spat into the star-lit evening sky, as sparkling embers climbed high above the barren ground of the New Orleans wastelands. A large plume of grey smoke curled its way through the air in the wake of the blaze, thick and angry as it swirled and churned its way up to the heavens - carrying with it the ash and fumes of its majestic creator.

The deep orange and yellow hues of the blistering living beast raging in front of him, had succeeded in hypnotising Halvar as he sat watching the fire with a transfixed stare. The crass and obtuse musings of the other Jarls sat around the clearing out back of Baracuda bar had long since been drowned out by the hissing and crackling of the flames, and the loud musings of his own mind.

It had now been four months since the clan had discovered the body of their desiccated lord here in the outskirts of the Louisiana city, and four months since they had begun to provide their master with blood procured from the various creatures that inhabited the pathetic cesspool of life across the Mississippi waters.

Human, witch, vampire – the Jarl had now lost count of number of beings whom had been drained of their lifeblood, for it to be fed to their lifeless master. And each time the gore of a new sacrifice had been brought back to Baracuda for sanctification by Balder, and then poured into the dry husked mouth of their Lord, Halvar had felt the slippery tendrils of hope lick and tease at his darkened soul. Only for the heavy burden of disappointment to then wrap him in its crushing grip once again, each time their attempts at resurrection were unsuccessful.

The other Jarl’s were understandably getting restless - tension and aggression becoming a common companion to them all with each unsuccessful attempt to resurrect their Master.

*And could he really blame them for their increasing anger?!!*

Even he, the usually level headed and stoic leader of their ranks, had been dangerously close to losing control of the anger that constantly raged deep within him. He had almost resorted to using the power of the Blood-Bond on a few occasions now, to inflict pain and suffering upon his fellow Jarls as a way of venting his frustrations.

The powerful gift of the bond had been bestowed on all seven of the original Clan Jarl’s by their Master – each of them submitting willingly over a thousand years ago, to the enslavement that bound them to the will of their Lord.

The control and authority of the bond was absolute.

Unyielding.

They were obligated to carry out its will – their Masters will – for the rest of their lives, without question or hesitation. There was no resistance or severance from its control. The Blood-Bond was now as much a part of their being as their very souls.
More so, since it no longer mattered what their own souls strived for or coveted. All that mattered was the will of the bond.

But that was not the be all and end all of the oath that each of the seven Jarls had given themselves over to.

With the repression and undisputable servitude, came the unsurpassable gift of immortality. The promise of a life never-ending, as the rest of the world’s inhabitants inevitably aged and died as they went about their pathetic, insignificant lives. Not one of the original seven Jarls had aged a single day since the moment they had held their Lord’s bleeding wrist to their mouths and greedily drank down the blood that had flowed from the wound the great Master had inflicted.

That glorious and fateful day had now been several centuries ago, but Halvar himself still looked and felt the 35 years of age that he had been as the bond’s gift had trickled down his throat and seeped its way through his entire body, cementing its grip.

And with the immortality had come power.

Each of them had been affected slightly differently when it had come to the skills and talents that the blood of their Master had bestowed or enhanced.

Balder, having already been a well-established Gothi within the village of his families clan, found that the bond greatly enhanced the well of magic that had already dwelled deep within him. Once only able to perform simple spells and incantations, the Gothi was now a formidable wielder of power, able to out-smart and out-manoeuvre every Witch that they had ever crossed paths with, during their time spent searching for their fallen Lord’s body.

Colborn, much to Halvar’s dismay, had been bestowed with the gift of brute strength and might – his already powerful muscles enhanced with supernatural vigour thanks to their Masters life-blood. It had also soon become clear that the violent and sadistic Jarl had not needed to put in any effort to maintain the increased clout of his strength, leading to the now overweight and heavy appearance of the Jarl. The bearded man enjoyed indulging in copious amounts of food and ale, almost as much as he enjoyed inflicting pain and suffering upon any unsuspecting fool who dared to cross him.

Fiske’s gift had been that of charm and charisma. Talents which the fair-faced Jarl had spent many of their first years spent in servitude of their Master resenting. The Jarl had certainly never been considered weak or lacking when it came to his ability to fight and engage in combat. He had proven himself time and time again on the battlefield, during the Great Clan Wars that had ravaged through their homeland a thousand years ago. But that fact had not been of any consolation to the Jarl as he had watched the likes of Colborn, Lief and Halvar all have their strength and fighting abilities boosted by the bond. He was a warrior - Fiske had claimed all those years ago. A veteran soldier ready to do battle for their Master’s cause and slaughter all those who opposed him. What use was an uncanny ability to sway and persuade the will of others on a battlefield.

Of course the attractive Jarl, who had already possessed a well-known penchant for seducing the numerous bar-wenches and serving girls he met when enjoying a brief respite from shedding the blood of his enemies, had soon come to appreciate the advantages of his bond-bestowed gifts. Both in, and out, of the bedroom.

Halvar himself had not been bestowed with any enhanced skills of strength, or magic. There had been no sudden injection of charm or wit into the gruff and curt demeanour with which he had been born. He had never been considered a particularly charismatic man back within his family clan, nor one of great influence or authority. The Jarl had of course been no stranger to the killing fields
associated with the aforementioned Clans-Wars. No able man of fighting age had been spared from the horrors and carnage of the bloody confrontations between different Clan factions. Engaging in combat to defend the honour of your Families tribe had been considered both a privilege and an undisputable right-of-passage amongst the people of their homeland. And despite his lack of brute strength, or the presence of a mind honed for combat, Halvar had always managed to survive the many skirmishes into which he had been conscripted, without incurring any more serious an injury than that of a bloodied nose, or superficial cut to an arm or non-critical part of his lean body.

Had you of asked any of the other six Jarls what gift they had originally thought the Blood-Bond had bestowed upon their leader, Halvar knew that his brethren would have claimed that it had been his uncanny luck and ability to survive, that had been enhanced by their Master. He certainly knew that the other six Jarl’s still to this day occasionally mocked the un-remarkable and mundane existence that had been his life, all those years ago.

But what most of his fellow brethren had not known about the man whom their great Lord had deemed suitable to lead his ferocious and fearsome Jarl’s, was that he had been born with a far greater than normal sense of loyalty.

Halvar had always thrown his all into serving the men that had ruled his families clan, displaying an unrivalled level of devotion and allegiance to their cause. What he had lacked in brute strength and agility when engaged in combat on the battlefield, he had made up for in droves with sheer determination and endurance to his Clan’s cause and beliefs. Halvar would have willingly put his life on the line, and undertaken any task necessary – no matter how perilous, or destitute it may have seemed to any of the other members of his families clan – to serve those who ruled over him. His faithfulness knew no bounds.

And it was that loyalty – the Clan leader knew – that had caused the Blood-Bond to gift him with the ability to rule over and enforce his will over the other six Jarls under his Masters rule.

When their great Lord had endured the unforeseen events that had led to both his disappearance and the subsequent desiccation of his body, the unyielding and unquestionable pull of the oath which surged through each of the seven Jarls veins had not dissipated, or even waned in its strength as many of the Clan members had thought it might do – had hoped it would do, in Colborn’s case. The pull of their Master’s will had remained just as robust and steadfast as the day they had all first taken his blood into their bodies.

With one distinct exception.

On that fateful day when their Master was unexpectedly bested - now over a thousand years ago - the control of blood-bonds will had in part, transferred over to Halvar himself. The seven Jarls were of course still bound to “serve and protect” their master at all costs – a mandate that had seamlessly morphed into “find and resurrect” after the demise and disappearance of the powerful being. None of them could waver from that goal – not even Halvar himself.

But both he and his brethren had quickly come to realise during that first waking cycle after their Lord’s downfall, that any command or order given out by Halvar had become impossible to disobey by the six other Jarl’s. So long as the directives that he demanded of his fellow Jarl’s were in the overall interest of their Master and his resurrection, the Blood-Bond would surge up throughout Halvar’s body and instantly quell any hint of disobedience or rebellion that may have been directed towards him by the other men.

His place as the leader of the Blond-Bonded Clan had been cemented by the very same oath that had first bound their fates together. And as such, their Lord’s choice had been clear – Halvar, the unremarkable yet fiercely loyal member of the Jarls, was to lead them in the task of both locating
and ensuring their Master’s return to power.

No matter what the cost.

No matter how many lives they had to end.

“By the Gods, I have worked out what we have been doing wrong!”

Halvar was abruptly pulled from his thoughts by the unusually bellowing tones of Baldar’s voice, as the Gothi came running from around the front of Baracuda, where the only door in and out of the wooden building resided.

The Clan’s only magic wielder had so far been absent from Jarl’s informal gathering - currently being held around the fiercely burning fire which Lief had constructed earlier that evening.

Halvar had not however felt the need to insist on the Gothi’s presence amidst their ranks, for he had known that the ever pragmatic Jarl had been knee deep in parchments and grimoires down in the catacombs that lay deep beneath the bar, as he attempted once again to determine why their recent efforts to resurrect their desiccated Lord had been frustratingly unsuccessful.

Had there of been a contender other than himself for the position of Clan Leader after their Master had fallen, Halvar knew that his stiffest competition would have come from Balder. The Gothi’s own loyalty to the Clan’s cause was almost as legendary as his own, and as such, Halvar could not remember a time he had actually had to call upon the power of the Blood-Bond to ensure that Balder towed the line.

*The same could definitely not be said of Colborn*, Halvar bemoaned to himself, as he watched the cumbersome Jarl twist his head in the newly appeared Gothi’s direction, and snarl out a response.

“You mean what YOU’VE been doing wrong, Balder! The rest of us have had no damned say in the matter!”

As the rest of the Jarl’s all murmured their agreement with Colborn’s statement, the slightly out of breath Gothi came to a stop beside Halvar’s own chair - holding out what looked to be a piece of old parchment paper that had fresh ink recently scrawled upon it.

Halvar took the document being offered to him, inspecting it closely as he listened to Balder begin his explanation.

“It’s been there inscribed on the tomb-slab all along. We’ve just been interpreting it wrong!”

“Again Balder,” Colborn shouted over from his position on the opposite side of the roaring fire, “the tomb that YOU have been reading incorrectly, you useless waste of space!”

Halvar didn’t need to read into the sudden drop in air pressure immediately around them, to know that the Clan’s Gothi was close to losing his temper with Colborn, and providing the would be usurper a magical punch to his large gut.

“Enough Colborn! Let the man speak!” Halvar barked out - a sharp edge of irritation wrapping itself around his words.

Surprisingly, the burly biker simply scoffed once in the Clan leaders direction, before resuming the draining of the tankard of beer within his hand.

“As I was saying”, Balder continued, as the air around the gathered Jarl’s slowly returned back to
its previous pleasant breeze, “it’s the interpretation of the final segment of the inscription which we have been erring upon. I had thought that the faded symbols had translated into *Blodet Av De Fremste i Landet* – The blood of the foremost in the land. Which of course, we all naturally had assumed meant the blood of the most prevalent species inhabiting the area – humans.”

A loud huff of incredulousness emitted from across the fire – but it was the only sign of Colborn’s distaste for the Gothi’s choice of words, before Balder continued.

“Which of course we soon realised was not working, no matter the creed or social status of the human that the sacrificial blood had belonged to.”

Halvar was beginning to feel his own frustrations rise as the Gothi appeared to be taking his time in offering up an explanation for his apparent break-through.

“So we then moved onto the Witches, and then the indigenous Vampires – all to no avail”, the Clan leader snapped. “We know all of this Balder, so please - do try and get to your point sometime tonight!”

“Right – of course”, the Gothi quickly responded – chided, but not disheartened. “The error in our judgement was not in the translation itself, but in assuming that the inscribed symbols had represented words from our own native language. In the light of our failed attempts, I decided to cross reference the slab’s markings using the new grimoires that Ake had procured from the last Witch that we drained of blood. And that was when it hit me!”

“I’ll bloody well hit you if you don’t get to the point sometime this century!” sneered Lief, from his position sat beside Colborn – earning him a hearty clap on the back from the smirking biker.

Ignoring the off-hand remark, Balder continued.

“The inscription isn’t meant to be deciphered into the language of the Clans, because the tomb slab itself was never intended to aid us in our plight. It was in fact, never intended for discovery by our kind at all.”

Halvar’s brow creased at that piece of information.

“But the ancient piece was found in the same catacomb as our great Lord’s body”, the Clan leader exclaimed. “Left by the Master himself in the hope that we would one day discover his final resting place, and bring about his resurrection.”

Blader shook his head vigorously, before continuing.

“But that’s just it Halvar, I no-longer think that it was our Lord that carved those symbols into the stone of the slab. I believe it was actually created by the one whom sealed the Master’s fate – as a warning to anyone who might one day stumble across his desiccated body.”

“A warning?” Fiske interjected, as he sat lazily sharpening one of the many hunting knives usually to be found concealed somewhere upon his body – the polished carbon-steel of the blade gleaming in the dancing light of the open fire. “Saying what exactly? Abandon all hope ye who enter here!?”

All of the Jarls present laughed at the fair-haired biker’s remark, save for Halvar whose attention remained fixed solely upon the agitated Gothi stood beside him.

“What warning do the markings depict, Balder?” he asked, trying to ignore the feeling of trepidation that was steadily trying to work its way over him.
“If we take the markings to symbolise the language of the man responsible for sealing our Lord’s fate, then the translation would read as, Hoiduge Esialgsest Igavesest Verest - Beware Of The Original Eternal Blood.”

A brief moment of silence fell over the Clan members, as each of them took in the Gothi’s words and began processing their meaning.

Eventually it was Halvar who shattered the stillness that had fallen over the Jarl’s, his voice deep and gravelly with disgust as his words came out as more of a statement, than question.

“Gods damned Mikaelson blood!”

A curt nod of the Gothi’s head, was the only response the Clan leader received.

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3.

“Well, this is certainly the most formal NetFlix and Chill evening that I’ve ever had!”

Freya had to admit that she was subtly impressed as she walked into the entranceway of Restaurant August - flashing a playful look of reprimand at Keelin as she passed by the wolf, who was holding open a large oak door for her.

Keelin let out a gentle laugh as she proceeded to follow her girlfriend into the historic, 19th Century French-Creole building. The impressive stone structure had played host to a number of different businesses over the years since its construction in what was known as the city’s Central Business District. But for the last six years it had been home to a recently awarded five star restaurant, which had been managing to make a name for itself as one of New Orleans finest eating establishments. Even Freya had heard of its popularity within the city - which was quite the accomplishment, considering that she hardly even found the time to eat the homemade sandwich that Keelin would often make for her each morning, let alone travel into the city centre for food.

Between her magical responsibilities, and the hours that Keelin worked at the Clinic, they rarely had the chance to make it out of the Quarter together to sample some of the city’s many fine restaurants.

“Did you honestly think that I was going to let us spend our first anniversary together sat on the couch in our apartment, watching one those god-awful Twilight movies for the hundredth time!?”

“Hey!” Freya exclaimed as she slowly began to undo the zipper that ran down the length of her black leather jacket. “I thought that we’d agreed – no more trash-talk about my guilty pleasure!”

Another laugh peeled forth from the wolf, as she shook her head.

“I will never understand what you see in those films. They are poorly written, terribly acted, and have the facts so, so wrong! I would sell my soul to be able to transition as pain free and fast as that muscle-bound boy does! And I can honestly say I have never seen a single one of your family twinkle and glisten in the sun!”

Freya couldn’t help but let out a small chuckle of her own at that remark, as an image flashed in front of her mind’s eye of her sister, Rebekah, stood in the middle of Bourbon St marvelling at her skin as it sparkled in the morning sun.
“What can I say – I’m a sucker for a supernatural romantic tale with a happy ending!”

Just as the witch was about to shrug the jacket off her shoulders, Keelin stepped up close behind her and placed warm hands over her own, effectively halting her action. As the wolf began to remove the garment for Freya in a particularly chivalrous gesture, she leaned in close and murmured into the witch’s ear.

“You’re my happy ending, Miss Mikaelson!”

A small flush of colour quickly spread across Freya’s cheeks, as she fought back the urge to twist around and claim the wolf’s lips with her own, right there in the restaurants foyer.

*Something told her that the exceptionally pristine looking maître’d, currently stood waiting to receive them into his establishment, would not approve of her devouring her girlfriend in front of him!*

“Charmer!” Freya resigned herself to muttering, as Keelin walked past her to speak with the waiting attendant – a large smile beaming on the wolf’s face as she moved.

“Reservation for two”, Keelin said to the attentive man, “under the name of Malraux.”

Freya raised her eyebrows in surprise at her lover’s words, as the maître’d confirmed the booking with Keelin and motioned for the two women to follow him into the restaurant. She had to admit - she was impressed! From what little the witch knew of the restaurant, the waiting list for being able to make a table reservation was rumoured to be several weeks long. To have one pre-booked for the evening of their anniversary – Keelin had to have contacted the restaurant months ago.

She leaned close to the wolf as they slowly followed their host through the entrance hall – nudging her girlfriend’s shoulder gently with her own.

“So basically, you lied to me when you said that you just wanted a quiet night in with a bottle of wine tonight!?”

A small smirked played on Keelin’s lips as she playfully returned the shoulder nudge.

“Well to be fair, I didn’t lie about everything. We are definitely going to be drinking wine!” the wolf quipped, throwing a quick mischievous wink towards her girlfriend.

Freya was about to make a quick retort to the wolf about being on a slippery slope of deceit, when the maître’d walking in front of them suddenly came to a halt - stepping to one side to usher the couple through a tall white door that he was gracefully holding open.

As she slowly walked over threshold, the witch’s mind was briefly distracted from thoughts of her girlfriend’s devious planning, by the sight of the grand dining room now splayed out in front of her. The softly lit, open-plan area was flanked by three long walls covered in a mixture of deep mahogany panelling and bare brickwork, with the fourth mostly consisting of floor to ceiling windows that looked out onto the evening-lit street outside. Two large, grand crystal-chandeliers hung high above the room – their purpose, Freya noted, seemed to be purely to provide decoration and ambience, as she couldn’t see any lightbulbs nestling in amongst the clear gemstones that adorned their frames.

A rich coloured hardwood floor clipped beneath the witch’s heeled boots, as she and Keelin once again began to follow their host as he skilfully weaved his way in-between the many tables stationed in the room. Every place-setting they passed was occupied – the many smartly dressed revellers all at different stages of their evening meals. Laughter and relaxed chatter filled the room.
- sounds that which although atmospheric, still somehow remained subdued enough to not ruin the overall romantic tone of the venue.

The maître’d eventually came to halt next to the only un-occupied table that Freya had seen during their walk across the main floor. Situated in the far corner of the restaurant, next to one of the large floor-to-ceiling windows, the small and intimate table had two chairs that were neatly tucked under the white-linen cloth covering its top. A whole host of silverware had been meticulously placed in their rightful positions on top of the pristine looking fabric - their highly polished surfaces catching the glint of flickering flame being provided by a single, red taper-candle sitting in a holder at the centre of the table.

As their host made to pull a chair out from underneath the table for one of them to sit upon, Keelin quickly stepped up to the man and politely halted his action. Raising an inquisitive eyebrow, the maître’d took a step back as Keelin took-over the action of sliding the chair back – indicating to Freya with a smile and small tilt of her head that the seat was hers for the taking.

“Securing the most romantic spot in the restaurant, taking my coat AND holding my seat out for me – anyone would think that you are trying to get into my pants!”

With a sidelong glance at their host – whose eyes briefly widened in reaction to the witch’s remark before quickly returning back to their placid, professional gaze – Keelin laughed and made her way over to her own side of the table once Freya had taken her seat.

“Can’t a lady spoil her girlfriend on the anniversary of their first kiss!?” the wolf asked - her deep brown eyes so full of promise that Freya found herself having to bite down lightly on the inside of her cheek to stop rogue moan of desire escaping out from her throat.

“Ahem!”

Both women were abruptly roused out of the fervent gaze they were holding as the maître’d, who was apparently still stood beside their table, discreetly cleared his throat. Freya had completely forgotten that that man was in their presence, and suddenly felt a little coy at the fact he had probably witnessed the heated glances between Keelin and herself.

Focusing his attention on Keelin, the host gestured to a leather covered menu that had appeared in his right hand as he spoke.

“Will Madam be requiring our wine menu?”

Freya could tell that Keelin was trying her best to prevent a smile breaking out across her face as she replied to the man.

“Madam most certainly will – you don’t work a twelve hour shift in an ER department and come out on the other side not needing alcohol!”

Either their host didn’t find the remark amusing, or he was simply keen to be on his way back to his post at the front of house - but Freya noted that his expression remained bland and calm as he dipped his head briefly in acknowledgement, and passed over the menu for Keelin to take. The man then quickly mentioned that a waiter would soon be with them to take their drink orders, and took his leave.

“Well he certainly….” Keelin started, before being interrupted.

“Had a mighty large stick up his…”
“Freya!” her girlfriend admonished light-heartedly, before the witch had chance to finish her sentence.

They both shared an amused look, before Keelin’s eyes began to roam over the subtly lit room – her posture suddenly taking on a hesitant demeanour.

“You don’t think I’ve gone too overboard do you? Booking us into a fancy restaurant and insisting that we wear our finest evening clothes? I just really wanted tonight to be special.”

“Hey…. Freya said softly, reaching across the finely-laid table to grab a hold of Keelin’s hand. “….this is perfect! Absolutely perfect! Just like you!”

She watched as the self-doubt that had been momentarily swirling in Keelin’s eyes dissipated - the wolf’s cheeks colouring slightly as a result of Freya’s compliment.

“Besides,” the witch continued, her look turning impish as she pulled her hand back and gestured with it to her girlfriend’s form, “anything that results in me getting to see your curves in that figure hugging pant-suit is an immediate win in my books!”

“I could say the same about the cocktail dress that you’ve poured yourself into” Keelin countered, as her eyes roamed over Freya’s attire in an appreciative manner. “If memory serves me right, the last time you wore that particular number, you whisked me away for a night of Jazz music and tequila after a rather….eventful….evening at your family’s home!”

Freya grimaced slightly, as the memory to which the wolf was referring to slotted quickly into place in her mind. Her lover was indeed correct – she has last worn this particular silver coloured dress on the night that her brother Elijah had killed a particularly nefarious witch by the name of Dominic, in front of over a hundred vampires and humans all gathered at the Mikaelson home for one of the family’s infamous parties.

The same witch, who exactly one year ago to the day, had succeeded in stopping Freya’s heart and orchestrating an attack on Keelin outside of St Theadora’s clinic.

Oh how she wished she could have been the one to end that bastard’s life, for the pain he had inflicted on both her family and Keelin – all in the name of the Hollow

Seeming to sense the dark place that her girlfriend’s mind had suddenly travelled to, it was Keelin who now reached for Freya’s hand - squeezing on it softly to effectively bring the witch back into the room.

“It’s not the events of the party that I remember that evening for, Freya”, Keelin said lightly, “but rather how much I really wanted to kiss you - both in the Bell Tower, and in the Jazz Bar.”

A small smile forced its way across the witch’s mouth, as the memory of the charged moment shared between the two of them in the Bell Tower after the party ended, flashed in her mind’s eye.

Seeing that her words were having a positive effect on her girlfriend, Keelin continued.

“I really wanted to throw caution to the wind and jump you in that moment, you know!” the wolf confesed, a wry smirk playing on her face. “You were oh so stubborn and obstinate in your insistence that your family’s needs had to come before your own – a fearsome and wild force of untamed nature. An emerald eyed, powerful Viking witch, whose stony-glare was enough to send cold shivers of fear down my spine.”

Keelin laughed.
“But my god, did I want to kiss you as you stood there looking at me all doe eyed in that sexy little number!” Keelin gestured at the dress that the witch was currently wearing.

Freya felt a flush of heat spread up her neck and into her face at her girlfriend’s admission.

She could clearly remember the exact way that Keelin had been looking at her, as soft beams of the Quarter’s street-lights had been filtering in through the Bell-Towers window slats – highlighting the wolf’s beautiful features, and her soft full lips. The two of them had still yet to share their feelings for one another at that point, despite how close their friendship had grown. But Freya knew that she would be lying to herself if she had claimed that in that exact moment, she too hadn’t briefly thought about what it would feel like to have the brunette’s lips pressed upon hers. To be close enough to Keelin to feel her breath mingle with her own, and feel the press of her hips up against hers.

“Why didn’t you?” was all that she managed to quietly say in response – the memory of those initial delicate feelings almost steeling away her ability to form words.

A smile remained on Keelin’s face as she replied - despite her eyebrows rising up.

“I still wasn’t completely sure at that point how you felt about me!” the wolf stated, her head shaking slightly as she continued. “I knew that there was definitely something between us – a spark that I was pretty sure you perceived just as much as I did, whenever we were in each-others company. But as far as I was aware at the time, you had not previously had any romantic interest in someone of the same sex.”

The wolf huffed before she continued.

“Plus, have you met you?! You can be pretty damn intimidating and closed off at times baby”, Keelin laughed. “I was afraid that if I acted upon my attraction to you, you would crush my wind pipe and rip out my spine for even daring to consider making a move on the great Freya Mikaelson!”

Freya couldn’t help but chuckle along with her girlfriend at that comment.

“I’m pretty sure I wouldn’t have ripped out your spine!” she retorted.

“This coming from the Viking witch who has a history of burning down entire villages on a whim!”

Freya rolled her eyes at Keelin, and let an exaggerated pout purse her lips together.

“That was one village – and I was a fourteen year old girl, with raging hormones and an evil Aunt hell bent on using my powers to destroy everything and everyone.”

She shrugged.

“Just a typical teenager really!”

Keelin laughed loudly at the remark, drawing several looks and raised eyebrows off a few of the other diners sat at the tables closest to them.

“Well, my vicious yet cuddly girlfriend - I for one am glad that I didn’t chance invoking your wrath on that night in the Bell Tower,” Keelin remarked, her voice lowered into a hushed tone once more. “Because I think it took what happened with that witch Dominic for us both to finally admit the depth of our feelings.”
The witch smiled, nodding gently in agreement.

“I fully deny being cuddly– but I’ll drink to that!”

“Oooh - Drink!” Keelin abruptly exclaimed, appearing to suddenly remember the presence of the restaurant’s wine menu in her hand. “Let’s get this anniversary night kick started!”

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“That’s amazing news!”

Freya’s words echoed out into the restaurant a little louder than she had intended, which she knew was no doubt the result of having just finished a fourth large glass of Champagne.

The bubbly had been flowing glibly for both Keelin and herself – the two of them conversing freely as they had leisurely polished off a starter course each, and then proceeded to share a main-dish. The splitting of their principle meal had mostly been Keelin’s idea, the wolf claiming that it would be romantic to both eat off the same plate whilst leaning in to each-others personal space. Freya’s pride had reared up and protested at first, stating to her girlfriend that the other diners around them would more than likely think they were trying to save money, and couldn’t afford to purchase a full meal each.

After laughing heartedly – and nearly snorting wine out of her nose in the process – Keelin had made comment on how Freya was in danger of sounding like her brother, Klaus, before proceeding to insinuate that the plans she had for them both later that evening would require them to not be too full, or sleepy from food. That remark, along with the quick suggestive flash of amber and gold in the wolf’s eyes that had accompanied it, was enough to send all thoughts of eating far from Freya’s mind. She had then spent the next few minutes trying her best not to act upon the urge to drag Keelin out of the restaurant before their first course had even arrived! It certainly hadn’t helped that she had been able to see the same look of barely tamed desire churning away in Keelin’s gaze either.

Now, as the waitress who had been serving their table for most of the evening skilfully removed their main-course plate and associated cutlery, Freya raised her half empty glass of Champagne towards her beaming girlfriend in a congratulatory gesture. The wolf had just shared the news that she had been put forward for a promotion at the Clinic where she worked, and that as there were no other candidates currently qualified enough for the role – the position was pretty much guaranteed to be hers.

“Thank you!” Keelin said, a proud look of accomplishment washing over her face. “I should hopefully know for definite if the Surgical Residency is mine or not by the time the department heads out for drinks next Friday evening. So fingers crossed it will turn into a night of celebrations!”

“Well you deserve it!” Freya exclaimed, as she made to top up both of their glasses from the bottle of Champagne that the waitress had left on the table. “Especially after all the work that you put into publishing your paper! They’d be fools not to make use of your talent.”

The witch lowered her gaze briefly as a faint look of regret crossed her brow.

“I’m just sorry that I can’t come with you that evening to help you celebrate.”
Keelin waved her hand in a motion of dismissal.

“There’s nothing to be sorry for, honey! I know how much of a tradition Hope’s birthday celebrations have become for you and your family. I wouldn’t dream of dragging you away from helping Hayley with the preparations for it. Besides, I reckon that Hayley would probably kick my butt twice as hard the next time we sparred, if I messed with her plans!”

A look of confusion settled onto Freya’s face, as her alcohol hazed mind tried to make sense of what Keelin had just said.

“When you next spar? What do you mean?”

“Huh?” the wolf blurted out, her eyes widening ever so briefly before a look of bashful embarrassment settled into place. “Did I say spar? Christ, I guess the Champagne is affecting me a little more than I first thought. I meant to say the next time we see each other.”

There was something in the way that Keelin seemed to be trying her best to school her features into a neutral expression, that didn’t quite sit right with Freya.

*If she didn’t know better, she’d have said that the wolf was suddenly nervous.*

“Is everything ok? You seem….anxious all of a sudden!”

Freya watched on as Keelin brushed off her concern with a wave of a hand – picking up her glass of Champagne with the other and downing half of its contents in one large gulp.

“What I am,” the wolf commented - a mischievous smile now tugging at her lips as she placed her drink down and leaned across the table to be closer to Freya, “is ready for a change of pace!”

The witch raised an eyebrow, as curiosity with regards to what her lover had in mind mixed intoxicatingly with the scent of Keelin’s perfume.

“Ready to head back home for some celebrating with far fewer clothes between us?” she asked the wolf suggestively.

“Actually”, Keelin purred, the corner of her mouth twitching up on one side, “I was thinking of taking you dancing, Miss Mikaelson.”

“Dancing?” Freya asked, a tinge of confusion lacing her words. “But the Spotted Cat is still currently closed for renovations! It was you who told me remember – when I suggested that we go there on the night before you jetted off to New York.”

The Spotted Cat, situated on Frenchman St in the Quarter, was their favourite place to frequent when the need for a night of good music and dancing took their fancy. The venue itself was not really big enough to be called a dance club – its primary purpose being that of a place where local talent could go to showcase their musical wares. Talent that - considering which city and cultural gene pool it arose from – always managed to blow both of their minds away with its quality and flair. On most nights, the sound produced by the various musicians and bands stepping up to share their gift, had its roots firmly cemented in the Blues and Jazz culture that the Big Easy was well known for. And despite the venues small and intimate size, Freya and Keelin would always manage to find a small corner of the room where they could sway in time to the beat – usually pressed up close together.

“Actually, I had something a little different in mind for tonight’s dancing”, Keelin mused, as she raised her hand in the air briefly to gain the attention of a passing waiter.
“Oh?” was Freya’s only response, as a small hiccup unexpectantly escaped from her throat.

She watched on with curiosity as Keelin greeted the waiter who had spotted the wolf’s raised arm, and requested for their cheque to be totalled and brought to their table. Once the young man had scurried off again in the direction of the restaurant’s bar, the brunette turned back to Freya and fixed her with a look bursting full of mischief and anticipation.

“Tell me Miss Mikaelson – do you have a head for heights?!”

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4.

“I thought you said that we were going dancing?”

Freya’s brow was creased in confusion as she steadily followed her girlfriend up the stairway of their apartment complex – hand stretched out in front of her so that her fingers were interlinked with those of Keelin’s as they climbed.

They had quickly managed to hail a taxi-cab as they had left the restaurant in the Central Business District, and Freya had been expecting her wolf lover to give the driver instructions to take them on to a bar or dance-club somewhere else within the city.

The witch, however, had been somewhat perplexed when Keelin had asked the man to take them back to their apartment block in the French Quarter. She had asked if the wolf had changed her mind and decided to take their “celebrating” to the bedroom after all – a change in direction that she definitely would not have been opposed to in the slightest.

Freya had not been able to take her eyes off Keelin during the entire time they had spent in the Restaurant August - and the way that the black pant-suit that her girlfriend was wearing had clung to her lithe body in all the right places. If truth was to be known, she had already stripped the wolf out of the garment several times in her head over the course of their meal, and was now particularly eager to see the clothing lying discarded on the floor, somewhere in their apartment.

But Keelin had avoided answering the witch’s query, instead smiling knowingly at her and telling her that all good things came to those who were patient.

*Patience*, Freya now thought to herself, as the two continued to climb the familiar stairs up to their apartment, *was definitely her least favourite thing to have to be!*

“Oh, I am aware of what I said!” Keelin replied jovially in answer to Freya’s question without turning her head around to look at the witch.

Freya gave the back of the wolf’s head a brief scowl, as the frustration at not knowing what direction their night was taking, now began to somewhat grate on her nerves.

As the two of them reached the fourth floor landing, she made to walk towards the fire-door that would take them into the corridor where their apartment was located. The witch was about to place her free hand onto the door’s handle, when a gentle tug on her other appendage pulled her away from the stairwell’s exit.
Keelin simply winked at her as she raised her brows in question – the wolf motioning with her head for Freya to continue following as she resumed walking up the next set of stairs.

Curiosity started to replace confusion in the witch’s head, as she allowed herself to be led up flight after flight of steps. It was not until they finally came to a stop in front of a closed fire-exit door at the very top of the stairwell, that Keelin finally turned to face her once more.

The wolf motioned to the doorway with her free hand and stepped to the side, as though encouraging Freya to continue onwards.

“Er, I’m pretty sure that’s the door that leads onto the building’s rooftop!”

“Correct!” was the simple one worded answer provided by her girlfriend.

“And you want me to open it and go through?” she asked, once again confused as to where the evening was heading.

“Correct again! You’re pretty good at this!” Keelin laughed – her eyes shimmering with barely concealed excitement.

“Alright”, Freya sighed, as she stepped around her girlfriend and placed a hand onto the long safety-bar running across the width of the door. “But if this is some kind of bizarre wolf-pack thing where you lock your partners on the roof of a building to celebrate an anniversary - let it be known that I’m only going to date Vampires from now on!”

Laughing at the remark, Keelin quickly stepped up behind Freya – pushing her front flush against the witch’s back, and wrapping an arm around the blonde’s waist.

Nuzzling her face into Freya’s neck, the wolf playfully nipped at the soft flesh she found there, before murmuring into the witch’s ear.

“Now why would I leave you out on the roof all on your own, when I fully expect you to be making me howl by the end of the night!”

A shiver of desire quickly ran down the length of Freya’s spine, causing the small hairs to rise up along both of her arms. With a smirk playing on her lips, she pushed down on the door’s mechanism at the same time as locking eyes with her lover.

“Oh I’ll make you howl alright, several times if I get my…..”

The words in Freya’s mind suddenly lost their way, as she stepped out onto the apartment building’s rooftop and laid eyes on the scene awaiting her.

The top of the complex in general, was nothing particularly out of the ordinary in appearance. Of course the witch had not exactly spent time on a lot of roof-tops over the course of her unnaturally long life. One or two here and there - usually when trying to find the optimal position to cast a particular spell, or on the rare occasion when she had been watching her estrange siblings from afar back in the years of her Aunt Dahlia’s reign, and needed a better viewing point from which to track their movements. But despite her lack of experience on the subject, Freya was confident in her assessment that the structure and appearance of the roof which she currently stood upon would be found replicated almost exactly across most of the city of New Orleans.

Most of the cities in North America for that matter.

But on this particular evening, it was not the mundane, grey-concreted surface upon which her
heeled shoes now clicked, that commanded the witch’s attention, as Keelin slowly exited the building’s stairwell to wrap her arms around the witch’s frame from behind. Nor was it the seeming sporadically placed roof-top vents with the wide blades of their fans endlessly spinning around to make a muffled humming sound that vibrated out into the New Orleans night sky. It wasn’t even the sight of a slightly misshaped, wooden bird-coup, tucked away over in the far corner of the rooftop with small white feathers littered around its base - Did someone in their apartment block race pigeons? - that took the breath away from Freya’s lungs, as her eyes began to glisten with the tears slowly forming there.

“Happy anniversary, Freya!” the wolf whispered into her ear before placing a soft kiss on her left cheek.

Just ahead of where they stood - right in the centre of the rooftop’s open space – was a wide rectangular area where the dull concrete floor had been completely covered with a thick layer of woodchip and foliage. Leaves of all different sizes and colours lay interlaced between various twigs and branches, as vivid greens and earthy browns swirled together to form a vibrant mosaic of nature. Rising up high out of the vegetation were four long wooden-posts – one placed at each corner of the fauna blanket – and each with thick twisting vines of ivy crawling up their length. Strings of twinkling fairy lights stretched and spread their soft light across the distance between each wooden column - fixed at each corner of the rectangular area by twine wound tightly around the top of the posts. The resulting glow gave the small enchanted area the appearance of being highlighted by the moon - as though the lunar god herself was bestowing her blessing upon the coppice creation.

Freya’s vision began to blur slightly as she noted that a thick, tartan picnic blanket had been lay on top of the carpet of greenery, over in the far corner of the space. In the middle of the rug sat a frosted bucket of ice, that had an unopened bottle of champagne and two crystal flutes nestled snugly in-between the numerous frozen cubes. A small wooden bench had been placed just outside of the fairy-lit area - and from the distance at which they were stood, the witch could clearly make out the presence of medium sized, original gramophone sitting proud atop the pew. Tiny beams of light glistened off the large brass pavilion horn that twisted its way up from the base of the turntable - giving the 19th century device the appearance of emitting its own unearthly glow. She could see that a black vinyl record was already pre-loaded onto the melody-maker’s plateau, with the sharp needle point of the reproductor arm poised just above the numerous grooves and ridges of the musical disc.

Freya both tried and failed to find her voice, as she continued to stand marvelling at the small patch of nature that had been brought to life deep within the depths of their urban city. She had no idea how much time had passed since she had stepped out and first lay eyes on the spectacle, but judging by the slither of worry that laced Keelin’s words when she next spoke, the witch figured it must have been at least a few minutes.

“Is it too much?” Keelin asked quietly, as she moved to pull away from being pressed up against Freya’s back. “Do you hate it?”

Registering the self-doubt in the wolf’s voice, Freya finally managed to shake off the emotional stupor that had wrapped itself around her and eventually succeeded in dragging her eyes away from the spectacle. Twisting around, she met Keelin’s worried gaze.

“Hate it?” she breathed out, her voice barely more than a whisper as her eyes still brimmed with un-shed tears. “Keelin it’s…..it’s beautiful!”

“You really think so?” the wolf asked - the uncertainty in her eyes waning somewhat in response to
Freya’s statement.

Turning back to observe the mini-woodland scene once more, the witch suddenly noticed that despite their being high up on the top of an eight-storey building, and the sun having long since climbed its way down over the lip of the horizon - several butterflies were fluttering around the patch of greenery, just below the top of the stringed fairy lights.

“How have you managed to create all of this?” she asked in wonder, as her eyes followed the erratic flight path of one of the white-winged insects.

Keelin stepped up beside her and interlaced her fingers with the witch’s own as she too appeared to focus her attention on the movement of the butterflies.

“Well… I may have had some help off Hayley!”

Freya twisted her head to face her lover, who reciprocated in turn.

“Hayley knows about all of this?” the witch asked, quickly thinking back to her conversation with the Hybrid earlier that morning.

It seemed her niece’s mother had already known the answer to the question she had posed to Freya over breakfast, in regards to what the two lovers were going to be doing later in the day to celebrate their anniversary!

“Well you don’t think I managed to haul all that wood and foliage up here by myself, do you?!” Keelin laughed, as she gestured to the spectacle ahead of them.

Freya turned once more, and started walking towards the leafy area – the wolf keeping pace with her as she slowly advanced onto the crisp foliage spread over the captivating display. As they reached the centre of the fairy-lit space, Freya let Keelin’s hand drop from her own to allow her to slowly twirl around on the spot – continuing to marvel at all the little details of the spectacle.

“I’m still confused how you’ve managed to create this though – even with Hayley’s help!” she muttered quietly, as though speaking only to herself - giving voice to the confusion still tumbling around her mind. “Everything seems to be contained just within this space – the leaves, the butterflies, the glow being emitted from the fairy-lights.”

Looking down towards her feet, the witch observed how little the mixed foliage on the floor had been disrupted by their shoes, as they had walked across its vibrant face. Not a leaf nor branch looked to have been disturbed out of its place, despite their advance through the vegetation.

Sensing that all was probably not as natural as it first seemed, Freya closed her eyes and drew in a deep breath - letting small tendrils of her magic extend out as she slowly released the air in her lungs. Her slithers of power gently poked and prodded at everything around her. The leaves and branches. The fairy lights, and the wooden beams that they were gracefully tethered to. Even the spritely butterflies as they danced high above their heads - their wings soundlessly beating out a rapid rhythm of flight.

There! It was faint, but she could still feel it as the muffled force reverberated tentatively along the coils of her own power. Magic!

“You had a witch enchant the space!”, Freya stated, drawing back on her own power as she turned to face her girlfriend once more. “But who? I highly doubt Tobias or any of his coven would have agreed to help you do this - especially for me!”
Keelin laughed at the look of puzzlement that was now knitting Freya’s brows together.

“Oh honey”, the wolf started, stepping closer to Freya and gently take the witch’s face into her hands. “You really are going to have to start remembering that you are not the only one in your family gifted with magic!”

Freya’s eyes widened at the words.

“Hope!?” she exclaimed, unable to keep surprise from leaking into her tone. “Hope was the one to cast the containment spell?”

A large smile stretched Keelin’s lips as she nodded her head in confirmation, and Freya could clearly make out the pride that shone in the wolf’s eyes.

Pride that she knew must be now leaking into her own features, as she once again looked over the well-controlled and checked wild nature of the small pocket of heaven that she and Keelin now stood within.

Her niece would have had to wield her fledgling magic with expert control and skill to not only have the spell continue its effect long after she had vacated the area, but to also hardly leave any trace of the original power used to cast the enchantment. It had only been when Freya had specifically looked for any signs of magic being at work on the apartment rooftop, had she sensed the power in play.

And even then, it had been only the faintest suggestion of magic swirling through the air!

“She did an amazing job, right?!?” Keelin said, as she lowered her hands down from Freya’s cheeks and interlaced them with the witch’s own.

Freya couldn’t help but feel a small amount of awe for Hope in that moment. There was no way that she herself would have been able to perfect such control over her raw power back when she had been that young.

“She most definitely did! I think I’m going to be the one taking lessons off her pretty soon!” Freya laughed, her eyes finally leaving their impressive surroundings to fix lovingly onto Keelin’s.

The wolf’s look quickly turned sultry as the corner of her mouth tugged up on one side. Pulling Freya further into her own space, Keelin gently squeezed the witch’s hands as she spoke.

“Dance with me, Miss Mikaelson?”

“I thought you were never going to ask!”

Quickly squeezing Freya’s hands once more, Keelin made to release them as her body angled towards the gramophone that still sat patiently waiting on the wooden bench to their far right. Freya, however, quickly halted the wolf in her tracks – a small tug on her girlfriend’s hands stopping Keelin’s movement.

“Here, let me!” was all she offered, before gracefully flicking her hand towards the old-fashioned turntable – the outreach of magic causing the gramophone’s needle to slowly lower itself onto the awaiting vinyl, as the various cogs and mechanisms within its worn and weathered case began to twist and turn.
The old, rickety gramophone began playing its fourth song of the evening as Freya slowly pulled her head back from where it had been resting on Keelin’s shoulder, so that she could look the wolf in the eye’s as they continued to sway gently to the music. The soothing melodic rifts of an expertly played Saxophone began to fill the space around them, as the accompanying harmonies of a bass guitar and piano joined to fill out the bulk of the tune.

Freya didn’t know how the wolf had managed it, but the vinyl disc currently spinning around under the deft needle of the turntable had so far played three of her favourite songs from the era when blues and jazz music had first been birthed, just up river from the very city they were now dancing within.

As the first song had begun to drift out of the large pavilion horn, Keelin had drawn the witch up close against her body, and the two had begun to sway, and twirl in time with the hypnotic rhythm of the melody caressing their ears. Not a word had passed between the two since they had started their dancing – both content to simply enjoy the intimacy of the moment as they breathed in each-others scents and felt each-others heartbeats drum out a synchronised rhythm of love.

“You know”, Freya now said, finally breaking the comfortable silence that had fallen between them, “before tonight I didn’t think it was possible for you to be any more perfect than you already were!”

Keelin’s eyes opened slowly to meet her own – the wolf having let them fall closed as the two had let themselves get lost in the feel of each-others presence.

“But then you go and pull this amazing evening out of the bag, and prove me wrong!”

The wolf laughed softly at her girlfriend’s remark, before leaning forward and placing a languishing kiss upon Freya’s lips.

After giving herself over to the feel of Keelin’s mouth upon her own for a few seconds, Freya once again pulled back to look the brunette in the eyes.

“In fact, it’s one of the things that I love about you the most. Your ability to constantly prove me wrong!”

The wolf’s brow furrowed slightly at the remark, as she finally found her voice again.

“Erm, ok!”

Freya couldn’t help but let out a huff of amusement at the confusion playing on her girlfriend’s face.

“Don’t look so worried, I meant it in a good way!” she laughed, caressing the wolf’s jawline with her thumb. “Before we met, I would have denied it was even possible for me to find happiness outside of my own immediate family. Let alone fall in love with a fierce, kick-ass wolf from out of town!”

The corner of Keelin’s eyes crinkled as she broke into a large, knowing smile.

“But then you came crashing into my life, and blew all of the beliefs I had about myself, way out of the water!”
“Er, I believe it was you who came hurtling into my life, Miss Mikaelson!” Keelin stated, an incredulous look of bemusement in her eyes. “Gun’s-a-blazing, and threatening to end my life every few minutes!”

The witch twirled her mouth to the side, as guilt quickly flushed through her at the memory of how she had first treated Keelin when they had met.

“But,” the wolf continued - a smirk tugging at her lips, “I soon turned that around, and had you falling at my feet, begging me to show you a good time!”

“Oh, so that’s what happened, was it?! Freya scoffed, playfully swatting at her girlfriend’s shoulder with a hand.

“Oh completely!” Keelin replied, the mischievous grin not leaving her face. “I mean just look at the facts – you practically pleaded with me to help you find a cure for marcel’s venom, you went out of your way to find random reasons to keep me around afterwards, then you invited me to your family’s swanky party just to see my fine ass in a revealing outfit. And let’s not forget the enchanted that ring you gave me, effectively curing the curse that I had spent most of my life loathing. A definite sign that you wanted to get into my pants, no matter what the cost!”

Freya laughed heatedly at the wolf’s remarks, as she nodded her head in agreement.

“Well, when you put it like that!” she chuckled.

The mention of the wolf curse that Keelin had been born with, had the witch looking up towards the night sky and the full moon currently shining down over the city.

“Can you still feel it?” the witch asked her girlfriend, as her eyes remained fixed on lunar god.

“The pull of the moons will?”

Keelin briefly looked up herself towards the full orb hung high above them, before returning her gaze down to Freya and flashing the witch a brief glimpse of her inner wolf – the brown of her eyes dissolving into a vivid hue of feral yellow, before returning quickly back to their human state.

“Worried that I might be more than you can handle tonight honey?” the brunette teased, as a grin that Freya thought looked more wolf than it did human, stretched her girlfriend’s mouth wide.

“Oh, I’m pretty sure that I can more than cope with anything you throw at me!” she countered, matching her girlfriend’s impish demeanour.

Keelin brought her right hand up between them, and began to twirl the Kyanite ring that was sitting proud in its usual place on her index finger.

“You know,” the wolf said wistfully, as though about to give voice to an idea that had been swirling around her head. “I should maybe get you a ring too, so that people know that we are together!”

Freya waved her hand dismissively, as she watched Keelin slowly turn the enchanted piece of jewellery around on her finger.

“I think it’s fair to say that most people know we’re dating now Keelin. Its not like we’ve ever tried to hide it!”

“True”, the wolf commented, her eyes rising to look at Freya once more. “But what if I wanted to make it official?!”
“I don’t understand what you….”

Before she had chance to finish her sentence, the witch’s voice was robbed from her for the second time that evening, as she watched Keelin pull back slightly from her and drop gracefully down onto one knee. Freya’s eye’s widened - mouth falling faintly ajar, as the wolf reached into a pocket within the tailored pantsuit she was wearing, and produced a diamond encrusted ring.

Holding the sparkling piece of Jewellery delicately between her thumb and forefinger, Keelin looked up at Freya with wide, hopeful eye’s – a slight tremble in her hand causing the ring to waver slightly as she spoke.

“I know that we have only been together for a year, and that its not exactly been the smoothest of rides for us both. But baby, you have come to mean more to me than anyone else in my whole life.”

“Keelin, I…..”

“Wait!” the wolf almost shouted, in an attempt to stop Freya from interrupting her. “I’m not finished!”

Pushing herself up off the floor once more, Keelin kept the ring held out in front of her as she continued to lock eyes with Freya.

“I know that we are not perfect, and our lives can sure be pretty bat-shit crazy at times. But Freya, there is no one else on this whole earth that I would rather face all of that crazy with – side by side, together! I love you with the whole of my heart, and I cannot….no, will not….picture a life for me without you in it.”

Tears began to well in Freya’s eyes again, as she watched the same happen with Keelin’s own.

“I don’t know what kind of future an ancient thousand-year-old Viking witch, and a cursed wolf who is the last surviving member of her pack-line, could possibly have – but damned if I can’t wait to find that out together!”

A small laugh forced its way out of Freya’s mouth, as the first of her tears broke loose from an eye and started snaking its way down her flushed cheek.

“So”, Keelin half said – half sobbed, as she lowered herself back down onto one knee once more. “Freya Mikaelson, will you please make me the happiest damn woman alive, and agree to be my wife?”

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Chapter End Notes

….sorry about the cliff-hanger.

Or am I????

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Chapter End Notes
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Chapter 6 up for grabs - finally!

Hoping this re-write of the chapter does my original draft justice. Damn stupid laptop theifs!

Also, guess I better put out a "Mature" rating warning for this chapter....enjoy your Sunday everyone ;-)
As a child she had been told by her now long-dead mother, that the stars were the kindred souls of all those that had lived before them – essences of the deceased that had been captured by the holy threads of the heavens, so that the departed may forever look down upon those who still remained on earth to guide and shepherd their way.

Her mother had of course been a melodramatic, gods fearing fool – who had lived her entire mortal life trying to please the many deities that their small community had worshipped, and had died whilst screaming out for her soul to be granted absolution by Hella herself.

*She had never loved the crazy and eccentric fool that had birthed her - affiliating far stronger with the might and cunning of the warrior father who had sired her. But she could not deny that the woman’s theory on the stars on high and where they originated from, had stuck a certain chord with her all those many years ago.*

And now, as she glanced heavenward towards the bright twinkling fireflies of the night, the woman made a silent request to the souls of her ancestors for guidance in the days to come.

Movement in her peripheral vision caught the woman’s attention, drawing her gaze away from the ebony of the evening’s sky to once more focus on the reason for her presence in the French Quarter that night.

The witch and her lover, it appeared, had begun to slowly sway in time to the music that now emitted out of the 19th century gramophone standing nearby them – their arms and bodies so entwined together that she had difficulty deciphering where one of them ended and the other began.

The sight of the two of them - dancing slowly atop of the building adjacent to the one she herself was crouched upon, surreptitiously concealed by the shadows of the night – caused a small lopsided smirk to tug ruefully on the side her mouth as a memory now well over a century old began to resurface in her mind’s eye.

The witch - whom she could see was now resting her head gracefully upon the shoulder of the other woman as they continued to move slowly in time to the melody’s beat - was certainly no stranger to dancing. This much the crouched figure knew from her own first-hand experience.

Her recollection however, of the blonde haired enigma’s music inspired frolicking, had certainly been more of an upbeat and buoyant affair, than that of the sensual form it was currently taking.

The memory that had chosen to present itself front and centre was one of the very last recollections she had of her time spent in the emerald-eyed witch’s company – or at least one of the last that she allowed herself to re-visit from that time spent in war-torn Lille all those years ago.

The year had been 1912, and the night in question had been All-Saints Eve – a popular French holiday that was both gravely respected, and wildly celebrated across the whole of Europe at that particular point in history. She and the witch had been associating with each other for just over 6 months at that point, and had long-since established the lucrative business deal that not only saw their pockets lined with an abundance of coin, but also sated their fervent need for rebellion against all those whom had ever wronged or repressed them.

Excitement for the impending celebrations and frivolities had been growing within the streets of Lille for well over a month, and both she and the witch had found themselves unable to avoid getting caught up in the general enthusiasm and anticipation that had washed over the city’s residents.

Though as the woman was now perched atop the tall chimney stack in modern day New Orleans,
she recalled having been far more eager to partake in the All-Saints-Eve festivities than the ever pragmatic Witch had been.

As the couple atop the building adjacent to her own continued to lose themselves in the soulful music that flowed around them, she let out a low, hushed laugh as she recalled the Witch’s response all those years ago, when she herself had asked the blonde to join her in a dance.

If she remembered correctly, the fiery retort that she received from her friend as they had both stood along the edge of an improvised dance-floor constructed in the middle of Lille’s town-square, had gone something along the lines of, “What exactly do you……

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……take me for, a damned foolhardy baboon!” Freya replied to her, a look of incredulous indignation twisting the witch’s features as she stared wide-eyed at the Seer. “It is bad enough that I let you convince me to abandon our wagon, and leave our belongings unsupervised for the evening so that you could indulge in your childish whims of fancy! I will certainly not let you lead me any further astray into whatever flights of fantasy you may be entertaining in that head of yours!”

Amelia laughed heartily at her indignant friend – the loud show of exultation blending seamlessly with the shouts and cries of celebration from the other revellers that were crowded into the town square for All-Saints Eve.

It seemed like every man and woman who lived in the city had turned out to pay homage to the spirits of their deceased loved ones, and give thanks to the various Saint’s and Martyrs of the faith unto which they adhered. Homage and thanks that apparently was to be paid in the form of eating, drinking, dancing, and generally giving themselves over to the needs and wants of their carnal desires.

Not that Amelia minded the local’s choice of tribute – she had certainly witnessed far more nefarious offerings made to the gods, all in the name of faith and tradition.

“Oh Freya, do relax! You yourself secured our wagon and belongings with a barrier spell – nothing is going to happen to them.”

The witch’s mouth tightened into a thin line as she turned to continue to watching the men and women of Lille dance and frolic around them.

The Seer had of course known that Freya had not wanted to partake in the evening’s festivities - the blonde having often expressed her distaste with regards to the reckless abandonment of protocol and social etiquette in the weeks leading up to All-Saints Eve. Amelia had simply retorted each time with the belief that her witch friend needed to let her hair down more often, and learn to have a little fun.

“I will relax when we have finally succeeded in making every last one of the entitled nobility scum infesting this city pay for their sordid indiscretions! A goal that I had believed, Seer, you were working with me towards?!”

The witch quickly threw Amelia a look of barely contained ire, before turning her fierce emerald eyes back onto the city’s revellers.
“Now don’t you be flashing me with that death stare of yours Darlin - you know damn well that I want nothing more than to take all of these rantallion’s for every single gold dime that they are worth! But even Machiavellian Charlatans such as ourselves deserve a night off every now and then!”

She playfully poked her companion in the ribs – her finger easily glancing off the smooth cerulean satin of the witch’s elegant gown.

“Besides”, Amelia continued, her look turning mischievous, “I believe you said to me a few nights ago, that if I managed to get Lord Dufort to part with the full contents of his purse in exchange for a reading, you would surrender to a favour of my choosing!”

The remark appeared to grab her companion’s interest, as Freya finally turned her gaze from the braying crowd and locked eyes with the Seer.

“I certainly don’t remember agreeing to such a juvenile whimsy - but I would be curious to know if you managed to obtain the gold non-the-less!”

Amelia laughed, winking at the witch as she proceeded to pull a male’s purse out from one of the many hidden pockets that she herself had sewn into her long, ruffled skirt. Freya’s eyes widened in surprise at the leather pouch embroidered in gold thread with the Duke’s initials, now resting in the Seer’s hand as she leaned in close with her voice lowered to a whisper.

“Not only did I acquire all of his ill-gotten gold, but the purse that it came in too! The poor fool didn’t remember his own name by the time he parted ways with me, let alone notice the fact that he was a small fortune lighter!”

Something akin to delight flashed briefly across the witch’s face, before her features were quickly schooled into a frustrated look of disappointment.

“You bedded him, didn’t you!?” Freya said, her words more of a statement than they were question.

“Absolutely not!” the Seer exclaimed as her eyes filled with the indignation of someone wrongly accused. “I would have hoped that you thought better of me by now, Freya!”

The witch lowered her eyes to the ground between them – drawing in a long, laboured breath as she appeared to contemplate the Seer’s words.

Amelia took a step closer to her friend, raising her arm to gently place a hand upon Freya’s fabric covered forearm. She quickly glanced around to check that they did not hold currently the attention of any revellers, before lowering her voice to a barely audible whisper.

“I had thought the matter of my affections and whom they belonged to had been made quite clear by now.”

She felt the muscles in the witch’s arm suddenly tense under her grip.

“Amelia, I don’t…..”

“Besides, my darlin Freya,” Amelia exclaimed loudly, cutting Freya off before she could finish the words that the Seer could not bring herself to hear again. “I got the Dukes gold, so now you are indebted to me. And I wish to dance!”

Before the witch could respond or register her intentions, Amelia grabbed onto Freya’s wrist and
tugged her friend into the middle of the dancing crowd. Men and women alike spun and twirled around them as they all appeared to let go of any social reservations and give themselves over to the beat of the music.

Amelia watched with amusement as Freya’s eyes grew wide with unease – the blonde’s head twisting left, then right, as she sort to find a way out of the pulsing throng of people. Realising she was in danger of losing her friend to the familiar aura of unease and discomfort that would more often than not settle over the witch in social gatherings, the Seer moved into Freya’s personal space, and placed two hands on either side of her face.

“Freya, it’s ok. None of these people even notice our presence here – they are too lost in their fevered frenzies of rapture.”

Her words appeared to break through the agitation that had quickly cocooned its self around her friend, causing Freya to cease her attempts to bolt off the dance-floor, and lock her emerald eyes onto Amelia’s own sapphire gaze.

Everything suddenly seemed to slow for the Seer – the dancing revellers pounding their feet around them, the rhythmic strumming of instruments from the musicians hired by the city’s nobility to entertain the masses, the carefree children weaving their way in and out of the crowd with paper streamers trailing out behind them – everything but her and the witch, fading insignificantly into the background.

Amelia searched deep into the bright green eyes before her, looking for a sign – any hint or suggestion that Freya could feel the charge in the air now swirling between them. The witch too seemed to be hunting for something in the Seer’s own gaze, her mouth parting slightly as a warm breath flowed from her lips and caressed at Amelia’s own. Their faces were now so close together that it would hardly take any movement at all from her to finally connect their lips and…..

“I have to go!”

The words rushed out from Freya’s mouth almost too quick for Amelia to register, as the witch pulled her face out of the Seer’s hands and turned to flee the area. Before she had chance to reach out a hand to halt her friend, Freya was gone – the flowing skirts of her cerulean gown already lost to the swell of dancing townsfolk.

Still able to feel the ghost of the witch’s breath upon her lips, Amelia let out a heavy sigh – her whole posture deflating as she remained rooted to the spot.

“One day Freya! One day….”

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…..I will get that kiss!

The cloaked woman was roused from her memories as a sudden movement atop the building she was observing drew her attention.

It appeared that the witch’s companion – the dark-haired woman she had met in the bar a few evenings ago, who’s scent alone had immediately given her away as being a wolf, let alone the barely contained possessive growl that had been vibrating through her body – had dropped down onto one knee in front of Freya.

Even from her distant position, crouched atop the adjacent building’s chimney, the woman could clearly make out the tell-tale sparkle of diamonds embedded in the ring that the wolf had produced
from somewhere within her clothing.

So this was a proposal!

She sighed quietly to herself.

It appeared that her former friend and one-time business acquaintance had not only finally admitted to herself that her carnal needs were drawn by the fairer of the two sexes, but had also entered into a seemingly serious relationship with the female wolf who was now babbling some un-audible nonsense to the witch.

A wry smile tugged at the woman’s shadowed lips, as she gracefully unfurled her legs and raised herself into a standing position – the hood of her cloak remaining pulled low over her face despite the sudden movement. Turning her body away from the roof that she had been observing, she quickly flexed each of the muscles in her arms and legs, preparing them for the impact that was to come.

With one last glance over her shoulder towards Freya – who was now stood face to face with the proposing wolf as the inane babbling appeared to continue – the woman let out a huffed breath, and stepped off the tall Chimney into the evenings air.

Soon old friend…soon!

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2.

A heartbeat…

Are those tears of happiness, or tears of disappointment?

Another heartbeat….

Oh god it’s too soon isn’t it?! She thinks it too soon!

Another……

What if this scares her away?? Am I going to lose her?!

Another…..

God damn - no one ever tells you this position plays hell on your knee!

“Freya? Do you…..Are you ok?”

Keelin’s cautious words were barely audible over the deafening silence that had descended around the two lovers – the needle of the gramophone having run out of vinyl to ride mid-way through the wolf’s haphazard proposal.

Barely a couple of seconds must have passed since she had finally given voice to the question that had been burning inside of her for weeks now, yet it felt like a whole lifetime could had played out as she gingerly waited on her girlfriend’s answer.
She had been determined to give the witch all the time she needed – as soon as she had seen the 
surprise in Freya’s expression, the wolf had told herself to patiently wait, and let the witch 
compose herself before she gave an answer to the question posed.

*But damn, a girl could only be left hanging for so long!*

“Freya?”

Hearing her name called out for a second time seemed to finally break the witch’s stupor, as she 
blinked rapidly a few times, causing more tears to trace their way down her flushed cheeks.

A faint, quivering whisper brushed across the witch’s lips – the word too faint for even Keelin’s 
wolf hearing to make out, as her lover’s glistening eyes remained locked on the ring still held in the 
brunette’s outstretched hand.

“What did you….?”

“Yes.” Freya said, her voice louder, but no less shaky.

Keelin slowly pushed herself up off the foliage covered floor, as a hopeful smile started to break 
across her lips.

“Really? You…..you’ll marry me?”

A small, emotion filled laugh escaped from the witch, as her blood-shot eyes finally left the 
sparkling ring and met Keelin’s own tear-filled gaze.

“Yes!” Freya exclaimed - loudly this time, as though suddenly wanting the whole of the French 
Quarter to hear her declaration. “Of course I will marry you!”

Keelin let out a laugh of her own, one that was overflowing with both relief and happiness as she 
felt a weight lift off her shoulders that she hadn’t even realised was there.

*She said yes….she said YES!*

Tears were now liberally flowing down both of the women’s faces, as the wolf nodded down to the 
outstretched ring – indicating to Freya that she wanted to place it on the witch’s hand.

Slowly, as if still trying to comprehend the course that her evening had taken, Freya raised up her 
left hand and allowed Keelin to delicately take hold of it. As she gently pushed the platinum, 
diamond encrusted band down onto Freya’s finger, both wolf and witch alike marvelled at how 
perfectly the piece of jewellery fit first time – appearing not to need any adjustments at a later date. 
Freya let out a huff of breath as she admired the new addition to her hand.

“Keelin, its so beautiful! How did you know….?”

“That you’re not a fan of huge protruding rocks on rings?” the wolf finished for her, a large 
knowing smile breaking out across her face.

A simple nod was Freya’s only response, as she continued to gape in wonder at the token of their 
engagement.

Keelin made a mental note to thank Rebekah the next time she saw the vampire, as she took in just 
how instantly in love with the ring her partner was.

The band itself was fairly simple in design - made from the highest-grade platinum available to
Jewellers, that had been given a matt, brushed finish so as make the piece look older than it actually was. The surface of the ring had been left smooth and without any patterns or ridges engraved into it, so that the focal point of the band became the dazzlingly bright and clear, large diamonds that had been delicately set into the metal itself – of which there were five in total.

When the time had come for the wolf to decide what type of engagement ring to purchase for her lover, she had at first panicked – realising that whilst she had of course seen Freya wearing an assortment of different rings on her fingers during the time they had been dating, she did not know whether to go with a modern design for the band, or a more traditional style harking back to Freya’s Viking heritage.

After searching for weeks - both in the various jewellery stores that could be found in New Orleans, and using online methods to try and gain inspiration - the wolf had finally conceded to the fact that she was probably going to need help, and called upon the one person that she knew would be more than happy to take on the challenge themselves.

Rebekah had nearly deafened Keelin as the squeals and shouts of the vampire’s delight had loudly resounded out of the wolf’s cell phone speaker and into her ear. It had taken her a good few minutes of trying to regain the eager blonde’s focus before she had been able to explain the difficulty she had been having, and request help – swearing the Original vampire to secrecy and pleading with her to not let anything slip to her sister about the wolf’s intentions.

To Rebekah’s credit, she had managed to keep her excitement about Keelin’s proposal plans mostly under wraps, and had provided invaluable assistance to help Keelin obtain the ring now sitting proud upon Freya’s finger.

“Well,” the wolf ventured in response to the witch’s question, “I may have had a little help with the ring’s design when I was up in New York for the medical conference!”

Understanding appeared to slot into place within Freya’s green eyes as she finally looked up from the glistening band on her finger.

“You met up with Rebekah?!?”

Keelin laughed at the incredulous tone in her lover’s words.

“Well, actually it was more along the lines of Rebekah meeting up with me! Some might even have called it a kidnapping of sorts!”

Freya raised an inquisitive eyebrow in response to the wolf’s words, encouraging Keelin to elaborate on the matter.

“I actually called your sister a few days after I arrived at the medical conference, to let her know that I was planning on proposing to you, and to ask for her help with idea’s on what kind of ring you would like”, Keelin began to explain. “She had wanted to drop everything there and then, and meet me at the hotel I was staying at, and I had thought that I had been successful in convincing her to wait for the upcoming weekend, when I would have some free time to spend with her!”

A short, knowing laugh from Freya told Keelin that the witch could easily guess that her attempts at delaying the vampire’s arrival had been both futile and ineffective.

“Of course, I had clearly underestimated how persistent your sister can be when she gets an idea in her head! The very next morning, midway through the delivery of my seminar on Ubiquitin Cell Mitosis, Rebekah burst into the lecture hall and marched right up to where I stood on the speaker’s
podium – declaring at the top of her voice that I was needed for a family emergency, and that I would be back to continue “boring” the students the next day!”

A hearty laugh escaped from Freya, as she shook her head gently.

“Well, to be fair, you brought that on yourself!” the witch stated in amusement. “Dangling the prospect of engagement ring shopping in front of my sister, and then telling her to contain her excitement for a few days – you’d have been more successful trying to get Elijah to spend a whole day wearing a baggy t-shirt and joggers!”

Keelin joined the witch in her laughter.

“Yes, well - I know that now! I was lucky that the professors didn’t revoke their invitation for me to be a guest speaker there and then!”

The wolf reached out for Freya’s hand once more - delicately turning the newly placed engagement ring around the witch’s finger as a warm smile spread across her face.

“After she spent the entire drive from the University campus into Greenwich Village pointedly ignoring my protests, your sister introduced me to a ring designer that she has apparently known for some time. A rather nefarious and ruthless looking fellow, that I swear had far more lizard in him, than human!”

Freya smiled as she nodded her head in recognition.

“That will have been Raoul!”

“Yes!” Keelin exclaimed. “That was him! “

Even the mention of his name made her skin crawl a little.

“I take it you know him too?”

The witch laughed lightly as she replied.

“Raoul has been catering to our families more, erm – specific - jewellery needs for several years now. The man’s talents for crafting pieces that are to be infused with magic are second to none. He is the one who created the gold bracelet that Hope wears around her wrist. Not to mention the Kyanite ring that adorns your own finger!”

Keelin’s brow’s raised at that particular piece of information.

“Well, that would explain why he kept staring at my hand with a sly smile then! I thought that he was plotting to steal it from me or something! You have to admit, honey, the man has a disturbing vibe about him!”

“He is certainly an acquired taste”, Freya conceded, before studying the sparkling ring upon her finger once more. “But you certainly can’t deny that he has an eye for beauty!”

Seeing how her lover’s eyes lit up with wonder whilst studying the engagement ring, Keelin mentally gave herself a pat on the back for trusting in Rebekah’s advice.

“So you definitely like it? I did ok?”

Freya’s look turned sultry as she reached for the wolf’s hands and pulled her close.
“Oh you did more than ok! But I think I would rather express my appreciation in a different way than just words….”

Before Keelin could even register the witch’s intent, Freya’s lips crashed passionately into her own, her tongue immediately sweeping across the wolf’s bottom lip seeking consent for entry – consent that was swiftly given as a small moan of desire escaped from Keelin’s throat.

The depth of the witch’s lust was clear from the second that Keelin felt Freya’s tongue slide fervently along her own. Her kiss was full of the promise of what was to come. Of the desires and needs that were currently raging through Freya’s veins demanding to be sated – desires that Keelin knew matched her body’s own call.

Deepening the kiss further, Keelin’s hands found their way into the witch’s tousled hair as her heated breath mixed with that of her lover’s. Rumbling within, she felt her wolf spirit bristle with anticipation – the beast already on high alert thanks to the formidable pull of the Harvest Moon shining bright in the New Orleans evening sky. Keelin knew that the magical barrier provided by the enchanted Kyanite ring on her finger still held fast, allowing her control over her own actions – but it did not stop her from feeling the power radiating down from the lunar god, and the effect that power was having on her wolf’s carnal urges.

As if in acknowledgement of the moons increased influence, her wolf let out a deep needy growl that vibrated up through Keelin’s throat.

Not because she couldn’t control it.

No - it was because she allowed it to.

Because she wanted it to.

Pulling away slightly in response to the throaty sound emitting from her lover, Freya’s gaze met with the wolf’s, and Keelin noted how the emerald green in the witch’s eyes had nearly been swallowed whole by pupils blown wide with longing.

“Downstairs?” Freya asked, her own voice low and gravelly as she tried to speak through her desire.

Unable to bear the loss of the witch’s lips upon her own, Keelin was immediately upon her lover’s mouth once more, shaking her head lightly as she began to nudge them both towards the picnic blanket that lay in one corner of the enchanted area’s space. She knew that Freya felt the urgency that was radiating off her, as the witch flung out her wrist – not breaking their kiss as she flicked it in the direction of the ice-bucket that still sat in the middle of the tartan cover.

Neither wolf nor witch paid heed to the loud clattering sound produced by the pale and its contents crashing across the leaf covered ground, as the entwined couple fell down onto the awaiting blanket.

It was only as she landed softly on top of Freya, that a small part of Keelin’s mind registered that the witch must have used her power once more to slow their descent at the last moment to prevent either of them from being hurt by their reckless abandonment.

Within seconds she found their positions being flipped by the witch – Freya lowering herself down on top of Keelin as she nipped and licked her way up the soft skin of Keelin’s neck.

The wolf within whined at the witch’s ministrations, and Keelin could feel her usual resolve begin to falter as the feral beast began to pant with the longing to claim its mate.
To claim their mate!

As Freya’s plump lips reached the shell of the wolf’s ear - tongue sweeping languidly across the sensitive skin it found there – Keelin felt the thin veil of separation between her and her animal spirit begin to blur.

“Clothes….off!” Freya demanded huskily in her ear - the witch’s own voice producing an impressive imitation of a growl.

Limbs, mouths, and teeth, all danced in a frenzied whirlwind of action as the two of them quickly sort to discard the garments getting in their way. In a matter of seconds, the torn remains of Keelin’s all in one outfit lay tangled and entwined with the shredded ruin of Freya’s dress – both items gladly sacrificed in the urgent quest for the feel of skin upon skin.

Freya eagerly lowered herself back on top of the wolf – her thigh snaking between Keelin’s legs to press up against the wolf’s core as her mouth blazed a trail of open mouth kisses along her lover’s collar bone. Keelin’s hips jerked upwards in response to the pressure against her clit, as the wetness already gathering there liberally smeared onto the witch’s leg through the now ruined black briefs she had worn under her pantsuit.

She both heard and felt the soft moan that escaped from Freya’s mouth in response – the vibration of the witch’s lips against her skin sending shockwaves of hunger rippling down her body.

Freya’s hand slowly started to make a trail down her torso, the blonde’s fingers gracefully tracing the outline of Keelin’s well-defined stomach muscles as they passed over them – causing the hairs along the wolf’s arms to all stand up on end in response to the sensual touch.

Another moan rippled out of the witch’s throat as her hand came to rest over the soaked material of Keelin’s brief’s, sending the wolf spirit within her wild with anticipation.

“Not….Not your hand”, Keelin managed to shakily voice as her human mind struggled to hold onto the control of her body.

Freya raised her head from where she had been sucking her mark onto the soft plump tissue at the top of Keelin’s breast, and the brunette could see the hint of a question trying to force its way through the thick haze of lust in the witch’s eyes.

“I want….to feel you….feel you come with me” she panted out in heavy breaths - the witch making it hard for her to formulate words as she kept up the pressure upon her core.

Clearly not needing any further explanation, Freya’s look turned predatory as she resumed her assault on the wolf’s body with renewed vigour. The sensation of her lover’s greedy mouth and hands ravishingly making their claim all over her skin, sent Keelin’s wolf spirit into a wild frenzy - shattering the last of her human resolve into tiny pieces as she lost the ability to distinguish which desires and sensations were born of woman, and which were born of wolf.

A flush of colour spreading across her neck and cheeks as Freya deftly removed the laced bra that the brunette had been wearing with expert ease.

Lips pulling back to revel rows of sharp canine teeth as the beast’s panting became increasingly laboured and heavy.

Her body arching against the witch as Freya blazed a trail of molten kisses over her exposed breasts, whilst making quick work of discarding her sodden briefs with soft, skilful hands.
A fur covered hind pushing high into the air, as front legs lowered down to the ground in submission and supplication to its mate

The moan of her lover’s name escaping from her lips as Freya made to remove her own underwear – hooded brown eyes catching sight of the blonde’s arousal as it stretched and dripped from tiny laced pants as they fell to the floor.

Strong muscles rippling across the back of a powerful body as the wolf began to mew and whine in anticipation of claiming its mate at the same time as being taken itself.

Keelin felt a jolt of fire course through her entire body as Freya moved to straddled over her – the witch connecting their swollen cores together as she began to dictate a rhythm with her hips for the brunette to match.

A burst of dazzling bright stars exploded in her mind, as she heard the alluring whispers of the pregnant Harvest Moon begin to increase in volume as it called out to her and demanded submission.

It’s tempting words commanding that she give herself over completely to its will, and lay her soul bare for it to then mould and shape as it saw fit. Promises of anything and everything that she could ever desire played out in front of her minds eye, and all she had to do in return was give in and let go

The whole world could be hers, the moon teased from its ruling chair high above if she would only submit and surrender herself over fully to the beast within.

A strained cry of pleasure erupted from Freya as she flung her torso forward – hands landing either side of the wolf’s head as she strived to find a better purchase between their bodies. The motion sent a shockwave of pleasure rocketing through Keelin’s core, nearly pushing her over the edge of an orgasm before either of them were ready.

Prising her eyes open, she felt her vision quickly narrow into pinpoint focus as the world around her became sharp and precise - a sign she knew all too well to mean that her human eyes had bled into their animal form.

As Keelin’s gaze fixed on Freya, her wolf growled possessively at the glorious sight of their mate naked above them.

The witch’s eyes were scrunched shut and her mouth slightly ajar as beads of sweat formed upon her brow from exertion – mirroring the glimmering sheen on Keelin’s own body as she held onto the blonde’s back and matched her lover’s motion, thrust for thrust.

Her beast’s heightened senses picked up on the marked increase in air pressure around them seconds before the fairy lights strung above the duo began to flicker on and off in succession. Tiny vibrations in the ground beneath her body hummed against the blanket she was lay upon, as the leaves and twigs covering the apartment block’s roof started to tremble and quiver.

Power…. she felt the wild beast within recognise, in a turbulent frenzied snarl.

And it was In that moment she knew – knew that her wolf spirit wanted to feel their mate’s power within them. It craved to bathe in the strength and might of the ancient magic that lived within the witch. Hungered to be completely enveloped by the primordial force and have it infuse into every cell within its body.

It wanted it.
She wanted it.

Needed it.

Feeling her core begin to flare and tighten into a firmly wound coil, the wolf knew that she would not be able to stop herself from free falling over the edge of oblivion for much longer, as the feel of Freya’s slick wet sex pulsating against her own drove every-one of her nerve endings wild with detonating energy.

“Baby….look at me. Want…to see you…."

Her human voice sounded like a distant far off plea, barely audible over the hurricane of carnal lust and desire ravaging throughout her body and mind. The words however, must have rung true regardless, as Freya’s own eyes prised open within an instant – passion and lust swirling in an intense battle for dominance deep within the dark pupils that gazed down at her.

And something else.

As the bulbs of the lights above the writhing couple all suddenly began to flare brighter than their wattage should have allowed, the small remaining coherent part of Keelin’s human mind suddenly registered that a second, more vibrant colour had appeared around the emerald green within her lovers eyes.

Gold….it was like a golden halo of energy…..

A loud moan ripped from Freya’s mouth as the enchanted scene’s fairy lights all began to shatter and burst, one by one in rapid sequence. Dazzling bright stars began to burst in the wolf’s vision as a wave of intense heat flooded her whole body, the force of which causing her hips to stutter in their thrusting rhythm.

“Oh god….Keelin…..”

She felt the energy of Freya’s release seconds before her own orgasm violently exploded throughout her body – its intensity pushing both woman and wolf over the precipice of reality, as her inner beast threw back its head and howled out its eternal allegiance to the Harvest Moon, who sat smug in its celestial throne.

Deep, ragged breaths mingled between their mouths, as both witch and wolf rode out the aftershocks of their climaxes – neither one pulling away from the intimate contact that they continued to share.

Seconds, or minutes later – the concept of time a stretch too far to comprehend as the thin veil between beast and human slowly started reform – Keelin felt the muscles of her lover begin to shift, as Freya slowly lowered herself down to be lay flush against the brunette’s body. The fast but sturdy thrumming of the witch’s heart vibrating against Keelin’s chest helped to anchor the wolf’s focus, as her mind continue to whirl in the aftermath of their union.

“Wow!” Freya breathed out heavily, as she began to lazily pepper soft kisses along Keelin’s collar bone.

Keelin prised open her eyes at the sound of the witch’s voice – noticing that the world had returned back to the normal fuzzy focus of her human sight.

Wow indeed!
“Are you….are you ok?” she managed to pant out between laboured breaths, causing the witch to pull away slightly from her chest.

“I think it’s fair to say that I’m more than ok, Keelin!” Freya laughed, as she raised a hand to the wolf’s face to gently brush a wayward curl of damp hair off her forehead. “Or did my screams of pleasure not quite make it through the sound of your own growls and whimpers!??”

The witch flashed Keelin a mischievous grin as a pout formed on the wolf’s lips – one that was quickly replaced by a faint look of confusion as a hazy memory slid into Keelin’s mind.

“Your eyes!”

“What about them?” the witch asked absentmindedly, as she resumed kissing her way along the soft skin at the base of Keelin’s neck.

“They were different somehow. They looked different.”

“Different how?” Freya murmured before nipping at the wolf’s earlobe with her teeth.

“I….I can’t quite remember. Just different! I was a little distracted at the time!”

Freya laughed softly as she continued with her ministrations upon her lover’s skin.

“This coming from the woman whose eyes turn feral every-time she orgasms!”

Keelin swatted at Freya’s shoulder with her hand, resulting in the witch’s giggling increasing in volume.

“What can I say, you bring out the animal in me!” she purred, as one of the blonde’s hands began to slowly make its way up the inside of her thigh, tracing along a path of particular sensitive nerves that resided there.

“Well”, Freya whispered into her ear seductively, just as her finger slipped easily into the wolf’s wet folds, "let’s see if I can rouse that savage beast a few more times, before the night is over….”

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Chapter End Notes

…..let me know your thoughts as always please guys, as I love getting all forms of feedback. And yes, make the most of this fluff, because the next chapter is the beginning of the doom and gloom! Haha ;-)

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Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

Sorry for the delay guys – but Chapter 7 is now ready for reading :-)

It’s been a crazy busy couple of weeks for me work wise, that’s seen me spending a week in Barcelona on various conferences etc (Barcelona is beautiful by the way – I totally recommend a visit if you have been thinking of going there! And if you are actually from there – congrats, your city rocks!! Haha), so sadly my time to write has been very limited.

Consequently I apologise if this chapter isn’t quite as well written as others or if the pace of it feels rushed in anyway. I was conscious of trying to get something posted for you all without any further delay.

So – with all that said, I hope you still enjoy, and please let me know what you think once you’ve read this latest update.

Peace-out! :-)
She was definitely now regretting having shared so much with Hayley about how well Freya had taken her proposal!

“Actually”, she began in an attempt to pull her friend’s mind out of the gutter, “now that you mention it, I have been feeling lot more in tune with my wolf hormones over the past week. Ever since the apex of the Harvest Moon on the evening we got engaged.”

Even though Hayley did not turn to look in her direction, Keelin could still make out the motion of the hybrids eyebrows rising in response to her words.

“Did that ever happen to you?” she probed, wondering if her friend might have experienced something similar. “You know, before you became a hybrid?”

“To be honest Keelin, before Hope’s blood changed me I was a slave to the lunar cycles just as much as any other wolf.” Hayley shrugged before continuing. “I spent every full moon running around wild and savage - with hardly any recollection of what I’d gotten up to when I turned back into my human form.”

The hybrid nodded down to the Kyanite ring on Keelin’s finger – her mouth twitching up on one side as she continued.

“But then again - I was not lucky enough to have a horny witch warming my bed, who was willing to enchant a ring for me”

“Hey!” Keelin exclaimed loudly, as she once again punched the hybrid lightly in the arm. “Don’t make me kick your ass for a third time this morning!”

Hayley threw her hands up in a mock-surrender - smiling at the wolf before an easy silence proceeded to fall between them.

A week had now passed since her romantic proposal to Freya upon the roof of their apartment building - and Keelin couldn’t deny that she and her newly appointed fiancé had spent every free minute of that time fervently trying to satisfy an apparently insatiable appetite for each-others bodies.

It was like the two of them had turned into a couple horny teenagers, Keelin mused to herself, as she and Hayley neared the spot where they had first morphed into their animal forms earlier that morning. Completely unable and unwilling to keep their hands off each-other.

Every morning that week when the alarm had sounded out to signify that it was time for Keelin to rise for the day and head to work, Freya had dragged the wolf back under their shared duvet to eagerly engage in what she had called “far more important, emergency medical examinations”.

Keelin had tried her best to protest the witch’s advances on the first morning that it had happened, claiming that she needed to be painting the perfect picture of dedication and commitment to her bosses at the clinic in the days leading up to the surgical residency being announced. Her words however had clearly fallen on deaf ears, as Freya had wordlessly taken hold of Keelin’s hand and brushed the brunette’s fingers up against the slippery wet folds of her swollen sex.

It had been a good hour, and several orgasms later, before the wolf had once again remembered that she was meant to be in work, and proceeded to run out of their apartment in a frenzy of explicit curse words and unbuttoned clothes.
As it had turned out, that first lust fuelled dawn after the evening of their engagement, had largely set the tone for the rest of their week.

Long, illicit lie-in’s spent eagerly chasing each-others moans and whimpers of pleasure. Suggestive and erotic texts swapped between phones whenever Keelin had managed to get five minutes to herself in-between tending to patients in the Emergency Clinic. Evening meals abandoned and forgotten as the two lovers had found a far better use for the surface of their dining table.

And the cushions of their large comfy couch.

And the rug-pile lay out in front of apartment’s faux-fireplace.

And the top of antique cabinet that rested against the wall just beside the coat stand as you entered their home.

And the shower.

It wasn’t like her and Freya had previously been prudes when it came to making love and indulging in their lust for each-other. Considering all of the supernatural drama and emergencies that came hand in hand with being part of the Mikaelson family, she and the witch had always managed to maintain a very healthy sex life given the limited amount of time that they usually had to themselves.

It was in-fact one of the many aspects of Freya’s personality that Keelin loved so fiercely – an impressively high sex drive that almost matched the wolf’s own.

Almost

But something had definitely shifted between the two of them since the night of the Harvest-moon, seemingly causing the both of them to lust after one another’s bodies far more - Keelin believed - than the what could be considered average.

Maybe this is what happened to all couples when they first got engaged, the wolf mused, still loving the sound of the word rolling around in her head.

Engaged!

She smiled to herself as she felt a familiar flare of heat flicker in-between her thighs at the memory of the week’s sexual adventures with Freya – hoping that the hybrid walking alongside of her didn’t notice the flush of colour that had suddenly spread across her cheeks.

Hayley had of course wanted to know every single detail of how the proposal had gone, and had been practically biting at the bit when she had picked Keelin up from outside their usual coffee-shop earlier that morning.

Thanks to a full week of twelve-hour shifts, and then any subsequent spare time being spent wrapped around her fiancé’s naked body, Keelin hadn’t been able to make any of the early morning training sessions that she had already scheduled with Hayley.

The hybrid had been more than understanding on the matter however, when Keelin had text her to apologise for changing their plans – simply replying with “Enjoy your sparring between the sheets instead!”

Hayley had of course since heard that the proposal had gone well from Freya, as she had joined both the hybrid and Rebekah for lunch on the day after the witch had said yes.
According to Freya - who Keelin had grilled for information on how her family had reacted during a brief respite in their love making that same evening – both Hayley and her sister had been absolutely delighted that Freya had said yes, and enthusiastically hugged the witch to within an inch of her life. Champagne had then flowed freely between the trio, whilst Rebekah had zealously started planning for an extravagant engagement party to be held at the Mikaelson Compound – no expense spared!

If there was one thing that Keelin had learnt over the past year of knowing Rebekah, it was that her future sister-in-law was never slow off the mark when it came to capitalising on a reason to throw a party!

As if sensing her train of thought, Hayley let out a small laugh as the two companions neared their intended destination in the Bayou.

“If you think I’m bad with my jibes, just you wait until you see Rebekah next! She’s dying to get all the juicy details off you as to exactly how the proposal and subsequent celebrations went!”

“Hasn’t she already had the full low-down off Freya this week whilst I’ve been at work?” the wolf asked.

“Oh come on Keelin, surely you know your future wife better than that!” Hayley chuckled. “Freya is most definitely not one for gushing! We got the bare minimum details – and had to ply her with alcohol just for them! You know how she likes to keep her cards close to her chest when it comes to emotions and feelings.”

Keelin laughed at her friend’s accurate assessment of the pragmatic witch who had captured her heart.

Even though her lover certainly didn’t shy away from showering her with love and affection, Keelin had to admit that even she had a hard time getting Freya to open up about her feelings sometimes.

“Well, I’m sure I can handle a little good natured teasing off Rebekah. Its, err…..the rest of your family that I’m a little nervous about!”

“Oh I wouldn’t worry too much,” Hayley stated as she waved her hand in a dismissive manner. “Deep down under that impassive suited façade, Elijah will be over the moon.”

The hybrid let out a small sigh before continuing.

“I that know he and I haven’t exactly been on the best of terms since….well you know….but I can still say with some confidence that he’s totally embraced you into the fold Keelin. You make Freya happy - and happiness is all he’s ever wanted for his family!”

“Actually”, Keelin said, as they made to step out into the small clearing where their clothes lay waiting for them, “I was more worried about Klaus and his….”

The wolf’s words trailed off into silence as a familiar scent suddenly hit her nose, distracting her train of thought. Stopping mid-stride, she inhaled deeply – noticing that Hayley simultaneously mimicked her action.

“Oh Crap!”

Hayley raised an eyebrow in response to Keelin’s outburst, as the hybrid moved to quickly grab her clothes off the leaf covered floor.
“I’m guessing from that reaction you still haven’t told her about our training sessions?!”

Keelin let out a low groan as she too sped up her efforts to re-dress herself.

“I was going to, but it kind of slipped my mind with the engagement.” she replied, quickly pulling a pair of denim jeans over her long slim legs. “How did she even know we were here?”

“Scrying!” a new voice resounded out, moments before Freya purposely walked into the clearing.

The witch came to a stop a few meters ahead of the half-dressed duo – folding her arms across her chest as she fixed a hard-eyed, suspicious glare upon them both.

“Either of you care to explain why my fiancé and niece’s mother are rushing to get dressed in the middle of the Bayou!?”

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2.

“We are not embarking on a full scale assault on the Mikaelson’s!”

Halvar’s voice stridently thundered out over the boisterous noise being produced by the numerous drunken bikers within Baracuda bar – effectively silencing the discord that had been escalating amongst the other Jarl’s over the course of their discussion.

The seven blood-bound men had first gathered around their usual table in the tavern a few hours earlier, at the request of the Clan leader. It had now been seven cycles of the sun since Balder had deciphered what he believed to be the true meaning of the symbols carved into the stone tomb-slab found with their desiccated Master. Seven cycles filled with heated arguments and debates on how the Jarl’s should act upon the newly obtained knowledge – with no tangible solution having been reached.

Or at least none that Halvar was prepared to entertain!

“It would be foolish, rash, and result in far more casualties than we can presently warrant!”

Halvar drew in a deep agitated breath as he both heard and saw Colborn’s distasteful sneer in response to his command.

Bringing a hand up to his face, the clan leader pinched his nose between two fingers as he let out a long, deep sigh.

“Coward!”

The burly biker’s statement was almost a whisper as his muted tone mingled with the smoke filled air of the bar - but each of the Jarl’s seated around the table heard the accusation nether-the-less.

Feeling the strained, tenuous hold upon his fraying temper quickly begin to fall apart, Halvar fixed his weary eyes upon his Colborn – trying his best to ignore the fire burning within as he spoke.

“It is not cowardice to know when a battle would not fall in our favour, Colborn! Do try and engage that infinitesimal brain of yours for once, instead of barrelling into a situation blindly without considering the consequences!”
“Consequences?!” Colborn blurted out in a rough, incredulous tone - earning himself several uneasy glances from the other Jarl’s as he continued his in his quarrel with Halvar. “What damn consequences? The numbers speak for themselves. We are the seven immortal Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan! There are what….four members of the Original family that remain alive in this century?! We outnumber and outmuscle….”

“Five!"

Balder’s sudden interjection into the heated dispute caused Colborn to stumble in his words.

“What?!” the agitated Jarl finally snarled in response to the clan’s Gothi, as his livid eyes remained locked with Halvar’s.

“There are five Mikaelson siblings that remain surviving.”

After letting his authoritative stare linger upon Colborn’s enraged face for a few heartbeats longer, Halvar finally turned his attention to Balder - sat immediately to his right.

“I was lead to believe that only three of the Original sons and their sister remained infesting this plane with their cursed lives”, the clan leader stated, his voice still swathed in exasperation from the heated exchange with Colborn. “Are you declaring that one of the other brother’s has recently been resurrected?”

Balder shook his head with the precise and determined movement of a wise owl.

“Not one of the deceased brothers, no!”

A confused silence fell over the group, as the reflective Gothi appeared to become lost in his own thoughts once more.

“For Gods sakes”, Leif finally blurted out from across the table after several drawn out seconds, “out with it man! Preferably before we all turn into bastard stone once more!”

“Hmmm?” The pensive Gothi questioned, as though being interrupted from performing one of his complicated enchantments. “Right, yes. I believe that we were deceived all those years ago, when we first learned of the Mikaelson family and the curse placed upon them by their witch mother!”

“Deceived?!” Halvar bellowed, turning in his chair so as to face the Gothi fully. “You dare to suggest that our Lord mislead us?!”

Out of the corner of his eye, the clan leader noted the callous smirk that quickly crawled its way across Colborn’s pock-marked face – no doubt in response to Halvar’s rare loss of temper with the clan’s Gothi.

“Not at all, Jarl Halvar”, Balder quickly remarked, his head bowing slightly in supplication to his leader. “I believe our great Master told us exactly what he himself had been deceived into believing.”

Clearing his throat, the Gothi turned in his seat to address the whole table once more.

“Esther birthed four brothers sired by Mikael, and another sired by Ansel. And then there was a sister, also sired by Mikael’s bloodline.”

“Making six of them altogether – we know all of this Balder!” claimed Fiske irritably from his seat next to Colborn. “Finn and Henrik are both now dead, leaving just three of the brothers and the
“Except,” Balder continued as he raised his finger, “Esther’s firstborn was not Finn, as we had all been lead to believe. Mikael’s seed first produced a daughter – the eldest of the Mikaelson siblings, whom was taken from the family when she was just five years old.”

“So there are two sisters?” Halvar questioned, his voice having mellowed from the impact of the news.

“Correct.”

“You are so full of shit,” Colborn scoffed at Balder, as he grabbed his tankard of beer off the large wooden table. “Where is your proof of this fictional drivel?! Or is this something else you have suddenly divined from that phoney tomb slab of yours?”

Both Ake and Fiske let out ridiculing snickers, reconfirming to Halvar their agreement with Colborn’s stance that the clan’s Gothi was fabricating the latest claim of Mikaelson blood being the key to their Master’s resurrection.

“Actually Colborn, you are my proof!” Balder stated with an air of indifference, causing the overweight biker to cough and sputter ale over himself as he attempted to gulp down on his drink.

“Me!” Colborn questioned incredulously, as he irately attempted to wipe spilled liquid off the lapel of his well-worn leather jacket.

“Yes”, the Gothi continued. “For once, one of your derisory and senseless trips into the city ended up actually being productive for our cause, instead of just beneficial to your loins!”

A low growling sound emitting from Colborn’s snarled mouth was the only response that Balder received. Seeing it as a small victory, he continued with his explanation.

“Whilst listening to you crow about your carnal conquests is usually the last activity I wish to engage in, your recent recollection of observing two of the Mikaelson brothers and their younger sister in one of the city’s taverns, peaked my interest.”

“You encountered the Mikaelson family in the city and didn’t report it to me?!” Halvar questioned angrily - his hard eyed gaze immediately flicking onto Colborn.

Colborn waved a dismissive hand towards the Clan leader, as his face schooled into a look of boredom.

“By the gods, you are not my mother Halvar! And be thankful of that too, since I slit that useless whore’s throat as soon as I was strong enough to wield a sword!”

“Colborn…”, Halvar growled, as the brilliant blue of his irises quickly began to darken with swirls of dark crimson hues.

“Alright, alright”, the bearded biker scoffed, placing his nearly empty tankard down in front of him. “Yes, I witnessed three of the Original family in a bar that some of the thralls and I were drinking in. The hybrid monstrosity Klaus, his brother Elijah, and their sister Rebekah. They were sat by the bar drinking for most of the evening!”

“So he saw the Mikaelson’s”, Fiske commented as he idly picked dirt from beneath his fingernails with a small, wooden toothpick. “We already knew that three of them resided here in New Orleans. It’s not exactly earth shattering news Halvar!”
“What it is, Fiske”, Halvar countered, trying to keep his voice steady despite the simmering rage vibrating through him, “is a potentially catastrophic setback to our objective! If they have already gotten wind of who we are, and what our purpose is…..”

“By the god’s, stop with the over dramatization Halvar!”, Colborn shouted. “They did not pay any heed to me – nor would they know who I was even if they had! They have no knowledge of our existence – as has remained the case over the past millennia!”

“One of them did pay heed!” Balder casually contradicted. “You said so yourself, whilst bragging about the evening to Fiske.”

Silence fell across the group, as all eyes turned to study the Gothi.

“I believe you referred to a power emanating, emerald-eyed blonde stood talking with the Mikaelson’s, who, in your own crude Neanderthal words - “looked every bit as fuckable as Rebekah, and couldn’t take her whoring eyes off you!” – correct?”

A snakes smile slithered across Colborn’s face as the memory of the woman in question slid into place.

“She’d have looked even better with my cock in her mouth!” the Jarl scoffed, earning a hearty jeer off everyone sat at the table – bar Halvar and Balder. “What the hell has that got to do with anything though?”

Pulling his face at the Jarl’s crass choice of words, Balder sighed before continuing.

“The fact that a witch would be associating so casually with the Mikaelson’s intrigued me. They have after-all not been known for their tolerance of the Wiccan bloodline throughout the ages. So I had a few of our thralls look into the matter for me. As it turns out, the woman was just as breath-taking as Rebekah Mikaelson because she herself is also a Mikaelson - the witch daughter born to Esther, sired by Mikael, and the eldest of the Original siblings.”

A palpable silence fell over the Jarl’s once more, as they all processed the Gothi’s revelation.

“And you are sure of her lineage, Balder?” Halvar finally asked, locking eyes with the Jarl.

“Positive”, the Gothi replied with a practiced air of confidence. “After learning of the thralls’ findings, I took it upon myself to dig deeper into the matter. Turns out the Mikaelson’s long lost sister re-appeared back in their lives earlier this decade, after breaking a century’s old curse placed upon her by Esther’s estranged sister.”

“Interesting!” was Halvar’s only remark, as he appeared to fall deep into thought.

“So the witch is a Mikaelson. Who cares?!” Colborn exclaimed loudly, throwing his hands up in the air. “I still don’t see what relevance it has to our plight!?”

“The relevance”, Halvar said as he continued to stare at his tankard of ale with deep lines of concentration creasing his forehead, “is that she must not have been cursed by Esther’s immortality spell – otherwise she would be an Original Vampire like the rest of her siblings. She… is mortal.”

When he received no reaction from the rest of his brethren, Halvar finally looked up once more and stared at each of them briefly - one by one.

“She is the solution to our problem!”
3.

“You scryed for my whereabouts?!”

*Admittedly they weren’t the first words that she had expected to leave her mouth – but her fiancé’s opening declaration had instantly struck an unpleasant discord within in her.*

From the corner of her eye Keelin saw Hayley’s brow rise in surprise to her question, as the hybrid continued to cover up her naked form. Freya on the other-hand remained a rigid statue of ire and ice, as her eyes finally stopped roaming between the two women, and fixed on Keelin.

“That’s not an answer to my question!”

Letting out a huff of irritation, Keelin pointedly finished pulling a yellow t-shirt over her chest before answering the witch.

“You swore that you’d never use magic on me again, Freya, after the sleeping spell incident!”

Freya continued to stare at her with a cold glare as she remained silent - seemingly prepared to wait on a response to her own question rather than answer Keelin’s peeved retort.

“Well”, Hayley said abruptly as she finished dressing, “as much as I’d love to stay and watch you two ladies stare angrily at each other in silence - I have an excited daughter who’s about to turn ten years old waiting for me at home. So if you’ll excuse me….”

Hayley grabbed her bag off the ground before making to walk back towards her car at the edge of the Bayou – pausing as she passed by Freya to briefly place a hand on the witch’s shoulder.

“Go easy on her Freya - it’s not what you think!”

The hybrid quickly glanced back over her shoulder and offered a sympathetic smile towards Keelin, before disappearing into the thick foliage of the surrounding marsh land.

Several seconds of incensed silence passed between the two lovers, before Keelin heard a small sigh come from the witch stood glaring at her. She noted that Freya’s angry posture eased by a fraction as she slowly unlocked the arms that had been folded across her chest.

“I wanted to surprise you at work this morning with some flowers”, Freya finally offered – her eyes remaining hard, despite the subtle relaxing of her stance. “So I went to the clinic to give them to you in person. Only you weren’t there, and the staff nurse on duty said that you were not due on shift until later this afternoon!”

Keelin inwardly winced - feeling a flush of shame begin to spread its way across her cheeks in reaction to Freya unravelling the lie she had told her earlier that morning.

“So I thought that maybe you’d decided to change your shift whilst you were on your way to work this morning. But imagine my surprise when the staff nurse went on to say that you were moved onto the later shift a few months ago, so I would have a better chance catching you at work sometime after midday if I needed you during the week.”
“Freya, I…..”

The witch’s hands quickly went to her hips, as she continued – cutting Keelin off.

“Naturally I became worried. Living the dangerous lives that we do, with no shortage of enemies and monsters constantly out to hurt or control us, I imagined a whole host of dire situations that would mean you having to deceive me as to your whereabouts each morning, for such a long stretch of time! When I couldn’t find you back at our apartment or the compound, I tried calling your cell – only for it to go straight through to voicemail each time. So yes - I decided to try scrying for you, because I was beginning to panic Keelin! After everything that happened last year with the Neivera pack, I couldn’t help but fear the worst.”

Keelin lowered her head and let her gaze fall to the ground - no longer able to meet her lover’s eyes.

_She had caused Freya to worry about her unnecessarily._

“When the pendant indicated that you were in the Bayou, I drove out here immediately - only to discover Hayley’s SUV parked just off the track back there!”

There was a brief pause of silence, as Keelin remained studying the dirt floor beneath her.

“Keelin, talk to me. I am going to attempt to be rational and assume that you aren’t having an affair with Hayley….”

She quickly raised her head once more in reaction to her lover’s words, flashing Freya a look that she hoped conveyed that the idea of her having an affair was both preposterous, and something that would never happen.

“…..so what is it? Are you in trouble? Is Hayley?”

Sighing heavily, Keelin slowly walked over to where Freya stood and took one of the blonde’s hands into her own.

“I’m sorry.”

“For?” the witch asked in response, her voice now calmer and quiet as she allowed Keelin to interlace their fingers together.

“For lying to you about my shift patterns at work.”

She sighed again, before finally deciding to bite the proverbial bullet.

“And for not telling you about my training sessions with Hayley.”

Freya’s eyebrows raised up as she studied the wolf’s face.

“Training sessions?”

Nodding slowly in confirmation, Keelin continued.

“After what happened last year, when Hatch took control over my body, I felt…..well it left me feeling very vulnerable and defenceless. The fact that he could so easily invade my mind in the way he did and force me to hurt the people that I love – it scared me Freya. And it continues to scare me every day - the thought that something similar could happen again. Like you said, your family has no shortage of enemies who are constantly looking for ways to hurt or kill you all! And
the simple truth of the matter is that your brother Klaus is right to be weary of me, and the dangers that I could pose to the safety of your family. I’m the weak link!”

Freya shook her head vigorously in response to Keelin’s words, as anger once again began to harden her emerald eyes.

“Has Klaus said something to you to make you think that?? That you are a liability to our family?! Because I swear to god I will…..”

“No honey”, the wolf said quickly in an attempt to prevent her lover’s renowned temper from flaring out of control. “He’s not said anything directly to me. But it’s hardly a secret!”

Raising a hand up, Keelin lightly caressed Freya’s cheek with her thumb in a bid to calm the witch as she continued.

“I know that you’ve tried your best over the past twelve months to shield me from his wrath over what happened to Hope - but I’m not stupid Freya. I know that he still holds me accountable for his daughter’s injuries. And so he should!”

Letting her hand fall back down by her side, Keelin shook her head lightly as the familiar feeling of guilt began to worm its way into her mind.

“Maybe if I had spent my life embracing my wolf heritage instead of trying to run and hide from it, then maybe….”

“Keelin, I’ve already told you - there was absolutely nothing that you could have done that would have prevented the Hollow’s spell from working. It would have had the same effect on even the most ardent of wolves.”

“I know honey,” she said - almost too quickly. “But that knowledge still doesn’t make me feel any less responsible. I was spiralling in the months immediately after the funhouse incident Freya, and I couldn’t see a way out of the bottomless pit of guilt that I had sunk into.”

The witch’s brow creased in concern as she instinctively reached out to try and pull Keelin into her arms – only for a look of confused hurt to flash in her eyes as the wolf took a deliberate step back to remain out of reach.

“I don’t want your pity, Freya”, Keelin said determinedly, as her hands balled into fists. “I’m just trying to explain how low I sunk after causing Hope’s and your injuries. I felt useless. Weak. And that’s just not me! I’ve never been someone who wallowed in their own self-pity, or let life’s setbacks dictate who I am as a person. I’m a fighter. I’ve always been a fighter. And I desperately needed to try and find a way to remind myself of that fact!”

Sighing, Keelin forced herself to relax her hands and let her fingers unfurl from the tight balls they had formed.

“It was not too long after I went back to work at the clinic, that it occurred to me it was finally time to stop trying to run from the monster that lives within me. I was born with the curse of the wolf gene, and that’s exactly how I have spent all of my life viewing it – as a curse! I purposely alienated myself from any form of pack life after my family were murdered, and did everything in my power to try and lock away that violent side of my nature into an internal compartment, and throw away the key. But the Hollow’s spell only served to show just how foolish I was to think I could ever escape the pull of the beast within me.”

Keelin raised her hand to study the Kyanite ring on her finger – its bright jewel glinting in a small
ray of sunshine that had managed to pierce through the thick canopy above them.

“When you first gave me one of these rings, I saw it as a cure. A way to be completely free of the burden I had been born with.”

Freya’s own eyes dropped to the jewelled band, as the expression on her face warred between concern, and confusion.

“But the events last year made me realise I will never be free of my wolf heritage. It will always be a part of who I am, and…well….that is something I refuse to be ashamed of anymore!”

A small smile began to grow on her lips as the wolf locked eyes with her lover once more.

“I wanted to start learning how to use the ring you gave me to its full potential. I wanted to become more than just a burden to your family!”

“Keelin….”

“I wanted to learn how to fight,” she continued, refusing to let Freya cut her off. “To learn how to properly control the beast within me, and use it to my advantage - instead of it always using me. So, I asked Hayley for help! I mean let’s face it, who better is there to teach me how to exert complete command over my inner wolf, than an actual Wolf Queen!”

Freya let out a small huff of acknowledgement, before nodding gently towards Keelin - gesturing for her to continue.

“Hayley was surprisingly receptive to my idea. I think I had convinced myself that she would just outright refuse my request – I mean, it was my wolf form that had attacked her daughter after-all. But I had hardly even gotten out the first few sentences of my prepared speech before she held up a hand to stop me, and simply said “If you’re asking me to help you train - count me in!”. I was lost for words!”

“That sounds like Hayley!” Freya offered, as she matched Keelin’s fledgling smile.

“So, we began to spend a few hours a morning sparing with each other,” the wolf continued. “I managed to get my shift pattern changed at work, telling my bosses that I needed some time each day to dedicate towards my research in Gene Therapy. And to be fair, it wasn’t a complete lie – Hayley and I would only meet every other morning – so the rest of free time I would spend utilising the facilities in the clinic’s lab to complete my paper.”

Keelin took a step closer to Freya as she paused in her explanation – searching the witch’s eyes for any hint of the anger that had been present when she had first arrived in the marsh clearing.

“I should have told you from the beginning”, she confessed - taking hold of the witch’s hands once more. “I know that now! But at the time I was still so raw and emotional over everything that had happened – I guess I just felt that it was something I needed to embark upon on my own. I didn’t trust myself to follow through on the decision to embrace my wolf heritage if I got anyone else involved.”

Freya’s gaze dropped down to study their intertwined fingers, as the hurt that had previously been marring her features briefly flashed in her eyes once more.

“But you involved Hayley!” the witch stated quietly – her whispered voice only just audible over the organic sounds of the Bayou’s wildlife. “You obviously felt that you could trust her with your decision. So why not me?”
“Honey, listen to me,” Keelin said, as she raised one of her hands up to the witch’s face, “I trust you, ok. I trust you with my life! And I admit that I was wrong to keep it from you for so long. I guess…well I guess I just wanted to make sure that I was making the right decision by embracing the monster within me, before worrying about what consequences it might have on our relationship.”

“Consequences?” Freya questioned, her brow furrowing suddenly. “I don’t understand? Why would you think there would be consequences?”

Shrugging her shoulders slightly, Keelin continued.

“Well, it’s not like you’ve ever really seen me when the beast takes control. Yes, you’ve always known that I am a wolf, and the last surviving member of my pack-line. But I’ve spent the majority of our relationship either suppressing the unpredictable and wild side of my nature with a serum, or under the calming influence of your Kyanite ring. You fell in love with a peaceful, level headed doctor. Not a feral, untamed, and unpredictable animal.”

Keelin could feel tears begin to gather in her eyes, as she quickly looked away from the witch – scared of what she might see in her lover’s eyes when the truth of whom she had agreed to marry finally hit home with Freya.

“I….I was worried that you might re-evaluate our relationship, if I let you see the true monster that I am.”

The last word had barely left her mouth when Freya’s lips suddenly pressed softly up against her own – the witch placing a hand upon Keelin’s back to pull their bodies close together. She felt all the tension that had been building in her muscles quickly begin to melt away, as the warmth of Freya’s embrace engulfed her, and their lips began to move in a delicate, well-practiced rhythm. Soft fingers caressed their way along her jaw, causing a quiet moan of pleasure to escape up out of her throat, and into the witch’s mouth.

After a few more seconds Freya slowly pulled away from Keelin’s lips, and rested her forehead against the wolf’s.

“I love you, Keelin”, the witch said, as she gently brushed away one of the rogue tears that had escaped down Keelin’s cheek. “I love every single part of you! And if embracing your wolf heritage is something that you feel you now want to do – then I will support you every step of the way. You are a kind, caring…amazing woman, and there is not a single bad bone in that body of yours. Nothing will ever change the way I feel about you. Nothing!”

Pulling away slightly from the wolf, Freya hooked her finger under Keelin’s chin and gently raised her head so that their eyes met in a teary gaze.

“And I AM going to marry you Keelin Malraux– furry paws n’all!”

Keelin let out a small laugh at her lover’s remark, as more tears began to make their way down her face.

“Just promise me one thing ok?” Freya asked, as she continued to caress the wolf’s face.

“Anything!” she breathed, as she studied the emotional emerald eyes gazing in adoration at her.

“No more secrets, ok? If we’re going to do this – build a life and grow old together – then we have to be completely open and honest with each other from now on, ok. Deal?”
A heartbeat passed between them, as a stark image momentarily flashed in Keelin’s mind eye, before quickly being replaced by her fiancé’s loving face smiling affectionately at her as she waited upon her answer.

“Deal!”, she replied, before leaning forward to connect their lips in another heart melting kiss.

*Now is not the right time* Keelin briefly thought to herself – pushing the image of Alanna further down into the recess of her mind, as her senses began to lose themselves in the feel of Freya’s tongue caressing her own.

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4.

*BANG!*

A loud, bursting noise suddenly echoed out across the open space of the Compound’s courtyard, causing the blonde-haired witch stood on the top two rungs of a stepladder to almost lose her balance.

Steadying herself once more, Freya let out a small laugh as she began to stretch out the rubber of a fresh balloon – readying it for being blown full of air and pinned to the side of the grand sweeping staircase.

“You know Freya,” came a female voice from over by the grand table in the middle of the courtyard, “you’d think a witch of your considerable talents and power would be able to handle blowing up a few party balloons, without managing to pop over half of them in the process!”

Freya heard Rebekah let out a hearty laugh in response to Hayley’s jibe, as both women worked to drape a string of fairy-lights between two large antique candelabras that sat in the middle of the large wooden table.

Rolling her eyes, the witch tilted her head to the side, as the hybrids words caused an idea to form in her head.

“Fine!” Freya remarked with a smirk, before emptying the remainder of the party balloons out of their plastic container onto the palm of her outstretched hand.

Closing her eyes, the witch drew in a deep breath and pulled forth a small tendril of power from deep within her reserves – quietly whispering an enchantment as she let go of the air in her lungs.

“Aere impleatur, glutinum figere!”

A whoosh of air ruffled the tussled blond locks framing Freya’s face, as each of the brightly coloured balloons that had been lay on her hand slowly raised up into the space in front of her. As if being blown into by an invisible mouth, the rubber inflatables quickly began to fill and expand, swelling to their maximum capacity within seconds.

A quick flick of the witch’s wrist saw the balloons smoothly float over to the staircase, each fixing
itself to the marbled stone with magical adhesive - producing an evenly spaced trail of rainbow colour, leading from the stone ground right up to the first floor of the compound.

Jumping down from the top of the step ladder, Freya landed gracefully on her feet and took a step back to admire her handy work.

“There!” she exclaimed smugly, before throwing a wink towards the two immortals stood by the grand table. “This decorating m'larky is a piece of cake!”

Another hearty laugh escaped from Rebekah’s lips, as she shook her head in admiration at her sister.

“Now why didn’t we think of that from the get go!” the blonde vampire exclaimed, as she finished hooking her end of the fairy-lights around the silver shaft of a candle holder. “Freya could have waved her magic wand and had the whole building decorated in seconds – freeing us ladies up to make a start on Elijah’s personal stash of aged bourbon, that I saw him squirrel away into his bedroom earlier today!”

Freya walked over to the duo as she watched Hayley shake her head in amusement.

“Come on Rebekah”, the hybrid chuckled, as she began opening another pack of colourful paper streamers, “there would be no sense of achievement if we simply cheated at decorating the Compound for Hope’s birthday!”

The blonde vampire playfully nudged her sister’s shoulder with her own as Freya came to stand next to her - rolling her eyes in Hayley’s direction as she spoke.

“I believe we could find a far better a sense of achievement at the bottom of a bottle of single malt – what say you sister?!”

Freya laughed at her sibling, before slowly turning around on the spot to survey the fruits of their labour so far.

Admittedly it had already taken the trio a good few hours of work – but the Compound was certainly beginning to look like the enchanted fairy wonderland that Hope had requested for her 10th birthday celebration party.

Balloons of all shapes and sizes hung from every exposed beam and chandelier of the courtyard’s ceiling, each with a glitter covered ribbon cascading down from its tie. Twinkling pink lights sparkled in their hundreds, giving the open space a beautiful cherry glow as the tiny beams of illumination bounced off the numerous shiny surfaces littered around the compound. The various columns and posts that grew up from the stone floor of the building had each been covered within an inch of their life in rich green ivy, interspersed with the occasional rose stained-glass bauble that glistened brightly against the background of vibrant foliage.

Each of the cabinets and wooden surfaces positioned around the perimeter of the courtyard had had their usual crystal decanters and candle holders removed, only to be replaced with an assortment of bowls filled to the brim with every flavoured type of candy that Freya had ever heard of – including some that she had not known even existed. One particularly wide dresser even had a large three-tiered chocolate fountain stood upon it, ready and waiting to produce a flowing river of molten coco for Hope’s friends to marvel at and sample when they arrived at her party in the morning.

The witch had to admit as she came to a stop to face her family members once more, the whole
effect could definitely have been achieved a lot faster with the use of a little magic. But she would have been lying if she’d have claimed not to be enjoying the time that they were spending chatting and laughing in each-others company as they worked.

“Do you think she’ll like it?” Hayley asked as she watched Freya silently assessing their progress.

“Are you kidding?!” Rebekah piped up, before Freya had a chance to respond. “The little cherub is going to fall absolutely head over heels in love with what we have created for her!”

“Well I have both of you to thank for that”, Hayley continued, as she too began her own sweeping evaluation of the courtyard. “Klaus wanted to hire a party planner for the occasion, and have a team of professionals do all of the work for us. But I just felt that Hope’s first big birthday party should have more of a personal touch to it. Especially since she’s so excited to be having all of her friends come over and see her home for the first time!”

“You certainly can’t beat a little family inspiration sometimes,” Rebekah admitted, as she began sprinkling pink glitter across the surface of the large wooden table in front of them. “Though I won’t lie, I will be leaving all of the dirty work to hired professionals when it comes to decorating our home for Freya and Keelin’s engagement party!”

Freya whipped her head around, and glared at her sister in response to her off-the-cuff remark.

“Please tell me that you are speaking in jest, Sister?!” the witch said with a hint of exasperation in her voice. “I specifically told you the other day that neither myself nor Keelin are wanting a big fuss made over our engagement! Especially considering how tense things currently are between Klaus and myself! I doubt even a small family dinner would be achievable without confrontation - let alone a big party!”

“Nonsense!” exclaimed the blonde vampire, as she continued to spread sparkling joy across the table. “It’s not every day a girl gets to celebrate the engagement of her sister to the woman she loves. And as I expect that you will only be undertaking such a magical union of love once in your lifetime – I will not be denied the pleasure of lavishing you both in gifts, champagne and dancing!”

Freya let out an exaggerated sigh, as she threw her hands up into the air.

“Hayley – help me out here! Surely you agree with me that a huge party will only serve to further aggravate the current rift between myself and my pig-headed brother?!”

The Wolf Queen looked up from the decorative paper chain of fairy shaped cut-outs that she was holding in her hands, and quickly offered Freya an apologetic smile.

“So, what you are both really saying is that I don’t actually have a say in the matter?!” Rebekah practically skipped to stand beside her sister – throwing her arm around the witch’s shoulders to pull her in for an awkward hug.
“See, I knew you’d cotton on soon enough love!”

Rolling her eyes, Freya shrugged Rebekah’s arm off her frame, and walked over to the one cabinet in the courtyard that had not been sacrificed to the party decorations for Hope’s impending birthday celebrations. Pulling three crystal tumblers in front of her, the witch began to pour a large measure of bourbon for each of them, just as Rebekah began to speak once again.

“Speaking of my lucky soon to be sister-in-law – where is she this evening? I would have thought that getting to make our family courtyard look a little less dreary and dull would have been right up Keelin’s ally!”

Freya handed an alcohol filled glass to both Rebekah and Hayley, before taking a quick swig out of her own tumbler – savouring the mild burn of the bourbon as it trickled down her throat.

“She’s actually out with her work friend’s tonight, celebrating the promotion that she’s been given at the clinic. It was announced earlier this afternoon that she will be filling the new surgical residency spot that’s opened up, which she is over the moon about.”

Freya took a quick look at the large grandfather clock that stood at the far end of the courtyard, noting that its chimes would loudly be announcing the arrival of ten o’clock in just a few seconds time.

“I should image that she will be well on her way to tipsy by now, as she and her colleagues have been out drinking since their shift finished at eight!”

“Then what in the world are you doing hanging about with us boring tarts engaging in tedious decorating, dear sister?!” Rebekah laughed loudly as she finished her bourbon. “Go and join your love, and help her celebrate her good news!”

“Hey!” Hayley exclaimed, throwing a frown towards the blonde vampire. “You happily volunteered to help with the decorating Rebekah. Don’t make out like I had to force you!”

Rebekah flashed a killer’s smile towards the hybrid, before she turned back towards her sister.

“Seriously love, get out of here! The two of us can adequately finish what’s left of this dreary task. And I am sure that Keelin will be delighted to have you join her as a surprise.”

A smile quickly broke across Freya’s face, as the prospect of joining her fiancé in Lafitte’s bar for a few celebratory drinks rolled around in her head.

“Are you both sure you don’t mind finishing up without me?”

This time is was Hayley who answered, as she grabbed the decanter of Bourbon from behind Freya and made to refill her and Rebekah’s tumblers.

“Honestly Freya, there’s hardly anything left to do now - we can finish just fine without you. Besides, Rebekah’s right – you should be out celebrating your fiancé’s good news with her, rather than being stuck here in the compound with us two deadbeats!”

It was now Rebekah’s turn to scoff at the defamation of her character – earning a sly smile from Hayley as the hybrid walked over to Freya.

Lightly shoving the witch in the direction of the courtyard’s large wooden doors, Hayley removed the now empty glass out of Freya’s hand, and made a shooing action with her arms.
“Go – and make sure to tell Keelin that we said congratulations on her promotion!”

Laughing as she walked, Freya grabbed her leather jacket off the coat-stand near the Compound’s entranceway – slipping it around her shoulders as she turned back towards her family.

“Oh, ok! But if I end up hungover and grumpy at Hope’s birthday party tomorrow – let it be known that you only have yourselves to blame!”

And with that, she stepped out into the cold fresh air of the New Orleans evening, leaving a laughing Rebekah and Hayley behind.

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5.

Lafitte’s Blacksmith Café Bar was well renowned with both residents and tourists alike as being the one of the oldest surviving structures in the whole city of New Orleans.

Found deep within the heart of the French Quarter, the Spanish Colonial building was believed to have been initially constructed as a residential house in the late 1700’s by the infamous pirate Jean Lafitte, before later on being utilised to facilitate the Lafitte’s smuggling business. It was not until the early 1940’s that the long-standing wooden structure took on its current purpose of providing a place where the general public could go to be fed and watered – so long as they had coin in their pockets, and time on their hands.

As with many of the old original buildings that littered the Big Easy, Lafitte’s had a whole host of rumours and legends that had been associated with it over the many years of its existence. Back in the early twentieth century, the building was alleged to have been used as a Mafia safe-house for the world renowned Marcello family, who made use of the structure for illegal seizures and as a place where people in the know could go to buy illegal contraband without fear of being discovered by the local law enforcement.

At the height of the U.S. Prohibition period, it was closely guarded knowledge amongst the local men of the Quarter that if a fella should happen to be walking past the rear entrance to the building late in the twilight hours of a Friday evening, he could find himself provided with a small bottle of rum in exchange for two bits, and a sworn oath of secrecy. And it was a secret that was well kept until well after the laws of Prohibition ended – the fear of a visit from one of the Marcello family’s more nefarious thugs being enough to hold the tongue of even the most loose-lipped chap in the local area.

Other rumours that still persisted into the modern day, included the notion that the old colonial building was haunted - the ghost most often associated with the building being the spirit of the Jean Lafitte himself. As it is often told by both local gossips and bored shop owners trying to retained the interest of a passing tourist - the apparition of the dead pirate has never interacted with anyone and has never said a word to those who have been unfortunate enough to witness its presence whilst drinking in the café bar. He instead is rumored to simply stand in the dark corner of the open floored tavern, whilst staring at people until he is noticed - at which time his ghost disappears into the shadows.
It was that particular supernatural rumor associated with the rustic wooden structure that Keelin now stood contemplating, as she leant against the long uneven bar of the very same drinking establishment.

Had someone asked her just over a year ago as to whether she would believe the legend of Jean Lafitte’s ghost to be true, she would have no doubt laughed skeptically in their face, before claiming that all tales of specters and phantoms were simply made-up stories that should remain solely in the imaginations of young children and fictional story-tellers alike. Yes, she herself was a wolf, and thus knew that the world in which she lived was not quite as black-and-white as most humans would like to believe. But she was also a scientist, and had grown up subscribing to the belief that the various species of “supernatural” beings littering the earth simply existed due to extreme genetic mutations and variations of the already complex human genome.

Of course, that belief system had been profoundly tried, tested, and strained over the last twelve months since she had been drawn into the outlandish world of the Mikaelson family. So much so that the wolf now found herself staring into one of the darkened corners of Lafitte’s cafe bar, purely to check if the fabled pirate’s apparition had decided to join her and the rest of the staff from St Theadora’s Health Clinic for a celebratory Friday night drink.

“Penny for your thoughts!”

The soft, friendly features of Joel’s face suddenly filled Keelin’s view, as the male nurse angled his head to try and gain her attention.

Blinking rapidly, the wolf let out a small surprised laugh as her mind was brought crashing back into the moment and the realization that she had completely zoned out on her friend as he had been talking to her.

“Oh god, I’m so sorry Joel!” she quickly blurted out, smiling apologetically at the male nurse. “My mind’s been all over the place today - I don’t know what has gotten into me!”

Her companion quickly shook his head in an attempt to brush off the incident as being of no concern.

“Well to be fair it’s hardly surprising that your brain is a little mushed”, Joel stated jovially - his voice raised to shouting level despite their close proximity, in an attempt to be heard over the loud pulsating music that was currently booming out of the tavern’s juke-box. “It’s not every week that a girl gets engaged to her bae AND secures the coveted position of surgical resident! I’m just surprised that you are still sober – if it was me, I’d be drunkenly dancing on a table top by now, singing “I’m Spinning Around” to anyone who’d listen!”

Keelin laughed at her friend’s analogy – nodding her head in agreement with his abbreviated round-up of the past seven days.

“Yeah, I guess you could say it’s been a rollercoaster of a week!”

Nodding towards the brunette’s untouched glass of red wine sitting on the wooden bar beside them, Joel raised a questioning eyebrow.

“Do you want something else to drink? You’ve not touched a single drop of that wine since we got here….ohhh, what we need is Tequila in our lives!” Joel suddenly exclaimed, the prospect of them slamming shots instantly lighting up his face with excitement.

He quickly leant forward over the wooden bar in an attempt to gain the attention of one of the three
employees that were currently rushing around trying to fulfill the numerous drink orders of the busy venue.

“Bartender! Two shots of your finest……”

“Actually Joel, I’m ok thanks”, Keelin quickly interjected, before her friend managed to finish his order. “I’ll give the shots a miss tonight!”

The nurse pulled back from the bar with an expression of shock plastered onto his face. Raising the back of his hand to Keelin’s forehead, he quickly ran his eyes over the wolf’s body in a mock medical examination.

“Girl, I think you need to sit down – you are clearly very sick!”

Rolling her eyes at him, the wolf quickly batted Joel’s hand away as he made to feel for a pulse point on her neck with two fingers.

“Give it a rest!” she laughed at her friend, shaking her head in fake annoyance. “I think I just have a bit of an off stomach. The sandwich I grabbed earlier in the staff canteen has been repeating on me all afternoon, and I’m pretty sure that alcohol will only make it worse.”

“An off stomach my arse!”, Joel scoffed, just before taking another swig of his own Strawberry Daiquiri cocktail. “You just want to stay sober so that you can go another few rounds between the sheets with your fiancé later tonight!”

The nurse’s drawn out emphasis on the word fiancé made Keelin laugh, as she simultaneously rolled her eyes in his direction.

“Careful Joel,” Keelin chided, as she quickly made to order a glass of mineral water from a passing staff member, “You are starting to turn a little green around the edges there with jealousy!”

“Damn right I’m jealous, girlfriend!” the nurse exclaimed loudly, momentarily drawing the attention of several other members of St Theodora’s Clinic staff that were stood drinking close by. “I would kill to be getting even a small fraction of the action that you two love birds have been engaging in this past week! Hell, I’ve been surprised that you’ve even been able to walk straight, let alone make it through your shift each day!”

“Joel!!” Keelin scolded - a flush of embarrassment quickly spreading across her cheeks. “That was meant to be private information between just you and me!”

Laughing heartily, Joel gestured briefly with his hand to the various off-duty doctors and nurses stood drinking around them – all of whom had already returned back to their own conversations.

“Oh I wouldn’t worry about them – unless its gossip relating to the recent Schmikael/Roseman scandal to come out of the Orthopedics department, they just aren’t interested!”

She huffed at the nurse’s words whilst at the same time noting that her friend was indeed correct – none of their surrounding colleagues appeared to have had their attention drawn by Joel’s little outburst about her and Freya’s sex life for more than a few seconds.

“I don’t blame you though”, Joel continued, “I wouldn’t be drinking either if I had a horny…… oooh boy!”

“Excuse me?” Keelin asked Joel, as she drew her gaze away from the bartender that had been in the process of handing her payment card back to her.
The wolf noted that her friend was now distractedly looking towards the opposite end of the packed tavern – his eyes seemingly tracking the movement of something, or someone.

“Erm….” the nurse started, as his widened eyes returned back to rest on Keelins own “….didn’t you say that you’d spoken with my flat mate about why it wouldn’t be in her best interest to join us tonight?!”

Keelin’s brow furrowed as she took in Joel’s words.

“Yes….?”

“Well”, her friend said with a grimace, “I’d suggest possibly writing it on her hand in permanent ink next time – since she and Holly have just walked in and are ordering drinks from the bar as we speak!”

Jerkling her head around in the direction that Joel had been looking, Keelin had to make a conscious effort to contain the growl that threatened to rumble out of her throat as she quickly located Alanna leaning over the bar and talking into the ear of a staff member.

“God dammit!” she swore loudly.

“Hey, maybe it’s not such a bad thing that she’s turned up!” Joel quickly offered when he noted Keelin’s knuckles turning white with strain as the wolf’s grip on her glass of water intensified. “I mean, this could be an icebreaker for everyone…..”

Joel’s words were quickly lost to the loud music and chatter in the busy bar as Keelin determinedly began to weave her way in and out of the drinkers stood between her and the younger wolf. Drawing in a deep breath, she attempted to calm her rising temper with each purposely placed step – the rational side of her brain repeatedly trying to remind the wolf that she was in a busy public bar, surrounded by her work colleagues.

Ignoring the cheerful wave and smile of greeting that Holly threw her way as she passed the junior doctor, Keelin reached out and grabbed onto the cotton sleeve of Alanna’s plaid shirt – tugging sharply on the fabric to gain the attention of the preoccupied wolf.

“Hey, Keelin!” Alanna hollered out over the din of the bar’s music - a smile widening her lips as she saw the older wolf. “Can I get you a dri….”

“Follow me, now!” Keelin didn’t bother to wait for her demand to register with Alanna, as she grabbed onto the girl’s elbow and firmly tugged her away from the bar. The younger wolf stumbled briefly as she quickly tried to fall into pace with Keelin, mouthing the words “just a minute!” towards her date as she was forcibly marched passed the confused looking doctor.

Coming to a stop in a corner of the bar furthest from where most of her work colleagues were congregated, Keelin abruptly turned and let go of Alanna’s arm.

“What the hell, Alanna?!” she growled, now making no attempt to mask the animalistic rumbling that laced her voice. “We had an agreement that you would stay away from the Quarter tonight!”

The younger wolf rolled her eyes at Keelin at the same time as rubbing at spot where the brunette’s hand had been holding onto her.

“Jeez, calm down!” the younger wolf groaned. “I’m only here for a quick drink with Holly, so that
she can introduce me to her work friends. I’ll be gone within an hour!”

“For heaven’s sakes”, Keelin shouted at the girl - her face beginning to flush with anger, “what part of “it’s not safe for you in the Quarter” are you not grasping, Alanna?! Have you any idea of the risk that you are exposing yourself to by being here?!”

“I know, I know”, the younger wolf sighed, as she folded her arms across her chest, “the Mikaleson’s hate my guts and will string me up from the nearest lamp post if they see me!”

“Exactly!!” Keelin said - threads of exasperation leaking into her tone.

“I just can’t see the problem with me being here tonight, though!” the wolf countered. “None of the Mikaelson’s are here, and you told Joel earlier this week that Freya isn’t able to make it. So I really don’t see why you are so concerned!”

“I swear to god Alanna, if you don’t get your infuriating butt out of the Quarter right now…..urgh…”

Keelin felt her words trail off as a sudden intense wave of dizziness washed over her. Burning heat rapidly flushed throughout her body - its onslaught in perfect synchronisation with the blurring of her vision that turned everyone around her into wooly, indistinct outlines. The whole world quickly tilted on its axis as the wolf felt her balance begin to falter – only for it to be swiftly righted once more as two strong arms hastily wrapped themselves around her body.

“Whoa there!” Alanna’s said – the younger wolf’s voice barely filtering through the cotton wool which had seemingly appeared out of no-where in Keelin’s ears. “Are you ok?!”

A surge of nausea began to crawl its way up her throat as she momentarily allowed herself to lean heavily into Alanna’s sturdy frame – not trusting her own legs to behave should she attempt pull away just yet.

What the hell had been wrong with that sandwich she had eaten earlier in the day!?

“I’m……I’m fine”, she managed to stutter out a few seconds later - finally feeling that she was no longer in danger of throwing up the contents of her stomach over the wolf still stood supporting her.

“Are you sure? You went very pale suddenly, Keelin! I thought that you were going to pass out.” Alanna said, with no small amount of concern lacing her words.

“I think I’m fine,” she replied, her voice gradually gaining in strength as the dizziness that had been swarming inside of her head like several hundred angry bees, finally began to recede.

Testing her legs with the full weight of her body, Keelin sluggishly moved to pull back from the younger wolf - only to be halted by the sudden tensing of Alanna’s arms around her waist.

“Honestly I’m ok! I can stand on my own……”

Her voice trailed off as she looked to Alanna’s face, and saw the panicked alarm that was now swimming in the younger wolf’s eyes as they fixed onto a point over Keelin’s shoulder.

Slowly twisting her head so as not to encourage another bout of dizziness, it only took a heartbeat for Keelin to locate the source Alanna’s distress.

Stood just inside of one of the venue’s many open doorways - with piercing emerald eyes fixed
lethally onto Alanna as hands balled into fists shook faintly at her side – was Freya.

*Oh Fuck!*

Keelin scrambled to extract herself from the support of Alanna’s arms, and swiftly turned her body around to fully face the direction in which the witch was stood. Blinking rapidly so as to try and re-center her vision, Keelin’s sight re-fixed upon her lover just in time to witness Freya’s icy stare slide with chilling intensity from the younger wolf, to meet Keelin’s own worried gaze.

Even at the distance from which she stood, the wolf could clearly make out the hurt and disbelief beginning to shimmer in her lover’s eyes, as the witch continued to gape at her.

“Freya…..”

The whispered name had barely escaped from Keelin’s mouth, before Freya’s brow swiftly knitted into a deep scowl as she spun around on the spot, and stormed out of Lafitte’s bar in a violent flurry of blonde hair and black leather.

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Chapter End Notes

....best buckle down for the next few chapters guys, as the ride is about to get rough!
Chapter Notes

Two chapters in a week - I don't know what got into me! Ha.

You'll notice this update is slightly shorter than my usual offering, but I wanted to give everyone a little taste of the drama to come - and I thought the emotional gravity of the scene also deserved its own chapter, without any other scenes taking away from it.

So, I hope you enjoy - and er, well, like I originally said, I hope you made the most of the fluff and romance in the previous chapters, because it's going to be pretty dark from here on in :-P

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8.

1.

“Freya stop…..please!”

The New Orleans skyline grumbled with the threat of a storm high above the street that the witch thundered along. Menacing black clouds sprawled their large puffy limbs across the sky, trapping the sickle shaped moon within their billowing boughs and snuffing out its ethereal glow. The clicking of Freya’s booted heels on the sidewalk swiftly became mute to her ears as a fierce wind picked up around her – its howling gusts crying, warning, and baying like a tortured wolf into the night as she determinedly pushed forward without pause.

“Let me explain!”

A crack of lightening shredded through the air as it fleetingly lit up the nights sky. Thunder nipped and chomped at the heels of the bright explosion, quickly chasing after its powerful predecessor as it’s echoing boom rolled across the whole of the city. The witch’s own power felt the air growing heavy and the increase in humidity long before the small hairs coating her skin finally did – their small strands all quickly standing to attention as if stimulated by some unseen hand caressing along her bare arms. The lightening had left an uncomfortable and oppressive atmosphere in its wake, with the sky now darkening as black as a coal miner’s handkerchief and closing in so low that the world around her appeared to shrink into a small, claustrophobic cage.

“Freya!”

Shapes of cars and silhouettes of people all began to melt into one large wall of suffocation - their persistent passing presence pressing down on her airway and making each drawn breath a labored strenuous effort of willpower and fuming resolve.

*She needed to get away. To be somewhere else. Anywhere else.*

Another violent fork of light ignited the whole street, highlighting the fuzzy outline of a figure as it
suddenly whirred by her in an inhuman blur of motion - only for it come to an abrupt stop mere inches away from her face. Pure instinct had her trying to side step around the newly appeared obstacle, her eyes not bothering to leave the floor to examine who or what was now hindering her progression down the street.

Freya soon realised however that she was no longer able to push forward, thanks to a steadfast hand now pressing solidly against her chest.

“Stop!”

The familiar voice barely pierced through the red haze of ire that had wrapped itself so tightly around her whole being, the witch found it almost impossible to focus on anything other than the fogs maddening whispers and tales of deception.

*She lied to you! She tricked you!*

The appendage pressed firmly over her heart remained rigid in its immovable will, despite her futile attempt to push past its obstruction.

“Freya, please, look at me!”

*She treated you like a fool! She’s known there whereabouts of the traitorous wolf all along!*

“Give me a chance to explain!”

*She was in the girl’s arms. Again! She was leaning in to....*

“Please….I love you!”

“NO!”

Freya barely recognised the sound of her own voice as the word of defiance boomed out of her throat in a landslide of gravel and emotion. As the final vibrations of the strident statement dissipated through her body, she felt the pressure being applied to her chest falter slightly in its conviction.

“No?” Keelin questioned, surprise leaking into her voice as she remained blocking the witch’s path. “What do you m.....”

“No!” Freya repeated with no less conviction, as the wolf’s face and body finally sharpened into focus. “You do not get to say that!”

“Say what? That I love you? Freya, I know you’re angry about Alanna, but.....”

“Move!”

The word was more command than it was request, as the witch strived to ignore the roaring demand of her power beseeching her to unleash its wrath onto the obstruction blocking her way.

“No! Not until you talk to me!” the voice belonging to her lover pleaded, its strength faltering on the last few words.

“Talk?! Freya scoffed loudly, finally locking her angry stare onto the deep brown eyes directly in front of her. “Sure Keelin, let’s talk. Do you want to start or shall I?!””
“Freya, I…..”

“Why don’t we begin with the fact that all you have done over the past year of our relationship is lie to me!?” Freya shouted, her face contorting with anger as the hurt and spite that were ravaging through her mind tumbled out in her voice. “Or how about the fact that, despite that damned wolf’s attempts to have my niece killed….to have me killed….you seem quite happy to throw yourself like a whore into her arms at the first opportunity!”

Keelin’s hand dropped away from Freya’s chest – the wolf taking a small step back as though enduring a physical blow from the witch’s words. A tiny part of the blonde’s psyche registered the shock and hurt that her choice of words had caused her lover – the fresh emotional wounds clearly evident in the glistening eyes currently staring back into her own. But her rational mind’s weak pleas for her to back-down and apologise, were all too easily drowned out by the hurricane of rage and indignation tearing its way through her head.

“It….it wasn’t like that!” Keelin responded quietly - her wounded voice barely audible above the howling of the wind that seemed to be picking up strength around them. “I’ve never thought of Alanna in that way!”

“Bullshit!” the witch spat out, just as another explosion of thunder rocked the heavens above them. “I saw you Keelin! On the night of the carnival….I saw you kiss her outside of the funhouse with my own eyes!”

Keelin’s gaze widened in response to her words, as the wolf’s mouth fell ajar slightly in apparent surprise.

Freya had not, to date, confessed to having seen the two women sharing a kiss on that fateful night twelve months ago. The hurt she had felt when witnessing the intimate moment between Keelin and Alanna had been easily swept aside and forgotten during the immediate aftermath of the Hollows attempt to have Hope killed – her attention and emotions instead being thrown into helping the woman that she loved recover from her ordeal at the hands of the Nievara pack’s leader.

But now, having just witnessed the two wolves once again locked in an embrace – all the pain and anger associated with seeing that kiss came flooding back, like a tidal wave of betrayal decimating its way through her heart.

“Freya, you saw Alanna attempt to kiss me - not the other way round!” Keelin retorted, as she quickly shook her head from side to side and stretched forward a hand in an attempt to grab the witch’s own. “And I stopped her as soon as I realised what she was trying to do. Honey, I swear to you that I have never….would never…. cheat on you like that!”

A mirthless laugh forced its way out of Freya’s throat, as she took a step back out of the wolf’s reach.

“You mean in the same way that you swore to me just this very morning that you’d not keep anymore secrets from me!” the witch hissed, feeling tendrils of static charge dance along the skin of her hands as the magic deep within her continued to stir restlessly. “How do you expect me to believe anything that you say Keelin, when you outright lied to my face after I laid my heart bear to you. When you’ve lied for months about your whereabouts each morning!”

Several beats of silence passed between them as the weight of Freya’s words pressed down heavily upon the wolf stood facing her. Small pellets of water began to spit down onto the sidewalk around them, as the rumbling of the storm above slowly intensified in volume.
“How long?”

“How long what?” Keelin asked tentatively, though the witch could tell that she knew exactly what the question was referring to.

“How long have you known about that Neivera filth’s whereabouts?”

“Freya,” Keelin started, her brow knitting together in an apparent plea for understanding. “Alanna’s not a bad person at heart, she just got caught up….”

“How long Keelin??” the witch persisted angrily, as the streetlight immediately to the side of them suddenly began flickering on and off in rapid succession.

A low cracking noise of splintering wood resounded out from the doorway of the shop next to the arguing couple, as Freya began to feel small tendrils of her power arcing out in an uncontrollable, outraged manner.

Glancing momentarily towards the malfunctioning lamppost and straining shopfront, Keelin once again made to take a step closer to the witch as she spoke.

“Freya I know that you are angry, but please, you need to try and calm down. We can talk about this back home if you’d prefer, where….”

“How…..long…..” the witch forced out between gritted teeth – small beads of sweat beginning to form along her hairline from the effort of trying to control her seething magic.

Sighing heavily in frustration, Keelin’s eyes fell to the ground between them.

“Since the day that Tobias was sworn in as the new Regent.”

“What?!” Freya bellowed incredulously – her word punctuated by another large crack of sizzling lightening high above the street. “That was only a week after the funhouse ordeal! You….you’ve been hiding her for that long??”

“I….” the wolf’s words trailed off, as she appeared to suddenly be at a loss for words to defend her actions.

“For Christ’s sakes Keelin, you were still in bed recovering from your own injuries at their hands! What the hell possessed you to contact the treacherous mutt?!”

“She contacted me!”, the wolf retorted, her voice raising slightly in frustration despite her continued inability to meet Freya’s stare. “Ok! She contacted me! I didn’t originally want anything to do with her, and I thought that I didn’t care whether she lived or died.”

The wolf raised her eyes again to meet her lover’s.

“But she was all alone, Freya! She’d lost her whole family – her whole pack! What was I meant to do?!”

“Oh I don’t know – how about let her rot in hell!” Freya shouted, as she flung her arms up in the air in exasperation. “She was never your friend Keelin. Not then, and not now! Surely you must see that?! Everything she said and did was all just lies and deceit to use you to get close to my family. To try and tear apart our relationship! To have you murder Hope! How can you even stand to be anywhere near her?!”
“Because she was blackmailed into doing all of those things!” Keelin barked back in immediate
response – her own temper apparently beginning to fray. “The Hollow had her family held captive!
Family that the spirit eventually then slaughtered! Christ Freya, you of all people should
understand the desperate length’s that someone will go to, to save the lives of their own kin! Think
of how we originally met, and the literal torture that you subjected me to in a bid to save your
brothers!”

Freya’s mouth gaped open slightly in reaction to the wolf’s words, matching the expression that
immediately appeared on Keelin’s own face as she quickly raised her hand up to her mouth in
apparent shock at her own brutal honesty.

Thunder rattled the heavens once more, as rain now began to cascade down upon the Quarter in
earnest. In a matter of seconds, both Freya and Keelin found themselves soaked to the core – the
two stood staring at each other in intense silence, as the various locals and party-goers that had
been mulling along Bourbon St all hurried off in different directions to find shelter out of the
storm. Gusting wind carried the volley of falling water in an ever changing series of patterns – wild
vortices whipping at the fabric of the pair’s soaked clothes one minute, then diagonal sheets lashing
against the couple’s drenched frames the next.

Panting lightly, Keelin’s gaze finally broke away from Freya’s as her head briefly turned up to the
heavens in response to the downpour now battering them.

“Ok….this is getting us no-where!” the wolf sighed, her eyes wearily meeting the witch’s once
more. “Let’s go home, dry ourselves off, and talk about this in a calmer…."

“No!”

“No? Freya we’re getting soaked, and the storm only seems to be worsening. I can hardly even hear
you over the wind let alone…."

“I said no Keelin!” Freya forced out, as her hardened glare remained upon the wolf. “I can’t just
head back to the apartment and pretend that everything is ok between us when it’s not!”

The wolf facing her blinked rapidly as rain water poured down her face.

“Ok, well…. we can head to Rousseau’s if you’d prefer, and talk some more over a bourbon
and…."

“No Keelin….I meant that I don’t think I can be around you right now.”

The witch felt a small pang of guilt flash through her chest as she watched the wolf’s face drop in
response to her words, but it was not strong enough to dissolve the thick film of betrayal that had
wrapped itself so fiercely around her heart.

Her lover’s whole demeanour looked to deflate as obvious tears began to shimmer in her eyes,
despite the dribs of rain already dripping into the wolf’s vision.

“Freya…. I’m sorry, ok”, Keelin said, her voice thick with emotion as she took a tentative step
towards the witch. “I’m so sorry that I didn’t tell you about Alanna still being in the city, and of
our continued friendship. I know it was wrong of me to keep it from you and I wish I had handled
it differently. But honey I love you…I love you more than anything in this life, and I know that
there is nothing that we can’t work through together!”

Freya could feel her own eyes begin to sting as they filled with emotion. Blinking the tears out of
her vision, the witch lowered her gaze to the ground as the anger that had been aggravating her
magic so intensively, slowly began to be replaced by a cold, bleak numbness.

“Please honey, come home with me”, Keelin pleaded through the rain, as she took another step forward and grabbed for Freya’s wet hand with her own. “I know that you believe in us and that we can…”

“I don’t know what I believe in right now Keelin”, Freya whispered, her voice barely audible over the wild racket of the braying storm as she slowly pulled her hand away from the wolf’s without meeting her gaze. “You’ve shattered the trust between us, and I….I don’t know if I can be with someone who I can’t trust, or who is going to constantly keep things from me.”

A small whine that was more canine than it was human, left the wolf’s throat - so quiet that Freya would have missed it save for the slice of pain that carved brutally through her heart in reaction to the noise.

“Are you saying that you want to end things between us?” Keelin asked, her voice breaking as more tears mixed with the rain drops tracing their way down her cheeks.

Freya closed her eyes and sighed - a torrent of emotions running wild through her core as the possibility of being apart from Keelin rioted through her head - someone whom only hours ago she had been prepared to spend the rest of her life with.

_Someone whom she had given her whole heart to._

“No....I….I don’t know. I just need some time alone to process….”

The witch’s words were cut off by a sudden juddering of vibrations filling the street around them – the noise more mechanical in nature than that of the wind and thunder that had already been assaulting their ears.

Forcing her glassy eyes away from Keelin, Freya quickly scanned around her as the rumbling tremors of her power begin to intensify once more - but unlike the pure rage that had been kindling its fire only moments ago, it was now a sense of impending danger that fanned its flames.

Barely a heartbeat passed before the witch witnessed three large roadster motorcycles come into view as they turned onto Bourbon St - their chrome engines bellowing out fumes of gasoline as the leather-clad riders aimed the rides towards where the witch and wolf stood. Large volumes of water sprayed out on either side of the bikes as their thick wheels sliced through the enormous silver puddles created by the torrent of rain that continued to pour down from the raging tempest in the sky.

Freya could feel Keelin tensing her muscles beside her, as a chorus of cat-calls began to sound out the over roar of the engines - the helmetless bearded men bringing their rides to a skidding halt on the road next to where the couple stood.

“Look what we have here boys - two lovely wenches all alone and getting their dainty selves drenched in the storm!” the biker closest to Freya sneered, as his gaze roamed over them both.

“Bet I could get them wetter!” another of the men snickered, flicking a thick film-covered tongue over his cracked lips as his beady eyes ran up and down the length of Keelin’s body.

Freya instinctively took a step to the right, placing herself between Keelin and the newcomers as she pulled forth a large wisp of power and let it flow down into her hands – ready to be unleashed upon the three leather clad men if required.
Behind her, the witch could hear a low warning growl begin to rumble in the wolf’s throat – the deep gruff vibrations just audible above the racket of the storm that continued to rage around them.

“Aww will you look at that, brothers”, mocked the biker who had been the first to speak, “the blonde one is being all protective over her companion.”

“There’s definitely no need to form a line ladies”, called out the second man as he kicked out the stand of his ride with a black booted foot, “there’s enough of us to go round!”

Freya flicked her eyes over to the third biker who had yet to say a word – a flash of recognition sparking in her eyes as she studied his pock-marked face.

*He was the leering biker that had been staring at her in Rousseau’s over a week ago!* 

Her eyes remained locked on him as the other two riders continued to make crude remarks whilst they moved to dismount their bikes. The silent grinning man held her gaze – his shadowy black eyes appearing to dance with anticipation as his sneer widened in response to Freya’s attention. Thick dark curly hair hung limp to his shoulders and was plastered to the man’s head - every strand still managing to look as though it was coated in grease despite the rain water that slid off them. His tight wiry beard was extensive – it’s mass completely swallowing the lower half of the bikers face as its length stretched all the way down to the lapels of his soaked leather jacket.

Out of the corner of her eye, Freya noticed the light of the nearest street lamp reflect off something metallic down by the man’s hip. A quick flick of her gaze confirmed that a thick metal link-chain hung loose from the biker’s belt – its true length undeterminable as it was concealed by the bulge of the man’s overhanging gut. Large flecks of a murky brown substance marred areas the otherwise perfect sheen of the chain’s surface – a substance, Freya quickly realised, that looked suspiciously like days old, dried blood.

The witch felt one of Keelin’s hands come to rest on her lower back, in a gesture suggesting that the wolf was trying to encourage her to take a step back - away from the menacing looking trio.

“So is this her then, brother?” the nearest man questioned, looking towards the silent biker as he jerked his head in Freya’s direction.

The corner of the burly man’s mouth slowly twisted up, warping his appearance into that of a poisonous snake as he gave just one single nod in answer to his companion’s question.

“Freya… we should leave!” Keelin said in a low, hushed voice – only just loud enough for the witch to hear above the evening’s howling wind.

Ordinarily, she would have scoffed at the idea of walking away from putting a few foul-mouthed, manner-less morons in their place. Especially ones who dressed and acted like they were the rejects from a poorly casted production of Grease – The Middle Aged Years. But there was something about the trio that not only had alarm bells ringing loudly in Freya’s head, but also seemed to have her magic recoiling away from their presence – the tendrils of power that she had readied trying to push their way back into the internal well that lived deep within her.

*Something about felt them wrong. Un-worldly.*

With one final glare towards the silent biker, Freya took a step backwards - nudging Keelin for her to start walking in the direction of the Mikaelson family Compound.

Both women turned to move at the same time, but only managed to take a few steps on the rain saturated sidewalk before coming to an abrupt halt.
A few metres ahead of the couple, slowly walking out of an alley that lead off the main street, were several more leather clad men – each looking more like they belonged in an out-of-town, run-down biker joint, than they did in the cultural heart of the French Quarter.

Freya quickly estimated that there were at least ten of the new-comers as they finished filing out of the side-street and came to a stop just a few steps away from her and Keelin. The witch’s mind quickly went into overdrive as she assessed which of the men looked to be the weakest, and which may cause her more of an issue, should they not fall to the first wave of magic that she was now readying to unleash within a heartbeats notice.

“Vampires…..” Keelin growled beside her - the wolf’s nostrils flaring as her stance subtlety altered into an attack ready posture.

Freya didn’t have to see the wolf’s face to know that her eyes had bled into their animal form.

“Just stick to the mission, Fiske!”

Realising the last voice echoing behind her was the one she had yet to hear, Freya twisted her head round just in time to see the largest of the bikers finish his warning command.

So they are here for a specific reason then, Freya quickly thought to herself, as the dark eyed man sneered at her once more when he realised her attention was back upon him.

Turning her gaze back to the vampires in front of them, the witch twisted her hands so that her palms were facing the undead hoard, and pulled her top lip back in a warning snarl.

“Move – or I will move you myself! Painfully!”

A fierce growl emitted from the brunette beside her - loud enough for all to hear this time as Keelin added her own warning to the one that Freya had issued.

“Aren’t they just the cutest!”

“Cute enough to bite, I’d say!”

Bearing her teeth, Freya swiftly raised her upturned hands towards the centre of the faction of vampires and released a pulse of power directly at them – the air around immediately round her fingers shimmering momentarily.

The sound of the roaring wind and rain whipping along the street continued to be the only obvious disturbance in the atmosphere, as all of the vampires remained rooted on the spot – untouched and unscathed.

Eyes flicking down briefly to her outstretched hands, Freya pulled forth a much larger ball of power and threw it with all her might towards the smirking men in front of her, as a small holler of
exertion escaped from her mouth at the same time.

Nothing!

Nothing but the steady falling stream of water that bounced dramatically off everyone’s bodies, and the street floor below.

As several of the vampires in front of them began to smirk and laugh at her failed efforts, Freya saw Keelin turn her head in her direction momentarily – surprise and confusion swirling in the wolf’s feral amber eyes.

“Well will you look at that”, came the voice of one of the biker’s from behind them. “The witch foolishly thought that her feeble mortal magic would come to her aid!”

“It’s a shame really”, contributed the other vocal rider. “I would have liked to have seen what kind of fight a Mikaelson Witch could have put up against us!”

Cruel laughter filled the street once more as the vampire closest to the duo took a step towards them both – his eyes bleeding into crimson hues as his snarling smirk revealed sharp teeth that glinted in the street light’s illumination.

Freya suddenly stumbled back - a direct result of Keelin swiftly stepping in front of her and using an outstretched hand to push her out of the on-coming man’s path. A loud growl left her lover’s throat as the wolf stretched open a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth and lunged for the throat of the now snarling vampire - it too baring fangs ready for the kill.

The witch quickly found her balance and made to spring forward, urging her power to ready its own battle cry and help Keelin fend off the large undead brute as the two crashed together in a deadly embrace of piercing canines and vicious roars. She had barely made it an inch forward however, before a large, muscular arm wrapped crushingly around her waist - instantly halting her advance and forcing all the air out of her lungs as a second arm snaked around her throat.

“That fight is not for you princess”, a deep, harsh voice rasped into her ear, as the arm around her neck tightened in an attempt to prevent her from struggling. “Unlike the wolf, I’m afraid we need you alive!”

Panic flooded through her whole body as Freya watched the vampire group ahead begin to close ranks around Keelin - the wolf disappearing from her view just before the biker holding onto her quickly spun them both around to face his companions and their motorcycles.

A loud whining noise sounded out behind her – its origin clearly canine in nature – turning the witch’s blood to fire as she begged and pleaded with her magic to respond to her command. Feeling nothing but her power continuing in its attempt to recoil away from her reach, Freya attempted to kick out at her assailant as he pushed her towards the awaiting two-wheeled machines.

“Let me go….. or I will make all of you wish…. you had never been born!” she grinded out between clenched teeth, finding it hard to speak against muscles flexing tightly around her throat.

Snickering laughter filled her ear, as the unnaturally strong biker continued to push her towards his companions.

“Fiske”, the large, snake like man still sat on his bike hollered, “do shut her up! Damned if I want to listen to the bitch whine the whole way back!”

Before she even had time to fully register the implication of the biker’s words, Freya felt the body
pressed up against hers quickly shift – the grip around her waist slackening slightly as thick fingers
gripped painfully onto her hip.

“Goodnight sweetheart!”

The hot, dank breath had barely finished stroking her ear before the world around her suddenly
blurred in motion – the bikers and their rides smudging into one as her entire body was thrown to
the side. Pain erupted in a flash of blinding white light as her head and shoulder instantly collided
against a brick wall – the witch barely registering her legs give way as her body slumped quickly
down onto the water covered sidewalk below.

Darkness rapidly encroached from all sides, as the pain in her head promptly flared into an
unbearable crescendo of agony. Rain drops rapidly hit her face with force as Freya dazedly
managed to make out the bulkier of the three bikers unhook the large metal chain from around his
waist, and throw it over to the man stood beside her crumpled frame.

Thunder boomed ominously high up in the sky, as the world finally closed itself in on the witch -
everything turning to black just as a cold bite of metal pressed harshly up against the skin of her
neck.

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Chapter End Notes

.....whats a Sunday without a wee cliffhanger to keep you entertained ;-) Sorweeeeeee, hehe.

Let me know your thoughts guys, and what you think is likley to happen.
Chapter 9.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 9 up for grabs!

Hope ya'll enjoy :-) 

Chapter 9.

1.

“Vampires….”

Keelin growled the confirmation to the witch stood beside her, as the familiar scent of the undead filled her nostrils – causing the wolf within her to bristle and snarl with the anticipation of a fight. Her vision quickly sharpened, bringing the gang of brutes in front into pin-point focus as she felt the familiar sting of her gums splitting to allow the descent of long, pointed canine teeth.

Focusing on the ever present barrier of the Kyanite ring, Keelin rallied the beast that was now pacing back and forth within her, like a predator waiting to be unleashed upon its prey. Letting a small amount of the primal power filter through the magical barricade and into her muscles, the wolf tensed and shifted position – fingers locking into rigid talons as her legs bent slightly, ready to leap at the first vampire who dared to take a step closer to them.

At her side, the wolf could sense that Freya was gathering her own power, in preparation to unleash it on the undead hoard. The magical energy flowing through the witch’s body – being quickly pulled up from deep within her core, and then pushed down into her hands and fingers – called out to the beast living within Keelin much in the same way that it had on the night of the harvest moon. Had they been in a less threatening situation, she would have taken the time to marvel at the strange new sensation and ponder what meaning its re-occurrence had.

Now however, was certainly not the time.

“Well isn’t this a pleasant surprise….the witch’s companion is a wolf! This night just keeps on giving! I call claims on her!”

“Just stick to the mission, Fiske!”

A part of Keelin’s mind heard the bearded biker’s behind them exchange their surprise at her being a wolf, but her predator’s instincts quickly dismissed their inane drivel as unimportant – the brunettes focus instead remaining on the immediate threat directly ahead, and the witch stood next to her.

“Move – or I will move you myself! Painfully!”

Her inner wolf eagerly pushed up against the Kyanite barrier in response to their mate’s warning - the gums of its maw stretching back to reveal row after row of saliva covered fangs as it let out a loud threatening growl. One that Keelin readily allowed to travel up her throat, out into the storm kissed night.
Even with the laughter that immediately followed Freya’s threatening words, the wolf’s nose still picked up on the subtle smell of fear that began permeating the air around her with its distinct scent markers of panic.

Despite their crude bravado and lewd remarks, a few of the vampires were clearly anxious about their own chances of survival.

*Good!*

“Look boys, the witch and her pet dog want to rough-house a little!”

“Aren’t they just the cutest!”

“Cute enough to bite, I’d say!”

Keelin felt Freya quickly shifted beside her - the witch throwing up her hands towards the vampires in an upturned manner, as though to release a wave of magic upon them. Rain continued to pour down upon the group of men however, with no obvious affect from Freya’s actions that Keelin could ascertain.

“Urrrrgh!”

A strained cry of exertion left her lover’s lips, as Freya once again motioned with her outstretched hands towards the brutes blocking their path. Keelin could smell the beads of sweat beginning to line the witch’s forehead as a result of the tension that she was exerting upon herself – but still there was no change in the atmosphere around them, or any harm brought upon the smug vampires.

Turning her head in Freya’s direction, Keelin’s eye’s quickly focused in on the outstretched delicate hands that she knew so intimately. A frown creased her brow as she suddenly realised the curious sensation which had been causing her inner wolf to bray and writhe in response to the surge in Freya’s power - had disappeared. The witch’s eyes flickered briefly with an emotion that Keelin was so unused to seeing on her lover, she almost misplaced its meaning. But it was their none-the-less. A brief dilation of the witches pupils - just for a fleeting second, before the emerald green eyes hardened once again.

Panic.

_Something was wrong with Freya's magic._

“Well will you look at that - the witch foolishly thought that her feeble mortal magic would come to her aid!”

“It’s a shame really, I would have liked to have seen what kind of fight a Mikaelson Witch could have put up against us!”

Her attention snapped back to the vampires just in time to see the thug nearest to Freya take a step forward – its features having now morphed to reveal the full cruelty and malice of its wicked nature. Quickly pushing all human rational to the back of her mind, Keelin allowed her wolf instincts to completely take control of her muscles and actions, as she stretched the Kyanite veil as thin as it would go whilst she remained in her two-legged form. Leaping forward, a fierce growl ripped forth from the snarling beast within as she pushed Freya out of the vampire’s range at the same time as aiming her canines towards the creature’s exposed throat.

It reacted quickly, attempting to bring its own fangs down upon her as she collided fiercely into its personal space. But its efforts were in vein as the wolf’s sharp teeth made contact with rough wet
skin a fraction of a second before the vampire’s own mouth could place true. Wasting no time she violently clamped down her jaw, feeling the oddly satisfying sensation of flesh tearing and bone shattering in her mouth as the coppery taste of hot blood rapidly flooded her senses. The creature lurched backwards with a cry of pain, causing a large chunk of its own flesh to tear away in the wolf’s mouth as the vampire scrambled haphazardly towards its fellow un-dead companions.

The injured cries of agony and indignation were however soon swallowed up by the remaining hoard of thugs, as they quickly began to close ranks around her.

Within seconds the wolf found herself completely surrounded by the vampires – their mocking sneers and laughter having given way to the snarling mouths and blood red eyes of vicious assassins ready to claim their kill.

Even with the scientific, human part of her mind now heavily subdued, the wolf could easily work out that she was easily outnumbered and out-muscled by the creatures now encircling her.

The odds were not in her favour.

Just need to stall them long enough to allow Freya to escape. Just stay alive long enough so that she can regroup with her family!

The thought had barely materialised in her mind before the wolf’s peripheral vision detected one of the vampires on her left incline its head fractionally closer towards her – it’s teeth bared for the kill. Allowing instincts to dictate her reaction, the wolf twisted her body in the direction of the creature at the same time as bending her legs, causing the vampires bite to fall wide of its mark as she quickly thrust a fisted hand upwards into the muscle of its gut. The thug’s actions had clearly been meant as a distraction however, as before the wolf’s fist had even finished connecting with the vampire’s torso, she felt a hard body press firmly up against her back – a powerful hand entangling itself in her hair and viciously pulling her head to one side to expose her throat. She had no time to react before sharp fangs brutally sunk into her mocha skin, sending a shockwave of pain shattering out into her neck as the beast within her let out a loud distressed whimper of discomfort.

No!!….Freya needs more time….

Adrenaline surged through her muscles once more as the initial shock of the bite quickly wore off. Throwing her arms up behind her head, the wolf grabbed hold of the vampire’s shoulders whilst its teeth remained lodged deep within her own flesh, and pulled the creature forward as she quickly dropped into a crouch. Her assailant cumbersomely went flying over her – the creatures fangs ripping painfully from her throat as it careered through the air and collided with several of its companions, sending them sprawling backwards on the rain drenched sidewalk.

The reeling vampires created a momentary gap in their ranks as they quickly strived to re-find their footing – allowing the wolf a brief glimpse of the street ahead as she crouched on the ground with a hand firmly pressed up against the bleeding wound on her neck.

The world around her suddenly slowed to a stop – its colour bleeding into a bleak mosaic of grey as her heart painfully stuttered in her chest. The wolf’s eyes bled back into the chestnut hues of her human sight, as they fixed upon the crumpled form of Freya’s body lying limp and motionless in a large puddle of water on the paved floor.

“No…..”

Tears began to blur her vision as she watched one of the bearded bikers crouch down next to her lover’s body and begin to wrap what looked like a thick metal chain around the witch’s neck and
hands – binding them together with a large, rusty padlock.

*Alive…..surely he wouldn’t be restraining her if she wasn’t still alive…..*

A small spark of hope ignited an explosion that wrecked through her whole body like a burning wildfire – shattering what remained of the magical Kyanite veil in an instant.

The wolf’s eyes blistered amber once more, as the liberated beast within her let out a ear piercing howl into the night – its haunted battle cry dramatically punctuated by the sickening sound of human bones rapidly beginning to break….…..and shift.

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2.

“So, are you going to tell me what all that was about?!”

The music in Lafitte’s seemed to be steadily increasing in volume, as the bar’s available floorspace rapidly disappeared thanks to the heavens opening up outside driving many of the people who had been passing on the street into the building to seek shelter.

Alanna watched on absentmindedly as a couple of the taverns staff members rushed out from behind the bar to close most of the venue’s open windows and doorways, which had shutters clattering back and forth thanks to the storms blustering wind.

The momentary chaos of the scene seemed to mimic the state of the wolf’s own mind, as she stood struggling to rein in the feelings of panic and anxiety that were currently chilling her veins.

“Alanna….are you even listening to me?”

Feeling a hand brush against her arm, Alanna was abruptly dragged out of the unnerved daze that she had fallen into. Looking up from the untouched tumbler of bourbon in her hands, the wolf saw that her date - Holly - was looking at her with what seemed to be a warring mixture of concern and annoyance.

*Clearly the junior doctor had just asked her something….sh*t, what had she asked?!!*

“Sorry, can you repeat that? I err…..got lost in my thoughts for a minute there”

Holly’s brow knitted together as she quickly placed her hands on her hips and pursed her lips.

“For a minute?! Alanna, I’ve been trying to get your attention ever since Dr Malraux ran out of the bar – a good ten minutes ago!”

The wolf’s eye’s widened as she realised just how long she had been running wild in the confines of her own head.

*Ah crap! Not the best way to treat your date….smooth Alanna, real smooth!*

“I’m sorry Holly, I was just a little distracted that’s all.”
“I’d say!” the junior doctor exclaimed, her stance no less irritated. “Do you and Dr Malraux know each other or something? She seemed pretty pissed at you!”

_Ha – now there was a question she had no idea how to answer!_

Shrugging her shoulders, Alanna took a large gulp of whiskey before letting out a small sigh.

“Kinda, yeah. We met in the Clinic actually – she saved my life last year, when I got rushed in after an attack.”

Holly’s eyebrows raised in interest as she remained silent - indicating with a quick motion of her hand for Alanna to continue, when the wolf did not at first elaborate further on her tale.

_Should she be rushing after Keelin to make sure the wolf is ok, instead of standing here making chit chat? What if Freya had completely lost her shit with her friend, in the same way that the witch had with her, a year ago? Fuck - what if Keelin was being choked by magic right now and….._

“Alanna! You’re doing it again!” Holly shouted over the juke-box’s music at the same time as lightly shoving the wolf in the shoulder with a hand. “Do you even want to be here with me anymore!?"

_Shit - keep it together Alanna. Focus!_

Quickly draining the remains of her drink, she put the empty tumbler down on the tall bar-table that they were stood next to, before taking both of Holly’s hands into her own.

“Of course I do! I’m sorry Holly, I’m being a terrible date”, the wolf confessed as she shook her head lightly. “I do want to be here with you, ok. Promise! The confrontation with Kee….Dr Malraux has just thrown me a little, that’s all. I really wasn’t expecting…..”

“Her fiancé to turn up!?"

Both Alanna and Holly turned their heads abruptly in response to the male voice that had shouted over the music beside them. There – stood with a tropical looking cocktail in one hand, and a glass of red wine in the other – was her flatmate Joel.

_Looking every bit as peeved as Holly! Great….just great!_

“Hey Holly”, the male nurse said in greeting to Alanna’s date - his features softening a little as he looked towards the junior doctor. “Would you mind if I borrowed my roomie here, just for a minute?"'

Throwing her hands up in the air in clear exasperation, Holly let out an incredulous huff, before pointedly grabbing her drink and coat off the table.

“Sure, why not?! You might as well have her attention - since I clearly don’t!”

“Holly, I…..”

The junior doctor quickly cut Alanna off with a raised hand, and a pointed look that unmistakably said that her date wasn’t interested in hearing it.

“Should anyone actually care, I’ll be over by the bar - chatting with my actual friends!”

Both Alanna and Joel stood in shamed silence as they watched the woman stalk away from them without a further word.
“It is entirely possible,” Alanna offered, after a few seconds of watching her date be greeted warmly by other staff members from St Theadora’s Clinic, “that I am the worst girlfriend ever!”

“I think you might be being down-graded to ex-girlfriend after tonight if the look on Holly’s face was anything to go by!” Joel remarked as his gaze also lingered on the junior doctor, before turning his attention back to the wolf. “So….spill it! What the hell just happened with Keelin?!”

Another large sigh left Alanna’s mouth as she proceeded to rub her temples.

“I think I may have messed up!” she eventually offered, her head bowed low - unable to meet her flatmate’s stare.

“No shit, girl!” Joel scoffed, as he folded his arms across his chest. “That, I could have told you the moment you walked in the bar! You were asking for trouble turning up when you had been warned not to…. and you know it!”

The wolf grimaced in acknowledgement of the truth in her friend’s statement.

“But what I actually meant,” Joel continued, “is what happened to Keelin? It looked like you had to catch her to stop her from tumbling over! Was she ok?”

A frown formed on Alanna’s face as she remembered the paleness of the older wolf’s face as she had looked to be about to faint.

_In the flustered aftermath of seeing the Mikaelson witch, she’d completely forgotten about her friend’s weird turn._

“Actually, I don’t know”, she admitted to her flatmate. “I didn’t really get chance to ask her what was wrong. She was fine one minute – shouting and threatening me with all kinds of horrors. But then she suddenly paled – like really paled – and lost her balance. I thought she was going to keel right over!”

“Huh!” the male nurse said, taking a sip of the cocktail in one of his hands. “She’d been complaining earlier of having an off stomach, but brushed it off as having eaten something dodgy. Lucky you caught her hey….otherwise Freya would have entered to find her girl sprawled on the floor! You never know, maybe it will work in your favour that she saw you helping her fiancé….”

“Oh fuck!”

Joel was cut off mid-sentence by Alanna’s cursing, as the wolf dropped her head into her hands with a groan.

“What?” her flatmate questioned, as she continued to grumble incoherently to herself.

_Freya had walked in after she had already caught Keelin and been holding onto her! From the witch’s perspective over by the bar’s entrance, it probably looked like they were……ah shit…. shit!_”

“Alanna?”

“This is bad!” the wolf finally uttered, from between her fingers. “Really bad!”

Finally dropping her hands away from her face, Alanna quickly grabbed the untouched glass of wine out of Joel’s hand and took several large gulps of its contents.

“Ok…since I know for a fact that you hate red wine,” Joel remarked, his eye brows raised, “either
Ruby Rose just died, or there’s something you’re not telling me about this weird love/hate triangle that you, Keelin, and Freya appear to have going on!”

She huffed a laugh at her flatmate’s choice of words, despite feeling like she wanted the ground to open up and swallow her whole.

“Honestly Joel, you wouldn’t believe me if I……”

Alanna’s words suddenly cut off – the wolf tilting her head slightly to the side as she detected a faint but distinct noise with her enhanced hearing, despite the loud chatter and music filling the bar. She felt the world around her quickly shift into acute focus, as the hairs all along her arms sprung up to attention.

*A wolf’s howl…. Somewhere close, and clearly distressed*

“What the hell……”

Alanna flicked her heightened gaze over to Joel in response to his outburst – the male nurse now stood staring at her with wide eyes and looking as though he had just seen a ghost.

“Your….your eyes?!”

*Great…..just great!*

“Joel, I’ve got to go - but I’ll explain everything later, ok. Promise!”

Not waiting for an answer from her spooked flatmate, the wolf began pushing her way through the lively crowd that now filled the whole of Lafitte’s tavern – her head bowed low so as not to draw attention to herself. Pulling open the venue’s main doors, Alanna quickly bounded out into the stormy night – instantly becoming soaked by heavy rain that looked to have made Bourbon St rival the Bayou for the sheer volume of water currently saturating its every nook and cranny.

Stopping only briefly to scent the ionised air, the wolf took off down the road at full speed – her only thought being the hope that she wasn’t too late.

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3.

The sidewalk just outside of the French Quarter’s Borbon Novelties store, had become a macabre montage of torn limbs, bloody flesh, and the mangled remains of what looked to have once been a federal issue, blue mailbox – its enveloped contents now sodden and strewn across the waterlogged street. Four presumably dead bodies lay scattered on the sidewalk, large chunks of their anatomy missing as the legs and waist of a fifth protruded out of the smashed windscreen of a car parked in front of the store. Thick blood could be seen oozing from under the lifeless forms, its deep crimson tone quickly being diluted as it extended out from the bodies, by the torrent of rain water falling from the clouds above.

The stench of vampire blood filled Alanna’s nose, coating her nostrils like a thick film of oil as she
swiftly located the apparent cause of the grisly carnage – a fierce confrontation still raging on in the middle of the road. Turning to quickly assess the situation, the wolf could see three large men all dressed in similar dark clothing, out of breath and crouched in attack stances whilst circling a scuffle happening in front of them. The vampires were blocking her full view of the brawl, but it did not take long before the high pitched yelp of a wolf emitted out from somewhere in the centre of the struggle – telling Alanna the only thing she needed to know.

The wolf was outnumbered, and injured

A fierce growl ripped from her throat, as she drew back her lips into a savage snarl – rage and adrenaline instantly coursing through her body in abundance. Pushing off the side-walk, Alanna ran towards the brawling group and leapt onto the back of the nearest vampire. Her canine teeth had ripped into the man’s neck before the brute even had chance to react to her appearance – blood instantly spurting out of his torn carotid-artery and spraying over Alanna’s face.

Within a heartbeat she was back on the ground, eyes quickly scanning back and forth over the chaotic mass of fur and black leather tousling beside her in an attempt to find a way to help the wolf. Crushing hands suddenly clasped around her forearms from behind, pinning them painfully to her side as another assailant stalked towards her with his fangs bared for the kill. Letting out a deep threatening growl, Alanna pushed all of her wolf’s strength into her biceps and twisted her arms at the same time as her torso, coming face to face with the vampire who had been holding her as she broke from his hold. Within the blink of an eye, the wolf had wiped the snarl of the brute’s face with a swift knee to his crotch – placing her hands on either side of his head and viciously snapping his neck in two, before he’d even managed to shout out in pain.

As the unconscious vampire dropped to the floor, Alanna twisted her head and bared her spittle laced canines at the man who had been readying to bite her only seconds ago. She saw hesitation flicker in the thug’s eyes as he came to a stop just a foot away from her – that, and something else too.

Surprise.

He was clearly surprised that someone of her stature – far smaller and daintier than he and his muscular companions were – had been so easily able to best two of his companions without so much as breaking a sweat.

Evidently the creep had underestimated the ability of a wolf who had spent her whole pack-life training to kill and fight vampires.

Crouching into a pounce ready position, the wolf tensed her calf muscles ready to leap towards the vampire and use his momentary indecision against him – only for a blur of dark brown fur to suddenly collide with the un-dead brute from their right. A large maw of teeth that were already dripping in blood clamped down over the whole of the vampires neck as both beast and man crashed down to the ground. Alanna could hear the tearing of muscle and sinew as the large wolf crunched down its jaw – fully decapitating the creature within seconds and causing its head to lull off to the side on the waterlogged street with a particularly unpleasant squelching sound.

Panting heavily, the thick furred wolf turned away from the slain vampire and locked its feral yellow eyes onto Alanna. A low rumbling growl began to emit from the animals throat – one that the younger wolf easily deciphered as being more of a begrudged acknowledgement of her presence, than that of a threat or warning. She let out a huffed response as she roamed her eyes over the wolf – quickly trying to assess the numerous cuts and puncture wounds that littered its body to see if any of them looked fatal. Despite the onslaught of rain from above, blood still managed to stain most of the brown fur covering the beast - but a hurried scenting of the air told the younger
wolf that a great deal of it belonged to the vampires who’s remains now littered the street around
them. Only a small fraction of it contained Keelin’s scent markers – and most of that was gathered
around the two particularly nasty looking puncture wounds that she could see marring the large
wolf’s neck.

Alanna made to take a step towards the animal, but halted when both she and the brown beast
abruptly whipped their heads around in reaction to the sound of large boots rapidly slapping down
into puddles of water close by. It appeared that the vampire that Alanna had rendered unconscious
was now awake once more and making to retreat back to whatever hole he had climbed out from -
rather than face the two of them now that he was alone. Not pausing to question her instinctual
reaction, Alanna quickly set off in pursuit of the un-dead creature – only faintly hearing the sound
of cracking bones over the high winds that lashed against her body as she ran.

She caught up to the fleeing vampire with ease – her petite frame far more adapt for speed than that
of the hulking thug who was clad in cumbersome leather biker-pants and thick soled boots. With a
deft leap off the ground Alanna was upon him - momentum bringing both of them crashing down
onto the slippery ground in a chaotic whir of limbs and teeth. Twisting her body as they came to a
sliding stop, Alanna was in the process of bracing two hands on the thug’s chest to push herself up
when a quick flash of metal gleaming in the street lamps illumination preceded an explosion of
white hot pain across the whole of her right side. Despite her best efforts, a loud whine escaped her
mouth - quickly followed by an angry growl as she immediately delivered an elbow to the face of
the snarling vampire beneath her as he moved to push her off.

As the creatures head smacked back against the hard concrete ground, the wolf opened her mouth
wide and swiftly lunged for his exposed throat.

“Alanna, DON’T!!”

The metallic taste of copper flooded her mouth as she savagely ripped the flesh of the vampires
throat away – a wet sound of blood gurgling in the dying man’s mouth being joined by footsteps
splashing on the road, as someone rapidly approached from behind.

Before she’d even had chance to spit the torn flesh out of her mouth, Alanna felt herself being
roughly shoved aside – her body sliding across the slick floor as her eyes locked onto Keelin’s
human form whilst the brunette quickly bent over the felled vampires body.

“Where is she?! Where have they taken her?!” the older wolf shouted hoarsely at the choking
brute, her face wild and desperate as she clutched onto the wet lapels of his blood covered jacket.

Nothing but the sound of gagging and pain came from the vampire, as Alanna watched dark veins
in what remained of his neck and face begin to protrude out from rapidly greying flesh.

“No, no, no….Fuck!!” Keelin cried out, as the vampire’s eyes fell closed for the last time in its
existence.

Letting the thugs now lifeless body drop back down to the ground, the older wolf whirled to face
Alanna – her expression a hot mess of anger and anguish as rain water assaulted her skin.

“Dammit Alanna, I needed one of them alive!! They took Freya!!”

Still lay in the position that she had come to a stop in, the younger wolf winced - both in realisation
at the mistake she had made in ending the last vampires life so quickly, and in response to the
searing pain that was slowly increasing in intensity as it continued to wreck its way along the side
of her ribcage.
“I’m… I’m sorry, I didn’t think that…..”

“That’s just it though isn’t it Alanna,” Keelin retorted, her voice full of fury as her dark brown eyes continued to bore into the younger wolf, “you never bloody think! You just show up and do whatever the hell you want, regardless of the consequences that your actions may have for those around you!”

The older wolf shook her head in irritation as she pushed herself up off the ground. Sweeping her gaze up and down the street, Keelin scented the air before letting out heavy sigh full of emotion.

“And now I have no idea where they have taken her thanks to this damned storm washing away their scents! FUCK!”

“Keelin, I’m so, so sorry – I swear wouldn’t have killed him if I’d have known that you needed him ali….urgh…”

Her words trailed off as another flash of agony tore through her – so strong it knocked the air from her lungs as she tried to apologise to her friend once more. Looking down to her wound, Alanna saw the hilt of a knife protruding out of her side - presumably attached to a blade that was embedded deep in her flesh.

“You’re wounded!”

She heard the slight softening of Keelin’s tone as the older wolf’s eye shifted to her side as she noticed the knife - just as the world around her started to feel a little fuzzy around the edges.

“Oh this little thing”, she quipped - trying to make light of the situation despite the blazing pain now beginning to claw at her whole body. “It’s just a small….flesh….wound…..”

The feeling of her head hitting the ground barely registered on Alanna’s radar, as the elbow that she had been propping herself up on gave way. Rain drops splashed down upon her face as she blinked rapidly in an attempt to clear the dark patches that had begun to encroach on her vision – the pools of blackness swirling and throbbing as though living entities all of their own.

Keelin’s face was then above hers, the wolf’s eyes full of concern as they seemed to search for something in Alanna’s own.

“You know…..”, she drawled, her voice weak and faint against the haunting whistles of the storm’s wind bellowing around them.

“Alanna, I need you to stay awake ok! Stay focused on my face.”

“….I’ve always thought you have…..”

“Just concentrate on your breathing! In and out….In and out!”

“….the prettiest of eyes…..”

“Alanna! Come on dammit, stay with me!”

The darkness swallowed her vision whole - its cold tendrils wrapping her in an alluring embrace as the wolf’s fading thoughts remained on the last thing that she had been looking at.

…..so beautiful……

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Chapter 10.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 10 up for grabs!

I have a confession - this chapter was actually meant to have a few more scenes added on to it. But it has been taking me so long to write it all, that I have decided to split the original content into two separate chapters, meaning that I could get something posted for you all sooner rather than later.

So here are the first few scenes to read, whilst I continue writing the remaining ones for the next chapter posting.

Happy reading all, and as always, let me know your thoughts. I'm especially keen to know how folks think this situation will play out, as I continue writing the remaining scenes of the chapter :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 10.

1.

The great expanse of the Mississippi River had taken on a morose grey and murky appearance, as its choppy waters mimicked the tempestuous mood of the sky high above it. The violent thunder and lightening that had accompanied the storm from the night before had finally ceased waging war on the New Orleans skyline in the early hours of the morning, leaving just the torrential rain to continue falling in their wake.

And fall it did.

Relentlessly, without a single break nor pause for breath since it had begun lashing down upon the city nearly twenty-four hours earlier. The local news station, WDSU, had been the first to send their weather team out onto the streets as first light had broken. They had proceeded to report on how the torrents of water running along every square inch of the city had already caused major disruption for both local and tourist early-risers alike, who had been trying to travel to and from the Big Easy. By the time midday had come around, most of the businesses in the city's various quarters and wards had decided to pack up shop for the day – boarding up entranceways and windows as they prepared to ride out the worst of the storm.

The wolf had not actually seen any of the weather reports that had been streaming almost constantly on the local tv stations over the course of the day - but she did not need some well-spoken reporter in dressed in a bright yellow raincoat and dramatically stood outside in the rain, to tell her how long the storm was going to continue its miserable campaign over their city.

For even if the rain was to suddenly gave way to brilliant blue skies and sunshine in the next few minutes, Keelin knew that her own world would remain unsettled and turbulent until the moment
her lover was back home, and safe in her arms.

“Arrrrrgh!”

A loud, tortured scream echoed out and bounced off the tall walls of the dock-side warehouse, inside of which the wolf currently stood as she stared out at the rain that continued to cry into the Mississippi river.

It was certainly not the first shriek of pain that had she had heard bellow out that day, as the passing hours taunted and mocked their utter lack of progression. And it most probably would not be the last, given how full of rage and fury the Mikaelson hybrid currently was.

Glancing back over her shoulder, Keelin’s tired eyes quickly assessed the numerous injuries now littering the body of the vampire slumped on his knees in front of Klaus. Blood was pouring freely from the creature’s mouth onto the cold concrete floor, no doubt the result of yet another blow having been delivered to its face by the maddened hybrid. She now also counted three wooden steaks protruding out of the man’s body at various places – one more than the last time she had glanced back to check on the progression of the violent interrogation.

One of the vampire’s eyes had swollen shut, the tissue around it rapidly turning deep shades of red and purple, whilst it’s other roamed wildly back and forth, reeling from the pain it was being made to suffer.

Not that she cared in the slightest about the thug’s anguish. Her curiosity simply lay in figuring out how much more time they should afford on this particular piece of vermin, before they gave up and moved on to try and find the next.

Klaus had already allowed this specific undead biker to live longer than the other two leather clad vampires they had already tried to extract information out of. The first - back on the rain-slick cobbles of a narrow alleyway behind Rousseau’s - had not even managed to finish snarling out his disgust for the Mikaelson family, before Klaus had viciously beheaded the fellow with one powerful swipe of his hand. As the remainder of its body had slumped down to the ground, Keelin had been about to point out to the hybrid that they would never learn the whereabouts of Freya’s location if he didn’t even ask their captives a single question – but one quick flash of Klaus’s fiery amber eyes in her direction had been enough to quash that remark before it had made it out of her mouth.

The second of the muscular brutes that they then managed to track down a few hours later - harassing a young woman as she had been trying to board up the front of her shop in the Ninth Ward - had not fared much longer than his dead comrade. After Klaus had thrown the creature - who had been twice the size of the hybrid, both in height and weight – through the wood covered window of the store, he had proceeded to punch his hand through the vampire’s chest and grip harshly onto it’s rapidly beating heart. The unwashed lout had been screaming out his second attempt at denying having any knowledge of Freya’s whereabouts, or of the bearded men who had taken her, when Klaus had suddenly roared angrily and ripped his hand out of the thug’s chest – a bloody heart still clasped tightly in the hybrids fingers.

Freya had told her many a time in the past of the vast strength that hybrid held within him, usually when she had been describing how brutal one of Klaus’s tantrums could turn if someone or something threatened his family. But the wolf had not truly appreciated just how inhumane the hybrid could be with that strength, until witnessing it in all of its frightening glory several times this day already.

Until she had had to tell him that his oldest sister had been violently abducted by an unknown
Turning her head back towards the warehouse’s open doorway, Keelin’s ears barely registered the continued screams of the tortured vampire as her troubled mind wandered back to the events that had transpired on the evening before – after her fight with the hoard of leather jacketed un-dead vermin had come to an end.

It had taken longer than she had expected for an Ambulance to arrive at the bloody scene on Bourbon St, after she had placed the emergency call - and her already battle-weary arms and shoulders had been close to the point of seizing-up completely by the time one of the paramedics had thankfully taken over administering CPR to Alanna. The young wolf’s heart had stopped beating only a few seconds after she had lost consciousness, and Keelin had still not been able to get it working again of its own accord by the time the medics had arrived.

The emergency response team had quickly managed to intubate the wolf and start defibrillation within a few seconds of attending the scene - and by the time they had loaded her into the back of their truck and set off for St Theadora’s Emergency Clinic with the vehicles blues-and-twos blaring into the stormy night, Alanna’s heart had been stuttering along at an unsteady rhythm of its own accord.

Keelin had easily been able to read the surprise on the emergency crews faces when she had declined the offer to ride with them to the clinic. The two paramedics knew her professionally from their interactions at St Theadora’s, and had assumed that the doctor would want to continue working on the young woman’s case when they arrived at the E.R. Sadly however, Keelin had other pressing matters that had needed attending to without any further delay - and although it had pained her to watch the wolf be driven away with her life hanging in the balance, the primal urge to find and rescue her mate was absolute.

It had taken just one look at her rain soaked, wounded body – blood stained clothes ripped beyond repair and hanging off her in tatters thanks to an unplanned shift between forms – for Rebekah and Hayley to quickly abandon their tumblers of bourbon and be at the wolf’s side in a supernatural blur of speed before she had even finished making it through the Compound’s doorway. The wolf had barely managed to assure the two women that she was not in need of their healing aid before Klaus and Elijah had joined them – the duo having sped into the Courtyard as soon as they had smelt the blood that coated her body.

Had her visit to the Mikaelson home been under any other circumstances, Keelin might have been nervous – worried even – by her first encounter with Klaus since she and his sister had gotten engaged.

Especially given the gravity of the news that she had been there to deliver.

But the harrowing fear of never seeing her fiancé alive again – of what might be being done to her love with the passing of every wasted second – far outweighed any self-preservation that the wolf had for her own well-being.

Rebekah had sped off up to her bedroom to acquire fresh, un-ripped clothes for the wolf, as Keelin hurriedly conveyed the details of her and Freya’s confrontation with the three strange Biker’s and their vampire thug’s.

In hind-sight - as she stood still listening to the continued tortured screams of the vampire being brutalised in the dock-side warehouse - Keelin realised that she should have probably foreseen the male hybrid’s reaction to the news that his sister had been attacked and abducted whilst in the wolf’s company.
Expected it even.

But as she had struggled against the cold stone of one of the courtyards many pillars, the air being choked out of her lungs by the Mikaelson hybrid as his snarling face and blazing eyes had been just mere millimetres from her own – Keelin had still managed to be shocked by the sheer ferociousness of Klaus’s sudden attack upon her.

It had taken the combined strength and efforts of both Hayley and Elijah to prise the hybrids hands from around her throat, and then the added presence of Rebekah – who had reappeared in the courtyard upon hearing the wolf’s choking noises – to calm Freya’s enraged brother long enough for Keelin to plead her innocence in the witch’s current predicament.

It of course had not helped matters that she had reeked not only of the various slain vampires whose blood had covered her torn clothes, but also of the distinct scent markers that had belonged to the Neivera wolf pack – resulting in the wolf having to defend her actions of concealing Alanna’s whereabouts over the past 12 months for the second time that evening.

Keelin had silently thanked every god under the sun for Hayley’s presence in the Mikaelson compound as she had finished explaining Alanna’s involvement in the evening’s events – for had the Wolf Queen not been there to swiftly block Klaus’s lunge to rip her heart out of her chest, the wolf doubted that she would now be stood here, in one of the numerous warehouses that lined the Port of New Orleans dockside, reminiscing about the confrontation.

*If Klaus had mistrusted her before last night’s events, it was nothing compared to how much he probably loathed her involvement in his oldest sister’s life now!*

After much animated cursing, and vehement threats to wipe both her and Alanna’s existences from the face of the earth, Klaus’s rage was finally subdued by his siblings long enough for them all to begin formulating a plan of action to try and locate their missing sister, and bring those responsible for her abduction to a bloody end.

None of them had known where the new biker-gang in town originated from, or where their current location could be found, so it was agreed that they would split up and each take on a different task and section of the city, in an attempt to cover more ground in a shorter period of time. Given how easily the three bearded bikers had overpowered Freya, and Keelin’s suspicion that her lover’s magic was presently malfunctioning, all of them had agreed unanimously on one thing – the chances of finding the eldest Mikaelson alive and unharmed were rapidly growing bleaker with each passing minute.

Given her extensive history of getting her own way when it came to the King of New Orleans, Rebekah had agreed to head over to Marcel’s apartment to try and recruit both him and his vampire troop to their plight. Elijah had readily volunteered to go and speak with the Witch Regent, Tobias, to see if he could persuade the city’s Wiccan faction to help locate one of their own through the use of magic. They had all known that it was a long shot - given the turbulent and often violent history between the Mikaelson family and the witches of New Orleans. But Elijah had been investing a lot of time trying to build a positive relationship with the Regent since the fellow had been sworn in after Vincent’s unfortunate death the year before - and he was confident that he could at least persuade the man into helping them locate their missing sister, if not the coven themselves.

Hayley had declared that she would rouse Hope from her evening’s slumber, and take the youngster to stay with Mary in the Bayou for a while – freeing the Wolf Queen up to commence her own search for any signs of the biker-gang in the marshlands on the outskirts of the city. Vampires were not particularly known to use the Bayou as a place to lie-low, given the fact that the land was known to harbour many a wolf looking to remain secluded from the hustle and bustle of
city life. But as the leather-clad gang appeared to not originally be from New Orleans, there was a chance that they did not know of the Bayou’s greater than normal wolf population.

Or simply did not care, if they did.

When Keelin had finally voiced her own plans to begin a search of the French Quarter and its surrounding Wards to see if she could pick up on the scent of the strange new vampire’s and find one of them alive to question, Klaus had immediately declared that he would be joining her, as he had no plans on letting the Malraux wolf out of his sights until his sister had been found alive and well.

He had of course then added that should Freya not be found still breathing, or should a single hair on his sister’s head have been harmed by the creatures that had taken her - he would end Keelin’s life in a way so painful, it would make the god of death herself wither in horror.

And the wolf did not for one second doubt that he would make good on that promise too!

Both Hayley and Rebekah had loudly protested the idea at the time, stating that Klaus would be better off conducting his own search in the city for any sign of Freya’s whereabouts, so that more ground could be covered in less time. But the immortal hybrid had been resolute in his decision to not let Keelin out of his sight, and could not be dissuaded from that notion no matter how hard his family had tried.

In the end it had been Elijah who had pointed out that Klaus’s insistence on keeping a close eye on Keelin whilst they searched to find clues to Freya’s whereabouts, was at least, a damn sight better than the hybrids earlier urge to splay the wolf’s innards around the courtyard for all to see.

None of them - including herself - had been able to disagree with that logic!

And so here they now were – nearly twenty-four hours and several dead vampires later, and still no closer to knowing of Freya’s whereabouts, or any details about the bearded bikers who had taken her.

Keelin let out a weary sigh into the cold air of the warehouse – rolling her head from side-to-side to try and ease some of the tension currently residing in her neck.

Her whole body had begun aching from head-to-toe earlier that morning, and despite the accelerated healing advantage that came hand-in-hand with being a wolf, her muscles had continued seizing up and complaining as the miserable rainy day had progressed.

She supposed - in what was no doubt some ironic twist of the universe – that her body’s refusal to heal as quickly as usual was her inner-wolf’s way of mimicking the despair and worry that her human mind was currently wallowing in.

Please…..please be ok baby, she thought to herself - a single tear escaping from her tired eyes as they remained fixed on the waters of the vast river outside of the warehouse.

“Well that was another waste of bloody time!” Klaus’s voice suddenly boomed out angrily beside her – abruptly pulling the wolf out of her thoughts. “The pathetic fool’s inane rambling contained nothing but pleas for mercy, and claims to have no knowledge of these bearded bikers that you profess took my sister!”

Ignoring the hybrids poorly veiled mistrust, Keelin turned her head to look back at where the tortured vampire lay motionless on the warehouse floor – its head now resting several meters away from the body that it had been once been attached to.
Turning back to face the warehouse doorway once more, Keelin began rubbing her aching temples in a circular motion with her hands.

“They’re lying! They have to be! All of the vampires that we have interrogated today have had the same weird scent as those who attacked us last night. They’re part of the same group….I know it!”

“And are you quite sure it is them who are distorting the truth – and not yourself?!”

Anger flashed yellow in her eyes as Keelin rounded on the hybrid – her lips pulled back into a snarl as she growled out her irritation towards him.

“I’m getting pretty damn sick of your sly accusations Klaus!”

The hybrid’s own eyes quickly flashed with blazing amber as he took a quick step closer to Keelin – breeching her personal space.

“Oh I make no attempt to hide my true meaning, wolf!” Klaus snarled in her face. “You have caused nothing but trouble for my family since you waltzed into Freya’s life. First my daughter was injured by your own claws, and now my sister is missing - quite possibly dead! And if I find out that you have had anything to do with that, then so help me I will…..”

“What Klaus?” she shouted - frustration and worry finally shattering what little hold on her temper she had left. “You’ll what? Kill me? String me up by my insides and behead me like you do any other being that doesn’t bow down to your will?! Believe me Klaus, if we do not find Freya alive I will happily let you end my life in whatever horrific and painful way you see fit. Because you’re right!”

Tears began to run down her face, as she continued to shout in the volatile hybrid’s face.

“Christ, do you think that I don’t agree with you!? You’re right! I am to blame! I am to blame for Hope’s injuries a year ago. If I had been a better person….a stronger wolf….then I might have been able to resist Hatch’s control. Been able to stop his attempt on your daughter’s life! And if I had been a better fighter, or a more savage foe, then yes – Freya would no doubt be up in her Bell Tower right now obsessing over some god damned spell, instead of….of……”

Her words tailed off as thick emotion coated her throat.

Dropping her tear-filled eyes away from the hybrid in front of her, Keelin let out a heart felt sob into the space between them.

“I love her Klaus…..I love her with every fibre of my being! And if she is hurt, or……or worse because I failed to stop those bastards from taking her, then I….I…..”

A hand was suddenly on her shoulder – not roughly or in a threatening manner as she might have expected from the hybrid, given the outburst and spittle laced words that she had just subjected him to. But gentle, and lenient in its presence instead.

Comforting, almost.

“We will find her Keelin!”

The wolf looked up to meet the eyes of her fiancé’s brother – their blue hues now softer in appearance, despite the anger and worry that she could sense still lurking behind them.

“Freya is a Mikaelson - and we Mikaelson’s are formidable forces of nature to be reckoned with! If
I know my sister, there won’t be much left of the foolish tyrants that took her by the time she’s finished with them. It can be said that her temper has been known to rival that of my own!”

“Ha!” the wolf huffed, wiping at the tears that remained on her face with a sleeve of the grey top that Rebekah had lent her. “Now that I know from first-hand experience!”

A rare genuine smile broke across the hybrid’s face, as his hand dropped away from her shoulder.

“Come – let us continue in our efforts. There are still a few hours left before sundown when we agreed to meet with the others and discuss their findings.”

Nodding her head, Keelin silently thanked the hybrid for his unexpected words as she gathered her things to leave the warehouse.

*She only hoped that the rest of the Mikaelson family had been having better luck than they had.*

*************************************************

2.

**Darkness.**

Its omnipotent presence had become near stifling as it wrapped around the witch as she remained hanging in the position that she had awoken in. The suffocating black blanket of obscurity was so dominant over her surroundings, so absolute, that she was no longer able tell whether her eyes were open or closed as she waited on her captors revealing themselves.

Freya had long since lost track of how long it had been since she had regained consciousness in this place – wherever this place might actually be. The obsidian cocoon of darkness pressing against all of her senses had quickly robbed her mind of the ability to keep track of the minutes as they ticked by. Hours, days, weeks – she could have been bound in her current predicament for months for all she knew, as the world continued steadily on without her.

And bound she was.

The witch had lost track of the number of times that she had attempted to free her hands from the cold metal shackles that were wrapped tightly against the skin of her wrists. Skin that now felt so bloody and raw from struggling against the restraints that pinned her arms above her head, that Freya did not need any light or illumination to know that she was going to have some pretty severe scars should she eventually be freed.

If she was ever freed.

No-one had come to reveal themselves since she had first awoke with a pounding headache and throbbing shoulder – however long ago that had now been. No matter how hard she had struggled against the metallic bonds that wrapped around both her wrists and ankles, or how often she had shouted out into the bleak nothingness surrounding her, demanding to be let free and acknowledged - she had received no response or reaction. Not even a huffed breath or smug laugh had reached her ears, which might have suggested that her captors were present somewhere out in the darkness and taking some form of warped pleasure out of her escalating confusion.
Had she simply been left here to rot? To die a slow and painful death of dehydration and malnutrition in this opaque corner of hell?

Cold damp stone continued to press unforgivingly against Freya’s back, as she once again attempted to reach deep into her core and locate the magic that had lived within her for most of her life.

For as far back as she could remember, the raw Wiccan power that she had inherited from her mother at birth had hummed and vibrated through her veins – its presence the one constant in her otherwise turbulent and chaotic life.

As a youngster, barely old enough to stand on her own two feet, she had pictured it as some form of scary monster that lay hidden deep within her. One which would appear randomly when she least expected, to smash a plate, break a tool, or burn the soft straw that had lined her bed – much to her mother and fathers irritation.

During her teenage years spent at the mercy of her ruthless and unforgiving Aunt Dahlia, Freya had come to loath the power that constantly flowed through her body – seeing it as the reason for the involuntary separation from her family, and for the terrible atrocities that her Aunt would force her to commit.

The day that Dahlia had purged the witch’s unborn baby from her womb, Freya had wanted to end it all - her life, the magic that continued to grow in power and lived in her core – everything. Her aunt’s obsession with the “gift” that lived within her had destroyed everything good in her life. Everything she had worth living for.

It had not been until the witch had finally managed to break the curse forced upon her by Dahlia that she had learnt to see the true value of the power thrumming in her veins. The protection that it allowed her to provide her family with, and all of the ways that it enabled her to keep the numerous enemies of the Mikaelson clan at bay. Not to mention the aid it provided in helping Hope cope with her own magical gifts.

Freya knew that her magical power was the main contribution that she brought to the world – and the legacy that she would leave behind when the time came for her to pass onto the next life.

It made her who she was.

And now – here in this desolate place of bleak miserable nothingness – it appeared the one companion in life she had always been able to depend on, had finally abandoned her.

Nothing. There was just nothing there, as Freya once again desperately searched in the internal well that she had always envisioned her magic to dwell, deep within the very core of her being.

Only an empty dark void greeted the panicked probing tendrils of her mind – its utter hollowness seemingly joining forces with the misery of her physical surroundings to mock and taunt her.

What was she without her magic? What use would she be to her family - a clan of powerful immortals that had no shortage of humans and monsters alike out to cause them harm. How could she ever hope to protect them if she was nothing but a lowly mortal? If she was just Human?

How could she protect Hope?

Protect Keelin?
The witch felt her eyes begin to fill tears as the last memory that she had of the wolf suddenly assailed her mind.

Keelin had literally thrown herself into the midst of several hulking, blood crazed vampires in an attempt to protect her. To save the witch from having her throat torn apart by sharp fangs, after her own magic had recoiled away from the confrontation – scurrying like a coward to hide somewhere in the far depths of her soul.

The hoard of un-dead had closed ranks around the wolf so quickly that Freya hadn’t even had the chance to see Keelin had been successful in besting the first of the vampires she had lunged for.

And then that canine-like wail of pain that had pierced through Freya’s heart – had that just been the Keelin being caught off-guard by a physical blow, or had it been more serious in nature.

Had the wolf even survived the confrontation?! Was her lover now.....No! NO! She refused to think like that. Keelin was alive. She had to be!

The witch’s head fell forwards as despair crashed another wave of misery over her - the motion causing shards of pain to shoot down her arms as the raw flesh of her tattered wrists pulled against her restraints once more.

Tears began to liberate themselves from her eyes as Freya’s head hung low – not in reaction to the fresh wave of physical pain that continued to mercilessly knaw at her limbs, but instead in response to the memory of the last words she has spoken to the wolf.

They had been angry words.

Words born from a deep feeling of betrayal.

Keelin had lied to her! Kept secrets from her, and deceived her into believing that the last of the scheming Neivera wolves – Alanna – had long since run from the city of New Orleans. But that had been a lie – another lie that the wolf had told her. The two women had been meeting regularly, right under her nose and she had been completely blind to it. Unaware of their continued friendship – as Keelin as called it.

How could she have not known!?

The wolf had of course claimed that it was an innocent bond that continued to flourish between her and Alanna - nothing more than just one wolf trying to help out another. But Freya had seen them! She had seen them kiss at the carnival all those months ago, and then again in Lafitte’s embraced in each-other’s arms. Keelin had once more tried to claim her innocence, but the fact was she had seen them!

How was she meant to ever trust the wolf’s words again, when Keelin had already admitted to deceiving the witch about so much over the past year?!

If she made it out of this predicament, this...incarceration, would she be returning home to a relationship full of love and trust? Or one that was now far too damaged by betrayal to be able to be fixed?

Freya’s thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the stark sound of metal scraping against metal filling the black void ahead of her. The witch quickly raised her head, leaning it against the wall behind her as the beating of her heart quickly increased in pace.

Was that the sound of a key in a lock??
The warm, flickering glow of fire began to emerge several metres in front of her – its wavering orange and yellow tones causing the witch to scrunch her eyes shut in pain, despite the soft intensity of the light. Instinctively Freya tried to move a hand to rub away the stinging in her eyes – only for a loud cry of pain to burst out of her mouth as a result of the increased pressure of the metal restraint on her torn wrist.

“Listen to that brothers”, a deep gravelly voice said, its volume painful to her ears after having been in complete silence. “Our guest is already screaming into the night, and we haven’t even laid a hand on her yet!”

The rasped words were quickly followed by an echoing chorus of gruff laughter – indicating to the witch that she was now in the company of at least four to five others.

Before she’d even had chance to re-open her eyes, a large hand quickly gripped around her neck, its fingers instantly pressing down into her skin as a hot breath washed over her face.

“For someone who’s meant to be a Mikaelson, you are disappointingly weak, witch!”

Bile rapidly rose in the back of Freya’s throat as the rancid odour of stale beer and un-brushed teeth forced its way into her nostrils. Prising open her eyes, she blinked rapidly as the blurred outline of a bearded face completely filled her vision

“Back off Lief!” another deep voice called out, its tone swaddled in authority and seemingly less hostile in intent than the others she had heard so far. “Give her some space to breath!”

The face pressed close to hers let out a reeking huff of breath over her skin, before both it and the hand around her throat gradually pulled away.

Slowly her vision began to clear, bringing into focus seven large men all stood in a group before her – their various harsh faces highlighted by the flickering firelight being emitted from three large torch pyres that had now been brought to life along the walls of the room.

Risking a fleeting glance away from the men, Freya quickly tried to take in as much of her newly-illuminated surroundings as possible, to possibly aid in her escape should the opportunity arise.

The area appeared a lot smaller than the all-encompassing darkness had originally deceived her into believing. Rectangular in shape, its damp walls looked to have been constructed from large irregular shaped stones of varying colours – their smooth surfaces suggesting that they had originally been found near flowing water of some kind. The room’s uneven ceiling was particularly low – so much so that the head of the tallest Biker stood facing her was only an inch or so from touching it. Its appearance was mundanely unremarkable, save for the presence of a large metal hook situated where it would normally be expected to find an electric light fitting.

*It was probably a cellar*, the witch quickly thought to herself, *“given the dampness of its walls and low height…..but a cellar of what? A house? A public building? Judging by the condition and style of the stone around her, it had to be somewhere very old.*

Other than the looming bearded men and the torch pyres that were lighting the area, the only other thing that Freya could see situated the room was a rather non-descript looking wooden table, stood near the centre of the enclosed space. She could tell that there was something lay upon its surface, hidden under a dark red cloth - but the positioning of the bikers in front of the bench prevented her from getting a good idea of what it was.

“Freya Mikaelson!”
The witch’s attention snapped back to the man stood in the middle of the group – the one whose voice carried with it a definite air of command, and to whom the others seemed to gather around. Despite the soft, diffused light being provided by the nearby torch flames, Freya could still clearly make out the colour of the man’s bright blue eyes as they danced with fierce intensity.

“First born Viking child to Esther and Mikael Mikaelson, eldest sibling to five brothers and one sister, gifted with a particularly virulent strain of magic inherited from your mother’s side of the family, and, most importantly….blessed with the simplistically short life span of a mortal human.”

Freya raised an eyebrow towards the man.

“I’m not terribly sure you can call over a thousand years spent on this earth short”, she rasped out, the witch’s voice hoarse from her time spent shouting into the empty darkness that had been clawing at her skin until only minutes ago. “But you seem to have the rest of my number marked.”

“Oh yes”, the bearded man continued, “an unnatural lifespan being the result of a curse not too unlike the one bestowed upon my fellow Brethren and I. Only ours is far more of a gift, than it is burden.”

One of the bikers stood to the left of the blue eyed man let out a low throaty huff, as though in disagreement with his companion’s words. A quick flick of her eyes confirmed to Freya that it was the overweight bearded man whom she had seen both in Rousseau’s, and when Keelin and her had been attacked – his hulking presence still managing to be overpowering despite now being surrounded by several other well built, muscular men.

“Whilst you seem to know all about me, I am afraid I am at a loss as to who you are – other than soon to be dead!”

Her choice of words caused a few of the bikers to let out rough gravelly sneers, their amusement at her bravado clearly apparent on their harsh faces. But the blue eyed man at the centre of the group remained stalwart, his features none changing in the flickering light.

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“Of course, where are my manners!” he exclaimed, after the scoffs of the other bikers died down. “I am Halvar, only son born to Olaf and Astrid Olsen of the Volsung Clan, loyal subject and servant of the great Chieftain Magnus, and Chief Jarl of the Blood-bound Clan.”

Freya’s emerald eyes widened briefly at the information, before quickly returning to their normal appearance as she attempted to school her features.

“These,” the man gestured to the other bikers gathered, all of whom had their smirking eyes locked upon her, “are my brethren in arms, and fellow members of the Blood-Bound Clan.”

“Vikings….if what the bearded man was claiming was true, the seven of them were Viking born – just like she and her siblings! But if that was so, then it would make them…..

“And to answer the question I can see burning in those pretty eyes of yours, witch”, the group’s leader continued, “yes - we are of similar age, you and I!”

“Well, at least I don’t look a day over twenty five!” Freya quickly retorted, as her mind continued to reel. “You, on the other-hand, all look as though you’ve seen every damn one of those thousand years”

Whilst the witch’s remarked earned her another rumble of low laughter from the group, the glare boring into her from their now identified leader only seemed to grow in intensity as his mouth tightened into a thin line.
As a young child, she had listened to many tales from her father of his time spent fighting alongside the various clans of his homeland, in what would later become known as The Battle of Maldon. The clan leaders, or Jarls as they had been known back then, had been renowned amongst her people for their unforgiving ferociously on the battlefield, and brute force and accuracy when wielding their axes and swords. If these seven leather clad men were indeed who they claimed to be – then even Klaus would struggle best them in a match of pure strength alone.

“Enough with the idle chatter Halvar!” another of the bikers growled, drawing Freya’s attention as she recognised him from their scuffle on Bourbon St. “Tell the wench what we need of her and let this be done!”

Despite the deep gruffness of his voice, she noted that the man who had spoken looked younger than the rest of those gathered in front of her. Unlike his companions, his face was clean shaven and his hair actually looked to have seen the business end of a brush within the last century. High cheekbones gracefully defined his face, with piercing green eyes that were similar in colour to her own being his crowning feature.

Were it not for the malice intent shining clear in the emerald gaze locked upon her, Freya would have gone as far to call the man handsome – good looking even.

“Like what you see sweetheart?!” the beardless biker sneered when he realised the witch’s attention had lingered upon him. “Want me to show you exactly what….”

“That’s enough Fiske!”, Halvar boomed, his voice managing to fill the whole room despite its volume remaining steady.

“It doesn’t matter what you want from me,” she rasped, her eyes fixed back on the clan leader, “as you will all be dead soon enough!”

The hint of a smile tugged at the corners of the clan leader’s mouth, as he made to take a step closer to her.

“Brave words from a witch who’s lost her power, wouldn’t you say?” Halvar said, as his eyes appeared to bore into her very core to see the empty well where her magic usually dwelled.

Freya tried to reach down for her power once again - more from instinct than hope that she might actually find it there, suddenly reappeared after its ill-timed game of hide-and-seek. She knew it was missing. Could feel its absence with every breath drawn into her lungs - like a piece of her anatomy had been amputated, leaving only loss and mourning in its wake.

“Oh, I wouldn’t despair too much witch”, the blue-eyed biker continued, as if sensing her inner turmoil. “Your magic’s absence will not be permanent. I’m afraid it is just an unfortunate side-effect of being in the presence of my brethren and I…..or fortunate, depending on whose perspective you see it from!”

If the man noted the surprise in her eyes, he did not let on as he continued to speak.

“It will return once you are back amongst your loved ones. Of course…..whether you are returned to them alive or dead, will all depend on your willingness to aid us in our plight!”

“Aid you?!” she croaked, choking down on a cry of pain thanks to the restraints around her wrists continuing their assault on her flesh as she tried to wriggle free of their hold once more. “You think that chaining me to a wall after attacking and abducting me is somehow going to make me want to aid you!?”
A small amused huff left Halvar’s mouth, before he motioned to the witch’s wrists and ankles with a hand.

“I’ll admit that our methods may seem a little….crass, considering your mortal lack of power in our presence. But if there is one thing that we Jarl’s have observed over the many years of our existence, it is that the creature who is foolish enough to underestimate the Mikaelson family, is always the creature who ends up dying a horribly painful death at their hands.”

Anger twisted her mouth into a snarl, despite the intensifying throb radiating down her arms.

“And so, to the reason we are having this little chat.” Halvar continued, ignoring her scowling features. “There is something that we require from your family, to aid us in completing our purpose for being here in this damned city. And whilst I have no doubt that we could easily best your brothers and sister in straight up face-to-face combat, we have neither the time nor inclination to plan an effective assault upon your family. Which is where you come in, girl!”

Halvar began to pace back and forth in front of her as he spoke, some of his companions tracking the motion with their eyes, whilst others kept their attention fixed intently on the witch.

“You will obtain what we need from each of your siblings, and deliver it to us - without them discovering what you have taken, or learning of our existence. A simple task for someone of your….talents, shall we say. You would then, of course, be free to return to your pathetic mortal life, and go about your business as usual!”

Freya scoffed at the biker’s words as he finished speaking.

“You must be an even bigger fool than you look, to think that I won’t have my brother’s snap your necks the second I get out of here!”

“I told you this was a gods damned waste of our time, Halvar,” snarled the overbearing bearded biker to the clan leader’s side. “Let us tear her open and be done with this! I’m sure having their sister’s innards delivered to their front door will send a clear enough message to the Original scum!”

She watched on as Halvar appeared to struggle to reign in his anger at his companions words – the biker taking a few deep breaths before proceeding to speak once more.

*There was clear animosity between the brothers, as Halvar had described them all to be. Information she should possibly store for later – should she survive long enough to see a later that was.*

“Oh you will aid us, Freya Mikaelson - daughter of Mikael. For as my brother Colborn has so perfectly demonstrated, I do not need you to like me to have you do my will. Nor do I need you to agree with our plight.”

Halvar motioned with a hand towards another of the bearded men, whom Freya now watched as he handed a small vial to the clan leader before retaking his place amongst in the group of bikers.

“This,” Halvar stated, holding the small container between his thumb and forefinger as he displayed it to Freya, “is a sample of my blood. And thanks to the blood-bond bestowed upon the seven of us by our great Master, it grants me - and me alone - control over any human mortal who ingests it.”

The witch heard another grunt of discontent come from the biker whom Halvar had referred to as Colborn.
“Not complete control of course,” Halvar continued as he ignored the other Jarls displeasure. “Our Lords great power is unfortunately somewhat diluted when imposed upon a mortal through my own blood. But it still grants me enough domination over that human’s free-will to ensure that any command I give is carried out – to the letter.”

Freya felt a knot of fear begin to take hold within her gut, as the Jarl’s eyes continued to bore into her own.

*If what he was saying was true, then what would he have her do once they forced that blood down her throat? Hurt her siblings? Kill them? What the hell did these Vikings want from her family?!*

“Of course as with all powerful magic, the blood-bonds enforcement is not entirely straightforward. In what some might call an ironic twist of the gods, the bond will only take root within a mortal if they give themselves over willingly to its power. Readily sacrifice their free-will in the name of our great Lord’s glory and rule.”

A huff of laughter escaped from Freya’s lips despite the pain that continued to assault her arms and wrists.

“Well I’m afraid that you sorry excuses for Hell’s Angels have gone to a whole lot of trouble for nothing,” she grated out, her throat still raw from shouting, “if you for one minute think that I am going to drink any of your blood willingly! Now get me the hell out of these chains!”

Halvar smirked at her words as he took another step closer to the witch – his coming to a stop only a few inches from her own.

“Oh I didn’t expect that you would agree immediately, Freya Mikaelson,” he drawled out, as his eyes roamed languidly over her face. “In fact, my brother here would have been mighty disappointed if you had. Isn’t that so Ake!?”

The clan leader took a small step back from Freya, giving her just enough space to see another of the bikers make his way over to the wooden table in the middle of the room. Ake – she presumed – reached out for the dark red cloth draped across the bench’s surface, removing it with one swift tug of his hand to reveal an assortment of metal blades and tools that mirrored the dancing torch flames upon their polished surfaces. The muscular man slowly ran his hand over the gleaming instruments, his palm hovering just above the utensils as it glided along the table in no particular rush or hurry.

“So, you what….” she scoffed, her eyes moving back to Halvar’s smug face, “…plan to torture me until I willingly agree to drink that blood?! I hate to burst your greasy haired bubble, Jarl, but there is nothing that you could do to me that would make me betray my family. I would give my life to protect them, and there isn’t anything that you or your pathetic lapdogs could ever do to me that is worse than what I have already endured throughout my lifetime!”

The blue eyed biker smiled at her as he slowly drew in a deep breath of air.

“Oh I already know of your history witch”, the clan leader said quietly, his gaze pinning her own. “Everything that your Aunt subjected you to whilst you were at her behest! She was quite the expert of torment from what my sources lead me to believe. Her crowning glory no doubt being the day that she caused you to rid yourself of the whelp that grew in your womb!”

Anger instantly flared within her at the mention of the child that she had lost so many centuries ago, its fiery flames burning through her veins and fraying her temper. Pushing the pain that flared white hot in her wrists deep down into the recesses of her mind, Freya drove her body as far
forward off the wall as the restraints would allow, bringing her snarling face within millimetres of the clan leaders.

“You know nothing about my life, Jarl! Nothing! And when I eventually get free of these chains, I am going to take great pleasure in slowly ripping your rotting heart out of your chest!”

She had barely spat out her last word before Halvar’s hand flew up to grip painfully around her throat – the Jarl roughly slamming her head back into the stone wall against which she was chained. Stars burst in front of Freya’s eyes, as pain ripped through her skull at the same time she felt her airway being crushed shut by the man’s large hand. As she struggled for breath, her blurred vision cleared just enough for the witch to see that the eyes now boring intensely into her own swirled with deep colours of red and black – Halvar’s dazzling blue irises now completely gone.

“Everyone has a weakness, witch. Everyone!” he spat into her face, his teeth bared in anger as his voice took on a deeper, gravely tone. “And when we find yours….which rest assured we will….I’m going to take great pleasure in making you bow down on your knees before me in submission!”

Stinging tears filled her eyes as she continued to struggle for breath against the crushing weight of the Jarl’s grip - her arms and legs jerking painfully against the metal restraints that wrapped around them.

After what felt like an eternity, the overwhelming pressure on her throat finally disappeared – leaving Freya to cough and gasp for air as the clan leader stepped back into the midst his brethren. She watched through watering eyes as the group of bikers all turned and began making their way towards the small door at the far side of the room – all except for the one that had been referred to as Ake, who remained stood by the table of glinting instruments.

Halvar did not speak another word as he reached the door himself, simply inclining his head briefly towards the remaining Jarl before stepping over the threshold, and sealing them in.

Trying her best to gain control over the coughing fit caused by her assaulted throat, Freya locked her bloodshot eyes upon Ake as he appeared to finally decide on an instrument of pain – the Jarl picking it up off the red cloth with such delicacy one would have thought it were an intricate spiders web glistening with the dew of morning, rather than a solid steel blade that had been sharpened within an inch of its life.

Smiling wickedly at the knife, the muscular biker slowly made his way over to where she remained chained to the wall, his dark eyes dancing with malice and cruelty. Coming to a stop just centimetres away from her face, the Jarl raised the blade up and gently placed its cold metal tip against the skin of her cheek. His eyes followed the knifes path as he dragged it lightly along her face, too little pressure being applied for it yet to break the skin upon which it travelled.

“We are going to have some fun, you and I!” the man spoke in an almost whispered tone, as he continued the blades path upwards on the opposite side of her face. “The question is…. where should we begin?”

Freya refused to give the Jarl the satisfaction of an answer as she drew in a long deep breath, steeling her mind and body for the pain that she knew was about to be unleashed.

*She would endure this. For her family….she would endure!*
.....I should probably pre warn you now, the next chapter is not for the feint hearted. But I will of course include the appropriate trigger warnings at the time of posting!
A deep weariness began to settle over Hayley as she entered into the Mikaelson Compound’s courtyard from the deserted street outside. The hybrid sluggishly rolled her head and neck back and forth in an attempt to ease the tension that had built up in the muscles found there over the past forty-eight hours, as both stress and lack of sleep waged war on her body.

Candle light flickered throughout the large open space of the ground floor, it’s soft comforting glow usually serving as a welcome embrace whenever she returned from her daily activities out in the city of New Orleans. Yet on this evening, as the hybrid began to follow the sound of familiar voices up the grand staircase and down the hall into the family’s main living-room, the dancing naked flames only seemed to aggravate the tension currently grating along her nerves – the amber flickers of vigour and vitality a stark contrast to the mood of those currently residing in the home.

She finally came to a halt in the open entranceway to the furnished room, arms folding across her chest as she wearily leant against the doorframe to observe the scene unfolding within.

Sat cross-legged upon one of the Mikaelson’s many antique couches was her daughter Hope - the young girl’s eyes closed in concentration as the repetitive words of an enchantment quietly left her mouth. One of the young witch’s arms was outstretched, a small pendant clasped in her hand as it dangled freely over a large map of New Orleans that had been laid out over the coffee table in front of the couch. Hope’s other hand was clasped gently between both of Keelin’s who sat next to the
youngster on the cushioned furniture - the wolf’s gaze fixed intently upon the piece of jewellery as it swayed gently back and forth suspended in the air.

A quick flick of Hayley’s eyes across the room marked the presence of both Klaus and Elijah, as the brothers stood leaning against the mantelpiece of the room’s large fireplace – each keenly watching Hope as she performed her spell. Behind the duo, large majestic flames leaped and danced their way up into the chimney as thick logs of wood crackled and burnt, providing the living-room with a comfortably warm atmosphere despite the cold temperatures of the storm that continued to rage outside.

Klaus’s gaze momentarily strayed from his daughter, a brief inclination of his head acknowledging Hayley’s arrival before the hybrid’s attention returned to Hope. Elijah on the other-hand did not so much as glance in her direction, as the vampire stood twirling an expensive looking cufflink on his pressed shirt’s sleeve. Hayley noted the concern that sat heavily upon her ex-lovers face, creasing his brow as he continued to watch his niece as she scryed - no doubt for his eldest sister’s whereabouts.

Concern that had unlimitedly set up home on all of their features over the past couple of days, squatting alongside its common companions; worry and unease.

Two days.

It had now been two full days since Freya had been violently abducted by a motorbike riding trio whom had attacked both the witch and Keelin on Bourbon St, and they were all still no closer to discovering where the witch had been taken, or who was responsible for her kidnapping.

The family had all reconvened at the Compound on the previous evening to update each other on the progress that had been made during the first twenty-four hours of their search for Freya – or rather lack of progress as it had eventually turned out.

Klaus and Keelin had apprehended and questioned a total of five vampires over the course of the day – each seemingly belonging to the same gang of bikers that Keelin had marked the scent of during in her confrontation the night before, and each just as frustratingly tight lipped as the next.

Their unsuccessful efforts had left both the hybrid and the wolf angry and exasperated, but one thing that had surprised Hayley as she had watched both of them return into the Mikaelson home, was that relatively little of that ire had been directed towards each other. She had fully expected the two polar opposite characters to be at each-other’s throats after several hours spent alone together – especially given the murderous rage that Klaus had descended into when he had discovered Keelin’s part in aiding the Nievera wolf Alanna to remain in New Orleans. But as the two of them had strolled into the courtyard late on the previous evening - their defeated postures signalling just how little information their efforts over the day had produced – it had not escaped Hayley’s attention when Klaus had lay his hand briefly on Keelin’s shoulder and given it a quick squeeze, before rushing off up to his daughter’s bedroom to give the young witch a goodnight cuddle.

Unfortunately there had not been time for her to grill Keelin about the apparent thawing of Klaus’s icy facade towards the wolf – but Hayley had made sure to store away the information to remember to ask the wolf how she had managed to break through to the Mikaelson Hybrid at a later date.

Elijah had returned home only a few minutes after his brother, and with the sandy haired Regent, Tobias, in tow. Had the high-witch of New Orleans been uneasy about being surrounded by the Mikaelson family whilst stood in their courtyard, he had certainly not shown it as he had proceeded to relay how both he and members of his coven had tried scrying for Freya’s whereabouts by using
some of the witch’s personal effects that had been provided to them. Unfortunately their attempts had been unsuccessful – both when trying to locate the witch and in their attempts to detect the signature markers of the wiccan power that ran through Freya’s veins.

Which in turn had only given further weight to Keelin’s suspicion that something had been wrong with her fiancé’s magic when they had faced off against the gang of vampires.

Hayley herself had then had to relay to the group how her own efforts spent searching for information in the Bayou had been just as unproductive. Whilst Hope had spent some time catching up with Mary at the old wolf’s waterside home, the hybrid had changed into her wolf form and scoured much of the marsh-lands surrounding the outskirts of New Orleans, searching for any indication that the biker gang were residing in the area, or had passed through it recently. She had committed to memory the scent markers that had laced the blood covering Keelin’s torn clothes the night before, and had hoped that she would pick up on a similar scent somewhere in the thick foliage of the Bayou, indicating that the vampires were either hiding out there, or had at least passed through to provide them with a trail to follow. But there had been nothing. Nothing apart from the usual animal scents that she had come to know so well during her time spent running through the swamp on four furry legs.

As frustrating as her lack of progression had been – the hybrid’s worry for Freya’s wellbeing increasing with every passing hour - Hayley had still felt a large pang of guilt rush through her as she had returned to Mary’s home later that afternoon to find both Hope and the old woman sat with brightly coloured party hats upon their heads as they shared a large piece of chocolate cake. Thanks to the eldest Mikaelson’s abduction, the fact that it had been Hope’s tenth birthday had been somewhat pushed to one side whilst her family rallied around trying to discover her aunt’s whereabouts. Hope had of course declared that she didn’t mind, and was just as worried for her aunt’s safety as the rest of them. But it had still pulled on Hayley’s heart strings as she had walked into the old wooden cabin and watched as Mary made a fuss of her granddaughter turning another year older.

*She had made a mental note to spoil her daughter rotten once the current Mikaelson drama had been resolved. Possibly with a trip to somewhere far away from the constant supernatural war that waged itself upon the city of New Orleans.*

The only Mikaelson who had not returned back to the Compound at the end of their first day of searching had been Rebekah. The blonde vampire had called Klaus earlier in the day to say that she and Marcel were in the midst of formulating a plan to scour the areas of New Orleans that the city’s supernatural faction usually tended to shy away from – the whole of the Business district, and the residential areas of Algiers, Terrytown, and Harvey. The King of New Orleans had rallied all the members of his vampire-cadre that weren’t needed on business elsewhere, and given each of them a different area to scour for clues of where the new un-dead biker gang in town resided when they weren’t out drinking in the various taverns of the city.

Josh and the other bar-managers of the Quarter had also been advised to report back to Marcel if any of the leather-clad gang entered into their establishments for a drink. Due to the ferocity of the storm that continued to hammer the city, not many of the cafes and bars along Bourbon St had remained open – most opting to close up-shop for the day thanks to the lack of locals and tourists daring to venture out from the warmth of their own homes. But there was still the odd drinking-hole refusing to bend to the will of nature- Rousseau’s being one of them - and given the frequency with which members of the new gang in town had been seen downing shots of bourbon in the taverns of the Quarter, there was a good chance at least one member would show their face at some point over the next twenty-four hours.
Or so they had hoped.

“Nothing. There’s just nothing for my magic to latch onto!”

Hope’s quiet voice quickly pulled Hayley from her thoughts – the hybrid refocusing on her daughter as the young witch let the arm that held one of Freya’s pendants over the map, drop down to her side. Turning to face the wolf sat next to her, Hope let out a frustrated sigh before lowering her eyes to her lap.

“I’m sorry Aunt Keelin - I thought that if I channelled your love for Aunt Freya then maybe it would help me locate her rather than just focusing on a personal belonging of hers alone. But I still can’t pick up on any trace of her.”

“Could her location be being cloaked by a spell, Hope?” Elijah asked, as Hayley watched Keelin smile weakly towards her daughter - no doubt in gratitude for the young witch’s efforts to try and find her partner.

“It’s possible I guess”, Hope said as she swivelled her head around to face her uncle. “But in my lesson’s with Aunt Freya, she’s always told me that if there is a spell at work trying to mask someone’s whereabouts, then you can usually feel the resonance of that enchantments power when scrying, even if you can’t actually locate the person themselves.”

The young witch sighed and shook her head in frustration before continuing.

“I can’t sense anything. No magic or vibrations of any sort! There’s just nothing there.”

Hayley watched Elijah’s solemn gaze slowly trail to Klaus, and then over to herself before the Original lowered his voice to an almost inaudible tone.

“If both the witch faction and Hope cannot locate Freya, and there no trace of any magic that could be cloaking her….could that mean that our sister is….”

“NO!”

Elijah was abruptly cut off by Keelin, as she quickly stood up off the couch that she had been sharing with Hope. Hayley could see tears beginning to shimmer in the wolf’s tired eyes as she looked pointedly towards Elijah.

“Keelin,” the smartly dressed vampire said softly, “I am not saying that we should give up hope or cease in our efforts. I just think that we need to consider the possibility that….”

“NO!” the wolf barked out once more, fiercely holding Elijah’s gaze for a few seconds longer before moving behind the couch to begin pacing back and forth. “She’s alive! I know she’s alive!”

“But we can’t know that for sure!” Elijah countered, his own voice uncharacteristically filling with emotion. “Our sister - as powerful as she is - has only the healing ability and lifespan of a human mortal. Should she have sustained a grave injury at the hands of her captors, or….”

“They needed her for something!” Keelin interrupted loudly as she paced, her eyes roaming wildly over the floor. “They could have killed her right there on the street, on the night that they attacked us. They had the opportunity to whilst I was surrounded by their vampire thugs. But they didn’t! They instead took her back to….to wherever they’re hiding, for a reason! If she’s of use to them, then surely they will need her alive. So she has to be alive. She’s…..she’s”

Tears were now falling down the wolf’s face as she turned towards Hayley, her gaze locking onto
the hybrid in a pleading manner as though willing her friend to agree with her train of thought.

Pushing off the doorframe upon which she had been leaning, Hayley walked over to the wolf and quickly enveloped her into a hug. She could feel just how tense Keelin’s muscles were as she rubbed a hand up and down the wolf’s back – glancing over the brunette’s shoulder to Elijah, as she spoke.

“Keelin’s right,” she stated, keeping her voice low so as to try and diffuse some of the tension in the room. “If they went to the trouble of moving Freya to another location instead of just killing her on the spot, then chances are they need her alive. We just need to find a lead….anything that gives us an idea of who this gang is, and why they have come to New Orleans!”

Elijah let out a long sigh, as he nodded his head in agreement. The vampire offered no further words however, his brow furrowing as he appeared to lapse into deep thought.

“Right, well….,” Klaus suddenly stated, his loud voice booming throughout the room as his eyes glared widely at the drawing room’s exit. “Just standing here like useless fools is getting us bloody no-where!”

Charging across the room from the fireplace, the male hybrid looked to have grim determination on his face as Hayley watched his hands ball into fists at his side.

“Where are you heading, Niklaus?” called Elijah from where he remained by the roaring flames of the fire.

Whirling around to face them all as he reached the doorway, Klaus threw his arms up in a gesture of frustration and annoyance – his voice soaked in ire as he shouted back towards his brother.

“I’m off to sodding well find our sister, Elijah! Someone must know of this wretched gang’s whereabouts, and I’ll rip the heads off every damned vampire, witch and wolf in this rotting city if I have to!!”

Without waiting for a response, the hybrid stormed off down the first-floor corridor – Hayley’s ears picking up on every step her daughter’s father took through the Mikaelson house, and then for several metres more as his boots pounded along Bourbon St thereafter.

Pulling away from the arm that Hayley still had draped over her shoulder, Keelin made as though to chase after the enraged hybrid, quickly walking towards the rooms open doorway.

“Keelin, wait!”, Hayley called out, trying to stop the wolf in her tracks. “I’d leave him be for a little while if I was you. He’s not known to be in the most rational of minds when this worked up!”

Stopping just as she reached the exit, the wolf turned to face her, an expression of deep weariness engraved on her tear streaked face.

“I can’t just sit here Hayley,” Keelin blurted out, emotion rife in her tired voice. “I need to be doing something! I need to be back out there looking for her too!”

Hayley took a few steps towards her friend, understanding and sympathy coating her words as she attempted to get the wolf to see reason.

“I know… but its late, and you’ve been out searching none-stop since your fight with those vampires! You’re going to run yourself into the ground if you don’t try and at least get a little rest.”

As if highlighting her point, the hybrid watched as Keelin began to sway slightly on her feet – the
wolf throwing out an unsteady hand to brace against the wooden doorframe beside her. Blinking rapidly as though trying to clear her vision, the brunette let out a small huff of acknowledgement as Hayley reached her side.

“I just need a little food to line my stomach and then I’ll be back out on the….”

“Stop ok. Just stop!” Hayley said somewhat sternly to her friend, as she placed a hand on her shoulder. “You are no use to Freya if you push yourself to the brink of exhaustion! It’s not going to be light again for a good few hours yet, so why don’t you take yourself off to Freya’s old room and get some much needed sleep. We can all then resume the search again at dawn, ok?”

The wolf raised her eyes to look at Hayley with a tired, emotional expression upon her face.

“But what about Klaus?” the wolf countered, although Hayley could already hear some of the fight dissipating out of her drained friend’s voice “He’s likely to do more harm than good right now if he’s left to his own devices. What if he destroys our one chance of finding Freya by killing a potential lead before….”

“Leave Niklaus to me,” Elijah quickly cut in, the immaculate vampire already moving effortlessly across the wooden floor towards the exit. “I’ll shall catch up with my brother and see that he keeps his beheading of the locals to a bare minimum!”

A grim smile tugged at the Original’s lips as he nodded in brief farewell to both Hayley and Keelin, before quickly disappearing off in pursuit of Klaus.

“Come on”, Hayley said calmly, as she grabbed hold of one of Keelin’s hands and tugged her into the hallway. “I’ll get you some fresh sheets for Freya’s old bed. The rooms not actually been touched since the day you two moved in together, so apologies if it’s a little dusty.”

Despite her own insistence that the wolf got some rest, Hayley was still a little surprised when Keelin allowed herself to be pulled along the hallway towards the eldest Mikaelson’s room.

A sure sign that exhaustion must have finally been taking over the wolf’s body!

Turning her head back towards the room from which they had just left, Hayley called out to her daughter, whom had remained sitting on the antique couch.

“Hope, start getting yourself ready for bed sweetie! I’ll come say goodnight in a few minutes ok?!?”

As a faint, resigned “ok mom!” reached her ears, the hybrid let go of Keelin’s hand when the two of them reached the closed door to Freya’s room.

“Get some sleep ok! Tomorrows a new day, and we’ll scour every damned inch of this city until we find Freya and bring her home!”

As she placed a hand upon the brass knob of the bedroom door, Keelin paused mid twisting the handle – her voice low and tentative as she refused to meet the hybrids eye’s.

“What if Elijah was right Hayley? What if Freya really is……I couldn’t handle losing her when I’ve only just found her”

“We will find her Keelin!” Hayley said softly. “And knowing Freya, she’ll be so pissed that she’s been forced to miss her niece’s birthday….she’ll burn the whole damn city down herself, before casually walking into the Compound to no doubt wonder what on earth we were all the fussing about!”
No hint of a smile graced the wolf’s face, as she sluggishly nodded her head gently before opening the door into Freya’s bedroom and slowly walking into the dark room.

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2.

The sweet coppery tang of fresh blood generously filled Halvar’s nostrils, as he pushed open the ancient iron reinforced door leading into one of the many catacomb rooms dwelling under Baracuda bar. Soft flickering light provided by the three large fire-torches bracketed to the damp stone walls, danced and wavered across the expanse of the low roofed, oppressive chamber as the Clan leader’s eyes quickly located the reason for his being there.

As he began to walk across the slippery stone floor, Halvar heard others begin file into the room behind him – the Jarl not needing to turn to know that it was Vidar and Fiske who now joined him as he continued his advance towards the far wall of the space. He had left instruction with the bar-manager in the tavern above to tell the two Jarl's to join him in the interrogation tomb at their earliest convenience - and true to form, the burly vampire had carried out his instruction with efficient competency.

There were not many of the Thralls that stood out to Halvar – the crass vampire biker’s far too contemptible and beneath his own stature to even register on his radar the majority of the time. But he had to admit, the one whom had introduced himself Curtis when the Jarl’s had first arrived at the run-down wooden tavern just over six months ago, had managed to impress him with the sheer amount of dedication and loyalty that the man had shown to aiding their cause. As such, the Clan Leader had promoted the vampire to the position of tavern manager – his main tasks to oversee and keep order amongst the Thralls whenever Halvar and the other Blood-Bound Jarl’s were absent from the venue, and to maintain the up-keep of the building.

Even Curtis however, was not permitted down into the catacombs below the main floor of Baracuda. As far as the vampire bikers were aware, all that dwelled down here was the bar’s cellar, and rooms where the Jarl’s spent their personal time.

*The blood-sucking fools would probably run a mile if they knew the true purpose of the ancient chambers underneath their midst.*

An ear piercing scream suddenly shattered the air, its despairing shrill tone echoing off the walls of the catacomb just as Halvar came to pass the wooden table standing in the centre of the room.

A wanton smile tugged at the Clan Leaders lips in response to the loud cry of distress, as his eyes wandered over the tools that lay strewn on top of the cloth covered bench.

Gone were the immaculately shining and unblemished metal contraptions that had reflected the surrounding fire light so perfectly only a day ago, when Ake had first unveiled his treasure trove of torture. In their place now rested a dull array of discarded instruments - each one so completely covered in a mixture of fresh and dried blood that Halvar had trouble distinguishing where one tool ended, and another began.

*He had always wondered why the torment loving Jarl had kept the instruments of pain and death*
wrapped so delicately in such a finely made dark crimson cloth – as though one of the wooden chests where all their other weapons and armour were stored wasn’t good enough for tools. But now, seeing how closely the tones of the fabric matched that of the witch’s blood currently seeping off the various blades and needles into its fibres – he supposed that he could see a certain amount of poetic prophecy in the Ake’s choice of swathing.

The Clan Leader quickly noticed that one of the instruments on the table appeared to retain most of its polished sheen - its presence a menacing beacon of bright steel amongst its bloodied and used comrades. Without pause, Halvar swiftly plucked the device up off the red cloth – turning it gracefully within his hands as he eventually came to a stop to stand next to Ake.

A quick sidelong glance at the Jarl told Halvar everything that he needed to know with regards to how much Ake had relished taking his time over the past twenty four hours spent alone with the Mikaelson witch.

In stark contrast to the bloodied tools of his trade, the biker’s clothes and exposed skin remained completely un-marred by the results of his time spent trying to break his subject. Being no stranger himself to having to extract information out of various captives over the many years of their existence, Halvar knew all too well that if a blade was slashed too quickly over skin, or a poker thrust too deeply into flesh at the wrong point on a body - blood would spray out wildly, peppering the perpetrator in a grisly tapestry of red were he foolish enough to not angle his body away correctly.

But despite the gut wrenching screams and whimpers that Halvar had heard coming from this chamber whenever he had passed by it over the past day, not a single drop of blood had made it onto his brother’s being.

Not that he should have been surprised. The sandy haired man stood next to him was renowned amongst the other Jarls for excelling at this, and taking delight in his work. If charm and wit were Fiske’s natural borne talents, and fearsome brute strength and violence were Colborn’s, then the ability to find increasingly more creative and brutal ways extract information out of the most tight lipped of captives was something that Ake had simply been borne to wield.

Turning his attention away from the mercilessly grinning Jarl, Halvar let his cobalt eyes slowly roam over the broken figure of their guest, who’s wrists and ankles remained tightly chained to the slick stones of the chambers wall.

Numerous small cuts and lesions littered the witch’s arms and legs – the blood slowly clotting around them easily visible under the ripped material of her clothes. Most of the lacerations appeared to be shallow despite their angry appearance, suggesting that Ake had taken his time in slowly drawing a sharp knife across the woman’s skin - applying just enough pressure to cause a searing pain in the flesh, without actually inflicting too much permanent damage.

The abnormal angle at which the witch’s left forearm now bent just before it met her shackle bound wrist indicated that both the bones located there had been broken – no doubt, Halvar deducted, the cause of the scream that had rang just out as the he had entered the room, given the lack of swelling that had yet to form around the area, and the large metal hammer that Ake currently tossed from hand to hand as he watched his fellow Jarl assess his work.

The bulk of the blood that both coated the tools of torture lay on the wooden table behind them and soaked the woman’s tattered clothes to point of saturation, appeared to be coming from two large open wounds across her abdomen – one lying just below her right breast, and its slightly smaller twin marring opposite side of her body. The flesh immediately around both wounds looked to be frayed and ragged, as though it had been further aggravated with a serrated device once the initial
piercing blow had been dealt.

Halvar did not need to scrutinise the bleeding injuries any closer to know that his brother had picked those two areas purely for their locality to the woman’s liver and pancreas. Any jailer worth his salt knew that if the blade of a sharp knife, or the tip of a scalding hot poker was plunged and twisted into right place of those particular two vital organs of the human anatomy, it unleashed an unbearable tidal wave of pain throughout the whole body – more often than not causing the subject’s brain to think that it was on the brink of death.

Causing them to be overcome with uncontrollable fear!

Making them willing to do anything - offer anything - to survive.

The Clan leader also noted a large area of the exposed woman’s torso that was deepening in colour – reds and purples choreographed together upon her skin to form a dancing trope of deep bruises and blistering welts that twirled and pirouetted in a macabre union of torture.

Knowing of his fellow Jarl’s fondness for the smell of burning flesh, it did not take long for Halvar to fathom that Ake had probably taken his time in breaking several of the witch’s ribs using either a metal hammer or crowbar that had first been heated in the fire of one of the chamber’s torches.

Drawing in a deep breath, Halvar let the air out slowly through his nostrils as he raised an eye brow raised towards Ake.

“I seem to recall telling you brother, that we need the witch to remain functional by the end of this!”

“Oh her mouth functions just fine!” the Jarl huffed towards him, before turning on his heels and walking towards the wooden table. “The vicious and imaginative ways in which has been promising to slowly end my life have been rivalling some of my own finest work over the years!”

Placing the hammer which he had been twirling in his hands down upon the bench, Ake plucked a small red kerchief out of a pocket in his pants and proceed to wipe his face free of the sweat that had gathered there.

“She has a surprisingly high level of tolerance for a mortal woman”, the Jarl commented as he moved to stand back beside the Clan Leader.

The witch’s head was currently slumped forward, having appeared to have fallen unconscious after the last bout of pain that had been unleashed upon her – though Halvar wouldn’t have put it past their captive to be faking her apparent blacked out state, in a feeble attempt to try and delay Ake’s next damning blow.

“Mortal or not, the wench is a Mikaelson”, Fiske remarked from where he and Vidar now idled behind the duo. “And members of that family are not particularly known for being easy to coerce!”

“So I can assume that she has not yet agreed to my offer?” Halvar asked, a slither of irritation seeping through into his words, despite having already anticipated that the witch would take longer than the average human to break.

Sighing lightly, Ake gestured towards the sagged woman with a hand.

“As of yet, no! But I can assure you Halvar that given more time, I will…..”

“Time, Ake, is something that we do not have the luxury of!” Halvar interposed, his voice rising as
further frustration stoked the fire that lived within him.

He took a step closer to Freya’s slumped form and grabbed a fistful of the blonde’s sweat dampened hair to roughly jerk her head upwards.

Although Ake had left the witch’s face untouched – a specific command that Halvar himself had issued to the Jarl via the Blood-Bond’s unquestionable authority - her skin appeared to have turned both ashen and sallow during her time spent at the Jarl’s mercy.

A far cry from the sun-kissed complexion of the woman they had first hauled into the dungeon two days ago.

Keeping his tight grip on the witch’s scalp, the Clan Leader leaned closer into her body – bringing his lips up to the shell of her ear.

“I know that you are awake, Witch”, he whispered - his voice caressing the fine hairs along the woman’s skin like that of a lover trying to elicit a moan of pleasure from their mate. “I can tell by rhythm of your breathing!”

He paused briefly, his mouth lingering next to her ear as he allowed a heartbeat to pass to see if she would acknowledge his words.

“But should you need a little encouragement to join the conversation….?” Halvar continued after gaining no response “….please, allow me to provide it.”

Without pulling away, the Clan leader brought his free hand up to the open wound located over the woman’s liver and slowly began to thrust his thumb into the bloody, torn flesh. Beads of sweat instantly began to appear along the witch’s forehead, as the lids of her closed eyes tried to scrunch together in an even tighter fashion. Noting the clear signs of increased discomfort despite her continued refusal to engage with him, Halvar pushed deeper into her - twisting his thumb one way, and then the other as he increased the pressure applied by his hand.

A rasping cry of agony peeled forth from the Freya’s lips, as she attempted to jerk her body back from Halvar’s onslaught upon her - only to be quickly halted by the cold unforgiving stones of the chambers wall.

Seeing the woman’s eyes finally prise open and begin to roll wildly around the room as she continued to gasp in pain, a large viper like smile spread across the Clan Leader’s face.

“There!” Halvar crooned as he slowly extracted his thumb out of the wound – its thick girth now liberally coated in bright crimson blood as he finally pulled it completely free of her tattered flesh. “Now we can talk like proper, civilised people?!”

A fit of coughing suddenly rocked the witch causing her body to jolt against the wall upon which she was chained – the juddering motion provoking another gasp of pain to escape her.

“There is….nothing…..civilised about you…..” the blonde faintly managed to rasp out once the coughing had subsided, as her bloodshot eyes eventually found Halvar’s.

Hate shone there, in the emerald green irises that he found glaring back at him with a surprising level of intensity and force, given all that the witch had already endured.

Hate - and a grim slither of determination.

*Ake was right*, Halvar admitted to himself as he fierily returned the woman’s glower. *She was not*
yet at breaking point, not yet ready to give herself over to his control. Not even close!

“You of course know that this could all be over within seconds, Witch”, he ventured, giving the woman a chance to concede despite the steely resolve that he could see still burning within her, “if you were just to drink a small amount of my blood willingly. A few drops and we could have you out of those shackles, patched up, and sent back to the comforts of your family home.”

A heavy laboured breath forced itself from the witch’s mouth, as her eyes gradually drooped to the blood-stained gravelled floor that lay a few inches beneath her restrained ankles. Halvar watched on as her cracked dry lips appeared to sluggishly form a series of words, despite their being no discernable sound to accompany them.

Fearing that the woman was actually going to slip into a true unconscious state for real this time, he slowly leant closer into her personal space once more.

“What did you…”

Without warning, the witch quickly raised her head up and venomously spat into Harlvar’s face – wet globules of blood saturated saliva slapping over his nose and mouth before he had chance to pull back.

“I said, you worthless piece of shit”, the woman managed to snarl despite her weakened state, “that you can all go to hell!”

Halvar angrily recoiled, taking a step backwards as his hand flew up to wipe the phlegm off his reddening face.

“I’ll neverwillingly give you control over my actions!” the witch continued as her exhausted green eyes bored into his own. “Never! So you might as well just kill me and get it over with.”

A palpable silence fell throughout the catacomb as Halvar felt the familiar burning rage within his core begin to roar and flare, its loud bellows demanding that he end this woman’s – this mortal’s – life for her insubordinate defiance.

Snarling as he bared spittle laced yellowing teeth, the Clan leader whipped his head around to Vidar and Fiske, both of whom stood with their eyes fixed viciously upon the stalwart witch.

“Move her, now!” Halvar bellowed, his already gruff voice deepening even further as the blood-bond’s power surged within his veins.

The two Jarl’s were in motion within a heartbeat, each shifting to a different side of the witch as they proceeded to unlock the metal shackles that now dug so deeply into her flesh that Halvar could clearly hear the cloying wet noise produced by the binds tearing through tissue and blood as they were forcibly ripped from the woman’s limbs.

An ear-piercing cry of pain tore from their captive’s throat as large calloused hands clasped down tightly over the freshly exposed, bloody wounds on her forearms. The corner of Halvar’s mouth twitched into a sneer as further whimpers of distress continued to flow from the woman while Fiske and Vidar dragged her body across the gravelled floor, towards the centre of the chamber.

Good! the Clan Leader inwardly raged to himself as he watched his brethren wrench the slumped witch’s arms up towards the large hook protruding out of the catacombs low ceiling. Let her whimper and bray in pain! Let her feel every single cell in her mortal body rupture and tear! Let her scream for death until her throat and lungs both filled with blood from the exertion! She would eventually break! They all did!”
As the other Jarl’s finished re-shackling the woman’s wrists onto the hook, Halvar sensed Ake take a step closer to him – his voice both low and vexed when he spoke.

“I could have broken her myself Halvar! A few more days and I’d have had her begging to drink from that vial of blood!”

“We cannot waste more any time, Ake!”, Halvar growled out, disgusted by the dented pride radiating off his fellow Jarl. “Pain alone is clearly not enough to crush this Mikaelson witch’s spirit!”

Not waiting for a response from the disgruntled biker he made his way over to the centre of the catacomb where the woman’s bruised and bloodied body now dangled from the ceiling – her figure swaying gently back and forth as she strained to gain a foothold on the gravelled floor.

A sickening crack emanated out from the witch, quickly followed by another loud holler of pain as the tendons in her right shoulder gave way under the renewed pressure. The angle of her arm abruptly altered as a result, when its socket either ruptured or dislocated – Halvar could not tell which.

Fiske moved to take up position next to Ake, leaving Vidar to hover near the woman as Halvar grabbed a fist full of her hair once more.

“If there’s one thing I’ve learnt over my lifetime witch, it’s that even the fire burning within the proudest and most resilient of mortals can eventually be snuffed out. And yours….” the Clan Leader scoffed, as he forcefully squeezed upon her newly torn shoulder to elicit yet another tortured cry of distress, “is rapidly losing its flame!”

Taking a step backwards from the woman, Halvar fixed his blazing eyes onto hers as he motioned over to Vidar with his hand.

The tallest of the Jarl’s quickly walked up to the dangling figure whilst pulling a large hunting knife from a sheath attached to the belt around his leather pants. With one quick swipe of the blade, the biker had ripped away what had remained of the witch’s thin top and the blood-stained white bra that had been sitting underneath it.

As the remnants of her clothing fell away, leaving the woman’s top half naked and shivering in the frigid atmosphere of the damp Catacombs, Vidar began to step backwards from her position - counting out loud to himself as he measured exactly four paces in distance. When he finally appeared happy within his position, the Jarl slowly shrugged off his leather jacket – letting the garment fall unceremoniously to the floor as he unhooked a loosely coiled leather whip from the back of his belt.

The Clan Leader’s eyes darted briefly over to his now bare-armed comrade, before returning his attention back to the witch. His eyes languidly roamed over the newly exposed expanse of blood splattered skin - a part of his masculinity that had been dormant for many centuries stirring fleetingly as he registered the way in which the woman’s nipples quickly hardened in the the cold air now mercilessly clawing at them.

“Let’s see how that notorious Mikaelson resolve holds up under several lashes of an iron-tipped whip!”

Halvar watched within no shortage of delight, as fear - clear as the morning now breaking across the New Orleans wastelands high above them - began to flood into the witch’s eyes.
A quick nod of the Clan Leader’s head had Vidar flicking out the full span of his whip – the cast iron claw that had been fixed onto the end of the long leather lash centuries ago now scraping through the gravel covering the floor, as the Jarl cracked its length back and forth in preparation.

“This….” Vidar chuckled heartlessly as he sized up the woman’s bare back with hungry eyes “… may sting just a little!”

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3.

The torrential rain that had now been assaulting New Orleans for three continuous days remained relentless on its campaign of misery, as the people of the city persisted to hunker down and ride out what was now reported to be one of the worse storms to grace the state of Louisiana for the past ten years.

Tourist trade within the Quarter had all but ceased to exist since the heavens had first opened up, causing its streets to closely resemble those of a sodden ghost town, with only the occasional resident or local business owner to be found rushing quickly along the water saturated sidewalks – hoods pulled low over bowed heads as they braved the rain to reach their intended destination.

As Keelin stood tucked into the small alcove immediately outside of Rousseau’s locked cellar door, she absentmindedly pulled the hood currently draped over her own head lower, whilst watching large drops of rain bounce off the cobbled alleyway’s floor just a few feet ahead of her.

A cold chill ran along the wolf’s spine as she began to gnaw gently on her bottom lip – the bitter breeze accompanying the storm still managing to nip at her skin despite the thick green hoodie that she had quickly swiped from Freya’s closet earlier that morning to wear.

Slowly folding her arms over her chest in a futile attempt to conserve heat, Keelin felt a sharp pang of longing tug painfully at her heart, as the motion caused the scent of her lover to rise up off the garments material and begin to wrap itself around her being. Letting the rhythmic beat of the evening’s rain begin to fill her ears, the wolf briefly closed her eyes as she called up a mental image of the last time she had seen the witch wearing the long-sleeved garment.

The two of them had been lay naked in front of their apartment’s faux-fire, on the large hand-knotted rug that Keelin had purchased on her travels through Cambodia a few years before the Mikaelson’s had barrelled into her life. She recalled that a fine sheen of sweat that had been glistening in the room’s candle light had been covering Freya’s breasts and toned stomached as the witch had lay panting slightly thanks to their third bout of love making that evening.

The wolf couldn’t quite recall why, but the subject of whom – out of the two of them - could make the best Daiquiri cocktail had eventually arisen. Freya’s fierce competitive streak had inevitably gotten the better of her, and the witch had suddenly leapt up off the rug and quickly disappeared into their bedroom without explanation.

Keelin had remained lying in front of the fire, smiling in bemusement as she had listened to various rustling noises emerging from their room, before the witch had eventually re-emerged a few minutes later – having donned the green hoodie that the wolf now wore standing in the alleyway.
behind Rousseau’s.

Her lover had made a show of slowly sauntering across the open plan living area of their apartment towards the kitchen island - hips swinging from side-to-side under the hoodie in an exaggerated fashion as her long naked legs had prowled along the floor.

Keelin had quickly forgotten all about their cocktail rivalry as the heat in her core had quickly rekindled at the sight of Freya’s provocative sauntering. She had swiftly made her way over to the witch to press her up against their tall Smeg-Fridge, and relieved her of the hoodie once more – its soft fabric falling to the ground as the wolf had made deft work of bringing Freya to her fourth orgasm of the evening.

A small sigh drifted out over the wolf’s lips, as she let the fond memory of that heated night slowly recede out of her mind – opening her eyes once more as the harsh reality of her lover’s absence came crashing back to torment and frustrate her.

Three days they had now been searching for Freya. Three days with absolutely nothing to show for their efforts except several dead vampire bikers – all of whom had remained frustratingly tight lipped despite the world of pain unleashed upon them by both Klaus and Elijah – and a constant nagging headache that refused to shift no matter how many painkillers the wolf took.

She knew of course that the persistent pain throbbing just behind her eyes was her body’s way of telling her that she desperately needed to get some rest, and eat something more substantial than the pop-tart that Hayley had forced her to consume earlier that day - refusing to let the wolf leave the Mikaelson Compound until she had seen every last crumb be devoured.

It had been a terse compromise between the two of them, after Keelin had refused to waste precious time sitting down with the female hybrid and her daughter as they tucked into a spread of croissants and Danish pastries after what had no doubt been a sleepless night for them, similar to herself.

Precious time that could instead be spent on continuing her search her missing fiancé.

But as Keelin now stood waiting on the arrival of the last spark of hope that she had remaining, the wolf wished that she had at least grabbed one of the delicious smelling pastries on her way out of the Compound to consume on the go, as her stomach let out another rumbling groan of protest.

“Ahem!”

The sound of a deep voice being cleared just a few meters to her right sent a shockwave of surprise rippling through her body as Keelin jolted – extended canine’s bared from under the hood of her sweater, and a growl rumbling in her throat as she quickly spun around in the alleyway to face the newcomer.

“Now is that anyway to greet the person who has come to aid you in your hour of need?!”

Keelin kept her lips pulled back in a snarl as she quickly assessed the figure now directly in front of her with the acute focus of her wolf eyes. Tall and thin in stature, the black-haired male stood with the casual ease of someone who was confident of being able to protect themselves in a dark alleyway deep within the notorious battlegrounds of the New Orleans supernatural factions. The hint of a smile seemed to ghost thin lips that were framed by a pale-skinned angular face, as obsidian black eyes narrowly stared back at her in an unwavering manner.

Although the man was wearing what looked to be a long, non-descript black rain-coat, Keelin
quickly realised that the newcomer didn’t have a single drop of water on him, despite being stood in the middle of an alleyway that was being thoroughly assaulted by rain. A quick once over of his entire frame revealed to her that the droplets of water on course to hit him seemed to make it within a millimetre of touching his being before suddenly disappearing, as though passing through some unseen portal that had spread itself around the man’s whole body.

Her confusion in regards to the strange phenomenon must have been written across her face, for the dark-haired male suddenly let out a curt huff of laughter whilst gesturing to the wolf’s own rain-soaked clothes.

“You may have fangs and claws my dear, but I have a few….gifts….of my own, shall we say!” the man chuckled, despite no hint of humour shining in his jet black gaze. “Now, if you are quite finished with your unnecessary display of mongrel hormones – shall we discuss the reason why you summoned me here to this vermin infested city of the damned?!”

Keelin allowed another small growl escape into the night, before slowly straightening out of her attack ready stance –her vision returning to normal as her canine teeth slowly receded.

“You are the one who calls himself Asyre?” she asked the tall figure, keeping her voice curt and hushed despite the continued roar of falling rain around them.

A slight inclination of the head was the only confirmation that Keelin received as the tall man continued to eye her in an expressionless manner.

“And you have the ability to locate someone for me? Someone whom conventional witch magic has been unable to find?”

As drops of rain now poured down her face in earnest despite the hood that remained in place, Keelin watched the corner of the man’s eyes crinkle as his thin lips parted in a horrifying smile that revealed two uneven rows of needle point teeth.

“For a price my dear…..for a price!”

Swallowing down the cold tendrils of unease that had tried to crawl up her throat at the sight of the pale man’s attempt at a smile, Keelin endeavoured to school her features into an impenetrable mask of indifference as she cautiously continued.

“And exactly much money do you require?” she asked, her words coming out sharper than she had originally intended.

“Oh, I do not deal in such trivial things as money, my dear!” the man drawled in a slippery voice as he waved an aging hand between them. “I have no need of the possessions or finery that you mortals waste so much of your irrelevant lives coveting so feverously!”

The wolf raised an eyebrow, as she once again studied the figure that stood just a few feet away from her.

“If we mortals are so irrelevant, why bother to engage with us?” Keelin ventured, willing her voice to remain calm. “Why go to the trouble of making it known that your services are for hire?”

The wolf had spent a large chuck of that morning visiting some of the more nefarious institutions and establishments that festered down the many forgotten paths and passages of the city’s underworld.

Bars that, although appeared permanently closed to the general public from the outside, actually
housed regular speakeasy events for the human faction’s gang-lords, and the less aesthetically pleasing supernatural beings that could not put on a human appearances to the outside world – in the same way that wolves, witch’s and vampires could.

Stores that sold simple trinkets and New Orleans souvenirs on the shop floors that they had open to unsuspecting locals and tourists of the city, but had an altogether more wicked and immoral stock of goods and services for sale to those that knew the right questions to ask, or the right currency to offer.

And lastly – but certainly not by any means the least important stop off of her morning – Keelin had ventured deep into the forgotten and mostly overgrown area of the Bayou that had once been known amongst the ancient creole wolves of Louisiana as the “Sa Ki Mal Peyi” – or The Evil Lands.

Exploring the wild area in her wolf body so as to be more acutely aware of her surroundings, and to be ready to either fight efficiently or fleas quickly should the need have arisen – Keelin had eventually come across an area within the dense foliage that had housed a small wooden hut hidden amongst the various trees and vines of the swamp. Covered in centuries of dense thick moss and sprawling lichen, the structure would have easily gone unnoticed to any human eye that roamed over the area. Indeed it had not been by sight alone that the wolf had become aware of its presence, but instead due to the bitterly sour stench that had been seeping out from inside of the hut which had caused her canine nose to wrinkle in disgust as she had slowly passed by.

The unpleasant odour had only intensified as Keelin had cautiously approached the mossy structure, accumulating in a veritable aromatic punch to her gut when its previously camouflaged front door had suddenly flung open, revealing what the wolf had first assumed to be a hunched over old man stood in its wake. It had not been until a few minutes later, when the male had greeted her wolf form as though he had already been expecting her and beckoned for her to follow him into the hut, that Keelin had re-evaluated her first impression of the aging man.

He had not been merely hunched over due to arthritic bones, or bent down as she had originally assumed, but rather an actual primordial dwarf, whose small stature had been genetically coded since birth – which given the white covering of hair upon his head and deeply wrinkled face, Keelin assumed had been several decades ago.

Eventually, after the old man had realised that the wolf was not following him into the hut, he had returned out into the marshlands with what had appeared to be a dark tattered cloak draped over his arms – carefully laying the garment onto the ground before Keelin, before disappearing back into the darkness of what she had assumed to be his home.

After a few minutes of deliberation, the sound of breaking bones and shifting flesh had rung in the Bayou out as Keelin returned to her human form and quickly wrapped the fraying cloak around her body – surprised to find that despite the sickly smell radiating out of the hut, the cloak itself had an aroma of pine leaves and fresh cotton.

The dwarf had reappeared in his doorway a heartbeat after she had finished covering herself with the simple robe, and spoken what Keelin had later come to believe would have been his first words in many years, given the raw gravelly nature of his voice and poor grasp of language.

“You come to seek help finding a loved one!” had been the man’s only words of greeting, posed as more of a statement of fact rather than that of a question.

A simple yet cautious nod of her head had resulted in the old dwarf shuffling once more back into the depths of the small camouflaged hovel - returning several minutes later with what had looked
to be a small scrap of yellowing parchment in his hand, that he had promptly outstretched towards Keelin in invitation for her to take.

When Keelin had made no move to remove the paper from his hands, the aging man had let out a high pitched cackle that had caused his whole body to shake, before eventually calming himself once more.

“Read the words on the paper, and help with come!” the dwarf had eventually declared, after a few more heartbeats of silence between them.

Gripping tightly onto the edges of the cotton cloak with one hand, Keelin had cautiously stretched out her free arm and quickly plucked the parchment out of the man’s bony fingers. A brief examination of its surface had revealed several words written in what she had assumed to be Latin, scrawled in a messy but legible calligraphy of black ink.

“A spell?” had been the question that she had guardedly posed to the old man, and the only two words that the wolf uttered during her entire time spent the Bayou that morning.

The dwarf had enthusiastically shaken his head in a negative fashion before simply replying, “Speak the words – help will come!”

Keelin had only looked back down at the old scrap of paper in her hand for a second – two at the most – but by the time she had raised her eyes once more both the petite old man and the opening leading into the small hut had completely disappeared, leaving only the sealed moss covered shack in their wake.

Completely perplexed by the whole experience, and not wanting to push her luck any further than she already seemed to have done, Keelin had quickly returned to four legs before darting back through the dense foliage of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi to the more familiar, well-trodden bulk of the Bayou.

“Questions, questions…. you ask a lot of questions mortal!” the obsidian eyed man remarked before drawing in a deep breath as he prepared to walk down the alleyway away from her. “If you are not interested in striking up a bargain then I shall be on my way…..”

“Wait!” Keelin shouted above the noise of the falling rain. “If not money, what is your price to locate someone for me?”

The man halted in his retreat, slowly turning around to face her once more – a grim smile stretching his lips taught.

“Years, my dear…. I deal in years.”

Silence filled the ally as Keelin rapidly blinked the rain out of her eyes, trying to make sense of the new-comers words.

“Years? What do you ……”

The wolf’s words were cut off as a blur of motion from above abruptly drew her attention. Within a heartbeat a hooded figure had landed directly behind the dark haired man, whose black eyes suddenly widened – an expression close to shock taking over his features.

The world seemed to slow to a stop – everything but the falling rain freezing in place as Keelin’s eyes remained locked on the strange man and the dark outline of the figure now pressed up behind him.
A second passed.

Another.

Keelin’s eyes flicked down to the man’s exposed neck where a thin crimson line suddenly began to crawl its way across his throat, stretching the entire expanse of visible skin from one side to the other in less than a heartbeat. A distinctive smell of blood flooded into her nose just moments before the man’s head lurched violently to the right and toppled away from his shoulders completely.

It was the wolf’s eyes turn to widen as they watched the severed head land and roll across the water covered cobbles of the alleyway, before jerking back up to witness the remainder of the man’s body crumple down to the floor in front of her.

Left in its wake stood the figure of a tall woman whose every feature appeared veiled under a dark red cloak. All except for a slim porcelain white hand that protruded out of one of the long sleeves, holding what looked to be a small, blood coated ceremonial knife in its grasp.

Keelin slowly blinked, before finally managing to jerk out of the stupor that seemed to have wrapped itself around her. Drawing her lips back into a snarl, the wolf let out a deep warning growl as her legs bent at the knee ready to pounce – canine teeth having once again descended down from her gums ready for action.

“Oh do try and calm yourself Darlin”, a silky smooth voice chimed out from the shrouded figure. “If I wanted you dead, I’d have simply let you carry on making your fools bargain with the Ravmocker here!”

That voice ….she knew that voice from somewhere.

“Now…”, the mysterious woman continued, before slowly raising up her arms to drop the cloak’s top off her head “…how about you and me get ourselves out of this rain and discuss a few pressing matters over a glass of aged bourbon!”

Recognition began to crawl over Keelin as woman’s hood dropped away to reveal a mane of long jet-black hair, bright sapphire eyes, and red plump lips that were slowly twisting into a wry smile

“Amelia?” she all she managed to say, the word vibrating out in a growl thanks to her inner wolf refusing to back down from the moment.

The woman’s head dipped briefly in confirmation, before she raised the knife in her hand up to her lips and ran a tongue along the flat of its blade – appearing to savour the taste of the now dead man’s blood.

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Keelin could have sworn she saw a quick shudder run the length of Amelia’s body as the woman swallowed the blood of the man lay decapitated between them.

Looking down towards the corpse that had belonged to the one slither of hope that the wolf had had left to locate Freya’s whereabouts, Keelin felt her body begin to pulse with anger at the now lost opportunity.
“What the hell did you kill him for?” she growled towards Amelia, as her eyes locked back onto the tall woman. “I needed his help to.....”

“Find Freya?” the sapphire eyed woman interrupted, her head cocking to the side before she let out a small laugh. “Believe me Darlin, no help that a Ravmocker could provide would be worth the price that they demand.”

Amelia looked down towards the dead man, a grimace of distaste briefly distorting her features.

“A particularly deviant and repulsive breed of demon that likes to masquerade in human form - leeching life from those desperate enough to seek out its services!”

“Leeching life?” Keelin asked suspiciously, as her inner wolf continued to bristle towards the woman from her lovers past.

“That’s what I said Darlin! Had I not been nearby to intervene, this particular Ravmocker specimen would have no doubt demanded several years of your life in exchange for claiming to be able to show you where your missing fiancé is currently being held.”

Keelin’s eyes widened at the revelation.

“If he knew where she is, why did you kill him?! Dammit Amelia, I could have gotten him to reveal Freya whereabouts to me without agreeing to any fucked up deal! I could have....”

“What - tortured it out of him? Like you and that brutish hybrid have been attempting to do over the past few days, to any vampire who’s ever been within sniffing distance of a leather jacket?”

The dark haired woman fixed her gaze onto Keelin, as the wolf felt herself take a small stumbled step backwards in confusion.

“You.....you’ve been following us?”

“Oh honey,” Amelia exclaimed, amusement flashing in her eyes, “the trail of mangled and decapitated bodies of un-dead vermin being left across the city hasn’t exactly been hard to miss – even with this god infernal rain helping to clean up most the hybrids sloppy work! You two are lucky that most of the city are holed up their homes thank to this storm - otherwise I imagine you’d be facing some stiff questions from the human authorities.”

When Keelin did not immediately respond, a look of irritation flashed across Amelia’s face which the woman quickly attempted to school into nonchalant boredom.

“I can see that I am losing you here Darlin, so let me attempt to put all of this into an easy bite-size morsel that even a barely housetrained mutt like yourself can understand”

A low growl rumbled out of Keelin’s throat in reaction to the woman’s slur against her wolf heritage, which the dark haired beauty appeared to choose to ignore as she continued.

“My good friend Freya has been taken by some unknown faction within the city. Neither you nor the extended Mikaelson family have been able to find a trace of either her or the men who took her, despite the clearly effective “maim first, ask questions later” tactics that you’ve undertaken.”

Keelin’s growl deepened further at the condescending tone which Amelia had adopted, despite letting the woman continue.

“Desperate and out of options, you decided to turn to a Ravmocker for help – no doubt calling out
the ancient summoning words of the Ravmocker tribe. Speaking of which, I’m curious - how did you come to learn of their existence?"

The low rumbling within her throat was the wolf’s only response to Amelia’s bemused question, as Keelin attempted to reign in her rapidly growing dislike for the woman.

“Well I guess it is of no concern, I believe this particular specimen of the species was one of the last remaining in existence – and he’s hardly going to be bothering anyone else anytime soon, is he!” the dark haired woman mused, more to herself than to Keelin. “So where was I…. ah yes, you being desperate to find you fiancé and all out of options!”

Keelin narrowed her eyes at Amelia as heavy rain continued to assault her face.

“I am still failing to see how any of this is your concern?!?” the wolf said, her voice thick with suspicion. “Do YOU have something to do with Freya’s disappearance?”

“Me?!” Amelia exclaimed in an apparent shocked tone. “God’s, no! The last I saw my old friend was the very night that you and I first became acquainted in the bar that I believe we are currently standing outside of. Speaking of which, why on earth did you choose to meet the Ravmocker here? What is it with you humans and your insistence on meeting demons and monsters in dark, secluded alleyways?! It’s like you all have a death wish engrained into your souls!”

The wolf’s eyebrows raised at the question.

“I….I didn’t know that he would be a demon when I……hold up, us humans? Are you implying that you are not human yourself?”

A wicked smile broke across Amelia’s lips, before she threw a quick wink in Keelin’s direction.

“What I am, Darlin, is someone who wants to help you locate your lost love! And unlike our deceased friend here, I will not be demanding anything in return for my aid.”

Keelin took a moment to consider what the sapphire eyed woman had said – her eyes flicking back and forth between the headless body lay motionless on the rain soaked floor, and her fiancé’s one time friend from over a century ago.

After a few heartbeats, the wolf simply let out a heavy sigh before silently turning to make her way back along the alleyway towards Bourbon St.

“Wait,” Amelia called out from behind her, “don’t you want to hear what I know?”

Pausing in her heavy steps, Keelin twisted her head over her shoulder to look at Amelia with tired eyes.

“Here’s what I know! You don’t have any clue as to where my love is - because if you did, you would not be stood here bothering to offer me aid. I might not know what connection it was that you had, or still think that you have with my fiancé - but I do know that whatever your interest is in finding Freya, it will not be borne from a place of altruism.”

Keelin watched as the smirk that had been tugging at the dark haired woman’s lips the entire time they had been conversing, finally looked to disappear.

“I’d advise that you stay far away from me, Amelia, and from Freya. Because if we cross paths again, I’ll happily show you just how savage and un-house broken this wolf can be!”
She let a glimpse of her inner wolf flash briefly in her eyes, before turning back towards the alleyways exit and resuming her weary walk back to the Mikaelson Compound – leaving the dark haired beauty behind in the pouring rain.

4.

Pain.

She had long since descended into a hell world filled with nothing but the agonising claws of white hot pain tearing along every inch of her broken body, and the echoes of her own tortured screams ricocheting through her head like the whaling of a wild banshee determined to let the world know of the torment it had endured.

Freya had quickly lost track of the number of lashes that she had been made to endure at the hands of the Jarls - each snap of unbearable agony eventually all melding into one large suffocating blanket of insufferable torment and pain had that stolen the very air from her lungs.

She had tried, at first, to keep count of each time the sharp metal shards fixed onto the whips tip had torn into the flesh of her back, ripping away skin and muscle to leave a trail of what felt like scorching hot lava to slowly burn its way into her.

But by the time the leather whip’s crack had boomed out into the chamber for either the third or fourth time – she could not remember which - her mind had already buckled under the weight of the agony tearing at her very being.

She had lost consciousness a few times - that much the witch could still recall as she now struggled to keep afloat in the endless sea of pain that engulfed her. The brief respites of darkness and oblivion had rapidly become Freya’s only ally during her time spent hanging from the large hook fixed into the chamber’s ceiling. An unlikely friend that she had desperately welcomed with open arms each time its black tendrils had crept up on her - and equally one that she had mourned the loss of with a never ending torrent of tears each time it had departed.

The Jarls themselves were clearly no strangers to torturing people in order to obtain what they wanted. Every time that she had passed out – her mind unable to bear the whips assault upon her flesh any longer – the tall Jarl who had held the leather lash would pause in his onslaught, and wait until the Clan Leader had managed to rouse her back into the waking world once more.

And each time that she had reluctantly returned to the agony of consciousness, Halvar’s bearded face had been there – nose to nose with her own as he had asked for the third….eighth….twelfth time if she was now ready to willingly give herself over to his control. If she was finally ready for all of the suffering and torment to end, by the simple act of her drinking the small vial of blood that he had continuously held within his grip.

The torch lit chamber had roiled and churned around the witch in a throbbing haze of suffering every time she had tried to focus her tear-filled gaze upon the blue-eyed Jarl demanding an answer from her. And every time, she had tried to will the words to form in her mouth to tell the unwashed piece of shit exactly where he could shove that tiny ampoule of his blood.
But she had not been able to find the strength. The strength to form those words of defiance. The strength to rip her chin away from the rough hand that had so often gripped onto it, forcing her to meet the Clan Leaders stare. The strength to scream out to the Jarl that she was a Mikaelson - and Mikaelson’s did not betray the safety of their family members, no matter how much pain they were subjected to.

No – any slither of rebellion or defiance that she had had left within her after the cruel ministrations of Ake and his vicious tools of torture, had all too quickly bled out of the deep gashes that now pulsed in agony along the ruined remains of her back.

A sharp cry of pain now escaped her lips, as Freya once again attempted to lift her cheek off of the rough cold gravel upon which it was pressed – only for her head to collapse immediately back down upon the ground with a thud.

There was simply no energy left within any of her muscles.

Her body had not only been subjected to the horrors of physical torture, but had also been starved of any food since her incarceration days, or weeks ago – the concept of time now a strange and mystical being, one which mocked and laughed at her as it remained forever just out of her reach.

The bearded bikers had however not been completely inept in their hosting skills. Water had been forced down her throat at least a handful of times now from what her tormented mind could recall. The Jarls no doubt making sure that her body did not shut down completely due to the onset of dehydration.

The lack of strength in her arms and legs had not prevented her from at least trying to push herself up off the floor that she now lay crumpled upon – however each feeble attempt had only served in stoking the fire of agony that still raged and burned along every inch of her body.

A body that she imagined must now look even worse than it felt, considering that Halvar had not even ordered the other Jarl’s to re-secure her against the catacombs wall after Vidar had finally ceased his relentless assault upon her back. The chains around her wrist had simply been disengaged from hook protruding out of the low ceiling, before her body had been allowed to collapse unceremoniously onto the gravelled floor – where she now remained, shivering in the chambers frigid air despite the searing fire that she could feel burning along every single cut and gash littering her body.

Despite her blurred vision not being able to make out anything other than the small stones pressed up against her face, Freya knew that the Jarl’s had long since left her alone in the dimly lit Chamber, having departed soon after the whipping had stopped.

Halvar had been enraged.

She had felt the fury radiating off the Clan Leader, its energy so fierce in intensity that it had somehow managed to pierce through the hurricane of pain decimating its way across her body, to register in the tatters of her mind.

The Jarl had shouted and seethed at the other men in the room as Freya’s limp and bleeding body had swayed back and forth from the hook - declaring each of them to be an incompetent and useless fool. He had thrown insult after insult towards the bikers, mocking everything from their masculinity to their intelligence for not being able to break the will of a lowly incapacitated, powerless, mortal – Mikaelson or not.

As pain had roared down both of her arms from the motion of Vidar roughly unhooking her from
the ceiling, the witch had been thankful for the small mercy of the Clan Leader not having the ability to see directly into her mind. For it if he had, Halvar would have realised just how close she had come to breaking as the last few lashes of Vidar’s whip had landed upon raw and bloodied, skinless flesh. Just how close she had come to begging for all of the pain and suffering to come to an end.

Just how close she had come to accepting that dammed vial of blood.

By some luck of the god’s however, or simply a small twist of fate in her favour, the Jarl had appeared too consumed in his anger towards his own brethren to notice the thin precipice of surrender upon which Freya had been perilously teetering on.

And so they had left her – collapsed on the ground and free of any bindings to the wall or ceiling. Painfully tight shackles remained secured to her wrists and ankles, but they were no longer fixed to anything else within the room. Such were her captives’ confidence in the fact that her body was now too broken to be of any use to her should she have the notion to try and escape.

And they were right in that assumption. As the witch lay fragmented and ruined, bleeding out on the chambers cold and unforgiving floor, she knew that the Jarl’s were right.

There was nothing in her left to give. No spark of defiance. No witty comeback or promises of a dealing the Jarl’s a painful death once she was reunited with her brothers and sister. No bargains or promises to try and deceive the bearded men with, in an attempt to have them set her free.

Nothing.

Nothing, save for the fact that she had still not given up that last shred of free will flickering weakly inside of her.

Her mind - as unravelled and frayed as it now was – still at least remained her own.

The sound of a door creaking open on rusted hinges suddenly shattered the silence that had fallen over the chamber after Halvar and the other Jarls had left. Dread immediately began to wash over Freya once more, intensifying the shivers that were already wrecking their way along her battered body, as gravel covering the caverns floor crunched under approaching footsteps.

Silence filled the room once more, as the nearing steps came to a halt just as they had been about to reach her. Unable to summon any energy to lift her head from where it lay face-down on the floor, the witch eyes strained back and forth in their sockets as she tried to gleam any details of whom the newcomer might be.

Seconds quickly turned into minutes as the only discernable sound in the room around her continued to be the unsteady beating of her own heart, thrumming out a malevolent rhythm to which the pulsating pain running through her whole body diligently marched along to.

She was being watched – Freya didn’t need any of her missing power to be able to feel the presence of another’s eyes boring into her through the thick silence that currently choked the room.

Another handful of heartbeats – another failed attempt by the witch to roll herself over onto her back so as to better see who now stood in the chamber with her.

How long were they going refrain from announcing their presence? What were they waiting for? Were they here to inflict more pain upon her in yet another attempt to have her willingly drink Halvar’s blood. Were they just there to watch her, under orders from the Clan Leader to make sure that she didn’t try to escape?
As if she could somehow find the energy within her to even make it to her feet, let alone breakout of this…..place!

“Pathetic!”

The low gruff voice grated harshly on her ears as it appeared to materialise up from the cold gravel that her face was pressed against.

Her heart began to pound along in a faster rhythm, its sound now near deafening in her head as sharp tendrils of fear began to claw at the few shreds of skin remaining on her back.

“Pathetic and weak!”

The statement was stronger this time – louder, as it resounded through the chamber with an almost echo like quality.

She knew that voice. She had heard it before.

“All of you – every single one of your kind – are nothing but useless, feeble bitches that crumble to the ground at the first hint of a little hardship!”

Through the disorienting fog of her exhaustion, Freya finally recognised the hate filled gravelly tones as belonging to the overweight biker - the one whom had glowered at her across Rousseau’s on the night that she had seen Amelia. The one whom had simply stared at her with something akin to a dark hunger as his fellow Jarl’s had taunted her and Keelin on the night she had been abducted.

The Jarl that Halvar had referred to as Colborn.

She had purposely marked the sound of his voice when her captors had first revealed themselves to her in this chamber of hell, days….weeks….months ago.

As she had committed all of their voices to memory - or at least the ones who had spoken in her presence.

“Look at you, shaking on the floor like a beaten dog! Is that what you are wench, a wretched beaten dog waiting for its master to teach it some discipline?”

Freya barely had time to register the sound of gravel shifting, before a heavy black boot swiftly collided into her side – eliciting a muffled cry of pain to escape from her raw throat as more of her ribs fractured from the force of the impact.

The coppery taste of blood began to fill her mouth, either from the inside of her cheek that she had bitten when the Jarl’s kick had jarred her, or from something far worse tearing somewhere deep within her body. She could not tell which.

“You know dog…..”, the biker continued - his voice now sounding more distant, as though he had strolled casually across the dimly lit chamber whilst Freya had been drowning within the new tidal wave of pain flooding her chest, ”….you might have Halvar fooled into thinking that you are still no-where near breaking point - that the Mikaelson blood running through your veins is somehow making you more resistant than the average human is to my fellow brethren’s methods of torment. But do you want to know what I think, dog?”

The sound of small stones and pebbles suddenly shifting were the only warning that Freya had, before a rough calloused hand clamped down tightly across the lower half of her face, before it twisted her head up as far as the taught tendons in her neck would allow.
Irises that churned and roiled with infinite vortexes of crimson and black now glowered into her own barely open eyes, as the bearded Jarl’s face hovered mere centimetres above her own. The rancid smell of the overweight man’s stale breath smothered over Freya’s nose, causing bile to quickly rise up in her throat - its acrid tang mixing with the coppery palate already lingering in her mouth.

“I think, that you are just one small push away from lapping down that blood like a starved bitch.”

A cruel sneer began to pull at the Jarl’s mouth as his eyes continued to bore into her.

“And I’d wager a tankard of Curtis’s finest ale that the wolf I’ve seen you associating with, is the key to you making you kneel!”

The greasy haired Jarl let out a rasping snigger of amusement as Freya’s red-rimmed quickly eyes widened in response to his words.

No.

NO!

He couldn’t know of her relationship with Keelin…could he?

The witch’s mind whirled as she desperately tried to push down upon the pain that now threatened to overwhelm her completely, so as to try and recall the times that Colborn had seen her outside of this hellhole cavern.

Seen her and Keelin.

The wolf had walked past the hulking biker and his gang that night in Rousseau’s – leather jacketed vampires jeering and catcalling her lover as she had made her way to the bathroom. But she remembered that the overweight Jarl’s attention had been solely fixed on her, a predator’s grin twisting his mouth as he had stared across the bar.

And then again on the night of her abduction – unlike the fair featured Jarl who had leered over Keelin like a deranged school boy lusting after the head cheerleader who never gave him the time of day – Colborn had only been looking at Freya. The same gluttonous sneer on plastered his face.

“She reeks of you…. did you know that?” Colborn mused, as he finally let go of the painful grip that he had on her chin. “The human wench who’s really a wolf, stinks of the Mikaelson witch who now lies here bleeding at my feet, nothing more than a broken dog.”

The Jarl let out a huff of amusement at his own choice of words, as he began pacing back and forth next to her collapsed body.

“So, I found myself wondering, why would the dark-haired bitch smell so strongly of a Mikaelson wench? The two of you are not mother and babe. Nor are you sisters born from the same womb. So why would her skin and clothes be teeming so vividly with your scent markers, that I could smell them as clear as the day each time she passed me by?!?”

Agony flared in her dislocated shoulder as she desperately tried to move an arm under her frame in an attempt to push herself up off the floor. An attempt that was quickly foiled by the gruff biker, who casually kicked out at her injured shoulder as his pacing took him past her.

Freya’s resulting scream resonated loudly around the whole catacomb as she landed back into the gravel with a thud, right onto the raw flesh of her destroyed back.
As Colborn came to a halt next to the witch, his eyes now looking down upon her, the smirk that had been lounging upon his mouth quickly dissolved, leaving only a grimace of distaste in its wake.

“She’s your lover!” the Jarl spat out in disgust, as his narrowing eyes looked down his nose and beard at her. “And the one whom we should have had chained up in here from the start – helping her become acquainted with Vidar’s whip and Ake’s blades as you were forced to watch on!”

A torrid mixture of fear and anger began to flare painfully within her heart, as the despicable reality of the Jarl’s words began to rip its way through her mind.

“N….No!”

The word rasped from her throat at an almost inaudible volume, as the effort of trying to speak caused sweat to break across her dirt covered forehead.

“She….she is…n…nothing….to….me!”

She had to try – try and convince the cumbersome Jarl that Keelin meant nothing to her. Was simply a casual associate whom she had happened to be with each time he had seen them together.

If they brought Keelin here, if they hurt the wolf in the way that they had tortured her, the pain that they had wrecked upon her body….No!

She had to try.

“Just a….an….acquaintance.”

Excruciating agony ripped through her whole body as the Jarl suddenly gripped under her armpits with his hands and hauled her body up off the cold floor – as though her weight was nothing more than that of a child’s ragged-doll to him. A thunderous roar ripped out of the Jarl’s mouth as quickly twisted them both around – the chamber becoming a dizzying blur of motion to Freya’s eyes, before she was abruptly thrown against an unyielding edge of the wooden table that had previously housed Ake’s blades and knives.

The Jarl was immediately upon her, one rough hand pushing her neck down towards the surface of the bench, whilst the other gripped painfully onto her hips and pulled them back towards his rock-hard frame.

Panic tore through the witch as her face and chest were violently pressed down against the rough grain of the tables wood – the full weight of the biker’s body crudely pressed up against her dangling legs, preventing any hope of a struggle.

Not that she had any strength left in her to struggle.

Not that she had anything left in her at all.

Hot, sour breath slithered across the shell of her ear as Colborn pressed the heavy bulk of his torso over the raw remains of her back in an attempt to reach her face - eliciting yet another cry of pain from deep within her chest.

She could feel him then – even through the agony that was now shredding at her very soul thanks to every cut, and gouge, and burn, and lash that they had subjected her to – she could still feel heat of the Jarl’s manhood throbbing through his pants as he pressed his crouch painfully against her backside.
“I want you to think about your lover, witch!” the Jarl sneered into Freya’s ear, as the abrasive coarse hair of his beard smothered over the side of her face that was not pressed against the table. “Think of everything that we will do to her if you do not kneel before us and drink that damned blood!”

The distinct sounds of a belt being ripped free from its confines and a metal zipper being hastily unfastened, mixed with the Jarl’s heavy breaths in her ear and the thunderous cry of her own heartbeat roaring in her head.

Keelin… Oh god, no!

“Think about every scream and plea for mercy that will rip out of her whoring throat….” Colborn’s voice rasped, as his breathing began to pick up in pace, “…when I’m buried deep inside of her!”

A strangled sob was all that managed to leave Freya’s mouth as the horror of the biker’s words struck a wound in her soul far deeper than any of the horrific gashes that now marred her back.

“That is of course, “the biker continued, his voice forcing its way into her ear with invisible oiled talons, “once I am through fucking you!”

She felt the bulk of the biker’s weight pull away from the back of her legs briefly, as a rough hand quickly hooked its way under the rim of her dirt covered denim jeans. The forceful snap of the material being ripped away from her skin with just a singular powerful tug from the Jarl barely registered on the witch’s body, as a cold numbness began to ripple its way across her naked form.

And as Colborn deftly freed himself from the confines of his leather pants – a groping hand roughly pulling her legs apart to allow the biker to push the tip of his manhood up against her core – a single, fragile word ghosted through Freya’s mind before it too began to lose itself in the impassive coldness of shock.

Keelin….

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Chapter End Notes

....please don't hate me! :-/
Chapter 12.

Chapter Notes

Ok guys, the same ***Trigger Warnings*** apply to this chapter as the previous one. The scenes of torture in the Jarl's catacombs are finished, however there are plenty of references to them in this installement. So be warned!

Hopefully some of you are still wanting to read my tale after the shocking events that occurred in the last Chapter. So to those of you still bearing with me, thank you for your continued support.

This will be my last posting now before Christmas, as I will be taking a short break to enjoy the festivities with my family and friends. Since we are now half way through this 2nd installement, think of it as a mid-season break - haha - to return as soon as Christmas is over.

I hope that you enjoy the Chapter, and as awlays, please let me know you thoughts. I am interested in them more then ever as we ride out these dark chapters together.

Hope that you all have a great Christmas :-)
the acutely infectious bug.

The Emergency Room’s senior attending had sounded both apologetic and desperate when he had called Keelin’s cell phone earlier in the day, to ask if she could cover a twelve hour shift in the clinic. The hospital had originally been very understanding when the wolf had contacted them earlier in the week to declare that she needed to take a few personal days to deal with an urgent family matter, and would be back in work as soon as it had been dealt with.

Despite the high level of supernatural drama and emergencies that came hand in hand with courting a member of the Mikaelson family, Keelin had so far managed to avoid taking too much unplanned leave from the Clinic. Even when she had spent a few days staying amongst the members of the Neivera wolf pack over a year ago, she had managed to secure that time as last minute Holiday allowance. It had of course helped that her friend Joel had been in charge of the clinic’s rota at that point in time, and gone out of his way to juggle the other Doctor’s shifts to accommodate for Keelin’s absence.

A highly appreciated favour that the wolf had not let go unrewarded – once she had eventually recovered from her injuries.

But as her manager had been explaining that morning just how short staffed the clinic was thanks to the raging storm, and just how desperately they needed her help should she be able to make it into work - Keelin had known that she had no other option but to answer his call for help. Especially considering it had now been a whole week since she had asked for the personal time, and such an absence was usually expected to only last a couple of days – three at the most.

The truth was, however, that she had still been very close to telling the senior attending that she was unable to cover any shifts at the clinic, despite their desperate situation. And had it not been for the fact that Haley had suddenly appeared before her in the Mikaelson Compound’s courtyard and grabbed the cell phone out of her hand – telling the man on the other end of the line that of course Dr Malraux would be happy to provide cover and would arrive at the hospital within the hour, before abruptly hanging up on him and offering the phone back to her friend – Keelin would not now be stood staring out at the never ending storm from one of the clinic’s second floor window’s.

The wolf let out a heavy sigh as she slowly raised a hand to rub at her tired eyes.

*She shouldn’t be here wasting precious time in the clinic! Time that would be better spent out there, searching for Freya!*  

Keelin had eventually let Hayley wear her down earlier that morning – the hybrid insisting that should any developments arise with regards to Freya’s whereabouts, she would call the wolf immediately and fill her in. Assured her several times in fact, that she would be the first to know if the rest of the Mikaelson family discovered even the smallest of clues or leads on the matter.

As assuring as the hybrid had been trying to be, Keelin had still been able to see the doubt that had been weighing heavy in her friend’s eyes as she had spoken the words of comfort.

Seven days.

Freya had been missing for seven days now. And despite their best efforts to stay positive and hopeful in their search for the witch, the same look of weary defeat and loss had been gradually settling over the features of all of the Mikaelson family – one by one. Even Hope, whose youthful optimism had remained stalwart during the first few days of their hunt for her aunt, had finally begun to show the tell-tale signs of defeat upon her young face whenever Keelin had seen the
withe.

Yet despite all of the doubt that Keelin could now see creeping onto all of the Mikaelson’s features whenever she was with them, the wolf refused to give up hope that her lover was still out there – somewhere – alive and waiting to be found.

Both Hayley and Rebekah had been trying their best to prepare her for the worst over the last forty eight hours. Keelin of course knew that neither of the two women would admit to it should they be asked, and both had diligently kept up their respective searches for Freya without break nor pause. But the wolf could plainly see it in their faces, and hear it in the tone of their voices whenever they spoke to her with an update on their progress – they were no longer expecting to find the witch alive.

The same could also now be said of both Elijah and Marcel - who had now extended their searches out further afield, with the King of New Orleans and his vampires taking their search efforts into the neighbouring city of Lafayette, and Elijah accompanying the witch regent Tobias to the city of Hattiesburg, where there was rumoured to be a small coven of witches who commonly practiced in long forgotten dark arts and spells that had been lost to modern generations of magic wielders. Tobias had been reluctant at first to even entertain the idea that the fabled “Oblivioni” coven was anything other than exactly that – a fable created as a warning by tired witch mothers who were sick of hearing their young wards ask for the hundredth time why they weren’t allowed to learn about or practice the dark arts.

But after a little persuasion provided by the well-dressed Original vampire - the nature of which Keelin had wisely decided to not to ask about - the young regent had reluctantly agreed to at least accompany Elijah on his errand to Hattiesburg, to see if they could locate any members of the mythical coven and discover if they had knowledge of any forbidden spells that may aid in locating Freya’s whereabouts.

Keelin had still seen the look on Elijah’s face however as he had left for the neighbouring city with Tobias, on the previous morning. And it had not been one filled with optimism.

Determination – yes. But not hope.

It now appeared that the only person other than herself that still had faith in her fiancé being found alive was Freya’s ever fiery and ardent hybrid brother. Much like the wolf, Klaus had refused to even entertain the idea that their complete lack of progress over the past week was due to the fact that the witch no longer resided on the mortal plane. Tensions between the disagreeing Mikaelson siblings had in fact reached an explosive crescendo two days ago, and Keelin had been unfortunate enough to walk into the Compound just as Klaus had flung a particularly sharp steak knife towards Elijah’s head as a result of the suited vampire suggesting that they should have Tobias and his coven conduct a séance to see if Freya’s spirit was detectable in the afterlife. Elijah had deftly side stepped out of the oncoming knife’s path with such effortless grace and ease, that it might as well have been flying through the air at a snail’s pace.

Unfortunately for her however, the kitchen utensil had indeed been hurled by the hybrid with such supernatural strength and speed, that the wolf had barely had time to register the knives approach after Elijah had cleared out of its way, before it had effortlessly embedded itself into her shoulder, right up to the hilt of its shining silver handle.

Keelin had later been thankful that Hope had already been tucked into bed for the evening, as the explosion of explicit words that had erupted out of her tired and irritated mouth as the knife had sliced through her flesh would have made even the most hardened sailor blush with surprise. Thankfully however, the blade had not managed to nick any major blood vessels, and her
accelerated wolf healing had already begun knitting the wound back together within a few minutes of Rebekah removing the offending utensil and placing pressure upon the wound.

Klaus had been quick to angrily declare that should any of them care to help, he would be out in the city searching for their “very much alive” sister – but had still paused to throw a remorseful wince towards Keelin as he had passed the wolf on his way out into the New Orleans night. Considering the maddened state of worry for his sister’s wellbeing that the Hybrid had been wrapped within, the wolf had surmised that it was the closest thing that she would get to an apology off her fiancé’s younger brother, and decided not to hold it against Klaus the next time she saw him.

And now, as she stood absentmindedly rubbing her blue hospital scrubs over the spot where the steak knife had hit her, Keelin knew that there was only the smallest slither of a thin scar still marking the spot – and that it too would have probably disappeared by the time she finished her shift for the day.

Sighing heavily, the jaded wolf turned from the stormy scene that was presenting itself to her through the second-floor hospital window, and looked down at the unconscious woman that lay unmoving on the electric bed in the centre of the small private room. A rueful smile threatened to tug at Keelin’s downcast mouth as she acknowledged the electric monitor that had been fixed onto to the patient’s left forefinger via an infrared clip and was currently chiming out the steady beat of a recovering heart. Walking over to the IV stand that was positioned just to the right of the bed, the wolf quickly checked the flow of fluid being slowly pumped into the woman’s arm, before grabbing the grey chart hanging off the foot of the bedframe and sitting down in the plastic chair next to the bed to inspect the notes that had been written in the scrawl of one of her fellow doctor’s.

A myocardial infarction caused by neurotoxicity, that had been the result of King Cobra Snake venom being introduced directly into the patient’s blood stream – was the official diagnosis documented in the pages that Keelin now flipped through. The woman’s heart had stopped a total of five times before the emergency surgical team had managed to determine the presence of the venom upon the knife that they had removed from her right side – a knife that had narrowly missed the patients liver by just a few millimetres. Thankfully St Theodora’s always kept a small stock of snake anti-venom within its on-site medical stores due to the continued insistence of the city’s tourist board in running trips into the marshlands of the Bayou for out-of-towners.

Out-of-towners who had usually never set foot into a quagmire before in their lives, and thus had no idea of the numerous dangers posed by the local wildlife that called the Bayou home.

A large dose of the anti-venom had been immediately issued to the patient, as the on-call surgeon had worked diligently to repair the damage caused by the large serrated knife that had been liberally coated in snake venom. Despite their quick thinking and diligent efforts, the emergency team had still been pleasantly surprised when the woman’s heart had eventually begun to show signs of returning to a normal sinus rhythm - each having already conceded that the venom had probably been in the patients system too long for the anti-venom to have a positive effect.

Even the staff nurse that had shown Keelin into the room only a few minutes ago had made comment that God must have been shining down upon the young woman on the night that she had been rushed into the hospital, for her to survive after such a large dose of snake venom had been in her system for so long.

Keelin had only offered a tired nod to the nurse in response, knowing full well that no God had had anything to do with the patients seemingly unusual resilience to the venom of the cobra snake – but rather it had more than likely been the supernaturally resilient properties of the blood running through the wolf’s veins, that were the reason for her now recovering – all be it slowly - in one of
the hospital's beds on the cardiac ward.

Alanna had been lucky.

Very lucky, Keelin acknowledged with a sigh, as she placed the patient chart down onto the bed and took one of the younger wolf's pale hands into her own.

She had not previously heard of any cases where a wolf had been subjected to such a high dose of poisonous snake venom and lived to tell the tale – either documented within the medical journals she had studied during the years she had spent studying as a med-student, or amongst the stories told by her own family pack when she had been growing up back in Austin. Her kind's accelerated healing properties often meant that they did not react in the same way to toxins and bacteria as human mortals did – most wolves finding that they would recover from what would be considered a serious life threatening infection for a human, within a matter of hours – barely breaking into a sweat as their bodies enhanced immune system rapidly disposed of the intruding cells.

But according to the toxicology results on Alanna’s chart, the level of cobra venom that had been found circulating the young wolf’s blood was almost ten times the amount that would normally be delivered from a single snake bite. And just a single bite more often than not resulted in the victim’s organs beginning to fail within thirty minutes of it being introduced into the bloodstream, if not treated with the appropriate anti-venom.

The fact that both the ambulance EMT’s and the Emergency Room’s on call doctor had managed to jump-start the wolf’s heart at all – let alone on five separate times – before the anti-venom was finally delivered, was being viewed by the faculty as a rare medical anomaly, and would no doubt be subject to much scrutiny and debate over the upcoming weeks.

Not that she could find it within herself to care about any of that as she sat looking at the sweat sheened face of the sleeping wolf.

*Her friend was alive and slowly recovering. Considering everything else that was going to shit around her – she supposed that that could at least be considered a small win in her favour.*

*Considering that Freya’s fate might not be quite so fortunate.*

No! She could not let herself think like that. Freya was alive…..

A familiar high pitched beeping sound suddenly broke the relative silence of the hospital room, causing Keelin to jump slightly in her seat. Releasing the younger wolf’s hand she quickly reached for the small black pager that forever lived on the waistband of her scrubs, and checked the number showing on its digital display.

*Joel was trying to get hold of her – no doubt to advise of an incoming patient.*

“Great!” the wolf muttered to herself quietly as she slowly stood up from the hard plastic hospital chair and stretched out the muscles in her back and arms.

Briefly looking down at Alanna, Keelin smiled weakly towards her unconscious friend before turning to head for the room’s exit.

*She had a feeling that it was going to be a long shift!*
“So, what’s inbound?”

Keelin immediately wrapped her arms around her body as she came to a standstill next to Joel, bracing herself against the frigid ministrations of the howling storm. Despite the fact that St Theodora’s ambulance bay was flanked on three sides by tall walls of the hospital, a fierce wind was still managing to cause havoc in the unloading area, whipping violently at staff member’s hair and clothes as heavy rain continued to lash down from the murky grey sky above.

Joel turned his head towards her, his brows narrowing together as he stood awkwardly jiggling from one foot to another in a vain attempt to generate body heat whilst they waited on the imminent arrival of an incoming ambulance – the sirens of which Keelin could already faintly hear over the storm thanks to her enhanced wolf senses.

“Oh, nice of you to join us!” the male nurse remarked curtly, irritation clearly creeping into his words. “You do remember that we’re thin on the ground today right?! Or was there a sudden medical emergency up on the Cardiac ward that their own resident doctor couldn’t handle perfectly well on his own?!”

A quick sideway glance towards her friend was all it took for Keelin to determine where Joel’s true frustrations lay, as she noted the worry and weariness that were shining as plain as the day in his grey eyes. Her own face must have been reflecting a similar expression, as the harsh lines angling on the male nurse’s brow quickly dissolved away when the two of their stares met.

“I’m sorry Keelin,” Joel sighed, as his gaze dropped from hers and returned to the ambulance bay ahead of them. “I didn’t mean to snap!”

“It’s ok. I’ve been worried about her too you know!”

Keelin knew that she did not need to clarify whom she was speaking of, as she watched the male nurse’s expression flick back and forth between confusion and concern.

A heavy sigh left his mouth as he gently shook his head.

“Did you know? What she is?”

Joel’s question was so quiet that Keelin almost missed it, as the whispered words jostled for a place amongst the savage wind’s high pitched whistling and the continuous drumming of rain drops.

Was he referring to their mutual friend’s wolf heritage? Had Alanna let something slip to him?

“Did I know what?” she asked back cautiously, making sure not to be overheard by the other staff nurse who had now joined them outside as they waited on the new patient’s arrival.

The male nurse seemed to be about to answer her, before appearing to quickly reconsider the words that had been forming in his mouth. Drawing in a deep breath, he turned back to face her and reached out a hand to give her arm a quick squeeze.

“I’m sorry, I’m being so bloody insensitive! Here I am prattling on about my enigma of a flatmate, when you’ve got a whole world of your own crap to worry about! Has there been any news on Freya?”
Keelin felt her whole posture tense at the mention of her missing lover’s name – Joel’s hand becoming a heavy weight on her arm as she listlessly searched her mind for any words that might not result in tears beginning to burn in her eyes.

Coming up short, the wolf decided that a brief shake of her head would be the safest answer, as the approaching ambulances siren grew steadily louder.

Appearing to sense the perilously thin line of composure that the wolf was currently tight-walking along, Joel gave her arm another quick squeeze before dropping his hand away and returning his attention back to the empty bay ahead of them.

“I really did try and avoid paging you for as long as possible”, the male nurse offered as his eyes remained searching for the inbound emergency. “But Dr Thornton is still tied up in surgery with that GSW that came in first thing this morning, and Dr Winter’s was called up to an emergency on the Paediatrics ward just before this EMT call came in over the dispatch. You’re the only one that’s free at present.”

“Honestly Joel, its ok.” Keelin replied as she tried to focus her mind for the task ahead. “Being active will hopefully help to take my mind off…..off things for a while.”

A small nod of the male nurse’s head in acknowledgment was the only response that she received – for which the wolf was thankful for.

If she was honest within herself, Keelin had to admit that Joel had been nothing but supportive since the whole nightmare of Alanna’s injury and Freya’s disappearance had first begun. She had initially been weary of telling anyone outside of the Mikaelson Family’s immediate circle of associates about Freya’s abduction – fearing that any sort of revelation might cause a tear in the perilously delicate veil of secrecy that separated the supernatural element of New Orleans from the everyday lives of mortals.

But it had been Joel who had answered when she had called the clinic on the afternoon after the biker gang attack wanting to know how Alanna was fairing up. The male nurse had been verging on an all-out panic attack as he demanded to know what had happened after Keelin and Alanna had rushed out of Lafitte’s Bar on the night before, and why his flatmate had just come out of surgery for a wound caused by a knife coated in snake venom.

As Keelin had stood in one of the city’s dockside warehouses, looking out over the moody Mississippi River whilst listening to Klaus try to painfully extract information on Freya’s whereabouts out of a leather clad vampire, her tired and worried mind had struggled to think of an alternative plausible explanation for what had happened.

So, the wolf had ended up telling him the truth.

Or at least a watered down, non-supernatural version of the truth.

Joel had fallen silent on the other end of the phone as Keelin had explained how she and Freya had been involved in an emotional argument on Bourbon street when a gang of bearded bikers had cornered and attacked them. That a few of the men had knocked Freya unconscious and abducted her whilst she herself had been attempting to fight off some of the others. And how Alanna had rushed to try and help her, only to end up getting stabbed by one of the bikers for her trouble.

She had purposely left out the details of how between them, Alanna and herself had killed everyone of the bikers who had remained behind after Freya’s kidnapping – instead implying that the brutes that had attacked them had quickly fled off into the night soon after Alanna sustained her injury.
Keelin had figured that shock must have taken over her friend’s mind by the time she had finished her explanation, as the male nurse had remained silent on the other end of the phoneline for a few heartbeats before quietly stuttering out the words, “But…. your and Freya’s argument wasn’t… wasn’t too serious was it? You guys are still together?”

A small huff of amusement now left her mouth as she stood waiting in St Theadora’s ambulance bay, remembering what Joel had chosen to focus upon out of all the shocking events that had unfolded on that fateful evening.

“Ok, here we go!”

The nurse’s statement drew the wolf out of her thoughts just as the awaited ambulance turned off the main road and into the Clinic’s emergency unloading bay.

Keelin and the assembled nurses quickly fell into the well-oiled and practiced routine of receiving an emergency patient from one of the ninth ward’s many ambulance vehicles. The wolf remained stood in position whilst she watched Joel and the other staff nurse, Helen, reach for the vehicles back doors once it came to a halt a few metres away from the Hospital’s entranceway. They then proceeded to help the emerging EMT technician to unload the patient gurney off the back of the ambulance, whilst the lead paramedic - a man called Adam whom Keelin knew was fairly close to retirement now having just celebrated his sixtieth birthday – approached Keelin to begin giving his assessment of the patient that had briefly been in their care.

“Hey Adam – what have you got for us”, Keelin asked, trying to force a smile to form on her face in greeting to the familiar paramedic.

“Honestly”, the experienced medical professional began, as he handed the EMT chart to the wolf, “This one’s a mess!”

Keelin raised her brows absentmindedly in reaction to his statement, trying to focus on the chart stats in front of her as she fell into step with Adam as they walked in front of the gurney towards the hospital’s entranceway.

“Adult female, found unconscious on a roadside on the outskirts of the ninth by a passing police cruiser. Patient was unresponsive and asystole when we arrived, and the officer on scene was administering CPR. We managed to regain a tachycardia rhythm before departure, but it has been far from stable on the journey here. Multiple lacerations and blunt trauma injuries all over her body that I’d estimate to now be a few days old. Apparent fractures to her left forearm, fingers on both hands, and from the swelling on her torso, I’d say that several of her ribs were broken too with possible internal bleeding. But the worst of it is to be found on her….”

“Oh fuck!”

Both Keelin and the paramedic halted in their tracks just as they reached the double doors that lead into the clinic’s trauma department - quickly turning around to see what had caused the sudden outburst from Joel. As her gaze fell upon the male nurse stood at the head of the gurney, Joel’s gaze flicked up from the patient and locked onto hers – eyes wide in apparent surprise.

And in the brief heartbeat it took for her work colleague to find words to force past the jolt of shock rushing through him - she knew.

From the distress shining in his eyes as gaped at her open mouthed - she knew.

“Keelin…. its Freya!”
Thrusting the EMT chart that she had been holding into the hands of the paramedic next to her, Keelin rushed to where Joel stood at the head of the gurney and looked down upon face of the unconscious woman. The patients features were slightly obscured by the bulky head brace that the emergency response team had placed upon her as standard protocol, but the woman’s face was instantly recognisable to the wolf nether-the-less. As were the distinct scent markers that her nose was now finally picking up.

*It’s her! Oh god… it’s her!*

The world around Keelin seemed to slow to a stop, as her reeling mind struggled to recall the list of injuries that she had only half been listening to the paramedic Adam reel off, only a few seconds ago.

*Broken ribs….lacerations…..her heart hadn’t been beating…..oh god what if they’d not got there in time….something about blunt force trauma….*

Voices began to sound out around the wolf, but the words being formed didn’t manage to pierce through the thick viscous fog that seemed to have blanketed itself over her the moment she had recognised the person to whom the broken body on the gurney had belonged to.

“Shit, she’s slipping back into asystole!”

“Start chest compressions! We need to get her inside, now!”

*Her face looks so gaunt…so delicate and fragile compared to the thick red padding of the brace framing it…she looks like she’s not eaten in days….*

“Which trauma room?”

“I think trauma two is free!”

*Where had she been all this time….what the hell had happened to her….who had done this to her….*

“Keelin I think she needs a chest line…..Keelin?”

*Someone had been hurting her whilst she had wasted time sleeping…..whilst she had wasted time talking in the Compound someone had been doing this to her love….*

“She’s crashing, what do you need us to do??”

*Freya had needed her and she hadn’t been there….she had suffered because of her inabilities…..* 

“DR MALRAUX!”

Joel’s voice was suddenly ricocheting through her head like a bull in a china shop, ripping its way through the thick clouds of stupor filling her mind like they were nothing more than fine puffs of mist. The doubled door entranceway and the bustling sounds emanating from within the building came crashing back into focus just as the male nurse thrust his face in front of hers – his eyes wild and determined.

“Snap the hell outta it doctor – you have a patient in there that’s going to die if you don’t get your shit together right now!”

*Die? Freya was going to…..no….NO!*
The wolf within her suddenly let out a deep growl as it bristled up against the magical Kyanite barrier – a growl that had made it out of her throat before Keelin had the chance to stop it. Eye’s flaring with amber tones quickly came into sharp focus onto Joel’s own, her now racing mind barely registering the shock that suddenly gleamed in the male nurses stare as she made to push quickly push past him.

“Where?”

She knew that her voice had sounded more animal than it did human, but as Keelin pushed through the doors into the familiar surroundings of the clinic, she only had one concern rushing through her. One thought blocking out all other matters or worries.

“T….trauma two”, Joel’s voice stuttered out from behind her as the doors made to swing shut on him.

Freya WOULD live…. she would not fail her again!

******************************************************************************

3.

Fuck….had her eyes just….only briefly, but….and that noise…. had she growled at him….actually growled?!?

With a quick shake of his head, Joel pushed through the double doors that lead straight from the ambulance bay into St Theodora’s trauma unit – immediately breaking into a jog across the polished green floor of the corridor in an attempt to catch up with Keelin who was now speeding towards Trauma Room Two.

He had worked at the hospital for nearly eight years now, having completed all three years of his nursing degree placement in the clinic before being offered a permanent Registered Nurse position by emergency department’s chief DNP. A job that he had jumped at the opportunity to take given the close proximity of the hospital to the apartment that he had taken over the rental agreement on when his older sister had made the move from New Orleans to Atlanta, and the fact that he had already built up several good friendships within the emergency clinic over his initial years spent training there.

As such, the department’s layout and workings were now so ingrained into his memory, that he knew he could probably find his way to any room or locate any required instrument or piece of machinery with his eyes closed – from memory reflex alone.

But right then, as he followed Dr Malraux through the corridor at high speed, the nurse knew that even a new student fresh out of the medical school classroom would have been able to locate where trauma room two was right then without having any prior knowledge of the departments layout – all they would have had to do is follow the trail of fresh blood that had splattered down onto the floor.

The two of them almost skidded in the crimson fluid as they simultaneously reached the trauma room’s entrance and rounded its corner without slowing.
The room itself had already descended into the familiar scene of chaos that went hand in hand with working upon some of the more seriously injured patients that they received from the emergency EMT’s – or organised anarchy as he often liked to think of it when back home, reflecting on a day’s events.

The paramedic who had worked upon Freya during the ambulance trip over was still up on the gurney straddled over the blonde as he delivered yet another rapid set of chest compressions. Joel had seen Adam jump up onto the trolley as it had been wheeled into the building, when it had become apparent to all there that Dr Malraux was making no move to start the required CPR - despite her fiancé’s heartbeat failing.

He had never seen Keelin react that way to a trauma before. The brunette was usually so professional and focused when dealing with patient’s whose lives were hanging in the balance - it had been like her brain had short-circuited the moment that she had seen it was Freya on the gurney. And those eyes - the same as Alanna’s had been….

Noticing that the Doctor had now arrived and appeared to be focused on the task at hand once more, Adam quickly jumped off the gurney and moved aside so that she could take over the chest compressions.

“Joel I need an intubation kit, size 3 scope” Keelin stated, each word punctuated by the thrust of her crossed palms upon Freya’s chest. “Sanders?”

Helen Sanders, one of the recent in-take of new staff that had transferred over from the Tulane Medical Centre just over a month ago, was beside Keelin in a heartbeat with, eyes wide and expectant.

“Charge the defibrillator, I need it ready stat…..shit, where’s all this blood coming from?!?”

Joel was already across the room pulling an intubation kit out of the med-tray when he heard Keelin’s outburst. Twisting around to head back, he quickly noted what had caused the doctor’s swearing – the blood that had been slowly dripping off the sides of the ambulance trolley upon which Freya was still lay was now beginning to flow in earnest, causing twin pools of gore to steadily collect on either side of the gurney.

“That’s what I was trying to tell you earlier, before the patient crashed”, Adam called out from where he and the other EMT were waiting on their trolley being returned to them, “there are multiple lacerations on her back. Deep ones! They were only moderately bleeding when we got to the scene, but I imagine the force from the chest compressions is increasing the flow.”

As he placed the Laryngoscope into Keelin’s waiting outstretched hand, Joel quickly nodded at the doctor – taking over the chest compressions whilst Keelin swiftly moved to the head of the gurney to begin inserting the Endotracheal tube down Freya’s throat.

With the practiced ease of someone who performed the manoeuvre several times a day, Keelin had the tube in place within seconds - quickly attaching a bag pump over its socket as she shouted over to the EMT’s still stood near the doorway.

“Guys if you want this gurney back you are going to have to help us out here. I’m short staffed and need your hands!”

Adam had cleared the distance between them in a heartbeat, grabbing the pump out of the Keelin’s hands and beginning compressions to push air into the patient’s lungs.
“Sanders how’s that defib looking, I need it now!”

“Ready!”

Joel continued pumping with his hands as he watched the slight framed nurse hand over the two defibrillator paddles to Keelin, who quickly checked the machines charge before turning back to Freya.

“Ok, clear!”

Quickly moving his hands away to allow the paddles to be placed, he watched on as the blondes body instantly arched off the table, her limbs going rigid as the defibrillators electricity discharged into her heart and surrounding nerves.

All eyes in the room fell onto the heart monitor that been emitting the daunting monotone drone of a flat-line ever since he and Keelin had entered into the trauma room less than two minutes ago.

Nothing.

He quickly resumed the chest compressions without needing any prompt from the doctor.

“Ok, charging again – Sanders, prepare 5mg of epinephrine!”

Keelin’s voice was back to the focused, no nonsense tone of an emergency room doctor determined to resuscitate her patient, and it was having a somewhat calming effect on Joel despite the tense atmosphere currently filling the trauma room. It was a voice he was used to – one that he respected, and knew to mean that his friend had descended completely into her professional “life-saving” persona, pushing aside any emotions for the time being.

_A voice that was fully human, and not…..whatever it had been out in the ambulance bay!_

“Charge complete - everyone clear!”

He quickly pulled away from Freya’s chest again and turned to watch the heart monitor as Keelin administered another surge of electricity into their patient’s heart.

Nothing again.

Keelin grabbed the syringe that nurse Sanders was holding out for her - taking only a second to locate the correct spot above Freya’s heart before plunging the needle deep into the muscle surrounding the failing organ and pushing down upon the syringes plunger.

The drugs administration appeared to have a positive effect, as a rapid yet fragmented beat began to ring out of the heart-monitors speaker.

“There’s a pulse, but it’s tachycardic”, Adam stated, looking at the machine’s read-out as he continued to pump air into the patient’s lungs. “I’d say there’s increased pressure around the heart!”

Joel watched on as Keelin quickly studied the deep bruising on display across most of Freya’s torso and chest with analytical eyes.

“Joel grab a chest drain kit, I think the right lung is collapsed and causing the increased pressure on her heart. Sander’s, have the usual tests ordered ASAP – CBC, Cardiac Enzymes, Chem 7, and a Tox-screen. And order down three bags of A Positive – we need to replace some of this blood that
she’s losing. You…”, Keelin shouted towards the second EMT still stood by the rooms entrance, whom Joel didn’t recognise, “Go and get the portable x-ray out of trauma one, I need to get a better look at what’s causing all this bruising!”

To her credit, the ambulance crew member didn’t hesitate nor batter an eye before turning to rush off to the other trauma room for the requested equipment. Keelin’s demand had been both curt and rushed, and had she spoken to the EMT in any other situation in that manner, the doctor could have been branded rude and bad-mannered. But most of the staff who worked in a medical emergency environment always knew to expect their colleague’s mannerisms to change when a patient’s life was hanging in the balance.

Saving the life came first – poor etiquette could be excused later.

As he handed over a white tray to Keelin that contained the requested chest-tube, Joel turned to rush over to the small refrigerated unit housed in one of the far corners of the room.

“I think we still have a bag of A Positive left over from the GSW patient this morning!” he called out over his shoulder, as Keelin prepared to insert the chest tube into Freya’s right lung.

Returning to the gurney with the blood, he began hooking the bag onto an IV pole and fastening on the drip chamber and tubing ready for attaching it to the cannula that had been inserted into the back of the patient’s hand. He could not help the grimace that formed on his face as he noted the deep lacerations on the blonde’s wrists as he worked, looking to have been caused by some sort of sharp restraints.

“Come on….come on…” Keelin muttered to herself, as she carefully attempted to feed the thin tubing through a small incision she had made above one of the patient’s ribs, into the small pleural space around Freya’s right lung. “Got it!”

All eyes once again focused on the heart monitor, as the erratic rhythm beeping out from the machine slowly began to take on a steadier, even rhythm.

Joel let out a breath that he hadn’t realised he had been holding, thankful to see that the chest drain had been successful in relieving some of the pressure around the blonde’s heart.

The female EMT re-entered into the Trauma room pushing a portable x-ray machine in front of her as she approached. Keelin looked up briefly and indicated for the woman to set the device up over by the far side of the room.

“Right let’s get her transferred over onto our own gurney.”

Joel finished hooking up the end of the blood IV into Freya’s hand, before moving to grab the Patslide off the wall where it was hanging.

“Ok Sanders you’re with Joel – Adam with me. On my mark, roll her towards me and get the slide under ASAP. If she has wounds on her back, we need to make this as smooth as possible to prevent further aggravation and blood loss!”

Passing the large plastic slide over to Sanders for her to balance on the side of the ambulances gurney, Joel carefully grabbed onto Freya’s hip and leg over the hospital issue blanket that had must have been wrapped around the blonde’s lower half by the EMT team when they had placed her in the ambulance. Keelin reached over from the opposite side of the gurney to grab onto her partner’s upper arm, whilst Adam placed both of his hands on either side of the head brace framing Freya’s face.
“Ok, carefully, one…two…three….roll!”

Between them they quickly rotated Freya’s frame, so that her body moved to balance on her left flank.

“Oh… god!”

Joel hardly registered the gasped words of revulsion that escaped from Sanders beside him - all colour draining from his face as his eyes landed on the bloodied mess that had once been Freya’s back. Blood flowed freely from what he swiftly estimated to be well over thirty long gashes criss-crossing over the area. Severe wounds that, if he didn’t know better, Joel would have said had been inflicted by some sort of whip or crop.

*Christ, what the hell had happened to her?!!*

A loud clattering sound rang out through the room as the Patslide fell from Sanders grip – the nurse turning quickly from the gory scene in front of them and running over to the corner of the room, where she proceeded to empty the contents of her stomach into a sink.

Keelin quickly motioned for the female EMT to take her place holding onto Freya’s upper arm, whilst she moved around the gurney to see what had made Sanders react so violently. As the doctor’s eyes landed on the macabre tatters of skin and flesh, Joel noted a look of horror briefly flicker through Keelin’s eyes before she quickly schooled her expression into one of professional medical assessment.

“Ok… well….now we know where all the blood is coming from! Right, we’re going do this the old fashioned way, without the slide. Adam can you grab one of the large sterile absorption pads off out of the bottom left cupboard behind you and place it on the trauma gurney.”

Keelin quickly turned to the female EMT who was still holding onto Freya’s forearm whilst looking expectantly at the doctor for further instruction.

“I’m sorry, I don’t know your name…”

“It’s Julie.”

“Right, Julie. Can you take your colleagues place and keep the patients head steady as we lift her across,” Keelin ordered, moving back to the opposite side from Joel and gripping onto Freya’s limbs. “Ok, on my say, we do this slowly – Adam how are we looking on that pad?”

The male paramedic rushed back over to the gurney, quickly unrolling the sterile cushioned cover over the hospital trolley before taking up position with his hands on the blondes frame.

“Slow and steady….lift!”

The four of them managed to move Freya’s unconscious body over to the assigned gurney without mush struggle – placing her down carefully so as not to tear open the wounds on her back any more than they already were. Adam and Julie quickly began the process of grabbing their equipment and placing it on the bloodied ambulance trolley as Joel made to grab the blanket that had been covering the blonde’s lower half.

“Here, don’t forget your cover.”

“You guys might as well keep it until you’re done” Adam said as he waivered a hand towards Joel, “it’s too blood soaked to be of any use to us for the rest of our shift. Besides, it’s the only thing
covering her at present. She was naked when the squad car discovered her.”

“Naked?” Keelin asked, her eyes flicking over to the paramedic from where she was helping an ashen looking Sanders set up the portable X-ray machine. “She was found on the side of the road, naked?”

Joel watched as Adam nodded his head in confirmation whilst packing up the last of the EMT gear.

“Yeah, the squad car driver said he thought that she must have been dumped out there by someone driving a vehicle into the city, as there were no footprints in the sodden mud around her or any tracks suggesting her body had been dragged there. But there were muddy tyre marks all around her, as though the vehicle or vehicles had travelled over the rough terrain instead of the road itself.”

Keelin’s brow knitted together as she returned to working on the x-ray machine with nurse Sanders. Joel could only guess what must have been running through his friends mind at that moment, as she no doubt tried to piece together how her fiancé had come to be in such a critical state, abandoned on a road on the outskirts of the city.

“Right, do you need us for anything else before we head out?” Adam asked, as he and Julie made their way over to the Trauma Room’s exit.

Seeing that Dr Malraux appeared to be too lost in her own thoughts to have heard the paramedic, Joel quickly offered a smile towards the EMT team, and shook his head.

“I think we should be good now. Thanks for your help.”

Turning back to the gurney, he saw that the X-ray machine was now ready for use, its image capture target resting over Freya’s mottled and burnt torso. All three of them that were left in the room quickly donned the protective vest’s that hung off the back of the portable device, before Keelin triggered the machine into action.

“Ok - I also want one of her right shoulder as it looks like the socket may have shattered, and Joel, can you remove the blanket, I think we need to get an image of her left femur as well as I’m not happy with the angle in which her leg looks to be lying under that cover.”

“On it!” was the male nurse’s only response as he moved to position himself lower down the gurney.

“Ok that’s the shoulder image done – Sanders ring theatres and see if they have a table free for our patient. I think it’s Andrews who’s covering emergency procedures today. Let him know that we have an urgent case with possible haemorrhaging around the liver and pancreas, as well as numerous deep lacerations to the back coming his way.”

“Yes Doctor.”

Quickly changing his gloves more for one’s not coated in the patient’s blood, Joel began to peel back the ambulance blanket that had been draped over the blonde’s legs. He immediately found his eyes wandering from Freya’s crooked left thigh to what appeared to be the tip of several lacerations at the top of both of her inner thighs. Placing his hand gently on her, the male nurse slowly pulled the blonde’s leg towards him to get a better look at the injuries.

What he saw, quickly made his blood run cold.

“Oh God….Keelin....”
The words came out of his mouth in a low and shaky tone, as the male nurse struggled to retain his composure.

“Mmm hmmm?” Keelin murmured in reply, not taking her eyes off the chart that Sanders had just handed her, showing the first blood tests to be returned from the emergency pathology lab. “Christ her platelets are low! I know she’s lost a lot of blood but the read-out is almost none existent. Something else has got to be ….”

“Keelin!”

The brunette doctor finally looked up from the chart – her eyes quickly following to where Joel’s gaze remained locked on Freya’s thighs.

A number of large bruises could be seen littered across both of the blonde’s inner thighs, each a fierce mosaic of deep red and purple colours as the tissue underneath Freya’s skin continued to bleed long after what must have been the initial trauma. Several sickle shaped abrasions also marred the area, the likes of which Joel knew from his experience working in the trauma unit, were usually caused by fingernails having been forcibly pressed into a patient’s soft tissue over an extended period of time.

But the injury that had sent cold slithers of disgust and revulsion running down the male nurse’s spine, stood out with far more anger and rage than the other wounds marring Freya’s inner thighs – a clear indication that the abuse which the blonde’s whole body had been subjected to had been intended to leave a lasting impression of hate and suffering.

Carved deeply into the flesh on the inside of Freya’s right thigh were several large letters – macabrely framed by the blood that still oozed out of the incisions, and spelling out four clear words of a message.

“SHES MINE NOW WOLF”

A few seconds passed before Joel managed to finally tear his shocked gaze away from the appalling display of cruelty – his eyes slowly lifting to Keelin, who appeared to have frozen in place. The doctor’s face had taken on a grey hew - her mouth slightly ajar, as expressions of horror and grief battled for dominance in eyes which had quickly begun to fill with the silver slithers of tears.

“Doctor Malraux, the patient’s heartbeat is becoming tachycardic again, and her blood pressure is dropping at an alarming rate.”

Joel slowly turned his head towards nurse Sanders, who’s attention was intently fixed upon the heart monitor near the head of the hospital gurney – a distant thought entering into his head that it was a small mercy the already flustered nurse had not yet seen the inhumane injury to their patient’s thigh.

Another few seconds passed, before the female nurse finally turned her head towards Keelin, eyes wide and expectant as she waited on her superior’s response.

“Doctor?”

Joel watched on as Keelin slowly blinked once – then a second and third time rapidly in succession, as she quickly raised a hand up to her eyes to rub away the tears that had begun to fall down her cheeks. Moving back to the head of the gurney, the brunette inhaled a deep, shuddering breath before addressing them both.
“It’s got to be internal bleeding that’s causing the resumed pressure on her heart – the chest drain only served as a temporary relief. Sanders, call the theatres again and tell Andrews that our patient is coming up to him now, so he better be damn well ready!”

As the female nurse quickly moved over to the internal phone attached to one of the trauma room’s walls, Joel heard a much quieter, trembling request aimed in his direction.

“Cover that up…..,” Keelin said, unable to meet Joel’s eyes as she continued, “….and….order a rape kit.”

A simple nod of the head was all he offered in acknowledgment, knowing that the best way he could be there for his friend in that moment was to ensure that her directions were carried out without any fuss, or without any difficult questions being thrown her way.

Grabbing a pack of sterile, medium sized dressings out of the emergency cart next to the gurney, he quickly unwrapped them and began to cover the angry looking cuts on Freya’s inner thigh. They would require stitches sometime in the near future, as would multitude of gashes on the patient’s back - but the surgeons immediate concern was going to be finding the cause of internal haemorrhaging.

Just as Joel finished securing the dressings, the double doors to the trauma room burst inwards as the attending surgeon Andrew’s stormed in - three flustered looking theatre ODP’s close on his heels.

“Ok Malraux, what’s so damned important to have me to be dragged out of an emergency appendectomy?” the irritated surgeon bellowed as he came to a stop midway across the room - hands resting on his hips impatiently as he continued. “I’ve had to leave Winter closing up for me – and gods only knows how many times that useless intern has managed to botch up a simple….”

“Twenty five year old female who’s suffered mass blunt trauma across the whole of her torso,” Keelin began, her voice loud and domineering as she pointedly interrupted the procrastinating attending. “Heart failure occurred once in the ambulance on the ride here, and again upon arrival, with defibrillation applied and 5mg of epinephrine administered. Despite a chest drain being inserted for a collapse of the right lung, her heartbeat remains tachycardic and irregular, leading me to believe that there’s internal haemorrhaging somewhere in her abdomen, probably around the liver area if the large wound in that area is anything to judge by!”

Andrews expression remained irritable as he grabbed the blood results chart out of nurse Sanders hands, and walked over to the gurney to quickly inspect the patient. The surgeon’s eyes quickly softened however, when recognition registered across his face.

“Is that….”

“Yes”, Keelin quickly answered, before the man could finish – her quivering voice having lost some of the authority from only moments before.

Joel quickly recalled that the attending surgeon had met Keelin’s partner on a few occasions over the past twelve months, when the blonde had attended some of the talks that Keelin had presented to the medical faculty on her gene therapy research.

Andrews gave the brunette doctor a quick look of sympathy, before his expression returned to that of an irritated, over worked surgeon as he turned to his ODP colleagues.

“Get her up to theatre two now, and prep for immediate surgery.”
“But doctor, theatre two’s about to be used by Stridgen’s team for an emergency laparoscopy on…”

“Then one of you better get up there fast and tell Stridgen’s team that they are going to have to find somewhere else to perform their key-hole exploration. A bleeding out patient with tachycardic rhythm takes president. Now move!”

Two of the ODP’s quickly scrambled over to the gurney upon which Freya remained unconscious and began to help Sanders move the patient and the various machines and IV’s attached to her out of the trauma room, as the third ran off up the corridor, no doubt to try and secure the operating theatre as per the attendings instructions.

Pausing on his way to follow his team, Andrews glanced over to Keelin again.

“Is there anything else I need to know?”

“She….she’s got numerous deep lacerations across her back, which are deep and will probably require a plastic consult on before they are sutured. I’ve not checked the x-rays yet, but I suspect that she’s suffered fractures of several of her ribs, her left ulna and radius, possibly the left femur, and I think that the right shoulder socket has been shattered. And….there’s several cuts on her thigh that will need suturing.”

The attending’s gaze softened once more as he nodded his head in acknowledgement.

“Have the X-rays sent up to theatre. And try not to worry Doctor, I’ll make sure that she’s returned to you.”

With a quick nod of his head in the male nurse’s direction, Andrew’s swiftly left in pursuit of his team.

A deafening silence quickly fell across trauma room two, as both Joel and Keelin remained staring at the double doors swinging back and forth in wake of their patient’s departure.

A few seconds passed before he finally managed to find strength in his voice once more.

“I’ll get the X-ray images uploaded onto…..”

A quiet, strangled sounding sob suddenly burst forth from Keelin, causing the male nurse to abandon what he was saying as he quickly turned to face his friend.

The brunette raised a shaking hand to her mouth as tears now began to flow freely from emotion filled eyes that remained fixed on the doors that Freya had been wheeled out of only moments ago.

Joel began to extend an arm out towards her, intending on trying to provide some form of comfort to his friend – but that one arm rapidly turned into two as he swiftly stepped forward to catch Keelin as the doctor’s legs gave way beneath her.

Lowering both of them into a kneeling position on the floor, Joel awkwardly manoeuvred his arms around the brunette’s shoulders as she collapsed tearfully into his arms. Her sobbing gradually became louder in volume, as Joel could feel her whole body shaking from the force of the grief now flooding over her in earnest.

“Hey…..she’s going to be ok”, he soothed, rubbing a hand up and down the back of Keelin’s scrubs. “Everything’s going to be ok.”
But as he continued to try and comfort the distraught doctor in his arms, Joel could hear the lack of conviction in his own words as they washed over them both.

After an attack vicious enough to leave her with those sort of injuries – he doubted that Freya would ever be ok again!

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Chapter End Notes

....I won't lie, writing that last section left me almost as distraught as Keelin!! :-( I'm emotionally in need of this break!
Chapter 13.

Chapter Notes

Ooook, so I felt bad leaving you all for Christmas with the image of Keelin breaking down on the trauma room floor surrounded by Freya's blood. It felt a little macabre, even for this dark 2nd installment of my trilogy!

So here is the next scene in the story - its a much shorter chapter than usual due to the fact that I unfortunately don't have enough time now in the run up to Christmas to write all of the remaining scenes that take place in the hospital. You will still need to wait until after New Years eve for them!

But as this scene is quite short, and ends a little more positively than the last - I thought it would be a nicer place to leave the tale for a few weeks. Well, I say nicer - its still fraught with emotion. But at least it doesn't end in disaster, haha.

Hope you enjoy guys, and this is definitely me signing off for Christmas this time ;-)
access to the floor for patient gurney’s and medical equipment - the entire third level of St Theodora’s clinic was dedicated to the Hospital’s four main operating theatres, and their associated scrub rooms. Two of the theatres were usually assigned to deal with operations that were considered routine in nature – scheduled procedures such as tumour removals, coronary bypasses, biopsy’s, and the removal of various non-vital organs of the human body. Whilst the remaining two were allocated for use related to unplanned emergency procedures, which often involved operating on patients who had been brought into the hospital’s emergency department in a critical condition.

Access to the theatres themselves was restricted, thanks to a swipe-card security system placed on the interior door that separated the third floor’s elevator lobby from the rest of the level. Only certain staff member’s within the Hospital had the relevant security clearance coded into the small microchips on their ID-Badges that would allow them to enter the surgical rooms - and as such, the brightly-lit pale green corridors that ran parallel to the theatres were usually empty and filled with nothing but silence.

A small mercy that Keelin currently found herself grateful for.

Legs pulled up close to her chest, a small part of the wolf’s mind registered that she had long since lost feeling in the cheeks of her butt, as she sat on the cold hard floor of the corridor that ran alongside Theatre Two with her back pressed up against the wall.

Not too long after she had first arrived on the restricted level and unceremoniously dropped down onto the floor just outside of the operating room’s double doors, a fresh-faced looking ODP on her way to one of the scrub rooms had stopped and offered to try and find a chair for Keelin to use whilst she waited for the on-going surgery to finish. The wolf however had barely registered that the young woman had been talking to her, and by the time Keelin had wearily raised her bloodshot eyes up from the floor to acknowledge the ODP’s presence, the girl had already started on her way once more – no doubt to complain to her work colleagues about the ignorant Emergency Room Doctor that was sprawled on the corridor’s sterile floor in blood stained scrubs.

She assumed that at some point, one the surgery management team must have called down to the Emergency department to query why one of their doctors was sat keeping vigil outside of Theatre Two, instead of down in the clinic seeing to her own patients – because around twenty minutes after the first ODP had passed her, another had emerged onto the corridor and silently placed a small cup of coffee into one of her hands, before disappearing back down the corridor without uttering a single word.

No doubt Joel, or possibly even Nurse Sanders, had relayed to the team on floor three that the critically injured patient currently being operated on in theatre two was the fiancé of the doctor currently sat on their floor in blood-stained scrubs - and that it would be pointless trying to move her until she knew the outcome of the life-saving surgery.

Keelin knew that she was probably testing the patience of the under staffed emergency department’s senior attending by just abandoning her post halfway into a shift - but the simple truth of the matter was that the minute Freya’s broken body had been rolled into the hospital on that bloodied ambulance gurney, the wolf had become mentally unfit to attend to any patients or work on any critical cases.

It had only been through sheer determination, the fear of knowing that her lover could lose her life, and the fact that there had literally been no other doctor available to administer the emergency care that the witch had so desperately needed, that wolf’s mind had remained focused enough to keep Freya alive until the surgical team had been able take over.
Thankfully it had not been long after the witch had been cleared out of trauma room that Dr Thornton had finally returned to the department, having finished operating on the GSW patient that had presented to the emergency clinic earlier in the morning. Joel had quickly jumped to his feet and guided the seasoned Attending away from where Keelin had still been knelt on the blood stained floor of the trauma room, struggling to rein in the tears and shaking that had erupted the moment the last of her fragile resolve had shattered.

The male nurse had returned a short time later, and patiently helped the wolf up whilst telling her that Thornton was more than happy to cover the rest of her shift, and that they were gaining an extra pair of hands in the form of the junior doctor Holly, who had just arrived at the hospital despite it being her day off, to visit Alanna.

Seeing the young trainee enter the building, both Joel and Sanders had nearly caused Holly to have a heart attack of her very own when they had suddenly jumped in front of her and practically begged for her assistance.

*She did not know how she would have ever made it up off that trauma room floor, had it not been for the male nurse.*

As soon as Andrews and his team had whisked Freya off to theatre to try and kick-start her body and patch it back together again, all of Keelin’s professionalism and composure had been mercilessly ripped away within one painful heartbeat - leaving only shock and devastation in their wake.

If truth was to be known, the wolf wasn’t exactly sure how she had managed to make her way up to the third floor, let alone have enough mental capacity to remember to grab her new “Surgical Resident” ID badge out of her assigned locker in the staff room, before entering the into the service lift and absentmindedly pressing the button marked with a big numerical “3”.

She technically wasn’t meant to start using her new security clearance for another two weeks, when she was officially to begin taking on the cases of surgical patients. But the hospital’s administration team must have either been having a slow month, or had simply been trying to keep ahead of their work load, as her new ID badge had been already waiting for her in the Emergency Clinic’s internal mail boxes earlier that morning, when the wolf had arrived to start her shift.

And so now here she sat hours later - arms hugged tightly around her legs with an untouched cup of cold coffee still held loosely in one of her hands.

*Those words…. those four hateful, blood-soaked words…..*

Keelin’s lid’s fell shut as fresh tears began to sting eyes that were already swollen and puffy from crying.

Out of all of the horrific injuries that she had witnessed upon Freya’s body that morning, it was those fifteen gruesome letters that had been sadistically carved stroke by stroke into her lover’s flesh, that kept on relentlessly assaulting her minds eye.

It had been a message directed at Keelin personally - that much had been obvious as soon as she had laid eyes upon it.

Whichever of the bikers it had been who had etched those words into Freya’s skin hadn’t just committed the appalling act on the off-chance that Freya might have a partner who would see them.
He had known that the witch had a lover - specifically a wolf lover.

He had known about Keelin. He had maimed her lover's flesh specifically to let her know what he....what he had done to her mate. Her Freya.

Another quiet sob wrecked its way up through Keelin’s chest and out of her mouth – cold coffee spilling onto the polished green floor as a result of the shaking that had resumed in her arms and legs.

It was her fault....all of it was her fault. If she hadn’t of lied about Alanna’s continued presence in the city, Freya wouldn’t have stormed off out of Lafitte’s bar on that fateful night. They wouldn’t have gotten into that damned argument on the street and been distracted, for the bikers and the vampire thugs to ambush them. Freya wouldn’t have been taken and....and subjected to such horrific injuries. She....she wouldn’t have been brutalised in such a cruel and sadistic manner.

Keelin scrunched her eyes closed even tighter and let her head drop onto her raised knees as she felt the wolf within her let out a whimper of distress at the knowledge of what their mate had gone through because of them – a high pitched whine that echoed down the hospital corridor and bounced off its pristine walls.

Whipped....her back ....those horrific lacerations....they had looked like injuries that only a whip could leave. They must have stripped her and then.... oh god....

Another whine peeled forth from the wolf’s throat as images of all the wounds that she had seen littering her lover's body sped through the her mind on replay, like a macabre reel of film that had become stuck on a never ending loop of torment.

The broken bones – the angry looking burns – the puncture wounds that went through both flesh and muscle and looked as though they had been inflicted by a hot poker – the terrible bruising – the deep cuts from where restraints must have been secured around her wrists and ankles.

It wasn’t hard for the wolf to reach the conclusion that her lover had been systematically tortured. They had had Freya for a whole week, and they had methodically inflicted injury after injury upon her - no doubt breaking her body in an attempt to break her will.

But why? What had the bastards wanted? Had they even had an agenda, or had it all just been some sort of sick game for them?!

The wolf let out a long shuddering sigh as she raised her head up off her knees and let it fall back against the wall that was pressed up against her back. Scrunching the cuffs of her dishevelled scrubs into her hands, Keelin quickly wiped at the tears flowing down her cheeks before checking the watch on her wrist for the tenth time since she had arrived on the third floor.

Five hours.

They had now been operating on Freya for five hours.

She supposed that it had to be at least be a good sign that the surgery was still underway – had they not been able to find and stop the internal bleeding, Freya’s heart would have already succumbed by now to the impossible pressure that had been being placed upon it.

All she needed to do was survive the surgery – survive long enough for Andrews and his team to get her out of immediate danger, so that one of Freya’s siblings could then provide her with some of their healing blood when she was out of theatre and....
Keelin’s brows suddenly knitted together, as she began to fumble around on the floor for the cell phone that she had let unceremoniously drop down beside her upon her arrival.

Finding the device tucked under her bent legs, the wolf activated the home-screen to see if she had received any missed calls, or text messages in response to the voicemail that she had left for Hayley as she had been making her way up to the hospital’s theatres.

Nothing.

There was nothing from the hybrid, despite Keelin having told her in the message that Freya had been found and brought into the hospital that morning in a critical condition.

All that glared back at her was the picture that currently served as her lock-screen – a rushed and slightly blurred selfie that she had managed to snap of her and Freya stood under the bright Harvest moon and twinkling fairy lights on the night that she had proposed to the witch.

The wolf had wanted to take a photograph of the moment just after Freya had said yes - to forever have a reminder of the evening that they had gotten engaged.

Tears quickly began to swell in Keelin’s eyes once more, as she studied the brilliant smile that she had managed to capture on Freya’s face when taking the photo – the witch’s bright emerald eyes clearly gleaming with happiness and joy in that moment.

That amazing night had only been two weeks ago, yet it felt to the wolf like a whole lifetime had somehow managed to pass since she had gotten down onto one knee and asked Freya to be her wife.

They had been so happy, wrapped up in their own little bubble of romance and love making - so full of hope and excitement for the future they might build together.

*Would she ever get to see that carefree smile on her lovers face again? After what she had been subjected to….after what they had done to her….would Freya ever be able to smile like that again?*

Keelin knew that the witch had been no stranger to pain over her extended lifetime.

From what Freya had told the wolf about her time under the control of her Aunt Dahlia, she knew that her lover’s life had been filled with both physical and emotional pain thanks to the hateful ministrations of the deranged older witch. She had been forced to commit numerous magical atrocities upon innocent people, and had regularly had her power painfully syphoned out of her by Dahlia as the maniac woman had perused her derange quest for superiority amongst the witch covens.

It had been torment that had lasted over several centuries – and Hayley had once told Keelin, during a break from one of their training sessions, that Freya had been an emotional mess when she had first been reunited with the Mikaelson’s. That the witch had come a long way on the road of spiritual recovery by the time Keelin had entered into her life.

But even Dahlia – as cruel and malicious as Freya had made her sound to be – had not subjected the witch to such a prolonged onslaught of acute physical torture whilst painfully restrained.

If she survived the surgery, Keelin knew that the wounds on her lover’s body would no doubt heal – probably even disappear completely within a day if she drank some of her sibling’s blood. But the mental scars, and the effect that it would have on her psyche by being hurt in such an intimate way – those types of injuries, the wolf knew, often never truly healed.
SHES MINE NOW WOLF - one of those bastards had done that to her love. Done that to her Freya. Her powerfully fierce, frustratingly stubborn, extremely loyal, and passionate Freya. She must have felt so alone….so scared....

“Umph....”

A muffled shout of pain and loud clattering noise suddenly resounded up the corridor towards her, appearing to have originated from somewhere behind the double security doors that leading out to the service elevators.

Frowning towards the exit, Keelin quickly unfurled her arms from around her legs and wearily pushed herself up off the floor – cursing mildly under her breath at the pins-and-needles that instantly erupted in both of her butt cheeks, as she scented the air around her.

That cologne, it belonged to.....

The wolf jumped as both security doors forcefully flew open – splinters of wood and shards of metal flying through the air and landing on the floor in a flurry of debris. A loud crunching noise sounded out as Klaus Mikaelson’s boot crushed what remained of the third floor’s security lock under it – the hybrid not pausing in his advance towards where Keelin stood despite the shrapnel that continued to rain down around him.

With a quick tilt of her head, Keelin could see what looked to be the bodies of two security guards slumped and unmoving on the ground next to one of the elevator’s doors, as two theatre ODP’s stood pressed into a corner with frightened looks of shock upon their faces. A heartbeat later, the formidable forms of Elijah and Rebekah Mikaelson emerged from inside of the second elevator, quickly stepping over the debris of the shattered doors as they hurried to try and catch up with their advancing brother.

“WHERE IS SHE?!”

Klaus’s voice boomed along the relatively narrow corridor as his wild eyes fixed onto Keelin. As he continued towards her with a determined momentum, the wolf was momentarily unsure if the raging hybrid was going to come to a stop in front of her, side step around her, or abruptly shove her out of his way in his ardent resolve to reach his sister.

“Klaus, you can’t just barge in here like this - destroying hospital property and attacking personnel!”

A small part of the wolf’s mind registered the fact that her voice sounded like it had been dragged over a bed of molten hot coals – its tone rasping and thick with emotion.

“I’ll bring this entire sodding building down, wolf, if you do not tell me where my sister is right now!”

“Niklaus, please…” Elijah said from behind the hybrid, as the two Original vampires finally caught up with their sibling, “…do try and calm yourself!”

“Calm?!?” Klaus exclaimed incredulously as he rounded on Elijah and gestured wildly to the various doors leading off the corridor. “I have no bloody intention of being calm brother, when our eldest sister is in one of these rooms being butchered by Neanderthal cave men with their archaic methods!”

“Those cave men, as you refer to them, are professional surgeons Klaus! And they are currently in the process of trying to save her life!” Keelin barked, her voice gaining volume as frustration began
to mix with the despair running amuck inside of her.

Klaus whirled back to face the wolf, his face a violent portrait of anger and impatience as his eyes bore fiercely into hers.

But Keelin could also see another emotion roiling around in the hybrid’s bright blue stare, despite his obvious attempts to hide it.

Fear.

He was afraid for his sister’s life.

As if each detecting a distinctive smell at the same time, the nostrils of all three of the Mikaelson’s flared as they turned their heads towards the theatre doors situated just behind where Keelin stood.

She knew all too well what the immortals could now smell – it was the same scent that had been assaulting her nose and causing her inner wolf to bray and whine in distress ever since the ambulance had pulled up to the emergency clinic earlier in the day.

Freya’s blood.

Klaus’s eyes flashed with tones of amber and orange as he quickly made to push past Keelin in order to reach Theatre Two’s entrance.

Flinging out her arm in an attempt to stop him, she swiftly relaxed the Kyanite ring’s hold over her inner wolf and tapped into the supernatural strength and speed that lay within her.

Within a heartbeat she was stood in front of the theatre’s entranceway, blocking the path of the agitated hybrid.

“You can’t go in there, Klaus! Not until they’ve finished.”

Eyes that burned fiercely with rage, drilled unforgivingly into her own.

“Like hell I can’t, wolf! Move, before I lose what little patience I have left for you!”

Klaus grabbed painfully onto Keelin’s shoulder and attempted to shove her aside – a move that would have sent any normal human flying thanks to the supernatural strength that the hybrid infused into the action. But surprisingly the wolf managed to stand her ground, as the muscles of her legs and upper body tensed with enhanced power all of her own.

“No!” she growled, her own eyes and temper flaring to match the hybrids. “If you barge in there right now whilst they still have her under anaesthetic and cut open, you will do more harm than good! I will NOT let you jeopardise her chances of survival, Klaus!”

“Nic, what Keelin is saying makes sense”, reasoned Rebekah from where she stood behind Klaus, as one of the blonde’s hands quickly appeared on the hybrid’s shoulder in a calming manner. “Modern medicine has come a long way since you and I were mortals – if Keelin says that our sister is currently in the best hands to ensure her survival, then we should probably take heed!”

“Please”, Keelin beseeched of the hybrid, whilst internally forcing her wolf aspect to back down from the fight it was itching to have. “Let the surgeons do their job. Once they close her up and move her into the ICU, you will then be able to provide her with some of your blood.”

“And what if they fail?!” Klaus quickly retorted - though Keelin noted a small amount of the sharp
edge had now left the hybrid tone. “I swear wolf - I will hold you fully responsible should our sister not make it through this day!”

All pretence of anger and defiance quickly bled out of her, as Klaus’s words struck deep within her heart.

Feeling her whole posture deflate under the weight of the returning grief and despair, Keelin’s eyes dropped away from the hybrid’s as her head slowly bowed towards the ground.

“I already hold myself responsible for what’s happened to her.”

Her words were barely above a whisper, despite the silence that once again filled the hospital corridor.

Seeming to sense the shift in Keelin’s demeanour, Elijah smoothly stepped up beside his siblings and let his eyes quickly roam over the wolf’s dishevelled form.

“Keelin, I believe that it is our sister’s blood which so liberally covers your attire”, the suited vampire ventured calmly, as a certain amount of apprehension glistened in his eyes. “Can you tell us what happened?”

Keelin’s vision began to blur as tears started to fill her eyes once more.

Forcing her head upwards, she attempted to meet both Klaus and Elijah’s stares, before her sorrowful gaze finally came to rest on the smooth and beautiful face of Rebekah. The blonde vampire had managed to school her features into an illusion of calm control, despite the worry and apprehension that the wolf could clearly smell rolling off of Freya’s sister in droves.

*How could she even begin to describe the appalling state that Freya had been found in, lying naked and dying on a roadside. How did someone tell their fiancé’s family that their loved one had been…..been so horrifically tortured….and….*

Seeing that the wolf was clearly struggling to keep her composure and find the right words, Rebekah took a step closer to Keelin and placed a comforting hand on her upper arm.

“Hayley got your message, love”, the blonde vampire stated in a soothing tone. “She was in the bayou when you called, apparently searching some god forsaken sounding area called the Sa Ki Mal Peyi. Being in her wolf form, she’d left her phone with her clothes by her car, so she only found out that you’d been trying to get hold of her around twenty minutes ago. We came as soon as Hayley called to tell us the news. Then a rather dashing looking fellow down in your Emergency clinic – Joel I think he said his name was - said that Freya was currently in surgery when we asked of our sisters whereabouts, and that you were probably up here waiting on its outcome.”

Rebekah rolled her eyes Klaus’s direction before she continued.

“As you can imagine, my hot headed brother here was less than impressed when the handsome chap then told us that we’d have to wait in some poxy little room downstairs until Freya came out of surgery!”

Keelin’s teary eyes widened as she suddenly feared for her all of her Emergency Clinic colleagues’ safety.

“Oh I wouldn’t worry too much, love,” Rebekah mused in response to the wolf’s reaction, “Elijah and myself managed to compel all of those who witnessed our dear brothers outlandish temper tantrum to forget that we had ever set foot in the hospital. And a little of my blood quickly saw to
the attractive nurses broken jaw.”

“What?!" Keelin exclaimed loudly, as she turned to glare at Klaus. “You broke Joel’s jaw?!”

“Well…” the hybrid huffed, as he shrugged his shoulders in nonchalance, “…the insufferable upstart shouldn’t have implied that I wasn’t important enough to be taken straight to see my sister!”

Rebekah rolled her eyes yet again towards Klaus, before taking one of Keelin’s hands and clasping it between both of her own.

“Honestly Keelin, the attractive man-child is fully healed and without any memory his run-in with the Great…Klaus…Mikaleson!”

A loud huff came from Klaus’s direction in response to his sister jibe, before the hybrid wearily moved to the wall opposite the theatre room doors and lent his shoulder against it.

“You wouldn’t happen to know if he is seeing anyone, would you?” Rebekah light heartedly asked Keelin - the worry in her eyes remaining despite some amusement filtering through onto her face.

“He’s gay”, was all that the wolf could bring herself to say, her voice a listless monotone as she struggled to find room within her already troubled mind to process the fact that her work colleague had just been assaulted by her fiancés brother.

“Typical!” Rebekah sighed theatrically.

All four of them abruptly turned their heads towards the Theatre’s doors when they suddenly opened from within, giving way to a slight framed woman who was dressed head to toe in green scrubs with a white surgical mask covering the lower half of her face.

Shock and confusion could be seen registering in the eyes of the theatre nurse, whom Keelin didn’t recognise, as she quickly met each of the Original siblings stares before finally bringing her own to rest upon the wolf’s.

Pulling the mask away from her mouth, the woman’s voice was full of caution as she spoke to the wolf.

“Dr Malraux?”

Keelin gave a quick curt nod to the nurse in confirmation, as she felt a sharp cold tendril of dread begin to claw its way along her spine.

*Oh god, Freya….was she….*

“Dr Andrews asked me to come and let you know that your partner….”

“Fiancé!”

“Sorry?” the nurse confused nurse asked, as she turned her head towards Rebekah in reaction to the vampire’s pointed statement.

“My sister is Dr Malraux’s fiancé. They are engaged!” Rebekah reiterated in such a matter of fact manner, that Keelin would have laughed fondly at the vampire were if not for the paralyzing fear that was now near suffocating her, as she waited on the news of Freya’s condition.

“R…Right”, the petite woman stammered in confusion, before quickly turning back to Keelin. “To let you know that your fiancé is being moved into the ICU now. He said that he would meet you
there as soon as he has finished his post-op scrub down.”

The wolf shakily let out the breath she had been holding – tears escaping from her eyes as she gave the nurse a quick nod of gratitude before the woman quickly disappeared back into the Theatre – letting the doors fall shut behind her.

“Well…” Klaus asked loudly, his eyes wide in expectation as he took a step towards Keelin, “…what the bloody hell does that mean?”

Quickly trying to wipe away the fresh tears from her face, Keelin allowed the smallest hint of a small to tug at her lips, as she met each of the Mikaelson siblings eyes, one by one.

“It means - that she survived!”
Chapter 14

Chapter Notes

Well - it’s a little earlier than planned, but here is the next chapter of my tale.

Hope that you all enjoy this update, and as always, feel free to let me know your thoughts once you have read it.

Apologies by the way if you spot any grammatical or spelling errors, or the like, as thanks to the hectic time known as Christmas I have not had chance to proof read this Chapter - but I figured I’d still post it anyways since its been a while.

I will hopefully be able to get one more chapter posted before I head off on my holidays for two weeks in January. I am off to….wait for it….New Orleans - whoop!! – thanks to a seriously awesome birthday present off my wife. I seriously CAN NOT WAIT, since I have never had the pleasure of visiting the Big Easy in person before, even if I do feel like I already know the city pretty well thanks to all the internet research I have been doing for this story.

Anyhow, I hope that everyone had a lovely Christmas, and that you also have a great time celebrating the arrival of the New Year. Remember guys, if you can’t be good….well just make sure that you don’t get caught ;-) Haha.

Enjoy!

Chapter 14.

1.

Rebekah had always hated hospitals.

The groans and cries of agony of various people in pain.

The constant smell of blood making her throat constrict, and dry out with an acute thirst and such an intrinsic longing that it took all of her centuries-honed will power to resist acting upon.

The acrid aroma of the various bleach’s and cleaning products used by the healing establishment’s cleaning staff in an attempt the rid the building of the stench of death and disease.

Everything about the mortal infirmaries made her skin crawl with the need to try distance and herself as far away as possible from their contaminated walls.

Even back in the late 1800’s, when she spent some time volunteering as a nurse on the influenza wards of the New Orleans Sanitorium, she had loathed the reek of suffering and mortality that had managed to cling onto to every fibre of the standard issue uniform she had had to wear when treating the various patients that crossed her path. The immortal’s time spent working in the sanatorium alongside the witch Genevive, had been meant to help her feel some form of absolution
for all of the atrocities that she had committed over the centuries as a vampire.

Had been meant to provide relief from the never ending self-loathing and hate of what she had become, that dwelled deep within her forsaken soul.

All that she had come away with from that experience however, was a great deal of contempt for how fragile the pathetically weak human body truly was. That, and - as she would only come to discover over a century later - an eternal enemy in the form of her old friend Genevive’s, for the Original having deceived the witch and ultimately been the cause of her untimely death.

But as she and Elijah now trailed behind Klaus and Keelin, walking through the corridors of St Theodora’s, the blonde vampire realised that it was the first time that she had ever been within a hospital as a restless and anxious visitor concerned for the wellbeing of a family member, instead of as a volunteering nurse or breaking in as a ravenous vampire in search of a quick fix meal.

Ever since they had set off from the theatres to head for the ICU area of the hospital, Rebekah had been internally berating herself for the initial panic and worry that she had felt for Freya’s life when she had first received the call off Hayley to say that the witch had been found, and rushed into hospital. Of course her eldest sibling was going to survive whatever injuries she had sustained when incarcerated by the scoundrels that had taken her. If modern medicine had failed in that sterile room of surgery, then the ancient healing blood that ran through her family’s veins would have easily seen the witch restored back to full health.

Would indeed still take away any cuts or bruising that were left Freya’s body, as soon as they reached where her sister had now been moved to.

So why was she continuing to worry for her sister? Continuing to be so anxious about what condition they were going to find their sibling in?

She supposed - as the four of them passed under a sign that indicated they were now entering into the Intensive Care Unit area of the hospital - that her uncharacteristic flare of panic was in part down to the sorrowful state that they had found their sister’s fiancé in, when the three of them had arrived at the hospital.

There were many things about Freya’s choice of partner that Rebekah had come to both like and respect over the year that the two of them had now been dating – not least of which being how happy the wolf was clearly making her eldest sister, despite the witch’s tendency to walk on the more sombre and serious side of life.

But the trait that the blonde vampire had come to admire the most in the Malraux wolf, was her apparent ability to always remain calm and focused no matter what life seemed to throw at her.

Even when Keelin had initially been held captive by Hayley and Freya and used by the two of them purely for the purpose of extracting the much coveted venom out of her wolf glands – the brunette had still somehow managed to give the impression of taking it all in her stride, eventually turning the situation around in her favour by not only gaining herself a Kyanite ring to control her curse, but also finding a love interest in Freya at the same time.

The Original vampire was not too proud an immortal to be able to acknowledge the fact that when any outsider attempted to form an association or bond with her unique and troublesome family, they usually ended up paying for that connection with either their sanity - or their life.

But with Keelin it had seemed to be different.
The wolf’s moral resolve and clear headed rationality had appeared to remain unfaltering and consistent, no matter what disasters or supernatural threats had befallen Freya or the rest of the Mikaelson’s.

So when the Original vampire and her brothers had arrived at the hospital to find the wolf looking so uncharacteristically dejected and heartbroken – Rebekah had initially thought that they were already too late, despite the rush to provide their sister with healing blood.

From the sorrow that had been swimming so ardently in the wolf’s teary eyes – she had thought for one terrifying moment that Freya had already had her mortal life snatched out from under her.

Thank the gods that that had not been the case!

Freya’s heart was still beating - and in just a few minutes time, Rebekah and her brothers would be reunited with their sibling to provide their blood, and have the witch back on her feet and out of the godforsaken building of death within a few minutes.

So, why could she still feel such despair and anguish radiating off Freya’s fiancé in droves? What wasn’t the wolf telling them?!

“Excuse me, but I am going to have to ask you all to leave - right now!”

Each of them turned their attention in the direction of a tall, blue-scrubs covered female who was hurriedly rushing towards them from behind a nurse’s near the entrance to the ICU department.

“No visitors are allowed onto the ward without first thoroughly washing their hands, and putting on protective gloves and aprons. Hospital policy clearly states that there are only two people allowed around a bed at one time - and I’m sorry, Dr Malraux, but I cannot let you onto the ward in those contaminated scrubs. You will need to change first! ”

Each of the Mikaelson siblings raised their eyebrows as they turned to look towards Keelin.

“R…Right….of course….I’m sorry Josie,” the wolf stammered out, as though being roused from somewhere deep within her own thoughts. “It’s been a crazy morning - I’ll go and grab a fresh pair out of stores now. Can you tell me which room Freya Mikaelson has been placed into please?”

Still eying Rebekah and her brothers with a look of deep suspicion etched upon her face, the ICU nurse nodded in the direction of one of the private rooms that lead off from the main bulk of the ward.

“Room 2 – they have just finished transferring her over from the theatre’s machines onto ours. Dr Andrews called a few minutes ago to say that he is on his way down to make sure the patent is stable following her transfer, and apparently to speak with her partner.”

“That’ll be me,” Keelin said, flashing the nurse a weak smile. “And these are her immediate family members.”

“Oh….right”, the tall dark haired nurse sputtered, with enough surprise in her voice that Rebekah quickly fathomed not everyone who had contact with the wolf on a professional basis must have been privy to her preference when it came to sexual partners. “I’ll er….let him know that you are just getting changed then, when he arrives.”

With one last pointed glare towards Rebekah and her brothers, the nurse stalked back towards the desk from which she had appeared.
“Enough delays,” Klaus muttered irritably towards Keelin, as the wolf made to turn back towards the departments entrance. “We are seeing our sister now!”

“I will take care of the staff,” Elijah declared, quickly smiling in a placating manner towards Keelin when the brunette’s eyes widened in alarm. “A little compulsion will ensure that we are not disturbed further by hospital protocol.”

Letting out a small sigh, the wolf nodded in what Rebekah assumed was begrudged agreement.

“Ok, but please, try not to touch anything or disturb any of the staff who are sat beside the patients’ beds – the people in this unit are very unwell and…..”

“We understand, love,” Rebekah interrupted calmly, as Elijah and Klaus set off about their tasks. “Go – get yourself cleaned up and changed. We’ll have our sister well on her way to being fully healed and raring to go by the time you join us.”

A small frown creased the vampire’s brow as she watched the silver slither of tears begin to form in Keelin’s eyes, apparently in response to words that had she had only meant to be encouraging.

With a small nod of her head, the wolf turned and began to make her way out of the ICU department - no doubt in search clothes that were less covered in her fiancé’s blood.

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By the time Rebekah caught up with her hybrid brother, she found that he had already entered into the room within which they had been told Freya was situated, and was currently stood next to the hospital bed - his face fixed into a rare unreadable expression as he stared down at the unconscious figure lay before him.

Slowly making her way over to the opposite side of the bed to Klaus, the blonde vampire was momentarily taken back by the sheer number of machines and wires that surrounded her unmoving sister. Beeps and mips of varying tones were being emitted by several monitors positioned both above and to the side of the small bed - a quick inspection of which told Rebekah that Freya’s heart appeared to have a steady, if not particularly very strong, beat.

A standard hospital issue sized bag of blood hung from one of the IV stands near the head of the cot – its long tube filled with crimson fluid feeding into a cannular that had been inserted into one of the witch’s heavily bandaged arms. A draining device also appeared to have been inserted into her sister’s chest – the length of its tubing emerging out from under the sterile smelling white sheet that covered the witch, feeding into a collection bag that had been secured onto the side of the bed with a clamp.

As she reached the side of bed, it struck Rebekah just how small and frail her sister’s body seemed in comparison to all of the bulky equipment that surrounded her. The witch’s face looked painfully thin considering it had only been a week since the vampire had last seen her – too thin, like she hadn’t had a bite to eat during the entire time that she had been missing.

A few minor scratches and bruises marred the blondes face, but Rebekah suspected that those trivial looking injuries were nothing in comparison to what probably lay under all of the heavy bandaging and casts that appeared to cover most of her sister’s body.
The vampire was no stranger to the sight of blood or injury - having spent most of her one thousand years of life either causing horrific wounds to those who had wronged her, or baring witness to the ghastly results of one of either Klaus or Elijah’s killing spree’s.

Such carnage unfortunately seemed to come hand in hand with being one of the first Original vampires to walk the earth.

But as she now stood there in that small oppressive hospital room, looking over the painfully thin and injured form of her older sister, the stark reality of just how terribly fragile and breakable the human mortal body really was caused tears to begin forming in her eyes.

“She looks so small.”

The uncharacteristic softness with which the hybrid spoke as his eyes remained fixed upon Freya’s face, was almost as unnerving to the blonde vampire as that of the appearance of the witch lay before her.

Raising a hand to her eyes to swiftly wipe away any tears before they began to fall, Rebekah inhaled deeply before triggering the descent of her vampiric fangs out of her gums. Biting down into the thin skin that surrounded her wrist, a fleeting wince crossed her features as she waited for her blood to begin oozing out of the fresh wound.

“Well – lets get to work on rectifying this horrible mess, shall we!”

Being careful not to disturb any of the tubes or wires feeding into and out of Freya’s body, Rebekah slowly lowered her bleeding appendage over her sister and gently pulled down on the witch’s chin with her other hand so as to open Freya’s mouth for the dripping blood to fall into.

“Well – let’s get to work on rectifying this horrible mess, shall we!”

“Can you smell that?” Klaus asked quietly, his brow furrowing as the two of them waited on Rebekah’s blood taking effect upon their sister’s body.

She didn’t need to ask her brother to clarify any further to know what scent he was referring to. The faint yet strange fragrance had been confusing her senses ever since the three of them had first picked up on presence of Freya’s blood on the third level of the building.

All having been born from the same mother, the blood than ran through the veins of each of the Mikaelson siblings had related properties – one such similarity being a distinct “family” scent marker that each of the Original siblings had come to recognise relatively soon after Esthar’s spell had turned them into the first vampires to walk the earth. Klaus’s own version of their family scent marker was slightly different to the others, due to him having a different father from the rest of the siblings. It was however still discernably recognisable as being “family” to Rebekah and her other brothers, thanks to their shared maternal lineage.

The only other Mikaelson’s family scent marker that differed slightly was Freya’s.

Thanks to the witch having been sequestered away by their Aunt Dahlia when she had been just five years old, Esthar’s immortality spell had not affected Rebekah’s elder sister – leaving her with both a finite lifespan, and blood that remained mortal in nature.

The family scent marker was still present however in the crimson fluid running through Freya’s veins, all be it tinged with a distinctly human aspect.

A distinctly human aspect that seemed to have altered in fragrance, since Rebekah had last smelt her sister’s blood!
The blonde vampire nodded in response to her brother’s question, as she continued to hold her bleeding wrist above Freya’s mouth.

“Do you think it’s a result of her having been so gravely injured? The physical trauma causing her blood’s scent to alter?” she queried, despite already knowing that it was highly unlikely to be the case.

Freya had come close to death on a few occasions before this day - the most recent having been only twelve months ago, when the Neivera wolf Hatch had forced Keelin’s wolf body to bite into the witch’s neck. The resulting injury had been a fatal wound, and her sister would have died had Rebekah not returned to the Funhouse in time to provide Freya with her healing blood.

*Her sister had been lay dying in a pool of her own mortal blood on that fateful evening, yet she had not noted any change in the usual scent markers associated with the witch.*

Klaus’s lack of acknowledgement of her suggestion told Rebekah that the hybrid also didn’t lend much merit to the theory.

“It’s strange – her blood still smells of her, and yet…..”

The hybrid’s words trailed off as the hospital room’s door opened, giving way to both Elijah and Keelin – the latter still managing to look dishevelled and worn-out despite having changed into a completely fresh pair of hospital scrubs.

“All of the nurses in the department have been compelled into believing that we are here on official medical business – we should not be disturbed further,” Elijah explained, as he came to a stop to stand beside Klaus. “How fairs our sister?”

Rebekah watched as Keelin slowly approached the bed with a certain amount of hesitation in her gait. The wolf’s gaze was full of emotion as it slowly scanned over Freya’s fragile form – red rimmed eyes seeming to touch upon on every individual bandage and cast that covered the witch’s injuries, before finally coming to rest on the wrist that the Original vampire was holding to her sister’s mouth.

“She seems….” the blonde vampire said, her voice trailing off as a look of confusion began to knot her brows together.

“What? She seems what?” Keelin asked, instantly picking up on the uncertainty that had been apparent in Rebekah’s voice.

“Well….I would have thought that she should at least be rousing from unconsciousness by now.”

Twisting her wrist around to check that blood had continued to flow out of her wound, Rebekah noted that Freya’s face remained both slack and sickly pale in appearance, despite the viscous red liquid clearly visible within her mouth.

The blonde vampire made to move her bleeding appendage back over the witch’s mouth, but was halted when Klaus placed his hand on her arm.

“Let me try!”

Each of them watched on in silence as Klaus repeated the same motions that Rebekah had moments earlier, bringing his bloodied wrist to hover above Freya’s mouth as he gently tilted her head up to meet the dripping fluid.
Several heartbeats passed by, with no obvious change in the witch’s unconscious state.

“Why isn’t it working?” Keelin eventually asked, panic spiking her tone as her eyes flitted between both Rebekah and Klaus.

“I….I am not sure,” Klaus admitted quietly, as he slowly pulled his wrist away from his sister’s mouth.

“The only injuries that I know of which have not been able to be cured by either vampiric or hybrid blood, are those that have involved Marcel’s venom!” Elijah commented, as his face took on the same perplexed expression as that of his siblings.

“Well it certainly wasn’t Marcel who did this to our sister,” Rebekah stated, unable to keep the defensive tone from her voice as she fixed her glare onto Elijah. “He was in my company the entire time that Freya was missing! Besides, he has no current quarrel with our family - there is no reason why he would….”

“You misunderstand me sister,” Elijah quickly interrupted, as he raised his hands in a placating manner. “I did not intend to imply that Marcellus had anything to do with Freya’s current predicament. I was merely pointing out that his venom is the only substance that we have ever come across which cannot be counteracted in the usual manner.”

Rebekah was about to re-iterate once again that it could not have been her former lover’s venom causing the anomaly in their blood’s ability to heal Freya, when the door to the hospital room suddenly flung open - causing all present to quickly turn their heads in its direction.

A blonde haired, middle aged man stood in the open doorway, dressed in similar style hospital scrubs to Keelin - the only difference being that his were green in colour as opposed to her blue. Noting that the medical professional had a certain air of authority encircling his person, Rebekah quickly deducted that the fellow now stood eying each of the Mikaelson siblings in turn, was probably the one that she had heard referred to as Dr Andrews – the surgeon who had apparently saved her sisters life.

“Who are these civilians?” the surgeon questioned Keelin by way of greeting, as he fixed a stern uncompromising stare upon the wolf. “And what the hell are they doing in the room of a patient who has only just come out of major surgery?!”

“Ah….Dr Andrews….they are….”

“Who we are is of no consequence!” Klaus snarled angrily, the hybrid having swiftly moved into the surgeon’s personal space in supernatural blur of motion. “What is of importance mortal, is you explaining what it is that you have done to my sister which prevents my blood from healing her?!”

“Excuse me?!” Dr Andrews exclaimed incredulously, as bewilderment and a small hint of fear replaced the irritation that had been contorting his face. “What the hell are you talking…..”

“Tell me EXACTLY what manner of injuries ail this patient, and what you barbaric butchers have done to her under the pretence of saving her life. Now!”

Rebekah did not need to see her brother’s eyes to know that his spittle laced command to the surgeon had been delivered with compulsion.

“Klaus… no….”

Keelin’s plea faltered in her mouth when the hybrid whipped his face around to where she stood -
revealing a stare that blazed fiercely with the orange hues of his hybrid form, and dark veins swollen with blood that rippled under the skin of his eyes. A deep rumbling growl vibrated out from the hybrids throat, before he turned his head back to the surgeon, whose own eyes had taken on a glazed, blank expression.

“The patient presented to the Emergency department in a state of asystolic cardiac arrest caused by increased pressure being placed on the heart and surrounding pericardial sac by a mass internal haemorrhaging….”

“In layman terms, you intolerable buffoon,” Klaus growled once more - white knuckled fists forming at his side. “Tell me what’s happened to my sister in words that I don’t need a sodding medical degree to understand!”

Keelin quickly reached for the hybrid’s arm in an apparent attempt to halt his current course of action.

“Please Klaus, don’t do this…..”

“ENOUGH!”

The hybrids raised voice bellowed throughout the small hospital room, as he rounded on the wolf. Rebekah watched on in surprise as her brothers pupils dilated and contracted in rapid succession whilst he snarled in Keelin’s face.

“Stand there, don’t move, and be quite! I will not tolerate any more of your interference wolf!”

With a quick confused and concerned glance towards Elijah, Rebekah made to protest her hybrid brother’s actions – only for the words to falter in her mouth before they had managed to fully form, when the suited Original gave her a swift shake of his head, indicating that they should let their brother proceed with obtaining the answers he sought.

Surely her brother must have known that his compulsion would not work upon the wolf ?!

Despite the anger and shock that she could now see writhing within Keelin’s widened eyes, Rebekah noted that the wolf made no further attempt to address Klaus, or shift from her position – the hybrids compulsion apparently having taken root deep within her mind.

But….how?!

“The patient’s heart failed due to the increased pressure being placed upon it by internal bleeding and excessive blood loss,” the compelled surgeon began - his voice having taken on an emotionless monotone tenor. ”A deep penetrating wound on her right flank had pierced into the top of her liver, causing the organ’s tissue to bleed out into the surrounding body cavity. We managed to stop the haemorrhaging and in turn reduce the pressure on her heart, but we had to remove the affected section of the liver as it had been damaged beyond repair. She has suffered a torrent of blunt force trauma wounds across the whole of her body – ones that I suspect were inflicted by either some form of hammer or metal pole, judging by the shape and spread of the bruising. They have resulted in the fracturing of eight of her ribs, two bones in her left arm, the rupture of her spleen, the shattering of her right shoulder socket, and a clean break of her left thigh bone. Most of the fractures we have managed to set and we have removed what was left of her spleen - however her shoulder is going to need further surgeries to fully repair the extensive bone structure damage seen in the area. Several of the tendons in both of her wrists have been severed due to the repeated grating of either a metal or plastic material into the flesh surrounding the area, and the ankle of her right foot has shattered, probably due to the patient straining too forcefully against a restraint.
There are in total thirty eight severe lacerations across her back - the likes of which I have never seen before in my entire medical career! If I had to call it, I would say that they had been inflicted by some sort of metal tipped whip or belt that has been repeatedly lashed across the area. We have been able to suture some of the more shallow gashes, but she is going to require several skin graft procedures to fully close most of the deeper rips in her tissue."

“Bloody hell….”

The words had left Rebekah’s mouth in a shocked whisper before she realised they had even formed, as her mind struggled to keep up with the extensive list of injuries that the compelled surgeon was reeling off.

“There were several deep lacerations in the flesh of her left inner-thigh that we have sutured and dressed, however I am afraid that the wording formed by them will probably never completely fade and will no doubt remain as a permanent scar. I have requested that one of my colleagues who specialises in cosmetic surgery comes to take a look at the area, to see if he can….”

“Wording? What wording?” Klaus growled, as his eyes continued to bore into the surgeons.

A strangled sort of noise suddenly emitted from somewhere deep within Keelin’s chest, causing both Rebekah and Elijah to glance over in her direction with concern. The wolf’s whole frame looked to be shaking, as though every muscle in her body was desperately trying to fight against the supernatural compulsion that had leashed it into place.

“Niklaus, perhaps we have heard enough….”

“I WILL know everything, Elijah!” Klaus roared, never once taking his stare from the compelled doctor in front of him. “What….wording?”

“The various cuts in the area appeared to have been intentionally positioned so as to spell out the words “She’s mine now wolf”. There was also extensive bruising and bleeding around the reproductive soft tissue, which lead us to perform an ultrasound scan during surgery. It showed a great deal of damage had been caused to the patient’s cervix and uterus, and whilst we repaired as much of the tearing as we could, I suspect that your sister will unfortunately no longer be able to carry a child due to the scar tissue that will form. The initial test results that we have had back from the forensics kit that Dr Malraux ordered, suggest that there were at least two different types of semen found in and around the patients reproductive organ and m…..”

“Nik! For god’s sakes….that’s enough!!”

Rebekah’s words were shrill, and a stark contrast to surgeons flat toned droning, as the Original vampire moved to stand next to Keelin and place what she hoped to be a comforting hand upon her shoulder. The brunettes blood shot eyes had glazed over with a glassy film, and tears were now running freely down her cheeks despite the wolf still being unable to move her body.

Klaus’s own gaze faltered, as the ire that had been blazing in his eyes was replaced by shock.

“R….Right. That will do.”

As Dr Andrews fell silent, Klaus turned towards Keelin, his head slowly shaking from side to side

“I…. I didn’t realise…..”

“Release her!” Rebekah implored, her own voice sounding stunned as she took in the blanched appearance of her brother.
“Yes – of course! You are free to move and speak wolf. I am sor….”

Klaus’s words of apology were abruptly cut off as Keelin robustly slapped her hand across his face – the wolf’s features quickly morphing from indignant anger, into sorrow and grief as she burst into a torrent of tearful sobs.

Rebekah wasted no time in pulling the brunette into a tight hug and was mildly surprised by the fact that her sister’s fiancé accepted the offer of support without resistance, given how betrayed she must have currently felt by Klaus’s actions.

From over Keelin’s shoulder, Rebekah watched on as Elijah approached the stupefied surgeon whilst Klaus numbly walked over to the foot of Freya’s bed and placed his hands on its frame.

“You will forget being made to tell us what happened to Freya, and accept that we are permitted to be in her room at any time….” Elijah began, as he fixed his eyes onto the surgeons, “….and you will ensure that my sister receives nothing but the best quality of healing care that this hospital can provide. If I find out that she suffers one second of unnecessary pain because of your short comings, I will not hesitate to end the life of everyone in this building. Are we clear?!?”

“Yes.”

“Leave us! You may return once we have left.”

Dr Andrews promptly turned to leave without further comment - letting the door fall shut behind him.

An emotionally charged silence blanketed over the room save for the rhythmic noise of the machines that were hooked up to Freya, as all three Originals reeled at the revelation of what injuries had been inflicted upon their sister by her abductors. Even Keelin’s continued weeping had turned quiet, the wolf shaking in Rebekah’s arms as the vampire stared into a corner of the room with stunned, unfocused eyes.

“Find them!”

Klaus’s voice was so quiet that Rebekah almost missed it over the deafening roar of her own troubled thoughts.

Loosening her grip from around the heartbroken wolf, Rebekah took one of Keelin’s hands into her own to offer continued support as she looked towards her hybrid brother.

“What was that?”

The sound of metal groaning under pressure rung out into the room, as Klaus’s grip on the foot of Freya’s hospital bed tightened - the knuckles on his hands turning white as they began to shake. The hybrids glassy stare remained fixed on his unconscious sister’s face as Rebekah watched his expression turn from one of shock - into blind fury.

“Find….them!”

“We still have no idea who it was that took our sister, let alone where…..”

Elijah’s words were abruptly silenced by the loud screeching resonance of steel being ripped apart, as Klaus tore the top half of the bedframe off the end of the hospital cot. A bellowing roar ripped from his throat as he spun around and launched the mangled metal at the far wall of the room – the sharp shards embedding themselves deeply into the partition as pieces of plaster rained down onto
the green tiled floor.

Rebekah felt Keelin’s jolt of shock reverberate through their adjoined hands, as Klaus stood panting in the middle of the room – eyes blazing amber with ire and lips drawn back to reveal spittle laced fangs.

“FIND…THEM!”

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2.

“RARRRRGH!”

The thundering rumble of Halvar’s voice vibrated across the whole of Baracuda’s open plan tavern, as the wooden chair that he had thrown shattered upon its impact with one of the many drunken bikers present in the bar. The vampire in question immediately dropped to the ground with a thud - a grey hue spreading up his neck and across his heavily scared face thanks to one of the many splintered shards of wood having pierced directly into his heart.

Several of the leather-clad men that the thrall had been stood drinking with all took a step back from where the vampire now lay unmoving – their eye’s widening with apprehension as they looked over to the usual large round table where the Jarl’s spent their time drinking.

The Clan leader was beyond furious.

“She was our ONE chance of obtaining the Mikaelson’s blood this cycle”, Halvar bellowed - his voice both deep and gruff as his eddying blood red eyes fixed menacingly onto the object of his ire. “Our ONE opportunity! But now we’re cursed to another hundred years of petrification because YOU couldn’t keep your gods dammed cock in your pants!”

The Clan leader swiftly grabbed another chair from beside the table where the seven Jarl’s had all congregated, and brought its frame crashing down towards Colborn. The overweight biker appeared to have anticipated the enraged Jarl’s action however, as his arm was raised above his head to absorb the impact of the piece of furniture a heartbeat before it managed to meet its intended mark.

As wooden shards rained down around him, the bearded Jarl’s own eyes began to churn with hues of deep red and black – his lips pulling back into a yellow toothed sneer as he thrust his face towards Halvar.

“Need I remind you Halvar, that had it not been for me she wouldn’t have knelt before you AT ALL! Besides….” Colborn continued, taking a step back and gesturing towards where Ake and Vidar currently sat watching the fiery exchange, “….she was already dying by the time they had finished with her! How were any of us to know that your blood wouldn’t cure her injuries!?"

“Much as I hate to agree with the obnoxious pig”, Balder chimed in from his seat at the table, whilst waving a hand towards Colborn, “he does have a point. Ake’s work alone would have been enough to ensure the eventual shutdown of her body. As you well know Halvar, our methods are designed to ensure the death of the subject should they not willingly give themselves over to becoming blood-bound. Only upon complete submission to the bond are they healed by your blood.”
“Exactly!” Fiske stated, letting out a loud belch as he finished downing the contents of his tankard. “We had all assumed that your blood would both bind and heal her. It’s not exactly our fault that it only did half the job!”

“Isn’t it, Fikse?!” Halvar retorted, fixing his livid glare onto the baby-faced Jarl. “Because from what I hear, neither you nor Colborn had any intention of bringing the witch before me - despite her eventually begging to drink my blood. Had Leif not entered and heard the woman whimpering her submission, you two mindless fucks would have carried on until she was nothing but a rotting corpse!”

“For the love of the Gods, Halvar, we get it!” Colborn roared as he began pacing around the table. “You’re pissed that we got a piece of the Mikaelson bitch’s ass and you didn’t…..”

“And damn, that ass was sweet!” Fiske snickered as Colborn passed by him and slapped the Jarl on the back.

“….the point is we broke her and she willingly drank the blood! We got the bloody job done. So get the hell off your holier than thou pedestal, before someone knocks you off it!”

“Is that a threat, Jarl Colborn?!” Halvar growled, his voice dropping dangerously low as the power of the blood-bond ignited within his veins and began radiating out across the large round table. Despite the rest of the bikers all cowing their postures the instant that his power smothered over them, Colborn’s head remained high and defiant. Halvar noted beads of sweat beginning to appear across the bulky Jarl’s brow, as his face started to turn red from the effort of trying to resist the blood-bonds dominance over his own free will.

“A….little fucking…..gratitude….would….be….nice!” the bearded biker stuttered out through gritted teeth as his whole body began to shake from exertion.

Halvar slowly began to stalk over to the opposite side of the Jarl’s table, where Colborn suddenly thrust out a hand in an attempt to steady his struggling frame against the large piece of furniture.

“GRATITUDE?!?” Halvar boomed, his voice laced with gravel as blood began to trickle out from all of the Jarls’ noses due to the weight of the power now emanating from the Clan Leader. “Gratitude for ruining our one shot at obtaining the Mikaelsons’ blood this cycle?! Gratitude for sealing all of our fates to another hundred years spent petrified in stone?! Do you want to see exactly WHAT GRATITUDE I HAVE FOR YOU, JARL?!”

Colborn let out a loud cry of pain, as his hands flew up to either side of his head. Scrunching his eyes shut, the overweight biker collapsed down onto his knees beside the round table, as blood now began to flow from his nostrils in earnest.

“Halvar…” Balder groaned out from his seat - the Gothi’s own voice laced in pain,”….we need him. I cannot perform the ritual without all seven of us present!”

The Jarl’s words appeared to fall onto death ears, as Halvar’s incensed eyes continued to bore down upon Colborn, whose large frame had now keeled over onto the floor – his body writhing in agony from the pressure being placed upon it.

“Our Lord needs all seven of us!” Baldar cried out again, in another attempt to break the Clan leaders enraged trance.

Halvar’s top lip curled up into a sneer, as he looked down upon the thrashing Jarl in front of him. Several more heartbeats passed, before the clan leader’s eyes finally began to return to their normal
“Be thankful that I have a reason to spare you Jarl!” Halvar uttered, as the intense pressure that had built up in the air around the Jarl’s gradually began to dissipate. “Though I doubt our great lord will be quite so merciful with you, upon his return!”

As Colborn remained lying on the floor, panting heavily in the wake of the pain that had been holding his body in a vise like grip, Halvar kicked out one of the empty chairs around the Jarls’ table and slumped himself down into it. Bringing a hand up to his temple to begin rubbing the area in circles, the Clan leader let out a heavy sigh.

“Tell me that you at least disposed of the witch’s body somewhere far from here?! Conventional magic and scrying shouldn’t be able to locate her, but I refuse to run the risk of our great lord’s location being discovered before our next cycle comes to pass.”

“I had some of the Thralls dump her on the outskirts of the city,” Ake replied as he finished wiping away the last of the blood that had collected under his nose. “With any luck, it will be days before she is discovered – by which time nature’s scavengers should have cleared away any evidence of our involvement.”

“Actually, my lord….” an apprehensive voice called out from one of the tables near the taverns bar, “….there is a small chance that the witch may have survived!”

Every pair of eyes sat around the Jarl’s table quickly focused in on the voice’s owner - a short, dark haired vampire whose left eye was missing from its socket. Upon noticing that he now held the attention of all of the blood-bound clan leaders save for Colborn, the maimed biker dropped his head down low in a clear sign of submission.

“Survived?” Ake asked incredulously, throwing a quick look of confusion towards Vidar before continuing. “Her heart had stopped and she was left on the edge of the wastelands, alone! No mortal could have…..”

“He speaks the truth, my lord”, a balding biker said, as he came to stand next to the one-eyed vampire. “We have both just returned from the city and passed by the spot where her body had been dumped. There was a squad car pulled over, and the copper looked to be attempting to perform CPR on the blonde.”

“I doubt he’d have been bothering were she stone cold dead!”

All of the Jarl’s sat around the table turned to look towards Halvar expectantly – even Colborn who had finally managed to hoist himself up off the floor and into an empty chair, raised his eye’s wearily towards the clan leader.

After several heartbeats of silence whilst Halvar looked to be studying his tankard of ale intently, the Clan leader finally turned towards Balder to address the Gothi.

“What are the chances of the bond having taken root in the witch?” he muttered, almost too low for the rest of the Jarl’s to hear.

Balder appeared to consider the question for a moment, before cocking his head to the side in a pose that each of the Jarl’s knew to mean that the Gothi’s mind was rapidly processing all the possible outcomes of a situation.

“Well she did willingly agree to drink your blood, there’s no question about that. And we all witnessed our great Lord’s mark establish itself upon her body.”
Balder took a long pull of ale before continuing.

“But the woman was barely conscious when she consumed the blood, and her heart had already begun to fail by the time you issued your commands. With the healing aspect of the bond not manifesting, there is a good chance that her body and mind were already too far lost to Hellas’s realm for our lord’s power to have taken root.”

“But if she did manage to survive, and is not under the control of the bond”, Ake began, drawing the attention of the Jarl’s with his concerned tone, “then she is likely to tell her siblings of our existence, and of our plight! They will no doubt try to exact revenge for what we did, and attempt to stop us from resurrecting our master!”

A palpable unease fell across the table as Ake’s words struck home with most of the bikers.

“And what so what if they did,” Colborn huffed, his voice having gained in strength despite the continued pale pallor of his skin. “The Mikaelson’s that remain alive would be no match against the seven of us. Not to mention that one of the brothers no longer resides in New Orleans, and that the mortal witch’s power is useless against us - even if she did survive!”

“It is still a confrontation that we do not want to be engaging in so close to the end of our current cycle!” Leif offered, as he used yellow stained fingers to place a knuckle sized twist of loose tobacco onto a thin rizla paper.

“You mean that it’s a fight that YOU don’t want to get into,” Colborn sneered towards Leif, just as the Jarl began rolling his joint. “You couldn’t best an old woman who had one arm tied behind her back! Why don’t you let the real men sat around this table worry about the fighting, whilst you go back to crocheting a shawl for your latest boy-lover!”

A stream of ale splattered across the table as Leif rose up halfway off his seat and threw a full tankard directly at Colborn’s head. Managing to move out of the flying jugs way just in time, Colborn bared his teeth at the riled Jarl in a condescending smile.

“Awww, did I touch on a nerve there, pretty boy?!”

“Enough!” Halvar exclaimed, as he slammed his own drink down onto the table – instantly regaining the attention of all the Jarl’s. “We need to be sure of the witch’s status, before we plan our next move! If she lives, then we need to know if the commands that I issued took root. If they didn’t, then she needs bringing back before me!”

“I’ll send a group of Thralls into the city to…..”

“No!” Halvar interrupted before Ake could finish. “Colborn will go. Alone!”

“What?!” the overweight Jarl coughed out, spluttering droplets of drink down his leather jacket as his widened eyes locked onto Halvar. “Why should I be the one to risk my hide?!”

“This is your mess Colborn – therefore you can clean it up!”

“You heard what Balder said earlier, the Mikaelson bitch was already dying by the time I got to her!” the bearded Jarl declared, his voice rising with frustration.

“Silence!” Halvar ordered, his glare fixing onto the overweight Jarl. “You will head into the city and find the witch. If she lives, determine if my orders took root within her. If they did not, bring her back to kneel before me once more - preferably before she can relay any details to her siblings!”
“If she was indeed found by a policeman like the Thralls said, then dead or alive I imagine she’ll have been taken to the nearest hospital within the city”, Balder offered. “I’d suggest maybe starting there.”

Colborn’s gaze rapidly flicked between Halvar and Balder, as his face steadily flushed with an infuriated crimson hue.

“But…”

“Go! Now!” Halvar growled, his voice laced with the power of the blood-bond once more.

Cowering his head slightly, the overweight biker pushed his chair back from the table and lumbered to his feet. Anger could be seen written all over the Jarl’s reddened face, however he made no further attempt to question the Clan Leaders decision – apparently in no rush to be reacquainted with the pain that Halvar had inflicted upon him earlier.

The remaining Jarl’s all watched on as Colborn slowly made his way over to the Taverns exit whilst checking that all of his knives were secured in place at various points on his body.

“Are you sure that sending him alone is the right decision?” Balder asked quietly, as the overweight Jarl reached Baracuda’s exit and let himself out into the stormy afternoon.

Nodding his head slowly as though lost in thought, Halvar picked up his tankard of ale and took a long deep drink of the amber fluid.

“Yes,” the Clan leader replied as he placed his stein back onto the table - his voice as equally subdued so that only Balder could hear it whilst the other Jarl’s began striking up conversations amongst themselves once more. “The witch had no fear of us Balder. Even after Ake and Vidar had broken her body and left her wavering on the precipice of death – there was still no fear in those damned emerald eyes. Exhaustion and pain – yes – and also resignation to the fact that she was going to die at our hands. But nothing that we had done had scared her into submitting to the bond.”

Halvar paused briefly and sighed – allowing a resigned look of acknowledgment to wash across his features.

“Colborn and Fiske’s method might have been crude, and could very well still cost us the witch’s life - but the insubordinate fool was right about one thing.”

Balder raised a questioning eyebrow towards the Clan Leader.

“He was the one to break her!” Halvar continued. “Not me, or Ake, or Vidar. Not even Fiske. The fear that was finally in her eyes when she was bowed before me and submitting herself over to the blood-bond – it was a fear of Colborn, and of the promise that he made to the witch to do exactly to her lover as he had done to her.”

Understanding washed over the Gothi’s features as he looked back towards the large wooden door through which Colborn had exited a few moments ago.

“Any of us could have gone to assess the Mikaelson wench, Balder – her magic doesn’t work on us after-all!

“But it is only Colborn that she would fear enough to not put up a fight should he need to haul her back to us - thus minimising the possibility of her siblings being alerted to any form of a struggle”, the Gothi theorised.
Halvar nodded his head once more, before pulling out a small vial of blood from a pocket hidden on the inside of his leather jacket and slowly turning it around in his hand.

“Exactly!”

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3.

“Kalus, for heaven’s sakes - put her down!”

Keelin’s voice rang out in the hospital room as she lurched forward to try and grab a hold of the hybrid’s arm.

“She was just trying to take a sample of blood!”

A strangled noise of pain emitted out from the mouth of a terrified looking nurse, as she hung a few feet off the ground from the vicelike grip of Freya’s hybrid brother. The dark-haired woman’s cheeks were slowly turning a bright shade of purple as Klaus continued to snarl viciously in her face whilst ignoring Keelin’s attempts to prise his arm away from the hospital worker.

“No one is touching my sister! No One!” the hybrid snarled, his face pressed up close to the frightened nurse’s own.

“Klaus please, try and see reason! Freya is still in a serious condition – you need to let the ICU staff do their jobs!”

Keelin’s nostrils flared as her wolf senses picked up on the distinct scent markers of fear now being emitted off the staff-nurse in undiluted thick waves.

Dammit, what was taking Elijah and Rebecca so long?!

The two immortal vampires had disappeared off the ICU department nearly thirty minutes ago now, each intending on placing calls to different people in an attempt to once again rally their ally’s help in discovering the true identity of Freya’s abductors.

Rebekah had at first been reluctant to leave Keelin alone with Klaus, given how volatile the hybrid’s mood had turned since learning of the full extent of the bikers’ assault on Freya.

The cloud of powdery plaster had not even finished raining down from the damaged wall in the witch’s room before Klaus had bellowed out in a fit of anger once more – lunging for the medical cart that had been stood near the hospital room’s entrance, and violently throwing it against the door that the surgeon, Dr Andrew’s, had closed on his way out.

Med-wrapped dressings, needle syringes, and sample collection tubes had sprayed out across the whole room in an erupting fountain of medical supplies, as the cart itself had shattered beyond repair thanks to the hybrid’s enhanced strength.

It had taken both Rebekah and Elijah’s combined efforts to restrain Klaus long enough for Keelin to plead with him to stop raining down hell in the same room where his seriously injured sister still
lay unconscious and defenceless against the flying debris and shrapnel he was creating. It had only been when the wolf had then pointed out to the Original hybrid that a stray piece of flying med-cart plastic had nicked a small cut into Freya’s left cheek – fresh blood collecting in a thin line across her pale skin creating an easily detectable smell to each of the supernatural beings in the room - that Klaus had finally reigned in his emotional outburst.

The hybrid had swiftly returned to his eldest sister’s side - his eyes resuming their usual pale blue colour as he had plucked one of the scattered dressings off of the witch’s bed and silently proceeded to gently wipe away the thin line of blood that had appeared on Freya’s face.

Another round of compulsion had then been required by Elijah, enacted upon the various staff members working within the ICU unit - to convince them that Freya had been mistakenly placed into a side-room that was undergoing maintenance construction work, and to have the witch moved to a different room on the opposite side of the department.

Klaus had not left Freya’s side since his initial outburst – neither during the transition of her bed, numerous monitors, and drip’s over to their new room, nor when Elijah and Rebekah had declared that they needed to make some calls and had departed to move to an area of the hospital where a better cell-signal could be obtained.

Keelin had left the hybrid watching over her fiancé to seek out Dr Andrews once more, intending to speak with the surgeon in more depth with regards to what further surgeries Freya was going to require and his overall prognosis for her recovery. It was not a conversation that she had expected to have to have with the man – initially believing that once Freya had come out of surgery one of the witch’s siblings would fully heal her body with their blood. But it now appeared that her lover was going to have to tread the long road of natural recovery – a journey that would be slow and hard work given the extent of her injuries, and no doubt extremely frustrating for Freya given that the witch was not exactly known for her patience.

She had found the surgeon stood at the nurse’s station near the entrance to the ICU, still looking somewhat dazed and bewildered from Elijah’s compulsion as he poured over a set of patient notes whilst chewing on the end of a ballpoint pen.

Andrews had greeted Keelin as though it was the first time he had seen her after Freya’s surgery had come to an end, and had begun a much less frank account of what injuries he and his surgical team had attempted to repair.

Acknowledging the sordid list of her lover’s wounds for what was then the third time that day – once with her own eyes in the Emergency department, and twice by Andrews describing them – had not been an easy task for her. But she had known that the surgeon now had no memory of his time spent describing every last detail of Freya’s condition to Klaus and the others, and so had let the man once again give his professional opinion on the wounds, and explain what actions they had taken.

The wolf had just been about to hear what Andrews thought would be the best course of action for healing some of the more severe lacerations on Freya’s back, when a loud scream had ripped out of the room in which her fiancé now resided.

Cursing quietly under her breath, Keelin had rushed back to where Freya now lay in a supernatural blur of speed, and had entered to find the now purple-cheeked nurse dangling a few feet off the ground with Klaus’s hand gripped around her throat, and a freshly opened haematology kit scattered across the floor of the room.

“Klaus, for Freya to recover she is going to need to have further tests and procedure’s performed –
the staff will need to take her blood often to monitor her stats. Let the nurse go - she was just trying to help!”

The terrified woman’s eyes slowly began to roll back in her head as she began to slip from consciousness.

“I’ll take the blood myself Klaus” Keelin began, her voice imploring in a desperate attempt to prevent the hybrid from ending the poor nurse’s life. “Ok - if you don’t want any strangers touching Freya, I’ll take any samples that are required or administer any drugs she needs. You trust me right?”

The hybrid’s glare gradually slid away from the dangling nurse to lock onto Keelin – anger and worry clearly waging a desperate war within the bright blue irises that fixed onto her.

“I would never willingly do anything to harm your sister, Klaus. I swear it on my life! She is my world, and I want her to recover from this just as much as you do. Please – if you let the nurse go, I promise that only I will go near Freya with a needle, ok?”

Silently the hybrid’s head drooped forward in defeat as he released his grip on the now unconscious nurse. Keelin lunged forward as the woman slid down the wall towards the floor – managing to catch the nurse just before her top half connected with the ground. Quickly locating a pulse in the woman’s neck, the wolf looked up towards Klaus and raised her brows in a questioning manner.

Thankfully the seemingly subdued hybrid quickly caught onto the gist of her silent request, and slowly nodded his agreement to provide the nurse with some of his blood. Keelin lowered the woman gently to the ground before leaving Klaus to heal and compel her, as the wolf made her way over to Freya’s bedside.

She had just finished collecting the final required vial of Freya’s blood when both Rebecca and Elijah entered the room once more, each pausing briefly to frown at the sight of their brother helping a rather confused looking nurse up off the floor and out of the room, before coming to stand either side of Freya’s bed.

“Dare I ask what happened in our absence?!” Elijah enquired as he studied his unconscious older sister.

“Let me guess,” Rebekah started before Keelin had a chance to respond to the well-dressed vampire. “That poor confused woman attempted to tell our dear brother what is best for my sister’s health, to which he reacted in his ever calm and reasonable manner?”

Keelin let out a small huff of bemusement as she began to label up the various vials of Freya’s blood so that they could be processed by the pathology lab.

“Something like that!” the wolf grumbled, as she finished preparing the samples and moved to check on the monitor’s read outs of Freya’s vitals. “He doesn’t want anyone touching her, other than us.”

Rebekah took a step closer to the bed and gently took one of her sister’s bandaged hands into her own as she looked down upon the witch in concern.

“I can understand that”, the blonde vampire whispered, her usually calm features contorting to convey the troubled thoughts that were running through her head.

“And you think that I don’t?!” Keelin said in exasperation, shaking her head as she adjusted one of
the dials on Freya’s IV Drip. “When I think of what she has gone through….what has been done to
her…..”

The wolf’s words trailed off as she fought to prevent the tears that had begun to collect in her eyes
from falling once more. Drawing in a deep breath and letting her eyes fall shut, she attempted to
swallow down the fraught emotions raging inside of her into a far dark corner of her heart – trying
to temporarily lock them away for the time being.

*Dammit Malraux – keep your shit together!* Keelin berated herself internally. *For Freya’s sake,
keep it together. She needs you to be a professional right now, not an emotional wreck of a fiancé.
Her recovery comes first! It has to come first! Everything else can be dealt with later.*

Finishing her work on the IV drip, Keelin turned to face the two vampire siblings who remained
staring at their sister with undiluted concern swirling in their eyes.

“Did either of you make any headway with your calls?”

Klaus quietly re-entered the room just as Keelin finished asking her question - taking up position
beside his family as he too waited on their responses.

“I have instructed Tobias to take a handful of his most trusted coven members with him back to
Hattiesburg to continue grilling the Oblivioni coven for more information. We only discovered a
handful of witches residing in the city, each claiming to be nomads and insisting that their
knowledge of the old fabled coven’s practices and power had long since been lost over generations.
But both Tobias and I had felt that they were holding back– possibly unwilling to tell a couple of
outsiders of their ancestors well kept secrets.”

“So, do you think that they might know of some form of magic that can break through whatever it
is that has been preventing Hope and the other witches of New Orleans being successful when
scrying for the biker gang’s location?” Keelin asked.

“Honestly, I am unsure. After all, we don’t even know if this gang’s location has been magically
concealed. But the many legends associated with the Oblivioni coven often make reference to their
witch’s having access to dark and mysterious spells. One’s which no other modern day coven
retains knowledge of. I believe that if such magic does exist that can locate our sister’s tormentors,
I suspect it will be known by these mythical witches of folklore.”

“And what of your call, sister?” Klaus asked Rebekah as Keelin walked over to the rooms entrance
and popped her head out of the door to gesture for one of the passing nurses to take the blood
samples that she had taken down to the path-lab for testing.

“I spoke with Marcel and informed him of Freya’s….condition.” Rebekah began, her voice
catching on the last word.

Anger began to rapidly flare in Klaus’s eyes once more, causing the blonde vampire to quickly
raise her hands in a mollifying manner as she continued.

“Calm yourself Nik, I left out the more intimate details of her injuries. I simply told him that our
sister had been tortured at the hands of her captors, and that neither vampire nor hybrid blood had
so far been successful in healing her. He is going to send over one of his boys with a sample of his
augmented blood to see if it has an effect upon her injuries where ours failed.”

Klaus rolled his eyes at the reference to the self-appointed King of New Orleans enhanced status,
but Keelin still noted that his posture relaxed marginally after Rebekah’s assurance that she had not
told the Marcel the exact nature of Freya’s wounds.

“I also mentioned that the emergency services found our sister on the outskirts of town, on route 47 heading out to the wastelands. He’s heading there now, taking some of his cronies to help conduct a search of the area. If memory serves me right, there’s not exactly a lot to be found out that way – mostly just desert terrain interspersed with small oasis’s of marshland. But it’s not like we have a lot else to go on right now, so I guess it is better than nothing!”

“The police officer that found her mentioned to the paramedics that there were tyre tracks leading away from her body, as though she had been driven there by someone. Maybe if we’re lucky, the rain won’t have washed away all traces of those imprints yet and Marcel will be able to…..”

Keelin’s words suddenly trailed off as a weak groaning noise unexpectedly came from behind her.

“Mmmph…”

Quickly twisting her body around, the wolf’s eyes immediately fell upon Freya’s face – just in time to see the witches eyes begin to flicker from side to side under their lids.

“Is she…” Rebekah started, as all three siblings looked on in anticipation.

“I think she’s trying to come round,” Keelin affirmed, as she forced herself to pull her eyes away from her fiancé’s face so as to study the various medical-monitor read outs. “Her heart rate is increasing, as so is her breathing.”

The wolf quickly moved over to a small locker that was positioned on the left wall of the room, and swiftly began to tap in a six digit code into the metal cabinets security lock.

“What are you doing?!?” Klaus demanded, his eyes flitting between Keelin and his eldest sister.

“I’m going to prepare a shot of painkiller for her – if she is indeed regaining consciousness, I want her to be as comfortable as possible. And since you are refusing to let anyone else near her, it’s not like I can call for her actual doctor to do it!”

Ignoring the scorn in the wolf’s words, Klaus took a step closer to the head of the bed and searched his sister’s face beseechingly.

“Sister, can you hear me?”

Keelin halted in her advance back to the bed as she watched her fiancé’s eyes suddenly fly wide open and begin to flick from left to right in a rapid motion.

“Freya, honey, you are safe and in hosp….ARRGH!”

Pain sharply erupted in the wolf’s head, spreading its white hot tendrils across the whole of her skull like slithering electric eels, as her hands flew up to her temples and her eyes scrunched shut. Keelin barely registered the cries of agony that simultaneously came from all three of the Original immortals stood around Freya’s bed as the floor beneath her feet began to violently vibrate – causing her to quickly lose her footing.

As she unceremoniously crashed forward to land roughly onto her knees - dropping the syringe and vial of morphine that she had been gripping in her right hand onto the floor – the glass of the small room’s window forcefully shattered outwards, causing jagged shards to rain down onto the street several floors below.
The wolf felt a trail of blood begin to trickle out of her nose as the intense pain within her head increduously increased in intensity, causing yet another cry of distress to erupt from her mouth. From the shouts of panic that her enhanced hearing could detect coming from the rest of the hospital building, Keelin quickly realised that it was not just her immediate surroundings that were being affected by the outburst of power coming from her fiancé.

Forcing her eyes to prise open despite the crushing pain within her skull, the wolf managed to twist her head just enough to glance towards Rebekah, whom had now also dropped down to her knees next to the hospital bed due the combined forces of the shaking building and the magical onslaught upon the blood vessels within all of their heads.

“R….Rebekah….can….you….urgh….can you reach….her….”

Keelin’s voice was almost inaudible over the collective noise of various furnishings and hospital equipment smashing onto the floor and the screams of panic coming from the ICU department just outside of Freya’s room.

The blonde vampire appeared to not have heard Keelin’s plea, as the wolf watched blood began to ooze out from under the lids of the Original’s squeezed shut eyes, joining the trail of crimson fluid that was already snaking its way down from her nose.

As the white dust of plaster began to rain down around her from the shuddering ceiling above, Keelin used what little capacity of concentration she had left in her pain riddled mind to stretch thin the magical Kyanite barrier that lay within her – instantly feeling the powerful might of her inner wolf course through her muscles as a result of the action. The quaking room abruptly came into acute focus, as the irises of her eyes bled into their animal form and she flung out a hand towards the ditched syringe and morphine vial that were bouncing lightly up and down off the shaking floor.

Cursing, despite the severe pain still erupting in her head, Keelin tried to push herself closer towards the medical supplies that were frustratingly just beyond her current reach. Out of the corner of her eyes the wolf detected that Klaus was trying in vain to pull himself up off the floor by gripping onto the metal frame at the foot of Freya’s bed – the hybrids appearance mirroring that of Rebekah’s thanks to the trails of crimson fluid that streaked down his face.

“Sister…..stop……”

Klaus’s words appeared to have no effect on the intensity of power that continued ripple forth from the injured witch, as violent wisps of might persisted on their determined path of destruction and chaos.

The shrill sound of glass shattering burst forth from other windows framing the hospital building, as Keelin finally managed to close her outstretched hand around the syringe and vial that jostled on the floor. Gritting her teeth together, the wolf used every ounce of her enhance strength to push herself up off the ground and grab onto the side of Freya’s hospital bed with her free hand. The exertion required by the move caused the crushing pain within her head to yet again spike in intensity, triggering the wolf within her to whine and yelp out in a high pitched display of distress.

Managing to get an elbow under her and onto the bed, Keelin raised her shuddering vision towards the face of her lover, whose wide gaze remained fixed on the ceiling above as it swirled with a wild, untamed terror. The wolf was not even sure that Freya’s bloodshot eyes were registering the hospital room within which she lay - her petrified expression being that of someone who was being
forced to stare unblinking at their worst fear.

A panic attack....her barely conscious fiancé was having a panic attack, and lashing out at everything around her with raw, uncontrolled magic....

“Freya, baby….your safe now….rrrgh….please…. listen to the sound of…. my voice....”

There was no indication that the witch had even heard Keelin’s strained words, as the unblinking blonde’s mouth slowly began to stretch open in what looked to be a silent scream.

As the heart monitor hooked up beside Freya’s bed began sizzle with smoke and emit bright sparks of electricity into the surrounding air, Keelin forced her fingers to close tighter around the syringe in her hand as she plunged its needle into the top of the vial of morphine. Laboured breathing caused her grip to shake as she drew up what she hoped to be the right volume of morphine into the needles shaft – her pain cocooned vision still unable to focus long enough to make out the graded scale that ran up the length of the plastic barrel. As the expended vial dropped down onto the bed, the wolf nearly dropped the syringe from her hand as another wave of intense pain decimated its way through her head, causing her shaking legs to give way and her torso to collapse onto the hospital bed over Freya’s bandaged right arm.

The unexpected contact appeared to break the fear induced paralysis that had taken hold of Freya - her frail frame beginning to thrash to-and-fro under the white sheets that covered her just as Klaus managed to haul his body over frame at the foot of the bed.

Noticing the hybrid struggling to claw his way closer to his witch sister, Keelin tried to blink away the blood that slowly beginning to cloud her vision as she fumbled for the syringe that had landed somewhere on the bedcovers.

“Klaus….her arm….help me keep her…..arm steady....”

A roar of pained determination let rip from the hybrids bloodied mouth as the veins in his neck began to protrude out from exertion.

Slowly extending one arm out in front of the other, Klaus eventually managed to pull himself along the bed and over to Keelin’s position where the hybrid clamped a hand down onto his sisters arm - narrowly missing the thick bandage covering her injured wrist. Keelin raised the tip of syringes needle towards the cannula protruding out of the crutch of Freya’s forearm just as the neon tubed light fixture above the bed suddenly exploded in an eruption of bright sparks, causing glass to shoot out in all directions.

Flinging himself over the bed in a blur speed and bellowing pain, Klaus managed to shield Freya’s thrashing form from most of the sharp debris just as Keelin connected the shaking needle into the cannula.

Slowing pushing down onto the syringe’s plunger, Keelin fought against the overwhelming pain in her head to lock her blurred gaze onto Freya’s frightened emerald eyes as they flicked wildly around the room.

“It’s….it’s ok honey….you’re safe.....”

Several heartbeats passed, before the vibrations passing through the Hospital building’s foundations slowly started to dissipate. Keelin felt the vice like grip on her head begin to lessen as she noted the candescent wild intensity that had been shining in Freya’s fear filled eyes lessening.

Groans of discomfort came from both Rebekah an Elijah as they slowly pushed themselves up off
the floor. Breathing heavily, Klaus slowly pulled himself back from leaning over the bed – the hybrid’s movements exhibiting an uncharacteristic level of delicacy as he attempted to refrain from causing his injured sister any further discomfort.

“What….the bloody hell was that!?” Rebekah huffed out, as she attempted to wipe away the blood now liberally coating her face.

Watching her lovers eyes gradually flutter shut as the witch fell into a drug induced unconsciousness, Keelin let out a trembling breath as she straightened into a standing position and placed two fingers gently against the pulse point on Freya’s neck. Counting the beats as they pulsed blood through Freya’s veins, the wolf sighed thankfully as she felt her fiancé’s heart fall into a slow but steady rhythm.

Chaos could still be heard erupting throughout the various departments of the hospital despite the violent shaking and juddering of the buildings walls having now ceased. The wolf’s hearing managed to pick up on individual words such as “Earthquake” and “Tremors” amongst the frenzied confusion of the clinic’s staff and visitors as they tried to make sense of what had just happened.

Running an assessing eye over the rest of Freya’s body in an attempt to see if the witch had managed to pull any of her stiches whilst thrashing about, Keelin spoke to the dazed Mikaelson siblings in a hushed tone, so as not to be heard by anyone outside of the room.

“That was some form of post traumatic panic attack!”

“A panic attack?!” Rebekah exclaimed loudly in surprise. “Christ….I thought that those just involved a shortness of breath and breaking out into a sweat?! My brain felt like it was being fried like an egg on a hot pan, and the whole bloody building nearly collapsed down around us!”

“Then I guess we just witnessed what happens when a witch as powerful as our dear sister has one of those attacks!” Elijah mused, as he gracefully brushed plaster dust off the arm of his suit.

“She looked petrified!” Klaus stated softly, his eyes not leaving Freya’s once more relaxed features. “Of us! She looked petrified of us!”

“Honestly.…” Keelin began in a wavering voice, as she started to unwrap the now blood stained bandage that had been secured around Freya’s left wrist, “….I doubt that she could even see us. My professional guess would be that she was trapped in some form of waking nightmare, no doubt reliving some horror that we could not see.”

As she continued to remove the discoloured dressing from her lover’s appendage, Keelin watched on as Klaus lips began to press into a hard thin line – anger flaring bright in his vivid blue eyes. A rumbling growl began to emit from his throat, as his hands balled into white knuckled fists at his sides.

“Niklaus, might I suggest that you refrain from any further outbursts whilst in our injured sisters company”, Elijah warned in a low voice. “I doubt that this Hospital would withstand any further assaults upon its structure!”

The fuming hybrid appeared to ignore his brother’s words as his eyes began to bleed into their ferocious animal form.

“I…am going to skin….every last one….of those god forsaken bikers alive!”

Klaus snarled words managed to reverberate forcefully throughout the small hospital room, despite his relatively hushed tone.
“Not if I get to the bastards first!”

Keelin twisted her head towards Rebekah, surprised by the fierce tone in which the blonde vampire had spoken. She was further taken aback to be met by intense blood-frenzied red eyes, as Freya’s sister hissed in rage – exposing long sharp extended teeth.

Within the blink of an eye, Rebekah had vanished out of the room - swiftly followed by a blur of motion that Keelin presumed to be Klaus following hot on his sister’s heels.

Turning towards Elijah, the wolf raised her eyebrows in reservation.

“Oh I wouldn’t worry too much,” the suited vampire stated with a casual air, despite the grave look of concern still plastered upon his face as he monitored his unconscious sister. “They will no doubt keep their maiming and disfiguring within the supernatural element of the city – I doubt that your human colleagues have anything to fear!”

“Is that meant to put my mind at ease?!” Keelin asked incredulously, as she pulled a fresh suture kit from one of the discarded drawers of the destroyed medical cart that lay on its side next to Freya’s bed.

Offering the wolf a humourless smile, Elijah elegantly sat down upon the edge of Freya’s bed and gently took the witch’s free hand into his own.

“Given what has happened to our sister, Keelin – I’d simply be grateful that the whole city of New Orleans isn’t already burning down to the ground.”

As she carefully began replace the torn stiches in Freya’s wounded left wrist, the wolf knew in her heart that Elijah words rang true.

“Because believe me, if we do not find the deplorable scum responsible for this atrocity soon…” the Original vampire continued, his voice dropping dangerously low, “…I will gladly light the match myself!”

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Hey! Happy New Year Everyone.....and yes I know I am a little late in saying that!

I am so sorry for the long delay in getting this next chapter to you all. As perviously mentioned, I was away on Holiday for two weeks in January (FYI - New Orleans is an AMAZING city, and totally worth the hype!), and since my return, work has been so crazy busy that I havent been able to find any time to write!

Still, I'm here now, and with the next chapter installement of this tale.

So....where were we?! Well, below is a quick recap for everyone, just incase you've forgotten where this wee tale had got to, over the last several weeks:

1. Some decidably evil characters rocked up into town, known as Jarls. In case you've forgotten - we hate them!
2. An old, flirty friend of (very old, like - older than your granny old!) Freya's appeared back into her life, causing Keelin's wolfy possessive instincts to well and truely kick in!
3. Freya and Keelin got engaged - Keelin being the one to romance her girl and pop the question, to which Freya (of course) said yes!
4. Freya discovered that Hope had developed a new, worrying power - mind reading!
5. Keelin and Freya got into a major arguement on Bourbon St (which, I can now say I have walked along - whoop!) thanks to Freya discovering that her fiance had been hiding the presence of Alanna in New Orleans from her. Freya was on the verge of breaking up with the wolf when some of the Jarls and their vampire lackies rocked up to further ruin everyones night.
6. Freya was kidnapped and tortured at the hands of the Jarls - it wasn't very nice! Did I mention we hate them?!
7. Keelin and the Mikaelsons turned the city upsidedown looking for their loved one - but to no avail. Klaus got a bit murdery!
8. Freya rocked up to St Theodora's hospital one morning in an ambulance, where Keelin was on shift and had to rush to save her life. Joel was a sweetheart!
9. Klaus and family turned up to the hospital once Freya was out of surgery and learnt the full extent of their sisters injuries. Klaus took it....well he took it like one would expect any emotionally challenged, volitle, short tempered, killing machine to do - badly!
10. Freya momentarily regained conciousness and nearly destroyed the whole hospital and everyone in it thanks to a powerful wiccan panic attack. Shit got real for Klaus and Rebekah's anger.

.....and I think that's everyone now caught up :-) 

So, onto this next chapter. As it has been for the last good few chapters of this tale, *TRIGGER WARNINGS* remain in place - you know the score by now, its a dark and shitty time for our fave characters, so be prepared for plenty of reference to violence, torture, and sexual abuse.

Ok, well I hope you enjoy - and I promise to try and get the next chapter written in under a month this time. Ahem.
Darkness had long since fallen over the city of New Orleans, rapidly bringing to an end the eighth consecutive day of wind and rain as Storm Gelda continued to thunder its way across the state of Louisiana. Local businesses and tourist attractions alike remained closed for the most part, with only the ever present Emergency Services and News Crews continuing to operate with any noticeable capacity around the city.

The latter of which had been particularly busy since the occurrence of a bizarre localised earthquake, that had struck several buildings in the heart of the city’s Ninth Ward early that afternoon. The Louisiana Department for Seismic Exploration and Activity had recorded the Earthquake as a moderate sized event, with the tectonic plate activity topping 5.9 on the Richter scale – the epicentre of which was detected to have been located somewhere in the vicinity of St Theadora’s Hospital.

There was one particular detail however that the local News Stations and reporters had been repeatedly focusing upon ever since the event had taken place. The tremors that had been causing Richter scale read-outs seemed to have been originating from just above the earth’s crust, as opposed to deep within it.

Numerous theories and conjectures had already been spawned by both local media, and so the called “experts” whom had been being interviewed live on the T.V to try and explain the phenomenon – the most common theory appearing to be the notion that an explosive device must have detonated somewhere within or close to St Theodora’s Hospital, the pulse wave of which had then subsequently triggered the seismic activity that had radiated out from the clinic’s foundations.

Of course the small issue of their having been no evidence or remains found of a bomb, or indeed any explosive material within the building, had not deterred most of the regional media outlets from running with the headline “Potential Terrorist Attack Rocks Down-Town New Orleans” when the Ten O’clock News Update had aired across the local TV channels that evening.

A headline that Amelia had rolled her large sapphire eyes at in bemusement when she had caught sight of its wording scrolling across one of the many TV-sets dotted around St Theodora’s communal areas, as she gracefully made her way up to the ICU ward.

*Typical of mortals - always in a rush to blindly place blame without any credible evidence!*

The raven haired beauty had of course instantly known the true source of the tremors that had rocked the foundations of several buildings surrounding St Theadora’s Health Clinic and resulted in two deaths - as well as eight seriously injured members of the public being rushed to various hospitals across the city of New Orleans.
She had known its source – and subsequently known what it had signified.

Freya was alive!

As the Seer effortlessly passed by St Theadora’s ICU Departments nurse’s desk both unseen and unchallenged, a small shiver of exhilaration quivered down her spine at the memory of the Viking Witch’s raw and uncontrolled power washing over her as it had rippled out across the Ninth Ward.

She had only been a few blocks down from the Hospital at the time, tracking the movements of one of the many vampires that she suspected to be under the control of the Blood-Bound Jarl’s. Amelia had known that she had been clutching at straws by attempting to follow the unwashed biker, as he had stalked his way along one of the wards many water saturated streets. The wiry-haired vampire had been the fifth one that she had endeavoured to trail in as many days, in the vain hope that one of the gang-members would eventually slip up in their attempts to keep the location of their master’s sanctuary hidden.

The place that she had come to learn was called Baracuda.

But it had seemed that the immortal Viking Jarl’s had trained their latest set of Thrall’s well in the art of concealment, as all of those that she had attempted to trail back to the biker’s refuge had either caught wind of her presence and remained holed up in the confines of the city, or had managed to fall prey to the murderous rampage of Freya’s hybrid brother as he had sought to discover the whereabouts of his abducted sister’s location.

Such was the Seers current frustration at her lack of progress in locating the Jarl’s, she had been considering plucking out the heart of the latest biker that she had been fruitlessly tracking - just for the hell of it - when the breath had been knocked out of her lungs by the intense wave of power that had emanated out of the tall hospital building situated on Read Boulevard.

A small gasp of pleasure had escaped from Amelia’s mouth as her body’s own brand of power had sung out in response to the Viking Witch’s magical touch – an ancient primal force that she had not felt pulse through her in over one hundred years, but could still remember every raw detail of as though it had only been a few days ago.

All thoughts of dismembering the leather-clad vampire that she had been trailing had vanished out of the Seers mind as she had found herself gravitating towards the source of the Ninth Wards tremors - intent on seeing how her old friend faired after having been a guest of the Blood-Bound Clan for so long.

And maybe….just maybe….finally discover the Jarls’ current location.

Amelia could practically taste the sickly air of ill health that draped itself over the whole of the intensive care unit, as she silently passed by several occupied beds and the nurses who sat beside them keeping a vigilant watch over their patients. None of the scrubs wearing staff even lifted an eye in her direction as she made her way over to a side room at the far end of the dimly lit ward, where the Seer’s ever reaching senses told her the Viking Witch resided.

As she reached the closed door that she knew Freya to be on the other side of and placed a hand onto its handle, her eyes fell shut momentarily – the Seer sending out a gentle wave of probing psychic energy into the room beyond. Within a heartbeat, a vivid collage of shapes and colours began to be painted within her mind’s eye, giving her an abstract artist’s impression of what lay waiting for her on the other side the wooden barrier.

A lone figure lay motionless in a bed surrounded by machines, with another individual curled up in
A small frown began to crease Amelia’s brow as she noted the colour of and texture of the aurora being given off by the unmoving person lay in the bed.

During their time spent together in Lille, the one thing that the Seer had always revered about her magic wielding business partner – other than her striking beauty – was the vivacious and animated aura that had always pulsed off the witch in droves.

Despite Freya’s constant refusal to divulge any information to Amelia with regards to her past or family life, it had not taken long for the Seer to fathom that the witch’s upbringing had been both a turbulent and chaotic time – one which had left many a scar upon the blonde’s mind, if not her body. Yet despite the serious and often hard edge to Freya’s character, the dazzling and vigorous reds and oranges of her aura had told Amelia that the witch’s spirit had never truly been broken by the horrors of her past.

There was a fun loving and feisty woman hidden beneath all of the walls of anger and resentment that the witch had built up around herself, and Amelia had known back then - in the heart of the Hauts-de-France region - that she had been the only one to see Freya Mikaelson for whom she truly was underneath her well-rehearsed sombre façade.

A fact that she had teased the witch about mercilessly, during the rare quieter days spent relaxing along the winding banks of the Deûle river.

But now, as the Seer stood in the ICU ward with her hand hovering over the door handle that would lead her into Freya’s room, all that she could sense emanating off the figure lay unconscious on the hospital bed was a bleak and joyless fusion of ashen greys and smoky black.

A stark contrast to the spirited greens and yellows pulsating off the figure that sat curled up in corner of the room.

No doubt belonging to the witch’s wolf lover, Amelia noted to herself as she slowly pushed down onto the door’s handle and entered into the side room.

One of the Seer’s eyebrows immediately raised in a display of intrigue as the finer details of the hospital room came into focus now that she was able to see it with the clarity of her physical eyes. Given that this had to have been the epicentre of the power surge that had rocked the whole of the 9th Ward, Freya’s room looked to be in surprisingly good stead.

A large, fresh pane of glass was housed in the wide window-frame – the yellow and black manufacturers tape still in place, criss-crossing over from one corner of the pane to the other. Several long cracks that must have ripped open in the flooring as it had been vibrating, looked to have been filled with some form of fast setting sealant material, whilst a quick glance up to the ceiling showed her that over half of the panels housed there were obviously brand new – their bright white colour proving to be a stark contrast next to the aging cream of the older panels surrounding them.

Amelia shook her head knowingly to herself as she softly treaded over towards the head of the hospital bed, realising that the witch’s vampire siblings must have compelled the hospital’s maintenance team to fix most of the damage in Freya’s room as soon as the power surge had ceased.

The rest of the medical building certainly had a long way to go before it was back to its normal state of existence.
Coming to a stop next to the machine which was steadily beeping out the rhythm of Freya’s heart, the Seer let her sapphire eyes fall onto the unmoving face of her old friend.

The witch looked gaunt – her cheekbones protruding out an unhealthy amount under the dark, sunken bags that were encircling her closed eyes. Concern began to crease Amelia’s brow as she allowed her gaze to wander over the full form of her old friend’s unconscious body.

Numerous physical wounds have been inflicted upon Freya – that much even the simplest of human minds could have easily deduced without much need for close examination. But she was one who was gifted with far more insight than even the sharpest of mortal intellects – a gift that Amelia now drew upon, as she gently placed one of her hands onto the pale forehead of the unmoving witch.

With a quick glance to her left to ensure that the wolf remained in a deep sleep - curled up tightly on the large uncomfortable looking armchair - Amelia let her eyes slide closed as she slowly pushed a fine wisp of psychic power out of her fingertips and into Freya’s mind.

Instantly the Seer was bombarded with a rapid succession of stark, vivid images – each one flashing in her mind’s eye for the briefest of seconds before giving way to the next. Colour was an absentee in the hurried collage of powerful emotional pictures – the details of their contents instead being painted in varying degrees of morose greys and tyrannical black.

Pain….Despair….Fear….Oppression….Hopelessness…. 

Crushing and unrelenting emotions of anguish bombarded the Seer’s mind’s eye in a relentless attack - unwavering in their misery and desolation. A small gasp escaped from Amelia’s mouth as the sheer force of the haunting images caused the Seer to stumble back half a step – her free hand quickly flying out to her side to steady herself using the bed’s metal frame as she strived to maintain the link between her mind and the witch’s.

Taunts….Degradation….Shame….Stale breath….Suffocation…. 

The graphic sensations continued their assault blow after blow within in the Seer’s mind - each one more threatening than the last, and each one determined to break the tenuous psychic connection stretching between the two old friends.

Blood….Keelin….Fear….Keelin….Pain….Keelin….Defeat….Submission….Keelin….NO! 

A muffled cry of pain gasped forth from Amelia’s mouth as she violently ripped her hand away from Freya’s forehead – the Seer unable to withstand the force of psychic torrent any longer. Drawing in a deep haggard breath, she opened her eyes and looked once more towards the sleeping wolf – convinced for a moment that the brunette must have heard the loud screaming of the images that were rattling through Freya’s mind.

The sensation quickly passed - composure once again settling over the Seer as she recognised that the garish and vulgar pictures that had been peeling forth from the witch had only been detectable by herself thanks to her unique gifts, and that the wolf remained blissfully unaware as she continued to sleep soundly.

Turning back towards the unconscious witch, an emotional mixture of pity and sadness crept into the Seer’s eyes – causing the usual brilliance of the sapphire hues found there to dampen and dull.

Drawing in a deep breath, she allowed her eyes to fall shut once more as her mind attempted to piece together the brutal yet fragmented information it had just been bombarded with.
Freya had been tortured at the hands of the Jarls – that much was clear.

From the scents and smells that had coated the psychic images, the Seer managed to determine that most of the physical pain suffered by the witch had been inflicted by the sadistic knife loving Ake, and his equally as cruel and malicious brother, Vidar. She would have recognised their putrid scent markers anywhere, despite having not been within their presence for many a century.

However the scent that had been the most prevalent in the images - the one which had almost suffocated Amelia as she had tried her best to keep her psychic power flowing through the witch’s mind – she had recognised as belonging to the foulest of the seven Jarl’s of the Blood-Bound Clan. Colborn.

The witch’s mind was drowning in the malevolent essence of the overweight bearded Jarl, and a small shudder rippled through the Seer’s body as she realised what its unclean presence meant in regards to what her old acquaintance had been subjected to.

“I am so sorry, my friend”, Amelia whispered out into the silence of the hospital room – her voice quiet enough to not be detected by the sleeping wolf, despite the brunettes enhanced hearing. “I should have been there….I made a promise to you and….and I have let you down!”

Guilt quickly rampaged its way through her, as the Seer’s mind suddenly found itself drifting back through the decades to the narrow, sewage coated cobbled streets in the slum’s area of Lille. To one darkened pathway in particular, and the sensation of rain kissed, cold hard stone pressing unforgivingly into the exposed skin of her back, as she had struggled helplessly under the weight of………..

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……..his body pressed down upon hers, trapping her helplessly beneath him as his spittle coated tongue licked its way up the side of her cheek.

“So you think you’re better than me, wench?” the panting male rasped into Amelia’s ear as he continued to painfully grip onto her wrists as he pinned them by her sides on the slippery wet cobbles. “You think that you can just destroy a man’s life and not have to pay the consequences!?!”

Fear clawed along her veins, as the Seer gagged on the overwhelming stench of stale alcohol flooding into her nostrils, coming from the mouth of the man pressed down on top of her. The brute was extremely drunk, which meant that the unusual gifts with which she had been born would have little to no affect upon his intoxicated mind.

And without her gifts – she was nothing more than a slight framed woman trapped under the larger, stronger body of an enraged tyrant intent on exacting his revenge.

“You’ve taken everything from me! Destroyed my reputation…ripped apart my family!” the man continued venomously, as he attempted to force her legs apart using one of his course woollen-pant covered thighs. “So now I am going to take everything from you…starting with what little dignity a whoring charlatan like yourself has left!”

Acting purely on instinct, Amelia thrust her left knee up into the brute’s stomach with all of the force that she could muster, eliciting a grunt of pain to escape from his mouth. The action was not
enough however to dislodge the large framed man from his advantageous position on top of her, and the Seer swiftly found herself on the receiving end of a closed fist to face as the man retaliated to her efforts.

Pain and white light exploded across her vision, as the force of impact violently knocked her head back against the stone cobbled ground. The world rapidly took on a fuzzy appearance as Amelia’s vision began to swim with dizziness as a result of the blow.

“Stupid bitch!”

Warm spittle splattered across her face as the infuriated man pushed her legs apart once more, this time using his hands to painfully grip onto her thighs as Amelia’s body went limp beneath his. A split second later he was fumbling with the metal fastenings on the front of his pants, attempting to free himself from the confines of his clothing.

“I’m going to make you wish you had never been born….”

Hot stale breath washed over mouth as the man began to press himself down over her body once more.

“…and then I’m going to split you open from top to tail, and feed your remains to the stray dogs on the streets!”

“I think you’ll find that you’re the only dog present here tonight!”

Amelia’s wavering conscious managed to regain some of its focus as she registered the sudden presence of a familiar female voice.

The brute on top of her had barely begun to turn his head towards the source of the new voice before his entire body was abruptly thrown to the side, causing him to collide forcefully into the wall of one of the buildings that lined the dark, narrow alleyway.

Whilst the Seer attempted in vain to hoist her herself up onto her elbows, a loud cry of pain erupted out of the man’s throat as the sickly sound of bone snapping echoed out into the night.

“Arrgh….no….no….p-please…..”

“Please what?!” the enraged female voice boomed out from somewhere just ahead of where Amelia remained crumpled on the ground. “Don’t treat you like the filth that you are?!“

Another bone snapping preluded another cry of agony from the felled man to Amelia’s side.

“F…Freya”

Amelia’s shaky voice was barely a whisper, and inaudible above the shrill cries of pain now filling the alleyway.

The wailing brute’s body was suddenly jerked up off the floor – choking noises beginning to escape from his mouth as an unseen force gripped tightly onto his neck. A heartbeat later and he was flying through the air, limbs flailing beneath him before his body crashed violently into the wooden frame of a doorway, two buildings down.

The sound of boots hurriedly splashing in the small pools of water collecting between street cobbles reached Amelia’s ears a mere second before Freya’s face appeared in her line of sight – the witch crouching down beside her as she quickly gave the Seer’s body a once over with concerned
“Are you hurt? Did he….”

“NO….no, I’m ok. Just a little shaken that’s all.”

Freya gently placed a hand underneath the Seer’s arm and slowly helped her up off the ground - causing Amelia to marvel at how the witch could switch so easily from a fearsome force of nature, to a tender caring friend in less than a heartbeat.

The blonde’s brow quickly furrowed as she appeared to catch sight of something just to the left of the Amelia’s face. Placing a smooth skinned hand upon the Seer’s chin, the witch slowly turned Amelia’s head to the side, causing a flare of pain suddenly shoot down the nerves in her neck.

“You’re bleeding!” Freya exclaimed, as she let go of the Seer’s chin and began to pull a delicate looking cotton kerchief out from under one of the sleeves of her pale green dress. “We should get you to a physician – that’s going to need to be sutured!”

Quickly taking the witch’s hand into her own before Freya could raise it up to the gash marring the back of her head, Amelia looked into her friend’s concerned emerald eyes as she attempted to ease the blonde’s concerns.

“Honestly Freya, I’ll be fine. There really is no need to fuss!”

“But your head….”

“Will be as good as new within a few minutes!”

The Seer didn’t need to reach up and touch the gash in her scalp to know that it had already begun to stop bleeding as freely as it had been only a few seconds ago – the familiar tingling sensation of her accelerated healing knitting together torn flesh running through her body.

Freya too must have suddenly realised what was happening as her gaze left Amelia’s and returned to the wound, the witch’s eyes widening significantly, either from surprise, or suspicion – the Seer could not immediately pick up on which emotion was now running through her friend’s thoughts.

*Damned head wound, impairing her psychic abilities*

“You….you’re….a vampire?!”

Freya’s words were laced with accusation, as she stumbled a step back from Amelia’s personal space – the witch’s hands raising up slightly in front of her, as though readying to defend herself with magic if required.

*Suspicion it was then- shit!*

“No….Freya, it’s not like that!” Amelia said, reaching her own hand out towards the witch who was continuing to slowly back away from the Seer as her green eyes narrowed. “I am very much alive, and human!”

The crease now lining Freya’s brow deepened further as her suspicious eyes continued to burrow into Amelia’s.

“Then…then what are you? Why have you been deceiving me all of this time?!”

She attempted to take a small step towards the witch - desperate to try and keep her friend close
enough to be able to see the sincerity that Amelia hoped to now be showing on her face.

“I swear I have never tried to deceive you Freya. I am exactly what I have always claimed to be – a Seer!”

Confusion now began to fill the witch’s narrowed eyes, as Amelia watched her try to reconcile the fast healing wound with what knowledge Freya had of Seers and their existence.

“I was born with a certain amount of power, much like yourself. But whereas yours no doubt comes from being the daughter of a powerful female witch, mine was actually inherited from my father’s lineage. He too was a Seer - a very powerful one, who had vast quantities of psychic energy stored within his being. Some of which was then passed on to me upon my conception.”

Despite the suspicion that remained in her friend’s fierce gaze, Amelia noted with some relief that Freya’s hands were slowly starting to lower from their attack ready stance. The Seer had no doubt that she would be able to defend herself against a blast of magic thrown at her from the witch – a simple lash of psychic energy aimed at Freya’s mind would have the blonde writhing around on the floor in agony within a heartbeat – her nerve endings reacting to a pain that didn’t actually exist.

Not in the physical sense anyways.

But the truth was, Freya was the last person that Amelia ever wanted to have to use her abilities upon. Despite the witch’s insistence on their friendship simply being an advantageous convenience which aided their business relationship, the two of them had managed to grow close over the last few months. Freya had finally started to relax more often in Amelia’s company, even going as far as making candid suggestions as to what the two of them could do for “fun” on the rare occasion when they permitted themselves a day off from conning the wealthier residents of Lille to part with the contents of their swelling purses.

The Seer of course knew that her growing feelings for the witch were so far unreciprocated – she did not need the aid of her psychic talents to be able to pick up on that. But that fact did not stop Amelia from hoping that maybe one day, Freya would come to see that the human emotions from which she so ardently shied away from – love, affection, lust – were not such bad things to allow into her heart, if shared with the right person.

*If shared with her!*

“Please Freya, I swear that I would never purposely try to deceive you. I have always maintained that I am a Seer – I just didn’t embellish on what exactly that entailed. I have learnt from past mistakes to keep the more…. supernatural…. elements of my existence hidden. Much like yourself!”

Freya’s head tilted to the side as she continued to scrutinise her business partner.

“I have never hidden the fact that I am a witch from you Amelia! From the moment we met on the riverbank all those months ago, I was upfront with you about my birth-right.”

“But you kept the details of what exactly that entailed close to your chest!” Amelia countered – her voice imploring. “You didn’t exactly willingly divulge just how powerful a witch you are, or what abilities your magic infuses you with. It wasn’t until the Countess Valois blamed my readings for her husband running off with their maid and hired that assassin to end my life, that you unleashed the full extent of your power in front of me!”
“He was going to kill you. And me! What exactly was I meant to do, let it happen?!?” Freya exclaimed, her voice raising in exasperation.

“I’m not saying that you did anything wrong Freya!” the Seer said, her own words matching her friends in volume. “I was….am….extremely thankful for your actions that night. And tonight! I am just pointing out that had it not been for that attempt on our lives, I would never have known the extent of your power. You weren’t exactly rushing to tell me all about it. And I can understand why! These abilities that you and I have – people would never understand if they knew what we are capable of doing. They would react in fear….in ignorance. And you know as well as I do Freya how fear and ignorance can bring out the worst in mankind. We would never be allowed to live anything close to normal lives – and probably end up tied to a burning steak, charged with heresy!”

The witch’s gaze fell away from hers, as she appeared to consider the point that the Seer was trying to make.

After a few moments of loud silence between them - during which Amelia was forced to contemplated what life in Lille would be like without her partner in crime bringing a smile to her face daily – Freya finally let out a small sigh into the darkened alleyway, before meeting her eyes once more.

“So what you’re telling me is that you have actually been reading people’s minds and futures when they sit with you for a session? It’s not just a ruse like we planned, to deceive the local gentry into parting with their money?”

“Oh no,” the Seer stated, a small smile playing on her ruby lips despite the tension that remained hovering between them, “that is most definitely a ruse! I wouldn’t waste my psychic energy on actually delving into the minds of the sort of men who pay for my services!”

“And have you…. Freya began, the harsh edge in her voice giving way to a tone that Amelia quickly perceived to be something akin to embarrassment, “….have you ever used your abilities on me?”

In that moment, as the witch’s eyes slowly fell from her own as she apprehensively awaited the Seers answer, Amelia wanted nothing more than to throw caution to the wind and pull the blonde into a tight embrace. To not only show Freya how much she meant to her, but to also reassure her that she was in-fact the only person that Amelia had ever met whom she would not use her abilities upon – at least not without first having her permission.

The Seer shook her head gently as she quickly decided that right then - as they stood on the cobbles of one of Lille’s darkened alleyways with what was quite possibly a soon to be dead man bleeding out behind somewhere them - was not the time for confessions of her heart.

“No, I have not. And I swear to you, I will never do so either. Not unless you ask me to.”

Silence fell between the two friends once more, as both Witch and Seer looked on at each other anxiously, waiting on the other to speak first.

Eventually it was a low, guttural groaning nose coming from further down the street that broke the accumulating tension in the air – Amelia’s assailant apparently regaining some hold upon consciousness. The Seer watched as Frey’s eye’s slid from her own, to land on the injured man who lay several feet behind her – an expression of disgust quickly taking up residence on the witch’s face. A soft vibrating sensation quickly began to crawl up the skin of the Seer’s arms – one that she instantly recognised as being caused by her own psychic power reacting to a flare up of Freya’s wiccan magic. As a small shudder of pleasure ran down the length of Amelia’s spine,
Freya made to push past her – murderous intent written clearly all over her face.

“Freya wait!” the Seer implored, quickly griping onto her friends arm in order to stop the witch’s advance. “We should take our leave before we are seen in the same alleyway as him!”

“No until I have ended that vermin’s life!” Freya snarled, her eyes not leaving the crumpled form of the injured brute.

“No – we need to leave now! Do you not recognise him? That is Lord Dufort himself. He tracked me down after his wife finally learnt of his frivolous spending on my services, and took her leave – taking their three children with her. And whereas I cannot condone his actions tonight, we cannot take the risk of ending his life. If word got out that the great Lord Dufort had been slaughtered like an animal in the slums of Lille, there would be a colossal manhunt for his killers. The authorities would come down hard upon the poorer communities that make their homes here, and take it out on them. We can’t be responsible for that Freya, it would not be fair!”

“Fair?!” the witch shouted in exasperation, as she finally tore her gaze away from the man and locked her enraged emerald eyes back upon Amelia. “Was it fair of him to try and force himself upon you just now?! Or to be about to murder you!? If I hadn’t already of been out looking for you….if I hadn’t have heard that nobility scum’s threats as I passed by the end of the alleyway, then he would have…."

“I know, ok. I know!” Amelia yelled, cutting off the witch’s rant. “I am all too aware of what his intentions were! And I am once again in your debt for you coming to my rescue!”

Letting her eyes fall closed for a moment, Amelia drew in a deep calming breath before lowering her voice in an attempt to soothe the fraught atmosphere between them both.

“Darlin, I cannot thank you enough for your aid, and I swear to you that you will forever have whatever protection my power can provide you with from this day forward. Especially from the likes of men like the Duke here, who think they can treat women like objects to be used! But we have to leave him alive Freya. His death would cause too much unrest in the city. And too much unwanted focus on the likes of us!”

Freya’s stone cold glare landed on the injured Duke once more – her lips drawing back into a snarl at the sight of the man whimpering to himself in pain as he lay in a pool of his own blood.

Amelia remained still and apprehensive as few tense heartbeats passed, before the witch finally forced out a huff of resignation and spun around to take her leave.

“I don’t need your protection Seer!” the blonde called out to Amelia, as she determinedly stormed to the end of the alleyway without looking back. “I can look after myself!”

Watching on as her friend exited the cobbled alleyway and immediately disappeared onto the main street, the Seer blew out a long sigh of relief. Her head wound now fully healed, she used a little of her power to block out the noise of her would-be attacker’s cries for help at the same time as quickly forming a psychic picture in her head of the route Freya was now taking – satisfied after a few seconds that the witch appeared to be heading back to their encampment on the edge of the city.

“You might be one hell of a powerful witch Darlin,” Amelia muttered to herself in a low, rueful voice, “but there are certain monsters in this world that even your ancient magic won’t protect you from!”
Taking one final look back at the Duke, the Seer started to slowly make her way across the cobbles, intent on following in Freya’s steps.

“But I swear to you on all that I hold dear - I will do everything in my power to ensure that you never have to cross their path!”

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Darkness had now draped itself over the small hospital room situated at the far end of St Theodora’s ICU department, as the late hour drew close to midnight. Amelia’s mind slowly began to return to the present, with the steady rhythm of the heart machine hooked up to her friend’s body being registered by her hearing once more. A lone tear quickly escaped from the Seer’s closed eyes seconds before they drew open once more, and landed upon Freya’s slackened features.

“I should have tried harder to find discover their whereabouts!” she whispered, more to herself than the two sleeping individuals that were occupying the room with her. “As soon as I learnt of their presence in New Orleans, I should have spent every waking minute hunting them down!”

A small sigh of regret flowed over her parted lips, as the Seer shook her head gently.

“I wasn’t even close to the French Quarter - but the familiar vibrations of your power crashed into me as though I had been stood only mere inches away. You were alive! Somehow….you were still alive! And suddenly finding the Jarl’s didn’t seem anywhere near as important as seeing your face again for the first time in over a century!”

The Seer shook her head to herself once more, as her fingers continued to caress the witch’s cheek.

“I let my own foolish need to reconnect with you make me loose sight of my mission – and in doing so, I betrayed the promise I once made you to protect you from them. I….I am so sorry Freya.”

Movement under her hand quickly drew Amelia’s attention back into the moment, as Freya’s face slowly began to contort into an expression of pain. The witch’s head started to move slightly from side to side, as a quiet groan escaped from her throat.

Realising that her old acquaintance must have been having a nightmare, the Seer quickly glanced over to the sleeping wolf in the corner of the room, before moving her hand from where it lay on Freya’s face to rest upon her clammy forehead instead.

“I once told you that I would never use my abilities upon you without your permission first,” she quietly muttered to the distressed witch, who continued to thrash back and forth in her sleep under Amelia’s hand. “But my gifts can help to heal a troubled mind….and I cannot just stand and do nothing by whilst you continue to suffer because of those monsters!”

Just as the Seer began to call forth a thick tendril of her power to send into the witch’s psyche, Freya’s thrashing intensified, causing her head to jerk fiercely to the right and allowing Amelia to briefly catch sight of something that was hidden behind her old friend’s ear.

Frowning, the Seer gently turned Freya’s head to the side once more, and pulled aside the lobe of
the witch’s ear so as to get a better look at the small mark marring her skin.

Her eyes quickly widened as both recognition and horror flooded through her in a tsunami of shock. A stumbling step back from the hospital bed had the Seer’s hand flying up to her mouth in an attempt to prevent the anguished cry of realisation escaping from where it had risen up in her throat.

“By the gods….Freya…..what have you done?!”

The stunned words came out a little louder than she had intended, and a rustling of movement from the corner of the room drew Amelia’s eyes away from the unconscious witch to land on the brunette wolf. The Seer watched on in perfect silence as the stirring woman’s eyes mercifully remained closed as she shifted her position in the large chair – appearing to be seeking out a more comfortable position than the one she had been in.

A few seconds of movement later, and the wolf fell still once more – her breathing returning to the steady rhythm of someone who was caught in throws of an exhaustion induced sleep.

Amelia’s eyes remained wide as they returned to her Freya’s troubled features.

Too late….she had been too late…..

Letting out a shuddering breath, the Seer closed her eyes once more – scrunching them together in distress, as her mind raced along in a flurry of panic and distress.

Eventually, after a few long drawn out minutes she opened them once more, and slowly took a step back towards the witch’s bedside.

“I cannot protect you anymore, old friend!”’, Amelia whispered in sorrow, a desolate pain piercing her heart as she looked briefly towards the sleeping wolf once more. “But….maybe…..maybe I can help to prevent you having to endure the anguish that now sits in my heart. Prevent you experiencing the heartbreak of your actions causing harm to the person you love.”

Drawing in a mournful breath, the Seer reached into a pocket within her hooded tunic and attempted to calm the decimating thunder raging in her head as she prepared her parting gift.

Reaching down to clasp the witch’s limp hand into her own, Amelia slowly leant her body over the hospital bed and placed a tear laced kiss onto Freya’s cheek, before pulling back and making her way over to the room’s exit.

As her hand twisted open the hospital’s door handle, she paused to take once last look back at the woman who had not only saved her life a century ago, but had also saved what little humanity had remained in her tortured being.

“I pray to the Gods that we do not cross paths again, Freya Mikaelson” she whispered - sorrow lacing her words. “For I do not know if the remaining shreds of my soul would survive having to kill you!”

And before her final whispered word had even finished reverberating its way gently through the subdued atmosphere of the ICU side room – the Seer was gone.
Pain.

Beep

Everywhere.

Beep

Crushing and suffocating - its white-hot fingers clawing their way over every inch of her body with their sharp, piercing talons.

Beep

Merciless and unforgiving, as it left no nerve or muscle untouched on its quest to conquer every part her physical form.

Beep

Pain.

Beep

And….

Beep

…..what the hell was that god forsaken, infernal noise?!

A soft glow of green light blanketed itself over her dark surroundings, as Freya slowly opened her heavy-lidded eyes and tried to push past the heavy weight of pain that threatened to drag her back down into the obscure abyss from which she had been trying to crawl her way out of for what felt like an eternity.

Cracked, dry lips attempted to move as the witch suddenly felt the deep-rooted thirst that was burning through her throat and threatening to steal the very breath from her lungs.

Water….she needed water!

Drawing in a quiet shuddering breath through her nose, Freya’s eyes began to roam from side to side despite her head remaining motionless, as she attempted to figure out if any of the Jarls were stood nearby waiting to unleash a fresh wave of torture upon her – or if they had disappeared off into a different part of the catacombs, leaving her naked and alone to rot away on the cold gravelled floor.

A gravelled floor that had somehow taken on the soft, warm quality of cotton sheets since she had last held on to consciousness

Confusion began to flood her mind, as the witch dared to try and twitch the aching fingers on her right hand – expecting to feel the course roughness of small stones under her touch, but instead having the sensation of smooth linen lightly kiss her skin.
Scrubbing her eyes shut once more in an attempt to clear her heavily blurred vision, Freya eventually opened them again and willed her sight to focus on something - anything, that might provide an answer as to where the Jarl’s had now moved her.

_Had her body been dragged into a different part of their lair?_

Another wave of pain ricocheted across her torso, causing a small quiet gasp to force its way out of her mouth before she had chance to stifle it.

_Oh god, had she alerted them to the fact she was now awake?! If they knew she was no longer unconscious, they would start again….he….he would start again….._

Cold, undiluted fear quickly flooded over her, causing the weary muscles in her arms and legs to involuntarily tense despite their prolonged non-use.

Causing a fresh wave of agony to rip through her whole body.

“Urgh…..”

A sudden rustling noise from somewhere close by reached her ears, as the witch inwardly cursed herself for crying out into the darkness as a result of the discomfort ravaging through her muscles.

_Oh god….no….not again….please…._

“Freya?”

_She couldn’t endure anymore….no….no more…._

“Freya, baby, can you hear me?”

A small, almost inaudible thought tried to capture the witch’s attention through the thick blanket of panic that now held her in its vice like grip.

_That voice…..it’s not them….._

“Honey it’s ok. You’re safe….I promise, you’re safe!”

The blurred outline of a figure suddenly appeared in her line of sight, as the soft green light that had been surrounding her highlighted the person’s slim frame as they slowly leaned down towards her.

“Listen to my voice Freya. It’s Keelin….can you hear me?”

Keelin….

“I’m here baby….you are safe and I’m here.”

A fresh wave of panic flooded through her, as the realisation of who it was now leaning over her and what her presence in the catacombs meant, exploded into her mind.

_Oh god no….not Keelin….she didn’t care what the Jarl’s continued to do to her…. but please…..not Keelin….._

A faint rumbling vibration suddenly began to resonate against her back and legs, causing another bout of pain to unleash itself upon her.
“Honey you need to try and calm down – your magic is beginning to react to your emotions again. Please, listen to my voice – you’re safe! I’m here with you…..”

“No!”

The rasping word burst forth from her split lips, as Freya threw all caution to the wind.

She had to get Keelin away from the Jarl’s…..she no longer cared if they knew she was conscious…..she had to try…..

Concentrating on all of her willpower, and on what little resolve was left within her broken body, she attempted to pull her torso up off the ground – thrusting her chest upwards towards the fuzzy outline of the woman she loved.

“Arrrrrggh….”

A cry of agony ripped from her throat as the searing pain of a thousand knives ripping into the flesh of her back, threatened to drag her back into the bleak nothingness of oblivion.

“Baby no! Stop!”

Two hands were suddenly gripping gently onto her upper arms, trying to prevent her from raising up off the floor any further, as the world lurched violently from side to side in her vision.

“You are going to rip even more of your stiches if you don’t stop trying to move! Please Freya, calm down!”

Stiches…..had the Jarl’s…..why would they suture her…..

The outline of a face was suddenly right in front of her own, forcing her vision to try and contract into a short-sighted focus.

She blinked once.

Twice.

Large, brown eyes that were filled with worry and now only inches away from her own, came into focus – their chestnut irises seemingly searching her gaze for something as the unmistakable scent of her lover began to fill her nose. The comforting familiar smell of her strong, caring wolf, and…..

…was that disinfectant?!

“Freya you are in hospital, and currently recovering from major surgery”, Keelin said, her voice suddenly sounding more like that of a professional doctor, than a worried fiancé. “I promise I will explain everything to you, but you HAVE to try and calm down and stop moving, before you cause any further tearing of your wounds!”

Hospital? She was in hospital? Not the Jarl’s catacombs?

“S….Safe? You’re…..safe?”

The hoarse, cracked words caused another wave of pain to surge up from within her rib cage and into her throat, sapping all of the energy that she had left in her body - but she needed to be sure. She needed to be sure that Keelin was safe.

That he…..he wasn’t anywhere near the wolf!
A small amount of relief appeared to bleed into Keelin’s expression, as the wolf let out a slight huff of nervous laughter.

“Yes baby, I’m safe. As are you!”

Her lover shook her head marginally from side to side, as she gently encouraged Freya to lower herself back down onto ground.

No….not ground…..a bed. She was lying in a bed.

“Typical that the first thing that you worry about upon regaining consciousness, is my well-being instead of your own!”

Another groan of pain escaped her lips as her back once again made contact with the bed’s mattress. Her eyes scrunched closed as a nauseating wave of sickness pushed its way up her throat in response to what felt like a million little shards of glass piercing deep into the skin of her back.

…the crack of a whip resounding in her ears as its metal tip sent a white hot lash of agony searing down an already bloodied back….

“You’re clearly in a lot of pain!”

The wolf’s words were back to having a professional air, as they served to draw the witch’s mind back into the room once more.

“I’m going to go and prepare a shot of painkiller, to hopefully take the edge off for you.”

The familiar features of her lover began to move from the witch’s shaky vision, causing a cold tendril of panic to pierce into her rapidly beating heart.

“Don’t….l…lea…."

“Hey….hey, it’s ok”, Keelin cooed, her concerned face returning into Freya’s eyeline once more. “I’m not leaving you, I promise! I just need to grab some morphine from the drug cabinet outside. The one in here didn’t survive your…..well it’s no longer here.”

The wolf made to place her hand softly upon the side of Freya’s face, but halted midway as soon as she saw the witch’s whole head flinch away in reaction to the movement.

“I….I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Freya watched on as the wolf slowly pulled back from the bed and cleared her throat, before raising a hand up to her eyes to quickly wipe something away.

“I’ll be right back I swear”, the wolf said, her voice having appeared to thicken with emotion. “And I’ll bring you some water, as well as something to help ease your discomfort.”

Before Freya had time to react, Keelin had disappeared out of her line of sight – the sound of soft footsteps reaching her ears as the wolf quickly made her way across the hospital room that Freya assumed she must be in.

It was over…..she had survived….somehow she had survived…..

She felt the familiar sting of tears as her vision began to blur once more in reaction to the strong wave of relief that suddenly flooded through her veins.

Relief, and confusion.
How had she ended up here, in the hospital? How had she managed to escape from the Jarls? The last thing she remembered was.....was......

A frown began to crease her brow as the witch struggled to latch on to any form of substantial memory of her last waking moments in the catacombs.

There had been pain.

So much more pain than she had thought would ever be possible for a person to endure and remain alive.

And there had been voices. Harsh laughter and taunts thrown in her direction.

Was it Halvar’s face that she recalled seeing last...or....or his face, pressed up against her own as he.....

A small whimper of distress peeled forth from the witch, as she tried to shake away the mental image that had suddenly taken root in her minds-eye. Without thinking, Freya attempted to raise her left hand up to rub at her eyes, only to be met with a sharp flash of pain that shot right from the tips of her fingers, up to the top of her shoulder.

As small beads of cold sweat broke out across her forehead, the witch suddenly felt the sensation of something pressing into the palm of her left hand.

Attempting to steady her breathing once more, Freya raised her head as far up off the pillow as the pain would allow, straining to see down to the heavily bandaged hand lay at her side.

Something was crushed in her curved palm.....something that looked to be made out of card.

She didn’t know what suddenly possessed her, or why the urge to know what it was that lay in her hand became so strong that it pushed all other thoughts and sensations out of her mind – but Freya quickly bit down on the inside of her cheek, as she began to try and move her left arm once more.

Agony ripped through her muscles, burning its way along the whole of her arm and into her chest cavity as the witch slowly began to raise her appendage away from the safe refuge of cotton sheets. Tears of pain began to freely flow down her cheeks, as the weakened, torn muscles in her arm began to shake from the exertion now being placed upon them.

Just a little further.....all she had to do was raise her hand just a little further, and.....

There!

She managed to twist her palm ever so slightly, and there was the object that she had apparently been gripping onto without being aware – direct in her line of sight.

Crumpled and creased, as though its too-big-a-size had been squashed and forced to fit within her smaller palm, lay what appeared to be a single tarot card. Thanks to the lack of any real light in the hospital room - save the diffused glow being given off from the various digital screens of the medical machines flanking her bed – the witch couldn’t make out any of the finer details adorning the card, save for two distinct features.

The first being the main image that had been printed in the middle of the card – that of a regal looking emperor sat both upright and rigid on a golden throne.

And the second being two large words, that looked to have been hurriedly scrawled across the
tarot card in what Freya could only assume was blood, as the darkened crimson edges of the lettering were now beginning to crumble away thanks to the card being jostle about in her shaking hand.

**GASESTE NAZIRUL**

Gaseste Nazirul.....it.....it was a language that she knew she should recognise, but.....oh god the pain.....

“Argh!”

A loud gasp of pain hollered out from her as the muscles in her shaking appendage finally gave way, and her arm unceremoniously crashed back down onto the bed.

Another cry of agony peeled out of her mouth as she felt what must have been a row of stiches tear open somewhere upon her wrist – the white-hot pain of flesh tearing causing even more tears to fall from her eyes.

The sound of a door crashing open only just managed to make it through the haze of discomfort that felt like it was trying to suffocate the air from her lungs, before Keelin’s concerned features quickly appeared in her line of sight.

“What is it Freya, are you.....what the...”

The witch watched on pain squinted eyes as Keelin’s gaze fell upon the now blood soaked bandage wrapped around her left wrist. Placing a metal dish that looked to contain a syringe filled with fluid down upon the bed, the wolf slowly extended her own hand out towards Freya’s arm.

In a moment of sudden panic, the witch managed to force her fingers to move just enough to push the crumpled tarot card out from her palm and under one of the folded creases of the sheet covering her body.

She didn’t know why, but she had a strong feeling that the message on the card had been meant for her, and her alone.

“How in the world have you managed to tear your stiches again?”

Freya could hear exasperation coating Keelin’s words, as though this hadn’t been the first time the witch had done something of this manner.

Turning her head back to her lover, the wolf’s eyebrows knitted together as she noticed the tears that were continuing to roll down Freya’s face.

“Baby you need to stop trying to move – there’s only so many times I am going to be able to replace your stitches before the tissue becomes too damaged to suture.”

The wolf’s words fell hollowly upon her, as Freya’s weary mind whirled in an attempted to make sense of the tarot card’s message.

“I’m going to inject you with some painkiller ok – it should start to ease your pain a little, and probably make the world seem a little fuzzy around the edges for a while.”

The witch vaguely heard a small clicking like sound, before seconds the feeling of a strange, yet not entirely unpleasant cold sensation begin to climb its way up her arm.
What language had the words been written in….she knew she had come across it before.…

“Ok, that should start to work within a few minutes honey.”

Keelin’s voice strangely sounded more distant to her, as though the wolf had moved away from the side of her bed, across to the other side of the room.

“Try to concentrate on your breathing Freya, until the painkiller takes its hold.”

It was.....it was Romanian, that was it.....the first word had been written in Romanian!

The vague sensation of her wrist being slowly lifted off the bed flitted through Freya’s mind, as she felt the room around her slowly begin to blur and fade.

“Dammit, I best get Winters to look at this before I attempt to suture it again – I think it might now need a skin graft.”

.....but who did she know that was Romanian.....or simply knew how to speak.....R....Romaini.....

“Baby don’t fight it ok, just let the painkiller relax your all of your muscles....”

.....s...someone who....someo....

Freya’s eyes fell shut as the familiar face of oblivion once again beckoned for her to accept its dominance over her mind. Only this time it didn’t welcome her with a cold, unforgiving embrace. This time, it seemed to whisper softly in the witch’s ear with words of comfort, as a feeling of soothing warmth began to spread its way all over her body.

.....someone she had once known......

“Sleep Freya - I promise I’ll be right here when you wake up again.”

.....Amelia....

The witch’s thoughts finally ceased whirling around on a dizzying carousel of confusion, as the encroaching darkness suddenly became absolute - and claimed her once more.

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Chapter End Notes

It would be lovely to hear from you all after such a long break, and see how you think this tale is progressin. Hit me up with a comment, and I promise to “try” and answer any questions you have.

Try being the important word there, haha.
Chapter 16.

Chapter Notes

Howdy ya'll - and welcome to Chapter 16 of my tale!

It's quite a dialogue heavy chapter, so I apologise if the standard of writing isn't quite as up to par as usual. I tend to get carried away when writing dialogue between the Mikaelsons, and the characters personalities take over in my head, taking on a life all of their own, haha. In short - I don't know when to stop! Ha. Anyhow, if you can forgive all of that, I hope you enjoy the interactions between everyone.

Now....****PLEASE BE WARNED*****...scene 2. of this Chapter has quite a few flash back sequences for Freya. The scene is mainly written from Keelin's point of view, but the flash backs (in italics) are obviously happening in Freya's mind. **THEY ARE NOT FOR THE FAINT HEARTED**. It involves references to what she endured at the Jarl's hands, so as you can imagine, some of it will be pretty grim. Please DO NOT READ scene 2 if any of the stuff that happened to Freya in the Jarls catacombs triggered you or made you want to stop reading this tale. Skip straight from Scene 1 to Scene 3, and I can give you a trigger free summery of what happened on request.

Again - you have been warned.

Ok....so that's enough scaring people for the time being, haha. Happy reading all ;-)
A sudden flare of bright light highlighted the two scrub wearing figures as they stood at the foot of the standard issue hospital bed – the result of yet another fork of lightning streaking across the morose sky outside.

“I promised her that I’d be here when she wakes up again. I don’t want her to be unnecessarily scared, or even more confused than she already is, by breaking that promise!”

Keelin watched the male nurse’s eyebrows knit together as he picked up the drug chart off the end of Freya’s bed and began to study it.

“I’m sure she won’t even remember you saying that– she looks to on a pretty damn high dose of morphine!” Joel exclaimed, his tone suddenly wary. “Have you seen this? It says that 50mg was administered intravenously in one dose at 3am – surely that’s been recorded in error? That amount could have killed her if the notes are correct! Who signed off on…..”

The wolf’s gaze trailed sluggishly from the agitated nurse to the stormy scene outside, as she waited on him reading the authorising signature on the chart – and braced herself for his likely reaction.

“….YOU authorised AND administered it?! Keelin are you crazy?!”

A heavy sigh forced its way out of her mouth, as Keelin raised a hand to rub at her tired eyes.

“Joel….”

“Pushing aside for a moment the fact that an intravenous dose of that size could have killed her – hell, SHOULD have killed her – there’s the other small matter that you could get struck off for this Keelin! You know damn well that you shouldn’t be continuing to treat her. She’s your fiancé! You have an emotional attachment.”

“Joel if you would just listen for a….”

“Fuck! I could be hauled in front of a review board myself if I don’t go and report you! They’ll know….they’ll know that I’ve been in here and seen the chart, and if I don’t say something….god dammit Keelin….because of course I won’t report you, so that’s my head now on the chopping board…”

“JOEL!”

Her raised voice resonated heavily in the small room, and caused the male nurse to visibly jump as the metal chart dropped out of his hands and clattered loudly onto the tiled floor.

“Stop panicking!” she continued, her tone returning to its previously soft, tired tenor. “No one is going to be struck off – and yes I know that it was an unusually high dose, but Freya’s metabolism is not exactly….well, it differs to most humans.”

Silence filled the space between the two professionals for a heartbeat, as Joel blinked rapidly at his friend in confusion.

“Her metabolism is different to…..to most humans?” the male nurse finally said after another beat of silence – each word uttered slowly, as though he was trying to make sense of them.

“Yes.”
“Most humans!”

“Yes Joel, most humans”, Keelin sighed, trying but failing to keep the signs of exasperation out of her tone.

She knew where this conversation would inevitably end up leading, and was unsure if she had the energy left within her to handle it with the care that it required.

*Please Joel, not here….not now.*

Her friend slowly looked over to Freya, who remained unconscious in the hospital bed – his eyes squinting slightly as he appeared to search the witch’s features for any clues as to what Keelin was referring to.

“So, are you saying that she is….n-not h-human?”

Had they been in any other situation – had her fiancé not have been lying right there, body broken and mutilated thanks to being tortured at the hands of some sadistic leather wearing monsters – Keelin might have laughed at the way in which Joel had stuttered the words “not human”, like he was an unpaid extra in a b-rated, straight to DVD horror movie - who had never taken a day’s acting class in his life!

As it was, the strain of being in a permanent state of extreme worry since this whole ordeal had begun a week ago, coupled with getting no more than one or two hours of sleep a night – had Keelin feeling like she might never laugh again.

“Joel, can we have this conversation another time, please? I’ve got an awful lot on my mind at the moment and…..”

“Seriously Keelin? You tell me that your fiancé is not human, and then expect me to just let it slide until a more convenient time?!” Joel proclaimed loudly, as he bent down and swiped the discarded medical chart up off the floor. “And since we’re on the subject, would you care to explain to me how in the world it is possible for your and Alanna’s eyes to turn all….all….animal like one second, and then be back to normal the next?”

A startled cough let her mouth, as the male nurse’s words hit her.

“Our e-eyes…..”

“Yes Keelin, your eyes! Not to mention the fact that you growled at me yesterday morning in the ambulance bay! And not in an “it’s my time of month so back-the-fuck-off” way, but rather a “I’m most definitely team Jacob” kind of way!”

*Great! Joel had witnessed her inner wolf clawing to get out….Alanna’s too it seemed….and was now referencing Twilight of all things. Urgh….Just great!*

A hoarse coughing noise coming from the hospital bed suddenly drew both of their attentions.

Flashing her friend a quick exasperated look, Keelin moved to grab the small cup of water that was sitting on top of a cabinet near the head of Freya’s bed, and leant over her fiancé to bring its straw towards the wakening witch’s mouth.

“Make sure you just take small sips, ok honey!”

Keelin watched on as Freya took the straw between cracked lips and began to drink – the blonde’s eyes roaming too-and-fro as she attempted to gain some focus on her surroundings.
Satisfied that her fiancé wasn’t in any immediate danger of choking on the liquid that she was taking, the wolf looked back over her shoulder towards where Joel remained stood, defiantly waiting on an answer.

“Ok, so there are some things we clearly need to discuss!” Keelin whispered quickly, trying not to startle Freya as the witch slowly began to regain some awareness of her environment. “But I promise you Joel that neither you nor I will get into trouble for the information on Freya’s chart, and the dose of pain killers is right for her metabolism due to a few “special gifts” that she was born with! I can assure you however, that she is very much human!”

The make nurse raised a sceptical eyebrow in her direction in response to the rushed words.

“Can you please just trust me on this for now?” she implored of her friend. “I swear I will tell you everything once Freya is more stable - ok?”

Another coughing fit from the Witch had Keelin quickly moving the glass of water away and reaching for some blue-roll to gently wipe away a few drops of liquid which had spilt onto Freya’s neck. A loud sigh from Joel had her looking over his way once more – stifling the urge to roll her eyes at the nurse as he threw his arms up into the air dramatically and spun on his heels to take his leave.

“Fine, my lips are sealed! But you owe me a proper explanation Malraux!” Joel stated as he reached the rooms closed door. “AND a bottle of Mr Daniels finest bourbon….since I get the feeling that I am going to need it!”

The faintest of smiles tugged at her lips as she felt a small wave of relief wash over her in response to her friend’s words.

“You’ll get one Joel, I promise. For this, and for all of your help yesterday morning when Freya was first rushed in. I honestly don’t know how I would have kept it together without you!”

Joel turned back towards her and gave a small nod of his head in acknowledgement, before appearing to suddenly remember something.

“Alanna was asking for you earlier by the way. Turns out that she is being discharged later this afternoon, as blood tests this morning showed that are no longer any traces of the snake venom in her system. And it would seem….” the male nurse continued, his voice taking on a dead pan tone,“…that despite the knife wound to her side having been both 4 inches deep and 2 inches wide when she was first rushed in – there is now no trace of it what-so-ever on her body. None!”

Keelin’s eyes remained trained on Joel in an purposefully expressionless manner, despite her knowing that the nurse was expecting some kind of reaction with regards to the news that their mutual friend’s body had somehow completely healed from a wound that should have taken many months to get over.

“But I suppose that is something else that you will explain to me later, right?!?” Joel finally sighed after a few seconds of getting no response from the doctor.

Keelin slowly nodded her head in confirmation, offering her friend the best “I really am sorry for all of this” look that she had in her repertoire.

“I’ll try and get over to see Alanna later, before she leaves”, the brunette confirmed as Joel opened the side-room’s door to take his leave. “And Joel….”

He turned to look at her over his shoulder as he paused on the room’s threshold – eyebrows raised
expectantly.

“Thank you again. I swear I don’t know what I’ve done to deserve your friendship….but I’m
eternally grateful that I have it!”

The nurse’s mouth tugged up to one side as he offered her a quick nod of his head, before closing
the wooden door softly - leaving the wolf alone with her injured fiancé once more.

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2.

“How are you feeling, Freya?”

It had now been a few minutes since the witch’s coughing fit had subsided and she had remained
conscious enough to be aware of her surroundings. Keelin had been making use of the time
checking on Freya’s vitals, and making sure that there were no issues with any of the drips feeding
various antibiotics and fluids into her fiancé’s body to help it heal from the surgery that it had been
subjected to.

“How are you feeling, Freya?” the wolf asked as she moved to check on the heart
monitors read out. “It’s a half hour or so before you can have another dose of morphine, but I can
give you some Tylenol before then, if you need it?”

She paused in her actions when she realised that she was getting no response from her fiancé.

Noticing that the witch’s head had turned towards the stormy scene playing out on the other side of
the window, the wolf placed the medical chart that she had been holding onto a cabinet, and
walked around to carefully sit on the edge of Freya’s bed, so that she could see the witch’s face
better.

Despite her lover’s eye’s looking both bloodshot and tired, Keelin noted that they appeared lucid
enough to suggest that Freya was fully conscious, and should have been able to recognise the
words she had been saying to her well enough.

“Freya can you hear me ok?” the wolf asked, her tone managing to sound both professional yet
caring at the same time. “I know this must all be confusing and strange for you right now, but I
want to make sure that you are not suffering any side-affects from the anaesthetic you were given.
The scans of your head didn’t show any lasting trauma had been sustained to the brain, but…..”

“I’m o..ok.”

The witch’s words were so quiet and course, that Keelin might have missed them were it not for
the fact that she saw Freya’s lips move as she spoke. A small frown began to crease her brow as
she noted that despite Freya finally engaging in the conversation, the witch’s eyes remained glassy
and emotionless as she continued to stare listlessly out of the window.

“Do you remember where you are?” Keelin asked, worrying that her fiancé’s mind might still be
struggling with accepting that she was no longer being held captive.

“Hospital.”
Despite the apathetic tone to the witch’s hoarse voice, Keelin was relieved to know that she was now at least properly aware of her “safe” surroundings. Satisfied that the morphine seemed to be doing its job and that Freya didn’t appear to be in quite as much discomfort as she had been in the earlier hours of the morning, the wof dared to venture a little further with their conversation.

“You were brought into the Emergency clinic yesterday morning by ambulance. A police cruiser discovered you unconscious on a road side near the outskirts of the 9th Ward, and called it in to dispatch.”

She paused, cautiously checking Freya’s features to ensure that her words were not causing the witch any distress. But her fiancé’s face remained blank of expression – weary emerald eyes never moving from the point upon which they seemed to be fixed, somewhere outside of the window.

“It was touch and go for a while - but we managed to get you stabilised in the clinic, before you were rushed up to theatre for surgery.”

A flicker of something quickly flashed across the witch’s face – a fleeting emotion that Keelin couldn’t quite decipher.

There one second, and then gone the next.

“You….you w...worked on me?” Freya croaked, her eyes still not moving to meet Keelin’s despite the question.

“Yes honey. I….well I was the only doctor available at the time. Thanks to the on-going storm, the hospital is extremely short staffed at present. It’s not usual practice for a physician to be allowed to treat a loved one”, she continued, letting out a small huff of bemusement, “but this isn’t exactly a “usual” situation. It appears that Klaus has no intention of letting anyone other than immediate family anywhere near you, now that we have got you back - and between his and Elijah’s efforts, I think practically every professional working here has been compelled to some degree or another.”

“My family….they’ve been here?”

Keelin gently nodded her head, hoping that the motion would draw Freya’s attention away from the storm outside – but to no avail.

“They arrived whilst you were still in theatre”, she finally said, trying for now to ignore her growing concern for the witch’s mental state. “They will be back to see you again soon. I called Rebekah earlier to say that you were slowly coming around from the anaesthetic and....”

“Why am I still h...here?”

The question caught Keelin off guard, and at first, she did not fully understand the meaning behind the query. Her eyebrows knitted together as a small ball of worry began to roil around in her gut.

*Did Freya not realise the extent of her injuries?*

“Baby, you’ve sustained a lot of serious wounds to your body, and I won’t lie to you – you are very lucky to be alive! It’s going to take some time for you to....”

“N..No…” the witch sputtered with some force, despite a blank expression remaining on her face. “Why did they… not heal me?”

Understanding quickly crashed over Keelin.
“They tried honey. Both Klaus and Rebekah gave some of their blood to you as soon as you were brought out of Surgery. But it….well it didn’t work. Its left us all a little confused if I’m honest.”

A small huff of bemusement quickly escaped the wolf’s mouth.

“Well, most of us – your hybrid brother being his usual level-headed self, decided to settle on raging anger instead of confusion. It’s fair to say that not all of the fixtures and walls in your original room survived!”

The wolf rolled her eyes at the memory of Klaus’s fierce outburst, before sighing lightly and continuing.

“Anyway, I think that they are going to bring some of Marcel’s blood with them this morning, to see if that has any success where theirs didn’t, since he is an enhanced....”

“How long?”

“How long for what?” the wolf asked cautiously.

“How long….until I can….leave?”

Concern once again washed over Keelin’s features, as she took her fiancé’s question. This had been the one thing that she had hoped Freya would not ask immediately – worried that the answer might upset the witch and cause her unnecessary distress at this very early stage of her recover. But as she studied her lover’s blank face closely for a few moments, it dawned on her that it would probably unwise to try and lie to Freya with regards to how serious the witch’s injuries and prognosis were. Especially given the way in which their heated discussion on the night that Freya had been abducted had ended.

Drawing in a troubled breath, Keelin absentmindedly attempted to reach for the witch’s hand in a gesture of comfort – only to feel a small wounded pang of rejection in her heart when Freya’s fingers instantly jerked away from hers, the second they made contact.

Get a damn grip Malraux... she admonished to herself, ...she has been through hell and back! This isn’t about you! Stop taking it personally!

“Well, I’ve not had chance to speak at length with your surgeon as of yet – Klaus has stubbornly refused to let him anywhere near.....well, it doesn’t matter,” the wolf sighed, attempting to try and stay on track and get through the difficult conversation ahead. “But from my professional experience - someone who has suffered the extent of injuries that you have, would usually be looking at another two to three days in the ICU to ensure that no serious complications arise from surgery, and then possibly around two to three months of rehabilitation on a normal medical ward.”

This time Keelin witnessed a definite shift in emotion within the witch’s eyes in reaction to her words – but it was not the one that she had been expecting.

Fear....that was fear flickering in her lover’s bloodshot gaze!

“No!”

“No?” the wolf asked, unable to keep the surprise from her voice. “Freya, baby, I don’t think you understand. You were on deaths door when you arrived here yesterday morning! Your heart had stopped beating due to all the pressure being placed upon it from your injuries. Had the surgeons not been able to stop the internal bleeding, then you would have....have....”
Her words trailed off - tears suddenly threatening to fill her eyes, as thick emotion began to betray her voice.

.... I would have lost you!

The witch’s face returned to its previous listless façade – her apparent fear seeming to have either disappeared, or been concealed once more under a heavy blanket of lethargy.

Keelin was unsure if that provided her with a sense of relief or not. At least the fear had been something. Some sign that the woman she had grown to love was still in there, under the worryingly impassive dimness of her eyes.

Deciding to try and continue with helping the witch understand the need for such a long stint in hospital and get it out of the way early on so that Freya could have time to process the information before her family returned - the wolf attempted to clear her throat of emotion before pushing forward with the explanation of what the surgeons had had to do.

“Part of your liver had been irrevocably damaged thanks to the large piercing wound on your right-hand side….”

**The paralysing agony of his cold, sharp blade piercing into her - drawing out a long guttural scream of pain from her throat as Ake laughed whilst slowly twisting the knife as it descended deeper into her flesh.

“You think that you know pain witch….you have no idea! But you will.....oh believe me, you will!”**

“….so unfortunately, they had to remove that particular section. Long term it shouldn’t have too much of an effect on your day to day life, but you might need to curb the number of late-night bourbon sessions that you and Rebekah like to engage in!”

Seeing that her attempt at light heartedness had had no effect on the witch, Keelin cleared her throat and pushed on.

“Your shoulder socket had shattered, and whilst they managed to remove most of the bone shards from the area, it’s possible that you are looking at a couple more surgeries to have the joint fully reconstructed. I suspect they will…..”

**The coppery tang of blood filling her mouth as the blunt force of the metal bar crashing into her already injured shoulder caused her teeth to rip into her cheek.

“Look brother, look how she squirms in her chains like a pathetic child! Let us make her scream for mercy....scream for death!”**

“….look at fitting either a metal or fiberglass socket to replace the destroyed bone, but the orthopaedic surgeon will consult with us beforehand to confirm.”

Lowering her eyes to the bed, Keelin quickly debated on how to approach the subject of the numerous lacerations on Freya’s back. She had no doubt that the ordeal which her fiancé had been through to receive those horrific marks would have been extremely traumatising, and found herself suddenly wishing that the other Mikaelson’s were there, to help try and comfort the witch as she continued her explanation.

“The surgeons were able to suture a lot of the…. the cuts on your back, but the more severe lacerations are going to need skin grafts to help close and heal the surrounding tissue. I promise
though honey, we’ll get the best…..”

**CRACK…..

A shrill scream bounced off the damp walls of the catacomb as molten fire once again lashed itself across the raw flesh of her back.

CRACK…….

“Arrrgh!”

CRACK…….

“Drink the blood witch, and all of this pain will disappear. Just agree to succumb and your body will be as good as new once more!”

CRACK…..

The world lurching into darkness, as a sharp metal claw mercilessly flayed bloodied remains of skin as her body swung back and forth from the metal restraints above.**

“….plastic surgeons in the state of Louisiana to take a look at it. Hell, I’d be surprised if Klaus hasn’t already hunted them down and compelled them to come and….“

Keelin’s words faltered as she saw Freya’s eyes begin to glisten in the day light now pouring into the hospital room from outside, with silvery slithers gathering at the bottom of the witch’s lids.

“Oh Freya, I’m sorry”, she quickly whispered as her own vision began to blur with emotion. “I shouldn’t have….I’m so sorry baby….I was just trying to explain why you needed to remain here for so long, and…..”

Her words faltered as she found herself suddenly at a loss for what to say in order to try comfort the woman she loved. Tears began to escape down her cheeks as she slowly lowered her head – frustration and grief once again running rife through her heart.

_God how she wanted to just scoop the witch into her arms and hold her. To lie down on the bed with Freya and hold her tight until all the pain went away. Until the woman she loved felt safe and at peace again._

Taking a few deep breaths to try and curb her own crying, Keelin quickly wiped the tears from her face with the sleeve of her scrubs.

The wolf nearly jumped right off the bed in surprise when she suddenly felt an unexpected feather light touch on the side of her knee – a spot where she was known to be particularly ticklish at the best of times.

Glancing down, she saw that the little finger on Freya’s right hand had extended out and that its tip was now lightly connecting with her leg – the connection both tenuous and delicate, but there nether-the-less.

Keelin chanced a teary look back at the witch’s face, only to find that Freya’s expression had not changed from the bleak, fatigued stare that had been there since her fiancé had regained consciousness. A lone tear had escaped down the witch’s cheek leaving a small glistening wet trail, but that remained the only notable difference in her appearance.
But it was something though, right?! The contact – Freya had moved that finger of her own accord to connect physically with her….surely that meant something?!. That maybe….maybe the witch found some comfort in the wolf being there with her?

“I….I was so worried about you Freya!”

The delicate, shaky words had left the wolf’s mouth before she had even had chance to properly register her intent to speak them.

“We all were!” Keelin continued, feeling like the small contact that now existed between the two of them was effortlessly shattering all of the resolve that she had been trying to hold onto in an attempt to prevent her own emotions over-spilling in front of the suffering witch. “After you were taken, we searched everywhere for you - day and night. I swear Klaus killed half of the vampire population in New Orleans trying to find out where those….those bastards had taken you!”

Another unsteady breath escaped from her, as the wolf closed her eyes and shook her head.

“We all tried to stay as positive as possible, but when Hope’s magic couldn’t even detect the resonance of a spell cloaking your whereabouts, let alone latch on to your life source, I….I thought that I had lost you.”

The tip of Freya’s finger remained touching her leg, but there was no other movement from the witch as Keelin struggled to reign in her tears now that they had started to fall in earnest.

“I swear to you baby, I tried to stop them from taking you that night on Bourbon Street. I tried to get to you the moment that I saw you had been knocked unconscious - but there were just too many of them. I couldn’t….I…..”

Keelin’s words trailed off the moment that she realised she was in danger of having a complete emotional breakdown right there on the edge of Freya’s bed.

**Dammit, pull yourself together! She needs you to remain strong. After everything that she’s been through, she needs you to be the protector – someone that she can lean on! Someone who she can turn to after everything those monsters did to her!**

Anger suddenly began to flood through her veins as the faces of the three bikers that they had encountered on that fateful stormy night flashed through her mind’s eye. A deep growl threatened to rumble its way up her throat as her inner wolf bared its teeth and snapped them at the kyanite barrier that kept it under leash. She could feel that her spirit animal wanted nothing more than to break free and find the ones responsible for hurting their mate. Find them, and take pleasure in ripping off their limbs one-by-one.

Slowly.

Drawing in a deep, steadying breath, the wolf waited for a couple of heartbeats before opening her eyes once more – trying to ensure that the anger she felt raging within did not materialise itself physically in her appearance.

“Baby, I know that it will all be raw and painful for you right now”, she said, her voice still an octave lower and weightier than usual despite her best efforts, “but…..can you tell me anything about men who took you? Any small insight into what they are, or even where they held you captive?”

**A thick droplet of rain splashed dramatically onto her cheek - appearing to have fallen from somewhere high above her current position trapped against a rough wooden table. Its impact**
caused a spray of finer beads to splay across her face – some landing on the tightly scrunched skin of her closed eyelid, whilst others entered into her mouth as it stretched open in a silent scream of pain.

*It tasted like she imagined sewage water would – dank and acrid, whilst somehow managing to be lukewarm in temperature despite the bitter, frigid air that filled the catacomb and clawed at her skin*

Another drib quickly followed in its brother’s wake, crash landing upon the swollen and discoloured skin of her right hand as it remained pinned down upon the uneven table-top by fat fingers stained with motor-oil.

*Was it raining? Was she still inside?*

The splintered wooden planks of the table beneath her rattled violently against sore nipples as she was thrust forward yet again, causing a burning flare of anguish to ravage its way through her core.

“How does she feel, that wolf lover of yours….is she ripe….is she as tight as you are?!”

Salty saline warred for dominance over the putrid tang of catacomb dew within her mouth, as her mute cry of torment continued to holler out into the dark chamber.*

Keelin’s tentative questions seemed to hang heavy and imposing in the air, as the wolf looked to her fiancée’s emotionless features with eyes now filled with the need for revenge.

“Did they give any indication as to what they wanted?” the wolf dared to venture further - raw animalistic anger spurring on her questions, despite a small voice of reason in the back of her head shouting that it was too soon to be trying to broach the subject with the suffering witch.

**Blinding white light bursting across her vision as course leather and metal zipper teeth crashed into the shredded remains of her back under the crushing weight of an obese frame. The darkness of oblivion encroaching on the edge of her consciousness, teasing her with the promise of freedom – of the blissful release of death – but remaining just far enough out of reach to prevent her from being able to welcome it with open arms.**

A throbbing of foreign flesh deep inside as a thick, rough tongue was dragged up her cheek - punctuated by suffocating stale breath in its wake.

“Scream out my name bitch - make music for my ears!”

Had she already died….was this what her own personal hell felt like…. the damnation of her soul for every life she had ever taken - every dark art she had ever practiced….

“Fiske, go and fetch the mutt companion of this wench. I’m dying to make the wolf’s acquaintance!”

Keelin….oh god no….

Hair suddenly being ripped from her scalp as a hand tugged sharply upwards, raising her face an inch or so off the table.

“Maybe if you won’t drink Halvar’s blood - she will!”

Repugnant words slithering into her ear, hissing and snapping at the shattered remains of her
“Can you hear something Fiske?”
“….not h…her…p.please ….I’ll drink…..”

“Possibly – though it sounds to me like she’s begging for more!”

Cruel, harsh laughter reaching her ears seconds before her head was slammed back down onto the table, causing acidic bile to rise up and burn her already raw throat.

“P…please…..I’ll d…drink the blood….”

The rocking of the table beneath her intensifying.

“I think you’re right Fiske, she can’t get enough….of ….me….urgh”

Heat flooding in - stinging torn flesh as beads of sweat dripped down onto her face from the panting brute above.

“Should I go and tell Halvar that she’s ready to willingly give herself over to the bond?”

“….p….please....”

“What, and miss your turn Fiske?! What do you think?!”

Malicious laughter filling the air once more, drifting out across the cavern and taking with it the last remaining scrap of hope that she had left.**

“Please Freya, is there anything that you can tell me that can help us find them?”

The wolf watched on as the witch’s teary eyes began to slide shut. Another heartbeat passed, before Freya’s head slowly shook from side to side – a gesture that Keelin took to mean her fiancé had no information to give her.

Had none….or was simply not yet ready to share anything about the ordeal.

The pained look that now took up home on her fiancé’s face finally caused the anger which had been threatening to engulf her completely, to dissipate. Her inner wolf quickly backed away from the Kyanite barrier, tail between its legs as Keelin felt her heart lurch for the broken witch lay next to her – the brunette’s eyes falling back onto the small bruised finger still barely touching her knee.

“Oh god, I’m sorry Freya. I….I don’t know what came over me. I shouldn’t have tried to push you for answers so soon.”

She exhaled a shaky breath.

“Please forgive me. I’m promise that I am here for you baby”, she whispered, more to herself than Freya. “However you need me to be – I will be by your side no matter what, and we’ll take things at your pace…..”

A familiar scent suddenly caused the receptors within Keelin’s nose to tingle, drawing her attention away from her lover and towards the closed door that lead out of the witch’s room.
Resisting the urge to lean over and place a soft kiss onto her fiancé's cheek, she rose up from her perch on the edge of the hospital bed, and quickly attempted to straighten out her crumpled scrubs whilst wiping away any sign of tears from her face.

“I’ll be right back, ok honey”, Keelin called back to Freya as she made her way over to the door.

Taking a deep breath for composure, the wolf steeled herself for the conversation that she was no doubt about to have.

The Mikaelson’s had returned.

3.

“Wolf I swear if you do not move aside right now, I will…..”

“Klaus please – keep your voice down! Try to remember that there are other critically ill patients in the ICU as well as Freya!”

Keelin had managed to sound both authoritative and professional despite her hushed tone, as she once again attempted to dampen down the flaring temper of her fiancé’s brother.

Both the hybrid Original and his well attired sibling, Elijah, had just been stepping foot onto the ward when the wolf had emerged from Freya’s side room, swiftly closing the door behind her. She had instantly been able to smell the increased level of blood scent markers lacing the immortal’s breaths, indicating that each of them had either recently been feeding to keep up their strength for what battles may lay ahead - or they had been rampaging through the city tearing out the throats of any leather clad vampire that they could find whilst letting rip with anger over what had happened to their sister.

Given the unpleasant whiff of the “undead” that she could detect clinging to the blood particles on their breath, she quickly concluded that it was more than likely the latter scenario that had occurred!

“The rest of these pathetic mortals can go to hell for all I care – they are but insignificant specs of dust compared to my sister. Now move Keelin – for you do not wish to trifle with me right now!”

“I am not trying to prevent you from seeing her Klaus”, she said sternly, totally unphased by the hybrids poorly veiled threat towards her. “I just need you to try and understand the delicate nature of her current situation, before you go barging in there, guns-a-blazing!”

Stepping up beside his brother, Elijah quickly placed a hand upon Klaus’s shoulder before the hybrid could react further, and gestured for the wolf to proceed with her explanation.

“Please Keelin, do continue. For we of course…”he said, locking eyes with his brother momentarily before continuing, “…do not wish to cause our sister any unnecessary distress!”

Anger continued to simmer within the Hybrid’s crystal blue eyes, however Keelin noted that he appeared to take heed of his brother’s words non-the-less.
“She’s in a lot of pain, as to be expected given the extensive nature of her wounds and the surgery that she has undergone. And although she is now fully lucid and aware of her surroundings, she is both subdued and very withdrawn – which again is normal considering the traumatic ordeal that she has been through.”

“Has she given any indication as to where she was being held for the past seven days?” Elijah quickly asked, cutting off his brother who looked to have been about to launch into yet another rant at the wolf.

“No – to be honest she’s hardly spoken a word, other than to ask why she hadn’t been healed by your blood as of yet.”

“Ah yes”, the suited vampire said, raising his eyebrows as he spoke, “I can imagine that she is just as confused as the rest of us with regards to that little quandary. Rebekah is actually on her way over now with some of Marcellus’s blood – she left for his abode earlier this morning to acquire a sample for our sister’s consumption.”

“Yes yes,” Klaus barked impatiently, irritably pushing his brothers hand off his shoulder. “Rebekah has gone to play nice with her boy-toy to obtain his blood – not that it will make a bloody ounce of difference. I cannot see why his would work when ours did not! Now…” he continued, once again stepping up into Keelin’s personal space, “…let us through and we shall see what information Freya can provide us with, so that I can find the wretched heathens that dared to lay a finger on her, and begin feeding them their own innards, one ripped out organ at a time!”

“Klaus, please – I tried to ask, but she only withdrew further into herself. She’s not ready to…..”

“Enough wolf!” the hybrid boomed, seeming to have reached the end of his patience as he pushed Keelin roughly aside. “I think I know my sister better than you – she will speak to her own kin!”

Before Keelin’s bubbling rage had a chance to unleash itself upon the ignorant hybrid, Klaus had already pushed open the door behind her in a blur of supernatural speed, and begun making his way over to the occupied hospital bed within the side room.

Flashing a look of exasperation over to Elijah in the hope of gaining the vampires support in reigning in his brother, she found only a fleeting glance of apology thrown her way before the Original followed in his sibling’s wake into Freya’s room.

“I swear - you Mikaleson’s will be the death of me!” Keelin irritably muttered under her breath as she shook her head, fully aware that both immortals would still hear her words despite their hushed tone.

“Sister, it is good to see you awake once more!” Klaus declared, his tone surprisingly soft and having lost much of the anger that had been lacing it only seconds earlier.

Keelin watched on nervously from the foot of Freya’s bed as the hybrid gently crouched down on his haunches so as to be eye level with the witch. Despite him now being in his sister’s direct line of sight, Keelin noted that the witch’s eyes still remained unfocused and distant, as though she was somehow managing to see right through her brother’s head to continue watching the raging storm outside.

It appeared that Elijah had also noted the lack of response from his sister, as the vampire’s eyebrows looked to knit together in concern as he carefully sat himself down on the opposite side of Freya’s bed, making sure to avoid any contact with the witch’s injured body.
Klaus on the other-hand was completely un-phased by Freya’s apathy.

“We will have you out of here in no time sister, that I can promise you!” the hybrid stated, earning an exasperated look from Keelin as she reacted to his words.

“Klaus, you know as well as I do that Freya will need to spend….”

“And of course” the hybrid continued, point blank ignoring her, “we shall move your things back into your old room immediately so that you can resume living back within the safety of our family home - where you belong!”

“What?!” Keelin exclaimed loudly, shocked by the immortal’s words. “Klaus - Freya lives with me now! We’re engaged and have a home together…”

“Now!” the hybrid continued, waving a dismissive hand towards Keelin like she was nothing more than an annoying fly buzzing around his head. “Tell me sister – who are the wretched bastards that inflicted these wounds upon you, and where can I find them?”

Silence quickly fell over the small room, as Freya eye’s remained unfocused and unreactive, despite her brothers rather direct question.

“Sister, did you hear me?” Klaus eventually asked, his tone remaining soft despite the beginnings of frustration beginning to show in his eyes. “I need to know where I can locate the reprobates who did this to you!”

“Niklaus, maybe it is a little too soon to expect…”

Elijah’s attempt at reason died on his lips as he witnessed Klaus reach out and attempt to take one of their sister’s hands into his own, causing the witch to cry out in pain as she quickly jerked her whole arm away from the hybrid’s touch.

“Klaus, no!” Keelin called out sternly, as she moved to place herself between the hybrid and her fiancé in a blur of speed – one hand instantly bracing against Klaus chest as he rose up off his haunches. “Back off!”

“But I….”

The hybrids words trailed off as he watched Keelin spin round and focus all of her attention on Freya, who’s breaths had suddenly shortened and become erratic as her eyes scrunched tightly shut.

“Honey, listen to my voice. You are in hospital and safe, ok. You’re no longer in any danger, you are safe! Try and focus on your breathing,” Keelin cooed to her fiancé, making sure not to touch her as beads of sweat began to form on the shaking witch’s brow. “Come on baby, steady breathing….that’s it, in and out….in and out…..”

Keelin could sense that both Original brothers were looking on at her in worry and confusion for their sister, but her focus remained fully on Freya as she attempted to talk her lover out of the panic attack that had quickly taken hold of her.

“In and out….you’re safe and with your family Freya, no one can hurt you anymore!”

“I…I did not think that…..”

“That’s just it though isn’t it Klaus”, Keelin whispered harshly over her shoulder, as Freya’s breathing slowly began to return to a normal rhythm. “You never bloody think!”
“I….”

“No!” the wolf exclaimed, her voice rumbling with the thick gravelly undertone of a growl as she spun to face the hybrid. “You think that barging in here and pretending like everything is just going to be ok overnight, is in any way beneficial to Freya? That giving her false hopes of a speedy recovery and demanding that she move back into the Compound will just erase all of the suffering that she is going through? For Christ sake’s Klaus, your sister is lying here after several days of being viciously tortured and ra….”

The wolf cut herself off suddenly, and drew in a deep shuddering breath in an attempt to calm the outraged beast within. Closing eyelids over irises that had begun to bleed into their animal form, she took a moment to remind herself that getting angry at the ignorant hybrid would probably only serve to worsen Freya’s panicked state – not ease it.

When she eventually spoke again, her voice had returned back to its calmer, human tones.

“Please Klaus, for once, just try and put your family’s needs before your own! She needs a loving brother right now, not a murderous tyrant!”

Keelin inwardly winced almost as soon as the words had left her mouth, instantly knowing that they had been a mistake.

“Don’t EVER assume to understand the extent of my loyalty to my family, wolf!” Klaus glowered, his voice dropping low as rose to his full height and stepped into Keelin’s personal space. “We have been taking care of our own for over a thousand years, whilst you have been in my sister’s life for a mere pin-drop of her existence! Do not presume to think that being this decades choice to warm her bed, gives you any say in our family matters!”

Clenching her teeth together, Keelin allowed the possessive growl now emitting from her wolf to vibrate freely in her throat as her vision cleared to pin-point accuracy.

“She…is…my….ma-”

“Well, as per usual, it looks like I have arrived just in the nick of bloody time to prevent yet another Mikaelson family apocalypse!”

Rebekah’s pristine English accent suddenly flowed into the small hospital room from the doorway, cutting off Keelin’s heated response before the wolf had a chance to finish her declaration.

Neither hybrid nor wolf turned towards the blonde vampire however - both of their glares remaining intense and territorial as they continued their stand-off beside Freya’s bed.

“Urgh.…fine!”

Exasperation was clearly evident in Rebekah’s voice as she marched over to where Klaus and Keelin continued to glare at each other.

“You…” the blonde exclaimed, jabbing a finger into Keelin’s shoulder as she came to stand beside them both, “are a medical Doctor who should know better than to be engaging in petty arguments
in front of a patient!”

Keelin’s vision slowly dissolved back into her human sight as Rebekah’s words crashed through the thick fog of primal ire that had blanketed itself over her, a like a gust of fresh air blowing away the morning’s mist.

“And you…” Rebekah continued, turning towards her hybrid brother as she delivered an equally sharp jab to his shoulder, “…need to start accepting the fact that Keelin is our sister’s soul mate! They are engaged to be married, and she is already very much a part of our small dysfunctional family!”

The blonde vampire flicked her gaze back to Keelin as she placed a hand on the wolf’s shoulder.

“Always and Forever – right love?”

Rebekah’s last words reverberated through Keelin like a shockwave rushing along every nerve in her body. The wolf turned in surprised towards the blonde - her mouth opening and then quickly shutting again as she struggled to find the right response to the three ominous heavily loaded words that Rebekah had uttered to her.

“I…well, I….”

“Rebekah?”

Freya’s weak, hoarse voice sounded almost alien amongst the stronger, overpowering tones of the various immortals in the room, and immediately drew the attention of all gathered around the witch.

Flashing one last pointed glare towards both Keelin and the still seething hybrid, Rebekah made deft work of nudging them both out of her way so that she could gracefully sit down on the edge of the Freya’s bed.

“Hey there, love” the blonde vampire said, offering a tender smile to her elder sister. “Good to see you back amongst the land of the living! You had me worried for a while that I was going to be left having to deal with our obnoxious brothers all by myself!”

Keelin’s brows raised in surprise as she watched Freya’s gaze slowly move to focus on her younger sister – sending all thoughts of the earlier altercation with Klaus rushing from the wolf’s mind.

Tears began to form in her fiancé’s eyes as they landed on Rebekah, causing her green irises to shimmer in the morning light filling the room.

“Oh now don’t you start love”, Rebekah said softly to the witch, her voice beginning to thicken with emotion, “as you’ll set me off too – and we both know how much of an ugly crier I am!”

The blonde vampire lent over slightly as she delved her hand into a pocket of the long dark green coat she was wearing – eventually producing a small beaker of viscous red fluid that had had its top sealed over with a cork stopper. Swirling the contents of the jar around as she held it up for Freya to see, Rebekah smiled at her sister once more with kind eyes.

“Marcel sends well wishes for a speedy recovery, sister – and more importantly, a fresh sample of his blood! He would have come to see you himself, but he is currently tied up trying to smooth over the violent unrest that has broken out within the vampire faction of the city.”

“Violent unrest?” Keelin questioned, as she readily accepted the beaker of blood off Rebekah to begin preparing it for Freya’s consumption.
The blonde vampire sighed dramatically and rolled her eyes before continuing.

“Yes, it would appear that our little…. temper tantrum…. last night may have upset Marcel’s poor delicate lambs, and has them thinking that the Mikaelson family has declared all-out war on the entire Vampire faction of New Orleans!”

A loud scoffing noise came from Klaus - the hybrid throwing his hands up in the air in an exasperated gesture, as Keelin blinked rapidly at Rebekah whilst her tired mind tried to connect the dots.

“I would say that a “temper tantrum” would be a gross understatement when describing your and Niklaus’s murderous rampage in the small hours of this morning, sister!” Elijah interjected, a small smirk playing on his lips. “The streets are still running red with the blood that you both so haphazardly spilled!”

“Come now Elijah,” Rebekah quickly retorted as she turned to look at her brother across the bed - a smile so wicked forming on her face that Keelin was reminded once again of why she never wished to get on the wrong side of Freya’s younger sister. “You and I both know that you had to change your suit this morning before coming here, due to all of the gore that you managed to splash onto yourself whilst dismembering several of those wretched motorbike riding vampires!”

A simple raised eyebrow was the only response offered up by the pristine Original to his younger sister as he absentmindedly began to adjust one of the cufflinks under his suit jacket.

Shaking her head to herself at the ease at which the Mikaelson siblings were discussing an evening spent slaughtering the undead, Keelin removed a straw from the glass of water sitting on Freya’s bedside cabinet, and placed it into the now opened beaker of Marcel’s blood.

“Did you at least manage to find out any information from these vampires,” the wolf asked, as she lowered the straw to Freya’s mouth and held it steady for the witch to drink. “You know, before you beheaded them and painted the city with their innards?”

It occurred to Keelin, as she stood watching her fiancé take small sips of the thick crimson blood, that hearing several vampires had lost their lives last night in what had no doubt been a gruesomely painful manner, did not bother her anywhere near as much as the idea that, despite the Mikaelson siblings murderous efforts, they would still be no closer to discovering where the brutes that had done these horrific things to her lover were holed up!

Just one clue – that’s all she needed. One little clue, so that she could find them and spend five minutes alone with the bastard who had carved those words into Freya’s thigh! Five minutes would be all she needed to fully acquaint every single inch of his vile body with her long, brutally sharp talons! To carve a few of her own words upon his ripped out heart!

Keelin could feel her inner wolf bearing its spittle laced teeth at the prospect of confronting their mate’s tormentor, and it took all of her professional concentration to prevent its enraged growl from escaping beyond the confines of the Kyanite barrier.

“Sadly, we had no such luck”, Elijah sighed, as he intently watched his sister slowly drinking Marcel’s blood. “The motor-oil covered ruffians remained tight lipped right until…well until they had no lips left to speak with!”

“It did get me thinking though”, Klaus finally offered, as he began to pace the small space at the foot of Freya’s bed. “Maybe we have been going about this all wrong!”
“I see nothing wrong in tearing out the hearts of the undead filth who aided in our sister’s abduction, Nik!” Rebekah exclaimed, a vicious undertone giving gravity to her voice as she rose up off the hospital bed and moved to stand near the partially open window.

“That is not what I meant sister. I meant that we have been waiting for one of these motorcycle riding lowlife’s to spill their guts to us and provide us with information, right whilst we were in the midst of actually spilling their guts!”

“Your point being Niklaus?” Elijah asked, finally taking his attention away from Freya to study his hybrid brother.

“What if that clue has been staring us in the face the whole sodding time!”

Keelin joined both Rebekah and Elijah in exchanging looks of confusion.

“Motorcycles!” Klaus bellowed, loud enough to cause the wolf to almost drop the now three-quarters empty beaker of blood onto the floor. “All of the vampires who we have suspected have a connection to the wretches who held our sister captive, have all looked as though they belong to a particularly melancholic faction of the Hell’s Angels, am I right? And Keelin, did you not say that on the night Freya was abducted, the three bearded swine’s who rode off with her were riding classic Harley Davidson motorcycles?”

“Yes, but I am not sure how…”

“The point is, we have been searching all of the wrong places for where these leather loving grease monkey’s might be gathering! Instead of scouring the usual cemetery’s, bar’s and dockside warehouses, we should have been looking at the old biker bars and motorcycle haunts where you can find overweight bearded gang members with leather fetishes by the dozen!”

“But have been in looking in biker bars Nik,” Rebekah offered, shaking her head. “Hell, we pulled three of those bloody vampire’s last night out of The Dungeon bar just off Bourbon St! It still didn’t lead to anything!”

“Maybe Niklaus is on to something though, sister”, Elijah offered, as he too now rose up off the witch’s bed to stand closer to his pacing brother. “Freya was found abandoned on the outskirts of town, was she not? Just outside of the 9th Ward? There have been a few places out in the barrens that have served as refuges and pitstops for bikers and their rides over the decades. I believe Marcellus and I even frequented one not so long ago, when out hunting down the last of the Strix members. Baracuda, I think it was called.”

“Ok, so…” Rebekah began, picking up on her brother’s trail of thought, “…we drive out into the wastelands and tear down every bloody bar we find that has a motorbike parked outside! There can’t be that many…”

“Guys….I think that Marcel’s blood might actually be working!”

Keelin’s sudden words of hope immediately silenced the conversation and drew all three pairs of Mikaelson eyes towards their wiccan sister.

Freya still remained lying in the same position as before - her eyes tightly closed as she appeared to be concentrating on her breathing. But all of those present could immediately see the changes that were slowly occurring in the skin covering the witch’s face. Gone was the sickly grey hue and the sunken cheekbones - the deep purple bags under her eyes and the sore looking cuts that had split her lips. Even Freya’s shoulder-length tousled hair was no longer looking as greasy and lifeless –
it’s blonde colour and bounce seemingly having been revitalised in the last few minutes.

“Is it….is it working on her more serious injuries Keelin?” Rebekah asked hesitantly, the shake in her voice betraying the blonde vampire’s nervousness for her elder sister’s condition.

Taking a deep breath, Keelin moved closer to the head of the bed, and lent closer to Freya so as to prepare her for what she was about to do.

“Honey, I’m just going to check under the bandages on your wrists ok. I promise I will be as gentle as possible, and that there will be no sudden movements. Just tell me if you need me to stop, ok?”

Taking the witch’s continued silence as confirmation that it was ok to proceed, Keelin gingerly slid one of her hands under Freya’s right arm, and raised it up. Quickly checking her lover’s face for any signs of discomfort - and finding none – the wolf pulled a pair of surgical scissors out of the breast pocket of her scrubs and began cutting away the bandages that were covering the witch’s heavily sutured wrist.

Within a minute the last of the sterile dressing had finally fallen away from the witch’s wrist, and Keelin couldn’t help the relieved smile that began to creep its way onto her face.

“Its working!” the wolf happily exclaimed to the Mikaelson’s, a little louder than she had originally intended. “The sutures are already being worked out of her skin by the healing tissue.”

Rebekah leaned over towards where Keelin stood holding Freya’s wrist, to take a look for herself - raising her brows in surprise at the sight of fleshy pink scars already beginning to turn silver in colour as Marcels blood continued to repair her sister’s tissue cells at an accelerated speed.

“Well, will you look at that!” the blonde vampire huffed in amazement, turning to her two brothers as she continued. “Marcels blood has worked instantly!”

“That makes no sodding sense!” Klaus declared loudly, his face turning sour. “Why the hell would Marcels blood heal her and mine not!?”

“None of our blood worked on her Niklaus – it was not just yours!” Elijah pointed out, the vampires voice a picture of calm as his eyes remained fixed on Freya’s healing arm.

“I am a damn hybrid! The very first original Hybrid at that!” the blue eyed immortal continued, his mood worsening by the second. “My blood heals all wounds, even wolf bites!”

“Not all wounds, brother”, Elijah countered once more. “It cannot heal a wound infected by Marcels own venom, as you well know!”

“And so, we’re back to blaming Marcel for Freya’s injuries again are we?!” Rebekah asked in exasperation, turning to face her two brothers with her arms flung in the air. “Why the bloody hell would Marcel bother to send his blood to heal our sister, if he was the one who inflicted them on her in the first place?! It…was…not….him!”

“Of course you would defend him, Rebekah– you are always blind when it comes to….!”

Keelin rolled her eyes to herself as she attempted to block out irritating drone of the squabbling Mikaelson siblings whilst lowering Freya’s arm back down onto the hospital bed. She herself knew that it hadn’t been the vampire King of New Orleans who had cause such devastation to her lover’s body – and would have placed good money on the fact that Klaus also knew that his old protégée was blameless in the matter.
The wolf knew that the hybrid was just smarting over the fact that Marcel's blood had worked where his had not. Immortality had always seemed to be some sort of competition between the two old friends, and it was no doubt sitting uncomfortable in the hybrids mind that Marcel had just scored another point and trumped Klaus’s healing card.

*It seemed that no matter how much the human genome evolved and mutated - boys would always be boys!*

Shaking her head at the ongoing heated debate behind her, Keelin sat down on the edge of Freya’s bed and smiled at her fiancé, despite the witch still having her eyes closed.

“Hey baby”, she said softly, trying to gain the witch’s attention. “How are you feeling now that Marcel’s blood is taking effect?”

The wolf was pleasantly surprised to see Freya’s eyes slowly open and fix onto her own. Gone was the red, bloodshot glaze that had been dulling her lovers gaze – replaced instead with clear emerald irises and alert pupils of someone who was no longer suffocating under a barrage of pain.

*Well no, that was not entirely true* the wolf thought to herself as she studied the face of the woman staring back at her. *There was still pain there, marring her lover’s features. Only now it was the sort that came from wounds of the soul, instead of the body*

“Better….I feel….better!” Freya replied, her voice still subdued despite the croakiness having now left her throat.

Keelin’s smile widened hearing the confirmation from her fiancé.

*It was working – the blood was truly working!*

The witch suddenly moved in an attempt to try and prop herself up in the hospital bed – raising a few feet off the mattress before a small cry of discomfort escaped from her lips and her eyes winced in pain.

“Hey!” Keelin exclaimed in surprise, reaching out instinctively to steady her lover and prevent her from moving any further. “Steady on Freya! You shouldn’t be trying to move too much just yet!”

“Urgh….my damn back!” Freya cursed, pulling away from the wolf’s touch.

Frowning, Keelin stood up off the bed, and manoeuvred around the witch so that she could see her back whilst she was leaning forward.

“I’m going to take a look under the dressings, ok Freya?” the wolf said, making sure that the witch was comfortable with the idea before she took action. “But it means that I’ll need to open your gown down the slit at the back – so let me know if you feel too uncomfortable at any point, ok honey, and I’ll stop.”

Freya offered a small nod of her head in agreement, but Keelin still noted how the muscles in the witch’s arms all immediately tensed as her body appeared to curl in upon itself – whether out of fear of the potential pain that Keelin’s actions could unintentionally cause, or the panic of feeling exposed so soon after her ordeal at the hands of her kidnappers – the wolf could not quite tell.

*Probably both* Keelin thought to herself sadly, as a mixture of grief and anger stabbed painfully at her heart. *She was going to kill every one of them. Every….last….one!*

Taking a deep breath, the wolf forced her whirling mind into its professional hat as she began to
gently pull one of the larger sterile dressings away from where it had been attached to Freya’s back. It didn’t take long for her to be able to see that where there had previously been lash after lash of horrifically appalling cuts and gouges where her lover’s skin had once been, was now a collage of tender pink scars criss-crossing over her back. Some looked rawer than others – particularly where the whip had torn the witch’s flesh right down to the bone. But all were clearly responding to Marcels blood and the healing affect it was having on Freya’s body.

A small whimper of distress coming from her fiancé spurred Keelin into quickly replacing the dressing and closing up Freya’s gown, as she tried to keep her contact with the witch’s skin to a minimum.

“Its healing baby,” the wolf said, as she came back around to sit next to her fiancé. “Your back is just going to take a little longer than the smaller wounds on your body, that’s all.

“But the whi….the marks will eventually vanish completely, right love?”

Keelin quickly looked over her shoulder in response to Rebekah’s tentatively asked question, surprised to find all three Mikaelson immortals had ceased their bickering and were subdued once more as they observed their elder sister intently.

Offering the three siblings a reassuring smile, the wolf nodded her head before turning her gaze back to her lover.

“Yes”, she said, slightly taken aback by the amount of relief that she could hear in her own voice. “They will no doubt be fully healed by the end of the day.”

A small slither of cautious hope began to push its way into the wolf’s heart as she watched Freya’s lips fleetingly twitch up at the corners. The motion had been trivial – almost none existent. But it had been enough to cause tears to begin gathering in Keelin’s eyes, as she fought hard against the urge to pull the witch into her arms.

“It’s going to be ok baby”, Keelin said as Freya’s eyes slowly moved between each of her siblings, as though seeing them clearly for the first time since coming around from her surgery.

“It’s all going to be ok.”

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Chapter End Notes

This Chapter sooooo wasn't going to end on a happy note. But after all thats been happening recently, I figured I'd end it sooner than I intended and leave you with both wolf and witch smiling. Well, kinda smiling on Freyas part, lol.

I'll save the next lot of drama for the next chapter ;-)
Thought I’d give you guys a wee cheeky Sunday update :-) After the month long break in January, I am now conscious of not wanting to make you all have to wait too long between updates. So once again - this was going to be a longer chapter, but I’ve split it into 2 smaller ones so that you could have something to read today. The second will hopefully be finished by the end of the week.

Hope that you all enjoy, and don't forget to hit me up with a comment to let me know your thoughts - they not only help keep me motivated to use any spare minute I can find to work on the tale for ya'll, but they also continue to help shape the tone and sometimes content of upcoming chapters.

Enjoys guys :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 17.

1.

“Are you sure that you’re going to be ok with this?”

Placing a pair of standard-issue plastic safety glasses onto the bridge of her nose, Keelin peered back over her shoulder to where Freya was sat on the edge of her hospital bed – one leg bent slightly under the frame of the metal framed cot, whilst the other was extended straight out in front of the witch thanks to the large plaster-cast that encased it whole. The wolf noted how her fiancé was fidgeting grumpily with the another, smaller cast on her left arm, as though its presence against her skin was in some way offending the blonde.

“Yes, I just want them off!” Freya exclaimed irritably. “Urgh - they are itchy as hell!”

Turning back to the equipment that she was preparing, Keelin allowed a small smile to grace her face as she shook her head in reaction to her fiancé’s words.

Seven days of captivity and torture – and it’s an itchy plaster cast that bothers her the most!

Picking up the metal tray that contained her required tools, the wolf walked over to Freya’s bed and sat down on a small stool that she had acquired from the nurses desk near the entrance to the ICU department. Now eye level with the witch, she held up a small circular saw between them and pressed down upon its on-button briefly - causing the blade to whirl around at an exponential speed and give off a loud, vibrating buzzing noise.

One which made Freya visibly jump in reaction.

“Positive?” Keelin asked again in a knowing tone as she raised an eyebrow - wanting to make sure that the witch was fully aware of what removing the plaster-casts off her appendages would
“Because we can leave them until you’re a little more….adjusted.”

“I don’t need to adjust to anything, Keelin”, Freya barked impatiently. “Can you please just get the damned things off of me!”

“Oook”, the wolf said, frowning at Freya’s continued irritable tone. “Here goes then! Turn your head away slightly, so that no plaster flicks into your eyes. Sadly I could only find one pair of protective glasses in the department.”

With one last glance at her fiancé’s face, Keelin drew in a deep breath and began the process of cutting through the hard plaster covering Freya’s left arm with the small medical-grade circular saw. And despite her best efforts to focus all of her attention on the task in hand, a small part of the wolf’s mind couldn’t help but replay over the events of the day whilst she continued to worry about Freya’s emotional well-being.

It had not taken long the for blood that the witch had consumed to have a positive effect on all of her injuries. Within half an hour of Keelin passing the empty blood stained beaker back to Rebekah, all of the lesser wounds and bruises that had been littering Freya’s body had completely disappeared. The smaller of her broken bones had fully knitted back together, and every one of the severed tendons in her wrists and ankles had re-connected – giving the witch full movement of her hands and feet once more.

Another hour later and a few of the more complicated wounds had also begun to fully vanish.

Keelin had sent both Klaus and Elijah on errands to collect various sterile swabs and fresh dressings from elsewhere in the building, so that Freya would feel more comfortable removing her hospital gown whilst the wolf checked on the status of the various injuries that had covered her torso. The blonde hadn’t specifically said that she didn’t want to undress in front of her brothers, but Keelin had been able to read the panic that had instantly appeared in her lover’s eyes when the wolf had asked if she could examine the surgical wounds over Freya’s liver and the status of her cracked ribs. Freya’s gaze had widened and briefly flicked over to where the two males had been stood with their backs to the bed, as they quietly formulated the beginnings of a plan to hit every out-of-town biker bar that they knew of in just one evening.

As the witch had returned her flustered stare back to the bed, Keelin’s enhanced hearing had picked up on Freya’s heartbeat beginning to race along at a panicked pace, and had also noted that the witch’s face had drained of some of the colour that it had regained thanks to Marcel’s healing blood.

So within a few minutes, the Original male’s had been sent on their way - the two of them barely halting their conversation long enough to acknowledge Keelin’s fabricated request for supplies, let alone catch on to the real reason as to why they had been suddenly asked to leave.

Rebekah however, had remained - watching Keelin’s efforts from where she had been sat the corner of the room, in the hard-backed chair within which the wolf had managed to catch a few hours’ sleep the night before. When Keelin had finally gotten around to removing the dressings over where the surgical team’s fresh sutured incision scars should have been - revealing nothing but pale, smooth skin – the Original vampire had let out a small cry of “Whoop!” from where she was sat, earning her a brief fragile smile from her wiccan sister.

It had not escaped the wolf’s notice that the Rebekah’s presence seemed to have been providing some degree of comfort for Freya, ever since the vampire had arrived at the hospital earlier that morning with Marcel’s blood. Every time the witch had begun to feel overwhelmed or panicked during the removal of her bandages, it had been Rebekah that Freya had looked to for reassurance.
– and in turn, it had then been either a smile or few words of encouragement from the blonde vampire that had eventually spurred Keelin’s fiancé into allowing the wolf to continue her work.

Of course Keelin understood that it was only natural for Freya to be finding comfort in her younger sister being there for her, after the horrific ordeal that the witch had suffered at the hands of her kidnappers. From what Freya had told her in the past, Keelin knew that the two female Mikaelson siblings had quickly grown close after the witch had finally been reunited with her family following Dahlia’s demise. And she had witnessed many a time herself how tight the bond was between the two women, often coming home from a long 12 hour shift at the clinic to find Rebekah hanging out with Freya in the apartment – both of them drunk as skunks and usually laughing over some anecdote involving their hybrid brother and his famously short temper. And it was a sight that had never failed to put a smile on Keelin’s face – watching the woman she loved laughing so carefree and light-heartedly with her sister.

Which is why it of course it made perfect sense to Keelin that during her time of need, Freya would turn to that same sister to try and find some semblance of relief from the horrors that were no doubt plaguing the witch’s mind after what she had endured.

So why had it made her want to growl possessively and snap at the blonde vampire with extended canine teeth, every time Freya had turned to Rebekah for comfort, instead of her?!

Keelin had tried putting it down to the fact that her own emotions were understandably running high after the events of the past forty-eight hours. Anyone seeing the person they were in love with as broken and close to death as Freya had been when she had first arrived at St Theodora’s, could be forgiven for reacting to situations in a slightly uncharacteristic manner for a while afterwards.

She had indeed witnessed it herself many a time over the past few years whilst working as a Doctor in an Emergency Room environment. The calmest and mildest of family members had been known to launch into a fit of blind rage upon discovering that their loved one had been rushed into the E.R. after being violently attacked or sexually assaulted. And equally, some of the most robust and tough looking men that Keelin had ever had to speak with, had broken down into floods of tears upon hearing that their partner / mother / sister had been brutally attacked when on a night out with friends.

So it was of course perfectly natural for her own reactions to be a little off kilter, and out of character.

Natural, and totally normal that she had felt an overwhelming sense of relief crash over her when Rebekah had finally declared that she needed to run a few errands before night fall - promising to return and escort Freya back to her and Keelin’s apartment later that evening, before taking her leave.

A completely standard and ordinary reaction.

Normal.

Except it had felt anything but normal! Freya was her mate….HER mate, and she would gladly claw the eyes out of anyone who tried to take that unique bond away from her! Rebekah could stay the hell away from.....

The small circular saw’s blade fell silent half way along the length of Freya’s cast, as Keelin let her thumb drift off its trigger button as she closed her eyes – a heavy sigh forcing its way out of her nostrils.
“Is everything ok?”

Freya’s voice cut through the thick animalistic hormones raging through the wolf’s body like a hot knife through butter, quickly clearing a path in Keelin’s mind once more.

“Yes, sorry…” she said, her eyes opening up again as she gave a small smile to her fiancé, “….I guess it has just been a long couple of days!”

After a few heartbeats of studying the wolf with her piercing emerald gaze, Freya finally offered up a small nod of acknowledgement before returning to study the half split cast on her arm.

“You know,” Keelin said, trying to sound light hearted as she re-adjusted her position on the small stool to get a better angle with the saw, “you could probably remove these a lot quicker yourself using a little of your magic!”

The wolf could feel the muscles in Freya’s arm tense up immediately, smooth skin going cold to the touch under where Keelin’s own hand was resting lightly in an attempt to keep her fiancé from moving much as she worked.

“Hey, I didn’t mean to upset you,” she began, trying to get Freya to meet her concerned gaze as she quickly placed the saw down into the metal tray on the bed and attempted to scoot a little closer to the witch. “I was just being flippant honey. I’m sorry.”

Freya quickly shook her head in dismissal, still not making eye contact with Keelin despite attempting to brush off the negative reaction that she had clearly just had.

“No – it’s fine! I’m ok.”

“Have you….I mean….is your magic feeling like its working ok again now? Can you access your power ok?”

Freya offered up a shrug of her shoulders in response to Keelin’s question, as she apprehensively began to pick at one of the split halves of the cast on her arm.

“I can feel it’s presence again, if that’s what you mean,” Freya finally offered, after a few seconds of silence between the two of them.

“Was it…” Keelin started, before pausing briefly to try and find the right words for what she wanted to ask. “…was your power absent for the entire time that you were being held?”

Freya’s eyes slid shut - her brows knitting together into a deep frown before she offered the smallest of head nods in response the wolf’s question.

Anger swiftly followed on the heels of grief in Keelin’s mind as she realised that her fiancé must have been having some form of flash back at that very moment – no doubt of something that had happened whilst she had been held captive by the biker’s.

Something that had clearly been awful and upsetting, given the tears that had suddenly started to shimmer along the rims of her mates closed eyelids.

“Believe me when I say that no magic will be needed when I finally find them, Freya!” Keelin growled, suddenly unable to stop herself from vocalising the rage that she felt towards the men who had harmed her lover. “I’ll rip their god damned throats…..”

“NO!”
The witch’s eyes abruptly flew open – emerald irises wide and full of fear as she lunged forward and grabbed hold of Keelin’s wrist with her now fully healed right hand.

“Promise me Keelin, that you’ll not go looking for them!”

“W…What?” the wolf stammered, shocked by the sudden intensity with which Freya was now looking at her.

“You are not to go searching for them. Ok!” Freya insisted fiercely, her grip on the wolf’s arm intensifying to an almost painful level. “You need to swear to me that you won’t!”

“I…I’m sorry Freya, but that’s a promise that I can’t make!” Keelin eventually said as she shook her head in confusion. “After what they did to you…knowing how badly they hurt you….I can’t just let…”

“Yes, you can!” Freya exclaimed with force, cutting the wolf off mid flow. “You can just let it be! Besides….”, she continued, her voice suddenly changing into an obviously fake and off-hand tone, “….I’m fine – Marcel’s blood has seen to that. I’ll be as good as new as soon as I get these damned casts off and go home. It’s no big deal!”

“No big deal?!” Keelin said incredulously, her voice managing to sound both full of hurt and anger at the same time as she pushed herself back on the stools caster wheels and dislodged her wrist from Freya’s grip. “Are you being serious?! How….how can you say that, Freya?”

“I can say it because it’s true!” the witch quickly retorted, shrugging her shoulders in an exaggeration fashion as though trying to brush off the situation. “So I got a little banged up – it’s not like I haven’t been on the wrong end of a punch before. I am a Mikaelson after all - trouble has followed us around like a bad smell for over a thousand years!”

Keelin couldn’t believe the words that she was now hearing come out of her fiancé’s mouth.

A little banged up?!...The wrong end of a punch?!.....how could Freya suddenly be being so flippant about everything that had been done to her?? Was it some kind of bizarre coping mechanism that the witch’s mind had suddenly engaged, so as not to become overwhelmed by the horror of what had actually happened?!

Drawing in a deep breath in an attempt to calm her own raging hormones, Keelin slowly wheeled her stool back towards where was Freya sat on the edge of the hospital bed once again picking at her half-removed cast.

Making sure that her voice was schooled into a calm, relaxed tone, the wolf attempted to smooth over the tension that was now filling the small space between them.

“Baby, I get that it will be hard right now to process everything that happened whilst you were held captive, especially so soon after the event. And I swear to you that no one is going to try and make you discuss what those….those bastards did. Not unless you want to. But please, Freya…. don’t try and tell me that it was nothing!”

Tears began to well in her eyes as she slowly reached out her hand and tentatively placed it upon her fiancé’s knee - a small pulse of relief rushing through her when the witch didn’t immediately try and pull away from her touch.

“I saw what they had done to you Freya. You were lay on my trauma table, dying and bleeding out and….and I saw it all. Every way in which those monsters had hurt y…you.”
Her voice faltered on the last word - eye’s closing tight as a vivid memory of her lover’s broken body lying on the blood-soaked emergency room’s gurney attacked her mind’s eye.

*Shes…mine…now…wolf*

“You can’t expect me to not want to make them pay for that!” Keelin eventually said after a few seconds of silence - meeting the witch’s gaze once more. “Imagine if this was the other way around! Could you just let it drop if that had been me with all of those injuries? If they had taken me instead of you and hurt me in the way that they did you!”

Freyaa’s own eyes slid shut as she appeared to contemplate the wolf’s words.

“I did it so that it would never have to be you….to keep you safe!”

The witch’s words were so quiet, that Keelin wasn’t sure if her fiancé even realised that she had said them out loud.

“You did what, baby?”

Freyaa’s eyes flew open - panic evident in her features once again.

“You just need to stay away from them, ok Keelin!” Freya blurted out, her voice agitated once more. “Please….both you and my family…. you all need to just leave it be!”

“Did I hear someone mention the word family?!”

Both witch and wolf quickly turned their heads in the direction of the ICU room’s entrance – finding Hayley’s smiling face hovering through a gap in the door.

As her gaze fell onto Keelin, the hybrid’s grin began to falter as she noticed the tears brimming in her friends eyes.

“Crap, is this a bad time?” Hayley said, suddenly looking between both of the women nervously. “Because we can come back la….”

“No, it’s ok Hayley,” Keelin said as she quickly wiped away the tears that were threatening to fall down her cheeks. “I’m sure Freya would appreciate a break from just my company!”

The wolf had tried to keep the hurt that she was now feeling out of her words – but they had managed to come out sounding strained nevertheless – causing Freya to let out a small sigh as her gaze fell solemnly back down to her casted arm.

Frowning, Hayley flashed the wolf a quick questioning look whilst Freya’s attention was elsewhere, clearly not convinced that she wasn’t interrupting an important conversation between the two of them. Keelin however simply shook her head in response, hoping that the hybrid would realise that a distraction was probably the best thing for them at that moment in time.

“Oh, well…. ” the hybrid ventured - a small cautious smile reappearing on her face, “….I was going to wait to come see you after you got back to your apartment Freya, but I have a certain young lady with me who would not quit pestering to come and visit her favourite Aunty in hospital!”

The room’s door opened wider, revealing Hope to be stood just behind her mother – the youngster shyly twirling a strand of her auburn hair in one hand, whilst holding onto the back of Hayley’s coat with the other.
Keelin couldn’t remember a time when she had ever seen the small witch look so nervous and out of place in her surroundings – the girl had definitely inherited her father’s confidence when it came to being able to hold her own in almost any setting or situation. But the wolf quickly realised that it was probably Hope’s first time visiting a hospital – especially a ward that was full of critically ill patients – and made a quick mental note to ask Freya’s niece if she wanted to spend some time with her at work one day. Given the youngster’s talent for healing small animals with her magic, Keelin figured it might be something that would interest her.

“Hey sweetie,” Keelin called to the young witch with a welcoming grin. “I know someone who’s been itching to see her favourite niece too - right Freya?”

The wolf gave her fiancé’s leg a gentle squeeze with her hand, trying to rouse the witch out the internal thoughts that she appeared to have sunk into when her visitor’s had first appeared.

Hayley walked further into the room with her daughter in tow, stepping aside when she reached the foot of Freya’s bed to allow Hope a better view of her Aunt.

“Freya, aren’t you going to say hi to your niece!” Keelin whispered quietly to her lover, noticing that the witch was still yet to acknowledge the young girl’s presence.

“I brought you some chocolate Aunty Freya,” Hope’s voice rang out in the room, as the small witch dared to venture a step away from her mother’s side. “Mom said that you might not be hungry as of yet, but I know how much you lov…..”

Keelin slowly turned her gaze away from Freya when she realised that Hope had trailed off mid-sentence.

Looking over to the youngster, concern quickly began to take root in the wolf as she noted that Hope’s whole body appeared to have stiffened and gone rigid – her blue eye’s wide and fixed on her wiccan Aunt with what looked to be an expression of fear.

_Fear…or…was that shock?_

It appeared that Hayley had also noted the abrupt change in her daughter’s demeanour - the hybrid frowning as she placed a hand onto Hope’s shoulder.

“Honey, are you ok?”

No answer came from the youngest Mikaelson as she continued to stare intensely at Freya, but Keelin could have sworn that she could see Hope’s small arms start to shake lightly as they hung rigid by her side.

Crouching down next to her daughter, Hayley once again tried to get her attention.

“Hope what’s wrong….you’re starting to worry me.”

From the corner of her vision, Keelin saw Freya’s head begin to rise as the witch finally turned her attention to the youngest Mikaelson.

The slim leg under Keelin’s hand tensed.

“No…..NO…..” Freya shouted, her voice filling the room with a harsh timbre. “GET HER OUT…..GET HER AWAY FROM ME!”

Both Keelin and Hayley turned towards the witch, mouths gaping in shock at her sudden outburst.
“Freya, what in the world….”

“GET HER AWAY FROM ME!!” the witch shouted again - her eyes scrunching shut as her hands flew up to either side of her head.

Hayley’s shocked gaze met Keelin’s, the two women sharing a look of confusion moments before Hope appeared to thaw out of her stupor and turn on the spot - quickly running out from the room.

“Hope! Honey….wait for me!” Hayley shouted after her daughter- flashing one last bewildered look towards Freya, before rushing out to follow in the youngest Mikaelson’s footsteps.

Keelin quickly stood up off the small stool and hurried over to the side-room’s exit, just in time to see Hayley disappearing out of the ICU department’s double doors at the far end of the ward. Turning back to face her fiancé, the wolf’s brows knitted together as she observed Freya quietly swearing to herself under her breath as she rubbed at her temples with frantic hands.

“What the hell just happened?!” she asked, staring at the witch expectantly.

“Shit…shit...shit….”

The witch appeared to have not heard Keelin’s question as she continued to mutter expletives to herself, over and over again as her eyes remained scrunched shut.

Worry began to churn in the wolf’s stomach, curdling sourly with the confusion that had already set up home in her gut. Walking back towards the bed, she hunched down to be eye level with her fiancé and attempted to gain the witch’s attention by placing a hand on her shoulder – only for Freya to jerk away dramatically as soon as Keelin made contact.

“Freya, what’s happening? Talk to me, please!”

“Just…just keep Hope away from me!” the witch stammered, her posture remaining strained and edgy.

“But I don’t understand….why?” Keelin dared to venture, desperate to try and fathom what was going on in her lover’s mind. “I mean, I can see why you wouldn’t have wanted her to see all of your injuries earlier, but you’re mostly healed…”

“JUST KEEP AWAY!”

Keelin took a startled step back from the witch, stunned by the sudden venom coating Freya’s words.

“I….I’ll go and make sure Hope’s ok…..” the wolf said quietly, suddenly not sure whether she was welcome in Freya’s company anymore, “….give you some space for a bit.”

Seeing that the witch was lost in her own thoughts again, Keelin started to make her way out of the room. As she reached the doorway, she looked back over her shoulder at the woman she loved with both concern and uncertainty contorting her features.

“I’ll send one of the nurses in to continue removing your cast’s, ok?”

A curt nod of the head was the only response she received from Freya, before the witch turned away from the door and lay herself back down onto the bed.

Keelin opened her mouth to say more to her fiancé – to tell her that she wouldn’t be long, that she
loved her, and that they would figure all of this out together. But as she observed the witch, now lying on her side and staring out of the window once more, the words died in her throat.

Something felt wrong. Something that Freya wasn’t telling her – something other than the obvious torture that her lover had been made to endure.

Sighing, Keelin turned away once more and quietly closed the door behind her, before beginning to walk out of the ICU unit – using her wolf senses to follow Hope and Hayley’s scent markers.

Something was definitely wrong....

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2.

Slowing down her pace from a frantic charge to a casual walk, Hayley began to make her way through the busy Emergency Clinic of St Theadora’s hospital – being careful not to disturb any of the injured patients or the hard-working staff as she passed them by.

The whole department appeared to be rammed, with every gurney, bed, and chair that the hybrid could see being occupied by either someone waiting to be treated by one of the severely limited number of doctors available in the clinic, or by a concerned family member eagerly awaiting news on the status of their loved one.

It appeared that eight days of enduring the morose and dark temper of the raging storm outside was now beginning to have an affect on the temperament of the local people living in the city. As she passed them by, Hayley noted that most of the injuries that the patients were being treated for looked to have been gained from some form of altercation or fight. Split lips and black eyes, broken knuckles and bruised cheeks, cuts above eyebrows and fractured noses – the waiting room of the clinic looked more like a boxing gym’s locker room, than a general hospital department.

A fleeting thought passed through her mind, as she let her eyes casually wander over each of the patients that she passed by, taking in the agitated and angry expressions that remained on their faces, despite whatever scuffle that had been in now being over.

Was the on-going storm somehow actually having a measurable harmful effect on the population of New Orleans psyches? And if so, was it somehow connected to why Freya had so uncharacteristically lashed out at her young niece?!

Dismissing the thought almost as soon as it had entered her mind, Hayley continued on her way towards the doors leading out to the Emergency Clinic’s ambulance bay, where the highest concentration of her young daughter’s scent markers were now collecting.

From what Rebekah had told her of Freya’s ordeal suffered at the hands of the mysterious biker’s that had taken her, it was more than likely that which was causing the eldest Mikaelson to lash out – not Storm Gelda!

Reaching her intended destination, Hayley pushed open one of the swinging double doors and stepped outside into the semi-enclosed area dedicated to receiving those patients who arrived at the clinic via an ambulance.
Her eyes immediately fell upon the sight of a hospital employee crouched down next to her daughter, as the two of them stood in the middle of the bay being bombarded by the storm’s falling tears. Glancing up to the heavens, the hybrid marvelled at how the rain now looked to be evolving into a living, fluid fabric - making her feel like she could reach her hand up and let her fingers get tangled in its wet, interwoven fibres.

Honing in her enhanced hearing upon Hope and the male nurse that was squatted next to her in an attempt to hear what was being said over the loud roar of the howling wind, Hayley remained standing half in and half out of the Hospitals doorway for a few seconds, as she intently listened to the conversation.

“….do you think that we should maybe get you back inside young miss, and out of this pouring rain?” the hospital employee said to Hope, his voice soft and concerned.

Hope shook her head gently from side to side as she refused to meet the nurse’s eye’s, instead focusing intently on the rain-soaked ground just ahead of her feet.

“Well I’m sure that your mom or dad must be worried about you, sweetheart – are they here in the hospital? Were you visiting someone?”

“My Aunty Freya. She...she is sick.”

Hayley could see some form of recognition wash over the male nurse’s features in reaction to Hope mentioning Freya’s name – like he had immediately known who her daughter was referring to.

“Ah, so let me guess – that would make you Freya’s extremely pretty and incredibly smart niece called Hope, whom I have heard so much about?”

The young witch slowly lifted her head up and gave the hospital worker a suspicious once over in reaction to him claiming to know who she was.

“Ha, don’t worry young miss – I’m not mysteriously psychic or a spooky mind-reader. My name is Joel....” the nurse exclaimed - extending his hand out to Hope through the rain, as a warm smile broke across his face, “….and I work with your Aunt Keelin, here in the hospital. She speaks very highly of you!”

Despite the look of suspicion remaining on her face, Hope slowly raised her own hand and allowed the male nurse to take it into his own and give it a brief, firm shake.

“Now, what say we head back up to the ICU and reunite you with your family?”

A frown creased Hayley’s brow as she watched a look of panic once again take up residence on her daughter’s face, seemingly in reaction to the nurse’s suggestion of returning up to Freya’s room on the third floor of the hospital. Quickly pulling up the collar on her leather jacket, the hybrid stepped out into the ambulance bay and headed over to the drenched duo.

“Hey sweetie, there you are!” Hayley exclaimed, squinting through the rain as she came to a stop just beside Hope. “You had me worried, darting off so suddenly like that!”

The young witch offered a weak apologetic smile to her mother, as Hayley opened up her arms to offer up a hug to her daughter – one which Hope readily accepted as she lent in and wrapped her arms tightly around the hybrid’s mid-drift.

“Thank you for taking care of her,” she said to the male nurse, watching as he slowly raised up off his haunches and smiled amicably at the hybrid. “I’m Hayley – Hope’s mom.”
“Joel,” the nurse offered, his smile widening as he observed Hope’s tight embrace of her mother. “And it was no trouble – I was already out here waiting on an ambulance’s arrival when this little one came charging out of the building at full speed and bumped right into me. It was a miracle that we both didn’t end up on the floor, swimming through all of this rain water – hey kiddo!?"

Joel let out a small laugh when it became clear that Hope had no intention of responding to his comment – the youngster’s body remaining flush against her mothers as she continued the fierce embrace.

“I’m sorry,” Hayley offered to the nurse with an apologetic look, “she’s not usually this shy when it comes to meeting new people. I think seeing her aunty in a hospital environment has thrown her a little. Which is possibly why she suddenly bolted out of the ICU unit a few minutes ago!”

“Oh it’s ok,” Joel commented, waving his hand dismissively between them, “I can understand how it can be quite shocking sometimes to see a loved one lying in hospital injured. Especially given how serious Freya’s condition is! I’m actually surprised Keelin let you guys in to visit – we usually don’t advise younger family members to be brought onto the ICU unit, due to the nature of the patients’ critical conditions on the ward.”

So Keelin’s co-worker was clearly unaware that Freya was now fully healed, Hayley thought to herself as she continued to smile at the nurse. Someone was evidently going to have to compel the poor chap in the near future, if the witch was to head home that evening as planned.

“Those you all are!”

Hayley and Joel’s attention were drawn over to the hospital’s entranceway, from where they saw Keelin emerging as she threw on a light rain jacket before hurrying her way over to where they stood.

“Is everything ok?” the wolf asked as reached them, taking in the sight of her fiancé’s niece fiercely hugging Hayley.

“Yeah,” Hayley offered, gesturing to Joel with her head. “It seems that Hope managed to run right into a knight in pink-scrubs armour, who kindly looked after her until I arrived.”

Joel let out a small laugh as he nodded in greeting to Keelin, before shaking his head in the rain.

“Oh I don’t know about that”, the male nurse chuckled. “I think I could probably identify more with a pampered princess, than a battle-hardened knight!”

Throwing a quick wink towards his work colleague, Joel affectionately ruffled Hope’s wet hair with one of his hands before beginning to make his way back towards the clinic’s entrance.

“Nice to meet you Hayley,” the nurse called back over his shoulder as he walked. “And you too Hope! Try not to plough down anymore unsuspecting nurses today, hey!”

Hayley nodded her thanks to the male, as she felt Hope disengage one of the arms that had been wrapped tightly around her to offer a small wave of farewell to Joel.

“He seems nice!” Hayley said once the nurse had disappeared back into the building. “I take it that he’s already been heavily compelled, like most of the other staff working here since Freya’s arrival?”

“Actually, not as much as you might think,” Keelin replied, as she offered a small smile to Hope who had now pulled slightly away from her mother. “Rebekah had to remove a few memories of
the moment that Klaus broke his jaw during one of his fits of rage – but other than that, Joel pretty much knows what has been happening.”

The hybrid raised a questioning eyebrow at the mention of Joel’s broken jaw - but quickly followed it up with a shake of her head, indicating that she didn’t need, nor want to know the details.

“Are you going to explain to him about Freya’s miraculous healing”, Hayley asked, “or do you want me to compel him to forget that she was ever here in the first place?”

“No, its ok” the wolf replied with a small sigh. “I am long overdue a conversation with him about the supernatural element of the world in which he lives. He’s been a good friend to me since I moved to New Orleans, and has been there for me countless times despite the weird and wonderful things that he often witnesses - so I think it’s about time I told him the truth. Or at least - maybe a slightly watered down, less blood curdling version of the truth!”

Hayley huffed out a laugh in response to Keelin’s remark, nodding her head in agreement.

“Is Freya ok now?” the hybrid asked, changing the subject as she began to try and steer Hope towards the glass canopy that jutted out over the Hospitals entranceway – wanting to get the youngster out of the lashing rain.

“I…. well, to be honest, I don’t really know.” Keelin admitted as she followed closely beside them. “I have no idea why she suddenly reacted that way to Hope’s presence.”

As the three of them reached the small dry area of the ambulance bay, Keelin hunched down to be eye-level with the youngest Mikaelson as she continued.

“I’m sorry for how your Aunt Freya was just now, Hope.” Keelin apologised to the young witch, her large brown eyes both warm and kind as she spoke. “She’s been through a lot over the past week, and is really tired and drained. It doesn’t excuse how she shouted at you sweetheart, but I can promise that she won’t have meant to scare you. Infact I bet she’s up there right now feeling really bad about upsetting you!”

Hayley watched on as Hope’s features remained guarded and cautious, despite the wolf’s attempt to make her daughter feel better about what had happened.

Not that she knew exactly what had happened!

“Has she been that worked up ever since coming around from her surgery?” Hayley asked Keelin, as the wolf rose up to her full height in response to Hope leaning back into Hayley’s frame for another reassuring hug.

“Well that’s the thing,” Keelin said, her eyes narrowing in thought as she continued. “If anything, she’s been the complete opposite. Before Marcel’s blood healed her, she was very subdued and quiet. Which was only to be expected really – with all of the pain that she was suffering, and the ordeal that she’d been subjected to - I’m honestly surprised that she responded to anyone’s presence at all!”

Hayley nodded in agreement with the wolf’s words – she too had been amazed to hear that Freya had been reacting positively to the company of her loved ones after coming around from surgery - all be it in an apathetic manner.

The hybrid had bumped into Rebekah earlier that day as the blonde vampire had been returning to the Mikaelson Compound from visiting her sister at St Theadora’s. Hayley had of course instantly grilled the Original on what Freya’s status had been – both in the physical and mental sense –
whilst expressing her regret at not having been able to make it over to the hospital by that point to see the witch.

Not that Rebekah or any of the other Mikaelson’s had held it against her. In-fact it had been a joint “family” decision earlier that morning that Hayley would stay behind at the compound with Hope, to keep the youngest Mikaelson occupied and away from the hospital until such a time when Freya’s condition had improved - thus hopefully meaning it would be less of a shock to Hope’s young mind when she did eventually see her aunt.

Her daughter certainly had a far more mature disposition than most other ten-year-olds that Hayley had ever known - no doubt thanks to the countless supernatural goings on that the young witch’s family was subjected to on an almost daily basis! But at the end of the day, Hope was still just a little girl, who was thankfully naive when it came to some of the more nefarious crimes that the human race was capable of committing.

*And she prayed to god that Hope never had to learn the true nature of what her aunt Freya had been subjected to by the monsters who had held her!*

“And since Marcel’s blood began to take effect”, Keelin continued, dragging the hybrid out of her thoughts and back into the moment, “she’s been a little more responsive, but still in a very cowed manner. Nothing at all like how she just reacted then, when you guys arrived!”

“Do you think that she was maybe just concerned about trying to keep the er….severity of what happened to her away from….?” Hayley looked down at her daughter, indicating to Keelin who she meant without drawing the young witch’s attention, “….and ended up panicking?”

Keelin shrugged as she too looked down at Hope, who remained buried in her mother’s tight hug.

“I don’t know…possibly?”

The wolf drew in a troubled breath before looking out across the rain battered Ambulance bay in front of them.

“Something feels off with her though Hayley,” Keelin eventually continued, after a few moments of silence between them. “I can’t quite put my finger on what it is, but….I don’t know, it’s like there’s something holding her back.”

“I think that that’s probably normal though, right?”, Hayley offered, trying to ease the wolf’s clearly troubled mind. “After everything that she went through at the hands of those bikers - surely she’s expected to be behaving a little off? I mean, yes it shocked me the way she suddenly started shouting at Hope just then, but, well…..”

“Oh god no, your completely right,” Keelin quickly interjected, as she shook her head. “I wasn’t trying to say that I expected her to be 100% back to her old self as soon as Marcel’s blood had healed her. Christ, Hayley, if you’d have seen what those bastards had done to her….”

“Jarls.”

Hayley and Keelin quickly looked down to Hope, both startled by the small witch whose face was still buried in the front of her mother’s jacket.

“Sorry sweetie, what did you say?” the hybrid asked her daughter – unsure that she had heard the youngsters muffled word correctly as it had reverberated through the leather of her coat.

Hope pulled away marginally from her mother’s embrace – her blue eyes seeming to focus softly
on one of the stationary ambulances that was parked up in the bay as she spoke again.

“Jarl’s. The men that hurt aunty Freya – she calls them Jarls.”

The hybrids brows knitted together as she glanced over to Keelin, only to find the wolf’s own expression mirroring her own.

“What makes you say that Hope?” Hayley asked, after a few seconds of trying to fathom where her daughter had come up with her notion from - and coming up short. “Have you spoken to your Aunt Freya before this afternoon?”

It seemed like a futile question, considering that the hybrid knew Hope hadn’t seen the eldest Mikaelson since well before the witch had been abducted. But the youngster must have obviously come up with the perception of what Freya called her abductors from somewhere.

*The question was….where?!*

Hope’s head shook lightly from side to side, as her focus remained distant out into the ambulance bay.

“They hurt her mom…” the young witch eventually whispered, as tears began to form in her innocent eyes. “…they hurt her really bad.”

Before Hayley had the chance to respond to her daughter’s words, Hope had lent back into her frame - burying her face into the hybrids top as she began to cry in earnest.

Concern and confusion began to war within her mind, as Hayley quickly drew her arms around her daughter in an attempt to provide the distressed witch with some form of comfort. Looking over to Keelin, the hybrid raised her eye brows in a questioning manner- hoping that the wolf might have been able to make more sense of Hope’s words than she herself presently could.

“Has Freya been in contact with Hope since she came around from her operation?” Hayley whispered in a quiet, barely audible voice - knowing that Keelin’s wolf hearing would pick up on her words over the noise of the storm, whereas Hope’s would not.

“No”, the brunette replied, in an equally low tone. “At least, I don’t think so. I’ve scarcely left her side since she was brought into the Hospital – certainly not long enough for Freya to have had time to reach out to Hope. Besides”, the wolf continued as she shook her head in bewilderment, “she’s barely been conscious before this morning. And even if she had of been coherent long enough to send Hope some sort of message – it just doesn’t make sense that she would tell her niece about the men who abducted her. Even less sense that she would go into detail about the pain that she suffered at their hands.”

Keelin shook her head again, clearly perplexed by Hope’s words.

“She loves her niece more than anything Hayley – I doubt she’d ever want the girl to know about the horrific ordeal that she was subjected to!”

“So what do you think Hope meant by….”

Hayley’s words trailed off as she witnessed all of the colour suddenly drain from Keelin’s face. Within the space of a few seconds, the wolf had gone from simply looking tired and overworked, to seeming like she might actually pass out on the spot.

“Hey - are you feeling ok?”
“I…urgh”…the wolf stammered, as one of her hands quickly moved to rest on her belly. “…I think I’m gonna throw…..up…”

Before Hayley had chance to reach out a steadying hand to her friend’s shoulder, Keelin took off – spinning on her heel and disappearing through the ambulance bay’s double doors in a flurry of brunette curls and blue scrubs.

The hybrid stood looking at the Hospital’s entranceway for a few heartbeats, trying to decide on whether it was best to follow her friend and make sure she was ok, or whether to just give the wolf some space to empty the contents of her stomach into the nearest toilet.

Eventually coming to the conclusion that Keelin was more than likely just suffering from being overtired and overworked over the past few days - and would probably not want to be stood over whilst hurling up her last meal - the hybrid turned her attention back to her daughter, whose own sniffling appeared to be slowly calming down.

“Hey sweetie”, Hayley cooed to Hope, as she gently encouraged her daughter to loosen the vice-like grip that she had around her waist. “What’s say you and me go and find somewhere to treat ourselves to an ice-cream sundae? It might help take out minds off things for a little while, hey?”

A small tentative smile twitched on the young witch’s lips in reaction to the prospect of getting to eat her favourite food.

“And I tell you what,” the hybrid continued, encouraged by her daughter’s positive response, “I’ll even let you pick up to four different flavours to have!”

“Really?” Hope said, awe managing to creep its way in to her emotion lined voice.

“Yep….” Hayley said, making sure to pop the last letter of her answer. “….really!”

“Awesome!”

As the two of them began to make their way out of the hospital’s grounds, Hayley once again found herself both amazed and grateful with regards to the sheer resilience of her young daughter’s mind.

Something had clearly upset Hope, and the hybrid had the feeling that whatever had happened between the young girl and her Aunt, upstairs in the ICU department, somehow held more significance to it than Hayley’s whirling mind could currently fathom.

But for now, as Hope huddled close into her side whilst attempting to shield herself from the onslaught of the storm wind and rain, Hayley was simply thankful that her daughter’s thoughts now appeared to be focused solely on which flavours of ice she was going to pick, instead of the…. “Jarls”, was it?!….mysterious bikers who had dared to hurt one of the Mikaelson family.

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Chapter End Notes

...I’m not going to lie, I went straight to the freezer and pulled out a tub of icecream
after finishing that last scene ;-) Haha.
Chapter 18.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 18 is here for the taking!

I'm sure you'll all be glad to hear this is the last of the chapters that take place in the hospital - I know that there's been quite a lot of stuff to get through in its medical setting. But hey, at least these final scenes in St Theodora's are a bit quicker paced, with a little action thrown in for good measure ;-) 

So, I promised one of my readers in the comments that I'd start doing brief little recaps at the start of all my chapters, just so people could have a wee reminder of the important events that have happened so far in this tale. Help jog the memory and all that. So without further ado....

**.....PREVIOUSLY ON "WHAT LIES WITHIN"....**

1. Freya & Keelin got engaged - Keelin asked Freya, who of course said yes.
2. The two newly engaged love birds had some pretty wild sex together under the watchful eye of the powerful Harvest Moon.
3. Hope's power evolved, allowing her to read minds - a power which she currently has no control over.
4. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the (fuckers) Jarls.
5. Alanna was gravely injured when attempting to help Keelin fight some of the Jarl's Vampire henchmen.
6. Amelia, Freya's friend from over a century ago, revealed to Keelin that she too was looking for the men who had kidnapped the witch.
7. Halvar ordered Colborn to find Freya and make sure that the blood-bond had properly taken root within her.
8. Freya freaked out when Hope came to visit her in hospital, confusing Keelin even more as to what happened to her fiance when being held by the bikers.

Ooook, hope you all enjoy :-) 

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 18.

1.

The silence that now filled the small hospital room lay on her skin like a stinging poison, seeping through every small pore and slithering into her blood with its septic chill.

The sound of her siblings bickering earlier that morning had at least managed to serve as a small distraction – despite the topic having tediously been why Marcel’s blood had been successful in healing her when theirs had not. Even Keelin’s habit of humming to herself whilst she worked had been some form of background noise for the witch’s mind to latch onto, as her fiancé had taken her
time in removing the various sterile dressings and bandages that had been covering almost every inch of her body.

Even when the pleasant enough staff nurse had nervously entered into her room to continue detaching the plaster-casts from her arm and leg, the panicky chatter which the professional had quickly launched into – informing Freya of why Storm Gelda, in the nurses opinion, was going to cause both an economic and humanitarian crisis for the city of New Orleans – had at least managed to divert her attention slightly as she had stared blankly out of the oppressive room’s window.

But now, as she stood alone staring at herself in the cracked full-length mirror mounted onto one of the room’s walls, Freya felt like she was fighting a losing battle to stay afloat in the riptide of quiet encompassing her whole with its silent, exposing waters.

*Hope had heard her thoughts – heard the tormenting sound of her screams for mercy as the memory of them continued to ricochet off every nook and cranny that they could find within her mind*

Emerald eyes fell shut as the witch felt a painful pang of guilt stab into her chest.

*She should have remembered that her niece’s power had recently evolved – should have known the danger as soon as Hayley had said that her daughter was with her!*

A tormented sigh escaped from Freya’s mouth as she recalled what it had felt like to have the young witch’s power probing through her head.

She hadn’t realised what was happening at first – hadn’t recognised the strange sensation for what it actually was. She had been too caught up in the vice like grip of fear that had squeezed a hold of her the moment Keelin had declared that she was out for revenge against the Jarl’s.

Fear for her lover’s safety.

Fear of the bottomless abyss of insanity that she knew she would descend into should the Jarl’s ever subject Keelin to their own special brand of torture.

Fear of being made to watch what they would do to the wolf, and not being able to do a damn thing about it.

*Fear of her siblings and Keelin discovering what she had done.*

The dread and anxiety that had been flowing through her mind had been so consuming, that when the unfamiliar tingling sensation had first started to prickle in her head, Freya had ignored it – thinking that it was probably just a side effect of Marcels blood as it continued to heal all of the damaged cells in her body.

It had not been until the presence of Hope’s haphazard power within her mind had caused her own magic to stir and send out tendrils of curiosity to investigate, that the witch had finally realised something - or someone - was observing the thoughts running through her head.

And it had been several heartbeats too late – for by the time she had cottoned on to what was happening, she knew her mind had already given away too much information to the invading power.

*The Jarls….the pain….the disappearance of her magic….her fears for what they would have done to Keelin if she had not submitted….of what “he” still might do to Keelin if she didn’t comply.*
Hope hadn’t intentionally tried to invade her mind - that much had been immediately clear. The magic’s presence in her head had at first been messy and disorganised – chaotic almost, as though her niece’s power had suddenly tripped and stumbled into Freya’s psyche by accident, panicking once it had realised where it was.

But as haphazard as its presence had been, the young witch’s power had been strong – its raw energy swelling into a mighty crescendo when it had begun to feel threatened by Freya as her own power had tried to expel it. In the last few seconds before Hope had turned and run out of the room, Freya had witnessed the young girl’s magic almost take on a life of its own within her mind – refusing to be dislodged by the youngest Mikaelson’s own panicked and undisciplined attempts at recalling it, and growing hungrier for whatever secretes Freya’s psyche held within it.

Relief from its presence had only come once Hope had entirely vanished off the ICU department – the increased distance between witch and niece seemingly becoming too great, causing the foreign power within Freya’s mind to suddenly lose its grip and rip away.

She had tried to school her thoughts as soon as she had realised what was happening – had tried to push all the pain of what had occurred in the Jarl’s catacomb into the farthest depths of her mind, where Hope’s power would hopefully not find it.

But it had been too hard.

The memories were all still too raw.

Too real!

She just prayed that the connection had been broken before Hope had managed to see any specific details. Anything more than just a general feeling of the pain she had been subjected to, and the fear she had felt for Keelin’s safety.

Prayed that the youngster hadn’t had to witness the sadistic malice with which the Jarl’s had enacted their torture.

*That her niece hadn’t discovered what she had done!*

Letting out another heavy sigh, Freya slowly opened her eyes again – her gaze coming into focus on the solemn face staring back at her from the mirror.

The image being presented seemed almost alien in its appearance – out of place.

Smooth, unblemished skin that practically glowed with renewed health filled in the spaces between alert emerald eyes, plump soft lips, and a strong Viking nose that each of the Mikaelson siblings had inherited from their father.

*Hallow lifeless eyes, reflecting nothing but pain and sorrow after any hope of salvation had been snuffed out with each lash of the whip....each twist of a knife....each blow of metal against her body.*

A robust, sturdy heartbeat pulsing against the perfectly shaped crook of a neck, as a figure hugging black vest showed off toned muscles framing long slender arms.

*Mottled blue and black skin swollen over a disfigured shoulder that had been damaged beyond repair, as bones jutted out at unnatural angles from arms chained together at wrists that hung from a hook in the ceiling.*
Black skinny jeans hugging slender hips, as soft denim flowed effortlessly over lean, athletic legs.

White hot pain threatening to steal her sanity as a knife was dragged slowly through the already bruised soft tissue of her thigh – slicing her open over and over again as twisted laughter chipped away at her soul.

As Freya’s eyes wandered over every inch of the woman staring back at her, her mind struggled to reconcile the perfect picture of the health that she was seeing, against the ravaged and ruined remains of the body which her soul now felt it inhabited.

Gone were the sickening lacerations left by Vidar’s medieval, metal tipped whip. Gone were the deep cuts and burns inflicted by Ake and his collection of barbarically sharp knives and pokers. Gone were the broken bones and shattered joints caused by the Jarls dragging and throwing her body around like that of an unloved ragged doll. Gone were the purple welts and internal bruises left by groping hands and sullying advances.

The healthy woman stood reflected in the mirror looked nothing like the broken girl that the witch knew she now was - struggling just to find the will to keep on living, one weary breath after the next.

For Keelin….for Hope….for her siblings…. Freya fought to remind herself, as eyes devoid of emotion fell shut once more, …..she had to carry on, if only to try and make sure that the people she loved could never be touched by the Jarl’s and the Master that they strived to resurrect. She had to try!

A sudden light rapping on the other side of the room’s door quickly dragged the witch out of the bleak depths of her thoughts – startling her a little in the process. Tense green eyes immediately flicked over to the entranceway, just in time to see it begin to slowly creep open – whoever was on the other side obviously trying to be quiet as they made to enter into Freya’s room.

A cold, frosty expression fell across the witch’s face, as she felt icy distaste begin to run through her veins in reaction to her visitor being revealed in their entirety.

“Oh…. hey….y-you’re up?! Huh, I didn’t realise you’d be conscious….I mean, sure of course, why wouldn’t you be awake and healed!? Immortal family and all that….shit….they’re not here are they? No….course not, figure I’d be dead already if they were…..um….is Keelin about….”

Freya watched on, unmoving and unresponsive as the agitated young woman began rubbing the back of her neck as she continued to ramble.

“….I kinda wanted her to take a look at me before I left….oh, I meant….urgh, NOT like that, obviously….ha, cos you know, that’d be signing my own death sentence, right?! I mean….you’d choke me again with just a look right…..ha…..oh god, please don’t kill me….shit, you’re going to kill me aren’t you?!”

Letting out a deep breath, the witch raised an eyebrow in her visitor’s direction - contemplating the suggested violence for a heartbeat, before settling back into a steeled glare.

“Oh god, please don’t….crap…..ok…..I’m totally going to go….can you tell Keelin that I was….”

Freya’s scowl intensified as the visitor mentioned her fiancé’s name once again.

“….fuck…..er…..nothing, it doesn’t matter. I’ll tell her myself….shit….no….what I meant was, I’ll text her…..um, or not. Write, yep that’s what I’ll do….I’ll write her a letter, from the far off city that I am now moving to. Yep….gonna go…. far far away….”
A flash of white on the girl’s wrist caught Freya’s attention as her visitor extended out an arm – intending on pulling the door shut as she attempted to slowly back out of the room. A quick glance down at her own wrist had the witch seeing a similar band of colourless plastic hanging loosely around her healed skin.

“Are you sick?”

The offhand, monotone question had Freya feeling almost as surprised as the young woman stood in her doorway now looked - materialising on her lips before the witch had even realised she was going speak.

“Er…Huh? Oh….this?” the young woman said as she nervously waved her hand in the air emphatically, causing the white band to spin around on her wrist. “No, I’m good….well, I’m fine now….thanks to Ke….um, Keelin…..and a little of the hospitals anti-venom ….well a whole tonne of the stuff actually! Did you know that Snake Venom really messes with my kind’s nervous system?! Totally screws with the ol accelerated healing! Who knew right?! Makes me think that those vampire losers knew that they were going to be facing wolves on the night they attacked you guys. Its….well it’s good to er….to see that you’re ok now. I heard that you were held captive for a while….er….not that anyone was gossiping of course….Joel just mentioned that you were rushed in yesterday, and…..”

“Wait – what was that, about an attack and snake venom?!” Freya interrupted – her voice taking on a confused tone as her mind tried to make sense of a few specific words contained within the girl’s inane rambling.

“Um….on the night that you and K-Keelin were….you know…. j-jumped on by that gang of vampire pricks!” the young woman said in a wavering tone – small beads of sweat beginning to show on her forehead as she continued to slowly back out of the room.

“Alanna, stop!”

Freya’s voice resonated across the room, its stern command having an immediate effect on the retreating wolf, whose eye’s widened with fear as she froze on the spot.

“I have far more pressing things on my mind right now than whether or not you live or die!” the witch continued whilst sighing heavily. “So for the love of god, stop rambling and start making sense! Tell me what you know about the attack on the night that I was taken!”

She watched on with no small amount of irritation, as the tense young wolf seemed to contemplate her words for a few moments before finally drawing in a deep breath and stepping properly into the room. Closing the door behind her, Alanna resumed rubbing the back of her neck with a hand as she attempted to answer Freya.

“Sorry….I just….well the last time we met wasn’t exactly a fun experience for me….pretty sure I still have a bruise or two from that night, even with my wolfy healing….cos man did you do a number on my throat. I couldn’t speak properly for weeks….’”

Hardening her gaze once more, Freya’s head cocked to the side slightly as she interrupted the wolf.

“You were in league with the Hollow and tried to force the woman I love into killing my young niece, after you and your filthy pack had spent weeks manipulating and using her!”

“R-right…..” Alanna stuttered, head cowing low, “…I guess there was that. So you know…. forever grateful you let me live….um….did I say I was sorry, because oh my god you have no idea
“I am not interested in your apologies wolf – were it not for Keelin actively hiding your presence away from me over the past year, I would have killed you long ago. And taken great pleasure in doing so too! You’d be wise to remember that!” the witch glowered, her voice dropping low.

The wolf offered only a simple intimidated nod of acknowledgment in response to Freya’s poorly veiled threat, as the fear in her eyes intensified.

“The night of the attack – tell me what you know. Now!”

“Well…” Alanna said, her voice quick and unsteady as she attempted to meet Freya’s icy stare. “….I only know the details of what happened after I arrived. You were already no-where to be seen, and there were dead vampires everywhere! Keelin had taken out at least six or seven of the douchebags before I’d even got there. You should have seen it, there were bloodied body parts everywhere! I was in awe…. she’s a remarkable foe these days in her animal form…. I mean I already knew her wolf was impressive but…..”

“Alanna!”

“Right, sorry…focus.” Alanna said, flinching in response to Freya’s irritated tone. “So anyways, the remaining vamps had managed to surround her, and she suddenly whelped in pain. So I leapt in and started tearing throats. I mean, I wasn’t trying to steal her thunder or anything…I’m sure she could have handled them just fine without me. But, well you know….a fellow wolf in need and all that. I couldn’t just stand there and let them get away with hurting her. I think….well ok, I know she was pissed that I got involved, but still - between the two of us we managed to finish them off!”

“So where does the snake venom fit into this? And you being in hospital?” the witch asked, her eyes deliberately trained on the floor as she tried not to let an image of Keelin in wolf form being injured and outnumbered by the Jarl’s vampire thugs take root in her mind.

“Oh right, yeah…..that. Well, it turned out one of the vampires that I’d taken care of wasn’t quite done being a prick. He tried to run off, so I gave chase and took him down – man you should have seen it, I leapt on his back from a good ten yards away, it was awesome…..er, anyways, as we went down he pulled a knife from somewhere, and the shithead managed to jam it right into my side before we landed. Didn’t stop me from tearing his throat out like – but Christ, it hurt!”

“So, the knife had snake venom on it?”

“Yeah, it did. Stopped my heart a good few times apparently! Not that I have any recollection of that, one minute Keelin was leaning over me in the street…..I mean….fuck…..not like that…..she was totally being her professional doctor self, obviously! And the next thing I knew I was waking up here, several days later.”

“Is it all snake venom that can affect wolves like that, or just a specific kind?” Freya asked sharply, trying her best to ignore the flush of colour that had quickly crept into Alanna’s cheeks at the mention of Keelin leaning over her.

“Honestly…. I don’t know. I didn’t think that any animal venom could have that kind of effect on our accelerated healing. Packs mostly live out in the sticks after all – we’re surrounded by snakes and venomous creatures all the time. This is the first I’ve heard of it having such an effect. Typical it should happen to me!”

“And the anti-venom the hospital gave you – was it generic? Did it fully heal you?”
“Um, I don’t know. That’s kinda what I was wanting to speak to Keelin about just now….the knife wound has completely gone, and my heart is all good again, but there seems to be a weird small bruise of some kind left behind. I wanted her to have….”

“A bruise?” Freya interjected, cutting the wolf off as her brow furrowed “Show me!”

Alanna hesitated for a moment as her nervous gaze searched Freya’s face, seemingly unsure what the witch’s intentions were, and why she would be interested in a mark on her body.

“Um…. it’s just a little bruise, nothing major. I don’t even know why I thought to bother Keelin with it, so I’ll just…..”

“Show me!” Freya repeated again, letting a good chunk of the contempt she held for the wolf bleed into her tone.

“R-right…..”

Visibly gulping down on her nerves, Alanna gradually closed the distance between them both as she tugged on the bottom of her aqua blue t-shirt. As the wolf turned to the side just in front of her, Freya’s eyes immediately fell upon the area of tanned skin that Alanna had been referring to – her gaze widening almost immediately.

A sharp twist of apprehension quickly lashed down her spine as she slowly raised a hand and gingerly began to rub behind her left ear.

“See, I told you it was only small”, Alanna said, her head facing away from the witch as she continued to hold her top up over her ribs. “Pretty insignificant. It’s just…. well I guess its shape just weirded me out a little. I mean…. I don’t know if you can see what I mean, but I think it kinda looks like a cluster of triangle shapes. Which is a little weird right…. I’ve not come across many bruises that have straight lines before, and…..”

“The Valknut…..”, Freya breathed quietly - more to herself than the wolf, who had once again descended into a rambling mess of nerves.

“Huh?” Alanna asked, twisting back around to face the witch as she lowered her t-shirt back down.

“Alanna, are you positive that it was just snake venom on the blade that you were attacked with? There wasn’t any…. any blood already on the knife before it was used on you?”

“Er, well to be fair I didn’t really see the knife’s blade – just it’s hilt sticking out of my side once I’d killed the fucker who used it on me. Why?”

*It couldn’t be the same….could it?! The circumstances were too different – contrasted too much. But the mark….it wasn’t as clearly formed as her own, but still, the shape of it…..*

“Hey, are…. are you ok?”

Alanna’s voice became distant and fuzzy, as Freya let her eyes fall closed and her mind wander back to last memory she had of the dark, damp catacomb in which she had been held by the Jarl’s.
eliciting yet another scream of agony to rip forth from her mouth.

“Tell me what you want!”

Halvar’s voice grated down every nerve in her broken body, its tenor forcing its dominance over the shattered pieces of her resolve.

“….drink….I w-want to….drink t-the blood”

The words cutting through her mouth were as fragmented and damaged as the witch knew her soul now to be. She had nothing left. Nothing left to hold on to. There was nothing remaining of the person she once was. She was gone. All gone.

Except….except for this. This was all that remained within her to give.

And for Keelin….she would give it. Give it in the hope that it would somehow save the woman she loved from the fate that Freya now knew that she herself was destined for.

Her head fell forward, lolling over her naked chest as all remnants of muscle strength left her body. Darkness began to encroach in, tugging upon her consciousness and flooding her limbs with a cold, bleak numbness.

“Keep her awake! Don’t let her black out again!”

Thick, calloused fingers coated in blood…. her blood…. gripped painfully onto her chin, jerking her head upwards once more and pushing back oblivion by a few centimetres.

“Why wench? Why do you want to drink the blood?!”

Pain….there was so much pain.

“….to….to serve. I….I want t-to serve....”

“And serve you shall! Now take him into your body. Take him into your soul and let his life force flow through your veins!”

Warm, viscous fluid entering into her mouth – seeping into every cut in her gums, saturating every rip of flesh on the inside of her cheeks, and covering every bruise lining the back of her throat, with the thick coppery tang of blood.

“Listen to my words now witch! Listen to the commands that he bestows upon you through me!”

Burning…..a burning sensation beginning to flare up somewhere behind her left ear.

“You will do his bidding – you will go forth and obtain samples of blood from each of your siblings and bring them back to me, here in our lair. A sample from each of the living Mikaelson immortals who still walk this earth, without them ever learning of your treachery, or your objectives.”

The heat intensifying, searing into her skin like a hot poker branding into cattle’s hide.

“You will uphold the secrecy of our location, and never speak of what you learned during your time here. Not with a lover, nor with family, nor with friends, nor with foes. No one is to learn the true nature of our heritage. No one is to learn of our great Masters existence before his resurrection!”

Pain turning into agony as the smell of burning flesh forced its way into her nose.
“You will never bring harm to the Master, or any of his loyal subjects. You will protect his legacy, his body, and those that serve him with your life!”

A loud scream peeled forth from her mouth as seared flesh gave way to scorched muscle – the pain behind her ear clawing and shredding at the remaining sanity within her mind.

“And lastly, you will bring no harm to yourself witch. Your sole purpose in life now is to serve him. To serve me - without question nor resistance. And it is a purpose that you shall ensure you live to fulfil.”

The tall, looming figure of death reached out its clawed hand for her as she hovered on the precipice of oblivion, looking down into the opening maws of the hades.

“Is she still conscious? Balder, check her pulse…..we need to ensure that she heard my commands!”

“Our master’s bond has placed itself on her skin – she must have heard you!”

“We need to be sure!”

“I…..gods be dammed, Halvar, I can’t feel a pulse. Her heart is stopping!”

“Why is she not healing. Why is the blood not working?! ”

Death’s talons wrapped around her whole, shredding skin and bone as it gave one sharp tug on her soul – pulling her down into the black depths of oblivion.

Pulling her down into the fiery pits of hell.**

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2.

“Um….Freya? Are you…..do you need me to get one of the doctor’s?”

Alanna felt a fresh wave of panic flood through her as she stood watching the witch. It had now been at least a minute since Freya’s eyes had fallen shut, and most of the colour now looked to have drained out of her face.

Was the blonde having some form of fit? Shit….should she try moving her over to the bed?!

“I’ll er….I’ll go try and find Keelin!”

“No!”

The wolf felt her heart skip a beat as her whole body jumped in response to Freya’s loud declaration echoing out into the room.

“But y-you…..”

“I’m fine!” the witch affirmed with no shortage of force as her eyes flew open and her gaze came back into sharp focus upon Alanna. “You are to show that mark to no one. Do you understand me, wolf? No one!”

“What? But I….I don’t understand? It’s just a bruise, why….urgh…..”
Alanna’s words faltered as a sharp, piercing pain suddenly began to flare up within the confines of her skull. Hands flew up to her temples as the wolf’s whole frame began to bend over as a result of the pressure now being forced down upon her head.

“Arggh…..p…please….stop!”

“I could end you right here wolf! SHOULD end you for everything that you put my family through last year!”

The witch’s words barely made it through the suffocating blanket of pain that was now tightly wrapped around her whole head, constricting all of the blood vessels within her brain to breaking point. Alanna tried to raise her watering eyes up to meet those of her assailants, as another groan of discomfort forced its way out of her mouth.

“But for some reason that I can still not fathom”, Freya continued through gritted teeth, “Keelin appears to have developed a sorely misplaced soft spot for you…. and me killing you would probably only serve to bring pain to her heart.”

The wolf finally managed to lift her posture high enough to catch a glimpse of the witch’s face – immediately wishing that she hadn’t. Emerald eyes burning fierce with anger and disdain bored down into her own, and Alanna could see nothing but pain and torment emitting from the soul that lay behind them.

What had the kidnappers done to the witch?!

“So heed these words well wolf! You will keep that mark on your flesh hidden and show it to no one. And if I hear that you have gone against my warning, I can promise you this….no amount of pleading from Keelin will stop me from flaying the skin from your body, strip by strip! Do you understand me?!”

“Arrgh…..y-yes!” Alanna screamed out, as the pain within her head seemed to somehow intensify even further. “I swear….I’ll s-show no one! Please….stop!”

As though in answer to her cried plea, the crushing pain within the wolf’s head suddenly disappeared, leaving nothing but the memory of its presence rattling in her skull.

Heaving in deep breaths, Alanna attempted to straighten her posture once more.

“Jeeez, there was no need for that! You could have just asked calmly like a normal person would! But er, thanks for sto…..”

The words died in her mouth as she saw the expression of undiluted fear that had suddenly begun to take root on the Mikaelson witch’s features. Wide, frightful eyes stared out from Freya’s pale face - the witch’s head beginning to gently shake from side to side as she stared at trembling hands raised in front of her.

“I…. I didn’t stop. My power…. its…. oh god….”

“Will you look at what we have here!” a gruff male voice suddenly sounded out from behind where Alanna was stood. “You sure do seem to have a fetish for wolves, wench!”

Spinning around, Alanna’s mouth fell ajar as her eyes landed on the sight of a leather wearing, over-weight, bearded man jumping down into the hospital room from the far window, which looked to have been pushed wide open. Landing with a thud that caused the floor under Alanna’s feet to momentarily shake, the overbearing male patted down his jacket as he fixed a learing stare
onto the witch standing just behind her.

“Well it certainly looks like the healing properties of the bond finally worked their magic upon
your body! And by the god’s, what a body it is!”

A sickening, open mouthed sneer spread across the man’s lips, revealing a maw full of yellowing,
rotting teeth that made Alanna feel like she wanted to deposit her mornings breakfast onto the floor
right in front of her.

*Who the hell was this jerk – and how in the world had he manged to scale three floors of the
hospital building to come in through the window?!!*

The bearded male’s attention suddenly flicked over to the wolf, his black beady eyes narrowing as
he passed a lewd glance over her entire form – one that made her skin crawl and bile rise in her
throat.

“This does not concern you girl”, the intruder smirked as his gaze lingered uncomfortably on her
chest. “Leave now, and I will let you keep your life and your dignity!”

Whipping her head around quickly, Alanna made to look at Freya for any sign or confirmation that
the witch wanted her to leave – only to find that the blonde had taken a few steps back from where
she had previously been, and was now stood with her back pressed up against the rooms far wall.

It only took a heartbeat for the wolf to see how petrified the newcomer’s presence was making
Freya. Terror was written all over the witch’s posture – as though someone had poured gasoline on
a spark of fear within the blonde, causing it to ignite and spread like wildfire over her entire body.
The witch’s scent had changed too, fright and panic churning together in the sweat that was
beginning to line Freya’s forehead – reminding Alanna of the scent makers given off by the small
animals she would often prey upon and hunt when under the influence of a full moon.

*A trapped rabbit, caught in a snare with no where to run as a large, hungry predator prowled
towards it. That’s what Freya’s posture snow screamed of!* the wolf thought to herself as she began
to turn back towards the intruder. *This must be one of the bikers who had held the blonde captive.
One of the men that was responsible for all of the horrific injuries that Joel had told her the witch
had been rushed into the Emergency Clinic with!*

Locking eyes with the overbearing male, Alanna rallied her inner wolf as she bent her legs into an
attack ready stance and let a deep rumbling growl escape up through her throat.

“Sorry mister, but I think I’ll stay right here!” she snarled, flashing the man a glimpse of her
animal eyes. “You see, me and blondie here might not see eye to eye on most things, but I think it’s
safe to say that when it comes to vile filth like yourself, we’ll be in complete agreeance. You don’t
deserve to live!”

Arrogant amusement flashed across the leather wearing brute’s face, as he casually hulked over to
the hospital room’s door, and engaged the lock found just below its handle.

“Oooh, little wolf. I was hoping that you’d have some bite within you!” the biker laughed
maliciously, turning back around to face Alanna. “What are you….twenty….twenty two at the
most? Mmmmm, and probably perfectly ripe and ready for the taking under all of those clothes! I
think I can take a few minutes out of my mission to teach you some respect for your elders!”

Anger began to rise up within her in reaction to the man’s words, as the seedy tone with which he
had spoken made the wolf’s skin crawl with disgust.
“Hell, just ask your witch friend over there”, he continued, flashing a cruel smirk towards where Freya continued to cower against the wall. “She can tell you just how good it feels to be schooled by the mighty Colborn!”

“Gee, tempting as that offer sounds, douchebag”, Alanna began, as she felt sharp canine teeth begin to pierce through the upper gums in her mouth. “I think I’ll go with ripping your throat out instead. Sounds much more satisfying than I imagine a prick like you could ever be!”

Not waiting for a response, the wolf let out a deep, throaty snarl as she tensed the muscles in her legs and leapt towards the overweight biker - eyes blazing yellow and an open mouth full of deadly canine’s ready to clamp down into the first bit of flesh they touched.

“Alanna, NO!”

Freya’s cry of alarm fell onto deaf ears as the world suddenly appeared to bleed into slow motion for the wolf. As she angled her head to the side so as to reach the pulse point on the biker’s neck, a small part of her mind registered a subtle change in the man’s appearance. The oppressive black contained within his eye’s began to swirl with threads of crimson veins that pulsed and throbbd to the beat of a macabre battle cry. Opening wide into a roar of rage, his mouth appeared to stretch far beyond the normal confines of what the human anatomy should allow – revealing a thick, mucus covered tongue with black threads running through it.

Fear and apprehension quickly ghosted through the wolf’s mind. But it was too late.

A large, thick hand clamped down onto her neck before her teeth managed to make contact with the brute’s neck. Crushing pain compressed down over her throat, as the biker abruptly jerked her face towards his own and dragged his tongue up the side of her face.

“Foolish girl”, he snarled into her ear, voice impossibly low and overflowing with gravel. “You could have lived to serve. But now - now you shall die!”

Pain flared through her neck as the biker tightened his grip and pulled his arm back. A split second later she found herself flying through the air, the room rushing by in a blur of motion, before the curve of her lower back slammed ruthlessly into the porcelain sink situated in the far corner.

A sickening crack ricocheted out a second before her whole body slumped down onto the floor, coming to rest on her side.

Oh…..god……

Instantly she knew. Even before the white-hot pain and sickening nausea had time to register in the wolf’s mind – she knew. The impact had shattered her spine.

From where she now lay, crumpled and unable to move, Alanna could see through pain filled eyes that the biker’s attention had moved from her, and refocused onto the frightened witch across the hospital bed. With more speed than his bulking frame should have allowed, the man closed the distance between himself and Freya in less than a second – a hand burying itself into the fabric of her vest top as he dragged the witch onto the bed and threw her down onto its mattress.

“L-leave her….the fuck….alone!” Alanna managed to sputter through clenched teeth, as the agony that was now ripping through her whole body threatened to consume her completely.

The biker didn’t even bother to turn in her direction, as she watched him clamp an aggressive hand around Freya’s chin and yank her head up – forcing the witch to meet his eyes as he lent over the bed towards her.
“Much as I’d love to go another round with you witch, my visit here today has a far less fulfilling purpose. Tell me…do you remember your objectives? Do you know your purpose?!”

Alanna saw Freya’s eyes scrunch shut as the witch’s whole body seemed to shake in fear under the weight of her attacker’s presence.

“Y...Yes!”

The bikers gaze appeared to search Freya’s face for a moment, before he forcefully shoved her backwards - causing the back of her skull to bang into the metal frame of the bed’s headboard.

Reaching down to his left hip, the man pulled a long viciously sharp looking hunting knife out of one of the many sheaths fixed onto the belt wrapped around his hefty waist. Light glistened brightly off the smooth metal of the blade as he held it up in front of the witch’s face and turned menacingly it from side to side.

“Heart of stone, you. Let us see if you speak the truth, wench!” the biker sneered, as he placed the tip of the blade onto Freya’s cheek and lightly ran it across her skin – eliciting a whimper of terror from the eldest Mikaelson.

Alanna tried to move her arms – tried with everything that she had in her to get her hands under her body and push herself up off the floor so that she could try and help the witch.

But there was nothing.

Her mind was willing the action, but her body wasn’t listening.

Fuck…. her spinal cord must have been severed! Fuck!

Flipping the knife over in his hand, the biker appeared to suddenly offer the long bone hilt of the weapon to Freya.

“Take it. Take it and exact your revenge witch!” he snarled, his face mere millimetres away from Freya’s. “Take it and plunge it deep into my throat!”

When it became apparent that the witch was not going to grab the knife on her own accord, the man roughly grabbed onto one of her wrists and shoved the blade’s hilt into Freya’s splayed hand. Pulling back, he then threw his arms up into the air in an inviting gesture.

“Go on, split me open from chin to navel – take your revenge witch!”

“D...do it!” Alanna tried to shout over to Freya, despite the weak disposition of her voice. “What are y-you waiting for…..f-fucking kill him!”

Pain ravaged through her once more, as the wolf watched in hope as a slither of determination appeared to sweep across Freya’s face. The witch’s long slim fingers curled tightly around the blade that had been hanging loosely in her hand, a heartbeat before her whole body suddenly lunged forward towards the hulking biker stood with his chest exposed.

“Y-yes…..”

The word quickly died on her lips as Alanna realised the knife had come to an abrupt stop less than a centimetre away from sinking into the intruder’s flesh. Its tip began to shake as it hovered over the crumpled black t-shirt covering the bikers protruding gut, as a small cry of frustration peeled forth from Freya’s lips.
Cruel laughter began to fill the hospital room.

“Is that it. Is that all you have?!” the intruder hollered, his rough voice brimming with malice.

What was stopping the witch? A few inches more and the grotesque fucker would be choking on his own blood! God dammit Freya, do it!!

“Want to know what that is, witch?!” the biker laughed, leaning forward so that his belly pressed up harmlessly against the blade. “That’s your free-will shattered and gone! That’s your life belonging to us now!”

Alanna closed her eyes and tried to focus on the wolf spirit living within her. She knew that her accelerated healing ability would already be working upon the shattered bone and torn nerves within her spine. Knew that it would only be a matter of time before she would start to regain the ability to move her arms and legs.

But it wasn’t happening fast enough! She needed her mobility back now!

“Mmmm, she’s been here hasn’t she – your wolf lover!” the brute continued - a cruel smile stretching his lips wide. “I can smell her essence all over this room. We could make you kill her you know. Command you to thrust that knife deep into her beating heart and twist it around, over and over again whilst you watched on helplessly as the life slowly drained out of her. Would you like that witch? Would you like to witness the true power of the blood-bond?!”

Something changed in Freya’s eyes.

As she continued to beg her inner wolf to work harder - to heal faster - Alanna clearly saw the emotion within the blonde’s gaze shift from that of pure terror, into barren, lifeless desolation.

In a one fluid smooth motion, the eldest Mikaelson swivelled the knife in her hand around so that its sharp tip pointed cruelly towards her own heart, and quickly pulled her arms inwards towards her chest.

“NO!”

As the shocked cry of horror escaped from Alanna’s mouth, the hulking biker broke out into a loud fit of laughter – his voice booming cross the whole room.

Blinking rapidly, the wolf could see that the knife’s tip now hovered over Freya’s vest covered breasts, the blade quivering violently as the hands gripping onto its hilt shook with determination and force that appeared to be being restrained by some invisible force.

What the hell…..

“Did you honestly think we that we would let you kill yourself witch?!” Alanna heard the intruder sneer, as his cruel laughter continued to fill the room. Hitching up one knee onto the bed, the biker lent his whole frame into Freya’s personal space as he removed the hunting knife from her hands and pushed his face in front of hers. “Where would be the fun in that!”

Alanna felt her anger and frustration reach a whole new level of intensity as she watched the leather clad man thrust one of his hands into the witch’s hair and roughly pull Freya mouth against his own.

It was true – there was no love lost between her and the Mikaelson witch, and Alanna knew that her own life always hung in the balance by a tiny thread any time she was unfortunate enough to be
in Freya’s company.

But seeing the way in which the obnoxious and sadistic brute was terrorising the witch – seeing how helpless and vulnerable Freya appeared to be under the weight of the man’s sordid advances upon her – made the wolf’s blood boil in a way that she had never quite experienced before.

Enemies or not – the wolf wanted to help her.

Wanted to….

But couldn’t!

Thanks to the frustratingly slow healing of her severed spine, all that Alanna could do was lie there helplessly and watch on as the biker forced his tongue into Freya’s mouth and pawed at the witch’s chest with his free hand.

Keelin was not having a good day!

As she turned off the hospital’s long west-wing corridor and pushed open the double doors leading onto the ICU department’s main ward, the wolf began to feel the full weight of her exhaustion draining the energy out of every single muscle in her body.

It had been just over an hour since she had left the intensive care unit in pursuit of Hayley and Hope, but as the wolf nodded a brief greeting towards the two staff members sat chatting in the confines of the ward’s nurse’s station, it felt to her body like a whole day’s worth of strenuous activity had somehow passed since she had rushed from Freya’s room in a flurry of confusion and worry.

Four times she had had to empty the contents of her stomach into a toilet.

Four times - in four separate rest rooms situated in four different departments of the hospital, as she had tried to make her way back up to the ICU department.

As she had been bent over the last lavatory, heaving up pure acidic bile due to nothing being left in her belly to eject, the wolf had prayed that she wasn’t coming down with some form of stomach flu - or the dreaded norovirus that had recently been doing the rounds amongst both the staff and patients in St Theadora’s.

She did not have time to be sick!

Not when so much needed to be done.

Not when so much was wrong.

*Not when the bastards that had hurt the woman she loved were out there somewhere – still alive and breathing.*

Confusion still ate away at the wolf’s mind with regards to how Freya had reacted earlier in the
day – both to Keelin expressing a desire to exact revenge on the bikers who had held the witch captive, and to her fiancé’s wildly out of character response to seeing Hope.

Hayley had been right of course – none of them could expect Freya to be acting normal after everything the witch had endured over the past seven days. Powerful immortal blood might have healed away all of her lover’s physical wounds, but it would not be able to mend any of the scars that were no doubt now littered all over the witch’s soul.

Only time would have any hope of being able to do that.

Time…and a whole lot of love and patience.

She just hoped that Freya would allow her to be there for her through it all. That the witch didn’t try and push her away completely.

It was something that Keelin knew was a common theme amongst the survivors of prolonged violent attacks. The instinct to withdraw and pull away emotionally from both family and loved ones.

As a doctor who had treated many a victim of physical and sexual abuse, she had seen it happen all too often as her patient’s had returned for their aftercare visits to the hospital.

Family members would stop accompanying their relative to the clinic, but not because they no longer cared, or had suddenly lost interest in the well being of the victim. No - it was usually because the patient themselves had stopped telling their loved ones about their appointments, or had specifically expressed a wish to be left alone as they struggled to cope with the aftermath of the ordeal they had been subjected to.

She had been on numerous courses and seminars about this very subject – every medical student who wished to work within an Emergency Room environment had to, as part of their training. She had taken the exams, and studied the case notes. She knew all of the literature, and had experience of dealing with far too many victims of violent attacks thanks to her time spent working in the clinic.

Yet despite all of that knowledge and all of her skill, Keelin had never felt so lost and out of her depth than she did right then - slowly walking towards the closed door of her fiancé’s side room.

What if Freya’s reactions weren’t just those that were expected of a torture survivor? What if something else was having an effect on her fiancé’s state of mind?

The wolf hadn’t been able to shake the feeling that something else was amiss with the witch.

Not that she had been able to put her finger on exactly what that feeling was, or why it had been eating away at her ever since Freya had tried to claim that the abuse she had endured at the hands of her kidnappers was “not a big deal.”

But nethertheless, Keelin just knew that something felt wrong!

She would be there for her lover. Of-course she would! She would be anything that Freya needed her to be - for however long it would take to see a genuine smile break across the witch’s face once again. But still - she needed to know! She needed to know what was.....

Keelin’s thoughts trailed off as her nose suddenly picked up on an extremely strong scent of fear coming from Freya’s room. Fear and…. Alanna’s fragrance.... and....
Motor oil. That was motor oil!

All traces of fatigue quickly disappeared from her body, as the wolf launched herself towards the closed door - clearing the last few meters in a blur of speed before trying to push down upon a handle which refused to move.

As an unfamiliar male scent began to join the others saturating her nostrils, Keelin stretched her inner Kyanite barrier thin as she pushed some of her wolf’s enhanced strength into her muscles, and threw her shoulder at the locked door – instantly snapping the hinges that had been holding it in place, and sending the wooden barrier clattering loudly across the small room’s floor.

The scene with which she was met resulted in a sharp intake of breath - as shock momentarily paralysed her limbs and rooted her to the spot.

Form the corner of her eye, Keelin quickly registered the crumpled form of Alanna splayed awkwardly across the green tiled floor – the wolf’s back looking to be bent at an unnatural angle as her bloodshot eyes glared towards the bed in the centre of the room.

But it was what lay in her direct line of vision that made all sense and reason quickly leave the wolf’s mind, as pure rage began to pillage its way through her entire body.

Lent across the bed was the large hulking frame of one of the three bearded bikers she had seen on the night that Freya had been abducted. The brute’s right hand was roughly gripped around her fiancé’s neck, whilst his left had snaked under the witch’s top and looked to be pressing over her breast. The biker’s face was pushed so close to her lover’s own, that the only part of Freya’s expression that Keelin could see was the corner of her right eye as tears streamed out from under its tightly shut lid.

The massive male swiftly twisted his frame towards the room’s entranceway, his black malevolent eyes locking onto Keelin as the wolf’s brain continued to try and work past the shock and fury that were waging a war inside of her.

“Well, will you look who it is!” the biker sneered towards Keelin, as a vicious smirk contorted his face. “Tell me wolf – did you get my message?!”

Keelin’s world instantly came into sharp pin-point focus, as the bearded man’s hateful words were the last thing to register in her human mind.

Him! It was him….

The Kyanite barrier within her cleaved apart in an instant - bones beginning to snap and re-form at an exponential speed as the raging wolf spirit within Keelin completely took control.

By the time the biker had pushed himself up off the hospital bed and turned to face the doorway head-on, he was met by the sight of a fully transformed and snarling wolf, who’s gums were pulled back to reveal row after row of cut-throat teeth.

A deep loud growl vibrated across the room, as the large creature tensed the muscles in its hind legs and prepared to leap towards its mate’s attacker.

“As much as I’d love to tangle with you wolf – I’m afraid my time here is up!” the biker remarked, his voice deep and gravely as he slowly began to make his way over towards the large open window. “But don’t worry mutt – our time will come!”

Spittle flew from the wolf’s jaw as it leapt forward, clearing the distance between itself and the
bearded man in less than a heartbeat. Managing to sense the subtle shifts in the biker’s muscles just before it made contact, the raging animal twisted its body at the last moment, narrowly avoiding the mans outstretched hand that had been intended for its neck, as it’s powerful jaws clamped down.

The wolf’s sharp canines effortlessly tore through leather and cotton as they sink into the fatty flesh of the biker’s torso.

A loud, deep cry of pain boomed out into the room, as the overweight male gripped both of his large hands into the wolf’s thick pelt and threw all of his strength into flinging the animal across the room – teeth and a large chunk of flesh tearing away from his body as he stumbled backwards towards the window.

The wolf violently collided with the wall directly across from the window – a high pitched whine escaping from its throat as it slid down onto the ground in a flurry of fur and paws. Instantly, it tried to re-find purchase on the floor - attempting to push itself up only to falter and waver when one of its front legs immediately gave way from beneath – the bone bending at a nauseating angle just below the knee joint.

Hoarse laughter quickly filled the room, coming from the biker who was now hovering half in and half out of the widow – one hand braced against the frame as he gripped onto the large, bleeding wound on his side with the other.

“You certainly have fight in you wolf!” he sneered, watching the seething animal once again try to push itself up off the ground. “I shall look forward to the next time we meet!”

As his words echoed across the room, the biker threw once last look towards Freya - who was once more huddled into the far corner of the room, having pushed herself off the bed during the brief confrontation.

“Don’t forget witch, the clock is ticking! Tick tock….tick tock!”

Another growl tore out of the wolf’s throat, as it successfully managed to balance its weight on its three good legs and tensed its muscles in readiness to leap towards the window.

Bounding forward, the beast managed to land clumsily on top of the dishevelled bed just as the bearded biker pushed off from the edge of the window, and dropped down towards the street below.

Shaking its head quickly from side to side as though trying to shake off the pain of its injured leg, the wolf crouched once more in readiness to follow the man out of the window - when the trembling sound of a familiar voice sliced through the ire thundering through its mind.

“No…no…no…”

Turning its head towards the source of the words, the wolf’s ferocious snarl began to fade as it registered the sight of its mate curled in on herself on the floor - the witch cowering in the corner of the room and muttering incoherently in a barely audible voice.

The echo of bones snapping and shifting lasted all of a few heartbeats, before Keelin was pushing herself off of the hospital bed and scooting across the floor towards where Freya sat trembling.

Gingerly holding one broken arm close to her body, the brunette reached out to her fiancé with the other and quickly pulled her into a fierce embrace – enveloping her whole before the witch had time to flinch away.
“I got you baby…..I got you!” Keelin began to croon, voice horse and unsteady as her human mind attempted to ground itself back in her body.

To Keelin’s surprise, the witch made no attempt to dislodge herself from the full on contact – but continued to chant the word “no” over and over again in a faint weak voice, as tears streamed down her face.

“Shhhhh….I got you baby. It’s ok….it’s over!”

A rustling noise to her left had the wolf glancing over to the room’s sink just in time to see Alanna slowly pushing herself up off the floor. The younger wolf began to stagger over to the open window as soon as she found her balance on her feet.

“Alanna don’t!” Keelin called out, being careful not to raise her voice too loud in case it caused further distress to the shaking witch in her arms.

“But I can give chase!” the wolf quickly replied without looking back – continuing to hobble in obvious pain towards the room’s opening into the stormy world outside. “I’ll follow the creep’s scent to whichever stone he attempts to crawl back under and…..”

“I said don’t!” Keelin commanded, her eyes flashing amber towards her friend. “If he gets wind that you’re on his trail he will kill you without a second thought! You’re not fully healed yet, and as much as it pains me to admit it, the bastard is too strong – we need to be smart and re-group!”

She could clearly see the war of indecision that raged in her younger friend’s eyes, as Alanna looked back and forth between the open window and where Keelin lay on the floor with her traumatized fiancé. But in the end it was common sense that appeared to win out in the younger wolf’s mind, as Alanna let out a huff of resignation and slowly turned away from the room’s opening.

“Grab my phone out of my scrubs”, Keelin said in a curt manner, as she continued to hold on to the trembling witch with her good arm. “I need you to make a call for me!”

Alanna quickly located the torn remains of Keelin’s scrubs floor near the remains of the barged door, and picked up the black smartphone that had fallen out of a ripped pocket. Wincing in pain, the wolf began to shuffle over to her friend – quickly grabbing a thick orange hospital-issue blanket off the bed as she went.

“Who do you want me to call?” Alanna asked, as she reached the couple and gently draped the blanket that she had acquired around both the naked wolf and the trembling witch.

As Keelin attempted to adjust the draped cover, Freya let out a small whimper of distress – causing the wolf to pull the blonde even closer against her body as she softly kissed her forehead.

“It’s ok…. I’ve got you baby….. he’s gone. We’re going to get you out of here, ok!” the wolf whispered to her fiancé, as her own eyes began to fill with tears of anger and frustration.

*God dammit she had him, right there! He had been right there….and she had let the bastard get away!*

Alanna activated the phone in her hand and looked over to Keelin expectantly for the passcode to unlock its screen.

“2628”, Keelin said, not taking her eyes off Freya. “Call Rebekah, and tell her to get over here now!”
“Um….as in M-Mikaelson? H-here….now?” Alanna stuttered uncertainly, her eyes widening at the older wolf.

Keelin simply shot an exasperated look towards her friend, before returning her full attention to the woman shaking in her arms. As she heard the dialling tone of Rebekah’s cell phone chiming out from the device in Alanna’s hands, the wolf tried her best not to think what would have happened in the small hospital room had she not have arrived when she did.

“Hello…um is that Rebekah?” Alanna’s said nervously, as Keelin’s acute hearing picked up on Rebekah’s voice appearing on the other end of the line. “Oh hey….um no, its not Keelin…..no, she’s right here, just a little occupied at the moment! She wanted me to ask if you could get over to the hospital like, straight away. It’s an Emergency…..huh?.....oh, its um.....its Alanna….”

Keelin did not need supernatural senses to hear the audible gulp that her younger friend engaged, as Rebekah’s voice dropped dangerously low on the other end of the line.

“Erm….y-yeah….that Alanna!”

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Chapter End Notes

Ooooh, you have no idea how much I wanted to have Keelin kill Colborn in that last Scene. Like REALLY wanted it. But sadly, it was not to be, as his presence is required in later scenes. Still.....grrrr!
**PREVIOUSLY ON WHAT LIES WITHIN......***

1. Freya & Keelin got engaged, on the night of the Harvest Moon.
2. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan.
3. After a week of torture, Freya's will broke and she willingly gave herself over to be controlled by the Blood-Bond.
4. Colborn tracked Freya to St Theodora's hospital and paid her a visit, to find out if the blood-bond had fully taken hold.
5. Both Alanna and Keelin confronted Colborn as he terrorised Freya in the hospital - each sustaining injury before the Jarl managed to escape.
6. Rebekah discovered that Alanna still resided in New Orleans, despite the wolf being instrumental in a plot to end Hope's life a year ago.

Here's Chapter 19 for the taking.

Chapter 19.

1.

“Well, if it isn’t my deviously dishonest, future sister-in-law!”

Rebekah’s immaculate accent effortlessly filled the communal corridor outside of Keelin and Freya’s apartment, as she smiled in greeting to the tired looking wolf standing in the home’s open doorway.

“Urgh…. You are never going to let that drop, are you!” Keelin groaned, shaking her head as she stepped aside and gestured for the blonde vampire to enter.

“Let what drop?!” Rebekah asked in a mock innocent tone, as she walked past the wolf into the open plan flat. “The fact that you spent a whole year concealing the whereabouts of the traitorous filth who helped the Hallow try to kill my niece? Or, were you instead referring to the small matter of the preposterous friendship that you appear to have forged with that same bitch!”

“Hey!” Keelin softly admonished over her shoulder, as she closed the apartment door. “There’s no need for the bitch comment!”

Quickly flashing a rebellious look towards the wolf, Rebekah graciously sauntered over to the apartment’s large kitchen and began to look over the sizable collection of wine bottles that Freya and Keelin kept in a free-standing wine-rack next to their “Smeg” fridge.

Constructed from a mixture of oak and iron, the industrial style structure could have easily been mistaken for being the focal point of the whole food preparation area, despite the large modern range cooker and porcelain Belfast sink that had been installed nearby.
“Hmmm,” the vampire hummed as she elegantly plucked a bottle of vintage red from the middle of the rack. “I think that you should be thankful that I am simply calling her names - instead of slowly ripping the spine from her body. Don’t you, love?!”

A loud sigh escaped from Keelin’s lips as the wolf casually nudged past Rebekah and rose up onto her tiptoes to reach for the wine glasses on one of many high-placed, exposed-wood shelves that lined the back wall of the kitchen.

“Haven’t we already been over this Rebekah”, Keelin said calmly – placing two glasses down onto the large counter in front of the Original who was already in the process of removing the cork from the bottle of wine in her hand. “Yes, I shouldn’t have lied about Alanna’s whereabouts. And yes, I regret not having been more open with Freya and yourself about trying to help her get back on her feet! But I’m not sorry for aiding her – and there is nothing that any of you can say that will change that fact!”

Rebekah raised her brows at the wolf, as she began to pour wine into the glass closest to her.

“As I told you at the hospital”, Keelin continued, watching the full-bodied liquid roil and swirl as it filled the clear receptacle, “Alanna’s not the evil tyrant that you all believe her to be! She was being blackmailed and manipulated by both the Hollow, and her pack’s Alpha! The kid was just desperate, and trying to save the lives of her family!”

“Or so she would have you believe!” Rebekah quipped, sliding the now full glass of wine across the counter to Keelin. “It is all rather bloody convenient though, don’t you think – that there is no one left alive who could possibly contradict the mutt’s side of the tale!?”

Seeing the sharp, reproachful look that the wolf was now throwing her way, Rebekah quickly raised one hand in supplication, as she proceeded to use her other to pour wine into the second glass.

“Sorry love, I did not mean to be disrespectful to your kind.”

Keelin’s gaze quickly softened as she shook her head in dismissal.

“It’s ok ….it has just been a long few days! I guess I’m little more sensitive than usual.”

A frown slowly began to crease the blonde vampire’s brow as she slowly raised her glass of wine to her lips, and took a moment to properly study the woman in front of her.

Dark circles shadowed the wolf’s chestnut eyes, which currently looked as though they held the weight of the whole world within them. Mocha skin that usually exuded smooth silky radiance no matter what type of light kissed it, now appeared both sallow and ashen – as though Keelin had just been watching a particularly frightening horror movie and blanched pale when the tale’s killer had ended the life of a red-shirted extra in a particularly gruesome manner.

As she stood using an elbow to lean heavily upon the kitchen’s counter top, the wolf’s whole appearance screamed of someone who had not gotten a good night’s sleep in far too long a time. Someone who was close to reaching a burn out – both physically and mentally.

“Keelin, I don’t mean to sound rude – but you look like shit, love!” Rebekah said bluntly, as she watched the wolf take a large gulp of wine. “I know that we are all concerned about my darling sister right now – but are you making sure to take some time for yourself too?!”

“Hmm?” Keelin muttered, as though being roused out of a dazed and confused state. “Oh…. I’m
fine Rebekah. Don’t worry about me! I’ve just not been getting much sleep over the past few nights, that’s all.”

“Freya’s nightmares?” Rebekah asked, understanding in her tone.

It was no secret amongst the Mikaelson family that since Freya had returned home from the hospital four days ago, the witch had been suffering from particularly violent night terrors. Not only had Keelin mentioned them to both Rebekah and Hayley in conversation, but each of the Original siblings had actually heard their sister’s screams bellowing out into the night, as they had taken their turn in standing watch over the 4th floor apartment.

Screams that had nearly resulted in Rebekah kicking down the home's front door, after she had sped up the complex's stairwell in a flurry of concern and worry on the very first night of Freya being back in her own bed. It had only been thanks to her supernatural hearing picking up on Keelin’s soothing words of comfort that she had not burst into the apartment with her fangs extended and eyes blazing red – ready to mercilessly rip the heart from anyone who had the audacity to further torment her sister.

Keelin nodded her head in confirmation, as she gently rubbed at her temple with one hand.

“They seem to be getting worse”, the wolf admitted, her voice lowering to almost a whisper as she met the Originals gaze. “At first the nightmares were just causing her to wake up screaming, covered in a cold sweat. But they are now beginning to invoke her magic too. This morning I had to throw out three picture frames and replace all the light bulbs in the room, thanks to her power lashing out in the night. I.…”

Rebekah lent forward and gave one of Keelin’s hands a quick squeeze of comfort as the stressed wolf’s words seemed to falter.

“….I’m worried about her Rebekah”, Keelin finally continued, after appearing to take a moment to try and control her emotions. “Everything that’s happened is obviously running riot in her head, but she refuses to talk to me - or open up about any of it. And anytime I try to offer some form of comfort, or suggest doing something to try and take her mind off it all, she just pushes me away - claiming that she wants to be left alone. It’s like she’s completely shutting down, and refusing to let anyone, or anything in.”

The blonde vampire nodded her head in accord - squeezing the wolf’s hand once more as she sympathetically acknowledged Keelin’s growing concerns.

It had not escaped any of the Mikaelson family’s notice just how much Freya had been struggling with what she had endured at the hands of the mysterious bikers. Nor had it gone unnoticed how determined the witch had appeared to have become over the past few days to try and completely shut out anyone who loved and cared for her.

And Rebekah had to admit, it was leaving her with conflicting emotions.

Blind fury and rage had been her first “go-to” reaction when she and her brothers had first arrived at the hospital, after receiving Keelin’s emergency message.

Rebekah had been at the engaged couple’s apartment when the call had come through to her cell. Using the spare key that Keelin and Freya had given her not too long after they had moved in together, she had popped round to make a quick security sweep of the home in preparation for when her sister was to return there later that evening.
Rebekah herself had thought the checks to be a bit of an overkill move, considering that her sister was one of the most powerful witches the world had ever seen, and that the other occupant of the flat was a werewolf that had been freed from the limitations of the moon’s cycle.

One, whom Hayley had recently informed her, had been spending time training with the hybrid so as to hone her ability to rapidly transform and fight.

But Klaus had been insistent on the matter, claiming that should his siblings and Keelin be foolishly intent on Freya returning to the apartment after leaving the hospital - instead of the more protected and logical choice of the Mikaelson Compound – then they would damn well make sure that the complex had no security flaws which could be flaunted by any would be leather jacket wearing attacker.

It had not taken long for the blonde vampire to rally her brothers after ending the confusing call with the Neivera traitor, Alanna, and leaving the 4th floor apartment. Within ten minutes of hanging up on the rambling wolf, Rebekah, Klaus and Elijah had sped through St Theodora’s ICU department and into Freya’s door-less room, ready to rip apart anyone or anything that had looked to be out of place.

Instead of enemies however, they had been met with the sight of Keelin cradling a broken arm as she had been attempting to pull a blue scrubs-top over her head, whilst Freya had been sat in the large visitor’s chair in the corner of the room – curled in on herself and rocking gently.

Alanna had been nowhere to be seen, however Rebekah had picked up on the girl’s distinct scent the second she had entered the room – indicating that it had not been long since the rogue wolf had vacated the area.

Keelin had quickly launched into explaining to the three immortals what had happened just before they had arrived – barely managing to finish her words before Klaus had slammed the Malraux wolf up against one of the room’s walls and demanded to know why she had let Freya’s attacker escape with his life.

It had been left to the ever pragmatic Elijah to try and calm their hybrid brother down, thanks to Rebekah momentarily being overcome by her own crazed rage as she reacted to the news that one of her sister’s tormentors had tried to further harass her.

The blonde’s first instinct had been to rush from the hospital to try and pick up on the motorcycle-riding bastard’s trail. Keelin had described how, in her wolf form, she had ripped a large chunk of the man’s flesh from his side before he had managed to flee out of the room’s window. And that meant he had to have been bleeding as he fled back to wherever his grotty little hideout was located.

But a quick glance out of the room’s window had reminded Rebekah just how heavy the rainfall remained under the influence of Storm Gelda, and she had known that all traces of the biker’s blood would have unfortunately been swept away within seconds of it splattering onto the ground.

Her second instinct had been to demand that Freya provide every single detail of what had happened – every last element of the incident that she could remember, and every intricate feature about the biker who had attacked her. Exactly what he had looked like, what he had said, what threats he had made, what his strengths and weaknesses were, and most importantly, why he had risked the exposure of coming to the hospital to plague the witch once more.

A closer inspection of her sister had however quickly extinguished that line of thought. The witch had looked even more broken than she had when Rebekah had first seen her fresh out of the
operating theatre the day before. Freya’s physical wounds might have been all healed, but it had not been hard for Rebekah to see just how prevalent the injuries on her sister’s soul remained.

In the end she had gone with her third - and in hindsight, probably most irrational – instinct.

To vent her outrage at the fact that the Neivera wolf, Alanna, had not only been present when the biker had intruded on Freya’s hospital room, but also appeared to be alive, healthy, and still living in their city!

Thinking back to that moment in the small ICU hospital room, Rebekah couldn’t help but admire Keelin for the way in which she had handled each of the immortal Mikaelson siblings’ emotional outbursts.

In response to Klaus having roughly pinned her up against the wall, the wolf had somehow managed to remain both calm and collected – simply explaining to her fiancé’s outraged brother that whilst she could have followed the intruding biker out of the window and given chase, her priority had been, and always would be, Freya.

An argument that the wolf had made with such gravity of heart-felt conviction, that not even Klaus had dared to contest its validity.

And when Rebekah herself had momentarily lost control of all the rage building up within her and lashed out - accusing the Malraux wolf of deliberately harbouring an enemy of their family – Keelin had surprisingly stayed cool and composed as she had defended the sole surviving Neivera pack member to all three of the Original siblings.

Despite Rebekah’s taunting of her future sister-in-law as she had arrived at the apartment that evening, the blonde vampire had to admit - Keelin had presented a pretty convincing case in defence of the younger wolf.

But it had not been the claims of hardship endured by the younger wolf at the hands of the Hollow that had eventually convinced Rebekah to not immediately hunt down the Neivera pack member and feast upon her treacherous heart. Nor had it been the declaration by Keelin that Alanna’s entire family had been held hostage by the evil spirit so that it could force the wolf to partake in its plan to end the life of Hope Mikaelson.

Instead, it had been when all eyes in the room had quickly fallen onto the cowed and subdued form of Freya in response to the only words the witch had uttered for the remainder of that day.

“Leave the wolf be!”

Confused looks had been exchanged amongst Rebekah and her brothers in response to Freya’s monotone, subdued statement. Even Keelin had raised an eyebrow in her fiancé’s direction, seemingly surprised by the witch’s defence of someone whom she had previously been hell bent on ending the life of.

No amount of cautious coaxing or cajoling however, had persuaded the witch to further elaborate – either on why she now wanted the Neivera wolf’s life to be spared, or on the details of what exactly had happened in the hospital room before Keelin had broken through its locked door.

In the end it had been decided that the best course of action would be for Rebekah to accompany Keelin and Freya back to their apartment, whilst Klaus and Elijah would immediately begin enacting their plan to hit every out-of-town biker joint in an effort to find the deplorable scum who continued to plague their sister.
A plan that had so far produced nothing but further frustration and irritation, as Freya’s kidnappers continued to elude the Mikaelson sibling’s

“Has she said anything in her sleep whilst having these nightmares?” Rebekah asked Keelin, forcing her mind back into the here and now. “Anything that might help us locate where those bloody creeps are holed up?”

Keelin shook her head as she placed her glass of wine down onto the kitchen counter.

“No, nothing! It’s mostly just thrashing and screaming,” the wolf sighed, rubbing at her eyes.

“Well, why don’t I try talking to her again,” Rebekah offered. “See if I can convince her that it is in her best interest to…..”

“In who’s best interest to what?”

Both Rebekah and Keelin’s heads whipped around in response to Freya’s voice suddenly materialising in the living space of the apartment. They were met with the sight of the blonde witch emerging from out of the engaged couple’s bedroom - a look of guarded suspicion on her face.

“Hey,” Keelin said in greeting - flashing a brief warning glance towards Rebekah, before breaking out into a tired smile as she walked towards Freya. “I thought that you were trying to get some rest?”

“I’m sick of resting Keelin”, the witch snapped irritably, sidestepping around the wolf as their paths met in the middle of the apartment. “It’s all I’ve damn well done over the past few days!”

Rebekah did not miss the look of rejection that fleetingly flashed through the wolf’s eyes as Freya came to a stop at the Kitchen’s large island. Nor did her sister’s attire escape her attention either, as Freya reached over and snatched up Keelin’s abandoned wine glass – downing its contents in one large gulp.

“A little over dressed aren’t you love, for a night in front of the TV?!”

Rebekah gestured towards her sister’s clothing as she raised an eyebrow.

Head to-toe in figure hugging apparels, the witch looked more suited for a Friday night out on the tiles, than the mid-week “Netflix & Chill” evening that Keelin had suggested the blonde vampire come and join the couple for, earlier that day.

A see-through white chiffon top barely concealed the laced black-bra lying under it, as Freya’s trade-mark leather jacket hung off her shoulders. Fashionably torn and frayed black skinny-jeans ran the length of her legs, accumulating in a pair of high-heeled black boots whose stiletto tips looked as though they would be more suitably wielded as a weapon in battle, than relied upon as foot support.

“I’m heading out”, Freya stated, grabbing the opened bottle of wine off the counter and proceeding to refill the glass that she had now clearly claimed as her own.

“Out?! Out Where?”

Keelin’s surprise at her fiancé’s declaration was not hard to see, given the wide eyed glare the wolf was now throwing towards Freya as she walked back over to the kitchen.

“For a drink,” the witch replied, her attention directed towards Rebekah instead of Keelin. “I’m
getting a severe case of cabin fever cooped up within these four walls - I need some fresh air!”

“But….I…..we…..”

“I think what your dearest fiancé is trying to say”, Rebekah quickly interjected, sensing that Keelin’s was having trouble processing the witch’s sudden change in demeanour, “is that it is probably not wise to be heading out drinking in the Quarter right now, love. Not whilst we still have no idea where the Bikers who attacked you are, or what their intentions are.”

A heavy sigh left the witch’s mouth as she rolled her eyes at her sister’s words.

“Rebekah, I keep trying to tell you, I…..”

“Besides”, the blonde vampire stated, loud enough so as to purposely cut her sister off, “I didn’t just come over tonight to watch the dreary TV shows that you mortals like to call entertainment, whilst drinking all of your wine! I actually have something of great importance that the three of us need to discuss!”

Rebekah’s remark earned her a quirked eyebrow from both of the women in front of her, as Keelin came to a stop next to her fiancé.

“Do you honestly think that it has escaped my attention that my dearest sister and her betrothed have been engaged to be married for almost a month now, but we have yet to throw a party to celebrate the joyous occasion?!”

Silence filled the apartment as two blank, blinking faces were all that met the Original in response to her statement.

“Oh come on now ladies!” Rebekah exclaimed as she smirked towards the couple and rested her hands on her hips. “We are Mikaelson’s – throwing outlandish and lavish extravaganzas to celebrate any momentous event, is practically a part of our family’s legacy!”

“Er…” Keelin started, looking quickly between the blonde vampire and Freya, “….I’m not entirely sure that a party should be top of our priorities right now Rebekah. With everything that’s happened…”

“Actually I think you’re right, sister!” Freya interrupted, cutting Keelin off and causing the wolf to once again stare at her fiancé in surprise. “A party sounds like the perfect solution to the depressingly dull monotony of the past few days. You two should get right on that!”

Flashing a fleeting smile towards her sister, the witch quickly finished the contents of her glass before side-stepping around Rebekah and beginning to make her way over towards the apartment’s exit.

“Freya, wait!” Keelin shouted after her fiancé. “If you’re insisting on heading out, I’m going to come with you! Just give me a minute to change and….”

“I don’t want any company!” the witch abruptly shouted, turning back towards Rebekah and Keelin as she threw her hands in the air in exasperation. “Ok, Keelin?! I just…..I just want some time to myself! To enjoy a drink away from everything, and everyone.”

An uncomfortable air of awkwardness began to fill the apartment as both Rebekah and Keelin looked towards the witch in stunned silence.

Dropping her eyes down to the floor beneath her feet, Freya forced out a heavy breath and wearily
shook her head.

“I’m sorry, ok!” the witch sighed - tension clearly evident in her voice. “I just….I just need some space. I know that you all mean well, but I feel so damned suffocated by everything right now. I…."

Freya’s voice trailed off as she raised her head up and met Keelin’s eyes.

Eyes that - Rebekah could see as she quickly glanced over to the wolf herself - were beginning to fill with tears of hurt.

Shaking her head once again, the witch quickly looked away from her fiancé and turned back towards the front door.

“I’ll be back later tonight!”

Before either Rebekah or Keelin had chance to respond, Freya had disappeared out of the apartment - the large wooden door slowly falling shut in her wake.

“Well….”, Rebekah said, still staring at the apartments exit, “….I guess we should at least be grateful that she’s no longer an unresponsive, mumbling mess!”

A sharp huff of disbelief escaped from Keelin’s lips, drawing the vampire’s attention away from the door. Turning to face the wolf, Rebekah flashed her friend a sympathetic smile.

“Try not to worry too much, love. She’s no doubt just trying to find herself again after everything that has happened.”

Giving Keelin’s shoulder a quick squeeze, Rebekah placed her wine glass down onto the counter and started to follow in her sister’s footsteps.

“I’ll go and keep an eye on her,” she called out to the wolf over her shoulder as she reached the apartment’s exit. “Though I seriously doubt any of the vermin responsible for her abduction would be bloody foolish enough to enter the Quarter right now. Especially given how well-known it is throughout the city that both Marcel’s boys, and the Witch faction are all on high alert for any bike riding ruffians that look out of place!”

Opening the flats large door, the vampire turned back to offer one last parting smile to Keelin.

“But we all agreed that at least one of us would have eyes on Freya at all times – so don’t worry love, I shall make sure to keep her within my sights.”

It did not escape Rebekah’s notice just how dejected and at a loss Keelin was now looking, as the wolf offered up a small nod of her head in response to her future sister-in-law’s words.

“Just…. just make sure she gets home in one piece. Please!”

“Of course!” Rebekah replied, before quickly closing the door behind her, and making her way down the dimly-lit communal corridor.

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2.
Stale, dusty air caught in the back of Freya’s throat as she marched up the familiar wooden steps of her old Bell-Tower.

The sound of well-worn planks groaning and creaking under stiletto heeled boots filled the narrow stairwell, as the witch repeatedly whispered a one-worded enchantment under her breath whilst she climbed.

“Occultatum…. Occultatum…. Occultatum….”

Static charge sparked and flickered over every inch of her body, as she continued to use a small amount of power to maintain the cloaking spell that had been tightly cocooned around her ever since she had stepped out of her and Keelin’s apartment block.

The enchantment itself was not particularly complex with regards to the skill that was required to cast it, and had in fact been one of the very first spells that Freya had learnt as a young witchling - under the tutorage of her late Aunt Dahlia.

The devious and painfully paranoid sister of Esther Mikaelson had spent most of the first few months of Freya’s incarceration teaching her how to remain concealed away from prying eyes.

Desperate to keep the details of their location hidden away from the mother and father that the child had been taken from, Dahlia had continually drilled into Freya the notion that to be seen was dangerous. Life threatening! And that should anyone ever learn of her existence, they would immediately try to kill her - simply because of who she was, and the power she had been born with.

So the concealment charm had been the very first spell that the witch had been forced to memorise, and hone to pinpoint perfection.

And perfected it she had.

So much so, that there had been mornings when Dahlia had awoken in a fit of rage and panic, convinced that Freya had fled from their dwellings in the middle of the night in attempt to re-connect with the family she had been taken from. The young Mikaelson witch however, had still been slumbering on her cot of hay – simply hidden from sight by the enchantment that she had been unknowingly casting in her sleep.

And now, almost twenty two years later as Freya climbed the final step leading into the open space of the Bell Tower’s attic, the spell had once again served to aid in concealing her whereabouts from the family that she had been ruthlessly ripped away from, all those years ago.

Not that she felt particularly proud of her actions.

Deceiving both her loving fiancé, and loyal sister into thinking that she was off out into the Quarter to drink her troubles away, had left the witch with a particularly bitter taste of self-loathing clogged within her mouth.

Guilt that had only then further intensified in her gut as she had sensed Rebekah leaving the apartment to follow her, forcing her to cast the concealment spell to prevent the Original vampire from being able to track her to her true destination.

She had no doubt of course that given enough time, Rebekah would eventually work out where her sister had actually fled to, and make her way over to the Bell Tower to confront her.

Which is why Freya knew that time was not currently on her side.
She needed to be quick.

A brief flick of her hand as she strode across the floor resulted in flame bursting into life on the wicks of several large church candles, situated around the damp smelling space. A resulting soft glow began to chase away deep shadows that lurked in the attic, giving the witch just enough light to see the sparse furniture dotted about the familiar space, and the large bookcase that held the very reason for her being there that evening.

The bitter temperatures of the raging storm outside caused a brief chill to run down the length of her body, as Freya’s eyes rapidly moved over the spines of several leather-bound books housed on the shelves of the wooden antique. Various old titles presented themselves to her, each a priceless relic in its own right detailing ancient spells and hexes that had been cast by generations of witches over the last millennia. Some titles were written in the ancient Roman dialect of Latin, whilst others had their contents described in the old Romanian language once used by many witch covens that had resided in long since disappeared villages of Western Europe, centuries ago.

However, the particular volume that she was interested in scouring that evening, was one that contained page after well-worn page of scripture written in Freya’s and her sibling’s own native language – one that they had now not spoken in almost a thousand years.

Old Viking Norse.

Turning briefly to clear a space on the wooden apothecary table next to her, Freya pulled the thick text of Esther Mikaelson’s Grimoire out from its snug hiding place in the bookcase and placed it down in front of her. Plunging a hand into one of the pockets of her leather jacket, the witch closed her fingers around the tarot card that she had managed to keep concealed upon her person ever since first waking up in the hospital after her ordeal at the hands of the Jarls.

The card that she had come to believe the seer, Amelia, must had left in her possession after paying a visit to the ICU ward whilst she had still been unconscious.

Left in Freya’s possession after hastily scrawling the words “GASESTE NAZIRUL” across its surface in what she could only assume was the Seer’s own blood.

Translated, the short Romanian phrase had been a simple, yet commanding instruction.

“Find Nazirul!”

Freya had not been able to stop thinking about the message ever since that first night in the hospital, when she had discovered the tarot card stuffed deliberately into the palm of her broken hand. The word – Nazirul – was one that the witch knew she had seen somewhere before, but had not immediately been able to place where, or in what form of media it had been in.

It was not until she had been sat at the breakfast bar in her apartment earlier that morning – absentmindedly pushing flakes of muesli around a bowl with a spoon as Keelin had once again been attempting to engage in light hearted conversation to distract her troubled mind – that it had finally dawned on Freya where she had seen the word written before.

And now, as the witch let her eyes fall shut whilst pulling forth a tendril of power from her reserves and concentrating it on the folded card grasped tightly within her hand – Freya could clearly picture how the word had looked, scrawled in the eloquent handwriting of her long-dead mother.

As though the wind from the raging storm outside had somehow managed to find its way into the Bell-Tower’s attic to wreak havoc, the leather-bound cover of the Grimoire lay in front of Freya
suddenly flipped over. Page after page of ancient scroll paper began to flick and overturn, causing both scripture and diagrams to whiz by in a blur of speed as Freya continued to focus her mind on the word that had been written in her old friend’s blood.

\textit{Nazirul…..Nazirul….Nazi…..}

The light in the old attic abruptly intensified, as all of the candle flames simultaneously flared at the same time as the pages of the grimoire ceased to turn. A small gasp left the witch’s lips as the power that had been flowing through her quickly dissipated – its presence no longer needed thanks to the object of Freya’s pursuit having been found.

Opening her eyes, the witch let her gaze fall upon the book, and her late mother’s words that stood bold and defiant on the porous sheets of aging paper.

\textit{Guddom Beskyttelse – Protection of the Gods.}

There are many tales existing within the different witch covens of my homeland, that touch upon the subject of special objects which have been empowered to protect their owner from varying degrees of harm or misfortune.

Some of these artefacts are simple trinkets and charms that have been infused with magic by mortal witch’s themselves, and have exhibited varying degrees of success when it comes to protecting the wearer from malicious harmful intent.

Others exist in the form of large totems and statues that have been carved in the very image of the gods themselves – and can often be found situated in the homes of coven members, where they are used as a focal point for worship and reverence.

The most coveted fortification artefacts however, are those that are alleged to have been created by the hands of the Gods themselves, high up in the mystical forges of the heavens.

Much like the more renowned celestial weapons, such as the Gungnir – Odin’s deadly spear of precision, or the Mjolnir – Thor’s unstoppable hammer of destruction, the coveted objects of protection are said to be infused with the power of the very Gods that created them.

Many myths exist surrounding these particular items - most of which I would not place much authority in due to both the nature of their origins, and the loose mouths from which the tales have been spun.

I have, however, heard accounts of two such artefacts that I believe do indeed exist - and hold within them the blessed competence of the Deities whom are fabled to have created them.

The first such relic, known as the Svalin, is said to have been crafted by the goddess of Winter herself- Skadi. Primarily forged as a gift for the deity’s husband – Njord, the God of wealth and fertility – the Svalin is alleged to be a shield made from the purest ice, found only in the remote hinterlands of our forefathers.

Infused with Skadi’s raw power, the shield is believed to fully protect its bearer from the energy of the sun in all of its forms - be it born of fire or light. It is also said that no physical blow or strike was able to penetrate the shields smooth surface, despite the notoriously fragile nature of ice found across the mortal land of Midgard. Kept on his person at all times, Njord is believed to have wielded the Svalin during the infamous battle of Ragnorok, and it was said to have remained on the mortal plane long after the God of Wealth and Fertility’s demise at the hands of Odin.

However, from my own extensive research into the relic, I have come to believe that the Svalin was
actually returned back to the celestial heavens by Skadi herself, after the Goddess descended down upon Midgard to mourn the loss of her husband, and seek revenge on all those who continued to worship his executioner.

The second artefact believed to offer up the safeguard of the gods to its bearer, has been called many names over the centuries – each being gifted to it by the various mortals who have attempted in vein to harness its power of protection. Its true moniker however, was the one bestowed onto it by its creator - the demi-goddess Astrid.

As per the legends of our forefathers, Astrid was the half-mortal daughter of the infamous God of Light – Balder, and the product of an illicit love affair with the mortal clan-woman Myrrhyl.

Following somewhat foolishly in the footsteps of her father, Astrid herself fell in love with a mortal woman that dwelled on Midgard, and spent most of her time with the girl living in fear of the wrath Balder - should her father ever learn of her transgressions.

Somewhat imprudently believing that her father's wrath would more than likely be exacted upon her female lover, rather than herself – Astrid secretly enlisted the help of the dwarves Brokkr and Eitri to aid her in forging a talisman of protection. One upon which Astrid bestowed the name Nazirul.

Equally remarkable for both its striking beauty and alleged capabilities, the bejewelled Nazirul was said to have been infused with the life force of over a hundred Hentrei – a race of small, feline like creatures believed to have been bred by the Goddess of Beauty, Freyja.

Known for the fierce protection of their young, it is documented that fully matured Hentrei had the power to ward off any form of danger that threatened to bestow harm upon their young, regardless of whether the peril was physical or magical in nature.

Swearing the dwarven brothers to secrecy, Astrid returned to the mortal realm and gifted the newly forged talisman to her human lover – making the woman swear to never remove the item from her neck, no matter who might beg or demand her to do so.

Unfortunately, unbeknownst to the demi-goddess, Balder had already learnt of Astrid's indiscretions with the mortal female, and had ordered for his daughter to be detained and brought before him as soon as she stepped foot back on Midgard.

Enraged by his own kin's stubborn defiance and refusal to give up her union with the human born girl, Balder arranged for his daughter to be forever stripped of her ability to phase between realms – condemning her to spend the rest of her immortal life bound to his side in the heavens.

The Nazirul, however, was said to have remained on the mortal plane – hanging steadfast around the neck of Astrid’s abandoned lover.

Now there are several accounts and scriptures to be found within the clans of our land, concerning the mortal woman who had warmed the demi-goddesses bed. Most of which have clearly been distorted and warped with falsities and untruths as they have permeated down through-out the ages.

But there is one piece of information that remains the same - no matter which account of Astrid’s lover it is being relayed, or whose mouth it is that spins the tale. The demi-goddesses lover was believed to have been the daughter of a powerful Romanian Seer – Andrei of the Pretescu clan.

Should one be so inclined to further investigate the existence of the fabled Nazirul, I believe the
prevalence of the Pretescu blood-line would be a good place to begin. Unfortunately however, I fear that with the impending arrival of mine and Mikael’s first born child, I will no longer have the time nor resource to foster my fascination with Astrid’s celestial artefact.

A loud clattering noise from the street outside suddenly broke Freya’s concentration, causing the witch’s whole body to tense in reaction.

Checking on her inner magic reserve – more to acknowledge that the power’s presence was still there, than to ready it for use – the witch treaded lightly over to the slat covered window and looked down to the street below. There, sat cleaning its own face with a nimble paw, was a pristine looking black cat balancing effortlessly on the top of an overturned wooden crate.

*By the Gods, get a grip!* Freya admonished to herself, drawing in a deep steadying breath as she watched the red collared feline for a few heartbeats longer. *The Jarls are not here! He...is not here!*

Returning to her apothecary table, the witch quickly jotted down onto a spare scrap of parchment the Seer family name that had been mentioned in her mother’s notes – Pretescu.

She herself had never before given much credence to the myths and legends of the old Norse Gods.

That, however, was not to say that she hadn’t heard of their stories.

As a small child, Freya could remember that she had spent many a cold night huddled up to her father in their small hut, as Mikael had spun yarn after yarn about the great Viking Deities, and their legendary powers.

Odin, Thor, Balder – they had all featured in the Mikaelson patriarch’s tales as he had memorized his eldest daughter with accounts of their epic battles across the supposed nine realms of all life’s existence. Back then she had of course hung on to every word her father had spoken, in awe of the celebrated Gods and the fantastical powers they held at their fingertips.

But as Freya had grown older and been harshly introduced to the sombre realities of mortal life by her tyrannical Aunt Dahlia, she had come to believe that the ancient Viking God’s and their feats of glory, were nothing more than bedtime tales spun to her by a man desperate to distract his first born from the harsh realities of life.

A fantasy – nothing more.

But for Esther to have written about this supposed celestial forged talisman - this “Nazirul” – there had to have at least been some credence to the claims of its power.

From what Freya knew of her mother - most of which had gleamed from having spent hours and hours scouring over the pages of the first born witch’s personal grimoires – the Viking born woman had never been one to indulge in fantastical whims or fairytales.

By all accounts, the Mikaelson siblings' mother figure had been as pragmatic as she had been powerful.

So for Esther to have dedicated a section of her grimoires to the Nazirul, there had to have been some validity to not only its existence, but also the magic held within it.

*And for Amelia, who herself was a Seer of Romanian heritage, to not only know of the artefact but also feel the need to secretly draw Freya’s attention to it – surely it all had to mean something?*

Closing the thick leather-bound Grimoire and returning it back to its home on the antique cabinet,
Freya flicked her hand once more – this time to extinguish the few candles that had been burning in the attic.

With the Bell-Tower once again shrouded in deep shadows, the witch re-activated her concealment spell and began her descent back down to the streets of the French Quarter.

Ideally she would have liked to have continued her investigation that same evening, whilst the information from Esther’s grimoire was still fresh in her mind. But Freya knew that she was already pushing her luck and on borrowed time, given that Rebekah was no doubt already searching for her in the painfully few bars that still remained open, despite Storm Gelda’s continued onslaught.

Her efforts would have to be put on hold until the next day, when she could hopefully continue in her attempts to shed some light on the mysterious Nazirul talisman, and where on the mortal plane it might now reside.

The witch could not exactly put her finger on why - but she had a troubled feeling that locating the artefact was suddenly of great importance.

A troubled feeling that her old friend, Amelia, had been trying to aid her condemned soul in some way, when she had left that tarot card crumpled in her hand.

*A troubled feeling that the safety of those she loved, depended on it.*

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Chapter 20.

Chapter Summary

**Previously on What Lies Within....**

1. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan.
2. After a week of torture, Freya's will broke and she willingly gave herself over to be controlled by the Blood-Bond.
3. Freya attempted to make Keelin promise not to seek revenge upon the men who had held her captive - afraid of what they might do to the wolf if she got close to them.
4. Colborn tracked Freya to St Theodora's hospital and paid her a visit, to find out if the blood-bond had fully taken hold.
5. Freya found references to a mystical object called the Nazirul, in one of her mothers Grimoires. The same object that Amelia had written the name of on a tarrot card for the witch to find.
6. Rebekah told Keelin that she would follow Freya on her the witch's drinking session, and keep an eye on her.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 20 up for grabs guys :-) Its slightly shorter than normal as its just the one scene. But it took me ages to write this scene thanks to it being a proper emotional rollercoaster to get onto paper - so to speak. So instead of making you continue to wait as I write the remaining scenes of this chapter, I thought I'd post this one seaprately to the rest.

Hope you enjoy, and as always, let me know what you think :-)
Spitting the mouthwash out into the sink, Keelin grabbed a small hand towel off the heated rail next to her, and wiped away the beads of sweat that had formed across her brow. The wolf’s bloodshot eyes found a pitiful excuse for a reflection staring back at her, from the small mirror adorning the front of the wall-cabinet.

Rebekah hadn’t been wrong the night before – she did look like shit!

Keelin’s hands dropped to rest lightly over her abdomen, as she used experienced fingers to gently probe at the flat stomach beneath her cotton bed t-shirt.

Despite all the bouts of sickness that she had been forced to endure over the past few days, the wolf’s appetite had neither diminished or waned. In fact, if she was to be honest, Keelin had found herself snacking more and more in between meals, in an attempt to satisfy the hunger of a belly that was continuously being emptied into the nearest toilet.

Yet regardless of all the extra junk food and over indulgent late-night hot chocolates, the wolf could not feel or see any obvious change in her weight. If anything, the muscle definition of the abs framing her stomach appeared to be even more prominent than usual, under the soft touch of her fingers.

She had initially thought that she must have picked up an ill-timed case of the Noro-virus, that was currently doing the rounds amongst the staff of St Theodora’s hospital. But if that was what was making her ill, Keelin would have expected Freya to have also come down with the bug by now - given their close proximity when sharing the same bed at night.

But the witch had so far remained untouched by any symptoms of sickness or lethargy. In fact, other than the night terrors that she had been struggling with during the twilight hours, Freya’s health had never been better after ingesting the blood of Marcel Gerrard.

Had she picked up some sort of wolf related virus, or illness?

Making a mental note to have Joel discretely take some of her blood for testing the next time she was at work, Keelin drew in a deep breath and made her way over to the en-suites exit. Pausing to lean against the open doorframe, the wolf let her eyes wander across the dimly lit space of her and Freya’s bedroom, to the woman currently fast asleep in their bed.

Sprawled out on her back in a typical star-fish position, the blonde witch was snoring ever-so-lightly as she remained deep in slumber – thankfully undisturbed by the retching sounds that had been emanating from the bathroom only moments ago.

As the early morning light began to filter through the window’s closed drapes, it provided just enough illumination for Keelin to be able to make out the porcelain smooth features of her lover’s face – causing a hint of a smile to form on the wolf’s lips.

In that exact moment, Freya looked to be the most relaxed that Keelin had seen her in a long time. No nightmare or upsetting memory seemed to be currently plaguing her fiancé’s dreams, as a light snuffle continued to rattle from the blonde’s open mouth.

Which in itself was a small mercy worth being thankful for.

The whole night had in fact appeared to have been trauma free for the eldest Mikaelson, meaning that Keelin had managed to get more than just a couple of hours sleep for once – only waking a few minutes ago thanks to her belly’s annoying need to empty itself once again.
Of course, the wolf knew that Freya’s uninterrupted night of slumber was no doubt a result of the extremely inebriated state that her lover had managed to get herself into the night before.

Shaking her head gently, Keelin couldn’t help the small huff of bemusement that escaped her lips as a memory of the previous evening’s events – involving a very drunk Freya having to be practically carried back into the apartment by Rebekah - filled her mind.

The wolf had spent the first hour after Freya had so abruptly walked out of their home, incessantly worrying about the witch, and fretting with regards to what trouble her unsettled fiancé might end up getting herself into. It had only been when her smart phone had eventually lit up with a text from Rebekah - stating that the vampire had located Freya drinking by herself in Rousseau’s – that a little of Keelin’s anxiety had finally begun to dissipate.

Two hours later, Keelin had been stood waiting in the open doorway of her apartment as Rebekah and Freya had clumsily emerged out of the building’s stairwell – one of the witch’s arms propped around her sister’s shoulders as she struggled to remain upright.

The wolf had been able to smell the two Mikaelson siblings scent markers as they had drawn near to the complex, not to mention all of the alcohol that had been mixed in with her lover’s fragrance. Relieved that her fiancé was finally on her way back, Keelin had quickly prepared a large glass of water and fetched two Tylenol tablets from out of their medicine cabinet – placing both on the kitchen worktop in preparation for Freya to have before heading to bed.

Crooning had filled the communal corridor as the blonde-haired duo made their way over to the apartments entrance – Freya apparently drunk enough to show case her rarely heard singing voice during an uncharacteristic moment of lost inhibitions. The strange, and no doubt ancient, ditty about the Norse God’s - Odin and Thor - had made Keelin laugh despite her state of concern, as Rebekah had tutted and clucked her tongue in annoyance thanks to bearing the brunt of her sister’s weight.

After reassuring her fiancé several times that she had no intention of leaving her - a direct result of Freya stroking Keelin’s cheek as Rebekah dragged her past the wolf, before the witch had burst into tears and declared with slurred words that Keelin was far too good for her and should find someone more worthy of her love – Keelin had helped Rebekah put Freya to bed.

Within minutes, the blonde witch had been fast asleep – though not before once again loudly proclaiming she was unworthy of Keelin’s love, and that the wolf was “an angel fallen from the heavens who needed to be protected at all costs”.

A statement that had caused Rebekah to both roll her eyes and make mock throwing-up gestures to Keelin as they had both crept out of the bedroom – leaving the door ajar so that Keelin could keep an eye on her drunken fiancé from the apartment’s living-space.

The two friends had cracked open another bottle of wine to share, as Rebekah had relayed to Keelin the details of what had happened after she had left the wolf’s company earlier that evening.

According to the Original Vampire, it had taken her a good hour or so to locate Freya’s whereabouts – the witch seeming to have disappeared off down Bourbon St at an exponential speed.

Rebekah had described how she had actually looked for the witch in Rousseau’s as her first port of call – moving on to then search for her sister in the few bars that remained open along Decatur St, overlooking the Mississippi River. All had proved to be frustratingly futile, and it had only been when Rebekah had returned to Rousseau’s after paying Freya’s Bell-Tower a brief visit, that she
had finally stumbled across her sister.

The eldest Mikaelson had apparently been sat alone at the bar, watching on as a bottle of bourbon had been hanging unsupported in the air, whilst golden liquid flowed from its mouth into a crystal tumbler.

Seemingly correcting itself into an upright position, the bottle had then remained magically suspended above the bar-top as Freya had quickly downed the contents of the glass, before slamming it back down and manipulating the enchanted bottle to refill its contents once more.

Rebekah had gone on to describe how a perplexed looking Josh had hurried over to her from where he had been sat at the opposite end of the bar, and proceeded to beg Rebekah to take the drunken witch home - before Freya decided to use her power for something more destructive than that of helping herself to his dwindling stock of bourbon.

Taking pity on the young vampire, Rebekah had made her way over to her sister and proceeded to declare that drinking on ones own was a truly sorrowful state of affairs, and that no sister of hers would be allowed to drown her sorrows alone.

The Original vampire had apparently intended on taking her sibling back to the Mikaelson Compound for an hour or two, where the two of them could enjoy a finely aged bourbon as they put the world to rights. However as soon as Freya had stood up from her bar stool and promptly collapsed onto the wooden floor thanks to a lack of balance – Rebekah had realised that it was probably time to cut her sister off, and return her to the safety of her own bed.

Keelin and her future sister-in-law had spent another hour or so making light conversation as Freya slumbered deeply in the next room – most of which had annoyingly centred around the blonde vampire’s ideas for the engagement party that she was now insisting would be taking place.

It had quickly become clear to the wolf that no amount of protest from her was going to deter Rebekah from that fact.

The two women had eventually said their goodnights to each other just after midnight had chimed out from the antique clock that sat proudly on the wooden mantlepiece above the apartment’s log-stove fire.

Just before Keelin had closed the apartment’s front-door, Rebekah had once again re-assured the wolf that should anyone or anything try to make its way uninvited into their apartment, she would be there within a heartbeat to end its miserable life.

Painfully!

It had become something of a ritual over the past week – Keelin being reassured of her and Freya’s safety by whichever of the Mikaelson immortals turn it was to stand guard over the apartment that night.

The wolf didn’t know exactly where Rebekah and her brothers placed themselves during the long evening hours spent watching for any sign of the bikers who had taken their sister. But going off the concentration of their scent markers that she detected each night before settling into bed with Freya, Keelin assumed that it was somewhere upon the rooftop of the apartment building.

Freya, of course, had dismissed her sibling’s actions as both pointless and unnecessary – claiming that the immortals were wasting their time due to the fact that the bikers who had taken her were no longer a threat, and would not be making an appearance back into her life.
A claim that neither Keelin, nor the other Mikaelson siblings had believed for one second – putting Freya’s blasé attitude towards her attackers down to the witch’s mind trying to find some form of coping mechanism for dealing with all that had happened to her.

So the evening vigils had continued – with Klaus, Elijah and Rebekah all taking their turn to stand watch over their eldest sister and her wolf lover.

*Not that it would make an ounce of difference should any Freya’s attackers try to approach her again,* Keelin thought to herself, as she continued to watch her fiancé sleep from the bathroom doorway. *Her wolf would tear apart every last one of the leather wearing bastards before any of the Mikaelson’s had a chance to get a look in!*

The beginnings of a deep growl began to rumble its way up from her abdomen and into her throat, as Keelin drew in a deep steadying breath in an attempt to calm the fuming beast within.

Her wolf-spirit was restless.

Its heightened agitation and anger had been constantly lashing out at the Kyanite barrier within her, ever since Keelin’s human mind had stopped it from pursuing the bearded brute that had tried to further terrorise Freya.

The beast had been outraged that she had stopped them from finishing what they had started in that small ICU room.

Outraged that she had not given chase after the bastard who had hurt their mate!

And outraged that she had not given herself over completely to its primal killing instincts, during their brief scuffle with the bearded swine.

At the time of course, she had tried to calm her animal spirit with the same words of reason that she had so effortlessly delivered to Freya’s brother, Klaus – when he had slammed her up against the hospital room’s wall.

“My priority was… and will always be…. Freya!” she had stated calmly, whilst meeting the hybrid’s outraged glare. “If I had given pursuit it would have left her here alone and defenceless! And in case it has escaped your notice, Klaus - your sister is extremely traumatised right now!”

One quick look towards his eldest sibling, curled in on herself and shaking as she had sat in the large visitors chair, had been enough to convince Klaus that Keelin’s words had rang true.

But it had not been enough to convince the raging animal within her.

And now – after several nights of witnessing the horrific nightmares that continued to plague her fiancé – Keelin was no longer confident that she had made the right decision.

*It had been him! The one who had carved those hateful word’s onto Freya’s thigh! The one who had hurt her lover in such a brutal, intimate way! He had been right there, his disgusting face taunting her - and she had let him go.....*  

The growl vibrating in her chest intensified, as the room around her quickly came into a sharp, pinpoint focus. Gripping tightly onto the bathroom’s wooden door-frame, Keelin forced heavy lids to squeeze shut over eyes that were now blazing bright with the yellow tones of her wolf.

*Not here….not now!* she tried to reason with the raging animal, as it snarled and snapped at the magical Kyanite barrier. *Soon.....we will have our revenge soon!*
Of course she didn’t exactly know how soon that would be.

Despite the renewed attempts of the Mikaelson Originals to try and locate where Freya had been held captive, they were still no closer to actually finding the Bikers who had hurt her fiancé.

Night after night, the two siblings who had not been watching over Keelin and Freya’s apartment had ventured out of the city, in search of any bar or building that was known to play host to leather loving, motorcycle enthusiasts.

And night after night they had returned back to the Quarter empty handed, and increasingly frustrated.

There was a part of Keelin which ached to join the immortals on their nightly excursions. A part of her which was convinced that somehow, despite the never ending deluge of rain being unleashed upon the city by Storm Gelda, she would still be able to pick up on the now familiarised scent of the bastard who had assaulted her Freya.

A part of her that knew the twisted freak was out there somewhere, craving the impending confrontation with her wolf - almost as much as she was!

But Keelin knew that she could not afford to give herself over to those urges.

Not yet.

Not whilst Freya needed her!

A soft groan from across the bedroom quickly roused the wolf out of her thoughts.

Opening eye’s that once again harboured the deep browns of her human form, Keelin’s brow furrowed as she saw Freya’s features begin to contort in discomfort - despite the witch remaining asleep.

Pushing herself off the doorframe, the wolf silently padded barefoot across wooden flooring to reach the large king-size bed. As Keelin carefully lowered herself down to sit on the edge of the mattress, Freya’s head began to jerk from side to side, causing several locks of ruffled blonde hair to cascade over her face.

“Freya…” Keelin coaxed softly, trying to rouse the witch from the latest nightmare that had clearly taken hold, “…it’s just a dream! Wake up baby, your safe!”

Her lover’s thrashing only appeared to intensify, causing the duvet that was draped over her slim frame to ripple and shift.

Reaching out a cautious hand, Keelin lightly grabbed onto the witch’s shoulder and began to shake it gently - hoping the contact would help to break the hold that Freya’s nightmare appeared to have.

“Freya wake up, you’re having a nig….”

“Please….Halvar…..drink…..”

Keelin’s breath abruptly caught in her throat, as she reacted to the anxious words suddenly being murmured by the sleeping witch.

All of the muscles in her body locked into a tense, statue like state, as the hand gripped onto Freya’s shoulder froze in place.
“Halvar, not her…..arrrrgh”

Freya’s jaw locked open as her sleepy words quickly dissolved, giving way to a blood curdling scream. The sharp, piercing noise easily sliced through Keelin’s shocked stupor like a hot knife through butter, launching the wolf into action.

“Freya wake up!” she demanded urgently – now shaking the witch with more vigour. “You’re having a nightmare…. wake up!”

The hairs all along Keelin’s bare arms started to stand on end, as the distinct metallic scent of static energy began to fill her nostrils.

*Crap - not again….*

“Freya please, you need to wake up!”

The witch’s eyes suddenly sprung wide open – pupils blown wide with fear, pushing the green of her eyes into a fine, thin circle.

*No, not green,* Keelin quickly thought to herself, as she jerked back from her fiancé to give her some space. *Her irises, are they…..are they red?!*

Freya’s eyes began to sweep wildly from side to side, as she attempted to gain her bearings. Panting in erratic breaths, the witch blinked several times in succession - seemingly trying to dislodge a lingering image left over from the nightmare she had just been having.

“Freya…” Keelin ventured tentatively, in an attempt to gain her lover’s attention, “….are you ok?”

The wolf watched on as the silver slithers of tears began to fill Freya’s eyes, as the blonde finally focused them onto her.

Green, tear filled eyes.

*Had she imagined the red?! A trick of the light? Or was her mind now starting to deceive on her, thanks to the lack of sleep she had been getting over the past few days?!!* 

As though suddenly realising that she was not alone, Freya hastily dislodged a hand from under the bed’s duvet and rubbed away the tears that had started to trickle down her cheeks. Drawing in a deep breath, the witch hoisted herself up into a sitting position and quickly pulled down on the dishevelled cotton t-shirt that she was wearing - covering up her bare stomach.

“I…I’m fine!”

The statement was both short and curt, despite the crackling rawness of her voice – no doubt a result of the loud screams that had been tearing out of her mouth only moments ago.

“Are you sure?” Keelin asked, searching her fiancé’s features. “Can I do anything for yo….”

“I said I’m fine!” Freya blurted out in exasperation, as she continued to rub at her face.

Keelin recoiled back in response to her lover’s harsh tone, as though she had been physically shoved in the chest.

A reaction that did not go unnoticed by the witch, who’s features quickly contorted with guilt as she looked up from the duvet and met her partner’s gaze.
“I’m…I’m sorry, Keelin! I didn’t mean to sound ungrateful for your concern.”

Keelin continued to watch on warily, as the witch shook her head gently and dropped her gaze back down to the bed covers.

“I just….”I can’t get them out of my head,” Freya continued, her voice dipping to a whisper as her eyes scrunched shut.

Surprised by the witch’s murmured confession, Keelin dared to scoot slightly closer to her on the bed. The pained reference to the men who had tortured her was the first that Freya had made since she had left the hospital, four days earlier.

And the words that she had spoken in her sleep – they were definitely new.

*Halvar – was that one of the Bikers names?!!*

Looking on at her agitated fiancé, Keelin quickly debated in her head whether or not to reach for the witch, and pull her into an embrace.

It was what she wanted to do – and had been craving ever since the two of them had returned home to their apartment, days earlier. But Freya had so far been keeping her at arm’s length, seemingly determined to try and cope with the emotional fall out of her ordeal without any support or comfort from those who loved her.

*And Keelin would be lying if she tried to claim that it wasn’t upsetting her.*

Right now, however, it wasn’t about her.

None of it was about her – and she knew that.

She knew that Freya had to try and deal with what had happened to her in her own way, and in her own time. And that as the witch’s committed partner, it was Keelin’s role to simply try and give her fiancé as much time and space as she needed to attempt to heal and move on.

*Hell, it wasn’t as though she didn’t already know how stubborn and closed off the woman she loved could be at times!*

The eldest Mikaelson was one of the most self-sufficient and emotionally guarded women that Keelin had ever met. From both her own experience, and accounts that had been relayed to her by both Rebekah and Hayley - Keelin knew that her fiancé had always been one to internalise her pain and anger when times got tough.

It was who the witch was as a person - and the wolf had come to accept that over the year that they had been together.

*So why was she now feeling so hurt and rejected each time Freya refused to open up to her about the kidnaping?!!*

Gingerly chewing on her bottom lip, she decided to throw caution to the wind and twisted herself around on the bed so that she could sit next to her fiancé. Leaning back against the headboard, Keelin brought her legs up onto the mattress and gently placed an arm around Freya’s shoulders.

Muscles momentarily tensed under her touch, before slowly relaxing again as the witch let out a small sigh.
“I’m here for you baby,” Keelin said softly as she felt Freya lean into her side. “Whatever it is you need, I’m here for you! Juliet and Juliet all the way – remember?”

She felt Freya’s body jerk slightly, as the witch let out a small huff in response to the words that Keelin had once said to her near the beginning of their relationship.

“What if I….”

Freya’s words trailed off, as Keelin felt the witch’s body tense up once more under her arm.

“Honey its ok – whatever it is, just say it.”

When Freya spoke again, her voice was barely above that of a whisper.

“What if I can’t be your Juliet anymore?”

A frown quickly pulled on the wolf’s brow, as her fiancé’s words cut through the air around them. Pulling away from Freya slightly so that she could see her face, Keelin tried to search the tear-filled green eyes that remained downcast towards the bed.

“What do you mean?” the wolf eventually said, as she continued to watch her lover.

“I….I’m broken Keelin,” Freya whispered, her words weighted down with desolation. “I’m not the same person I was before….before….”

The witch’s voice failed, as the tears that had been imprisoned within her eyes finally escaped their confinement and made a bid for freedom down her cheeks.

“Oh honey,” Keelin breathed, as her heart lurched for the woman she loved.

Quickly closing the small space between them once more, the wolf wrapped both arms around the blondes hunched frame and gently pulled her into a full embrace. She could feel Freya’s body shaking against her own as a small sob escaped out of the witch’s mouth.

“You’re not broken, Freya,” Keelin cooed, as she rested her chin on top of her fiancé’s head and began to rock them both back and forth gently. “It’s just going to take time baby, that’s all. No one is expecting you to be instantly back to your old self after everything that’s happened!”

Freya’s head began to shake from side to side under the wolf’s chin, as she drew in a shaky breath.

“No….you don’t understand!” the witch whispered emotionally. “None of you understand. I…..what I did…..what they….”

Keelin felt a spark of anger ignite within the whirlpool of emotions that were currently wrecking their way through her body.

Anger at the men who had taken her mate, and held the witch captive for all that time.
Anger at the sick bastards who had inflicted all of the horrific wounds that she had seen marring her lover’s body on the morning that she had been rushed into St Theodora’s clinic.

Anger at the Bikers who had stripped away her fiancé’s dignity and left her laying naked and dying in a ditch – abandoned and all alone.

But more than anything – right there in that moment as she held onto the woman she loved, shaking in her arms – Keelin was angry at the cruel control that the leather wearing fuckers appeared to still have over Freya’s psyche.

As tears began to sting the edges of her own vision, the wolf swallowed down on the growl that was threatening to escape out from its Kyanite confines.

“Freya, please….” Keelin began – her voice having dropped to an almost inhuman tone, “….please tell me where we can find them?”

The wolf fell back against the bed’s headboard as Freya abruptly pulled away from the contact they had been sharing. Furiously wiping at the tears on her face, the witch shook her head violently towards Keelin.

“NO!” she blurted out loudly, shattering the quiet, subdued ambiance that had been filling the bedroom. “I’ve already told you Keelin, you can’t go after them!”

Keelin’s mouth fell ajar as she watched her fiancé’s whole posture quickly transform from one of misery, into fiery, outraged anger.

“Why can’t any of you understand that?! You, Rebekah, Klaus – all of you! You need to just forget about them!”

“Forget about them?!” Keelin huffed incredulously, as the anger now pulsing through her vein’s began to flare. “Freya, after everything that they did to you, how can you possibly think that your family….that I….could simply just forget about them?!”

Looking expectantly at the witch, Keelin watched as Freya scrunched her eyes shut and shook her head once more.

Seeing that she was getting no where with her reasoning, the wolf drew in a deep breath, and chose her next words carefully.

“Whatever they told you Freya….whatever this - Halvar - threatened to do if you spoke to us of their whereabouts, I can promise that….”

“What did you just say?!” the witch blurted out, as her eye’s widened and filled with undiluted fear.

Meeting her fiancé’s gaze head on, Keelin steeled herself to stay focused.

“Halvar….you said the name before, whilst caught up in your nightmare. He’s one of the bastards that took you right?” Keelin asked, despite not pausing long enough for Freya to answer. “Was it him who inflicted all of those wounds Freya? Did he threaten to hurt you further if you spoke any of us about them? Is Halvar the name of the man who attacked you at the hospital the other day? Because I swear to god Freya, I will tear his god damned throat out before I let him get anywhere near you again. I already took a chunk out of his side - next time he won’t get away so e…..”

“NO!” Freya exclaimed once more, her voice now clearly quivering in panic. “No… I…..I need to
The witch was suddenly jumping off the bed – bare feet hitting the cold wooden floor as she frantically looked around the room for clothes to change into.

“Leave?!?” Keelin said, startled confusion commanding her tone as she watched Freya kick off the bed shorts that she had been wearing, before haphazardly pulling a pair of jeans onto one of her leg’s. “Freya it’s six in the morning! Where are you….”

“I’m heading over to my bell tower, to start research on a new fortification spell!” the witch said hurriedly as she grabbed one of Keelin’s tops off the back of their dressing-tables chair. “I want to make sure that the compound is fully protected when we have our engagement party!”

Keelin’s brows knotted together in reaction to her fiancé’s words.

“Party? Freya, please just stop for a second!” the wolf pleaded - her voice rising. “Stop, and talk to me!”

Pulling her head through the opening of Keelin’s green, long-sleeved t-shirt, Freya continued in her efforts to get dressed as she replied.

“There’s nothing to talk about Keelin. I’m fine. Better than fine in fact! Now if I can just find my other boot…."

What the hell?!

“Freya, you are clearly not fine!” the wolf stated, more sternly than she had at first meant to be. “And I hardly think an engagement party is something that we should be worrying about right now!”

“Nonsense!” Freya huffed as she quickly sat herself down on the dressing tables chair, and began to lace up the black timberland boots she had finally managed to find. “Rebekah was right last night, we Mikaelson’s are renowned for our soirees and social events. And what better reason to have one than our own engagement!”

Keelin’s mind whirled at a dizzying speed as she attempted to make sense of the sudden dramatic change in her lover’s attitude.

Had the witch not just been saying she didn’t know if she could still be her one – like less than a minute ago – and now she was back to planning their engagement party?! Was it all just a diversionary tactic, to avoid having to discuss the Biker’s any further?

“Freya, please!” she blurted out, pushing herself off the bed and taking a step towards the flustered witch. “Can you just stop for five minutes and take a breath! We need to talk about this.”

“Talk about what? The party?” Freya asked, as she grabbed her cell off the bedside table. “I’m sure Rebekah will be far better than I at helping you arrange…..”

“No!” Keelin exclaimed in exasperation. “Not the party! I meant we need to talk about this….about us!”

The wolf gestured quickly at the space between the two of them, trying to emphasise her point.

“You keep pushing me away Freya, and shooting me down anytime I try and express my anger towards the men who hurt you!”
Seeming to be oblivious to the hurt now encompassing Keelin’s voice, Freya grabbed her leather jacket off the back of the couple’s wardrobe, and shook her head as she began to thread her arms through its sleeves.

“I’m not pushing you away, don’t be daft. And there’s no reason for you to remain angry over what’s happened. Its over. Done! Everything is fin…..”

“Freya, STOP!”

Keelin’s angered shout resounded throughout the entire room, and effectively halted the witch in her tracks. Wide green eyes locked onto the wolf’s own, as she continued.

“Just stop, ok! Everything is not fine!” Keelin stated in exasperation, as she held the shocked witch’s stare. “For gods sakes Freya, you were tortured and raped by god only knows how many of those bearded thugs – and you what, expect me to just forget about it and believe that you’re doing ok?!”

Shaking her head, the wolf gestured towards their shared bed.

“Every night since you returned from the hospital, you have woken screaming and covered in sweat thanks to your on-going nightmares about what those monsters did to you. And every night I have lay there and watched you cry and whimper in your sleep, no doubt thanks to the memories of what happened whilst you were held captive. And I’m what…. meant to be ok with that?!”

Freya slowly began to shake her head, as her gaze dropped away from the heavy weight of the wolf’s.

“Keelin, it’s not wort…..”

“No!” Keelin interrupted, her voice now filling with emotion despite the anger that still persisted in fuelling her temper. “No Freya! Don’t you dare try and tell me that what those fuckers did to you is not worth my anger. I hate them. Ok! For the ordeal they subjected you to, and for the hold that they still seem to have over you – I can’t even begin to describe how much I hate I have for them!”

A deep growl forced its way out of her throat in reaction to the words that she had spoken. Realising that the room around her had quickly begun to sharpen in focus, Keelin drew in a deep breath and closed her eyes momentarily – not wishing Freya to witness her inner wolf trying to break free.

After a few heartbeats of uncomfortable silence filling the room, a small huff forced its way out of Keelin’s mouth.

“Only moments ago, you were talking like you wanted to break up with me – and now what, you’re back to planning our engagement party?!”

Opening her eyes once more, Keelin attempted to take a step towards the witch, who remained staring at the floor.

“Can’t you see how messed up that is baby?!” she asked in a calmer tone. “Can’t you see how everything that happened is messing with your emotions?”

For the briefest of moments, Keelin thought that her words might have finally shattered through the emotional barrier that the witch had erected between them, as Freya’s pained eyes met her own once more.
“I… I can’t do this right now!” the witch suddenly blurted out, shattering the hope that had foolishly begun to take root Keelin’s chest. “The party is a good idea Keelin – it’ll bring everyone together for some much-needed fun.”

Side stepping around the wolf, Freya made towards the bedroom’s exit.

“Why don’t you go see Rebekah and Hayley today to start planning out the finer details”, the blonde called over her shoulder as she reached the closed door and twisted on its handle. “Between the three of you I’m sure you’ll be able to come up with an amazing theme for the compound, whilst I work on making sure there can be no nasty surprises on the night!”

“Freya, wait….”

“I’ll see you later ok – don’t wait up for me, as I’ll probably be late.”

And with that, the witch exited their bedroom, letting the large wooden door fall shut behind her as Keelin stood gaping in her wake.

*What… the… actual… fuck?*

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Chapter End Notes

....should anyone be interested, I actually re-watched the wedding episode of Season 5 just before writing this scene. Mainly to remind myself of how Keelin’s face and posture looked when she finally snapped and shouted at Freya for "pulling this shit on our wedding day!" Haha.

It helped with picturing and trying to describe how our fave wolf would look when she snapped at Freya for continuing to insist that what the Jarl's had done wasnt such a big deal.

Anyhooo, just a little "behind the story" info there, haha :-)


**Previously on What Lies Within...**

1. Keelin proposed to Freya after returning from a few weeks away in New York. After accepting her offer, Freya made love to the wolf under the watch of the powerful Harvest Moon, during which Keelin thought she noticed her lover's eyes briefly glowing golden.
2. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan. After a whole week of pain & threats against Keelin, her will finally broke & she gave herself over to be controlled by the Blood-Bond.
3. Keelin rushed to save Freya's life when the witch was discovered dying on a roadside and taken to St Theodora's for treatment.
4. Colborn paid Freya a visit whilst she was in hospital to affirm that the blood-bond had taken hold, and ended up scuffling with both Alanna and Keelin in the process.
5. Keelin's health appears to have been deteriorating ever since the night of her & Freya's argument on Burbon St - leaving the wolf mystified as to what is causing her lethargy & sickness.
6. The Mikaelson siblings have been searching any out-of-town bars that are frequently visited by motorbike gangs, in an attempt to locate the men who kidnapped and tortured their sister.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 21 up for grabs - hope that you all enjoy.

I'll be taking a break from writing over the next week, as its Easter. Me and my wifey have a few days off work, and are off to the country for a relaxing break (with the dog too of course! haha), and I think I might actually be divorced if I was to whip out the ol laptop and attempt to bash out a chapter, whilst we are meant to be taking some time off from the world! Ha.

But fear not, I will be straight back on it upon our return. I already have all of the notes written for the next update (and indeed all of the upcoming chapters, haha) so no flow of story should be lost :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 21.

1. Loud arrogant music filled the whole of Baracuda bar, forcing its way into every small nook and
cranny found within the enclosed space - like rushing waves of the sea filling millions of holes in the fine beach sand. The deep bass beat of a heavy metal tempo pulsed in the air, and pounded in the chest cavities of all those who sat drinking in the run down establishment.

Despite the relatively early hour of the day, every one of the large shabby tables dotted around the open space was occupied - the old wooden tops littered with arrays of broken bottles, half-drunk tankards of ale, and the various pastimes of foolhardy gamblers. Rowdy, raucous laughter rose up in volume every few minutes, peppered with loud threats of violence and dismemberment whenever a hand of cards, or the roll of a dice did not go in some drunken fool’s favour.

Sat on one of the tall stools that flanked the establishment’s central-island bar, Halvar absentmindedly rubbed at his temples with oil stained hands, as Curtis - Baracuda’s Bar Manager - continued to relay his latest status report to the Jarl.

“Ale supplies are beginning to dwindle, and we are down to our last crate of whiskey! Blood stocks are also reaching a critical level”, the large framed thrall huffed – his voice rough and grating, as though coarse gravel was being crunched in the back of his throat every time he formed a word. “With the way this putrid lot drink and feed, I doubt we’ll make it to the end of the day before the bar dries up completely!”

“Then send someone out to fetch more stock,” Halvar sighed - his tone both irritable and tired.

“If it was that easy, dontcha think I would have done it already!” Curtis grumbled as he threw his stock-take pad and pen down onto the counter – narrowly missing the chief Jarl in the process.

Halvar slowly looked up from the wooden bar - his hands pausing in their massaging motion as he locked his eyes onto the bearded thrall.

Eyes that quickly bled from their normal icy cobalt blue, into a deep crimson hue.

“Do not let the fact that I continue to allow you to run this sorry excuse for a tavern confuse you, Curtis!” Halvar warned, his manner having turned sinister within less than a heartbeat. “You, and every sorry excuse for a vampire in here, are nothing more than wretched slaves indebted to the great Master’s cause! There is dirt clogged on the bottom of my boot that has a higher status than you, Thrall!”

Halvar watched on as the bar manager’s head swiftly dropped in immediate supplication – all previous bravado having now fled from his body.

“My deepest apologies, Jarl Halvar!” the cowed man stammered, as a small amount of remorse mixed with a huge dollop of fear in his voice. “I did not mean to sound out of turn. Please, forgive me.”

Letting his fierce stare linger on the bar manager’s slouched head for a moment longer, Halvar eventually heaved out a heavy breath and waved a hand in dismissal towards the vampire.

“You were saying?” the Jarl prompted, as he returned to rubbing the sides of his head in a futile attempt to alleviate the throbbing pain that had taken root there.

It was getting closer – their next cycle of petrification. He could feel its impending approach within every stiffening muscle of his body, and every vein that struggled more and more to relay his blood. They desperately needed the Mikaelson Witch to deliver on her task – and they needed it soon!

“R-Right”, Curtis stammered, raising his head once more to address the Jarl directly. “I was simply
trying to say that it is difficult to obtain more supplies at present, due to the ongoing storm. There are no liquor stores or brewery’s remaining open – all having boarded up to ride out the bad weather. Even the blood banks are closed and hunkered down!”

“Then tell your men to kick down the doors and damn well take whatever they need by force!” Halvar stated, raising his voice to be heard over a particularly loud guitar rift blaring out of the speakers behind the bar. “They are vampires Curtis, not Kindergarten kids!”

“Of course, Jarl Halvar”, the bar manager said. “And were it any normal situation, they would have already ripped out the throats of anyone who tried to stand in their way. And forgive me Halvar, for I do mean to question your wisdom or authority – but you made it very clear at the start that we were not to attract the attention of the authorities, or any of the supernatural factions within the city when carrying out our duties.”

Curtis paused for a second, as if waiting to see if his words would once again invoke the wrath of the Chief Jarl.

“Wouldn’t our pillaging of the city’s stocks be doing exactly that?” he finally asked.

“Time is of the essence now, Curtis. Not discretion.” Halvar affirmed, as he grabbed hold of the tankard of ale sitting in front of him, and took a long, deep glug of the amber liquid. “Our great lord will be returning to us within a matter of days, and we need to make sure that our supplies are fully stocked and ready for the moment that he arises.”

Nodding his head in understanding, the bar manager squared his wide, muscle defined shoulders as he drew in an affirming breath.

“Then it will be done, Jarl Halvar!” Curtis said with renewed confidence. “The Great Lord will want for nothing when he returns to the mortal plane! We shall serve him well.”

Dismissing the Thrall with a brief nod of his head, Halvar slowly swivelled around on his stool, to survey the rest of the tavern as he continued to drink his ale.

*Fools, all of them!* the Jarl thought to himself, as he sneered in disdain at the numerous occupied tables of drunken and unruly vampires. *Do they honestly believe they are worthy of serving at the feet of the Great Lord?! Do they think they even deserve to be blessed with the honour of breathing the same air as the Master?!

Halvar let out a cruel huff of bemusement at the notion of a Thrall attempting to be in the same room as the Great Lord, and living to tell the tale.

*Fools!*

As the Jarl drained the last few drops of liquid out of his tankard, his gaze came to rest on the largest table in the bar – the one reserved just for the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan.

A deeper look of disdain quickly slithered across his features, as he registered the presence of his least favourite brother amongst those currently occupying the table.

Large quantities of ale sloshed and splashed across the surface of the wooden furniture, as Jarl Colborn animatedly engaged in a hand of poker with Jarl’s Vidar and Fiske.

From where he was sat, Halvar could just make out a large pile of glittering jewels and golden trinkets that had been piled in the centre of the table – no doubt being used as betting antes for which the Jarl’s were currently gambling for.
Halvar felt the liquid fire of anger begin to flare in his veins, as he watched the overweight, bearded Jarl poke and prod at the invaluable artefacts as if they were nothing more than plastic casino chips, waiting to be cashed in upon the winning hand being revealed.

Drawing in a deep breath, Halvar attempted to prevent the thundering furnace deep within his condemned soul from exploding, and sending him into a frenzied, murderous rampage.

Now was not the time!

Not when they were so close to having their Master walk amongst them once more.

Not when all seven of the Blood-Bound Jarl’s were required to complete the resurrection incantation – alive, and with all four of their limbs attached!

But by the God’s, did Colborn stretch his already perilously thin patience!

As he scowled at the Jarl from across the room, Halvar noted how Colborn no longer appeared to be favouring his left side, as the guffawing Jarl leant across the table to deliver a hard slap to Fiske’s shoulder.

Which, he guessed, had to mean that the large wound with which the overweight slob had returned to the Catacombs with a few days earlier, must have now fully healed. More’s the pity!

Halvar had nearly delivered an equally as brutal wound to the Jarl’s opposite side, when he had first learnt of the unbearable buffoon’s confrontation with the Mikaelson Witch’s female lover.

And to be fair, he was still undecided as to whether or not he should further publically punish the rogue Jarl in front of all their other Brethren!

Colborn had returned from the city full of self-assurance and arrogance, even despite the fact that a large chunk of his torso had been missing - ripped away thanks to what had looked to have been a large animal bite.

The obese Biker had dramatically burst through Baracuda’s double doors, spilling blood onto the already stained wooden floor as he had swaggered over to his brethren’s table to brag about his encounter with the Witch.

The full complement of Jarl’s had been present that night, and had been sat discussing the on-going preparations for their Master’s resurrection, when Colborn had arrived and disrupted their talks.

Halvar had sat silently seething whilst the obnoxious biker had relayed how he had taken on two fully transformed wolves at the same time - effortlessly fending off their advances, and snapping their bones as easily as if they had been mere babes fresh out of a wench’s womb.

It had only been when Balder had questioned why he could only detect the scent of one wolf’s fur upon the large frame of his brother, that Colborn had begrudgingly amended his tale - confessing that only one of the beasts present had actually phased out of their human state.

The forced admission however, had not served to dampen the Jarl’s brashness, as he had then gone
on to describe how the Mikaelson Witch was indeed now under the full control of the Blood-Bond. A nefarious sneer had stretched across Colborn’s mouth as he told of the blonde wench’s effort to wield one of his large hunting knives – first to try end his life, and then in an attempt to put an end to her own misery.

Both of which had been unsuccessful.

The relief Halvar had felt at the knowledge that the blood-bond had definitely taken root in the eldest Mikaelson, had sadly been short lived – thanks to Colborn going on to describe how one of the wolves that he had fought with, was in fact, the witch’s lover.

And it had been at that point that the Chief Jarl had lost control of his bubbling anger.

Erupting at Colborn in rage, Halvar had effortlessly flung all three hundred pounds of the Jarl across the bar and into the nearest wall - with just a simple flick of his hand.

*Such was the true might of the power gifted upon him by their Great Lord’s blood*

And as the winded Biker had been attempting to hoist himself back onto his feet, Halvar had yelled several obscenities at him whilst trying to resist the urge to snap his neck right there and then.

“You damned reckless son-of-a-bitch!” he had bellowed, causing most of the drunken thralls throughout the bar to fall silent. “The witch’s continued association with us is meant to be clandestine! No one can learn of the task we have set her – NO ONE! Especially not her family! Gods be Damned, I swear Colborn if you have jeopardised our one chance this cycle to resurrect the Master, I will…..”

The Chief Jarl had cut himself off mid-flow and drawn in a deep shuddering breath - attempting to calm the ire thundering through his body. When he had resumed addressing the overweight Jarl once more, his voice had dropped in volume.

“Tell me that you at least killed this wolf associate of the Mikaelson wench? That she no longer draws breath - and thus is unable to relay to any of the Original scum the details of your visit with the Witch?!”

Colborn had been brushing himself off as he had hastily replied to Halvar – a deep scowl twisting his features.

“What does it matter if the bitch saw me?! What does it matter if any of them know about us?! Once the master is back he will….”

“TELL ME THAT YOU ENDED HER!?” the Chief Jarl had shouted in rage, as his eyes had burned menacingly with the deep tones of red and black.

No answer had come forth from Jarl Colborn – who had instead simply spat onto the wooden floor in defiance, before storming off to the back of the bar and disappearing down into the catacombs below.

It had taken Balder and Leaf a good few hours to calm Halvar down that evening - eventually convincing the Chief Jarl not to tear Colborn’s head from his shoulders so that it could be mounted upon a spike and used as a macabre centre-piece in the tavern.

Thankfully the obnoxious Jarl had remained locked away brooding in his personal dwellings during the immediate days that had followed his return - giving Halvar time to concern himself with other matters, and push his latest bout of irritation towards the useless Jarl to the back of his
Until now!

Pushing himself off the bar stool that he had been sat upon, Halvar wearily stretched his neck from side to side – causing the bones found there to make a loud cracking sound. Fixing an icy glare upon the gambling Jarl’s and the stolen treasures of their Master, he managed to take all of one step in their direction before being halted in his tracks by the abrupt arrival of two thralls bursting in through Baracuda’s entranceway.

“W….we have….a ….problem!” stammered one of the breathless bikers, as he came to a halt in the middle of the bar.

A quick glance by Halvar over to Curtis, had the bar manager immediately cutting the sound of the loud music being produced from the taverns vintage juke-box.

As an air of silent anticipation began to blanket over all who currently dwelled within Baracuda, Halvar strode over to where the two recently returned thralls were stood attempting to catch their breaths.

“Well - out with it then!” the Chief Jarl commanded. “What is this problem you speak of?”

“There’s a…trio of….city dwellers …. currently traversing the…. wastelands,” panted the second Thrall, after his breathless comrade gestured for to him to explain. “About 3 miles out. They’re heading straight for us!”

Raising an irritated eyebrow at the pair of bearded vampires, Halvar tried to resist the urge to pluck their wearisome hearts out right there and then.

“So damned well get back out there and suck them dry!” the Jarl exclaimed loudly – disdain clearly lacing his words. “By the Gods, you are meant to be vampires!!”

“Forgive us, Jarl Halvar – but it is not that simple!” stated the Thrall who had spoken first, apparently having now recovered some control over his voice. “The three advancing towards us are not just your average Joe’s. They are Mikaelsons!”

The Chief Jarl’s quickly widened in response to the vampire’s statement.

God’s be damned!

Spinning on the spot, Halvar turned just in time to see Jarl’s Colborn, Fiske and Vidar all knock their chairs over as they jumped up from their seats.

“Halvar?” Vidar asked, as he looked to their leader. “What do we do?”

“We fight!” Colborn and Fiske both declared in unison – a look of steeled determination settling onto their faces.

“No.” Halvar said calmly, as his mind quickly went into overdrive.

“NO!” exclaimed Colborn incredulously. “For the love of the Gods, Halvar – this is not the time to be weak! We cannot let the Mikaelson scum discover the resting place of our Great Lord’s body! Taking them down is our only choice!”

“No!” the Chief Jarl stated again, this time with more conviction behind the word. “To fight them
now would be both reckless and foolish. Especially with Jarl’s Ake and Leaf currently away in the city on errands. We need to stick to our plan! We need to ensure that the Master is resurrected before we take on the Mikaelson family!”

Colborn flashed the Chief Jarl a withering look of disgust - and for a heartbeat, Halvar thought that the self-assured Biker might try to once again challenge his leadership over the Blood-Bound Clan.

*Just let the impotent moron try…*

“What would you have us do, Halvar?” Vidar asked impatiently, attempting to break the fierce stare-down happening between his two brethren. “If the Thralls were correct on their estimation, it will only be minutes before the Original immortals are upon us!”

Halvar let his withering stare linger upon Colborn for a few seconds longer, before he twisted his head towards the tavern’s bar - where Curtis stood stalwart, awaiting orders.

“Call for Jarl Balder now!” he demanded of the Bar Manager. “Get him in here immediately!”

With a quick nod of his head, Curtis quickly disappeared off towards the back of the tavern.

“Halvar?” Fiske questioned, as the Chief Jarl turned back towards his brothers.

“What does this place look like to you?” Halvar asked as he turned back towards the waiting Jarls and gestured to the space around them with his hand.

“A sodding dump!” Colborn huffed, earning himself a tense scowl from the Clan Leader.

“It looks like a bar!” Halvar exclaimed with a hint of exasperation - not waiting for either of the other two Jarl’s to provide their sarcastic pennies worth. “So that’s what we will have them believe it to be – nothing more than a run-down, out of town, biker’s watering hole!”

“But what if they attempt to search beyond just this room?!” Vidar quickly asked, gesturing towards the back of the Tavern to where the stairs lay, that lead down to the vast catacombs beneath the ground. “Or if they are able to sense what we really are?! None of us have ever faced an Original before Halvar – we don’t actually know the true extent of their abilities!”

“Which is exactly why I have summoned Balder!” Halvar stated, turning back towards the rear of the tavern, where the Gothi was now emerging out from the bar’s only stairwell.

The beginnings of a lob-sided smirk began to pull on the Chief Jarl’s mouth, as Balder quickly strode towards them all.

“He is going to help us play a little trick on the Mikaelson vermin!”

*****************************************************************************

2.

Howling wind and fierce rain thrashed their wrath against the small windowpane of St Theodora’s consultation room-two, like two tortured spirits trying to force their way into back into the living world from the darkest depths of hell.
The long fluorescent light running down the middle of the medical room’s ceiling continued to intermittently flicker off and on again, creating a brief strobe effect within the small space each time the power connection momentarily failed.

As Joel sat perched on a small stool next to his current patient’s gurney, he inwardly groaned at the increasing volume of bustling sounds emanating into the room from the rest of the Emergency Clinic.

Storm Gelda seemed to be bringing more and more patients tumbling through their doors every day! Pretty soon there would be no space left within the hospital to accommodate all of the injured and sick!

“Penny for your thoughts, young man?”

The croaky sound of old Mrs Kunkle’s voice quickly roused the male nurse out of his short-lived trance, causing a small smile of embarrassment to spread across his face.

“I’m sorry Mrs Kunkle”, Joel said, shaking himself lightly to try and help focus his attention once more. “I didn’t mean to seem so lost in my own head!”

The small, white haired lady smiled at him as he refocused his gaze onto the patient chart that currently rested on his lap.

“Now, where were we,” Joel muttered, as his eyes swept up and down the admissions form. “Ah yes, you were in the middle of telling me how it is that you have managed to sustain that nasty looking cut on your head. Something to do with a Kitchen cabinet was it?”

“Yes dear”, his patient began, as her frail hand tentatively raised to the gash marring her forehead. “I was cooking for my son you see – he’s such a lovely boy. About your age I’d say! Comes over every Friday to spend the evening with his old mother, and tells me about his week whilst I cook up his favourite meal. Red Beans and Rice! Now I know you young’uns like to microwave everything these days, but mark my words young man…”

“Joel, have you got a minut….oh sorry, I didn’t realise you were with a patient!”

Twisting around on his stool, Joel’s eyebrows raised when he registered the unexpected sight of Keelin - whose head and shoulders were currently poking around the consultation rooms door.

“Dr Malraux!” the male nurse exclaimed in surprise. “What are you doing here? I didn’t think you were back on shift for another couple of days?!”

“Hi, Mrs Kunkle!” Keelin said in greeting to Joel’s patient - smiling at the two of them as she pushed the room’s door open fully. “What are you doing back here again? Didn’t I tell you to lay off the wrestling with Garden Shears?!”

“Oh, you know how it is dear”, the patient replied kindly to Keelin - chuckling as Joel looked questioningly back and forth between them both. “When you get to my age, there’s not a day that goes by that doesn’t involve some sort of trip or fall!”

As Keelin nodded in acknowledgement and began to reply back to Mrs Kunkle with a kind remark, a small frown began to crease Joel’s brow in reaction to his work colleague’s appearance.

Dressed casually in a pair of black skinny jeans that had been matched with a blue checked shirt, it wasn’t so much the doctor’s attire that had caught his attention, as that of her sickly pale complexion.
She looked like she was coming down with a bad case of flu!

“Do you want to grab a quick coffee down the hall?” Joel asked the doctor, as he began to rise up off his stool.

“Oh, no - I don’t want to interrupt your work here. I can wait!” Keelin exclaimed with a smile as she waved goodbye to the old woman sat on the gurney.

“No, it’s ok - we were pretty much done here anyways, right Mrs Kunkle?” Joel said, as he too smiled at the elderly woman. “I just need to hand her chart over so one of the doctors can make a start on suturing the cut on her forehead, and then its off back home for this wee stunner here!”

“Now young man, flattery will get you no-where!” laughed Mrs Kunkle, as she waved goodbye to both him and the doctor as they left the consultation room.

Walking quickly over to the nurse’s station in the middle of the Emergency clinic, Joel placed the old woman’s chart into the minor-injuries rack, before motioning to Keelin to follow him towards the small staff room at the end of the corridor.

“Actually Joel, if there’s one free, would you mind if we had a quick chat in one of the treatment rooms?”

Raising a questioning eyebrow towards his friend, the male nurse nodded before leading the way over to Trauma room two.

Despite the large influx of patients that the clinic had been experiencing over the past week, most of the cases had only involved minor injuries and ailments – which in turn meant that their two major trauma units had seen relatively little use.

“So….” Joel began, stopping in the doorway to turn on the overhead lights as Keelin walked over to the centre of the room, “….are you going to tell me why you’ve come all the way to the clinic on your day off to have a chat with me - instead of sending a heavily filtered snapchat selfie, like any normal anti-social centennial would?!”

A small huff of laughter escaped the brunette doctor’s mouth, as she lightly ran a hand over the empty gurney stood in the middle of the room.

“Now Joel, you know damn well I’m a Millennial – we still retain some semblance of ability to talk to each other in person!”

The male nurses resulting smile was short lived, as he watched Keelin’s expression quickly change from that of bemused to broody, whilst she continued to study the gurney in front of her.

“Hey - are you ok?” Joel asked, as he slowly walked further into the room – intuition already telling him that the answer was no.

“I honestly didn’t think that she was going to make it out of this room alive,” his friend murmured sombrelly, as she traced her hand up and down the hospital trolley. “All of the blood that she’d lost, and with her heart not responding to the defibrillator…."

Keelin’s eyes fell shut as her voice trailed off - as if the brunette doctor was remembering every detail of the morning that her fiancé had been rushed into this very trauma unit, knocking on deaths door.

“But she did!” Joel stated, his voice kind but firm as he came to a standstill next to his colleague.
“And that was all thanks to you, Keelin!”

Opening her eyes once more, Keelin offered Joel a weak smile and nod of her head as she turned to face him.

“Is that what you wanted to talk to me about?” Joel asked. “Freya?”

“Actually, no”, Keelin said as she drew in a deep breath. “I, erm…. well I was hoping that you could take some of my blood, and run some tests on it whilst I’m here.”

“Oh!” he exclaimed, somewhat surprised at his friends request. “I er….well, I mean - sure, ok!”

Gesturing at the gurney for Keelin to jump up and sit on its cushioned surface, Joel quickly made his way over to the back of the room, where he knew one of the cupboards housed pre-prepared phlebotomy carts, ready for use.

Grabbing one of the trays that was full of various different vials, swabs and needles, the male nurse looked quizzically at Keelin as he made his way back over to her.

“Is there something in particular we’re looking for here?” he asked, placing the tools down onto the gurney next to where the doctor sat. “And I guess more importantly, is there a reason that you’re asking me to do this, instead of going through your own family practitioner?!”

“To be honest, I’m not entirely sure what I’m expecting this to find,” Keelin admitted, as she unbuttoned one of the cuffs on her shirt, and began to roll the sleeve up to expose the crook of her arm. “I’ve been experiencing a lot of nausea and weakness over the past week or so. But I’m pretty sure its not viral in nature, as no one that I have had contact with has come down with any of the same symptoms. So, I don’t know, maybe if you just run the generic tests – CBC, Chem-7, TSH, FT4, etc – I can get an idea if its anything worth worrying about or not.”

Nodding his head, Joel selected the appropriately coloured glass vials out of the tray as Keelin reeled off which tests she wanted running.

“Ok, no problem,” the male nurse confirmed – tearing open an alcohol wipe, and using it to clean the small area of skin over Keelin’s most prominent vein. “And the reason why I’m going against hospital protocol to do this, is…..?”

A small sigh left the brunette doctor’s mouth, as her attention remained pointedly focused on her own arm.

“Honestly?” she eventually said, just as Joel was removing the cap off a hypodermic needle.

“I think a little honesty would be a nice change of pace between us, don’t you?!”

Joel inwardly winced at his own remark, not having intended on being so blunt with his work colleague, despite the truth contained within the words.

But there they now were – his feelings - out in the open and hanging tentatively between them!

“Ha – ok,” Keelin huffed, meeting his eyes momentarily before returning her gaze to the blood vials in the tray beside her. “I guess I deserved that!”

“Ah, I’m sorry Keelin! I didn’t mean to sound quite so….”

“No, its ok Joel” his friend said, shaking her head as she spoke. “You have every right to be pissed
at me. Because you’re right, I haven’t exactly been honest with you since we first met. About who I am, and my….er….heritage.”

Expertly inserting the needle into her vein, Joel raised his eyes to meet Keelin’s as the first vial quickly began to fill with the deep crimson tones of blood.

“Your heritage?” he asked, still holding the doctor’s gaze. “The one that explains how you are a werewolf?!”

Keelin’s chestnut eyes widened in surprise, as she reacted to his words.

“You….you know?”

Smirking, Joel returned his attention back to the needle in his hands as he swiftly removed the now full CBC vial, and replaced it with the one that would be used for the TSH and FT4 blood work.

“Well - I do now”, he laughed, shaking his head gently, “since you’ve not immediately called me crazy for suggesting such a thing!”

“But….how….what…….was it something I…….does anyone else here……..fuck….?”

Placing another full vial of blood into the metal tray, Joel swiftly removed the needle from Keelin’s arm, and pressed a small cotton dressing over the area to staunch the flow. Leaving his thumb over the area to keep up the pressure on the tiny wound, the nurse finally met his colleague’s eyes once more.

“I think your secret is safe Keelin, don’t panic!” Joel said, in an attempt to calm his now clearly agitated friend. “Well, unless you have been making a habit of growling at colleagues in the ambulance bay, and flashing feral eyes at them!”

Wincing, the brunette let out a small sigh.

“I guess that was a pretty big give away, huh?”

“Ha, well…. its not exactly something you get to see every day, that’s for sure!” Joel laughed nervously, whilst labelling up the vials of blood that he had just taken. “Am I putting your name on these, or would you prefer to be Jane Doe on this occasion?”

“If you could keep them anonymous, I’d appreciate it,” Keelin confirmed, smiling appreciatively at the nurse. “My kinds blood produces slightly, erm, different results to most human samples.”

Nodding in acknowledgment, Joel labelled the glass containers appropriately and marked them as urgent, so that the pathology lab would have the tests completed and ready for reviewing within minutes of them receiving the samples.

After popping out of the trauma room briefly to hand the vials to a passing porter, Joel grabbed a stool from the corner of the room and dragged it over to the gurney where Keelin remained seated.

“So…” the nurse began, as he settled onto the seat directly in front of his work colleague, “….do you want to help elaborate on the strange and quite frankly mind-boggling information that I managed to find in the local library, detailing the suspected werewolf population of the New Orleans Bayou?!”

“There’s actual books in the library documenting the real-life existence of werewolves?” Keelin asked increduulously.
“Well, not books as in plural”, Joel corrected her. “There’s only the one – unless of course you count the timeless classic “Wolf-man” novel by Jonathan Maberry, or the Twilight series written by….”

“No!” Keelin interrupted, a look of disdain crossing her face as she rolled her eyes. “No one ever counts those bloody Twilight books, Joel! They are pure fictional trash, and could not be farther from the truth!”

Joel laughed as he nodded his head.

“Care to enlighten me on what is the truth then?” he asked. “You know, since we have some time whilst waiting on your bloods n’all.”

Drawing in a deep breath, the brunette doctor launched into an explanation of how the world in which Joel had grown up, was not quite as straightforward as he had been led to believe.

Werewolves, vampires, witches – according to his friend, all of the fictitious monsters that he had grown up reading about and watching on TV as a young boy, actually existed in real life, as opposed to just in the imaginations of authors and film makers.

Not only existed - but apparently lived in amongst the normal everyday people, right under their very noses here in the city, without most of them ever knowing.

As Keelin went on to describe how she herself had been born into a “pack” of werewolves, and had initially grown-up surrounded by many others of her kind back in Austin - Texas, Joel’s eyes got wider and wider as his overwhelmed mind tried to keep up with the new, startling information it was receiving.

*Vampires?! Witches?! Magic was real?! Actual, bonified “move an object with the just the flick of a hand” magic was….real?! Huh?!

“So, hold up…. Joel interrupted Keelin, just as she was describing how her surname - Malraux - was actually the name of her pack’s lineage, “…..are you telling me that the day you were born, you came out with four legs and paws - instead of the usual human limbs and features?”

A small huff of laughter escaped from Keelin, as she shook her head at his question.

“No Joel, it doesn’t work like that. I was born human – all of my kind were! We don’t actually gain the ability to transform into a wolf until we trigger our curse.”

“Mmmm hmmm,” the male nurse murmured. “So, what is it that triggers this…. er…. curse?”

Raising a hand to rub at the back of her neck, Keelin appeared to suddenly take on a nervous edge that Joel had not previously noticed during the relating of her tale.

“Oh, well…. you know…. there’s a lot of different things I guess…. ”

“Hold up,” Joel interrupted, as a new thought suddenly crash landed into his reeling mind, “you said the other day when Freya was still on the ICU ward, that her metabolism differed from most humans! Is she the same as you? A werewolf?”

Shaking her head again, Keelin chewed on her lip lightly as she seemed to search for the right words to say.

“No, she’s different to me and my kind. Freya is…. well, she and her whole family actually, they
Joel raised an eyebrow in reaction to his friend’s hesitant words.

*She’d practically just told him that Dracula, Teen-Wolf, and Harry bleeding Potter passed him every day, as he walked along the streets of New Orleans – how much more “unusual” could it get?!*

“More unusual than you being able to transform into a four-legged, ferocious beast every time there is a full moon ?!” Joel huffed incredulously.

“Actually, my transformations aren’t controlled by the moon anymore!” Keelin said as she began to twirl a bejewelled ring sitting on her right hand. “Something happened last year that meant...”

The brunette doctor’s words faltered as both her and Joel’s attention was suddenly commanded by nurse Sander’s, pushing open one of the double door’s leading into the Trauma unit.

“Joel those urgent blood’s you needed are back from.....oh, hey Dr Malraux!” Sanders called out, her tone quickly changing from rushed to surprised as she registered the presence of Keelin. “I didn’t realise you were on shift today?”

“Oh, I’m not”, Keelin said, quickly lowering the sleeve of her shirt and hopping down off the hospital gurney, as she smiled effortlessly towards the newcomer. “I actually just popped by to thank you and Joel for your efforts last week, when my fiancé was rushed in. I couldn’t have kept it together without you both, and your support and professionalism! You are both a credit to the hospital!”

“Awww,” cooed nurse Saunders, her cheeks flushing pink as Joel turned his face away from the nurse to flash Keelin a bemused look. “There’s no need to thank either of us, right Joel?! We were both just doing our jobs, after all.”

“R-right!” Joel agreed, turning back to face his fellow nurse. “Its what we’re trained to do after all!”

Smiling at both Joel and Keelin, Sanders nodded her head, before jerking her head towards the bustling hospital corridor behind her.

“Well, I better get back to it – more and more patients seem to be tumbling through our doors by the second! Good to see you Dr Malraux – I hope that your partner has fully recovered from her particularly nasty bout of flu now! Oh, and don’t forget about those blood’s Joel – they’re on the system for you now.”

Joel flashed a look of gratitude towards Sanders as she left, before quickly turning back towards Keelin and raising a brow towards her.

“So, I suppose that the reason everyone who works here mysteriously believes that Freya was rushed in the other day with breathing difficulties thanks to the flu – has something to do with her and her families “unusualness”?!?”

“Um…. yeah, something like that!” Keelin admitted, somewhat sheepishly. “It’s…. well, its complicated.”

Raising his hands up in front of him, Joel quickly shook his head at his friend.

“You know what – I think my wee fabulous mind has had enough crazy for one day! How about
you save the rest for when we have a bottle of bourbon and two shot glasses sat between us, to help soften the blow!”

Offering him a sympathetic smile, Keelin nodded her head in agreement, before gesturing towards the hospital issue i-Pad that was currently docked on a charging plate on one of the Trauma room’s benches.

“So, hit me with it, Doctor Joel – what’s the verdict,” Keelin asked playfully, as the male nurse walked over to grab the tablet. “Am I suffering with an unexpected and ridiculously rare case of tropical malaria, or do I simply just need to accept that even someone with my supernaturally enhanced abilities, needs more than two hours of sleep a night to function!?”

As he tapped in his user code for the i-pad, and brought up “Jane-Doe-125’s” blood results onto the screen, Joel began to scan an experienced eye up and down the various figures and percentages being presented to him.

*Oh…!*

The male nurse nervously flicked his eyes up to Keelin, before quickly lowering them to read over the results again.

*Oooooh….boy!*

“Joel?”

Keelin’s voice had lost most of its light-heatedness, as she attempted to gain his attention.

Clearing his throat, Joel cocked his head to the side as he endeavoured to find the right words to convey to his friend what the blood-test results were indicating.

“Keelin…. have you…. well, have you and Freya been receiving any fertility treatment recently?”

“Fertility treatment?!” the brunette asked, sounding just as confused as he currently felt. “Why would that have any relevance to…."

The doctor’s words trailed off as the implications of Joel’s words seemed to begin trickling into her tired mind.

“Well, your hormone levels are through the roof,” he continued, focusing his gaze back onto the blood results. “The estriol in your blood plasma is measuring 1.2 mg/ml, and your progesterone is 50ng/ml. It would suggest that you are…..”

“I’m a wolf, Joel!” Keelin suddenly exclaimed, as though the words should automatically explain the raised results to him. “Our hormone levels are far more elevated than those of the average human. Its doesn’t mean that I’m…. it just means that I’m a healthy, normal wolf, whose hormones are out of control!”

“Keelin…..”

“I mean, you heard me say that my kind live in packs, right?! Christ Joel, you should see some of the arguments and fights that break out on a daily basis just because of our raging, abnormally high hormone levels, and….”

“Keelin!”
“….if I was a guy, those results would be showing that testosterone pretty much dominated my veins. It’s totally normal and…”

“KEELIN!”

Joel’s elevated voice finally cut his friend off mid-flow, as her brown eyes widened as they met his own.

“It’s not just your Estriol and Progesterone, ok! The results are showing high levels of hCG in your blood too! Like, we’re talking third trimester levels of hCG!”

Turning the i-pad around so that his friend could see the results for herself, Joel watched on as Keelin’s already pale face quickly drained of what little colour had been left in it, as her gaze flicked back and forth over the screen.

“I…. that’s…. that’s not possible!”

The brunette’s voice was barely above that of a whisper, as she slowly raised a hand to cover her mouth.

“Well,” Joel said as his own eyes dropped back down to blood work results, “I can take a fresh sample of blood if you wish, and run the tests again. But Keelin, you know as well as I do, that hCG is only produced by the female body when…”

“Don’t!” Keelin suddenly yelled, effectively cutting him off. “Just don’t! It’s not possible Joel – ok! I’m in a gay relationship for crying out loud. I haven’t slept with a guy in…. in…. well the point is, it’s just not possible!!”

Joel took a step back as his friend suddenly began pacing back and forth along the length of the hospital gurney that stood next to them - agitation clearly taking a hold of her.

“It could be a tumour on one of my ovaries – that could definitely account for the increased levels of Progesterone,” Keelin stated, gesturing with her hand towards Joel as she marched back and forth. “Or it could even be the onset of Endometritis!”

“Ok, so, have you had any abnormal bleeding?” Joel asked, trying to help his friend realise that her suggestions were highly unlikely. “Or bouts of acute pain in your womb area?”

“Well, no, but that doesn’t mean that…..”

“Are you still regular?” he continued, unphased by the brunette doctor’s dismissive tone. “When was your last cycle?”

Keelin’s eyes began to flick back and forth in rapid succession as she appeared to contemplate Joel’s questions. Within a few heartbeats, the brunette finally halted her pacing and shook her head to herself.

“I….I think it was just before I returned from New York. No - that can’t be right! I must have had one since!”

“Keelin, it’s coming up to two months since you got back from your Seminar in the Big Apple!”

“That’s hardly conclusive evidence, Joel!” Keelin stated, avoiding his gaze as she resumed her pacing once more. “The past few weeks have been extremely stressful, and I’ve not exactly been looking after myself particularly well. You know as well as I do that many women can skip a cycle
when their bodies are stressed or exhausted!"

“And do those women also suffer with extreme morning sickness, and have high volumes of hCG flowing though their veins?!” Joel asked rhetorically, as a hint of sarcasm slipped into his voice despite his best efforts to remain professionally calm.

Coming to a halt directly in front of him, Keelin opened her mouth as if to avidly protest his claims once more – before quickly closing it again.

“Keelin, darlin – I’m not here to judge, ok!” Joel declared, as he placed what he hoped to be a calming hand upon his colleague’s shoulder. “I’m your friend, and I will support you no matter what. If this is unplanned, and the result of…. well, the result of a one-night stand, I can promise you that it doesn’t make any difference to me! I just want to make sure that you are…..”

“NO!” Keelin shouted, recoiling away from his touch. “No! I mean…. what the hell, Joel?! How could you even think to suggest that I have it in me to betray Freya’s trust like that?!”

“Hey!” Joel exclaimed, raising two placating hands. “I’m not trying to accuse you of anything here, ok! I just…. well if this isn’t something that the two of you have planned and actively sought help with, then…..”

“No, Joel! Ok! I’m not…. dammit, let me see that tablet again!”

Handing over the i-pad to the brunette doctor, Joel watched on as she furiously looked over each of the blood test results once more.

Then a second time.

And a third.

“Fuck…. this can’t be happening!” his friend finally breathed out, as she closed her eyes and let the hand holding the i-pad drop to her side in defeat.

Looking on at his friend in sympathy, Joel placed his hand on her shoulder once more and gave it a gentle squeeze.

“Well”, he dared to venture after a few seconds of silence between the two of them, “you did say that your kinds bodies and metabolisms differ to those of a normal human. Is it possible that this could be some sort of self-impregnation…”

“Urgh…. for crying out loud, I’m not pregnant! I…. I can’t be!” Keelin declared, shaking her head as she met his gaze once more. “Run the damned tests again!”

Joel opened his mouth, ready to state once again that she knew as well as he did the presence of hCG in her blood could only mean one thing. But the words quickly died on his tongue as he began to notice the presence of fear in his friend’s eyes, alongside the confusion and uncertainty that had already taken root.

She was scared!

“Ok!” he finally said, reaching for the phlebotomy kit once again, as Keelin hopped back onto the gurney and tugged aggressively at the sleeve of her shirt. “But you have to promise not to wolf out and eat me if these return from the lab confirming that you are definitely carrying a pup in there!”

He instantly regretted his choice of words, as Keelin fixed him with a withering glare full of
warning and malice.

“I…. am…. not…. pregnant!” she declared once again, as a deep rumbling sound began to fill the space between them.

Growling!

She was actually, bonified, growling at him!

Again!

*Oh boy…. for his own sanity and safety, he prayed that his supernaturally gifted friend was right!*
“I have not intentionally tried to anger anyone!” Elijah declared, whilst pulling the lapels of his suit jacket tighter around his body to shield against the storm. “I simply did not want to ruin the paintwork of my brand-new Aston Martin. Had I known that we were going to have to traverse such rough terrain, I would have picked a different vehicle to transport us here!”

“The bloody bar is in the middle of the waste-lands!” Rebekah exclaimed angrily, as she whipped her head around to deliver a withering glare towards her eldest brother. “We were hardly going to be driving along smooth, tarmacked roads!”

A simple shrug of the shoulders was the only response she received off Elijah, as they continued their trudge along the uneven ground.

“Come now Rebekah”, Klaus said, just as she let out a huff of annoyance towards her immaculately dressed sibling. “A little rain and wind never hurt anyone. Besides, it was you who insisted on joining Elijah and myself on a little excursion this afternoon. We could have easily checked out this latest dive on our own, tonight, whilst you kept watch over our eldest sister!”

“I am growing tired of doing nothing, Nik!” Rebekah declared, meeting her brothers stare. “These damned elusive tyrants have attacked Freya twice now. Twice!! And yet somehow, we are no closer to finding out who they are, or which bloody stone they keep disappearing under like spineless, cowardly cockroaches! It makes me so…. damned…. urgh!”

Fists clenched at her side, as the veins around the frustrated blonde’s eyes momentarily intensified - both in colour and size.

“I know, sister,” Klaus said, his tone laced with a surprising amount of clam understanding as he placed a hand upon Rebekah’s shoulder. “But I swear to you, we will find them! And when we do, I will make them regret the day that they clawed their way out of their wretched mothers’ wombs!”

The two of them shared a brief empathetic look, before Klaus’s hand fell away from her shoulder and his glare hardened with grim determination once more.

“Speaking of Freya”, Elijah said, when both of his siblings’ attention had once more returned to the wooden building ahead of them. “How fairs our good sister as of late? It has been a few days since I took watch over her and Keelin’s apartment, and I regret to admit that I have not managed to check in on her during that time.”

“She’s…..well she’s coping about as well as she can be expected to I suppose!” Rebekah said, after a moment or two of deliberation.

The three of them had not really had chance to discuss the state in which they had found Freya, after the latest attack upon her in the Hospital’s ICU department.

Immediately after the event, their focus had been solely upon making sure that their sister returned safely to her home, and to see if there had been any shred of evidence or trail left behind by the fleeing, injured biker, which they could pick up on.

As time had progressed, and they had come up with the plan to keep watch over Freya and Keelin’s apartment, the three of them had been mostly kept apart – seeing to their respective duties.

This damned walk that they were now engaged upon, was the first time any of them had had chance to talk as a family unit – and not be not otherwise interrupted.

“Tell me sister, brother…..does it not seem a little strange to you both, how our eldest sibling has been acting since returning to us from her captivity?”
Klaus’s question only just managed to make it to Rebekah’s ears, thanks to the sudden increase in ferocity of the wind as it whipped her golden locks across her face.

“Strange?” she scoffed in reply, whilst removing several strands of wayward hair from her mouth. “Nik, she was held captive and tortured for days by those bloody barbarians! What the hell did you expect her to be - happy and carefree?!”

“Of course not!” the hybrid immediately retorted, as they continued to push forward. “I saw her wounds just as clearly as you did Rebekah! We all know the full extent of the ordeal she was subjected to. But this is our sister we speak of - one of the most fearsome and powerful witch’s ever to walk the land! She has faced torment and anguish more times than can legitimately be counted - the same as us all - and not once has she shied away from exacting her revenge upon anyone foolish enough to harm our family! The Freya I know would be out here with us, determinedly scouring every inch of this god forsaken wasteland until the wretched mongrels who had harmed her were found, and painfully dismembered by her own magic - one body part at a time!”

“I get what you’re saying Nik”, Rebekah replied. “But you have to try and remember how intimate an attack upon Freya this has been! Not just in the physical sense, but on her status as a witch too! All of her magic and power deserted her on the night she was taken, remember?! I can’t imagine how debilitating and frightening that must have been for our sister, to suddenly find herself completely defenceless, and without the magic she has relied upon all of her life! I mean, can you picture suddenly being surrounded by a hoard of cruel monsters trying to harm you, and at that very moment discovering that you were no longer a hybrid? That you were suddenly just an average Joe – utterly human, and vulnerable!”

“Or so we have been led to believe!” Klaus scoffed, as he attempted to wipe his face clear of rain water. “Freya herself has not mentioned anything about a sudden disappearance of her powers! That piece of information came from the wolf whom warms her bed!”

“Oh, for crying out loud Nik!” Rebekah shouted in exasperation. “You have to bloody well get over this preposterous attitude you have towards Keelin!”

The blonde vampire caught sight of her hybrid brother rolling his eyes from the corner of her vision, as she raised an arm in an attempt to shield her face from the intensifying rain.

“They are engaged to be married for god’s sakes! And if it wasn’t for Keelin, our sister would not even be alive right now - brooding away up in her bell-tower over some form of new protection spell for the compound! She saved her life Klaus - twice now actually! How about showing a little gratitude for that fact, instead of constantly trying to find new ways to defile her character!”

“What spell for the compound?” Klaus asked, turning his squinting eyes onto Rebekah.

“Excuse me?”

“You said that our sister is currently working on a new protection spell for the compound!” the hybrid confirmed, somewhat irritably. “What is this magic in aid of? Surely she should instead be focusing her efforts on fortifying the apartment that she so foolishly insists on staying in with her wolf lover?!”

“It is for the night that we hold their engagement party!” Rebekah replied, wincing slightly as she remembered that she had yet to discuss the upcoming soiree with her two brothers.

“Party?!” Klaus scoffed, as he dramatically threw his hands up into the air. “We’re out here trying
to hunt down the tyrants who tortured her, whilst she’s what - back home planning the finer details of a party?! See, this is exactly the sort of preposterous thing that I’m referring to when I say that something feels off with her….”

“If you two are quite done with your bickering”, Elijah suddenly interrupted, “I think you that will find we have arrived at our intended destination!”

Throwing one last pointed glare towards Klaus, Rebekah turned just in time to prevent herself from tripping over the lower step of a wide wooden porch, that wrapped all the way around the building in front of them.

Taking a small step back, the blonde vampire stood with her brothers as all three of them quickly surveyed the exterior of the large, run-down establishment that they had set out on that particular afternoon to find.

A long row of at least twenty motorcycles were parked up on the porch itself, each a different make and model, and each looking as though it had recently been polished within an inch of its life – despite the horrific weather that was currently assaulting the vehicles chrome exteriors.

The building itself looked as though it had been erected sometime back in the early eighteen hundred’s - when the cowboys and outlaws of the great Wild West ruled the lands, and found themselves drinking in establishments such as the one Rebekah now stood outside of.

Wooden planks not only lined the walls, but also served as boarding over what the blonde vampire assumed had once been two small, glass filled windows on either side of the establishment’s entrance. The doorway itself was also constructed out of wood, but unlike the old saloon style swinging doors that Rebekah imagined had once resided on the hinges of this tavern’s framework, the barrier between the outside world and whatever dwelled within was blocked by one large solid sheet of oak, that looked to have been sourced from a different type of tree and era than the rest of the building.

Clearly the door of this place had been kicked down once or twice over the decades, and had needed to be replaced!

As her gaze travelled upwards, Rebekah noted that the front door of the tavern was not the only thing to look out of place on the old rickety framework of the building. Hanging high above the entranceway and somehow standing firm against the gusty might of Storm Gelda, was a large sign written in neon-lit letters that spelt out the name of the bar.

“Baracuda!” Klaus stated, as he too stared up at the bright red lettering. “A bizarre name for an old run-down shithole such as this, wouldn’t you say?!”

“Well, tasteless name aside, I would say that it is exactly the sort of establishment we have been looking for!” Elijah commented, as he gestured towards the motorcycles that flanked either side of the entranceway.

“Right!” Klaus declared, as he ascended the three steps leading up to the tavern’s entranceway, and placed his hand upon its handle. “Shall we…..”

Flashing an impish grin towards his siblings, Klaus pushed open the tavern’s door and took a step inside – immediately being followed by both Rebekah and Elijah, as they attempted to shake the rain water from their coats.
......ok, ok, so go for it. Send all of your "we knew it!" commnents my way! Hehe.

But hey look, in my defence, I never denied any of your (mostly correct) theories with what was happening with Keelin! I simply deflected, and bided my time before confirming what was going on in her belly :-) 

And DayDay - hope this chapter made you smile dude! Haha.
Chapter 22.

Chapter Summary

**Previously on What Lies Within...**

1. Freya and Keelin got engaged, before making love on the night of the Harvest Full Moon.
2. The two lovers got into a major argument on Bourbon St, when Freya discovered that Keelin had been hiding Alanna from her for over a year.
3. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by a motorbike gang calling themselves the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan.
4. The witch's will was finally broken by Jarl Colborn, who threatened to torture and rape her fiancé if she did not willingly give herself over to the Blood-bond.
5. The Mikaelson siblings tried to heal Freya's broken body with their blood, only for it to fail. It took a sample of Marcel's enhanced blood to cure Freya of her physical injuries - much to everyone's confusion, and Klaus's annoyance.
6. Keelin's health has been deteriorating ever since the night Freya was abducted, eventually resulting in the wolf asking her work colleague Joel to perform some tests on her blood. Tests, that appeared to show the wolf is pregnant.
7. Freya continues to be distant to Keelin, whilst trying to research the existence of the Nazuril - an amulet supposedly created by the gods to protect its wearer from harm.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 22 up for grabs guys.

Sorry for the wait! As previously mentioned I was away over Easter with my family, and since returning I have been taking my time writing this. In my defence - it's a long one! Over 20 thousand words to be exact. So hopefully that will make up for the delay between postings.

As always, I hope you enjoy! And don't forget to hit me up with a comment if you get chance, once you're done reading. I love hearing your thoughts on the tales progression. :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 22.

1.

A thick haze of tobacco smoke attacked both Rebekah’s eyes and lungs, as she briskly stepped out of the hammering rain and into the dusky bar called Baracuda.
As the blonde vampire’s swept her gaze across the large open space and her eye’s quickly adjusted to its shadowy ambience, it struck her just how calm and orderly the place appeared to be.

Round tables of varying sizes were cluttered across the rickety wooden floor, each occupied by at least two or more leather clad patrons as they engaged in drinking whatever poison the bar staff had seen fit to serve them. And despite the men around the tables appearing to be gambling via various games of poker and roulette, the noise being emitted from the crowd was minimal - giving the whole room a strange, subdued atmosphere.

Keeping in theme with the large “Baracuda” sign outside, the tavern’s walls were adorned with various plaques and signs that were all lit-up via bright neon tubing. Brash red, yellow, and blue light radiated out from the many hanging adornments, giving the whole room a distinct small town, eighties throw-back vibe – somewhere that time appeared to have forgotten nearly four decades ago.

*Like something out of one of those Stephen Spielberg movies that Kol loved to indulge himself in when he thought that no one was around* Rebekah mused to herself, as she continued to quickly take in her surroundings.

*Almost as though the man, whom she assumed was the bar manager, was purposely trying not to look in their direction.*

The liquor bar itself, she noted, was situated in the middle of the tavern - its large square shape lined by tall stools that flanked along each of its four sides with military precision.

Behind its high wooden counter, Rebekah could see a burly, muscular looking man stood engaged in the act of rigorously cleaning a glass tumbler with what appeared to be a well-worn, yet surprisingly clean cloth.

*Intensely engaged* the blonde thought, as both of the two immortals stood on either side of her simultaneously took a step further into the tavern. *Almost as though the man, whom she assumed was the bar manager, was purposely trying not to look in their direction.*

“Well…. isn’t this just a delightfully wretched establishment”, Klaus suddenly declared loudly, as he gestured around the open space with two outstretched arms. “Exactly the sort of place where one might expect to find the sort of low life scum that we are looking for – wouldn’t you say brother?!”

Rebekah could practically feel the intensity of Elijah’s inspection, as her well-dressed sibling continued to scrutinise each of the patrons sat drinking in the run-down saloon as he replied to Klaus.

“It certainly has it’s…charm!” the Original vampire mocked, as he cocked an eyebrow towards what Rebekah noted to be a fully working, brightly lit juke box situated along the back wall of the tavern.

“I guess the important question,” Klaus continued boisterously, as the three of them came to a self-assured standstill half way towards the bar at the centre of the room, “is whose heart does a hybrid have to rip out around here, to get some much needed answers!?"

Despite her impertinent brother’s poorly veiled threat, Rebekah was surprised to see that most of the tavern’s cliental did not bother to look up from their respective games of disrepute, or half-drunk tankards of ale. The numerous bikers - all of whom looked to be sporting either well-worn leather jackets, or black t-shirts that had various versions of the “Hells Angel” motif splayed across their backs - continued about their business as though the three Original siblings had never stepped foot into the bar.
That was - all except for one.

Sat on a wooden stool next to the central bar, was a tall blonde-haired man, whose long greasy locks cascaded over well-defined back muscles that appeared to be making a bid to escape from the confines of the tightly fitted black t-shirt he was wearing. Originally sat facing away from the three immortal siblings, Rebekah watched on as the bearded biker slowly swivelled around on his seat to face them – his expression looking both cool and collected, despite Klaus’s loud, raucous words.

“Awfully loud for a city-dweller, aren’t you?!” the man casually commented in a deep, gruff voice, as he appeared to run a disinterested eye over the Mikaelson siblings.

“Well,” Klaus started, as Rebekah watched her brother’s trade-mark smirk began to make an appearance, “from what I hear, you grease monkey types aren’t exactly a full basket worth of sandwiches when it comes to understanding basic sentences! And I didn’t want to run the risk of being misunderstood, since I have no intention of repeating myself!”

Cocking an eyebrow towards Klaus, the fair-haired biker appeared to momentarily consider retaliating to the insult that the hybrid had thrown his way, before breaking into what looked like a suspiciously calculated smile.

“And what exactly is it that we “Grease Monkey’s” can do for the great Klaus Mikaelson and his kin? Since I doubt you have travelled this far away from your city comforts simply just to sample one of my establishment’s finest ales!”

“You know of us?!” Elijah said, mild surprise evident his voice.

“Well of course!” the burly biker replied, as he gestured around the room. “My cliental might choose to drink out here in the sticks, but they are all New Orleans born and bred. And I doubt there is a Louisiana man alive who does not know of the legendary tales that follow you and your “unique” family around!”

All three Originals shared a brief look of intrigue, before quickly returning their attention to the muscular oily haired man, who was now taking a large glug of ale from what looked to be an old, time-worn metal tankard.

“Good!” Klaus suddenly exclaimed, as he began to close the distance between himself and the biker with long purposeful strides. “Then you will know that I am not someone to be trifled with!”

“Quite!” the man stated, before finishing his drink as his bright blue eyes followed Klaus’s advance.

As her brother took it upon himself to boldly claim the bar-stool next to the biker, Rebekah once again cast a wary eye over the rest of the tavern’s inhabitants - looking for any signs of tension or danger amongst their drunken, gambling ranks.

Of which she curiously found none.

“So tell me….” Klaus began, gesturing towards the sandy-haired man in an attempt to learn his name.

“Bear!”

“Bear?!” the hybrid mused out loud, with no shortage of ridicule in his tone. “Ok….so tell me “Bear” – when was the last time you and your cliental here kidnapped and tortured someone against their will?!”
Large droplets of ale abruptly flew across the space between Klaus and the biker, as Bear coughed up the amber liquid that he had just gulped down, in apparent shock at the hybrids question.

“Excuse me?!”

“Oh, I believe you heard me just fine, Bear!” Klaus stated, ignoring the globules of drink now staining his dark blue jacket as he held the bikers stare with eyes full of danger.

Rebekah could practically feel the tension now emanating from Elijah’s taught muscles, as he joined her in monitoring the drinking bikers for any sign of a reaction to Klaus’s challenging statement. The two of them silently agreed to observe one side of the tavern each, as they watched the patrons continue to ignore the confrontation currently happening right under their noses.

“I’m afraid I don’t follow you?” the blue-eyed biker professed. “Are you accusing us of something?”

As Klaus’s glare towards the biker narrowed in scepticism, something quickly dawned on Rebekah as her enhanced supernatural senses shifted into high alert.

*Their smell! Even over the strong stench of stale beer and days old sweat saturating the air around her – she could clearly make out the distinct scent markers being given off by each of the drunken patrons as they sat gambling away their money. Human – they were all tediously human!* 

A fact, she noted, that Klaus too appeared to suddenly register, as he leant in closer to the sandy-haired biker and locked eyes with the man.

Compelling, commanding eyes.

“You will tell me everything that you know human, about my eldest sister, Freya, and her recent abduction – including where she was held and who it was that dared to lay their hands on her! Everything…NOW!”

Rebekah watched on as the man calling himself Bear quickly took on the familiar slacked faced, dead eyed expression, that she had seen countless times on mortals who had been successfully compelled by a vampire.

“I only know of your witch sister thanks to the legendary tales that all of us New Orleans folk have heard over the years,” the blue-eyed biker began, his voice now monotone and listless despite the gravel that continued to crunch in his throat. “She is said to be both powerful and fearsome, with a brutal protective streak of her family. There have been rumours over the years that she appeared back in the rest of your family’s lives after being held captive for most of her early life by a tyrannical Aunt, and that she was initially treated with both animosity and scepticism by her brothers and sister! A foolish mistake on your behalves, I would wager!”

A loud, affronted scoff escaped from Rebekah’s lips in reaction to the biker’s words, causing Klaus to throw up a silencing hand in her direction, despite never taking his eyes off of Bear.

“I have no interest in your ill-advised theories!” Klaus snarled to the bearded man. “Stick to the facts – what do you know of her recent abduction? Were you or any of the cretins here involved?”

Both Rebekah and Elijah momentarily turned their attention away from the Tavern’s customers and back onto Bear, eager to hear his response.

“I have no knowledge of what you speak”, the biker claimed - his tone both flat and subordinate as his glazed over gaze remained locked onto Klaus. “If the Mikaelson Witch has been harmed in any
way, I can confirm that neither I nor any of my associates were involved. And I highly doubt any of
the regular drinkers in this tavern would have had the balls to attempt such a crime against your
family either!"

Klaus’s stare remained boring into Bear’s eyes, as he seemed to deliberate the man’s words.
“And has there been anyone else in this bar over the past week talking about the torment of our
sister? Someone who might not be a regular drinker here?” he finally asked, after a few moments
of consideration.

“No, there has been no mention of her, by any soul who has walked through our doors! Other than
yourselves of course.”

Rebekah’s brow began to furrow as the biker’s words roiled disappointedly around in her head.

Turning to his siblings, Klaus flashed them both a look of guarded suspicion.

“My siblings are going to take a closer look around this sorry excuse for a bar!” the hybrid
exclaimed, without taking his eyes off his family.

“Of course,” Bear replied. “We have nothing to hide!”

“Well, that remains to be seen now, doesn’t it!” Klaus declared, as he turned back to the biker and
flashed him a devilish smile.

Drawing in a deep breath, Rebekah began to weave her way in-between the occupied tables and
chairs in the tavern. As her eyes wandered over the various patrons sat chatting amongst
themselves, two things quickly became apparent to her.

All of the drunken customers present reeked of days old beer and unwashed clothes.

And all of them were men.

*There was not a single woman in the bar, other than herself!*

As she began to make her way over to a particularly large table in the far corner of the room, the
blonde vampire caught sight of her eldest brother pulling open a door that he had found at the rear
of the building – one that she automatically assumed would probably lead down to the taverns
 cellar. Pausing briefly in her advance, she was able to make out what looked to be some sort of
storage room just beyond the threshold that Elijah now stood upon. Chairs and tables appeared to
be stacked on top of one another, completely filling the small space from floor to ceiling with their
wooden appendages and leaving little room for anyone to fit into the space without first removing
the heaped furniture.

Sighing at the lack of progression they appeared to be having so far, Rebekah returned her
attention to the table ahead of her that was occupied by three particularly burly men who seemed to
be engrossed in a hand of poker.

As she came within a few footsteps, the biker closest to her – a somewhat overweight man whose
course-wiry beard fell all the way down to his bulging chest – twisted his head in her direction and
fixed a beady eyed stare upon her.

A glare, she observed, with no shortage of disgust, *that fixed leeringly upon her chest, rather than
her face.*

“Is there something that we can help you with, sweetheart?!” a particularly baby-faced looking
biker sat across from the ogling man asked, as a smirk tugged at his mouth. “Care to join us for a drink perhaps? Or would you prefer to cut straight to the chase, and come sit on my….”

“Viper! Where are your gods damned manners?!” exclaimed the third man sat at the table, as he quickly leant over and swiped his associate on the shoulder. “Excuse my friend here miss! He is young, and has yet to learn how to behave properly in the presence of a lady!”

Forcing her focus away from the bearded biker who continued to drag leering eyes up and down her body, Rebekah turned her attention to the other two patrons sat at the table.

“Well I’d suggest he learns pretty quick!” she quipped, flashing the younger biker a fierce, toothy smile. “Before I decide to teach him something that he’ll never bloody forget!”

All three of the men sat at the table laughed in response to her remark, causing the overweight biker to break his sordid gaze upon her for the first time since she had arrived in their company.

“Oooh darlin, you can school me any time you want!” the one who had been referred to as Viper remarked, before blowing a kiss in her direction.

Cocking her head to the side, Rebekah studied the baby-faced biker for a heartbeat longer, before suddenly launching herself around the table at supernatural speed. Before any of the three men had time to react, she had grabbed a handful of Viper’s slicked back hair and slammed his head down onto the table, so hard that large cracks in the wood instantly appeared beneath the side of his face squashed against the furniture.

As the bikers two associates simultaneously pushed up out of their chairs - apparently readying themselves to aid their friend - Rebekah lent down towards Viper as she effortlessly kept his head pressed down.

“Well how about we start with lesson number one,” she breathed threateningly into the struggling man’s ear as her eyes remained acutely trained on his two associates. “If you speak to me like that again - I’ll rip your pathetic tiny dick off and shove it down your throat!”

Loud, raucous laughter suddenly exploded into air around her, as the overweight biker stood across the table reacted to her words.

“Gods be dammed!” he huffed, leering in her direction once as his snickering died down. “You Mikaelson women sure do like to talk a big game, but your barks are far bigger than your bites!”

Rising up from the youthful biker’s reddening face, Rebekah fixed narrowing eyes onto the obnoxious man as his choice of words triggered in her head.

“What did you just say?!”

“Sister – if you are quite done having your fun with the locals, it is time for us to take our leave!”

Klaus’s voice resounded out across the bar – barely registering in Rebekah’s ears despite its volume, as she continued to glare intensely at the smirking biker in front of her.

Ignoring her brother’s call, the blonde vampire released her grip on the baby-faced biker’s head, and took a calculating step towards his large associate.

“You heard your brother, wench,” the sneering man mocked, revealing a mouthful of yellowing teeth. “Time to run along, before you bite off more than you can chew!”
Flames of anger seared in her veins, as Rebekah’s eyes began to bleed from their natural blue tones, into their deadly blood red vampiric form. Just as her top lip began to tug up at one side to reveal newly descended fangs, an immaculately preened hand fell upon her shoulder – causing the blondes head to whip around in its owner’s direction.

“Come sister, let us not waste our energy on these local dirt riders!”

Elijah’s voice cut through her ire, as his calm features implored her to exercise restraint.

“They might be sorely in need of a lesson in manners – but there is nothing here to suggest that they played any part in our sisters torment!”

Shrugging off her brother’s hand, Rebekah turned her attention back to the smirking bikers and sniffed indignantly towards the largest one, as her vampiric fangs began their ascent back into her gums.

“You would do well to prey that we do not meet again, little boys!” she remarked, before turning her back to the trio and falling into step besides Elijah as he made his way back over to the central bar. “For next time, my brothers will not be around to stop me showing you exactly what we Mikaelson women are capable of!”

As the two siblings reached the bar, Klaus stood up off of his stool and gave the sandy-haired Bear and the rest of the tavern one last look over.

“You know, over the years I have had the pleasure of drinking in some fine worldly establishments”, the hybrid began, sniffing the air as he spoke. “This, is definitely not one of them!”

A huff of air snorted out of the sandy-haired biker’s nose, as the three Mikaelson siblings swiftly turned on their heels and began to make their way over to the bar’s exit.

The noise of drunken men gambling and trading insults began to rise in the air, as Elijah was the first to reach the large wooden door leading out into the stormy afternoon first - pushing it open for his siblings to step through.

“Such a delightful place!” the suited vampire commented sarcastically, as they three of them stepped out onto the tavern’s large porch and listened to the exit fall shut behind them.

“Well, its certainly not somewhere we will be frequenting for our nightly bourbon!” Klaus remarked, as he pulled the collar of his jacket up around his neck and lower face. “But sadly it would appear we are still no closer to discovering the whereabouts of Freya’s tormentors.”

Turning to face both of her brothers, Rebekah shook her head as uncertainty began to niggle within her.

“Something didn’t feel right in there, Nik”, the blonde vampire stated with a frown. “Its was….I don’t know, it was just a little too….calm. Like the whole scene was staged or something!”

“It was certainly not what I think any of us were expecting when we first arrived here,” Klaus admitted, turning his attention back towards the wooden building behind him. “But they were all human – everyone of them. And if we are to believe the words of our sister’s fiancé, the wretched cockroach that tormented Freya in the hospital the other day, definitely did not have a human scent. Besides, the owner – Bear – did not profess to know anything of Freya’s abduction under compulsion.”
Rebekah scoffed, as she gestured towards the tavern.

“If that was even his real name!” she remarked cuttingly. “He was hiding something Nik. I can feel it in my bones! And that obese mongrel that I was speaking with, talked as though he had had interactions with members of our family before!”

“Unfortunately, sister, there are few within our city these days that do not know of our exploits!” Elijah commented, letting out a sigh of his own. “Chances are most of the vermin in there have crossed paths with us at one time or another. But that is not enough evidence to draw any solid conclusions upon. The bar was clean – there was no trace of Freya’s scent anywhere within its four walls, or any signs of someone having been held against their will there for several days. I believe Niklaus is correct – it might be a sorry excuse for a watering hole, that certainly attracts the dredge of human society as its cliental - but they are not the animals that we are looking for.”

“Come Rebekah”, Klaus said, placing a hand upon her shoulder. “Let us continue with our search. We still have a few more of these shit-holes to visit before the day closes to an end – and I for one, do not intend on spending any more time than necessary away from the city!”

Giving the bar one last look over, Rebekah slowly shook her head, before joining her brothers in stepping off the wooden porch back into the pouring rain.

**Something wasn’t right** the blonde vampire brooded to herself as they began the journey back to Elijah’s abandoned car. *No matter what her brothers said about their encounter here today – something was definitely not right about Baracuda, and the greasy haired bikers that inhabited it. And she intended on returning, to find out exactly just what that something was!*


2.

As Baracuda’s large wooden door fell closed, shutting the three Original siblings out of its four walls, Halvar’s blue-eyed gaze hardened into one of solid, unbreakable granite.

**Too close…. that had been too gods damned close for comfort!**

As a peculiar, pulsating sensation began to spread its way across the surface of his skin – starting at the top of his scalp and working its way rapidly down over his entire body – Halvar noted the approach of the other Jarl’s from the corner of his eye.

“Do you think they bought it?” asked Ake in a gruff manner, rubbing irritably at his bare arms as he too appeared to feel the effects of Balder’s enchantment wearing off.

“If they didn’t, it will not have been because of my magic failing!” Balder quickly snarled, throwing a look full of spite towards Colborn and Fiske as they too came to stand next to Halvar. “It will be because these two morons couldn’t keep their gods damned mouths shut!”

“Hey - that blonde haired bitch attacked me, not the other way around!” protested Fiske, as he scowled towards the clan’s Gothi. “I was just sat minding my own business!”

“Minding your own business?!” protested Ake incredulously. “You two might as well have just confessed to having fucked her sister, the way that you were both carrying on!”
“Don’t be such a snivelling mother’s babe!” Colborn sneered towards his fellow Jarl as he rolled his eyes. “We were just having a little banter. No harm came of it – after all, they left didn’t they?!”

“No thanks to you!” Balder stated, shaking his head. “They might have gone for now, but I highly doubt that they are without their suspicions after your bloated ego reared its wretched head!”

As a moment of tense silence fell over the Jarls, Halvar continued to play over the encounter with the Mikaelson siblings in his mind.

Balder was right. The Gothi’s enchantment might have served to convince the three Mikaelson’s that everyone within the bar was human, and also successfully hidden the stairwell leading down into the vast Catacombs below Baracuda’s surface. But the ruse had been far from perfect. And thanks to Colborn and Fiske’s loose mouths, the youngest sister of the family most probably now had suspicions about the innocence of the men drinking in the tavern!

“Honestly Halvar,” Balder began, addressing the Clan Leader directly to rouse him from his thoughts, “I doubt we have seen the last of them! They will be back – and next time, I fear that my little parlour tricks will no longer be enough to keep them at bay.”

“Hmmm!” Halvar hummed in contemplation - unable to disagree with the Gothi. “I believe you are correct. It would appear that we cannot wait any longer to perform the resurrection ritual!”

“But how can we possibly proceed?” Ake asked. “We still haven’t got the required components for Balder’s incantation to work - the Mikaelson witch has yet to deliver them to us!”

“We should have just killed her when we had the chance!” Fiske grumbled, in response to Ake’s words. “Tossed her aside, and launched a full scale attack on the Mikaelson’s home whilst they slept. We’d have had their blood in bucketful’s, days ago!”

“You forget, Fiske, that not all of the Original Immortals currently reside here in New Orleans!” Balder stated calmly, despite the tension that was quickly rising in the tavern. “And even with the element of surprise on our side, it would have been a particularly difficult and unpredictable battle. Halvar was correct to exercise restraint in that sense.”

“So, what now?!” Colborn huffed, throwing his arms up in agitation. “You expect us to hide away from the Mikaelsons like snivelling cowards, and endure another hundred years of petrification - all because our spineless leader here has no back bone?!”

“Silence!”

Halvar’s commanding voice boomed across the open space of the bar, effectively silencing both the Jarls, and the rest of the occupants sat drinking in the tavern.

“We will not hide, and we will not fail in our task this cycle!” he continued, throwing the weight of the blood-bond behind his words. “The Mikaelson Witch will deliver – it is impossible for her to defy my commands!”

“And if she continues to drag her feet?” Fiske dared to ask, despite his head now being cowed in supplication. “It has, after all, been six days now since you issued those orders!”

“We will give her until the sun sets two days from now!” Halvar said, as he turned to face his brethren.

“And if she still fails to deliver in that time?” Colborn asked, scowling at the Clan leader.
Halvar slowly turned his attention to the overweight Jarl, swallowing down on the fiery anger that always rose-up in his chest when he had to directly address the incompetent fool.

*A fool, he had to begrudgingly admit, that still had his uses!*

“Then you have my permission to fetch the witch’s lover here, and introduce her to your….particular brand of hospitality!”

A sinister leer slithered onto Colborn’s face, as the Clan leader continued.

“A little reminder of exactly what is at stake should soon hurry the eldest Mikaelson along!”

**************************************************************************

3.

“Fuck!”

Tiny vibrations quivered under her boots as Keelin strode agitatedly across the laminated floor of her apartment – a direct result of the wolf having slammed the home’s front-door shut behind her, as she had entered seconds ago.

Throwing her favourite brown suede purse on top of the free-standing kitchen island, the wolf placed both hands onto its marbled counter, and lent her weight onto them as she let out a loud, strained sigh.

A treacly smell of espresso coffee lingered in the apartments air, along with the faint scents of over cooked eggs and burnt toast. Sluggishly turning her head to glance over towards the kitchen sink, Keelin could see a dirtied plate and accompanying cutlery haphazardly abandoned in its porcelain basin - a sure that sign that Freya must have returned to the apartment at some point whilst the wolf had been out at the hospital.

Further scenting of the air, however, told Keelin that her fiancé’s visit must have only been short lived, as the Mikaelson witch was definitely no longer in the flat.

A small mercy that the wolf found herself uncharacteristically relieved for, as her troubled stare returned back to the counter top beneath her hands.

*How the hell could she be pregnant?!!*

Disbelief still waged a fierce war in her mind, despite the brunette having only left the hospital half an hour ago with the undisputable results of her blood tests still burning their condemning figures into her mind.

She had made Joel run the pathology work-up a further three times, before he had finally forced her to concede that the results being produced were not going to change.

hCG was undeniably coursing through her veins – and not just in small volumes either. Her work colleague had not been exaggerating when he had stated that the level of the pregnancy hormone present in her blood was that usually found in a woman who was well into her third trimester of pregnancy. For all intents and purposes, Keelin knew that her belly should be extended and
swollen to the size of a small watermelon, to warrant the volume of hCG currently flowing through her body.

But it wasn’t.

Pushing away from the kitchen counter, the wolf began the process of removing her thin outer jacket as she walked over to the full-length mirror that hung flush against a wall near to the apartments entrance. Successfully throwing the discarded garment onto a coat-stand without even looking, Keelin quickly pulled up the front of the shirt that she was wearing, and turned - so that she was facing sideways-on to the reflective glass.

Flat! Her stomach remained as level and even as it had always been – or at least for as far back as she could remember!

It was one of the very few perks of having being born with the werewolf gene that she ever allowed herself to acknowledge – possessing a much higher rate of metabolism than the average human! A direct result of which, meant that her body and muscles required relatively little activity on her behalf to remain both healthy and toned.

Not that the wolf had ever just sat back on her haunches and exploited that fact! She had always prided herself in taking care of her body, and making sure that she constantly maintained a healthy balance of food to exercise ratio. She was a doctor after-all, and had all too often seen the effects of what a poor diet of fatty foods coupled with a sedentary life-style could do to a person’s health.

Plus, she could not deny the benefits that having a toned body had brought to her love life over the years.

But even with her enhanced metabolism, and regular work-outs – she should still be able to see some sort of change in her physique, for the level of hCG that was currently running wild in her blood stream!

Running a hand lightly over the skin of her stomach as she continued to stare at her reflection, Keelin found her mind wandering back to the time that she had spent as a young girl, living amongst the now-deceased Malraux pack.

Pregnancy had been a common occurrence amongst most of the females in their blood-line. It had in fact become something of a running joke amongst the pack members over the years, that the Malraux women had been blessed by the Goddess of the Moon herself with particularly high fertility.

Blessed, or cursed – Keelin had never quite been sure as a small child which of the two words had seemed more apt, given all of the screaming and crying that she had often heard echoing out of the homes of those women who had once again gone into labour!

The one exception to the packs high fertility rate, however, had seemed to come in the form of her own mother.

With most of the betrothed couples that lived in the Malraux pack normally having at least three or four children running around and getting under their paws, Keelin’s own mother and father had been widely seen as the “unlucky” pair of the group, to have only the one child to call their own.

Her parents had always told her that they were perfectly happy with having just her, and that since the great lunar Goddess had already seen fit to bless them with such a kind and angelic little girl, what more could they possibly want. It was a tale that she had relished hearing as a youngster, late
at night when either her mother or father had been tucking her into bed.

But as she had grown older, and eventually had to endure the traumatic events that had led to the triggering of the werewolf curse within her - Keelin had come to learn that the inability to produce more children had been something that had actually troubled her parents deeply.

They had simply kept their sorrow well hidden from their young daughter.

A small sigh escaped the wolf’s lips as the memories of her long-dead parents drifted through her mind, like ghosts that had suddenly been awakened from their eternal slumber.

_Her mother and father would probably turn in their graves if they could see her right now – unexplainably pregnant without even trying, when it turned out that they had spent several years attempting to produce a little brother or sister for her without any triumph!_

Regardless, however, of her own parents’ lack of success, Keelin had still witnessed the females of her pack getting pregnant often enough to know that their gestation periods had run for the same length of time to that of an average human woman.

Nine months!

Nine normal months, spent growing an embryo into a foetus, and then that foetus into a baby ready to be born into the world.

And from her own extensive studies into the blood work and genetic markers of her kind’s bodies, Keelin knew that out of all the enzymes and hormones that ran at a higher level in a cursed wolf’s body – hCG was not one of them.

The pregnancy hormone, that was excreted exclusively by the placenta only when a woman began growing a child in her womb, was produced at the same rate in female wolves, as it was in female humans.

_So why were her blood results showing such a high volume of the hormone? How was it possible?!_”

The wolf suddenly let out a loud huff of laughter, shattering the silence in the apartment as she began to shake her head to the image of herself in the mirror.

“You’re somehow pregnant, despite not having had sexual relations with a man for over eight years!” Keelin scoffed to her own reflection incredulously. “NOTHING about this should be possible!”

She had not been lying when declaring to Josh that she had never, and would never – ever – cheat on Freya. Not only was she far too deeply in love with her fiancé to even entertain the idea of being able to hurt the witch in such a way, but she could also honestly say there was nothing that she was left wanting for when it came to her sexual needs.

Freya was an insatiable lover.

Ever eager to please the wolf, and prove herself worthy of their physical union, the witch had been a quick learner when it had come to discovering all of Keelin’s likes and dislikes in the bedroom. From the very first that time they had made love to each other back on Freya’s old bed in the Mikaelson Compound, Keelin had been both surprised and impressed by the sheer amount of passion and sexual appetite contained within the usually sombre witch.
And it was an appetite that had only seemed to grow in size over the year in which they had now been dating.

Despite her agitated state, a small smile now tugged at Keelin’s mouth, as she recalled the particularly passionate and mind-blowing love making that they had lost themselves in on the night of their engagement, just a few weeks ago.

She remembered that Freya had been a force to be reckoned with on that amazing night – effortlessly taking control and guiding Keelin to orgasm after orgasm under the stars high up in the sky.

Control that Keelin had been all too willing to relinquish over to her lover.

And as the glorious light of the large Harvest moon had kissed her lovers lightly tanned skin, Keelin remembered losing herself in the witch’s pupil-blown eyes time and…….

…….her eyes! the wolf suddenly thought to herself, as a specific memory from that particular night exploded across her mind. Freya’s eyes had glowed at one point during their love making! And not just in a radiant “I’m having mind blowing sex” kind of way. It had only been brief, probably for less than a second during the witch’s first orgasm of the evening – but her eyes had definitely blazed bright with a golden yellow hue!

Keelin’s own eye’s slowly began to widen as she looked back down upon the reflection of her flat stomach in the mirror.

“No…..that’s….that’s impossible!!”

As her whispered words of disbelief quickly dissipated in the air around her, the wolf let out a sharp yelp of surprise, in reaction to a loud knocking sound suddenly exploding out from the direction of the apartments front-door.

“For crying out loud – get a grip!” the wolf quietly admonished to herself, as a familiar scent began to fill her nostrils.

Tugging down on her shirt once more, Keelin quickly covered the short distance from the mirror to the home’s entranceway, and took a moment to draw in a deep, calming breath.

Schooling her face into what she hoped was a calm and collected expression, the wolf pushed down on the doors handle and pulled it open.

“Hey!” the wolf on the other side of the threshold stuttered, as a pink flush quickly began to spread across her cheeks “Is this a good time? Because I can come back later if its not! Shit, its not a good time is it?! Ok, I’m sorry, I’ll get out of here and…..”

Realising that the rambling wolf was reacting to the expression that must have been on her face – a look she had clearly not managed to pull off as calm and collected – Keelin quickly shook her head, and forced a weak smile to form on her lips.

“No, Alanna, its ok!” she stated, willing the younger wolf to not notice the slight uneasy quiver in her voice. “You just took me by surprise that’s all. I…. well, I guess you could say that you’re the last person I ever expected to find knocking on mine and Freya’s door!”

“Ha – I know right?!” Alanna exclaimed a little too quickly – betraying the nervousness that she must have been feeling. “And damned if I thought that I’d ever be here - doing that knocking! Guess I must have a death wish or something”
The young wolf let out a nervous laugh, as she quickly shoved both of her hands into the back pockets of the ripped jeans she was wearing, whilst tilting herself up and down on tiptoes.

“Is, err…. is Freya home?!”

Raising a curious eyebrow, Keelin observed her friend for a moment before providing her answer.

*The Neivera wolf was acting particularly fidgety and antsy as she stood there in the hallway – even for her!*

“Are you honestly expecting me to believe that you haven’t already scented the fact that my fiancé isn’t home?!” Keelin finally replied, as she frowned at the younger wolf.

“Well…. ok, no, I guess not.” Alanna replied, as a sheepish look quickly took up residence on her face. “I just wanted to be sure, ya know! I figured what with everything that’s happened lately, you guys would probably have a whole host of protection and mis-direction spells cloaking this place! Right?! So, my wofly senses might have been being misled and…”

“Freya’s not home Alanna!” Keelin interrupted, suddenly feeling irritated at the exchange. “So, come in if you want to - or don’t. But either way, please stop rambling on about spells and witchcraft in the hallway for all of my neighbours to hear!”

The older wolf abruptly turned her back to the doorway, and was halfway over to the kitchen’s central island when she heard Alanna finally take a step into the apartment and close the door behind her.

“Right, sorry! I guess I’m just a little nervous being here, that’s all.”

Flicking the “on” switch of the aluminium kettle sat on one of the kitchen counters, Keelin quickly grabbed two mugs off of a shelf and began setting them up to make both her and Alanna a cup of coffee.

“Wow!” she heard her friend exclaim from where she now stood in the middle of the living space, turning slowly around on the spot. “This place is awesome! I mean, I knew that you would probably have great taste in décor, given how amazing you always loo…. err…. well given how on fleek your clothes usually are! But this is something else Keelin!”

Raising her eyes from her task in hand, Keelin huffed quietly to herself as she saw the look of pure awe that had taken root upon Alanna’s face as the younger wolf checked out the apartment.

“Not that I’m not happy to see you Alanna,” Keelin said, as she resumed making a drink for them both, “but is there a specific reason why you’ve risked your life to come here today?!?”

Alanna stopped turning around as soon as Keelin’s words sunk in.

“Shit, do you think Freya is likely to try and kill me, for having been here?!”

Pondering the wolf’s question for a heartbeat, Keelin grabbed both of the steaming hot mugs in front of her and walked over to where her friend now stood, rigid and tense.

“If you’d have asked me that a week ago, I would have said yes!” the older wolf said, holding out a mug of coffee for Alanna to take. “But it seems that whatever happened between you and her in the hospital has…. well let’s just say that I don’t think that you are on top of Freya’s kill list right now.”
“Really?” Alanna asked in surprise, as she accepted the mug of coffee from Keelin. “Has she said that?!”

“Not exactly,” Keelin admitted, motioning with her head for Alanna to follow her over to the apartment’s large leather couch. “To be honest, she hasn’t said a lot of anything, since…. well since her return from being held captive. But she did defend you to the rest of her family, when they arrived on the ICU ward after you’d left. Rebekah and her brothers would have had your head on a pike by now, had it not been for Freya telling them all to leave you alone.”

“Huh!” Alanna said - brow rising in surprise as she slowly sat herself down onto the sofa next to Keelin.

“But of course, you didn’t know all of that!” Keelin pointed out, as she eyed the younger wolf over the rim of her mug as she blew on her hot coffee, “So, is there a reason that you figured risking your life was worth coming here today?”

“Oh right! Well, I saw Joel at the hospital earlier, as he and I are meeting up for a study date in the library later today, and I needed to find out what time he would be finishing his shift. I’m helping him revise for his latest round of Nurse Practitioner exams, and he’s…. um…. well, helping me hide from Holly! It’s a long story – don’t ask! Oh, speaking of which, did you know that Joel’s been chatting to some guy on Tinder for a while now, and is like, intending to meet up with him! He’s totally been keeping it quiet from me! I only found out last night because I walked in on him in our kitchen, all blushing and bashful whilst staring at his phone. I had to threaten him with my singing if he didn’t tell me immediately who had him all giddy and heart-eyed! And we all know how terrible my singing….”

“Alanna!” Keelin interrupted impatiently.

“Mmm?”

“The reason you’re here!?"

“Shit, of course! Sorry, I got a little side-tracked. Um…. oh yeah, so I saw Joel at the hospital and he said that I had just missed you, and that you might be in need of a friendly ear to bend. Something about receiving weird news, or something similar anyways - I forget his exact words. Anyways, here I am! Ready to cheer you up! Also…. well, I guess I kinda wanted to check in and see how Freya is doing too. I felt really bad about leaving so abruptly the other day, after the attack in the ICU. I mean, I know you told me to go because the rest of the Mikaelson’s were likely to kill me on sight! But still, it’s not been sitting right with me. Especially given how shook-up Freya was from the whole ordeal! I mean – was that greasy haired prick one of the guys who abducted her? Because…. fuck, Keelin, she was petrified of him!”

The older wolf’s eyes widened at the mention of the overweight biker that she had confronted in the hospital.

Of course - she had forgotten that Alanna had actually been present in the ICU room with Freya, whilst the attack upon the witch had happened!

Quickly placing her mug down onto the up-cycled palette coffee table next to the couch, Keelin lent forward towards the wolf and grabbed one of her hands.

“Alanna, can you tell me what happened in Freya’s room, just before I arrived?”

“Oh…. um…. h-has Freya not said?” Alanna stuttered, as her eyes dropped down and fixed onto
the hand that Keelin had laid on top of the younger wolf’s own.

“No”, Keelin confirmed, shaking her head with a frustrated sigh. “She’s refusing to talk to anyone about it! Just like she’s refusing to mention anything about the men who took her, or where we might be able to find them.”

Alanna’s gaze slowly rose back up to meet Keelin’s, as a frown crept across the younger wolf’s brow.

“Has she said why?”

“Again, no! She…. urgh….”

Keelin’s words trailed off as a sudden wave of nausea crashed over her, with such force that her vision blurred with dizziness.

“Hey, are you ok?” Alanna asked, as the older wolf’s grip on top of her hand tightened. “You don’t look so good!”

“I…. I just need a minute.”

Despite the world suddenly feeling like it was tilting on its axis, Keelin attempted to push herself up off the sofa – determined to try and make it to the bathroom before her stomach emptied its contents onto the floor.

She rapidly realised her mistake, however, when large patches of darkness began to encroach on her field of vision.

“Whoa – steady there!” Alanna said, jumping up from her seat and placing two hands on either side of Keelin’s shoulders to prevent her from losing her balance. “I’m not sure that you should be trying to stand right now!”

Drawing in deep breaths through her nose in an attempt to get a handle on her lurching stomach, Keelin allowed Alanna to guide her back down onto the couch.

“I think it might be the smell of the coffee!” she finally managed to say after a few seconds of swallowing down the bile rising in her throat. “Would you mind…."

Alanna quickly pushed herself back off the sofa and whisked away the two cups of steaming hot liquid – pouring their contents down the kitchen sink, before returning back to Keelin’s side.

“Thanks!” the older wolf muttered without looking up at her concerned friend.

A minute or so passed, whilst Keelin continued to draw in large lungful’s of air in an attempt to try and clear the sickliness from her system. It did not escape her attention, however, that Alanna remained dutifully by her side, without question. The wolf simply sitting close as she watched Keelin try her best to compose herself.

When the dizziness and nausea finally began to feel like it was subsiding, Keelin offered up a weak smile to the girl that was now sat watching her like a hawk.

“Sorry! I…. I don’t know what came over me!”

“Mmm hmmm,” Alanna hummed, as suspicion began to mix with the concern swirling in her blue eyes. “Sure you don’t! And I suppose that you were just at the hospital earlier for a social visit with
Joel too - hmm?!

Keelin quickly looked away from her friends accusing stare, as uncertainty of how she should respond to the wolf washed over her.

She knew that she didn’t want to lie to Alanna, especially after the young wolf had clearly put her own life on the line whilst trying to protect Freya from the leather wearing bastard at the hospital.

But how could she even begin trying to explain what she suspected was happening to her body?!

Scooting slightly closer to the older wolf on the couch, Alanna bent her head down in an endearing effort to catch a hold of Keelin’s downcast eyes.

“Hey, if it helps – I think I already know!”

Keelin’s gaze widened, as a jolt of panic spear-bolted through her chest.

“Y-you know?!” she asked, her voice quivering with alarm. “Did Joel tell you?? God dammit, I explicitly told him to keep it to himself until I figured out what…..”

“No, no….” Alanna quickly interrupted, shaking her head vigorously, “…. Joel hasn’t said a word. Honest Keelin, he just commented that you might need a friend to talk to, that’s all! I think he was frustrated more than anything that he had to stay and finish his shift, whilst you came back here - emotional and alone.”

“Oh!” the older wolf exclaimed, suddenly confused. “So…. what exactly is it you think that you know?”

“That you’re pregnant!”

The world suddenly felt as though it was being yanked out from under her feet, as Alanna’s words hit her like a truck loaded full of bricks. An icy chill ran down the length of her arms, at the same time as she felt her palms breaking out into a cold sweat.

“H-how….I mean, I’m not…. I can’t…. I…..”

“Hey, Keelin, it’s ok!” Alanna offered, as she reached over and ran a hand up and down the older wolf’s arm. “I won’t tell anyone, ok! Not until you and Freya are ready to share the happy news anyways!”

A nervous huff of laughter escaped from Keelin’s mouth, as she pulled away from the younger wolf’s touch. She wasn’t able to see her own face right now - but if she could – she knew that it was probably nothing short of ashen grey!

“Wait, this is happy news right?” her friend asked, as her tone suddenly changed to one of worry. “This is something that both you and Freya have been working towards together, yeah?”

Closing her eyes, Keelin attempted to calm the thundering thoughts that were now rushing through her mind at a hundred miles-per-hour.

Oh god, Alanna now knew as well as Joel?! How did she find out? Did anyone else know? Was it that obvious?! Had Rebekah and Hayley noticed? Had…. had Freya?!

“Oh, fuck! Freya doesn’t know, does she?!” Alanna suddenly blurted out, as her eyes widened. “But if she doesn’t know, then how…. oooh fuck! I didn’t know that you liked to…. well, you
know…. with guys…. I mean, each to their own like…. but…. I guess I just thought that you and Freya were happy together! I didn’t realise…."

“WE ARE!” Keelin stated loudly, cutting the younger girl off from her rambling. “We are happy together, ok! I haven’t cheated on Freya! Christ - why is that the first conclusion everyone is jumping to?!”

“Oh…. well…. thank god for that!” the younger wolf exclaimed, as her whole demeanour appeared to relax a little. “I mean, I know I’ve not exactly always been on the Keelin & Freya bandwagon n’all. Blondie is a Mikaelson after all. Not to mention the numerous attempts she’s made on my life! And fuck me, that temper of hers is…..well, anyways. Scary witch vibe aside, I guess what I’m trying to say is that I knew she was at least making you happy. But fuck, if she’d have found out that you were cheating on her…. Oh…. hold up…. uh…. if this pregnancy isn’t planned, and you haven’t been doing the dirty behind Freya’s back with some dude, then…. how…. err, huh?!”

Drawing in a deep breath, Keelin attempted to focus her whirling mind.

“Alanna, can you just calm down for a second?” she pleaded with her friend. “I’m still trying my best right now to not throw up all over you or my leather couch! I just need a second, ok?!”

“Shit, of course! Sorry.”

Keelin watched from the corner of her eye as Alanna forcefully pushed both of her hands under her legs, and began to chew on her lower lip - a clear attempt to silence the no doubt long string of questions that she still wanted to ask.

After a moment of two longer of charged silence between the two friends, the sickness finally felt like it was passing out of Keelin’s system enough for her to be able to concentrate on the conversation at hand.

Letting her eyes fall shut, the wolf attempted to order her jumbled thoughts as best as possible.

“Yes, I was at the hospital earlier to ask Joel if he could run some tests on my blood,” Keelin began, trying her best to portray a controlled and calm manner. “And yes, the results appear to show that I am pregnant. BUT….” she suddenly exclaimed loudly, in reaction to seeing Alanna opening her mouth in what was no doubt in an attempt to interrupt, “… I genuinely don’t have the first clue how that could be possible, or if indeed, it really is the case!”

Keelin paused, expecting Alanna to jump in with a whole deluge of questions that the wolf knew she wouldn’t have any idea how to answer. But instead of a spewing of verbal diarrhoea, she was surprised to see the younger wolf waiting patiently for her to continue.

Well that has to be a first! Keelin thought to herself as she took in her friends apparent stupor.

Rendering Alanna speechless! Christ, it really must have all sounded just bizarre as it felt!

“Alanna, if Joel didn’t tell you, how exactly did you work it out? Am I…. well, is it obvious?!”

“No!” the younger wolf finally said, after a few more heartbeats of stunned silence. “Well, not to most people I should imagine, anyways. It’s just - well you’ve been all over the spot recently with your health – what with nearly collapsing on me in Lafitte’s the other week, and all of the throwing up…. oh…. yeah, um…. Joel told me about that – you throwing up at work. But hey, don’t be mad at him ok, he’s just been worried about you. We both have!”

Keelin’s gaze softened a little, as she took in her friend’s obvious concern.
“But to be honest, at first I just thought that you were getting sick or something, what with everything that’s been happening with Freya and her abduction. It wasn’t until the other day in the ICU room, when you phased into your wolf form, that I realised there was something more going on than just a little over-tiredness and stress!”

“What do you mean?” Keelin asked, as she quickly tried to run over in her mind everything that she could remember from being in her animal form at the hospital.

“Well, your scent was different! Oh…. n-not in a bad way!” the younger wolf quickly tried to clarify, as a deep blush spread across her cheeks. “I mean it was still lovely. You still smelt nice, you know…. err, not that that was what was on my mind at the time, ha…. obviously! Big fat jerk in the room trying to hurt people, and what with me having shattered spine n’all! I just meant that….”

“Alanna!”

“Right. Focus. Sorry!”

Keelin smiled knowingly towards the obviously flustered wolf, as her friend eyes dropped down to coffee table next to them both.

“What I meant, is that the scent of your wolf’s pheromones have changed!” the younger woman clarified, after a moment’s pause to compose herself. “It’s actually quite common amongst our kind. When a female within the pack becomes pregnant with a child, the scent markers given off by her animal form’s reproductive glands alter, so that any male wolves within the area know that she is…. well…. off-limits I suppose. It used to happen all the time when the women in my pack became pregnant. The full moon would come around and force us all to phase into our wolf forms, but the pregnant members of the pack were still easily distinguishable, regardless. Not that they weren’t when in their human forms of course – large protruding bellies and all that. But you know what it’s like when we phase…. most human thoughts are banished from our minds, only to be replaced with carnal, animalistic urges. Hunt – Kill – Eat – Run – Mate! But even when we are locked in our wolf bodies for three nights a month and are a slave to the moon’s will, the pregnant pack member’s pheromones still let all around them know that they are off limits mating wise, and to be protected at all costs. Pack survival, and all that!”

As Alanna’s words began to sink in, Keelin was surprised to discover a small slither of jealousy working its way into her otherwise reeling mind.

She had not known any of this!

Not from first-hand experience anyway. By the time that she had turned seventeen and triggered her curse, , the rest of her pack – her family – were already gone.

Murdered.

Every last one of them.

*She had never experienced what it was like to run alongside her mother and father in their wolf forms – free and wild under the watchful eye of the moon. In fact, until she had met Hayley and Alanna, she had never experienced what it was like to interact with other wolves in their animal forms - at all!*

“Oh hey, I…. fuck…. I didn’t mean to upset you!”

Suddenly realising that tears had begun forming in her eyes, Keelin quickly swiped a sleeve across
her face as she shook her head towards Alanna.

“No, you haven’t, it’s ok. I guess – well I guess it’s just dawning on me that I never really had the chance to properly experience life in a pack. Not as a fully-fledged wolf anyway. My parents, grandparents, family friends - they all died before my curse was triggered. I guess it’s always been just me. A lone wolf that was determined to suppress that side of her heritage!”

“Shit…. of course! I remember you saying that night when we were all gathered around the fire in my pack’s encampment a year ago. Something about a vampire attack on your pack’s territory wasn’t it?”

Shaking her head, Keelin quickly shook off the melancholy that had managed to wrap itself around her. 

Now was not the time for unearthing old ghosts!

“So this change in pheromones in female wolves,” she quickly began, in an attempt to steer the conversation back on track, “are you sure that it only happens when they are pregnant? There’s no other reason for it happening?”

“Positive!” Alanna stated with conviction.

“And you’re absolutely sure that the …. er…. scent given off by my…. well, by me, has changed in that way?”

Another flush of colour spread its way across Alanna’s face as she answered.

“Um…. yeah. I’m positive about that too!”

“Huh!”

Silence fell between the two wolves, as each sat and contemplated the respective information they had learnt.

It wasn’t until the sound of Alanna’s phone receiving a text rang out from the young wolf’s jeans pocket that either of them spoke again.

“Shit, that’ll be Joel wondering where I am!” Alanna cursed, as she reached for the cell. “I was meant to meet him like ten minutes ago! I can cancel though – you know, if you need some company?”

“No, it’s ok”, Keelin replied, smiling at her friend. “Go and help him revise. I’ll never hear the end of it if he fails an exam all because I kept his chief study pal from attending a crucial session! Besides, it’s probably best that you leave before Freya returns for the evening. She might not be hell bent on ending your life anymore, but I don’t think she’s quite ready for a girly night of wine and gossip with you, just yet!”

The younger wolf let out a small huff of laughter, before her expression turned serious once more.

“What are you going to tell her?” Alanna asked. “About the pregnancy I mean.”

A fresh wave of panic flooded through Keelin’s body, as the reality of her situation began to hit home.

“Nothing!” she eventually said, as she felt the beginnings of a cold sweat begin to break out across
her brow. “I’m not going to tell her anything – and neither are you!”

“Oh hey, I have no intention of speaking to blondie about this – trust me! I like my head exactly where it is, firmly attached to my shoulders! But…. well, don’t you think that she has a right to know? I mean, you two are engaged to be married after all. And let’s face it, she’s going to find out sooner or later, when you start growing a wee bump under that shirt!”

Shaking her head, Keelin began to rise up of the couch to see Alanna to the door.

“I don’t even know for sure if I’m definitely pregnant yet!”

Alanna’s mouth opened as if to protest Keelin’s claim, but swiftly shut again once the older wolf held up her hand in an attempt to silence her.

“What I mean is - this shouldn’t be possible Alanna! Blood tests and pheromone changes aside, it shouldn’t be possible! I need to try and find out what’s happening - or what has happened - before I attempt to broach the subject with Freya. Besides, she’s not exactly in the right frame of mind at the moment to have something like this unloaded onto her. She’s…. struggling!”

Nodding her head in understanding, Alanna gave her friend a sympathetic smile as she began walking over to the apartments exit.

“Well, I’m no expert in this sort of thing,” the younger wolf offered as she moved, “but if it was me, I’d maybe start by tracking down and talking to a wolf elder. They’re usually the most knowledgeable when it comes to our kind, and our supernatural heritage. Oooh, what about that white-haired old woman that Hatch met with a few times when my pack first arrived in New Orleans. Erm….”

“Mary!” Keelin offered, despite wincing at the mention of the deceased Neivera pack leaders name.

“Yeah, that’s her! Isn’t she meant to be a wolf elder?”

As the two of them reached the apartments large wooden door, Keelin nodded in confirmation to her friend.

“She is, and it had already crossed my mind to pay her a visit whilst I was driving back from the hospital. Its just…. well, she’s Hope’s grandmother, and has a particularly close relationship with Hayley. I really don’t want any of Freya’s family to find out about all of this. At least not before I’ve had chance to find out exactly what is happening with my body, and talk to Freya about it.”

“I’m sure she wouldn’t tell them, Keelin!” Alanna offered, as she opened door before turning to face the older wolf. “She’s a pack elder – not a gossiping school girl. They’re, like, sworn to uphold the secretes and legacies of our kind. And err…. well, I’d wager that whatever this is, its going to be something pretty huge, legacy wise!”

“Oh gee…. thanks!” Keelin scoffed incredulously, lightly hitting the younger wolf on the shoulder. “Way to go for helping calm my already shot at nerves!”

“Ha, any time!” her friend laughed, flashing the wolf a genuine smile. “You know I’m just a phone call away, yeah? Or a text! Actually, definitely text – I hate speaking on the phone! Anyways, point is, if you need me, I’ll be here ok! Joel can survive one night of revision on his own.”

Returning Alanna’s smile, Keelin shook her head and made a shooing motion with her hands towards the younger wolf.
“Go! I’ll be fine. Honestly. I’ll go and see Mary tomorrow, and hopefully she’ll tell me that it’s just my body having some kind of weird wolfy-meltdown, and that it’ll pass without a baby in sight!”

“Ha, yeah well - you always have been a special one Malraux!” Alanna laughed. “In more ways than one!”

After waving goodbye to her friend, Keelin closed the door behind her and slowly made her way back into her home’s living space.

Flinging herself backwards onto the couch, the wolf hollered out a loud frustrated groan into the otherwise silent apartment, as her eyes scrunched tightly shut.

“URRRGH!”

Random sickness and scent aversion.

Elevated hCG levels.

Changes in her wolf’s pheromones.

Everything that was happening to her was pointing towards pregnancy - she could no longer deny that fact.

But the “how”, and “why”, and “what” of it all, had to be so far off the scale of normal - that she doubted even a wolf elder would hold the answers that explained how her predicament had come to pass.

Keelin did know one thing though - Alanna had been right! Even despite the younger wolf’s rambling, and poorly concealed crush on her.

She had to at least try and find the answers from somewhere - and quick! As it would only be a matter of time before her body started showing the more obvious physical signs of pregnancy – if that was indeed what was happening.

And then she would have no option but to tell others about it.

To tell Freya about it!

*Oh God…. how the hell was she going to tell Freya?!*

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4.

“Ok, which is it – Halsey, or Keelin?!”

Joel’s attempt at a whispered voice echoed loudly in the hushed silence of the New Orleans Public Library - successfully pulling Alanna out of the contemplative daze that she had slipped into.

“Hmmm?”

“I said which is it?!” Joel repeated again in a lower tone this time, as he looked at her expectantly
from across the large study table. “Your mind is clearly not on helping me with my revision, so I can only assume that it has once again got lost in a daydream about one of the two women that you lust after on a daily basis! Oooh…. or is it both?? Kinky!”

“Hey!” Alanna protested - picking up a yellow HB pencil that was lay in front of her, and lobbing it across the table at her flatmate. “I do not lust after Keelin!”

Effortlessly ducking out of the way of the flying missile, Joel let out a muffled laugh before rolling his eyes at her.

“Oh please, who are you trying to kid?!?” the male nurse scoffed. “I’m constantly having to mop up your drool whenever a certain brunette Doctor drops by our flat for a coffee! You’re so pathetically in love with her - it’s embarrassing!”

“I am not!” the wolf exclaimed loudly, drawing the disapproving attention of a handful of people that were sat scattered across the rows of long mahogany tables that ran parallel to their own.

After throwing a particularly pompous looking woman the most insincere, wide mouthed smile that she could muster, Alanna lowered her voice back into a whisper as she lent over and flicked the skin on Joel’s arm.

Hard!

“I admit, I used to have a teeny, tiny crush on her when we first met. But that’s it! End of!” she said - sticking her tongue out at her friend when he scowled at the assault on his arm. “And that was like a year ago. A lot has changed since then!”

“You might have changed your underwear a handful of times in the past 12 months,” Joel mocked, as he tried to feign interest in the book in front of him, “but I reckon that’s about all that’s different!”

“Hey – that’s a low blow! You know damn well that I’ve brushed my hair once or twice too!”

The wolf watched on as an impish grin matching her own quickly broke across her flatmate’s features - despite the nurse’s gaze remaining locked on the pages of text splayed open on the table.

“Face it, Alanna - you have it bad! There’s no point in trying to deny it!”

Rolling her eyes at the nurse, the wolf huffed as she turned to look out over the large open drop that was situated just a few feet to her left.

The regularly frequented research and study section of the New Orleans Library was to be found on the third floor of the recently renovated public building. Much like the other levels both below and above it, the various tables and stacks of books housed in the library were all arranged along the sides of a large square layout. This allowed for the centre section of each floor to be opened walled and flanked by mid-height glass balcony’s, that enabled visitors to look all the way down to the ground floor from whichever level they resided on.

The resulting view had been known to trigger bouts of vertigo in unsuspecting students and visitors, who had ventured up to the very top floor for the first time, and lent over one of the balcony’s to peer down at people checking out books at the ground-floor clerks’ desk.

A phenomenon that had occurred so often in the newly renovated library’s first few weeks of re-opening, a large “polite notice” sign had been screwed onto the wall near the sixth floors entrance, warning members of the public who had an aversion to heights to stay away from the balcony’s
Not that the large, open drop had ever bothered Alanna.

In fact, she always insisted that her and Joel utilised one of the tables running alongside the third floor’s glass balcony, whenever she accompanied him on a study session in the building of knowledge. And when her flatmate had finally picked up on her apparent preference after their fourth or fifth visit to the library – enquiring what it was about the view she liked so much – Alanna had simply stated that the open space both above and below gave her a certain sense of freedom, despite the fact that they were still enclosed within the buildings four external walls.

*She had, of course, purposely left out the part about her inner wolf sorely missing the vast open space that had come hand-in-hand with living in the wild of a Bayou! And how her spirit animal hated the over-populated confines of city life, ever since they had moved out of the swamps after the loss of their pack.*

“Seriously, where do you keep disappearing to?!”

Dragging her gaze away from the drop down to the ground floor, Alanna offered Joel a quick apologetic look.

“Sorry – I guess maybe I am a little distracted after all.”

“Want to talk about it?” the male nurse asked, quickly resting his head on his hands in a “ready to listen” position.

“I can’t stop thinking about Keelin… Geez, not like that!” she quickly clarified, in response to the corner of her flatmate’s mouth quirking up into a smirk. “I mean about her…. you know…. predicament!”

Despite Joel having specifically asked Alanna to drop by and check on Keelin earlier that afternoon, neither of the two flatmates had yet broached the subject of their mutual friend’s recent test results, since meeting up in the library over an hour ago.

Alanna knew that Joel was aware of Keelin’s apparent pregnancy – he was the one to perform the blood tests on the doctor after all! And she also knew that the male nurse will have suspected that Keelin had opened up to her about the situation, during her time spent at the brunette’s home.

She knew.

He knew.

But so far, neither of them had actually admitted to knowing!

Until now.

“Do you believe her?” Joel asked quietly, not quite meeting Alanna’s eyes as she turned her gaze onto him. “You know, about there not having been a guy involved?”

“Oh, of course, I do!” Alanna stated with no shortage of conviction - once again earning herself a harsh glare from the haughty woman on the adjacent table. “And so should you!”

The implications of her own words suddenly hit the wolf, as she watched her flatmate quirk his eyebrow questionably in her direction.
“Um…. well, that’s to say, I’m sure that there was no “unplanned” encounter with a guy. I mean – of course there will have been a man involved somewhere along the line, right?! Ha! Cos, like, you know, that’s how these things work, right?! Some sperm…. an egg…. and boom, a bouncing baby boy! Or girl! Could be a girl…. you never know! Yep…. a totally normal, completely mundane, planned preg….”

“Alanna…. its ok. I know!” Joel said, interrupting her rambling with a kind smile as he reached over the table and grabbed her hand.

“Y-you know what?”

Giving her hand a quick squeeze, the male nurse lent back into his seat and began casually leafing through the pages of the medical textbook in front of him – once again feigning interest in his studies.

“That Keelin is a werewolf!” he whispered nonchalantly, without looking up from the text.

Alanna’s eye’s widened at his words, as she felt her mouth suddenly loose all of its moisture.

“And that you are too!”

Oh…. fuck!

“I…. I mean…. pfssh, you’ve clearly been reading way too many of those marvel comics that you love so much! Ha…. werewolves…. that’s a good one, ya big geek! As if such a thing existed…."

“Keelin told me - at the hospital earlier today,” Joel continued, still not looking at her. “And then proceeded to growl at me - not for the first time, I might add!”

The ability to speak abruptly left her, as the shock of Joel’s statement slam dunked into her head.

*Keelin actually told him?! About the existence of the curse? About…. about her?! Oh fuck…. had the older wolf also told him how they had met?! Urgh…. about the terrible things she had done?*”

Despite her breathing having somewhat trebled in speed, Alanna suddenly felt like there was no air left in the large open building.

Like she was suffocating!

“Oh hey, Alanna – it’s ok!” Joel quickly said, his voice remaining hushed as he looked up from his studies to notice his flatmate hyperventilating. “Calm down, ok - I’ve not told anyone! Neither of you have anything to worry about with regards to that. I swear on my life that I will keep your secrete safe!”

The panicked wolf could tell that Joel was trying to say something to her from across the table, since his lips were moving rapidly as concern settled on his face. But for the life of her, she could not make out what those words were over the deafening alarm bells that had now taken up residence in her head.

“Alanna, you need to slow your breathing down, ok!” Joel stated as he attempted a smile, despite the slither of worry that was now gleaming in his eyes. “Don’t make me come over there and embarrass you with a paper bag!”

“Wha…. what did she…. about me…. wha…. “
“Keelin didn’t say anything about you, ok.” the male nurse said reassuringly, as he steadily held onto her gaze. “She literally only spoke about herself! I just took an educated guess about you. Your eyes did turn freakishly yellow in Lafitte’s bar after all, on the night of St Theodora’s staff do. Remember? And when Keelin’s did the same on the morning that Freya was rushed into the Emergency clinic…. well it wasn’t hard to put two and two together after that! I mean come on, you know me - I’m a total book nerd! It really didn’t take me long to find a text on the New Orleans Werewolf population, right here in the library!”

“Huh!” she finally managed to utter, as her breathing slowly began to steady itself out. “There’s a book?!”

“You know - for a pair of supernatural beings born into such a fascinating genetic-mutation heritage, you and Keelin sure do seem clueless when it comes to the texts that are available out there on your kind!”

Shaking his head in bemusement, Joel smiled supportively at her again.

“We good?” he asked, as Alanna began to feel some colour returning to her paled face.

“Y-yeah!” the wolf muttered, amazed at how at ease Joel appeared - despite having recently gained the knowledge that the fictitious monsters he was scared of a kid, were in fact very, very real!

“Good!” her flatmate exclaimed, as he leant back in his chair and folded his arms across his chest. “Because let me tell you girlfriend, if you think that the fact you need a leash and collar every full moon is going to get you out of helping me revise for these exams…. you are sorely mistaken!”

A brash huff of laughter escaped from Alanna’s throat, causing the already irked woman on the table next to them to loudly tut in their direction.

“Oh, bite me!” the wolf quickly snapped in the straitlaced lady’s direction, before whipping her head back around to face Joel.

“So, you’re not, like…. even a little freaked out?” Alanna asked, eying up her friend suspiciously. “I mean, it’s not like you just found out that I’m gay or something. Which of course, I totally am! This is…. well it’s pretty major!”

Appearing to contemplate the question for a few heartbeats, Joel began chewing the top of his biropen as he tapped the fingers of his free hand on the wooden table.

“Sure,” the male nurse finally began, shrugging his shoulders. “I guess in terms of shock factor, it’s pretty intense. But does it come close to the tragic night that I watched Britney Spears shave her head on the ten o’clock news, right before attacking the papz with an umbrella – hell no! RIP pre-2007 Britney!”

“Who’s Britney Spears?” Alanna asked, confused by her flatmates reference.

“EXCUSE ME?!” Joel blurted out loudly, nearly falling off his chair in the process. “Please tell me that you are jesting right now, Alanna Lowell?? Tell me that I have not let someone who is Britney illiterate worm their way into my life and my home?!”

Shrugging her shoulders, Alanna offered up a lob-sided smile to her friend.

“Hey – until I moved in with you, I’d never even owned a TV!”
Joel’s mouth dropped open, as he gawped at her with what seemed to be genuine astonishment.

“My upbringing wasn’t exactly what you would call conventional!” she continued. “The, erm…. pack…. that my family was a part of, was very traditionalist when it came to werewolf values and lifestyle. I only got my first cell phone 12 months ago, when Hatch needed me to be able to keep in contact with Kee…. um…. well anyways, the point is, I’m a bit of a late starter when it comes to pop culture!”

“So, what you’re actually telling me”, Joel began, forming his words slowly as though to try and make sense of them as they left his mouth, “is that not only are you likely to pee on my carpet and chew all of my Tom Ford cushions once a month when there’s a full moon - but you also have absolutely no idea just how utterly fabulous Christina and P!nk looked whilst shaking their thang in Lady Marmalade?!”

“What the hell is a Lady Marmalade?!” Alanna asked, once again stumped by his comment.

“Oh my!” Joel exclaimed - dramatically placing a hand across his forehead in feigned distress. “I’m living with an actual, straight out of the caves, Neanderthal!”

“Hey!” Alanna exclaimed loudly, whilst lightly kicking at her flatmate’s shin under the table. “At least I know how to load and unload the dishwasher – unlike someone I could mention!”

An over exaggerated cough suddenly sounded out from the table next to them, causing both friends to turn and look for its source.

“Some of us are here to actually study you know!” remarked the middle-aged, pompous looking woman who had now clearly lost her patience with the duo.

Simultaneously, both Alanna and Joel flicked their middle fingers up towards the library member, whilst brazenly flashing toothy grins at her scowling face.

As the woman let out an indignant “Well!” before promptly beginning to shove all of her papers and books into a large scholar’s bag – the two flatmates turned their attention back to each other.

“You should totally wolf out and bite her ass!” Joel whispered as he leant forward over the table towards Alanna. “That’d give her something to really complain about!”

“Joel!” Alanna scolded him, before joining her flatmate in breaking into a bout of poorly muffled laughter.

Another hour had passed by the time the two of them managed to regain focus enough to concentrate on Joel’s studies once more.

Alanna’s flatmate had the next round of his Nurse Practitioner exams coming up in just two weeks’ time - and due to the on going storm that now seemed to have taken up permanent residence over the skies of New Orleans, any free time that he would usually have had to study, was mostly being monopolised by mandatory overtime in St Theodora’s Emergency Clinic.

It had meant that the usually well prepared and studious male had not only been struggling to find
time to brush up on the vast volumes of theory associated with his chosen vocation, but had also had very little time to hang out with the wolf at their flat, or head out for a catch-up beer as they so often liked to do when life got a little too hectic.

*And Alanna had to admit – she had sorely been missing his company!*

Of course, her own life had been something of a particularly crazy ride over the past few weeks too.

Several steamy hook-up’s with the junior doctor from Joel’s work place - Holly - had seen her staying away from the flat a couple of nights a week whilst she burnt the midnight candle at both ends with the pretty blonde. And then of course there had been the weekend of the full Harvest-moon, which had seen the wolf taking herself off to the Bayou for its three-night duration, so that she could phase and run free without any worry of repercussion.

Much like she had done for most of the full moon’s that had occurred since her moving into the male nurse’s flat.

If she was to be honest with herself, Alanna was surprised that Joel had not suspected that all was not as it seemed with his flatmate earlier than he had. Considering that she would disappear once a month - for three whole days and nights - without offering up much of an explanation as to where she was going or why.

But that was one of the many things that she had instantly loved about the sandy haired male, when Keelin had first introduced them just over six months ago. His ability to always see the best in the people around him, and his ever trusting nature.

Of course, she had also seen that over eagerness to put complete faith in everyone that he met backfire on the male nurse once or twice too.

Especially when it came to his love life!

In the short time that they had known each other, Alanna had witnessed Joel have his hopes crushed by potential male suitors no less than three times!

Not that the wolf could understand why - her flatmate was a good-looking guy! Handsome in a “far too fresh faced for her liking, but she could see why it would appeal to others” kind of way, Joel took as much pride in his physique and appearance as he did his medical studies and work at the clinic.

His short, sandy-blonde hair was always fashioned into the latest “must-have” style, and Alanna had seen more than one guy be stopped dead in his tracks by the nurses piercing blue eyes and charming smile, when they had been on nights out in the city.

It was just unfortunate for him, that the gay-man population of New Orleans did not seem to be looking for anything more serious than a one-night stand, or cheeky weekend spent under the duvet with a stranger, before returning to their single lives when a Monday morning came around.

Of course, Alanna knew that that was a huge generalisation on her part – as there had to be at least some guys out there that wanted something a little more serious than a quick hook up on a night out. She just figured that Joel hadn’t been lucky enough to meet one of them yet.

*Maybe the new guy that Joel was currently crushing on would be different! Maybe this time, her big hearted and funny flatmate would actually meet the man of his dreams!*
“…of course the size of the laryngoscope used to feed in the tubing all depends on the patient’s…. and I’ve lost you to daydreams again, haven’t I?!”

Realising that she once again must have zoned out on her friend’s revision, Alanna’s eyes came back into focus just as the male nurse looked up from his notebook.

“Urgh, I’m sorry Joel. I’m a terrible study partner tonight, I know!”

“Well, I guess I can find it within my fabulous heart to forgive you. Of course – that’s so long as you realise that tonight’s take-out is totally on you!”

“Whoa – that’s a little unfair don’t you think!” Alanna protested with over exaggerated indignation. “Afterall, you’re the one with the higher paying job and….”

The wolf’s words trailed off, as a familiar scent suddenly demanded all of her attention.

Turning away from her flatmate, she leant her head and shoulders over the glass balcony next to her, and immediately brought her eyes into focus on the person that was currently hurrying past the Library’s front desk – all the way down on the ground floor.

Hood pulled up and head pitched downwards - to anyone else sat along the balcony edge of the building’s third level, the newcomer would have looked nothing more than a slight-framed woman who appeared to be in a rush to find a book, before leaving the library to continue on with her night elsewhere.

But thanks to Alanna’s enhanced senses of sight and smell, she was able to not only make out the shape of what she imagined to be a particularly large book already tucked away and concealed under the newcomers hooded jumper, but she could also easily distinguish the scent markers that were being emitted by the woman’s skin, under the casual clothes she was wearing.

Freya!

Alanna thought to herself, as she continued to watch the woman’s trajectory across the large, open ground-floor. What in the world was the blond-haired feisty witch doing here - in the library of all places?!

Before she properly had chance to realise what she intended on doing, Alanna found herself standing up out of her chair and making her apologies to her flatmate. Something about suddenly needing to be elsewhere, to do god only knows what, for an unknown period of time – her mind was already following Freya’s progression through the library, and not on the conversation at hand.

Leaving a confused looking Joel to his studies, Alanna was down the three long flights of stairs to the ground floor within less than a minute. And it took only a quick scenting of the air for her to pick up on the blonde witch’s location – now near the rear of the renovated building, amongst the stacks of Non-Fiction books that were found there.

Making sure to keep her footing light, the wolf hot tailed it in Freya’s direction with curiosity biting at her heels.

The public library was the last place that she had ever expected to see Keelin’s fiancé – which was the very reason that she had often hung out here with Joel, when she was meant to have been remaining hidden from the Michaelson’s. What in the world could this building full of biographies, crime novels, and text-books, possibly have to offer Freya that the witch could not find in her own grimoires?!

Slowing down her progress down, Alanna crept the last few footsteps to the edge of a book-stack
which her nose told her Freya was currently on the other side of. steadying her breathing down to be both quiet and discrete, the wolf marginally lent her head around the end of the tall wooden fixture and fixed an eye onto the source of her interest.

stood facing a seemingly smooth, white-washed concrete wall, Freya’s face was completely concealed from Alanna by the hood of the witch’s sky-blue jumper. nethertheless, the wolf could still picture the stern look of concentration that must have been on the blonde’s face, thanks to the particularly tense and stressed scent markers that were currently flowing off Freya in droves.

after a second or two more passed of the witch just stood facing the wall un-moving, Alanna considered approaching Freya to make sure that she was ok. the Mikaelson’s actions – or lack of in this case – seemed peculiar to her. Even for someone whom Alanna often thought of as being both mysterious and cagey.

Before she had a chance to act on her urge, however, the wolf’s intentions were halted by a sudden prickling sensation washing over her skin. Looking down towards her bare arms, she could see that all of the tiny hairs found there had raised up, as though a sudden chill had taken a hold of her body.

less than a heartbeat later, the smell of static electricity pushed its way into her nose, as her ears began to pick up on a hushed, whispered muttering coming from Freya.

The witch wasn’t stood there idly – she was performing a spell!

A deep ache began to take root in the wolf’s head, as the pressure in the air immediately surrounding Freya and the book-stacks next to her, increased exponentially. Leaning back around the wooden fixture so as not to be seen, Alanna scrunched her eyes shut as she attempted to ride out the pain in silence.

What the hell was Freya doing?!

Just as she began to feel like she could no longer bite back on the groan of discomfort pushing up her throat, the pressurised sensation abruptly disappeared.

Opening her eyes once more, Alanna noted that the hairs on her arms had also flattened back down, as she let out the breath of air that she hadn’t realised she had been holding.

Leaning her head back around the end of the bookcase, the wolf’s brows raised in surprise as she saw that both Freya and a large section of the concrete wall, had now appeared to have vanished.

Where a moment ago there had been a smooth, unblemished barrier separating the inside of the Library from the outdoor world, now stood an arched shaped opening – one which appeared to lead to another, previously hidden section of the building.

What the?!

Knowing that she should probably just turn around and head back to the safety of Joel and his normal, mundane medical-exam studies, Alanna pushed off the sturdy end of the book-stack and slowly tiptoed her way over to the archway. The thinning of Freya’s scent told the wolf that her prey was rapidly moving away from her position, and Alanna knew that she would need to act fast were she to keep up with the witch.

reaching the opening, her mouth fell slightly ajar as she paused to take in the details of what lay on the opposite side of the archway.
Shrouded in pools of darkness that greatly contrasted to the rest of the brightly-lit library behind her, Alanna marvelled at the large stone steps that she was now presented with. Leading down below the ground level of the building, the narrow and ancient looking staircase was sparsely illuminated by the flickering flame of fire-torches – which looked to have been secured to the stone walls by rusted iron brackets.

A damp and musty scent began to fill her nostrils, as the wolf’s mind struggled to reconcile the existence of the mysterious passageway, leading down from what was meant to be a wall separating the large library building from the outside world.

Just as she began to debate whether following Keelin’s fiancé any further would be a foolhardy thing to do, the archway surrounding the opening began to…. shift!

The wolf watched in wonder as the red bricks forming the outline of the aperture began to blend back into the surrounding white-painted concrete, as the opening seemed to begin shrinking in on itself.

*Fuck – it was closing back up! Any second now, what little chance that she still had to track Freya would be gone!*

Throwing all caution and reason to the wind, Alanna suddenly found her feet carrying her through the narrowing opening at a rapid pace. Coming to a stop on the second stone step down, the wolf twisted her head around just in time to see the way back into the brightly lit library, completely disappear – being replaced by thick concrete once more.

*Well…. Alanna mused to herself with no shortage of apprehension, guess I’m now committed to following the witch no matter what!*

Drawing in a deep breath, the wolf concentrated on the presence of Freya’s scent markers once more, as she began her descent down the narrow, murky stairwell.

The further she progressed, the greater the feeling of uneasiness in her gut seemed to become – making Alanna begin to wish that she hadn’t had quite so many slices of pizza for her lunch earlier that day.

Finally seeing the end of the stairwell come into view after a few more minutes, the wolf slowed her pace down so as not to clumsily burst forth into whatever lay beyond the last stone step.

An action that she was grateful for when she eventually reached the bottom and saw what lay beyond its un-barricaded opening.

Once again lit only by the flickering flame of fire, Alanna’s eyes took a moment to focus fully on the dimly illuminated room ahead of her. For all incentive purposes, the low ceilinged, rectangular shaped space appeared to be yet another area for the storage of knowledge and information. Only here - as opposed to the regular library upstairs – the books and the shelves that they were housed upon, looked to have been in existence since the very dawn of the written word itself.

Perhaps even longer.

Dust collected everywhere as far as she could see, with the glistening silk of spider webs woven loosely around the various books and old wooden stands. The damp, stone ground, was littered with dirt, discarded texts, and what looked like ancient torn manuscripts whose edges were both discoloured and curled in on themselves.

The uneven crevices in the cracked perimeter walls enclosing the space, appeared to have thin
vines of ivy growing out of them. Long green tendrils of resilient foliage spread out over the damp stones, with leaves shooting off in various directions along their length.

The stacks themselves looked to have been constructed many centuries ago – their aging and irregular wooden planks littered with tiny holes that were no doubt the result of a large woodworm community having settled there generations before.

Row after row of leather-bound books lined the shelves – the dusty texts all of varying sizes and shapes, and clearly all far older in age than Alanna.

*Hell, they looked older in age than her great-grandmother would have been, were the long since deceased wolf-elder still alive!*

It occurred to the wolf as she stood marvelling at the clandestine room of knowledge, that the paper and parchment of which the texts were constructed, should have probably decayed away a long time ago – given how damp and humid the underground space was.

*No doubt the result of whatever magic helped to keep the room hidden from the general public in the first place!*

“All are you just going to continue standing there gawping all evening – or is there an actual reason that you foolishly decided to follow me down here?!”

Nearly jumping out of her skin, Alanna’s breath caught in her throat as her eye’s widened in reaction to Freya’s voice catching her off guard.

Stepping out from behind one of the archaic bookstacks, and into Alanna’s line of sight, the witch raised her arms as she pulled the heavy cotton hood back off her head. Tousled blonde hair cascaded around her face, as fierce emerald eyes locked onto the wolf – the anger contained within them as clear as day, despite the shadowy nature of the torch-lit room.

“I, err…. um…. hey again!”

“Why is it,” the witch said irritably, as she forced a heavy breath out through her nose, “that whenever I bump into you wolf, it’s always somewhere that you shouldn’t be!”

“Ha!” Alanna huffed nervously, as she stuck her hands into her pockets and shrugged nervously at Keelin’s fiancé. “I guess fate just keeps on wanting us to spend some quality time together!”

Quirking an eyebrow at the wolf, Freya’s voice dropped into a deadpan monotone as she replied.

“I’d say it was less fate, wolf, and more your irritating habit of sticking your nose where it doesn’t belong!”

Anxiously dropping her eyes away from the witch’s intense scrutiny, Alanna quickly gestured to the dusty book-stacks lined up on either side of them as she attempted to steer the conversation to safer ground.

“So…. this is all….”

“Strictly none of your business!” Freya interrupted, commanding the wolf’s full attention once more. “You are not meant to be down here, Alanna!”

“And, err…. exactly where is here again?!” the wolf dared to enquire, despite the thick cloggy apprehension currently pushing its way through her veins.
A couple of heartbeats passed between the two of them, as Freya seemed to consider what to say – or do – to her unexpected companion. Eventually, just as Alanna was beginning to think that the witch might have drifted off in her own mind, Freya let out a heavy sigh, as she brought up a hand to pinch at her nose.

“This, wolf, is a sacred place! Somewhere that many generations of New Orleans witch covens have used to harbour valuable knowledge on the supernatural history of the world within which we live. Its is known only to the few, and visited only when absolutely essential, so as to avoid any unnecessary disturbance to the incredibly old and valuable texts held within its confines.”

“So… it’s like a secrete den for wiccan nerds?!” Alanna quipped, before being able to stop herself.

An icy, steeled glare was the only response the wolf received, quickly reminding her of the serious, unforgiving nature of the person she was speaking with.

“Right…. not the time for humour…. gotcha!”

“I’m going to ask you one last time, wolf, before I grow tired of your irksome presence and finally put an end to your life. Why were you following me?!”

Gulping down on her nerves once more, Alanna drew in a deep breath and threw caution to the wind.

“Well, you see…. Keelin’s worried about you! And before you start raining down the pain upon me – the only reason I know that, is because I dropped by your apartment earlier today to see how you were doing! And yeah, I know…. I’m probably the last person that you ever want visiting your home! But I…. well I didn’t like having to just leave you the other day in the hospital, after what had happened. And yes, I know that you had Keelin there, and all of your family were about to arrive…. but none of them had seen what had happened. None of them had witnessed what that fat bastard had attempted to do! What…. what you nearly did! And I…. well…. I kinda got the impression that there was probably more to the encounter than first met the eye.”

Alanna noted that the anger in Freya’s gaze seemed to shift, making way for tendrils of fear to take up residence alongside it.

“Fuck…. ok…. I know what happened to you at the hands of those creeps must have been awful! I mean, Joel only told me snippets of what injuries he saw when you were rushed into the emergency clinic, and I get the feeling that what he did divulge was probably censored too, due to that whole patient confidentiality crap they always go on about. But…. well, despite all of that, I guess…. I guess I just never thought that you’d be the type to try and take her own life!”

The wolf paused, scrunching her eyes shut as she inwardly winced at the oncoming pain that she knew was about to be unleashed upon her.

Only it didn’t come.

Daring to open an eye, Alanna noted that Freya remained motionless and glue to the spot, staring at her with wide eyes that were now full of panic – all anger having disappeared completely.

Finding the courage to continue, the wolf carefully took a step closer to the witch.

“But I guess…. um…. what got me thinking the most, was how you weren’t able to actually go through with it. And not because you suddenly didn’t want to…. I mean, fuck…. I could see the utter despair in your eyes, and how determined you were to end it all. But something stopped you! It was like there was suddenly an invisible forcefield preventing you from pulling his knife into
your heart, and….”

“Stop!”

Freya’s quiet voice trembled, as she closed her eyes and slowly shook her head.

“Please stop!”

“I…. I’m sorry,” Alanna said, suddenly not sure of how to proceed. “I didn’t mean to upset you!”

When she received no further response from the agitated witch, she let out a shaky breath and took yet another step towards the witch.

“Look…. I know that you and I aren’t exactly friends Freya – hell, I know for a fact that I’m lucky to escape with my life every time we meet! But…. well…. I know a little something of what it’s like to live in constant fear. Of what its like to be threatened and blackmailed on a daily basis. And that slimy creep in the ICU room, with his cocky arrogance and weird paedo vibe…. he clearly has some kind of hold over you! And I’d wager Joel’s totally nerdy collection of first addition comics, that it’s a creepy, magic enforced hold at that!”

Freya’s eyes abruptly flew open – ablaze with emerald green fury.

“You need to leave, now!” the witch commanded - anger radiating from her as she flung out her arm.

Alanna found herself suddenly flying backwards through the air – a direct result of an invisible force having collided painfully with her chest. Feeling her inner wolf instantly awaken, she nimbly managed to twist her body around mid-air – deftly landing on the ground in a controlled crouched position, facing away from the witch.

Twisting her head to look over her shoulder, the wolf’s vision sharpened into pin-point accuracy as she locked eyes with the witch once more.

“You need to leave, now!” the witch commanded - anger radiating from her as she flung out her arm.

“Leave!” Freya ordered once again.

“No!” Alanna growled, voice rumbling with the deep tones of her wolf. “Not until you tell me what’s going on!”

“I said... LEAVE!”

Freya’s hand flung out once more, a split second before Alanna felt a sharp, white hot pain slice across the flesh of her left cheek.

Slowly raising a hand up to the now stinging area on her face, the wolf pushed herself back up into a standing position whilst turning to face the witch head on. Pulling blood stained fingers away from her cheek, she fixed feral eyes back onto the witch.

“I’m not going anywhere, Freya!” she growled angrily, spurred on by the supernatural surge of hormones now rushing through her body. “So, you can either kill me right here, in cold blood! Or you can stop being such a fucking typical Mikaelson, and tell me what’s happened! Let me help you!”

Heavy breaths disturbed the dust floating in the air between them, as both women stared fiercely at each other across the dimly lit room.
What seemed like an eternity to the wolf passed by, before Freya finally broke the stalemate.

Dropping her eyes down to the floor, the witch’s whole body appeared to deflate as her shoulders slumped forward.

“I…. I can’t!”

“You can’t what?” Alanna asked, her voice having lost its previous edge as she felt her eyes soften back into their human focus. “Stop being so damned stubborn and just tell me?! I mean geez, how the hell does Keelin put up with….”

“I mean, I literally can’t talk about it”, Freya clarified, as her voice dropped to barely a whisper.

“Oh!” the wolf huffed, cocking her head to one side as she studied the witch more closely.

_Freya was telling the truth_, Alanna realised, as she took in the defeated posture of the witch.

“Um…. do you mean that you can’t tell me about it because I’m not someone you’re close to, or….?”

“I can’t speak to anyone about it, Alanna. It…. urgh…. the b-bon…..ARGH!”

Alanna watched on as Freya suddenly doubled over in obvious pain – the witch pressing both of hands against her temples in an action not too dissimilar to what the wolf remembered having done herself, the last time Freya had attempted to fry her brain!

Eyes widening in concern, she quickly closed the remaining distance between them both and placed an unsure hand upon the blonde’s back.

“Hey….are you ok? What’s happening? What can I do?”

“Urgh…. you can stop asking me questions that I can’t damn well answer!” Freya groaned, as she forcefully shrugged off Alanna’s hand whilst attempting to straighten herself back upright.

Taking a step back, the wolf held up her hands in an apologetic manner, before continuing to study the panting witch closely.

“Have the…. have the creeps that kidnapped you now got some kind of control over your actions?!?” she asked, only half expecting to get an answer off the Mikaelson witch as she articulated her train of thought out loud.

Breathing heavily, Freya scrunched her eyes shut tightly as her face began to flush red with apparent exertion.

“Oh my god, they have - haven’t they!?” Alanna blurted out loudly in realisation. “They’ve worked some kind of magical heeby jeeby on you, and are preventing you from letting anyone know!”

No response came from the witch, other than the sounds of her laboured breaths intensifying.

“Fuck! Does Keelin know? That you’re under that fat bastard from the ICU room’s control?!”

“NO!” Freya suddenly cried, as she lunged forward and gripped hold of Alanna’s arm in a vice-like grip. “Keelin cannot find ou…. urgh!”

Another pained cry escaped from the witch’s mouth, as she dropped her hand away from the wolf’s arm and stumbled back a few steps.
“Hey…. hey, its ok…. I get it. Or at least I think I do!” Alanna exclaimed, as the cogs inside her mind whirled around on overtime to try and make sense of the newly gained information. “The guys that took you have you under some kind of control spell, and part of that spell is stopping you from talking about it, AND if you try to talk about it, your head explodes in a whole world of pain! Right?”

The wolf quickly realised her error as soon as Freya’s face scrunched up in agony once more.

“Fuck….fuck, I didn’t mean to pose that as a question. Urgh, sorry!”

Staring apologetically at the witch, Alanna gave Freya some time for the pain in her head to clear, before she attempted to speak again.

“Right, so, assuming I’m right – all we need to do is let the rest of your family know, so that they keep a closer eye on you whilst they hunt down the freaks who’ve done this, and break the link between you and them. Now that I’ve worked it out, I can be the one to tell them so that your head doesn’t try to self-destruct, and….”

“NO!” the witch blurted out once more, focusing pain filled eyes onto Alanna. “No one can know, wolf! No one! You don’t understand, if you tell anyone, I’ll be forced to…..urgh….to…..kill you…..to kill…. them…."

A small huff of laughter forced its way out of Alanna’s throat, despite the clearly serious nature of what was unfolding.

“Well, at least you’d be getting to do what you’ve always wanted, hey – to end my life!”

The wolf simply stared at her through narrowed eyes, clearly not rising to the bate.

“Ok, fine!” Alanna conceded, throwing her hands in the air. “I can’t tell anyone! So, what can I do? There’s got to be something, blondie! Because I fail to believe that all of this mind control bullshit is going to lead to anything good! I mean, geez, the amount of power that you have at your finger-tips…."

The wolf visibly shuddered as she recalled what it felt like to be on the receiving end of Freya’s ministrations.

Straightening herself out once more, the witch drew in a deep breath before gesturing to the various bookstacks around them.

“An old friend of mine – someone who I used to know long ago – left me a note whilst I was unconscious in the hospital. One that was meant for my eyes only, and one that has led me to believe that she might know of what is…. is happening to me.”

Freya suddenly paused in her explanation, and after a heartbeat, Alanna realised that the witch was waiting to see if the words that she had spoken were going to unleash on another bout of pain upon her.

Satisfied that she was in the clear, Freya continued.

“The note made reference to a magic infused object that was fabled to have been created many millennia ago, by the very gods themselves. An amulet, fortified with strong protection magic that is foretold to shield its wearer from coming to any harm.”

“Ooh, like those copper amulets you can buy from the voodoo vendors on Bourbon St? The ones
that are said to be infused with Creole VooDoo Magic to ward off evil spirits?” Alanna asked.

Heaving out a heavy sigh, Freya rolled her eyes at the wolf, before beginning to walk down one of the book-iles.

“I personally have never been one to place much credence in the existence of the gods, let alone the supposed legendary objects of their creation. But…. well, my old friend has never been one to believe in flights of fancy either. So, for her to go out of her way to draw my attention to this particular piece – I figured there had to be at least some truth behind its possible existence. Thus I have been researching the legends associated with it ever since, by utilising my late mothers Grimoires, amongst other texts.”

“So, is that why you’re down here?” Alanna asked, slowly following the witch between the stacks. “You think this…. this magical trinket has been stored in this creepy wiccan den?”

“No,” Freya admitted, as she lightly trailed one of her hands along the spines of various leather-bond books as she moved. “I still have no idea where the object resides – or if indeed, it even exists at all!”

“Oh, ok…. so, why exactly are we here again?” the wolf asked, confusion causing her brows to knot together.

“I am here, because I believe that there is an old text in amongst these grimoires that might be able to provide some valuable information as to which Seer bloodline the amulet has been entrusted to in last few decades. You, wolf, remain here and are still in retention of your own head, simply because I believe that there is a small chance you might be able to aid me in my task.”

Alanna nodded her head to Freya in understanding, despite the witch’s attention being solely on the old books as she appeared to search for a particular title.

“Gotcha!” she exclaimed, a small smile forming on her face. “You find this text, work out where the shiny necklace is being held, we go and kick some butt to retrieve it – as lets face it, these type of things never belong to one of the good guys – then you put the magical amulet on, and voila, the slimy fat dudes hold over you is history! BOOM - goodbye lard-ass, hope you have a nice trip to hell!”

The wolf out stretched an arm and motioned with her hand to signify a “mic-drop”.

Freya’s eyes fell shut, as she let out a faint sigh.

“No.”

“No?” Alanna asked in surprise - stumped once again.

“No! The amulet isn’t for me Alanna. I…. I don’t think there is a cure for what I’ve done.”

Observing Freya’s pained features, the wolf tried to make sense of all the questions that were once again now burning a hole in her mind.

“What you’ve done? Are you implying that you did this to yourself? I…. I don’t understand? You were held captive and tortured against your will Freya! That was hardly your own doing! And if this protection thingy isn’t going to help you, why are you continuing to search for it? Surely we should be….”

“There is no “we” in this scenario, Alanna - ok?!” Freya suddenly blurted out fiercely, finally
turning away from the books to look Alanna in the eyes. “There is just me! This is my own mess, and I need to try and mitigate the fall out from it as best as I can.”

Alanna stared at the witch with wide eyes – no longer sure of why Freya was letting her stay if she was so determined to proceed alone.

As if reading her thoughts, however, Freya continued on in a far more subdued voice.

“The amulet – if it indeed exists, and if I manage to locate it in time – is for Keelin.”

“Keelin?” Alanna asked, still a little stupefied as her train of thought tried to keep up with the blonde Mikaelson.

“Yes. It is to protect her!” Freya stated, before drawing in a deep breath and forcing it out of her nostrils. “And the reason that I am telling you all of this wolf – is that I need you to swear to me that you will protect her too.”

Alanna’s brows raised so high that they nearly left her forehead altogether.

“I…. well…. of course! I would always try my best to protect her from any bad guys trying to harm her! I mean, come on, I totally kicked those vampire prick’s asses when they were trying to beat on her the night you were abducted. She’s my friend, after all! And that’s what friends do, right?! Look out for one another, in a friendly manner. Friends!”

A knowing smile began to stretch across Freya’s lips, as she observed the rambling wolf and the flush of colour that was beginning to spread across her cheeks.

“I know of your feelings for her, wolf!” the witch stated, her gaze surprisingly understanding despite their previous clashes around the subject. “And I know that you wish that you could be more than just a friend to her!”

“Um…. what?! Ha, don’t be daft…. she is totally your fiancé…. and besides, I’m seeing someone…. well, kinda…. possibly, though I may have fucked that up…. but anyhow, there is no way I have feelings for Keelin…. ha, what a crazy notion…. ”

“Alanna, that’s enough!” Freya commanded sternly, effectively silencing the wolf. “I know that you care for Keelin and wish that you could be with her! And whilst a large part of me would like to flay the skin from your very bones for even thinking of my fiancé in that way…. there is now a small part of me that is thankful for those feelings.”

A deep frown creased the wolf’s brow, as she struggled to understand where the witch was going with this.

_A How could Freya ever be ok with knowing that she would happily snatch Keelin away, if she ever suspected that Keelin felt the same way for her. If she ever suspected that Freya was making the older wolf unhappy?!

“I am counting on those feelings of yours, Alanna. Because I know that they mean you will protect her! And I need you to protect her from the…. urgh…. the…. ”

“The creepy fuckers who did this to you?” Alanna finished for the witch, realising that trying to talk about them directly was causing her pain.

“Yes! But most of all - I need you to promise me, on your life…. on everything that you hold dear…. that you will keep this conversation and knowledge to yourself! Because above all else, I
“I know, ok!” the wolf interrupted. “You want me to help stop those motorbike nerds from harming Keelin. I get it ok - stop causing yourself unnecessary pain by trying to talk about them!”

“…. from me!”

What?!

“Huh?! From you? Why the hell would I need to protect her from you?! You love her! I mean…. you DO love her, right?!”

“More than you will ever know, wolf!” Freya said, with such sorrow that Alanna immediately knew the words rang true. “Which is why you have to swear to me Alanna, swear to me on your life, that if I try and harm her – if those…. argh…. try to make me harm her, that you will kill me before I even get close!”

What the hell?! the wolf’s mind reeled as she searched Freya’s eyes frantically. Kill her?! If the witch tried to harm her own fiancé?! Her own fiancé, that was…. oh boy…. very likely pregnant with their impossible, yet somehow possible, child?! Oh boy….

“Alanna, focus!” Freya suddenly said, snapping her fingers right mere millimetres away from the wolf’s face. “Now is not the time to zone out on me! I need to hear you say it!”

“I…. I don’t know if you have ever met you,” Alanna said, after a few heartbeats longer, “but you’re not exactly an easy person to take down! Fuck…. I’m lucky to escape with my life every time we meet – and that’s without me provoking you further by trying to kill you! I mean…. I know I’m a wolf n’all, and that I’m pretty damn good in a fight! But that’s against vampires, Freya! Other wolves! Hell, even the odd swamp creature that dared to try and sneak up on our Bayou encampment looking for an easy meal! But not…. not you! Against you, I wouldn’t stand a chance!”

Freya let out a small huff of laughter, even though her face remained deadly serious.

“Usually I would agree with you about that, wolf. But even with what is…. what is happening to me, I still retain my own thoughts. My own feelings. I am preying that if it should come down to it – if I am ordered to hurt her – that I will be able to make sure you have a fighting chance against me. So long as the order doesn’t include you too, then somehow…. I hope I can find a loophole to enable me to pull my punches where you are concerned!”

“You hope?!” Alanna exclaimed incredulously. “A loophole?! Geez Freya, that makes me feel SO much better! I mean, have you heard yourself right now?!”

“I KNOW!” Freya shouted in exasperation, as she flung her arms up in the air. “I know, ok! I know that all of this sounds crazy, and that the only hope I have is based on…. well not a whole lot of anything! But it is all I have, Alanna! There is the very real possibility that I could be made to hurt the woman I love, and I could never…. ever…. live with myself it that happened! I…. I…."

The witch’s words trailed off as tears quickly began to fill her eyes. Lowering her head down, Freya’s hands went to her hips as she tried to get a hold of her emotions.

“Ok.” Alanna whispered, her own gaze raising to the rooms ceiling as she attempted to comprehend the enormaty of what she was agreeing to.

“O-ok?”
“Yeah…. ok! If you are forced to try and harm, or kill Keelin, I will do everything I can to stop you! I mean, I can’t promise that I’ll be able to kill you, BUT,” the wolf exclaimed loudly in response to Freya opening her mouth to protest, “I swear I will try and do whatever it takes. Because…. well, because you are right. I…. I am in love with her too!”

Instead of the rage and anger that Alanna now expected to see roiling in Freya’s eyes thanks to her admission – she was met only with apparent gratitude and understanding.

“Thank you!” the witch whispered quietly, her sorrowful eyes dropping to the floor.

“Can I ask something though,” Alanna continued hesitantly, once again trying to make sense of everything she had learned whilst in the secrete, magically hidden room, deep down under the New Orleans Public Library. “What makes you think that these douche-bags could actually make you harm Keelin? I mean, after all I was once someone who…. um…. who was part of a plot to try and harm your fiancé! And I gotta tell you blondie, your devotion to protecting her was fierce! Like…. I literally shit my pants that night of the carnival! What makes you think that your love for Keelin won’t override anything that this overweight prick and his mates order you to do to her!?"

“Because…."

The hairs all along Alanna’s arms began to stand up on end again, as the wolf felt the air around them both suddenly become charged with static electricity.

Freya slowly raised her head once more, and locked her eyes menacingly upon Alanna.

Fierce, deadly eye’s, whose irises were now swirling with the deep tones of red and black, as they bored deep into the wolf’s own.

“…. I’m one of them now!”

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Chapter End Notes

Soooo, yeah! Bless Alanna - i do feel for her, loving someone she knows that she can never have.

Anyhoo, as a side note, my best friend (who has never watched an episode of TVD or The Originals in her life!) has stated that she wants to read my stuff - mates supporting mates and all that. So I have said I will write a summary piece for her, bascially giving a brief overview of the history of the Originals, character backgrounds, and any cannon plot points from the show that she will definitely need to know before reading The Evil Within, and What Lies Within.

Soooo, my question to you readers is - what things do you think I need to definitely include? You guys might think of something that I don't, so any help will be appreciated :-}
Chapter 23.

Chapter Summary

**Previously on What Lies Within...**

1. Freya and Keelin got engaged, before making love on the night of the Harvest Full Moon.
2. Amelia - old business acquaintance of Freya's - appeared back into the witch's life one night whilst she was drinking with Keelin and Rebekah in Rousseau’s. Neither Rebekah, nor Keelin approved.
3. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by a motorbike gang calling themselves the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan, resulting in the witch accepting the Blood-Bond into her body.
4. Keelin confided in Alanna that she suspects she is pregnant - despite the younger wolf already having guessed. Alanna suggested that Keelin pay a Wolf-Elder a visit to try and get to the bottom of her seemingly impossible predicament.
5. Alanna followed Freya into a secretive Wiccan Den of Knowledge, where she ended up confronting the witch about what had happened in the ICU room. Freya confessed being under the control of the Jarl's, and begged for Alanna's help in protecting Keelin.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 23 up for grabs guys,

So - this chapter was originally going to contain the lore and mythology behind Keelin's "unexplainable" pregnancy, but sadly due to recent time constraints and various stresses at home, I have really been struggling to find time to write. So I have split what was going to be Chapter 23 into two parts. Unfortunately that means you will have to wait until next time for the "oooooh, ok!" moment with regards to Keelin's pregnancy - but on the plus side, it also means you get an update now without having to wait another few weeks for me to complete the full chapter.

Hope that you enjoy as always, and feel free to let me know your thoughts on the chapter afterwards.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 23.

1.

As she strode purposely under the thick vegetative canopy of the Bayou’s tree tops, Keelin began to feel a certain sense of calm diffuse through her body – one which immediately had a relaxing effect on both her tense muscles and fraught mind.
Drawing in a deep breath that was full of nature's wild and varied scents, the brunette doctor couldn’t help the small smile that found its way onto her lips as she steadily made her way towards the wolf-elder Mary’s swamp-side cabin.

For the first time in weeks, her inner wolf was still!

For the first time since the night of Freya’s abduction, her inner wolf was quiet!

Was composed!

And above all else, for the first time since their mate had been so viciously attacked by those motorbike riding bastards, her inner wolf had actually paused in its relentless attack on the Kyanite barrier that served to keep it chained up, and under control.

Skilfully weaving her way in and out of the tall leafy trees that stood like proud wooden watch-towers in the mighty kingdom of the Bayou, Keelin caught herself chuckling at the distinct feeling of “coming home” that was radiating off her spirit animal in smug droves.

“We’ve lived in a city for most of our adult life!” she muttered quietly to her inner wolf as they continued along the sodden ground of the marsh’s dry-land. “Stop acting like this is where we belong!”

As she felt her beast snort out a brief huff of indignation, Keelin smiled to herself once again, before sweeping her eyes back and forth over the large expanse of wilderness that surrounded her like a green and brown cocoon of coniferous bubble-wrap.

She certainly couldn’t deny the positive effect that being in Bayou always had upon her. Be it to train and hone her fighting skills, or instead simply just to run wild and free in her animal form - the visits to the boggy swampland always managed to lighten her mood, no matter what craziness life had managed to throw at her!

And what a crazy past few days it had been!

As she continued on her way to Mary’s Bayou cabin and her nose began to pick up on the faint smell of boiled potatoes and roasted fish, Keelin found her mind wandering back to the evening before – and the emotionally charged interactions that she had had with her troubled fiancé.

The witch had finally returned to their apartment just after 1am, and crept into their shared bedroom without the aid of light - apparently so as to try and not wake the wolf from the slumber Freya had assumed her to be in.

Of course Keelin had known of her lover’s approach well before the she had even stepped foot into their home - having picked up on the witch’s scent as soon as she had entered the building’s front lobby minutes before. The wolf had been lay awake in bed for just over an hour by that point, anxiously waiting on Freya’s return - despite having received a text from Rebekah earlier in the evening to say that she had discovered her sister once again propping up the bar alone in Rousseau’s. The blonde vampire had gone on to confirm that she would keep a watchful eye on her brooding sibling from afar, until the witch decided to return home.

It had therefore come as a surprise to Keelin, when Freya had seemed relatively in control of both her balance and coordination, as she had tiptoed around their bedroom in the dark changing into her sleep-shorts and vest.

As she had carefully crawled under their thick duvet, the witch had let out a heavy sigh and remained stoically on her own side of the bed, staring up towards the room’s ceiling whilst
seemingly wide awake despite the late hour.

Having been unsure at first of what to say to her fiancé, Keelin had cautiously scooted across the bed and closed the distance between them – stopping just short of making contact with the witch, in fear of unintentionally making her feel uncomfortable.

“Are you ok?” the wolf whispered, trying to sound drowsy despite having not been able to sleep a wink whilst waiting on Freya’s return.

A hummed “Mmm hmmmm” was the only response that she received, as Freya continued to stare out into the dark.

“Do you want to talk about it?” Keelin dared to venture further, after enduring a few more moments of the deafening silence that was been shrieking loudly between them both.

“There’s nothing to talk about!” the witch replied with a sigh, without turning to face her.

“Freya, I’m worried about you. Please…. talk to me?” Keelin said softly, as she tried her best to contain the flurry of emotions that were panging in her chest. “I miss you!”

“I’m right here, beside you!” her fiancé replied – tone relaxing slightly as she finally tore her stare away from the ceiling and turned her head on the pillow towards Keelin.

”Are you though?” the wolf pushed further, her whispered voice wavering as upset began to creep into it. ”Because it feels like you want to be anywhere but here, next to me!”

A loaded silence fell between them once more – the only sound in the room being that of the two lover’s out-of-synch breaths, as Freya appeared to not know how to react to Keelin’s words.

”I’m sorry,” the witch finally whispered, after what felt like an eternity to Keelin. ”I guess I’m just trying to get through each day one at a time. I’m…. not meaning to push you away!”

Feeling her heart lurch for the woman lay next to her, Keelin swallowed down on the whimper that escaped from the throat of her inner wolf, and dared to reach out for Freya’s hand.

Only for the witch to quickly pull away the moment that their skin touched.

“You need to talk to someone, baby” she finally whispered, once she had been sure that her voice would not convey the hurt that she had felt towards her lover’s rejection. “Even if that someone isn’t me. There’s a therapist that I work with at the hospital, who has experience dealing with....”

“Dammit Keelin…. I’m not one of your patients, ok!!” Freya suddenly exclaimed in exasperation. “And I don’t need to talk to some two-bit therapist! I mean Christ, what exactly do you expect me to say?! Hi, I’m a thousand year old witch – yes you heard me right, an actual “could melt your brain with just a flick of my wrist” witch - and I was recently tortured for days by a group of supernatural J…. ARGH!”

Freya’s hands flew up to her head as she loudly bellowed out in pain – an action which both startled Keelin, and sent a wave of concern rushing through her.

“What is it?” the wolf hurriedly asked – her voice seamlessly slipping into its professional tone as she quickly propped herself up on one elbow and leant over her fiancé. “Where is the pain originating from?”

Her lover’s breaths had shortened and increased in speed, as beads of sweat appeared on her
brow.

“I…. I’m fine…. it’s just a…. urgh…. stress headache!”

“It is clearly not a stress headache!” Keelin stated confidently. “Are you feeling any numbness in your face, or tingling in your arms?”

She quickly forced her eyes to shift into the sharp focus of her wolf - so as to better examine Freya’s features in the darkness of their bedroom.

The witch was lay tense and rigid on the mattress of their bed, with her eyes scrunching shut and a grimace of pain contorting the shape her mouth. But apart from the obvious physical indications of discomfort, Keelin was not been able to see any of the typical signs that would have indicated something sinister - such as a stroke or aneurysm - was occurring in the witch’s head.

“I…. just need a minute!” Freya groaned

Keeping her enhanced gaze intently trained on her fiancé’s features, Keelin remained silent by the witch’s side as the pain in her head appeared to slowly ease. Eventually Freya let out a weary breath before rolling onto her side, facing away from the wolf.

“I going to try and get some sleep”, the witch whispered into the dark as she curled in tightly on herself. “I have another long day of research ahead of me tomorrow!”

Confusion mixed with uncertainty in Keelin’s mind, as her eyes softened back into their human form whilst staring at the back of Freya’s head.

“For the protection spell, to secure your family’s home during our engagement party?” she eventually asked, unable to just let the matter drop despite herself.

A faint nodding of Freya’s head was the only response that she received – the witch clearly wishing for the conversation to be over.

“Freya, do you…. do you still want to be engaged to me?” Keelin whispered – shame colouring her face for having asked the question of the deeply troubled witch, despite selfishly being in need of hearing the confirmation, one way or another.

Tension quickly weaved a charged web of emotion between the two of them, as the wolf’s heart pounded loudly in her ears whilst waiting on Freya’s response. In the end, however, it was not words that broke down the barrier that had formed between the lovers ever since Freya’s return from the hospital.

Instead, it was the subdued sound of muffled sobs coming from the witch’s trembling form.

“I don’t want to lose you.” Freya breathed shakily, still facing away from Keelin as the wolf scented salty tears escaping down her cheeks.

“Oh honey….”, the wolf exclaimed - her own eyes filling up as she slowly closed the distance between their two bodies. “I’m not going anywhere! Not unless you want me to.”

Keelin carefully wrapped an arm around Freya’s torso and gently pulled the witch’s body up against her own – an action that her fiancé not only allowed, but also aided by pushing herself further back into the wolf’s embrace.

Nuzzling her face into the back of the blonde’s neck, Keelin lightly began to pepper Freya’s skin
with soft kisses whilst continuing to hold onto the crying witch.

“I love you” the wolf murmured onto Freya’s skin, causing a small shiver to run across the blonde’s exposed neck and shoulders. “Nothing will ever change that! And what happened was not your fault, Freya. What you’re feeling…. what you’re going through…. none of it is your fault! You understand that, right?”

“But…. what if it is?!” the witch whispered, her voice thick with despair and barely audible.

“It is not your fault, Freya!” Keelin repeated, her voice filled with conviction. “Nothing that those bastards did was your fault! And I swear to you baby, nothing that happened to you at their hands is ever going to make me want to walk away from you! From us!”

The wolf quickly swallowed down on a growl that threatened to rumble up her throat at the mention of the bikers who had hurt her lover.

“You should!” the witch breathed shakily. “You’d be better off without me in your life now…. safer!”

”Hey…. Freya, look at me!” Keelin said, as she tugged lightly on Freya’s shoulder in an attempt to encourage the witch to turn to face her. “Please.”

Freya slowly turned herself over to face the wolf, but her red rimmed eyes remained downcast – seemingly unable to meet her fiancé’s gaze in the darkened room, despite the intimacy of their closeness.

“You ARE my life now. Ok?!” Keelin said softly, whilst hooking a finger under Freya’s chin in an attempt to raise the witch’s gaze to meet her own. “I didn’t put that ring on your finger just to freak out and run away as soon as something bad happened! I mean, come on…. we’re a werewolf and a witch living in a city full of supernatural beings and monsters! And I hate to break this to you baby, but if you hadn’t already noticed - your family has a habit of attracting the attention of some of the deadliest beings ever to walk the earth! Danger and peril literally come knocking on our doorstep every other week!”

A huff of laughter escaped from Keelin, as she tenderly cupped the witch’s face in her hands and ran her thumb lightly over Freya’s cheek to wipe away the tears that were collecting there.

“And whilst I can’t predict what other curve balls life might throw at us along the way, I do know one thing for certain, Freya…. I have never felt safer or more protected, than when I am with you!”

Glassy emerald eyes finally locked onto Keelin’s own, before slowly sliding down to her mouth and back.

In a move that took the wolf completely off guard, Freya quickly closed the gap between them and connected their mouths in a soft kiss – one that tasted of both tears, and need.

It took a second or two for her brain to catch up, but eventually Keelin relaxed into the action – her eye’s fluttering shut as she quickly met the witch’s tongue with her own when it requested permission to enter her mouth moments later.

As one of Freya’s hands found purchase against the back of her head, deep within the thick curls of her hair, Keelin felt the witch press her body up close against her own – eliciting a small moan of pleasure from deep within the wolf’s throat.
“Baby.... baby, wait....” she panted, pulling her mouth away from Freya’s despite instantly regretting the loss of contact. “We don’t have to....”

“I want to!” Freya declared huskily through her continued tears, before quickly locking her lips back onto Keelin’s.

Breathing heavily into the witch’s kiss, Keelin felt a potent surge of want shoot through her whole body as Freya brought one of her thighs up to press into the wolf’s core. Revelling in the sensation of her lover’s mouth and tongue greedily demanding attention from her own, Keelin could feel her resulting wetness begin to seep through her bed-shorts and onto Freya’s bare skin.

As the witch’s mouth left her own and began a trail of hot kisses down the side of her neck, Keelin dropped her hands down and grabbed onto the back of Freya’s thighs, intent on pulling her fiancé’s body impossibly closer against her own.

“N-No....”

Air rushed over Keelin’s skin as Freya rapidly pulled away from the contact they had been sharing.

Scrambling wildly with both her arms and legs, the witch had pushed herself backwards off the bed and landed roughly onto the cold wooden floor with a loud “thud”, well before Keelin had had time to register what was happening.

“Shit.... are you ok?!?” the wolf asked, trying to shake off the heady intoxication of her arousal as she quickly clambered over to the edge of the mattress.

Keelin was met with the sight of her fiancé sat curled in on herself in the middle of the darkened room - arms wrapped defensively around her bent legs and her eyes tightly scrunched shut in obvious distress.

As the realisation of what she had done crashed over her in a sickening wave, Keelin quickly pushed herself off the bed and knelt in front of Freya, making sure not to touch the witch, despite the overwhelming urge to wrap her lover up in a loving embrace.

“Oh god, I’m so sorry! I.... I didn’t think. I shouldn’t have grabbed you like that. Please forgive....”

“I.... I can’t breathe.... I....”

Quick desperate breaths punctuated the witch’s words, as she feverishly clawed at the exposed skin of her legs with the nails of frantic hands.

“I.... can’t....”

“Freya, honey, listen to my voice....” Keelin pleaded, trying to sound as calm as possible despite the anguish now flooding over her at seeing what affect her touch had had on the witch. “.... you’re in your own home, and you’re safe. No one can hurt you here, ok. It’s just you and me.”

Appearing not to have heard the wolf’s words, Freya’s eyes flew open and began to dart wildly around the bedroom as beads of sweat broke out across her forehead.

“Come on baby - breathe with me, ok?!” Keelin implored further - an outstretched hand hovering close to the witch’s taught arm muscles as Freya continued to hyperventilate and hug herself tightly. “Listen to the rhythm of my breathing, and focus on matching it. Its just you and me, no
As Keelin remained knelt in front of her fiancé, breathing slow and steady in a calming rhythm, Freya gradually began to gain some control over her panicked delirium.

Fighting back on tears of anger towards the Bikers who had hurt her partner, the wolf’s attention was drawn to the skin of Freya’s shins, where thin trickles of blood were beginning to flow from several fingernail shaped cuts.

“That’s it, keep matching my breaths honey,” the wolf cooed over the dull rumbling of a growl that was forming in her chest.

“I…. I’m going to take a shower….” Freya stammered, starting to push herself up off the floor after a few more moments of focusing her breathing.

“O-ok,” Keelin said, with uncertainty in her voice. “Do you want me to come and help y….”

“No!” the witch quickly blurted out, as she wrapped her arms tightly around her frame after getting to her feet. “I just need to be alone!”

Before the wolf could respond any further, Freya had hurried across their bedroom and disappeared into the bright light of their en-suite bathroom – making a point of locking the door behind her as she went.

And just as it had the night before, when she had been left staring at small droplets of Freya’s blood on their bedroom’s wooden floor, Keelin’s inner wolf once again snapped its razor sharp teeth at the Kyanite barrier deep inside of her - frustratedly expressing its rage towards the men who had hurt their mate.

Their shared, undiluted, primal rage!

As Keelin continued on her way to Mary’s cabin, a deep growl began to vibrate in her throat as she felt the hormone levels within her body intensify and surge.

A fiery fury was being ignited in her veins, and despite the ever present Kyanite ring that sat on her right hand, Keelin had no urge to try and rein in her wolf-spirit’s thundering temper.

He had done this to their mate! That smirking, overweight piece of shit whom she had bitten a chuck out of – it was him who had carved those words into their mate’s thigh!

The wolf’s breathing robustly intensified as she once again recalled Freya’s panic attack from the night before, and the tears that had been cascading down her lover’s cheeks.

The witch had gone on to spend a good hour locked away in their en-suite shower - no doubt trying to wash away the memory of what the leather wearing bastard had subjected her to, when she had been both powerless and critically injured.

An hour, during which Keelin had been able to hear the heart wrenching noise of Freya’s continued weeping through the bathrooms door, as she had lay in their bed feeling both helpless and angrily frustrated.

He had left those hateful words on their lover’s thigh specifically to taunt them! A message aimed directly at Freya’s lover to confirm the greasy haired bastard’s claiming of territory!

The claiming of their mate!
Their mate!

The sting of splitting gums barely registered in Keelin’s mind, as she recalled how small and fragile Freya had looked when she had finally emerged out of the steam filled bathroom – large bath towel firmly wrapped around her, being clutched by taught white-knuckled hands. The witch had barely even looked in Keelin’s direction as she had declared that she was going to sleep on the couch for the rest of the evening, simply citing the need to be alone when the wolf had tried to protest the idea.

He had snuffed out the fierce light usually found in their mates emerald eyes.

Him – the man, yet not a man, whose putrid flesh had tasted of decay and festering infection.

Him – whose blood had reeked of pure, undiluted evil, as it had dripped out of their canine-lined maw.

Him – the one who had viciously robbed their mate of her self-worth and her fiery passion for life!

As the passing wooden trees and leafy greens all swiftly came into a clear cut, sharp focus, Keelin felt the rage searing within her veins quickly escalate into an explosive frenzy that began to rip and tear along her skin and bones.

Him!

“So now my dear, I know that we’re all the way out in the middle of the Bayou - but I really would prefer it if you didn’t transition whilst stood on my porch!”

Keelin’s blistering amber-gaze flew up from the ground upon which it had been scorching a trail upon - and immediately came into focus on the welcoming, yet authoritative grey eyes of the wolf-elder Mary.

“I’m going to go out on a limb and say that both you, and your seething wolf, could do with a cup of my calming home-made herbal tea!”

The inside of Mary’s water-side cabin reminded Keelin of her early childhood years, spent playing in the lake-side homes of her young friends, as their mothers and fathers had boisterously discussed pack business and wolf politics over several bottles of beer.

Much like the wooden cottages and chalets that many of the Malraux pack members had lived in all those years ago, Hope’s grandmother’s residence was sparsely furnished - with only the absolute bare necessities present in the well weathered, timber built cabin.

An old, black, cast-iron stove sat in the closest corner of the dimly lit, one roomed building – its hearth fire continuously lit, and currently boiling a large pot of water for the purpose of making tea. Above the stove, and suspended from the cabin’s low roof by thick fibrous rope, hung a long wooden rack that supported several pots and pans of varying shapes and sizes.

From the scent molecules that were still saturating the air around her, Keelin could tell that some of the pots had only just recently been used – no doubt to cook the potatoes and fish that she had
smelt on her journey towards the Elders home.

A rustic looking, stand-alone sink, stood fixed to the wall adjacent to the warm heath. Its old and discoloured copper piping looking to be the only source of running water within the whole of the Elder’s home, indicating to Keelin that Mary more than likely partook in the old, traditional wolf-pack method of cleaning away all of the dirt and grime of a day spent living out in the wilderness – with a brisk dip within the open waters of the Bayou itself.

Flush against the wall furthest from the cabin’s entrance, stood a small, yet cosy looking metal-framed cot – one that was covered in what appeared to be home-knitted and crocheted blankets of all different colours and patterns.

Keelin knew from her mornings spent training and chatting with Hayley, that Hope sometimes stayed the evening with her grandmother out in the Bayou – usually when family Mikaelson were once again up to their necks in some form of supernatural drama, and wanted to keep their youngest member far from harms reach. She imagined that the bright and joyful looking covers draped over the single-use cot were no doubt for the young witch’s benefit, more than they were an interior décor choice by the traditionalist wolf elder.

“What can I say,” Mary’s wise, croaky voice piped up as she followed the trajectory of Keelin’s bemused gaze, “the little one’s flare for vivid and vibrant things may well have rubbed off on this old relic of a wolf!”

Offering the elder a weak smile, she nodded her head in the direction of the only other piece of furniture that resided in Mary’s modest lodgings – a large, multi-shelved bookcase that appeared to house so many text’s, Keelin reckoned it would give Freya’s bell-tower collection of Grimoires a run for its money.

“Hayley never mentioned that you were such an avid reader,” Keelin commented, relived to hear that the rumbling growl of her inner wolf had now mostly dissipated out of her voice. “You must have well over a hundred volumes here!”

“Oh, I am sure that there is plenty about me that you have yet to learn, my dear,” Mary remarked, not unkindly. “But there will be many an occasion for us to acquaint ourselves better in the future, I am sure!”

Gesturing to the cabins exit, the wolf-elder finished pouring two mugs of piping hot tea and indicated for Keelin to follow her out onto the wooden jetty that lead off the home’s wrap-around veranda.

“So,” Mary said, as the two of them settled into two bamboo chairs set overlooking the watery expanse of the Bayou, “I am guessing that you are not here for a long overdue chat about the various pack boundaries that we wolves within the marshlands usually adhere to?!”

Keelin felt her face redden slightly as the elder’s obvious, yet placid, reprimand made her wince with guilt.

“Ah, about that”, Keelin began, feeling somewhat like a young wolfling once again, being told off for straying outside of the Malraux pack’s territory whilst playing with her friends. “I’m sorry if I have ventured into off-limits territory over the past few months. I have tried my best to stay within familiar area’s whilst training with….”

“Ha - oh it’s ok, Keelin,” Mary interrupted, smiling warmly at her flustered attempt at an apology, “I am only yanking your chain, my dear! Forgive an old woman and her poor attempt at humour.
Hayley came to me and asked if it would be ok for you two to train within our pack’s boundaries, several moon cycles ago. To which I of course said yes!”

“Oh…. well, thank you!” Keelin said, returning Mary’s smile despite being somewhat surprised that Hayley had mentioned their training sessions to the elder.

“But since I doubt it is your recent sparring with my granddaughter’s mother that has brought you to my home today, would you care to enlighten me on what is troubling you so my dear? And what it is that has got your wolf spirit quite so…. on edge?!”

Feeling her inner-wolf instantly bristle at Mary’s mention of its current agitated state, Keelin raised her brows towards the elder in a questioning manner.

“You can sense my…. my unease?” she asked, inwardly hushing her spirit animal before it could let out the growl that was brewing in its throat.

“Oh, my dear girl,” Mary mused, as she finished taking a sip from her mug of herbal tea, “any wolf worth its hide would be able to scent the distress and anger that is currently emanating off you in droves! Not to mention the fact that you were mere seconds away from phasing and giving yourself over to the primal killing impulses of your wolf, when you first arrived on my doorstep!”

Keelin’s gaze quickly fell away from the elder’s, as a wave of shame washed over her.

“Not that there would have necessarily anything wrong with that of course”, Mary continued when she saw embarrassment colouring the younger wolf’s cheeks. “It is all part and parcel of what we are after all. Wild, impulsive beings, controlled by the surges of our hormones!”

Gesturing towards the mug of tea that remained so far untouched in Keelin’s hand, the wolf-elder encouraged her to take a sip of the strange smelling tonic that continued to steam away in the tepid Bayou air.

“But from what I hear, you have been granted a certain amount of control over the more – animalistic – attributes of our kinds existence. Not to mention severance from the moon’s domineering command. So, I guess the real question here, my dear, is what is stopping you from choosing to order your wolf into submission, and allowing yourself a much-needed respite from its clearly enraged rebellion?”

Taken back by Mary’s choice of words, Keelin rested her mug of tea in her lap, as she used her free hand to rub at her temple.

“I wouldn’t exactly call any of my recent – feelings - my own choice,” she remarked tiredly, feeling the beginnings of a headache coming on. “What with everything that has happened to Freya, and now the sudden onset of my unexplainable, um…. condition – I think I’m lucky to still retain any control over my wolf at all. Kyanite ring or not!”

Mary raised her brows at Keelin’s words, before appearing to study the younger wolf with a shrewder eye than before.

As the elder’s gaze came to rest on her stomach, Keelin watched Mary’s grey eyes narrow in contemplation.

“When you refer to your “condition”, are you implying that you are….”

“Pregnant?!” Keelin offered, in a droll voice. “Well, that certainly seems to be the million dollar question of the moment!”
Raising a questioning eyebrow in her direction, Mary once again dropped her gaze back to Keelin’s belly.

“...and this is not something you have been planning for?”

“Ha – no!” the younger wolf huffed. “It is most definitely not! And, well, its err....”

She hesitated mid flow, unsure of how Mary would react to the more unusual aspect of her current predicament.

Or indeed, if the wolf-elder would even believe her.

Seeing Keelin’s apprehension, Mary nodded towards the younger wolf’s stomach, and smiled in reassurance as she gestured for Keelin to approach her.

“May I?”

Pushing herself out of her chair, Keelin took a step towards Mary and watched on with no shortage of nerves, as the wolf-elder placed two wrinkled hands lightly over her lower abdomen.

Mary’s eyes fluttered shut, and a few seconds later a warm smile began to spread across her face.

“Well, planned or not - you are definitely pregnant my dear!”

“Are you sure?!” Keelin asked in a hushed tone, searching Mary’s eyes beseechingly. “Because it could be anything you know…. some kind of werewolf virus, or…. or a tumour growing in my....”

“Close your eyes!” the wolf-elder interrupted - her calm, yet commanding tone back once more.

When she hesitated - unsure of what Mary was wanting from her – the older wolf simply smiled towards her and nodded in encouragement.

Letting out a heavy sigh, Keelin let her eyes fall shut and dropped her arms loosely to her sides.

“Ok, now just breathe!” Mary coached in an even, serene voice. “Concentrate your mind solely on your body, and let all other sounds and sensations fade away into the background.”

Trying her best to follow the wolf-elders instructions, Keelin attempted to zone-out all of the familiar sounds that had been filling her head since she had arrived in the Bayou earlier that morning.

The various species of birds that sat perched high in the tree tops, chirping out their cheerful morning songs.

Soft, long grunts coming from the local Deer population, as they called out to each other across the expanse of the marshland, to warn of possible danger and keep track of their young.

Squeals, chirps, and purrs of playful otters, as they slid down muddy banks on their belly’s and dove in and out of the Bayou’s murky waters.

The deep rumbling growl of her inner wolf’s ire, as it impatiently paced back and forth whilst snapping razor sharp teeth at the magical Kyanite barrier within her.

“Let go of all the anger and frustration that you are holding on to. Shut out all of the rage and indignation of your spirit animal, and allow your mind and body to feel at peace with one another as you breathe in the fresh air around you.”
Feeling the tension in her muscles slowly begin to dissipate for the first time in weeks, Keelin sensed her head begin to droop forward as the chaos and turmoil of the world in which she lived, gradually began to fade away.

“That’s it, breathe”, Mary continued in a hypnotic, lulling tone. “Now…. listen to your body, my dear. Not the primal needs of your wolf, and not the confusion of your human thoughts or worries. But just the natural rhythm of your heart, and the steady stream of your blood as it flows through your veins. Listen…. and tell me what you hear!"

As a deep sense of calm and tranquillity began to flow through her muscles, Keelin found herself becoming acutely aware of all the different organs and tissues that worked together in unison every second of the day, simply just to keep her alive.

The whooshing sound of air being pulled into her lungs, as the muscles of her diaphragm stridently worked to help her breathe in and out.

The steady rhythmic beating of her heart as it relentlessly pumped blood around the various veins and arteries of her body.

The bubbling grumble of a stomach that was more filled with acid than it was of food - as it strove to remind her yet again, of her constant need for sustenance as of late.

The….

…..wait! There! Just beneath the gurgling of her gut striving to digest the remains of the previous days lunch. It was only faint…. but…..

“Oh…."

The word escaped her lips in a gasp, as Keelin’s eyes slowly opened and focused in wide wonderment onto Mary.

“Is…. is that…."

Grinning widely, the wolf-elder nodded her head in confirmation, before gently taking hold of Keelin’s hand and pressing it up against her stomach.

“That, my dear, is your child!"

Looking briefly to the hands now laying over her stomach, Keelin closed her eyes again as she quickly sought out the faint, quick paced drumming once more.

A heartbeat! A tiny, fledgling heartbeat, that belonged to someone growing inside of her!

Another gasp of wonderment left her mouth - this time accompanied by the first genuine smile that she had expressed in weeks, as tears began to form in her eyes.

“Best not be letting you have any more of that then!” Mary suddenly said, breaking Keelin out of her stupor as the wolf-elder reached over for her mug of herbal tea. “It might be good for soothing the inner beast, but I’m not sure that your little one is developed enough just yet, for the medicinal punch it packs!”

Pregnant! She truly was pregnant! With a little…. little….

“What is my dear?” the wolf-elder asked, as she finished throwing the contents of Keelin’s mug
out into the Bayou’s waters. “You seem conflicted again?!”

“Mary, have you… well…. have there been any instances recorded in our kind’s history of female wolves becoming pregnant without…. having had any sort of relations with a man?”

The old woman’s eyebrows quickly rose up, as her mouth fell open in surprise.

“Oh!”

********************************************

2.

As the thundering high winds of Storm Gelda continued to wreak havoc on the rain drenched streets of New Orleans’s French Quarter, Hayley Marshal sat listlessly watching as the closed double door entranceway of Rousseau’s rattled and clattered on its hinges.

Fierce gusts of air rushing past tiny gaps in the venue’s window frames created a howling, high pitched symphony that sang out to the hybrid’s inner beast – fuelling a wistful urge within her to join nature’s concerto with a powerful howl all of her own.

“Are you sure that you’re ok? You’ve hardly touched your bourbon since we arrived!”

Rebekah’s pristine voice served to drag Hayley out of her self-induced daze, and land her back within the mostly deserted bar with a small jolt of surprise.

“I’m sorry Rebekah – I’m fine! Honestly….” she protested, when the blonde vampire raised a disbelieving eye-brow in her direction, “…. I’m just a little tired, that’s all.”

Draining the remaining golden droplets out of her tumbler, Rebekah motioned over to Rousseau’s bar manager, Josh, to indicate that she was in need of a re-fill.

“Well that’s understandable, love,” the blonde vampire said, before quickly grabbing hold of Hayley’s untouched bourbon and downing its contents. “I think it’s fair to say that we have all been burning the midnight candle at both ends, as of late!”

Nodding her head in agreement, Hayley began to mindlessly pick at one of the beer mats in front of her, as it sat on top of the long mahogany bar in the centre of the venue.

Rebekah certainly wasn’t wrong with her observation.

The whole of family Mikaelson had been on high alert ever since their eldest member had been kidnapped and tortured, just under two weeks ago. Tension constantly filled the Compound within which they lived, skulking around the home and throwing temper tantrums like it was a disgruntled teenager, lashing out at anyone who dared to cross its path.

It was the frustrating lack of progression that was taking the biggest toll on each of them, and the infuriating knowledge that Freya’s tormenters were still out there - somewhere - no doubt smug in the knowledge that they were managing to run circles around them all.

Day and night the Original siblings had been out searching for the Biker Gang who had dared to lay a finger on their eldest sister. And day and night, Hayley had watched them all return back to the Compound - empty handed and no closer to discovering which rock the spineless bastards were
And whilst the hybrid of course wished she could be out on the streets with them - thirsty for revenge and looking for heads to roll – she had been having to deal with a completely different issue all of her own, back at the Mikaelson home.

“Two more of your finest bourbons!” Rebekah said, rousing Hayley out of her thoughts once again. “And easy on the ice this time, Josh! I like to actually be able to taste the alcohol!”

Raising her gaze, Hayley saw that Josh was now stood in front of them both with a less than amused expression upon his face.

“The ice is an attempt to hide the fact that I ran out of decent bourbon several days ago!” the bar manager sighed, as he grabbed a non-distinct looking bottle off a rather empty liquor shelf behind him. “If the supply trucks don’t start getting through to the city soon, I’m going to have close-up like every other bar on the street.”

Scoffing towards the young vampire, Rebekah motioned for Josh to leave the bottle beside her glass, when he had finished re-filling it.

“Surely Marcel can have some of his boys fetch a few crates of stock for you, from out of town?!” the blonde remarked, only half managing to feign interest. “It’s not like they get up to much else these days!”

“Actually, they are all tied up on business as of late!” Josh commented irritably, as he placed two hands on the bar and lent towards his only two customers of the morning. “Marcel has every man available out looking for the gang who took your sister. It appears that we are once again nothing more than mere foot soldiers for the great Klaus Mikaelson to order around…. err, not that it’s not for a good cause, of course. Naturally. Ahem. So…. erm…. how is she doing anyway? Better?”

Hayley watched as Rebekah dangerously narrowed her gaze towards the suddenly flustered bar manager.

“Right… none of your business, Josh. Take a hike, Josh. Of course. I’ll just be over there if you ladies need anything else…. minding my own bee’s wax. I mean, it’s not like it’s my bar or anything!”

As the vampire rolled his eyes and stalked off to the far end of the counter to continue on whatever paper-work he had been engaged in, Rebekah let out a heavy sigh before swivelling around on her stool to face Hayley.

“So, tell me love, how is my little darling of a niece doing?” the blonde vampire asked as she slid a freshly poured bourbon along the bar towards Hayley. “With everything that’s been happening lately, it feels like an age since I got to spend any quality time with her.”

Grabbing onto the glass tumbler offered up to her, Hayley felt the beginnings of another headache begin to take root in her head.

“To be honest, I’m not entirely sure what’s gotten into her as of late,” the hybrid eventually commented, after a few moments of contemplation. “She’s been throwing tantrum after tantrum over the last few days - and I’ve no idea why, or what is causing them! But they have been getting so bad, that I am having a hard time trying to convince her personal tutor to keep on turning up for his daily sessions with her!”

“Really?” Rebekah asked, with no shortage of surprise in her voice. “I would have thought it was a
little early for the “terrible-teens” to be hitting the wee angel just yet!”

“I know! But honestly Rebekah, it’s like a switch has suddenly been triggered in her head, turning her from a sweet little ten-year-old, into a moody and argumentative recluse. It’s now a fight every morning just to get her to emerge from her bedroom, let alone engage in any sort of conversation around the breakfast table. Its like…. I don’t know, it’s like she’s constantly disappearing into her own head.”

“Well, it could be that she is just picking up on the sombre mood of everyone around her”, Rebekah offered, refilling her glass once again after downing its contents as Hayley had been speaking. “I know that we have all been trying to hide our recent anger and frustration away from the little one as best we can - but she’s bound to have noticed all of the tension, Hayley. She’s an astute little girl after all!”

“Possibly”, the hybrid sighed, swirling the contents of her tumbler around in an absentminded fashion. “I don’t know, I just get the feeling that there’s something more to it. Something that she’s struggling with, but doesn’t feel like she can talk to me about.”

“Maybe its magic related,” Rebekah suggested. “I mean, she hasn’t been able to train with Freya for a good few weeks now. I should imagine that’s got to be frustrating for her, given how much progress the two of them had been making on her wiccan studies.”

“Hmmm,” Hayley hummed, contemplating the vampire’s suggestion. “Potentially. I guess only time will tell. She was particularly shaken on the day that I took her to see Freya in hospital. In fact, come to think of it - it’s ever since that afternoon that her mood has taken a turn for the worse.”

“Well, you can’t exactly blame the little one for that!” Rebekah offered kindly. “I imagine seeing her aunt looking so defeated and vulnerable can’t have been easy for her. Don’t forget love, Freya is someone that Hope greatly looks up to – idolises even. Her whole life, Freya has been someone who she has seen to exude confidence, and wield powerful magics with relative ease and grace, whilst fiercely protecting her family. It was no doubt a huge shock to suddenly see her aunt looking so…. helpless.”

Dropping her eye’s away from Hayley, the Original vampire’s brown knitted together as she let out a heavy breath.

“It has been for us all!”

“Hey,” the hybrid said, reaching out a hand and giving Rebekah’s arm a quick squeeze. “I have every faith that Freya will eventually return to being the feisty, stubborn witch that we have all grown to love. Its just going to take time for her to heal, that’s all.”

“Oh, I know, love!” Rebekah remarked, flashing a brief smile towards the hybrid. “My sister is nothing if not resilient! I guess I am just frustrated that we are still no closer to finding the bloody vermin who have done this to her!”

“I take it that none of the out-of-town biker joints have provided any clues?”

“Annoyingly – no! Though there was this one place that we frequented yesterday that felt…. off.”

Hayley quirked an eyebrow towards Rebekah, encouraging her to elaborate as she took a small sip of her bourbon.

“It’s probably nothing to be fair”, the blonde vampire sighed. “Nik and Elijah certainly didn’t seem to think that there was anything suspicious about the run-down bar. But there was just…..
something. And I couldn’t quite put my finger on why, but I got the distinct feeling that the manner-less louts who were drinking in there, knew more than they were letting on. They certainly appeared to know plenty about our family for one!”

“Well - why don’t you head back there, and this time take Keelin with you!” Hayley suggested. “She has after all crossed paths with some of Freya’s attackers, and seen them in person. If any of the drinkers in there were indeed involved, then she would surely recognise them?”

“That had actually crossed my mind,” Rebekah said. “And I was going to ask her this morning, when she dropped by the Compound to discuss the engagement party preparations. But she seemed…. well…. distracted! Speaking of which, have you noticed how pale and sickly the Malraux wolf has been looking as of late?”

Hayley nodded in confirmation.

“I have thought that she’s been looking a little run down. But that’s got to be expected, Rebekah. It can’t exactly be easy on her, seeing the woman she loves going through such a traumatic ordeal. And from what I can gather, Freya isn’t exactly rushing to let Keelin help her cope with it all!”

“Hmmm, I’m not so sure that it’s just that though”, the vampire remarked thoughtfully. “Something else seems to be on her mind. Even when I suggested that she came and joined us today for a few relaxing drinks whilst Freya is busy cooped up in her bell-tower – she shrugged off the offer, claiming instead that she was off to the Bayou to see Hope’s grandmother.”

“Mary?!?” Hayley asked, surprised by the mention of the wolf-elder.

“It would appear so,” the blonde vampire confirmed.

“What business could Keelin possibly have with Mary?!” Hayley pondered out loud, her curiosity peaked.

“You know, I think you’re right!” Rebekah suddenly declared loudly, drawing the hybrids attention once more. “I am going to head back to that grotty little bar out in the Wastelands! Something definitely felt wrong about the place, and if there’s one thing that I’ve learnt over my thousand’s years of existence – it’s that a woman’s intuition is rarely ever wrong!”

“Sounds like a plan!” Hayley commented, smiling towards her friend.

“Care to join me?” the blonde vampire asked, looking at her hopefully. “A little blood and violence might be just the thing to help distract you from the troubles of raising a stubborn and moody mini-Mikaelson!”

“Actually, I think I will pass if that’s ok,” the hybrid said apologetically. “Whilst Hope’s busy with her tutor, I might take the opportunity to pay a visit to Mary myself. I’m long overdue a catch up with her, and…. well, I won’t lie - I am more than a little intrigued as to what business her and Keelin might have together.”
Rebekah let out a small laugh, as she threw a knowing smirk her way.

“Wolves! Always so bloody territorial!”

“Hey!” Hayley protested, hitting the Original lightly on the knee in mock offence.

“Fine - I shall go and apprehend Freya’s abductors all on my own then!” the vampire sighed dramatically. “Though I don’t know why it’s always left to me to bloody well take care of our family’s….”

“Actually, if it’s company that you are looking for – I wouldn’t mind joining you on your little excursion!”

Both Hayley and Rebekah quickly swivelled around on their stools, surprised by the abrupt appearance of another’s voice in the otherwise empty bar.

Stood facing them in the middle of the bar was a tall, raven-haired woman, that Hayley did not recognise – though it was clear to see from the look on the newcomer’s face, that she recognised them.

Or at least one of them.

“Rebekah, isn’t it?” the ruby lipped woman asked, as she fixed her bright sapphire eyes onto the Original vampire. “Freya’s younger sister?”

Brow creasing, Hayley flicked her gaze over to the blonde vampire next to her, just in time to see a distinct look of disdain flash across Rebekah’s face as she took in the newly arrived woman’s form.

“And you’re the blast from my sister’s past, that apparently doesn’t know how to read a room!” Rebekah replied, making no attempt to hide the apparent contempt from her voice, that she held for the woman. “Was my not so subtle threat, too subtle for you last time we met, love?! Do I need to make it a little more obvious for your pretty little mind?!”

Hayley was surprised to see Rebekah’s irises begin to bleed into their blood-red vampiric form, as prominent dark veins started to push up against the delicate skin under her eyes.

Who was this woman?!

“Oh, come now Darlin – you hardly even know me! Certainly not well enough to be throwing your weight around like a careless, immature whelp! Don’t make me have to teach you a lesson in proper decorum whilst in the presence of a lady!”

Flicking her gaze over to the dark-haired woman, Hayley noted that whilst her eyes remained the same colour of dazzling blue as when she had first arrived, they had taken on a threatening edge all of their own.

One that the hybrid would have sworn looked almost as deadly as that belonging to the snarling Original next to her.

“Oh….” the hybrid finally exclaimed after enduring a few more moments of the two women glaring at each other, in what would have certainly been considered a “pissing-match” had they been pack wolves. “Is someone going to fill me in on what is going on, before I have to have Josh here douse you both in sodawater!? Who is this, Rebekah??”

Letting her bold, challenging glare linger on Rebekah for a heartbeat longer, the smirking
newcomer finally turned her head towards Hayley and offered out her hand in greeting - as though only just registering the hybrid’s presence for the first time since entering the bar.

“I am so sorry, darlin - where are my manners”, the woman said, her face effortlessly morphing into a wide charming smile. “My name is Amelia, and I am a good friend of Freya’s!”

“Ex-friend!” Rebekah blurted out loudly under the disguise of a forced cough.

Raising an eyebrow at the Original’s remark, Hayley gave the immaculately dressed woman another quick once over, as a slither of understanding slowly began to take root in her mind.

*This was someone from Freya’s past! Someone who had quite possibly even been romantically linked to the witch, given the clearly possessive display of disdain Rebekah was currently engaging in. Freya’s sister was being territorial…. for…. for Keelin’s sake??*

“Oh, I believe you will find that she and I are still very much friend’s, darlin!” the woman called Amelia remarked to Rebekah, despite not taking her eyes off Hayley. “A mere century apart cannot erase the kind of connection that we shared!”

Hearing the cocky self-confidence within Amelia’s voice, despite the woman clearly knowing who – and what – Rebekah was, confirmed to Hayley that there was probably more to the raven-haired beauty’s nature than first met the eye.

A lot more, given the curiously strange scent markers that her heightened senses could detect lingering under Amelia’s overuse of perfume.

*What was she?!!*

To her credit, Rebekah managed to limit her reaction to the newcomer’s words to a simple snort of contempt, as Hayley noted the Original’s irises returning back to their natural light blue hue.

“Funny love - I can’t say that I’ve heard my sister mention your name once, since your brief reunion the other week!” the blonde vampire remarked with a calculated smirk. “So, I imagine you weren’t that bloody important to her!”

“Well, I should think that she has had rather more pressing matters on her mind!” Amelia quickly retorted, without missing a beat. “Like say, being tortured and raped by a gang of leather wearing thugs intent on ruining her life! Wouldn’t you agree, darlin?!”

Hayley’s inner wolf felt the sudden change in the room’s atmosphere a good second before her eye’s registered what happened next.

In a supernatural blur of motion, Rebekah launched herself at the raven-haired Amelia with a feral snarl on her lips – closing the distance between them and slamming the newcomer’s body down onto a small wooden bar-table - all within the time it took for Hayley’s heart to complete a single beat.

As the beer stained surface beneath Amelia’s body gave way, crashing down to the ground with a loud “CRRRRRRACK” and sending large splinters of wood flying across the bar, Rebekah intensified her hold on the woman’s neck whilst threateningly displaying newly grown fangs mere millimetres from her face

“Shit, guys, not in my bar, ok!” Josh’s irritated voice called out from behind where Hayley had now jumped up off of her stool – muscles tensed and ready to leap in and help Rebekah if required. “This is a kill-free zone!”
“What do you know of the attack on my sister!” the blonde vampire snarled fiercely into Amelia’s face, ignoring Josh’s plea as her eye’s once again bled red.

Despite the deep purpling of her face, Amelia somehow managed to defy the death grip that Rebekah had on her throat, to offer-up a surprisingly calm retort to the Original’s question.

“Well, darlin, isn’t that the question!”

Feeling the dynamic of the room shift once more, Hayley noted that the strange scent she had sensed radiating off Amelia before, suddenly intensified – a split second before a loud cry of pain ripped forth from Rebekah’s mouth.

Releasing her grip on Amelia’s neck, the blonde Original awkwardly stumbled backwards as her eye’s scrunched shut, and her hands flew up to either side of her head. Hayley could see discomfort clearly written all over the vampire’s face, as she clocked the dark-haired woman effortlessly pushing herself up of the ground, from the corner of her vision.

Feeling her eyes come into sharp, pin-point focus, Hayley let out a deep growl towards the newcomer as she bent into an attack ready crouch. Sharp canine teeth quickly split her gums in two, as the hybrid tensed her leg muscles and leaped towards Amelia, who had started to slowly advance on Rebekah’s crouched form.

Only she didn’t leap.

She didn’t move an inch.

“Sorry Darlin, can’t let you do that!” the blue-eyed woman stated calmly, briefly flicking her clearly bemused gaze over to the hybrid. “As the boy-vampire said, this is a kill-free zone. And I didn’t come here to fight!”

Inexplicably unable to will a single muscle within her body to move, Hayley’s mind began to reel at its sudden lack of control over her own actions.

What the hell was happening?! It was like…. like her brain had suddenly lost the ability to communicate with her limbs! With…. with any part of her body!

“Now, whilst I can’t deny that seeing the look of complete confusion on both of your faces is somewhat amusing - can we all agree that if I release you two beautiful ladies, we will continue our discussion in a more civilised, cultured manner!”

Unable to respond to Amelia in any way, shape or form – Hayley could only watch on as Rebekah let out a strangled cry of indignant rage as her reddened face continued to contort in pain.

Letting the self-confident, bemused smirk fall from her face for the first time since Hayley had laid eyes on her, Amelia came to a stop just inches away from Rebekah and opened out her arms in what the hybrid would have sworn looked to be a subtle gesture of submission.

“Despite what you may think you know of me, Rebekah, our goals are one in the same. I want to rain down justice on the ones who harmed your sister. I want to make them pay!”

A few long, drawn out seconds passed between all present in the bar, as the groan of Rebekah’s laboured, pain ridden breaths were the only sound to compete with the howling wind outside.

Finally, after what seemed like an eternity to the immobilised hybrid, Hayley saw the dark veins that had been framing Rebekah’s tightly scrunch eyes quickly begin to disappear back under the
vampire’s skin.

Closely followed by the ascent of the blonde’s vampiric fangs.

A heartbeat later, she could move her limbs once more.

“There, now that wasn’t so hard was it!”

“Wha…. what the hell are you?!” Rebekah panted out, as she slowly began to straighten back up into a standing stance.

“What I am, darlin, is of no relevance to the matter at hand!” Amelia remarked, as her flawless features remained imploring despite the bite to her words. “The far more pressing matter, is what makes you think that this tavern out in the Wastelands is where Freya’s tormenters are holed up?”

Never once taking her eyes off Amelia, Rebekah slowly made her way back over to the bar, where Hayley remained stood confused at the whole confrontation.

“You’re not a vampire, that much is obvious,” the blonde Original remarked, clearly undeterred from her line of thought as she came to a stop next to Haley. “Nor do you have the scent of wolf or human! So what…."

“I am someone who made a promise to your sister many years ago, to protect her from the brutes who you currently seek to end!” Amelia suddenly declared passionately, before dropping her eyes away from Rebekah’s suspicion hardened glare. “A promise I was unable to keep.”

As Hayley observed the raven-haired woman in front of them, it occurred to her that whilst the newcomer’s actions since entering the bar might have been far from trustworthy or honourable – the raw emotion lining her voice as she spoke of Freya was anything but fake.

“I failed her,” Amelia eventually continued as she re-locked intensely blue eyes back onto Rebekah – her voice once again level after a moment seemingly spent attempting to regain control over her feelings. “And whilst I cannot undo what has been done, I can help to ensure that the ones who did this to her are made to suffer for their actions!”

Despite Rebekah’s continued glare of mistrust aimed towards the mysterious raven-haired woman, Hayley began to notice the scent markers being given off by her friend subtly shifting in aroma.

_Violent intent and blood-lust, were being replaced by the more composed tones of determination and resolve._

“And what exactly makes you think that I need your help,” Rebekah enquired, her voice remaining guarded despite being measurably calmer. “I am, after all, an Original Vampire! If you indeed knew anything of my family, you would already realise that no man will be able to stop me from disemboweling him, should I discover he played a part in my sisters torment!”

Letting out a small sigh of frustration, Amelia cocked her head to the side as she confidently rested her hands upon her hips.

“You need my help, darlin, because despite the charmingly mis-placed confidence that you appear to have in your supernatural prowess – your vampiric status will not be enough to take down those whom you seek!”

Pausing briefly, Amelia took a moment to contemplatively cast her eyes over the dimly lit, open space of Rousseau’s - appearing to Hayley as though she was deliberating on how to phrase her
“But more importantly,” the raven-haired woman finally continued, locking her eyes back onto Rebekah, “you need my help because the millennia-old creatures that tortured your sister, have not been “men” for a very long time! And they have far more sinister reasons for being in your city, than just that of corrupting your sister!”

Turning her head towards Rebekah, Hayley flashed the original vampire a look of guarded intrigue – one that her friend returned as she met her gaze.

“Ok,” Rebekah declared with a resigned sigh, as she returned her attention to Amelia. “I’m listening……”

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Chapter End Notes

....sorry for the cliff hangers folks, but as previously mentioned, the answers will come in the second part of this chapter.

Oh and out of curiosity - did anyone see the picture I posted in the comments of the last chapter, of what Alanna looks like in my head when I write her? If so, I'm interested to know if it matches how everyone else has been picturing her - or if you're all like "oh, really?! Huh!"

:-D
Chapter Summary

**PREVIOUSLY ON WHAT LIES WITHIN....**

1. Freya and Keelin got engaged on the night of their 1 year anniversary, before making love on their apartments roof-top under the watchful eyes of the powerful Harvest Moon.
2. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan, resulting in her drinking Halvar's blood and submitting to the Blood-Bond.
3. Keelin discovered that she is mysteriously pregnant, and ventured into the Bayou to seek Mary's counsel on what might have caused her seemingly impossible predicament.
4. Freya and Alanna clashed in a secret chamber under the New Orleans Library, resulting in the witch opening up to the wolf and begging her to help keep Keelin safe.
5. Amelia showed up in just as Rebekah was about to leave for the wastelands and return to the bar called Baracuda, where the Original suspects all might not have been as first met the eye. Amelia disabled both Rebekah and Hayley without breaking a sweat, forcing both of them to listen to her pleas for understanding - she wants to punish Freya's attackers just as much as them!

Chapter Notes

Chapter 24 is finally up for grabs guys....hope that you enjoy.

I have had no time whatsoever to edit this installment, or re-read over it, so I shall apologise in advance for any and all grammatical errors....as I am sure there will be plenty!

Hope that you are all well, and feel free to hit me up with a comment if you have any questions or theories :-)

Happy reading guys :-)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 24.

1.

The comforting sound of crackling flames and simmering liquid helped to both soothe and settle Keelin’s unease, as she sat on the edge of Mary’s small cot, inside of the wolf-elder’s cabin.

As a fresh pot of water slowly came to the boil on the old hearth stove, the Malraux wolf watched
patiently in silence as Hope’s grandmother searched for a specific text amongst the various books that adorned her large wooden bookcase.

The old woman had now been muttering quietly to herself for the past few minutes as she ran a hand along the spines of different leather-bound volumes, reading out the title of each book she inspected in an attempt to locate the one she required.

The two wolves had returned inside to the cozy warmth of Mary’s home almost immediately after Keelin had revealed to the Elder that her pregnancy was not quite as straightforward as first met the eye.

After recovering from her initial surprise at the revelation that no male had played a part in Keelin’s current predicament, Mary’s temperament had quickly changed from one of wonder, to deep contemplation - as she had silently beckoned for the younger wolf to follow her back into the small swamp-side cabin.

“Ah, I believe this is the one!” Mary suddenly exclaimed, as she pulled on the spine of a particularly small looking book that had been wedged in the middle of a shelf. “La Legende Du Lou Honteux!”

Quickly searching her brain for what little knowledge of the old Louisiana Creole language she had, Keelin’s brow began to furrow.

“Legend of….of the….humbled wolf?” she slowly asked Mary, unsure of her attempt at translating the title.

“Shameful, my dear. The Legend of the Shameful Wolf!”

“Riiight,” the younger wolf remarked, flashing Mary a doubtful look. “Look, if this is going to turn into some kind of lecture on the proper use of contraception, and the pitfalls of having more than one sexual partner, then….”

“Ha, no child,” Mary interrupted, as she quickly dismissed Keelin’s assumptions. “I think both you and I are old enough to know how the tale of the birds and the bees works!”

Placing the green-coloured book, unopened, onto the cot next to Keelin, the wolf-elder slowly made her way over to the cabin’s warm hearth, and grabbed two fresh mugs from the hanging shelf above it.

“I am right in assuming that you have your own theory as to how your baby was conceived – am I not?” Mary asked, her back to Keelin as she began to make each of them a new drink of non-medicinal tea.

“I…. well, no!” Keelin answered, surprised by the wolf-elder’s unexpected assumption. “I have no idea as to how this has happened. And to be honest, until a few minutes ago when I heard the tiny heartbeat inside of me, I didn’t actually believe I was pregnant!”

“Mmm hmmm,” Mary hummed, as she finished pouring boiling water into the mugs.

Walking back over to Keelin, the wolf-elder handed her one of the steaming cups before slowly lowering herself down onto the cot to perch on the opposite side of the small book to Keelin.

“Let us quickly get one thing straight, my dear!” Mary said softly, her wise grey eyes focused upon her tea as she carefully raised the mug’s edge to her mouth to take a sip. “I do not talk in riddles, and I have no patience in life for half-truths or hidden agendas. When a wolf gets to my age,
tolerance begins to wear thin for the pointlessness of unnecessary mystery.”

Keelin’s brows raised as she took in the elder’s words.

“...In short, your time spent here will be far more productive if you stop lying to both yourself, and me!”

Unsure of how to take the older woman’s remark, Keelin simply stared at Mary with wide eyes, as the wolf-elder continued to calmly sip on her herbal tea.

“So, I’ll ask once more - what is the theory that you clearly already have rumbling around in that head of yours, on how you have come to be with pup?”

“I... I’m not li...” Keelin quickly began, before stopping herself short as her inner wolf let out a huff of shrewd bemusement.

Shut it you!” she internally berated to her spirit animal. What the hell would you know!

Feeling the beast inside of her shake its large furry head, before indignantly snorting air at the Kyanite barrier – Keelin realised that Mary’s assumption was not completely off the mark.

She did have a somewhat irrational theory on the “when” aspect, with regards to the child within her being conceived!

But that was exactly all it was – a highly unlikely, wild theory, based on the fragmented memoires of an unravelling mind that had been fervently lost in the primal mating urges of her wolf, during the throes of passion!

“Go on, my dear...” Mary prompted, “...I’m listening.”

Letting out a heavy sigh, Keelin dropped her chestnut gaze away from the wolf-elder’s face, and refocused her eyes upon the small, bewitched ring that permanently lived on her right hand.

“Well, I don’t know if Hayley has mentioned it to you, but Freya and I got engaged a few weeks ago,” the Malraux wolf began, “after I returned from a trip away in New York.”

Out of the corner of her eye, Keelin saw Mary simply nod her head and smile, before indicating for her to continue.

“I actually proposed to her on top of our apartment building, under a clear night sky - and after she had said yes, we erm... well, we...”

A small knowing smile fleetingly tugged at the wolf-elder’s lips, before her expression quickly returned to one of contemplative interest.

“...you know!”

“I think this old wolf can just about remember what it was like to be betrothed to someone,” Mary mused, as Keelin felt her cheeks beginning to flush a deep shade of red with embarrassment.

“Although I have to admit, my tastes in mate were a little more... masculine, than your own!”

The corners of the wolf-elder’s eyes crinkled as she smiled warmly towards her guest.

“So, you and the Mikaelson Witch made love under the watchful eye of the Harvest Moon, in all of the lunar goddesses full-bodied glory – am I right?”
Wishing for this particular part of the conversation to be over as quick as possible, Keelin simply offered up a terse nod to the wolf-elder without meeting her gaze.

“And it’s not like we haven’t made love on the night of a full-moon before,” she suddenly rushed on, the words tumbling out of her mouth at an exponential speed despite her deepening shame, “because we have. Often in fact! I mean, you know how heightened our kinds urge to mate is over the three days of a month when the moon is at its apex! The kyanite ring certainly doesn’t seem to stop me from experiencing that side of…. well…. anyway....”

Feeling all of the moisture suddenly disappear from her throat, Keelin quickly gulped down a large mouthful of tea, and attempted to reign in her mortifying rambling.

“The point is, on the night of the Harvest Moon, our love making felt…. different!”

“Different how?” Mary asked, the elder’s demeanour remaining calm and collected despite Keelin feeling like the walls of the cabin were rapidly closing in on them both like a scene from a claustrophobic’s worst nightmare.

“Well, for one, I could have sworn that I could actually hear a…. voice…. in my head,” she dared to venture, hoping that the wolf-elder would not immediately peg her as having gone crazy. “Though was only faint, and, well…. I guess to be fair it could well have just been the sound of someone talking from within the apartment block below us.”

“Is that what you believe?” Mary asked, taking another sip of her tea.

After a moment’s deliberation, Keelin decided to throw all caution to the wind and simply let rip with the rest of “the crazy” that was tumbling around in her head.

“No. I guess it’s not. I think…. or rather I felt, like the voice was coming from the Harvest Moon herself. Commanding me to let go of my human mind and body, and completely submit to the carnal needs of my wolf spirit. To give myself over to her will entirely, and in return, the goddess promised that she would grant me anything that my heart could possibly desire.”

Chancing a glance over to the wolf-elder, Keelin was surprised that instead of the disbelief and ridicule that she had expected to see plastered all over Mary’s face, she was met instead with a look of inquisitive curiosity.

Curiosity…. and concern!

“But it was not just the whispers and promises in my head that felt…. different,” she dared to continue. “My wolf also seemed to be affected more fervently than usual, by mine and Freya’s love making. It was…. well it was like I could feel it trying to call out to her, desperate to feel her essence mingling with its own.”

“Desperate for her essence?” Mary asked, her eyes having gained an intensity that Keelin had not noticed a few moments ago. “Or for her magic?”

Angling her head to the side slightly, Keelin considered the wolf-elder’s words for a moment as she cast her mind back to the night that she and Freya had spent on the rooftop of their apartment building – naked and entwined in a lovers’ embrace for what had to have been a good few hours.

Power…. her wolf spirit had been frantically howling inside of her in desperation to feel their mate’s raw power wash over them, and infuse into every cell within its body. It had greedily desired the witch to give her everything over to them – every last drop of the ancient, primordial magic that lived deep within her. It had wanted to submit and mate - not just with their blond-
haired lover who had been eagerly thrusting on top of them – but with the very power that had been surging through Freya’s veins! Her wolf spirit had wanted it. She had wanted it. She had…. needed it?!

“It was her magic!” Keelin eventually said, her voice having dropped to that of a whisper as her mind continued to lose itself in the memory of the night of the Harvest moon. “I…. I think I wanted her to infuse me with her magic. I remember feeling like I needed every pore of my body to be permeated by her power as it flooded into me and….”

The wolf’s words abruptly cut short, as her mind suddenly crash landed back into the room and remembered, with no shortage of mortification, of whom she was speaking with.

“I er…. oh god, I mean…..”

Holding her hand up as she smiled, Mary shook her head in dismissal before picking up the book that had been sat on the bed between them.

“No need for any of that useless human emotion known as embarrassment here,” the wolf-elder declared as she began to slowly leaf through the first few pages of the thin text. “We are pack animals, my dear. There is very little that I have not already seen, or heard, when it comes to the more…. carnal…. urges of our spirit animals.”

Swallowing thickly, Keelin was unsure whether Mary’s intended words of reassurance served to relieve the intense feeling of shame that was now turning her stomach in knots - or make it worse.

“So, you’ve erm…. you’ve experienced something like this happening before then?” she finally asked, after undoing the top button on her shirt in an attempt to allow some air to cool her flushed skin.

“Oh no, not I personally my dear,” Mary clarified as she appeared to search for a specific passage within the book she held. “But as this particular text details, there is said to have been an instance many moons ago, of a similar unexplained pregnancy endured by a female wolf.”

“Endured?!” Keelin asked, suddenly confused by the wolf-elder’s choice of words.

“Mmm hmmmm…. ah, here it is!”

Turning to face the wolf-elder more face on, Keelin took another sip of her tea as she felt her inner wolf perk up its furry ears in readiness to hear what Mary had to say.

“Just over three centuries ago,” the wolf-elder began - her gaze fixing on Keelin despite the open text lying in her lap, “when the original seven pack bloodlines still remained untainted and pure, we wolves had to adhere far stricter to the different territory boundaries that existed across the whole of North America. The Deep Water pack, BasRock pack, Poldark & Paxon pack, and indeed your own lineage my dear, of the Malraux pack - all had their own provinces and districts where their members were allowed to roam free without fear of contest or retribution. And for the most part, the original seven lived in peace, with fighting and war between different blood-lines kept to a minimum. That was of course, until the start of the great rift between my own lineage here in south Louisiana – the Crescent Wolf pack - and the wolves of the North East Atlantic pack.”

Keelin nodded her head in acknowledgement of Mary’s words, indicating that she was so far familiar with the elder’s tale.

Being born into one of the original seven wolf bloodlines, Keelin’s childhood had been filled with nights spent sat around a campfire listening to their pack’s Elder recall the tales of their forefathers,
and the battles that had been fought between the infamous Crescent and North East Atlantic packs.

Tales that more often than not had been meant to serve as a warning to the young wolflings, who more often than not had ended up sat around the Malraux Elder in a large semi-circle wide eyed, and completely enthralled by the old woman’s enthusiastic story telling.

“During the height of the Crescent/North East Atlantic pack confrontations along the north Louisiana borders”, Mary continued, her Elder story-telling voice becoming like a soothing balm to Keelin’s inner wolf, “legend tells of a young female wolf by the name of Lena, who was the only daughter to one of the North East Atlantic pack’s great Alphas – Baudet. Lena had travelled down with her father to the Louisiana borders to help other female wolves tend to the young and injured in their encampment, whilst the male wolves who had come of age fought in fierce battles with members of the Crescent pack.”

A huff of indignation escaped from Keelin’s wolf, as its fur bristled at the notion that only male wolves were allowed to fight in the great pack wars centuries ago.

“A woman after my own heart!”, Keelin huffed with a shake of her head.

“Mmmm, quite!” Mary mused, before continuing on with her tale. “The fate of Lena’s life, however, was said to have forever changed on the first night of the Harvest Full-Moon during the second year of the Great-Pack Wars. Worried that her chosen suitor, Caliste, would attempt to mate her as soon as the pack was forced to transition into their wolf-forms, Lena covertly slipped away from the North East Atlantic encampment during the daylight hours - before it was time for the Harvest Moon’s goddess to take her seat on her celestial throne. Upon discovering the disappearance of his daughter from their ranks later the same evening, Baudet - in his wolf form - orchestrated a pack-wide search of the surrounding woodlands, demanding each and every wolf under his command abandon their usual wild running, to track the whereabouts of his daughter instead.”

“And did they find her?” Keelin asked - an almost childlike wonder having taken over her tone, as her inner wolf continued to be enamoured by the spell of the wolf-elders story telling.

“No, my dear – they did not! In fact, it is said that no head nor tail of the young wolf could be found for the full three-night duration of the Harvest Moon’s reign over the equinox sky. Then, on the morning of the fourth day following her disappearance, Baudet - believing that his daughter must have fallen victim to one of the enemy’s many scouting excursions – began to ready a group his most trusted fighters to infiltrate the Crescent Moon Pack’s encampment and find those responsible for Lena’s death. The assembled group had been readying themselves to set off for the enemy lines, when a loud cry had rung out across the camp, declaring Lena’s return!”
Pushing up off the small metal-framed cot, Mary began to walk back over to the cabin’s large bookcase, with the green-leather bound text now closed shut in her hand.

“Baudet of course rushed to his daughter’s side,” the wolf-elder continued, as she slowly pushed the small book back onto a shelf, “and was surprised to find that despite a rather dishevelled and unwashed appearance, Lena was mostly unscathed. Nevertheless, the Alpha male insisted that the pack’s Elder check the young woman over, and hurried his daughter off to the aging wolf’s tent. For more than an hour, it is said that Baudet paced back and forth outside of the canvas pergola awaiting news on Lena’s condition – news that greatly shocked the Alpha when it was eventually received.”

“She…. she was pregnant?” Keelin dared to guess, now completely spellbound by the tale.

“Indeed she was”, Mary confirmed, turning back to face the Malraux wolf with a grim smile. “The pack’s Elder confirmed to Lena’s father and the rest of the wolves gathered outside of his tent, that the young woman was not only with child, but also appeared to be well into her third month of pregnancy!”

“What?! So…. so she had actually gotten pregnant months before disappearing during the Harvest Full Moon?” Keelin asked, suddenly confused by the legend’s timeline.

“Well – not according to Lena!” Mary replied as she remained stood by the bookcase. “When grilled by Baudet as to which of their packs males she had recklessly taken it upon herself to mate with, his daughter declared that no man nor wolf had fathered the child that now grew in her womb. The young woman then went on to describe how on the afternoon that she had fled from the safety of their camp, she had quickly found herself lost deep within the sprawling woodlands of the Louisiana border. Disorientated and rapidly entering into the debilitating fever of pre-transformation, Lena claimed to have happened upon a peculiar torch-lit clearing somewhere within the dense vegetation of the coppices. And gathered around what the young woman had described to be a large stone alter, were five mysteriously cloaked figures chanting in a language that Lena had not been able to recognise, and is said to have used the word “primeval” to describe.”

“Chanting hooded figures?” Keelin considered Mary’s words. “So…. a coven of witches performing a spell?”

“Indeed, from the documented description of the young woman’s tale, we modern day wolves would naturally come to that conclusion. But you have to remember my dear that back then, members of the seven original pack-line’s did not have much interaction with the human world, outside of their own territory boundaries. Most of them had never even heard of the existence of witches, let alone ever stumbled across one within their lands.”

“So, she claimed that the witches, what…. performed a spell upon her, to make her pregnant?” Keelin scoffed, suddenly finding herself feeling less empathetic to the female protagonist of the story.

“No, my dear, she did not!” Mary declared, smiling understandingly towards the frustrated wolf. “Despite the growing looks of suspicion and disbelief on her father’s and fellow pack members faces, Lena went on to describe how at some point during the delirium of her oncoming full-moon transformation, she came to find herself to by lying on the stone alter in the middle of the clearing. Unsure of how she had got there, and surrounded by the chanting figures, the young wolf claimed that despite attempts on her behalf to roll off the boulder plinth – she was unable to do so. Lena also said that she began to hear the whisperings of an inexplicable and ethereal voice within her head – one that was promising to grant her every wish, should she only surrender the essence of her wolf-spirit over to its command!”
Keelin could feel all of the colour quickly begin drain from her face, as a cold chill spread its way across her skin despite the cozy warmth of Mary’s cabin.

“S-she…. heard a voice too?” Keelin stammered, suddenly feeling like the Legend of the Shameful Wolf was no longer quite as fictional as it had first sounded.

“So Lena is said to have claimed! And it was a claim that unfortunately for her, was not well received by either her father, or the rest of the North East Atlantic pack. Seeing the deepening scepticism upon the faces of those listening to her, the young wolf quickly pushed on with her recollection of events – going on to describe how she had been held in place on the stone alter for the whole of the three days and three nights of the Harvest equinox, whilst the figures surrounding her had relentlessly continued to repeat their incantation over and over again. That during that time, she did not fully phase into her wolf-form despite the full moon high up in the sky – instead perpetually existing somewhere in-between wolf and woman. Lena described how whilst the voice in her head had continued to demand her allegiance, a fever like non she had ever felt before had attacked and intoxicated her body - causing all of the muscles within her core to spasm and shudder as her breaths had become quick and laboured. That a flush of heat had spread throughout the whole of her being, filling her completely with its raw energy and might.”

“So she, what…. had an orgasm?” Keelin asked sceptically, frowning at the wolf-elder.

“Well one would presume so, given Lena’s description,” Mary stated, shrugging slightly to indicate her own uncertainty. “Do not forget, these were the words of a young woman who was inexperienced when it came to having any sort of sexual relations with either a man, or woman! She would not have known what was happening, if indeed her body was experiencing such a thing!”

_Lena might not have known what was happening to her_, Keelin thought, as Mary’s words echoed in her head, _but her description of her ordeal in the woods clearing – the inexplicable voice demanding allegiance, the feeling of raw power rushing through her - sounded uncannily like what she herself had experienced, whilst making love to Freya on the night of the Harvest Moon!_

“Of course by this point in her recollection, both Lena’s father and the other pack member’s had come to the conclusion that the young wolf was either delirious from dehydration and lack of food, or outright lying about where she had been and what had happened. It is said that the young wolf quickly began to panic, realising that not only were her fellow wolves not believing her account of events, but were all beginning to look at her with steeled misgiving in their eyes. Even Baudet, who was said to have loved his daughter greatly, had an accusing sneer forming on his face as he carefully studied Lena. The young woman went on to further profess to not knowing how she eventually had managed to escape the strange clearing within the woods, claiming that on the morning of the fourth day – the same day that she now stood before her pack – she had awoken just a few miles outside of the North East Atlantic pack’s encampment. Fever free, and with the sound of another soul’s heartbeat thrumming away deep within her body.”

“What… just like that?! Suddenly back home and with a three month old baby growing inside of her?” Keelin asked incredulously.

“According to the Legend, yes!” Mary confirmed, her voice both sure and calm. “Of course, this tale was passed down through many generations of Elder-Wolves simply by word of mouth alone, before it was eventually translated into the written word sometime in the early eighteen hundreds. There is no doubt that some of the facts and details will have altered over the centuries.”

Slowly nodding her head in understanding, Keelin took a long sip of her tea before posing her next question.
“So what does the legend say happened to Lena’s baby? Was it born with the werewolf curse? Was it healthy?”

“Well,” Mary began, both her tone and expression turning grave, “sadly, this is where the tale takes a turn for the worse. You see, none of the pack members who were present when Lena explained her predicament believed her. Not a one! And as the young wolf had stood looking at her father in apprehension, waiting on him uttering his first word since her emergence from the pack Elder’s tent, fierce shouts of “Traitor”, and “Crescent Moon Whore” began rising up from the gathered crowd. You see, the young wolf’s tale had seemed so far-fetched, and so full of inconsistencies - most of the pack simply assumed that she was fabricating the whole thing in an attempt to cover up that fact she had mated with a wolf from outside of their ranks. In the crowds’ incensed state, it only took a few suggestive yells that Lena had mated months ago with one of their rivals from the Crescent Moon pack, before the whole pack became outraged by the unforgivable act of betrayal committed by Baudet’s daughter.”

“Did her father not come to her defence?” Keelin asked uneasily, not liking the direction that the tale was turning.

“Sadly, he did not,” Mary replied sombrely, her grey eyes taking on a heavy weight that told Keelin the next words to come out the wolf-elder’s mouth were not going to be easy to hear.

“Incensed by the lies that he had believed his daughter to have told, Baudet allowed himself to get caught up in the shared outrage of the gathered mob. In his eyes, his daughter had not only betrayed her pack by allowing herself to be sullied by one of the Crescent Moon wolves, but she had also irrecoverably tarnished their family name – and brought shame upon the Alpha like none he had ever felt before. It is said that when the first of the angered mob lashed out, striking Lena across her face with such force it caused the young wolf to stumble back into her father’s frame – Baudet violently pushed her away, as disgust contorted his features. The legend goes on to say that the last words the Alpha ever spoke to his daughter were ones of severance – declaring with no shortage of repulsion that he no longer considered Lena to be of his blood, and her ties to the North East Atlantic pack were forever severed.”

“He exiled her?!” Keelin exclaimed in surprise. “On the border of their enemies land – knowing that she was pregnant?!”

“No, my dear,” the wolf-elder said, her voice having dropped down to almost a whisper. “Baudet’s crime against his daughter and potential grandchild was much worse than just that of dis-owning them. He instead stood by and did nothing as the rest of the outraged pack descended upon her - clawing and tearing at her flesh as they dragged Lena towards the edge of the encampment. It is said that her screams and pleas for her father’s mercy could be heard all the way over the Louisiana boarder, by members of the Crescent Wolf pack. So much so that the rival wolves sent out a small scout group that same night, to investigate what had caused such a commotion within their enemy’s camp. And when the wolves arrived on the edge of the clearing that housed the North East Atlantic pack’s tents, they were met with the grisly sight of a badly mauled woman’s body, hanging lifelessly by her neck from the thick branch of a tree.”

“T-they killed her?!” Keelin asked, shocked by the revelation.

Mary nodded her head solemnly, as she slowly lowered herself down to sit on the cot next to the younger wolf once more.

“And her unborn baby?”

“According to the account that the Crescent Moon scouts relayed back to their Alpha upon returning home, there had been two very distinct features that had stood out on the corpse that had
been swinging back and forth in the nights high winds. The first being the word “Honteux” that had been written across the body’s bare breasts in what had looked to be blood. And the second, was the macabre large gash that had split open the woman’s gut from hip bone, to hip bone – revealing nothing but an empty, bloodied cavity where her womb and entrails had once been housed.”

“Oh god….” Keelin gasped, before raising a hand to cover her mouth.

As the dreary lifeless plains of the storm battered New Orleans Wastelands presented a grim picture of misery and desolation, Amelia found herself staring out of Rebekah Mikaelson’s car window with nothing but old memories and regrets filling her head.

Large rocks made of sandstone and shale hastily whizzed by the Seer’s unfocused sight, as she and Freya’s sister embarked on their impromptu excursion to the out-of-town biker bar known as Baracuda.

It hadn’t taken a great deal of her power to persuade the feisty Original into allowing her to tag along on the trip, after their initial confrontation back the French Quarter. Nor had it been too hard to erase the memory of their little skirmish from the mind of the attractive hybrid, who had been drinking with the blonde vampire when Amelia had entered the bar.

As far as the hybrid’s mind was now concerned, Amelia had never stepped foot within the bar known as Rousseau’s – let alone engaged in a rather petty spat with Freya’s sister.

A small smirk tugged at the Seer’s lips as she continued to stare out of the passenger side window of the flashy automobile.

*It never failed to amuse her how much easier it was to manipulate the minds of supernatural beings – compared to the more complex psyches of humans!*

Over the many centuries of her existence, Amelia had crossed paths with her fair share of monsters and mystical beings! From vampires to werewolves, ravmockers to witches, demons to hybrids, and of course the odd creature here and there who had no clear breed or defining species characteristics - other than that of being hard to kill, and dangerously deadly in a fight.

And out of all of them, not one of those supernaturally gifted beasts had ever taxed her power reserves quite as much as the times she had had to scramble the mind of a mortal.

*Well.... all except for the seven brutes who called themselves Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan - and their monstrosity of master!*

They, of course, had always been her Achilles-heel.

“So remind me again, love - how exactly did you come to know my sister all those years ago?! I fear that my tired mind has forgotten the tale.”

Rebekah’s voice cut through her musings as Amelia continued to stare out of the car’s rain
“The reason you can’t remember, Darlin”, the Seer drawled in her mixed continental accent, “is that you and I have never discussed it. Though I imagine that you and that Malraux Wolf no doubt grilled Freya about me, after our first encounter!”

Despite not having turned to face her as she had spoken, Amelia could still sense the scowl that Rebekah briefly threw her way, before the vampire turned her attention back to the dirt-track upon which they were travelling.

“Well then, let me re-phrase that for you!” Rebekah curtly remarked, her tone both cutting and deadly “You’re going to tell me exactly what connection it is that you seem to think you had with my sister back in the early nineteen hundreds - before I grow tired of your bloody attitude and rip out your insufferable tongue to feed to a wild coyote!”

A small scoff of laughter escaped from the Seer’s lips as she continued to watch the thick droplets of water fall from the dark clouds, high above the wastelands.

She had to admit – she was slowly growing to like Freya’s younger sister! The vampire’s self-assured cockiness and bold bravado were traits that she too had once worn with carefree recklessness - back when times were much simpler.

Back before the Jarls!

“Now there’s no need for the futile threats, Darlin. I am here to help, after-all!” Amelia mused, before slowly turning to face the driving vampire. “What exactly is it that you would like to know?”

“Well for one, I would like to know why you have chosen now - after nearly one hundred years - to suddenly show up in my sister’s life once again!?” Rebekah demanded, as her glare turned steely towards the oncoming road. “And whilst you’re at it love, you might as well throw in the explanation of how exactly you have bloody well managed to live long enough to do so!”

A small huff of laughter burst forth from the Seer, as she regarded the blonde vampire’s profile with bemusement.

It seemed that the Mikaelson sisters shared the same lack of patience and subtleness in life, as well their beauty!

“I did not choose to search out Freya”, Amelia admitted, somewhat surprised at her own honesty. “It was her magic that sought to find me – the moment I came within a few miles of the city’s outer limits!”

“Her magic?!” Rebekah scoffed, throwing the seer a quick frown of confusion.

“Yes, darlin, her magic! As I have already stated, your sister and I share a connection that no amount of time nor distance will ever erase.”

“Pretty sure I could erase it, by ripping your heart out of that damned perfectly perky chest!” the blonde vampire muttered, more to herself than to the Seer sat studying her.

“Quite!” Amelia mused, once again entertained by Rebekah’s bravado. “Did you know that you and I have met previously as well, darlin? I expect that you did not consider our brief encounter significant enough to bother committing to that thousand-year-old memory of yours – but it happened all the same!”
The Seer watched on as Rebekah’s eyebrows furrowed in reaction to her revelation.

“I highly doubt that we have, love!” the blonde vampire remarked. “The fact that you remain alive is a testament to that – I am a lot more…. restrained…. these days, then I used to be! Your throat would have been ripped out in seconds!”

“Ha! You know, I can see why Freya used to gush about you so fondly”, Amelia laughed, shaking her head at the Original. “There is definitely a certain…. charm about you!”

“Freya used to talk about me?!” Rebekah asked, surprise clearly evident in her voice as she threw the Seer a quick questioning glance. “Back in Lille?”

“Why of course!” Amelia replied with a smile. “She used to speak of you all! The brothers and sister that she so longed to meet, but feared would never accept her. Not that I had any clue of who…. or rather what, you all were back then. That little gem of information was not revealed to me until the very last time that Freya and I saw each other. Until the night I walked away.”

A few heartbeats of silence passed between the two unlikely allies, as the blonde vampire absorbed Amelia’s words.

“Tell me what happened…. “ Rebekah eventually muttered, her voice uncharacteristically low and tentative as she continued to coax their vehicle along the uneven terrain of the wastelands. “Please.”

Turning her gaze back out of the car’s passenger window, Amelia let out a small sigh as the hypnotic patter of rain hitting glass served to act as a catalyst for the dredging up of old memories within in her mind.

As the blurring reds and greys of the wastelands life-starved ground began to fade out of reception, the Seer could feel the familiar tingling sensation of her consciousness stretching out and splitting into two. One part remaining in the present, to ensure that her body continued to function and keep her alive - the other launching itself through the fabric of time itself as it eagerly searched out the crystal-clear memories of an event from her past.

Amelia’s eyes fluttered shut, as the vibrations of the car’s suspension beneath her seat became the present day anchor upon which her body latched itself to, whilst her mind broke free of its mortal confines.

_Lille._

For some reason that she had never been able to explain, it was always specific scents and fragrances that were the first to hit, as her mind infiltrated a specific time and place from her past.

The mouth-watering smell of fresh croissants baking to perfection in the stone ovens of the riverside city’s local patisseries, as they prepared fresh stock for the next days trade. The sharp, nutty scent of strong coffee wafting out of open window’s belonging to tall, wooden beamed town-houses that flanked along narrow streets and alleyways. The acrid stench of stale beer coating the throats of drunken patrons, as they stumbled on their way home after a sordid night of debauchery and overindulged decadence in the local whore houses.

The mixture of vanilla essence infused with the floral arrangement of fresh roses and jasmine, completing the intoxicating and heady fragrance that rose up off Freya’s skin to tantalise and tease Amelia’s whole body with promises of a union that she could only dream of one day getting to experience.
A shiver involuntarily rushed over the whole of the Seer’s body, as the intensity of the memory filled with the scent and warmth of Freya’s proximity threatened to overwhelm her present day senses completely.

“It was New Years Eve….”, Amelia finally articulated – her own tone sounding both strange and faint to the Seer, whose mind was no longer fully grounded in the present. “…and we were on the precipice of tumbling into the year 1915. The streets of the city were filled to the brim with revellers and merrymakers, all hoping to welcome in the new year with a vigour that had been sorely lacking over the preceding months – thanks to the onset of the damned war!”

“I remember!” Rebekah’s hazy voice drifted into her mind over the expanse of time and space. “My brothers and I were also in Lille on the eve of 1915, chasing down the notorious Rickard bandits who had dared to try and wipe out our family weeks earlier!”

Amelia’s mind continued to be bombarded with sensations long since passed, as the Original Vampire’s words ghosted through her conscience like the faint radio waves of a poor, fuzzy connection.

“Freya and I had spent the week leading up to the New Years celebrations in particular foul moods,” the Seer continued as her mind sustained it’s attempt to solidify more firmly into the sounds and sights of turn of the century Lille, “thanks to a particularly unpleasant disagreement that we had engaged in, several days earlier.”

A familiar feeling of regret began to knaw away at Amelia’s insides, as she recalled the harsh words that were spoken between Freya and herself, on the night that the witch had discovered the Seer in bed with a woman.

*Rose*

“Freya had been avoiding me since the night of our quarrel, and had taken it upon herself to find alternative sleeping arrangements from that of our shared encampment on the edge of the city. At first I did not think much of it - she was a formidable witch after all, and more than capable of taking care of herself in a city full of human rogues and assassins. But by the fourth night a knot of worry had begun to take hold in my stomach. One which would not disappear, no matter how hard I tried to ignore it. You see, I had not been entirely truthful with your sister on the night that I first met her, with regards to why I was in Lille that year.”

“She said that you had been a part of a travelling Carnival that was camped along the river Deûle,” Rebekah remarked, her voice now barely reaching the Seer’s displaced mind. “One that you seemingly abandoned on the night that you met my sister, in favour of striking up a business partnership with her instead. Which if you ask me, sounded bloody suspicious from the get go!”

“Oh I did not lie to her”, Amelia continued whilst in her trance-like state. “I had indeed arrived in the city with the Bastille Carnival, and helped them set up their encampment next to the river. My crime of deception, however, came from omitting certain elements of the tale.”

A small sigh escaped from the Seer’s mouth, as the memory of her first ever conversation with Freya began to flood her senses.

“I had actually only joined the carnival’s company a week earlier, when I crossed paths with them on the outskirts of the city Mons. They were originally travelling south, to Maubeuge - intent on performing their various circus acts for the small population of Nobles that could be found living in the small town. I however managed to…. convince them…. that there would be better takings to be had in the far grander city of Lille, and that I - their well-established Seer of many years – had seen
this fact within the cards themselves.”

Amelia’s lips tugged at the corner in a grimace, as the Seer remembered just how drained and exhausted she had been left after using her power on the entire troupe of human performers.

With the gift of hindsight, Amelia knew that it had been foolish to leave herself so drained of power and open to attack, especially during one of the Jarl’s “waking” cycles. But she had been in desperate need of a plausible way to integrate herself into the city of Lille without drawing any unnecessary attention to the fact that she was an outsider, who had no place mingling amongst the powerful gentry of the province. And the travelling carnival of circus acts had provided her with just that – a plausible alibi.

Everyone – from pauper to noble – knew that the colourful and vivacious folk who made up a carnival trope were from all different walks of life, and all different countries. The fact that Amelia had had a clear and crisp Romanian accent back in the early nineteen hundreds would have stuck out like a sore thumb in the French city of Lille, had she not have arrived surrounded by a medley of circus folk whom already spoke with a mixture of different accents and dialects.

_Bastille’s Carnival had been a perfect alibi to gain access to the city where she had believed the Jarl’s to be hunting for their master’s corpse._

“You see, I had not planned on meeting your sister of course”, Amelia continued ruefully, as one hundred year old memories continued to swirl and eddy in her mind. “I had somehow not foreseen her presence within the cards, nor the role that she would come to play in my life. Which in itself should have been a clear warning sign to stay as far away from her as possible, instead of engaging her in conversation on that fateful night along the banks of the river Deûle. But alas, one rarely listens to the pragmatic reasoning of one’s mind, when the heart instantly sparks interest in an enigmatic and alluring stranger. Especially one who was clearly suffering with burdens far heavier than someone of her age should have had to endure.”

Had Amelia’s conscious have been fully present within her body, she would have seen Rebekah briefly take her attention away from the road to pointedly roll her eyes at the Seer – clearly unimpressed with the raven haired woman’s description of an inexplicable magnetism towards her sister over a century ago. But as it was, the Seer’s conscious was now fully cementing itself back within the memories belonging to the New Year’s Eve celebrations of 1914.

To the night on which she had first discovered the grave error that she had made, by befriending Freya Mikaelson.

“It was not until the seventh night after our disagreement that I finally laid eyes on your sister once more, across a busy reveller-lined street deep within the city’s centre. I could of course have simply just used a slither of my power to locate her mind at any point during her time spent angrily ignoring my existence. But I had made her a promise that I would never use my gifts upon her without first asking her permission – and it was a pledge that I had foolishly held on to back then - like a small beacon of hope in our otherwise doomed friendship. Of course, as you can probably imagine, Freya was less than impressed when I eventually found the courage within me to traverse the hectic river of people and approach her with a mouthful of reprimands for childish, irresponsible behaviour!”

A huff of laughter burst forth from the Seer’s body, as it remained seated on the passenger side of Rebekah’s car – eyes now unfocused and milky in appearance.

“Her first words to me in over a week were nothing short of wicked, and I believe that had we not been stood in amongst the human population of Lille, she would have probably ripped my heart
from the confines of my chest with a simple flick of her hand! I can remember it so clearly - the contortion of disgust on her face as she said “Did I not make myself clear enough……

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“…..when we last parted ways, Seer?!” Freya sneered at Amelia, despite her eyes remaining pointedly fixed upon the bustling street ahead of her. “I want nothing more to do with your whoring ways! Our business arrangement is terminated, so you would be wise to stay your distance from me - should you value what is left of your miserable life!”

Despite the almost deafening noises of merriment and glee pulsating off the gathering crowds around them, Amelia could still hear the undertone of hurt within her friend’s voice, all-be-it deep beneath a poisonous venom with which the blonde had spat out her words.

“Freya please, just give me a chance to explain!” the Seer pleaded, managing to somehow keep her voice calm despite the inner turmoil that threatened to derail her usual confident façade. “The scene that you walked in on was not what it appeared to be! Rose was just a mark – someone whom was part of a ruse that I was working. I swear to you, I did not….”

“Stop lying to me!” Freya suddenly hollered, finally rounding on the Seer with emerald eyes that blazed fierce with stone cold anger. “All you have done since we first met is lie to me!”

The witch’s words forcibly hit home, punching through Amelia’s chest cavity as they aimed straight for her heart.

“I…. Freya I swear I’ve not…."

“No! I don’t want to hear it!” the witch cut her off sternly. “You lied to me about your power! You lied to me about your reason for being in Lille! And now I find out that you’ve also been lying to me about your relationships too!”

“What relationships?!” Amelia blurted out, feeling her own frustrations begin to bubble to the surface despite her best efforts. “I am not in a relationship with anyone! And why should it even matter if I am?! I don’t understand what your issue is?!”

“My issue is…..” Freya began venomously, arms flying out in a wild gesture despite the seemingly restrictive tight fit of her ivory coloured dress. “Is…..”

The Seer looked on at her business partner with wide expectant eyes, willing the worked-up woman with every bone in her body to finish her failing words.

Only no words came.

The tension filling the small space between them began to turn palpable as she continued to stare at Freya in exasperation. The Seer did not need the use of her power to be able to sense the true turmoil that had caused the blonde witch to react the way she had - when she had discovered Amelia in what will have looked to have been a loving embrace with Rose.

There had been a gradual shift of dynamic between the two business partners, ever since the evening that Freya had rescued from the unwanted advances of Lord Dufort. The changes had only been small at first, and probably would have gone unnoticed by most other people had they been in
Amelia’s shoes.

But she was not like most people.

Centuries spent manipulating the minds of both humans and supernatural beings, had not only taught Amelia how to influence the feelings and thoughts of those around her, but also how to easily detect any small changes in a being’s mood or disposition - simply by observing their postures and expressions.

Freya’s temperament towards her had been altering, and slowly morphing into something else. Something more….affectionate.

It wasn’t like the two of them hadn’t been close before her near fatal encounter with the brutish Lord.

Having lived, worked, and socialised together for what was coming up to twelve months, a natural bond of friendship had organically formed between them both. They had been effortlessly at ease whenever in each-others company, with jovial conversation always flowing openly and freely. Sure - they were business partners first and foremost! And most evenings would begin with discussions around any progress that had been made during day with regards to the current mark they were targeting. But by the time the two of them were parting ways to retire to their respective beds, their conversation had always managed to turn to more social, affable topics.

But since that night in one of Lille’s many dank and poisoned alleyways, Amelia had noticed a definite shift in the way her business partner regarded her.

The Seer had felt Freya’s gaze lingering upon her just a fraction longer than necessary, whenever the two of them parted ways in the morning to go about their daily tasks.

Light and seemingly innocent contact of the witch’s hands upon her own, had become more frequent – Freya absentmindedly reaching out to touch and connect with the Seer during conversation more often than she previously had.

Warm blushes of colour involuntarily flushing across the witch’s cheeks, whenever Amelia quirked an eyebrow at the sight of emerald eyes momentarily flicking down to her ruby lips.

Freya was attracted to her – whether the witch realised it or not!

And it was an attraction that was most definitely reciprocated on Amelia’s behalf. Had been reciprocated ever since she had first laid eyes on the enigmatic blonde on the banks of the river Deûle, all those months ago!

If only Freya would just admit it to herself!

“Your issue is what, Freya??” Amelia demanded again in frustration, after it became apparent that her business partner was struggling to articulate the feelings that were raging through her agitated mind. “Why should it even concern you who I choose to take to my bed?!!”

“I don’t give a damn who you choose to whore your body out to!” the witch snapped bitterly as she fixed her irate glare back onto Amelia. “I don’t give a damn about you, at all!”

“Then what has got you so angry?” the Seer exasperatedly asked. “If you don’t care about me or what I do - why did you storm away from our encampment the other night?! And why have you insisted on putting yourself in danger by roaming the streets alone ever since?!!”
“Danger?!” Freya scoffed, turning away from Amelia’s scrutiny to scowl at the surrounding crowds once more. “You forget who you are speaking to, Seer! There is not a mortal in this city who could best me in a confrontation!”

“It is not the mortals I am worried about!” the Seer exclaimed, before drawing in a deep breath in an attempt to calm her own emotions.

Ignoring the icy vibrations of detachment that were emanating off the witch in droves, Amelia stepped in front of Freya and boldly took one of her friends hands into her own.

“There are monsters currently residing somewhere in Lille, that even your magic could not stop Freya!” the Seer stated quietly, head dipping as she tried to capture her friends steeled glare. “Beings that only my power does not cower from! And when you did not return to our camp after the third night of your departure, I…. I began to fear the worst!”

“Well, I’m sure that having that young woman warming your bed provided ample distraction!” Freya retorted, pulling her hand free from Amelia’s grasp.

“Ok, that’s enough!”

The witch’s eyes finally fixed onto Amelia’s, as the Seer’s tone suddenly shifted from one of frustration, to provoked irritation.

“Rose was a mark, Freya! And one that I purely bedded so that her father - Duke Pernot - would discover us together wrapped in a lover’s embrace, and disown her from his estate! With his daughter now banished from the family will, upon his death all of the Dukes fortunes shall fall to his step-son - Rockfor. Something that young Rockfor was willing to pay handsomely for me to orchestrate! Had you actually have stuck around instead of storming off into the night – you would have witnessed Rose’s father descending upon our encampment and violently renouncing all ties to the girl!”

“Violently?” Freya suddenly asked – her change in tone betraying a small slither of concern that must have arisen for Amelia’s well-being, as emerald eyes quickly passed over the Seer’s body.

“Well – it would have turned violent, had I not temporarily castrated his mind as he attempted to lash out at his own kin!”

Smirking towards the witch in smug acknowledgement of her own power, Amelia once again reached out for Freya’s hand.

“Freya, please – don’t sever all ties with me over something as trivial as this!” she implored, her voice turning soft once more. “I care about you, and would never knowingly do anything to upset you!”

The witch’s eyes fell down and focused on the contact they that were now sharing via entwined, slender fingers.

“You still lied to me Amelia”, Freya eventually said, her voice barely a whisper that struggled to stay afloat in the sea of loud cheers and laughter around them. “About many a thing! How can you expect me to trust what you are saying, when almost everything that you’ve told me has been fabricated and false?!?”

Drawing in a deep breath, the Seer felt her heartbeat trip and stumble into a fast, erratic rhythm, as her system began to quickly flood with adrenaline.
It was now or never! Either she spoke the truth of her feelings, right here in this moment – or continue to keep them hidden, and allow the witch to walk away with hate in her heart.

Lifting up Freya’s hand, Amelia gently placed it onto her own chest – the witch’s palm splayed open as it came to rest over the Seer’s thundering heart.

“Then trust in my heart, Freya”, she breathed - her voice wavering faintly as Freya’s glistening gaze bore into her own. “Because it beats for you – and you alone!”

A charged, tangible silence quickly blanketed over the two women, and Amelia could only watch on nervously as a range of emotions appeared to flicker through Freya’s eyes.

*Gods be damned, what she would have given right then to have never promised to refrain from using her gifts to read the witch’s thoughts!*

A small sigh eventually pushed its way out of Freya’s mouth, as the witch’s gaze softened and briefly flicked down to Amelia’s lips, before returning to hold her stare again.

Swallowing down on her raging nerves, the Seer began to close the distance between the two of them - slowly leaning her face towards Freya’s as her own eyes lowered to rest upon the witch’s plump lips.

*Lips that she had spent many a moment daydreaming about how they would feel brushing up against her own!*

“Amelia…. I…..”

Freya’s words were cut off as a particularly loud and boisterous tenor rose up over the noise of the crowd around them – causing both Witch and Seer to glance in its owner’s direction as the intimate bubble encasing them was burst.

“Come now sister, you and I both know how much you enjoy a good New Years party! Why, was it not only last year that you slaughtered our entire household’s serving staff in a temper tantrum, simply because neither Elijah nor I wished to celebrate the ending of another year?!”

Amelia felt Freya’s hand instantly turn cold as it sat within her own.

Turning her attention back to the witch, the Seer saw that all of the tendons in her friend’s body had tensed as she now stood searching the crowd with wide eyes.

“What is it?” she asked, as the power within her instinctively began to stir – readying itself for action within a split-seconds notice if needs be.

“That’s…. that’s my brother!” Freya stated slowly, as her eyes appeared to find and fix onto the owner of the boisterous voice.

Following her friend’s line of sight, Amelia narrowed her gaze as she attempted to focus upon the well-dressed nobleman that Freya was now staring at in wide-eyed panic.

Walking tall and confidently, the sandy haired male appeared to be flanked on either side by two companions, who were assertively keeping in step with him. The woman on his left was almost as tall as he, wearing a deep burgundy dress that was accompanied by blonde hair bound up in a beautifully intricate design of cascading curls and braids. The suited male on his right appeared both stern and unyielding in nature - his stony glare seeming to search the crowds surrounding the trio for any signs of danger.
All three were clearly more than first met the eye, causing the Amelia’s power to prickle and sting under her skin with warnings of impending danger.

And all three were instantly recognisable to her!

“The Original Vampire’s…. a-are your kin?!” she stammered to Freya, as an icy blast of realisation began to freeze her core to the bone.

Ripping her attention away from her siblings, the witch quickly began to eye Amelia with new found confusion.

“You know of them?” she asked wearily.

“By the God’s, Freya!” Amelia exclaimed, as panic slowly began to weave its way into her mind. “Of all the time’s that you have spoken of your siblings to me, you did not think to mention who they are?! What they are!”

The witch’s brow began to furrow as her eyes quickly flicked between the approaching trio of vampires, and her business partner.

“How exactly do you know of them?!” Freya asked suspiciously, as she pulled her hand away from Amelia’s. “And of what importance are they to you!?”

A cold sweat began to break out across the Seers brow, as she cautiously took a step back from the wary witch who was now staring at her with guarded eyes.

“Dammit Freya, this whole time…. y-you have no idea of the danger that you have been in, simply by being near me! If you were born of Mikael Mikaelson….”

Her words trailed off into a charged silence, as the implications of who and what Freya truly was began to send shockwaves of dread through her whole body.

Oh god…. if they found out…. if the Jarl’s discovered that there was another…. a mortal sibling that had not been affected by Esther’s spell…. by the gods…. they could use the blood-bond upon her…. resulting in a catastrophic….

Scrunching her eyes closed, the Seer’s hands flew up to her temples in a futile attempt to try and ground her spiralling mind.

“Amelia, I swear - if you do not start explaining what the hell is going on, so help me god I will…..”

Freya’s words trailed off leaving a clear and menacing threat hanging in the air, as the dynamic between witch and seer quickly began to sour.

She had to sever their ties…. sever them and force the witch to leave Lille without delay! For if Freya stayed…. if they learned of her heritage…. No. NO!

Opening her eyes once more, Amelia abruptly stepped forward and grabbed onto Freya’s shoulders – gripping on tightly as she pulled her power into the forefront of her mind.

“What the hell…..”

“Listen carefully to me Freya,” Amelia began, fixing the witch’s emerald eyes with her own as she began to force tendrils of her influence into the blonde’s mind. “You are going to leave the city of
Tears began to sting at the corner of the Seer’s eyes, as more of her power instinctively flowed into Freya’s mind - laying bare all of the witch’s innermost thoughts and feelings for Amelia to see as clear as the revellers that partied around them.

Love…. love for her. It was only fledgling, and had been worrying and confusing the witch for weeks now, but it was there all the same – slowly blooming in her heart as she had battled daily to keep it hidden….

Drawing in a deep sorrowful breath, Amelia swallowed down on her own hearts rally-cried response to the witch’s feelings, and attempted to steel herself for what needed to be done.

“You will forget everything that we discussed this evening, and sever all ties that you have with me!” the Seer continued, her voice heavily weighted with emotion. “You will believe that when you walked in on Rose and I the other night, I confessed to you that I am in love with the girl, and that we plan on disappearing together so as to escape the wrath of her tyrannical father. Leave both me and this city behind Freya, and move on with your life – far away from here!”

As a familiar unpleasant tang of metal began to coat her mouth, the Seer let her hands fall away from Freya’s shoulders and took a step back from the witch.

A quick glance at the dazed and unfocused eyes of her friend told her all she needed to know with regards to the success of her powerful influence.

It was done.

In a few moments time, Amelia knew that Freya would shake off the temporary stupor that her power always inflicted upon its victims when she altered their memories, and be left believing every word that the Seer had just whispered into her mind.

She truly had now betrayed the witch’s trust…. and it was done.

As tears continued to shimmer brightly in her eyes, Amelia quickly leant forward and placed a soft, chaste kiss on the side of Freya’s cheek.

“Forgive me”, she whispered, before slowly pulling away from Freya and turning to take her leave.

Leaving both her friend and heart behind, Amelia bowed her head down low as she began to quickly weave her way between the various revellers filling the streets of Lille’s city centre.

So focused was her mind on trying to bury deep and lock away any emotions associated with the Mikaelson witch, that the Seer did not register the direct pathway of collision upon which she was now thundering along.

“Offf….hey! Bloody well watch where you are going!”

Stumbling backwards, Amelia’s gaze instinctively flicked up from the cobbled ground and landed on the irritated piercing blue eyes of Rebekah Mikaelson.

“I’m so s-sorry….,” the Seer mumbled, as she quickly wiped away the remnants of tears from her eyes. “Please excuse my clumsiness!”

A deep frown furrowed across the Original Vampires brow, as she studied the stranger in front of her a little closer.
“Do we know each other? You seem…. familiar!

Quickly averting her face away from the intense prying eyes of Freya’s sister, Amelia let a small laugh escape from her throat – forcing what she knew to be the perfect mix of nervousness and humility into the anxious sound.

“No madame, I-I do not believe w-we have”, the Seer purposefully stuttered in a timid fashion, as she lined her voice with a small slither of her power. “Please, forgive me, but I m-must dash - I am already late for an a-appointment!”

Bowing her head to the three Original’s, Amelia swiftly turned on her heels and began once again pushing her way through the bustling crowded street.

*She had to get away!*

Away from the temporary life she had begun to build for herself here in Lille.

Away from the Original Siblings who had apparently descended upon the city to join in with its infamous New Year’s celebrations.

Away from the Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan, whom she had still not managed to pinpoint the location of - despite knowing they were somewhere in the city, searching for HIS remains.

And away from Freya – the thousand year old witch who had not only somehow managed to steal her heart, but also foolishly made her believe that there might well have been a small chance of redemption for her rotting, condemned soul.

*A belief that was now shattered beyond repair*

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“That was you?!” Rebekah exclaimed loudly in disbelief, her voice echoing all around the cramped, two-seated sports car in which they both sat. “You were the timid servant girl who careered into me and broke the chain of my favourite antique Victorian bracelet?!”

As Amelia’s mind began the process of withdrawing itself back into the confines of her physical body, the Seer pressed a hand to her closed eyes and rubbed ruefully at the memory of the only time she had ever allowed herself to feel love.

*Love….and heartbreak.*

“Bloody hell, love!” the blonde vampire continued, as she slowly brought the car to a halt outside of what looked to be a run-down biker’s bar. “That’s a lot of information to take in on one short car ride!”

A heavy sigh forced its way out of the Seer’s mouth, as her eyes slowly began to come back into focus on her modern day surroundings.

“So – let me get this straight!” Rebekah continued, twisting in her seat to look at Amelia head on now that she had placed the car into park. “You were actually in Lille in the early nineteen hundreds to hunt down a group of mysterious Jarl’s, and just using your business arrangement with my sister as a cover to mask your true intentions?! AND, you were happily trying to get into Freya’s briefs right up until you discovered that she was related to me and my brothers - all because we apparently have some connection through our waste-of space-father, to these Jarls?”
Quirking her eye brows at Amelia expectantly, the blonde vampire continued.

“Does that sound about right, or did I miss something?!”

The Seer cleared her throat before letting out a small huff of laughter.

“No Darlin, you did not miss anything – I’d say that about sums it all up! Apart from the part where I was trying to get into your sister’s pants - I would never have encouraged Freya to engage in something that she was not comfortable with!”

“Ha!” Rebekah huffed disbelievingly. “That’s not how that tale sounded to me, love!”

Amelia internally rolled her eyes at the vampire’s words.

“So, did you eventually manage to find your prey?!” Rebekah asked curiously. “And what connection exactly did they have to Mikael?”

Leaning forward to peer out of the car’s windscreen, Amelia took in the large wooden tavern that they were now parked outside of, and the long line of roadster motorbikes that stood outside of its entrance.

“Well, if your intuition is as good as I suspect it is…. I’d say that I may well have finally found them!”

Amelia could almost hear the ball dropping in the Original Vampire’s mind, as Rebekah quickly glanced back and forth between the tavern and the Seer.

“Wait…. the men that you were hunting back in 1914 are the same bastards that recently abducted and tortured Freya?!?” the blonde blurted out loudly.

“The one and same!” Amelia confirmed nonchalantly, as she continued to take in every little detail of the run-down bar in front of them and commit it to memory.

“Now correct me if I’m wrong love, but didn’t you say that the Jarl’s discovering who Freya was would be catastrophic?” the vampire asked with no shortage of concern. “Something about making her take an oath or….”

“That they would force her to undertake the Blood-bond,” Amelia corrected Rebekah - eyes dropping down to her lap as the memory of seeing Freya lying broken and injured in hospital struck her mind’s eye. “Which is…. exactly what they did.”

_The mark of the Blood-Bond burnt into her old friend’s skin, was a sight that would now haunt her for the rest of her immortal years._

“What the bloody hell does that mean?” Rebekah asked, her voice rising with a mixture of anger and frustration. “What exactly have they bonded her to? What the hell do they want? And what…. actually, you know what – it doesn’t matter! Once I’m through with them, it’ll all be irrelevant. The authorities are going to be scraping their dammed innards off the walls of this grotty little shit-hole for months!”

In one quick fluid motion, an enraged Rebekah had unbuckled her belt and opened the drivers-side door of the car. However, before the vampire could step out into the rain, Amelia grabbed onto her arm and pulled the blonde back into her seat.

“Sorry darlin, but I can’t let you do that!” the Seer exclaimed, as she quickly speared the Original’s
mind with a thread of her power.

“What the hell do you think you’re…..”

Rebekah’s words trailed off as her face quickly slackened, and her eye’s lost focus.

“I thank you for your aid in locating the Jarl’s, Rebekah Mikaelson - daughter of Mikael – but I am afraid this is as far as you will be going”, Amelia stated calmly, as she lightly placed her hands onto the Original’s temples. “You are going to drive back into the city, and forget all about this rundown tavern and the men who reside within it. And you will forget everything that you and I discussed on our journey over here today. As far as you are concerned, our interactions ended when I departed from Rousseau’s earlier this afternoon – alone!”

Running her eyes over the blonde’s transfixed features, Amelia couldn’t help the small regretful smile that tugged on her mouth.

“I do believe that you and I would have got along in another life, darlin”, the seer remarked ruefully as she began to slowly withdraw her influence from the vampires mind. “Freya has been lucky to have you by her side these past few years!”

A heavy sigh forced its way out of her nose, as Amelia dropped her hands away from Rebekah’s head.

“I am just sorry that you won’t have more time together.”

Unbuckling her own belt, the Seer quickly extracted herself from the car – immediately pulling the hood of her cloak over her head as she began to make her way around to the drivers-side window. Tapping lightly on the glass frame, Amelia sent one last command into the Original Vampires head, before turning her back on the sports car and solemnly facing Baracuda’s entrance.

“Go – and do not search for this place again!”

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3.

Wind noisily howled down the narrow alleyway in which Freya stood, crying out to the heavens as it flung rain at the witch’s whole body with an enraged like vigour.

The morose gloom of the stormy afternoon faultlessly mirrored her mood, as the diminished lighting filtering into the eerie passageway gave the impression of the day being a later hour than it actually was.

Stood opposite the graffiti covered rear entrance of one of the Seventh Ward’s detached, single story buildings, Freya slowly raised her head towards the raging heavens – causing the heavy saturated hood that had been shrouding her face to fall back against her shoulders.

Emerald eyes filled with a thundering intensity fleetingly blazed bright, as they reflected a shard of lightning that sliced its way unforgivingly across the oppressive grey sky.

The witch could feel the magic that lived within her whipping agitatedly under her skin, as it tried
to respond in earnest to nature’s display of raw might. Every muscle in her body momentarily shuddered under the weight of the ancient power pounding through her veins, causing a small involuntary gasp to escape from her lips as its intensity took her by surprise.

*She could feel her magic changing.*

*Morphing.*

*Entering into a transformative state with reckless abandon and fervour.*

It hadn’t been something that she had paid much attention to at first – the subtle shifting in the vibrations and tremors of the power that had lived within her since birth.

The sheer overwhelming gravity of the chaos and turmoil that had taken up residence in her psyche immediately after her ordeal at the hands of the Jarls, had been all consuming - and left little room within her mind for much else to filter through.

Love, happiness, enthusiasm, magic - all were emotions and sensations that she believed to have been fatalities of the decimating wave of despair that had claimed her as its victim, deep within the Catacombs under the New Orleans wastelands.

Despair that had left her feeling nothing but numb, ice cold detachment - no matter whom or what she had attempted to interact with since being discharged from St Theodora’s hospital.

So when the first small, tell-tale signs that something was shifting within her power had materialised, Freya had been too cocooned within a now ever present shell of melancholy, to batter more than an uninterested eyelid in its direction.

That had all changed, however, the moment she had had to use her power to gain entry into the wiccan “Foré de Konnen et Puissance”, concealed deep under the foundations of New Orleans public library.

Despite the spell that granted admission into the Foré being relatively simple in verse – the security it provided against intruders and malicious intent was both fierce, and unforgiving in nature. If the Haitian enchantment detected anything other than a simple desire for the pursuit of knowledge within the heart of the witch wishing to gain entry, it would not only prevent admission to the wealth of knowledge held in the Foré, but also fire a devastating jolt of pure energy directly into the intruder’s heart.

One which never failed to induce an instant cardiac arrest.

It had therefore been with no shortage of panic that Freya had stood facing the unassuming wall of the New Orleans library, wondering why the Foré’s entranceway had not immediately revealed itself to her, once the last word of the spell had rolled off her tongue.

But when no pain or destruction had materialised itself within her heart, the witch’s eyes had frantically scoured the isle in which she stood for any signs that one of the Blood-Bound Jarl’s had followed her into the library, and was encroaching on her position. It had taken a good few seconds of uneven panicky breathing before Freya had finally realised that despite the entrance spell working, her own power was still very much present and flowing through her veins.

Present – and being probed.

Like a small child unsure of how to respond to a stranger’s advances in the street, Freya had been able to feel the concealment spell wearily prodding at her own indigenous power.
Tentative wisps of unfamiliar energy had cautiously nudged their way along her veins, seeking out the core source of her magic and attempting to assess its true nature in origin.

It had quickly become apparent to Freya that the “Foré de Konnen et Puissance” no longer recognised the magic that lived within her, despite the witch having already been granted access to the secretive library several times before.

The ancient enchantments assessment of her power can’t have lasted more than a few seconds, before the spell finally conceded and revealed the hidden stairwell down into the Foré’s main chamber. But it had been long enough to force Freya to finally acknowledge the fact that the power dwelling deep within her was beginning to feel…. different.

As she had descended down the Foré’s damp stone steps, the witch had internally reached into the well of power within her and pulled out a large swathe of its energy. Her skin had prickled and quivered with its vibrations as Freya had forced the power to surge through her entire body – her senses both tasting and breathing-in its unique essence.

*An essence that she had found herself no longer fully recognising.*

There was a new, harsher edge to it – one that was redefining its energy signature from the unyielding yet rational tenors of her mother’s wiccan lineage, to a more unforgiving and merciless force that faintly pulsed with the intrinsic need for destruction. Gone were the familiar hues of blue and green that Freya’s mind always associated with the power’s “appearance” within her – seemingly replaced with a hazy swirling fog of crimson and obsidian.

It had reminded her, with terrifying clarity, of Jarl Colborn’s eyes - as he had roughly held her face close to his own and bore into her with his cruel, sadistic stare.

Freya had no memory of physically reaching the bottom of the old staircase and making her way over to the first stack of grimoires that were housed in the Foré. Her body had seemingly acted on pure instinct and muscle memory alone, as her mind had reeled at the revelation of the new force taking root within her power.

As more energy had flowed out of her internal well of its own accord - seeking to engulf her whole with its strange and foreign essence as it ignored her commands of retreat - an unfamiliar voice had begun to whisper within her head.

*They will never understand…. No one will ever accept…. They will fear you…. They will hate you….*

As the invasive words of doubt had repeated themselves over and over on a broken loop of mistrust, Freya had begun to feel like what little grip she had left on her sanity was slipping away – her mind being pushed dangerously close to a ledge from which she would not be able to return.

Hands that had not quite felt like her own had reached out to grip onto the aging wood of a bookstand, in a desperate attempt to stop herself from being launched into a beckoning oblivion of madness. As a cold sweat had broken out across her brow, she had tried in earnest to force the power resonating through her whole body back into the well from which it had been gushing forth.

Tried…. and failed.

A cry for help had been rapidly building in the back of her throat, when the growing sound of footsteps descending down the Foré’s staircase had suddenly pierced through the whispers in her head. Within an instant, the power that had felt like it was suffocating and swallowing her whole
had retreated back into her internal reserves – leaving nothing but the ghost of its essence haunting the corridors of her muscles and mind.

Forcing herself to quickly regain some semblance of composure, Freya had detected the annoying presence of the wolf Alanna entering into the Foré, and finally stepped out to confront the girl after a few moments spent steadying her own heartbeat.

Stood now, staring up at the feral wrath of Storm Gelda’s clouds as rain relentlessly assaulted her face, Freya could feel her mutating magic pulse with raw hatred towards the memory of the Neivera wolf.

It had taken every last drop of willpower left within her, to resist the strong urge to kill her fiancé’s friend during their time spent together in under the New Orleans public library.

Within minutes of confronting Alanna, the foreign-voiced whispers had recommenced their taunting in her mind. Only instead of the previous murmurs of self-doubt and fear, this time the intrusive thoughts had tried to eat away at her sanity with declarations of mistrust and hate towards the wolf.

She knows…. she knows about us…. she knows about the bond…. she will use it against us…. she will use it against you….

Freya had had to ball her hands into fists as they shook by her side, solely to prevent Alanna from seeing the static charge of magic sparking at her fingertips, as it tried to force itself out in a killing blow towards the wolf.

When Alanna had correctly deduced that the Jarl’s had a supernatural hold over her – that they were forcing her to do their will – Freya had barely been able to stop her power from ending the wolf’s life right there and then. Lashing out with words of panicked anger, the witch had only just managed to lessen the magical blow delivered to the girl’s chest before it burst forth from her hand – resulting in Alanna simply being thrown across the room, instead of having everyone of her bones instantly crushed to dust.

_Fool…. she will be the end of you…. she will be the end of your relationship…. she wants her you know…. your wolf lover…. she wants you out of the picture…. she wants her all to herself…. _

As the whispers in her head had increased in both volume and intensity, Freya had lashed out at Alanna again – unable to fully resist the overwhelming surge of hatred that had boiled with crimson ferocity within her morphing power.

To her credit, however, the Neivera wolf had not backed down or shown any signs of fear in the face of Freya’s wrath. Instead, Alanna’s eyes had blazed bright with the yellow tones of her wolf as she had stood her ground and demanded that the witch either kill her there and then…. or open up to her, and let her help.

And it had been in that moment – as the two of them had stood glaring at each other with fierce intensity – that Freya had realised just how vital Alanna now was to protecting Keelin from the Jarl’s and their influence. The intensity with which the blood-bond coursing through her veins hated the Neivera wolf was almost suffocating.

It hated her so fiercely that it had occurred to Freya, as she had stood trying to desperately force her magic back into its well of reserve, that that hate was actually born from fear.
Fear of the threat that Alanna potentially posed to the Jarl’s plans.

Fear of that fact that…. the snake venom laced with Halvar’s blood, which had been on the knife plunged into Alanna on the night of her and Keelin’s fight with the Jarl’s vampire thugs, had not managed to work its influence over the wolf.

Had not managed to kill her!

As the small spark of realisation had fluttered to life in Freya’s mind, the whispering voice within her head had almost deafened her with its screams of denial and demand.

No…. NO…. she is nothing…. she is worthless…. kill her…. kill her before it is too late…. kill her before she tells them all of what you’ve done…. of what we will make you do…. kill her…. KILL HER….

And she had almost done it too.

She had come so close to actually ending Alanna’s life down in the “Foré de Konnen et Puissance”, that the memory of it now - as she stood letting the rain of Storm Gelda attempt to wash away the dark stain of the blood-bond from her soul – sent a fierce shudder of fear vibrating down her spine.

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“Can I ask you something though”, the wolf asked her hesitantly. “What makes you think that these douche-bags could actually make you harm Keelin? I mean, after all I was once someone who…. um…. who was part of a plot to try and harm your fiancé! And I gotta tell you blondie, your devotion to protecting her was fierce! Like…. I literally shit my pants that night of the carnival!! What makes you think that your love for Keelin won’t override anything that this overweight prick and his mates order you to do to her!?"

“Because….”, Freya began, letting out a small gasp of pain as she ceased all attempts to keep her infected magic at bay and allowed the hate filled power to completely smother over her, “….I’m one of them now!”

“Wh….what the fuck….?!”

Alanna stumbled back a few steps as the shock of seeing the sudden change in Freya’s features hit her hard.

“W-what have they done to you!?”

Hatred and anger filled every pore of Freya’s body, as the blood-bond flowing through her veins scorched its sadistic intent along her flesh.

“You want to know what was done to me, wolf?!“ she heard herself saying, in a voice that was as alien to her as the power that now readied itself to inflict misery and pain upon Alanna. “Would you like me to show you exactly what it felt like…..”

A glass shattering scream suddenly ripped out of the Neivera wolf’s mouth as Freya unleashed a wave of obsidian stained power upon her. The witch could feel a cruel sneer begin to contort her
mouth as eyes blazing crimson with rage bore down upon the shrieking girl in front of her.

“How does that bravery of yours feel now, wolf?!” the spiteful and strange voice sneered, as her corrupted power continued to unleash the collective pain of every single slice, blow, and lash that she had suffered at the hands of the Jarl’s, upon Alanna’s cowering form. “How does your love for the bitch that I’m fucking, feel to you right now?!”

As Alanna’s legs gave way and she collapsed on to the damp stone floor in screams of debilitating agony, Freya took a menacing step closer to her – the shocked, rational part of her mind recoiling in horror as it suddenly realised what the blood-bond intended on doing to the suffering wolf.

“Look at you, cowering on the floor like a weak child! You think that you are worthy to replace me?! You think that you would have any hope of satisfying her in the way that I do?!”

“F…Freya…. p-please…. please st.… stop…..” Alanna gasped, unable to raise her head enough to look at the witch as tears of pain began to stream down her colour-drained face.

“Oh, I’ll stop wolf”, she scoffed darkly, as the power within her continued to surge out of its well and viciously pour over Alanna. “Just as soon as you know exactly what it feels like to be stripped of every last ounce of self-worth and dignity!”

Alanna’s screams intensified as Freya terrifyingly felt the full hatred of the blood-bond slam mercilessly into the wolf.

“As soon as you know what it feels like to be fucked like a worthless bitch in heat!”

“N…. no…. please…. Freya…. this isn’t y-you” Alanna screamed out, panting heavily from the exertion of trying to force words through the white-hot agony tearing at her insides. “….don’t…. don’t let them…. destroy you…. destroy the…. the woman that…. Keelin loves!”

Keelin.

The name sliced into her mind like a bullet through flesh, weakening the psychological shackles that the blood-bond had slapped over her, just long enough to allow Freya to lash out with every ounce of resolve that she had left.

Mentally grabbing a-hold of the thick vines of sadistic magic flowing between herself and the wolf, Freya yanked back on the power with everything she had – managing to dislodge its hold upon Alanna a split second before it had the chance to tear apart the younger woman’s dignity.

A loud groan of exertion forced its way out of her mouth as she collapsed down onto her knees – every ounce of what little strength she had left now being used to try and hold back the might of her tainted power.

Whimpering in the injured tones of her wolf, Alanna managed to push herself up off the ground just far enough to meet the witch’s gaze.

“I’ll…. g-go get your…. family to…. help y-you…..”

“NO!” Freya blurted out through gritted teeth, her voice having returned to its normal tone as panic flared within her. “No!”

“But…”

“Alanna…. do you still not get it?! Don’t you understand?! If anyone finds out about this…. about
what I have become…. I’ll be forced to kill them. I’ll….”

Her words were momentarily choked off by the exertion required to continue to hold her outraged magic at bay.

“…. not be able to stop it again! Please…. go! Get out of here whilst you still can!”

Uncertainty warred in the wolf’s blue eyes as she finally managed to use unsteady legs to push herself up off the floor. Taking a small step backwards, Alanna continued to pant heavily as she wearily assessed the cowed witch in front of her.

“Fuck…. y-you need help Freya!” the wolf declared, her shaky voice both weary and distrustful as tears continued to fall down her cheeks. “You need to stop whatever this is, before you end up hurting someone you love! Before you…. you lose control like that on Keelin!”

Freya’s eyes scrunched shut, as the blood-bond’s incessant whispering flashed her a mental image of what Alanna had looked like, curled up on the floor in agony – only it wasn’t the Neivera wolf that now screamed out in torturous pain as the witch cruelly sneered down at her – it was Keelin.

“Protect her…. please!” she pleaded to Alanna in a whisper, as the fabricated image of her fiancé writhing under the might of her power continued to assault her mind. “Swear that you will protect her with your life, if needs be!”

“But….”

“Urgh…. Alanna for god’s sakes, get out of here!” Freya hollered desperately, as she felt her tenuous grip upon the raging power within begin to slip. “…. I can’t hold it back for much longer!”

With one final wince of uncertainty, Alanna turned and began to quickly limp towards the Foré’s staircase - pausing only as her foot landed on the first of the stone steps, to briefly look back at the suffering witch with a whispered declaration on her lips.

“I swear it!”

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A heavy sigh forced its way out of her mouth, as Freya’s pained eyes fell shut against the onslaught of the late afternoons falling rain. Slowly lowering her head away from the heavens, the witch pulled the water-soaked hood of her jacket back over her head, as the memory of her charged confrontation with Alanna slowly began to fade.

The raging power within her had quickly lost its ire once the Neivera wolf had disappeared from sight, allowing the witch to compose herself just enough to quickly mumble the Foré’s “exit” spell – freeing Alanna from its dusty confines.

By the time the wolf had made it out of the New Orleans library, Freya had once again gained full control over her own mind and body, with the whispering of the blood-bond having almost faded away.

Almost.

It did not, however, disappear completely - and as she had finally pushed herself up off the floor
and begun the task of searching through the various old Grimoires for the information that she had originally gone there for, Freya had still been able hear a faint hissing of words in her mind.

*Pointless…. your search is pointless…. nothing can save her now…. nothing can save her from you….*

And maybe the malicious voice had been speaking the truth.

Maybe all hope of her protecting Keelin from the Jarl’s…. from her…. was now lost, thanks to the blood-bonds apparent mutating of her power.

But she still had to try. Even if the chance was only a naive fool’s hope lost in a vast sea of doom and despair – she had to at least try.

Reaching into a pocket concealed within her jacket, Freya carefully pulled out a folded piece of ancient parchment, and checked once again the name that appeared several times within its fading scripture.

*Asselin*

Glancing up to her left, the witch’s steeled eyes fell upon the large sign that was hanging on the side of the single-story building that she was currently stood next to in the narrow alleyway.

“Assel’s Store of Wellbeing – Herbs, Remedies and Potions to Sooth the Modern-Day Soul!”

Breathing out a sigh of frustration, Freya pocketed the scripture once more before turning her attention back to the graffiti covered door that she assumed led into the rear section of the store. Letting her eyes fall shut, the witch held out her water covered hand and pushed a small slither of her tumultuous power over the wooden face of the locked entrance - searching for any signs of enchantments or magical snares.

Of which she found none.

*You’re barking up the wrong tree…. this is a waste of your time…. would someone powerful enough to be in possession of an artefact of the gods leave their doors un-hexed…. cease this foolish errand…. *

As the mocking words of the now ever present blood-bond whispered into her mind, Freya slowly stretched her neck to the side – cracking a bone as her jaw tensed.

If the bond wanted her away from this place – wanted her to believe it was going to be a futile dead-end – then there was a small chance that she might well be on the right track.

*Fool…. you are nothing but a worthless fool…. *

Ignoring the snake like hissing within her mind, Freya fixed her eyes onto the locked door once more, and flicked her wrist in its direction.

As the sound of disengaging locks clicked into the air around her, the witch took one last look up at the carrying heavens above her, before pushing her way into the dark gloom of the Remedies store.

“Ok, Julietta Assel”, Freya muttered quietly to herself, as her booted feet carried her over the building’s threshold. “Let us see what information it is that you know, that has this damned blood-bond so pissed!”
....so yeah, not quite the full reveal as to how Keelin got pregnant just yet. Seems my creative mind decided it would be better to draw it out over another chapter, so as best to fit everything in.

Sorweeeeee.

And also.... I don't like mean Freya! There, I said it. She upsets me. Damn this tale requiring me to write it. Haha.
Chapter 25.

Chapter Summary

Previously on "What Lies Within"....

1. Keelin asked Freya to marry her - the two then making love under the watchful eye of the Harvest Full Moon.
2. Freya was kidnapped and tortured by the Seven Jarls of the Blood-Bound Clan, eventually agreeing to ingest Halvar's blood and becoming blood-bound herself. She was tasked with obtaining a sample of each of her siblings blood.
3. Keelin's health had been deteiriorting, resulting in the wolf discovering that she is unexpectantly pregnant. After toiling over its imposibility with both Joel, and then Alanna - Keelin sought out counsel in the Bayou from the Wolf elder Mary, who told the Malraux wolf the tragic tale of the murder of Lena and her mysterious unborn child.
4. Alanna followed Freya into a secrete wiccan den of knowledge deep under the New Orleans Library, and worked out that the witch is under the control of the men who kidnapped her. She barely escaped with her life, after Freya's mutating magic tried to kill her. The witch begged Alanna to protect Keelin from her, no matter what the cost.
5. Freya's search for the fabled "Nazural" amulate continued, leading her to a seemingly abandoned store deep within the 7th Ward.

Chapter Notes

So, hey there everyone.... I'm back!

I am so so sorry for the looooong delay between postings. Long story cut short - my work life has pretty much taken up every spare second of my life over the past few months, and I've really struggled to find any time to write. I started this chapter at the end of June, and have averaged something like a paragraph a week since then! Its been crazy. (Lets just say I hope none of you guys ever have to suffer a criminal cyber attack on your business - it basically causes more misery & mayhem than Klaus Mikaelson managed in his entire 1000 year existance! Ha!)

On the plus side, it did mean I got to spend a few weeks over in Denver, Colorado last month, at my works office there. Was awesome for this Brit to get to see the Rockies in all their glory!

Anyhow, I digress. Here (finally) is Chapter 25.

In the interest of full disclosure, its not as long as it was originally going to be. There are two more scenes that were meant to be in this installment, however I have decided to add those scenes to the next chapter instead in the interest of getting something posted for you all to read.

As it's been so long, I'd advise maybe re-reading over the last chapter first, as this one picks up straight after its events, continuing those scenes. And yes, I have started the next chapter already and hope to have it completed A LOT faster than this one, now
that work is calming down a little again. I've missed writing so so much!

So, all that's left to say is that I hope you have all stuck around and are still interested in knowing how my wee Freelin trilogy plays out. I love hearing from you all, and trust me, I'm still just as excited to share this story with you. Especially the climax of this tale, and the resulting 3rd instalment of the trilogy. I genuinely can't wait to write that!! :-)

Happy Reading Guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 25.

1.

The air hung heavy and moist as Keelin steadily pushed her way through the dense foliage of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi. Heat and humidity pressed in on her skin, making her body’s natural reaction of sweat completely pointless.

Trees as tall as cathedrals still protruded up into the sky in this withdrawn, mysterious section of the New Orleans Bayou, but unlike in the well-trodden areas that the wolf was more familiar with, their domineering presence felt more oppressive than it did welcoming.

Swatting yet another mosquito away as it became fascinated with her face, Keelin took a moment to still her advance and draw in a deep, weary breath. Turning around on the spot amongst the thick bushes and plants encompassing her on all sides, the wolf attempted in vain to steady the rapid pounding of her anxious heart.

She really did not like this place – this twisted, ugly scar, marring the underbelly of the otherwise vibrant Bayou.

The Sa Ki Mal Peyi seemed to have a dark, underlying intelligence, all of its own. Its voice was the sudden screech of a bald eagle, deftly shattering the otherwise unnatural, eerie silence from where it perched high in the tree tops. Its presence was the brief flicker of a bobcat’s fur as it leapt from one branch to another overhead – stalking Keelin’s progress as she ventured deeper and deeper into the feline’s territory. Its breath was the unexpected rustle of leaves and snapping of twigs, as a wild pig ran in a frenzied panic from the predators who wanted its flesh for food.

She could have sworn that the Sa Ki Mal Peyi knew she was there.

And it seemed pissed.

Fighting off an involuntary shudder that threatened to crawl along her spine, Keelin let out a brief huff of nervous laughter before forcing herself to continue on her way once more.

She was a fiercely capable, bad-ass wolf, for Christ’s sakes! The swamp and its inhabitants should be scared of her – not the other way around!

Of course, the irony of this being the second time in as many weeks that she was willingly visiting this previously un-explored area of the Bayou was not lost on Keelin.
After her last excursion to the area, the wolf had sworn that she would never venture into this mysterious underbelly of the marshlands ever again – the first visit definitely proving to be more than enough to quell any curiosity that she may have held for the area.

Fate appeared to have other plans for the Malraux wolf however, as her search continued for answers to the unexpected life now growing within her.

Only an hour earlier, Keelin had been perched on the edge of Mary’s bed in a hazed stupor of shock, as the Wolf Elder had returned the leather bound “La Legende Du Lou Honteux” back to its spot on her old rickety bookcase. A torrent of emotions had flooded through the Malraux wolf as she had sat processing the supposed turn of events that had led to the brutal murder of Lena, and her unborn child.

Horror at the fact that the young girl’s pack had turned so easily on one of its own, just because they believed her to have become pregnant by a male from a rival group. And outrage towards the Lena’s father, Baudet, for not only failing to protect his daughter in her greatest moment of need, but for also refusing to listen to his own flesh and blood’s pleas of innocence when she had claimed to have had no intimate relations with any male wolf – let alone one from the pack of their enemy.

But most of all, Keelin had nearly been suffocated by the thick swathe of fear that had immediately wrapped itself tightly around her after she had learnt of Lena’s grisly fate.

*Was that how people would react to her own “inexplicable” pregnancy?! Was that how the Mikaelson family would react? How…. Freya would react?!*

Seeing that the panic that had taken up residence on the younger wolf’s face, Mary had quickly launched into down-playing the accuracy of the ancient legend, claiming that such “old-wolves-tales” often ended up being distorted over the years as they were passed between elder to elder - simply by word of mouth alone. However, Keelin had already seen the truth in the grey-haired woman’s eyes, and knew that Hope’s grandmother was just trying to soften the emotional blow delivered by the tragic account.

After another pot of tea had been brewed, Mary had shaken her head apologetically to Keelin when the younger wolf had asked if any of the texts kept within her cabin further elaborated on how it was that Lena had actually become pregnant.

As far as the grey-haired Elder had known, once word had gotten out about the slaughter of the pregnant North East Atlantic wolf, tensions between the warring packs had intensified, and the frequency of their battles increased. Baudet had blamed the Crescent Pack for leading his daughter astray and being the cause of her death. Whilst the Crescent wolves themselves were outraged at the rival Alpha for trying to cover up his own pack’s barbarism, with falsities and lies about their own members.

Lena’s tale of the strange cloaked figures who had been surrounding her chanting whilst she had been lay on a stone alter, was all but forgotten by her pack, as warring enemies clashed time and time again on the bloodied battlefield. And had it not been for the North East Atlantic Pack’s Elder relaying the tale to his own daughter, who in turn eventually became a pack Elder herself - Mary had believed that all knowledge of Lena’s account of her time lost in the Louisiana woodlands would have been forever lost.

Several moments of silence had passed between Keelin and the older wolf, as her whirling mind had attempted to make sense of the old Legend. Eventually the Malraux wolf had voiced out loud her thoughts, stating that the common factor between Lena’s tale and her own, appeared to be the
presence of magic at the presumed moment of conception – assuming of course that Lena had been
telling the truth all those years ago.

Mary had slowly nodded her head in agreement, and when Keelin had started talking of the
possibility of approaching Tobias, the regent witch of the French Quarter, to see if he could help
shine any light on her predicament - the Elder had quickly dismissed the idea.

“This is a wolf matter, my dear”, the older woman had stated - her voice kind but firmly resolute.
“And if there’s one thing that we wolves are good at; it’s making sure that we keep our kinds
issues within the pack!”

Keelin had been about to protest that she had not been part of a “pack” for many a year, when
Mary had quickly silenced her with words that had pierce right through the Malraux wolf’s chest,
and hit her straight in the heart.

“And before you try and feed me any of that “I’m a lone wolf with no family left” nonsense, take a
good look around you, child, and open your eyes! You have spent months training with my
granddaughter’s mother, have you not? The two of you sparring and running wild and free together
across our pack’s lands. You are engaged to be married to my granddaughter’s Aunt, and from
what Hayley has told me, you have come to love and cherish Hope like she was a pup born of your
own family’s lineage. And correct me if I am wrong dear, but when faced with an unexplainable
and strange dilemma, you have found your way to this pack Elder, to ask for advice and counsel!”

Mary had paused briefly whilst studying Keelin kindly.

“It might not be the one you were born into, but believe me child – you have a family now. You
have a pack!”

She had felt tears beginning to sting the corner of her eyes, as Mary’s kind words had washed over
her. Initially lost for word’s, Keelin had only been able to watch on in appreciation as the Elder’s
face had softened even further into a warm smile.

“Of course, that is if you will accept us as your kin?”

Taking the younger wolf’s teary nod of her head as a sign of acceptance, Mary had immediately
gone on to begin theorising on where she believed the Malraux wolf might be able to continue her
search for answers – proving once again how her pragmatism and no-nonsense attitude served her
well in the role as a pack Elder.

Whilst the grey-haired woman had confirmed that no pure-bred wolf actually had the ability to
wield magic, it did not mean that they were all completely ignorant on how the power of witches
worked, and the lore behind their mystical capabilities. Mary had gone on to explain that there had
once been an abundance of “Wolf Sages” living amongst the various packs of North America in the
later decades of the Nineteenth Century – both male and female wolves who had dedicated their
lives to the study of magic, and its ability to affect the habitats in which their packs lives. They
were initially well-respected members of the community, and revered for their vast specialist
knowledge almost as much as the Wolf Elders themselves.

A wariness of these Sages had however eventually taken root amongst the more traditional wolves
roaming the lands and swamps of America. A mistrust that they actively spread the word of, with
regards to the where the Wolf Sage’s true allegiances actually lay.

Did they consider themselves to be pure bred wolves, loyal and faithful to the packs within which
they were born? Or did they instead feel more of an allegiance to the power-hungry witches that
They spent their whole lives studying and revering?

It had not taken long for that mistrust to turn into fear and hate, spreading like wildfire across all seven packs of the lands. Sages were turned upon by their own pack members overnight – by their own families! And those that were fortunate enough to not be killed on the spot, were cast out of their packs and exiled from the lands which they had called home for most of their lives.

“They became nomad’s”, Mary had explained, her face taking on a similar sad expression to the one that it had sported when she had been relaying the tale of Lena and her unborn child. “And for the most part, our packs Alpha’s and Elders never heard of them again!”

“I am guessing that you still know of one, however?” Keelin had cautiously questioned the older wolf, beginning to understand that Mary did not necessarily conform to all of their kind’s laws and traditions.

“Well, when you get to my age my dear,” the Elder had continued, a small smirk playing on her lips, “and have lived in the Bayou for as long as this old wolf has – you get to know of most of its inhabitants, and which rocks they chose to hide under. Even those who do not wish to be found!”

Mary had gone on to describe how she believed that one such “Wolf Sage” possibly still resided in the New Orleans Marshlands, all be it in a particularly hard and dangerous area of the quagmire to navigate – the Sa Ki Mal Peyi. And that whilst the nomad wolf would now be even older than herself in years, and probably even less hospitable to the idea of unexpected guests than she – he was most likely going to be Keelin’s best bet when it came to someone possibly knowing how the life now growing inside of her had come to pass.

And so here she now was, painstakingly fighting her way through the thick foliage of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi for the second time that month.

Keelin had realised who Mary had been talking about as soon as the Elder had mentioned that the Wolf Sage was supposedly living in hiding, deep within the underbelly of the Bayou’s forgotten grounds. But something had stopped her from admitting to the old woman that she had already had a run in with the strange, short man.

Something about the bizarre encounter had her thinking that Mary would judge her harshly if she ever learnt of it. And it hadn’t taken Keelin long to realise after she had set off from the old woman’s wooden cabin, that she was most probably just projecting her own shame onto the Elder’s assumed response.

Shame at having been so reckless in her search for answers to Freya’s whereabouts, and summoning a deadly Ravmocker of all beings!

And shame at having had to be saved from said Ravmocker by that brazen harlot, Amelia!

But she had been desperate – almost to the point of delirium – to find her abducted fiancé after almost a week of no leads and no progress made. Leather wearing brutes had ridden off into the night with an unconscious Freya bound in chains, and every minute Keelin and the Mikaelson siblings had been unable to locate her, was another minute something horrible could have been happening to the woman she loved.

Things, it turned out, that were even more horrific than even her own panicked mind had been able to fathom back at that point!

And desperation leads people to desperate acts – even those who were supposedly meant to be
level headed doctors who had just been promoted onto a hospital’s leading surgical team!

“Urgh!”

Shaking her head to herself, Keelin let out a loud frustrated sigh as she fleetingly remembered the brand-new position that she had been meant to be starting within St Theodora’s operating theatres that very day.

But instead she was here, in the middle of the wild Bayou searching for answers to the impossible, yet somehow possible, life now growing inside of her!

“I hope they don’t fire my ass!” she muttered absentmindedly to herself, as yet another thorned bush threatened to rip the fabric of her skinny denim jeans.

“You know, talking to yourself can be considered the first sign of madness!”

Whipping her whole body around faster than the human eye could register, a deep threatening growl rumbled up and out of Keelin’s throat as canine teeth rapidly descended out of her gums. Sharp focused vision immediately located and locked onto the source of the unexpected voice, just as her top lip pulled back to reveal a razor-sharp snarl.

“Whoa…. easy there, Keelin! It’s just me!”

Blinking once at the newcomer, the wolf slowly straightened herself back upright from the attack-ready stance that she had instinctively crouched into.

“Jeez, I’m sorry…. I didn’t mean to startle you! But hey…. in my defence, I figured you would have scented my approach!”

Despite another growl rumbling deep within her chest, Keelin allowed the magical Kyanite barrier within her to begin to solidify once more as she huffed indignantly towards the younger wolf.

“What the hell are you doing out here, Alanna?!”

“Ha, ok, so straight into it then hey…. no pleasantries, or “Hey Alanna, how’s your day going?”. Because believe me, it’s not been the best so far! I hardly slept a wink last night thanks to all the pain of my body trying to heal, and then when I got to your apartment, you were nowhere to be found, and I had to deal with some angry douchbag cursing me for causing so much noise in your hallway. I mean jeez, all I did was knock a few times! What a prick! So then I had to concentrate super hard to be able to follow your scent all the way out here to the Bayou. And fuck, do you know how hard it is to track someone through all this…. this…. um, so like where exactly are we again?”

Drawing in a heavy breath, Keelin pinched the bridge of her nose with one hand as her eyes fell shut.

“I haven’t the time nor patience for this today, Alanna”, the older wolf exhaled irritably. “So, I’ll ask once more – what are you doing here? And why were you following me?!”

The Nievera wolf appeared to ponder the question posed for a moment as she studied Keelin’s features.

“I’m worried about you,” Alanna eventually said, taking a small step closer to her fellow wolf. “After everything that’s happened with Freya, and now your…. you know….,”
“Inexplicable pregnancy?!?” Keelin interjected in a deadpan tone.

“Yeah…. that! So, I dunno…. I guess I’m just worried that you’re going to push yourself too hard, and end up having some kind of wolfy breakdown, or the like!”

Keelin forced out a harsh huff of laughter at her younger friend’s words.

“A breakdown?! Wow, thanks…. good to hear that you have so much faith in my strength of character?!”

“Oh hey, look, that’s not what I meant!” Alanna was quick to remark, as a look of panic flushed across her features. “I just….”

“Regardless Alanna, that does not explain what you are doing here! In the Sa Ki Mal Peyi! Following me!”

The younger wolf’s eyes fell to the ground between them, as her mouth quirked to the side in trepid contemplation.

“I err…. well, I guess that I…. that I just wanted to make sure that you stay safe! You know, protect you and your little one from anything unexpected!”

“That I stay safe?! Protect me?!” Keelin scoffed at the squirming Nievera wolf. “In case you haven’t noticed Alanna, I am a wolf! And perfectly capable of holding my own in a fight! I could easily…."

Her word’s cut off, as she held her hands up suddenly and let out a loud sigh.

“You know what…. it doesn’t matter! Go home - stay here - or continue following me, I really don’t care. Just stay the hell out of my way. I don’t have time to babysit you right now, Alanna!”

Turning away from the younger wolf before she’d even finished her sentence, Keelin once again began to push forward through the dense undergrowth of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi.

As she rolled her eyes at the sound of the Neivera wolf beginning to follow in her footsteps, a troubling thought began to niggle at her mind.

Alanna was right - she should have been able to scent her approach! Long before she was close enough to make Keelin nearly jump out of her skin!

Brow furrowing, Keelin silently inhaled a deep breath as she continued to move.

Letting the humid air rush up into her flared nostrils and languidly pool over her tongue, she attempted to distinguish all of the different scents that should have been present in the vibrant Bayou’s atmosphere.

Heavy, earthy tones of the marsh-lands boggy terrain were the first scents to register, quickly followed by the salty tang of her own body’s sweat. But those were the only aroma’s that she could currently discern in the immediate area surrounding her.

Even now, with Alanna trailing only a couple of meters behind her, Keelin still could not detect the unusual mixture of fresh pine and sweet honeysuckle that she associated with the sole surviving Nievera pack member.

Nor could she scent any of the abundant wildlife that her mind rationalised had to be nearby,
hidden and scattered throughout the dense Bayou thicket.

*Shit.... was this another “symptom” of her unusual pregnancy?! The loss of her heightened sense of smell?!*

Glancing back momentarily, Keelin observed Alanna as the younger wolf purposefully scanned over their surrounding territory with the feral, alert eyes of her inner beast. The girl was no doubt listening and watching for the slightest rustle of a leaf, or unexpected crunch of twig that would indicate someone – or something – was preparing to attack them. And despite being in her more fragile human form, Keelin noted that Alanna looked every bit like the fierce predator that dwelled deep inside of her, as she nimbly prowled through the thicket.

Every bit like the competent protector that she had claimed she wanted to be, when Keelin had confronted her only moments earlier.

Turning her gaze away before Alanna had chance to notice her scrutiny, Keelin let out another small sigh to herself. Only this time it was more one of begrudging acceptance, than that of annoyance.

*If her own abilities were indeed somehow being affected by the new life growing inside of her, maybe having Alanna tag along in the treacherous Sa Ki Mal Peyi wasn’t such a bad idea after all.

Maybe.*

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2.

Pausing just a few steps into the darkened room, Freya stood still for a moment as she allowed her eyes to adjust to the dim lighting of her new surroundings.

Dust particles tickled irritatingly at her nose, as the smell of old musty wood mingled with that of the charged electrostatic scent of the storm outside. As her vision slowly began to focus, the witch could see that she had entered into “As sell’s Store of Wellbeing” through what appeared to be a dark, cramped storeroom – one that was piled high with numerous wooden crates and boxes of varying sizes.

Keeping her breathing quiet and steady, Freya let her hand lightly run over the top of the container closest to her. Through the use of a small tendril of her power, the witch detected what appeared to be several glass jars stacked haphazardly within the crate – each one empty of any contents, and each one sterile and clean despite the dank, mouldy state of the box that housed them.

Another quick examination of the next crate along also revealed similar contents, confirming to Freya that despite her suspicions of the true nature of this store, it appeared to at least be attempting to keep up the pretence of being a working, functional business.

A moment of doubt quickly flickered through the witch’s mind, as to whether the incessant whisperings of the blood-bond within her head had been right with regards to her barking up the wrong tree by coming to investigate the owner of this store.
The connection that she had made whilst down in the wiccan Foré under the New Orleans Public Library, had been tenuous at best – even by her standards. But after an hour spent searching through the numerous texts and scriptures housed in the old secretive warren of knowledge, it was the only connection that Freya had been able to find.

The book itself had been unambiguously named “A Witch’s Guide to The So-Called Seers and Prophets of New Orleans” – a title that had managed to cause a small smile to erupt over Freya’s features, despite her deeply sombre mood. And if the designation of the text hadn’t of been indicative enough with regards to the author’s thoughts and feelings towards the existence of Seers, its contents had certainly served to clear up any confusion from the very first page.

Let me get one thing straight from the start…. the author – an 18th Century Creole Witch who had gone by the name of Carmelou Azon – had begun …. if it is a foolish thirst for knowledge of future events yet to happen that you seek by reading these words, then I would advise that you cease right here! My tale is not one fabricated from the whimsical fantasies of uneducated witchlings and foolish, ignorant mortals. You will find only facts inked on these pages! And the most important fact of them all is…. Seers and Prophets with the true power of foresight, simply do not exist.

Freya had almost ceased her search of the text there and then, thinking that it would only be a waste of her time to continue reading the ramblings of a mis-informed witch, who had been intent on disproving the existence of very real beings.

But a quick glance at the books chapter listing had swiftly changed her mind, when she had seen that section-eight of the text had been labelled, “The Nazirul Effect – A Misleading Notion of Protection.”

Carmelou’s references to the Nazuril had mostly been dismissive in nature, claiming that accounts of the ancient artefact had been nothing more than stories fabricated by over protective parents in an attempt to calm their frightened babes’ nerves during time of conflict and war.

That the notion of an all-powerful, all-protecting amulet forged by a Norse God’s daughter was both preposterous, and laughable - despite the claims of those who liked to call themselves Seers.

Nethertheless, the 18th Century Witch had gone on to detail what the scriptures of her wiccan ancestors had claimed to have happened to the artefact, as it had supposedly been passed down through generation after generation of Seers over the millennia.

Originally said to have been gifted to the daughter of the Romanian Seer - Andrei Pretescu - it is claimed that the Nazuril remained within the Pretsecu Tribe for just over a century, heavily guarded by their most adapt warriors and spell casters.

However, during the years in which the Kingdom of Dacia fell to the Roman Empire, it is believed that the Nazuril was obtained and successfully sequestered out of the country by a rival faction - the Seer’s of the Dragos Clan - who ultimately ended up settling within the country of Hungary.

Here the artefact is said to have remained for another five hundred years, until one of the Clan Chiefs’ daughters, Karille Horvath, married into a wealthy French bloodline – a highly coveted and tactile union that was bought and sealed by the Dragos Clan offering up over half of their net wealth, as well as the coveted Nazuril artefact.

With the marriage officiated, Karille Horvarth moved to live with her Duke husband in the South of France, thus taking his name and becoming known as Karille Asselin.

For all accounts, it would seem that the Nazuril has remained within the Asselin family line ever
since that initial union, as no records have been fabricated of it having passed hands since.

I believe if you were to ask most fanatics and crusaders obsessed with the Artefact and its unlikely existence, they would tell you that any quest to find the object should be carried out either within the southern provinces of France, or the upper most north-west regions of Italy – centred around the city of Turin.

However, if one is foolish enough to place credence in the existence of the artefact, then you should probably take into account that during the late 17th century, certain factions of the Asselin family migrated over to the free-world, becoming one of the founding families of the Creole bloodlines to make their home in the city that is now known as New Orleans.

Freya had stopped reading the witch’s account at that point, after quickly skimming the following paragraphs and noting that they had been solely devoted to once again discrediting the existence of the fabled Norse relic, and declaring any who spent their lives searching for it, dim-witted buffoons.

From what she had seen in the 18th century witch’s account, Freya knew that there was a good chance that the Nazuril did still reside in the southern regions of France, as she did not know of anyone currently living in New Orleans – mortal, witch, vampire, or Seer – who had the family name of Asselin.

But just as she had been about to place the old text back in its place on the dusty bookshelf in the Foré, it had occurred to her that she did know of someone whom had a similar sounding surname.

Julietta Assel

Unashamedly tearing the relevant page of scripture from the ancient text, Freya had quickly made her way back out of the “Foré de Konnen et Puissance” and headed over to Rousseau’s, where she had spent the remainder of her evening nursing a tumbler of bourbon whilst brooding over the days rather disturbing turn of events.

It had only been when Josh had mentioned that her sister, Rebekah, had been restlessly pacing outside of the bar for well over an hour, that the witch had decided she had better call it a night, and return to her and Keelin’s apartment.

Despite having briefly tried to re-assure her wolf lover that she had been relocating to the couch to get some much needed sleep, Freya had found it almost impossible to switch off her brain and had spent most of the early morning hours running over in her head what she little knew of Julietta Assel.

The woman was in her mid to late thirties, and had owned the very store in which Freya now stood - Assell’s Store of Wellbeing – for most of her adult life, whilst managing to exist under the supernatural radar.

Freya had never actually visited the Seventh Ward store herself, but she had listened to Hayley speak of the shop and its owner several times over the last few years – the hybrid swearing by the various beauty lotions and supposedly calming medicinal remedies that she regularly bought from there.

According to her niece’s mother, the owner - Julietta - never failed to have a friendly smile and a warm welcome waiting for her regular customers, and treated everyone that she came across with a somewhat enchanting and disarming trust.
Which in itself had been the main reason that Freya had never before felt the urge to frequent the store in person.

She never trusted anyone who so freely trusted others – an irony that was in no part lost on her!

But here she now stood, in the dark and cramped storeroom of the shop, listening intently for any signs of life coming from the main room of the building.

Satisfied that she could not hear any movement or voices emitting from the main shopfront, Freya carefully manoeuvred herself around the various stacked crates and crept over to the storerooms exit. Being mindful not to make any noise, she gently placed a hand onto the handle and cautiously pushed down – pulling the door open and slowly entering into the shop.

The first thing to strike the witch as she took in her new surroundings, was just how light and airy the room looked, despite the storefronts tall windows having being boarded up with storm protection panels. A frown began to crease her brow as she attempted to search out the source of the natural looking light that was bathing the store in its calming ambience – of which she found none.

Sending out a quick pulse of power into the room, Freya was further surprised to discover no trace of magic or enchantment at work to produce the sunlight effect in the room.

It just seemed to…. exist.

Walking further into the shop, it occurred to the witch just how different the place appeared to what she had been expecting. From Hayley’s description of the eternally happy owner and the life healing services and products that she offered, Freya had pictured somewhere completely bathed in the swathes of bohemian culture. Somewhere that colour and vibrance poured out of every nook and cranny, with various cushions, lampshades, and futons furnishing the space in an almost cramped fashion.

Instead, the scene that she was now presented with looked like it was more suited to that of a dentist’s surgery, than a shop offering up homemade herbal lotions and creams.

Colour had clearly been absent from the storeowner’s mind on that day that she had decorated the store. Everything in it – from the walls and ceiling, to the sparsely scattered shelves and small countertop placed near the front of the shop – looked to have been smothered in a thick coat of white paint. Even the various labelled bottles and jars that lined the shelves had been made out of frosted glass, giving them a milky white appearance that effectively hid away the tonics housed within them.

In the centre of the space stood two small recliner chairs, that looked to have been bolted down onto the white-washed wooden floor with painted pins. The seats – covered in pristine white-leather upholstering – had been positioned in such a fashion that if two people were to sit in them, they would end up facing each other with very little space between their bodies.

The only other noticeable feature that Freya could see in the sparsely furnished room, was a medium sized hatch that was set into the floor near the far corner of the shop. Noting the presence of a small iron padlock securing the square shaped trapdoor in place, the witch assumed that a staircase must lay underneath the hatch’s cover – no doubt leading down into the buildings cellar.

Slowly walking over to the two chairs in the centre of the room, Freya continued to marvel at the phenomenon of natural light bouncing off the pristine white walls. There was definitely no trace of power lingering in the store, other than her own, yet somehow the storm boarded shop was
managing to capture the pure essence of the sun within its four walls.

“Quite the spectacle, isn’t it!”

Freya swiftly twisted her body round in a reaction of surprise to the softly spoken words – hands already up and ready to unleash her power as she moved.

Just in front of the storeroom door from which Freya had herself emerged only minutes ago, was a petite, blonde haired woman, who’s pale skin appeared almost as devoid of colour as the rest of the room as she stood smiling earnestly at the witch.

Dressed in what looked to be a tailor-made fitted uniform, the newcomer looked like she would have been more suited as a dental nurse, than a store worker in the middle of the 7th Ward.

Every piece of the outfit – from the crisply ironed trousers, to the tight scrub-like top – was the same pristine shade of white as the store in which they both stood, giving Freya the distinct impression that the woman before her was both cold and unfriendly, despite the warm smile plastered onto her youthful face.

“I am so sorry ma’am, I did not mean to startle you!” the store-worker quickly declared through a Cheshire-Cat like wide grin, as her eyes took in Freya’s defensive stance. “I thought you had heard me enter the room!”

Narrowing her eyes towards the uniformed woman, Freya slowly began to lower her hands as she straightened out the predator-like stance that she appeared to have reflectively crouched into.

“I apologise, my memory appears to be on the blink today, as I do not recall having anyone booked in for an appointment this afternoon. Forgive me – what name is the session under?”

Taking a second to once again run her eyes over the smiling woman’s cold appearance, Freya eventually managed to calm the roiling magic within her just enough to be confident that her voice would to least be steady and calm when she spoke her first words.

“I do not have an appointment,” the witch said slowly, her tone still managing to sound suspicious despite her best efforts.

“Ah, so you are a walk-in!” the woman in white declared, with no apparent shortage of joy. “Well that is even better! Ever since this delightful storm made its home over our precious city, custom has been a little lack lustre. Not that I have minded so much of course – a change is as good as a break and all that, right?!”

“How exactly did this woman think she had managed to just “walk-in”?!?

“So,” the store-worker began cheerfully, as she started to make her way over to the small shop counter near the front of the room, “what is it that I can help you with today? A lotion to aid with a troublesome rash? Face-cream to help maintain those beautiful features of yours? My special blend of herbs and spices for tackling sleepless nights?”

Turning on the spot as she followed the woman’s graceful, feline-like movements across the wooden floor, Freya quickly debated on how to broach the subject of why she was really there.

Would a cool and calculated direct approach be best, or a more subtle, delicate handling of the
subject?

“Well I….”

“Oh, wait, you’re here for a therapy session, aren’t you?!” the woman excitedly interrupted Freya, clapping her hands together in a show of delight as her green eyes appeared to light up with joy. “Of course, silly of me to think otherwise. Come, come…. sit and we shall begin!”

Frowning once more in confusion, Freya watched as the store-owner enthusiastically gestured towards the two white chairs fixed in the middle of the room – indicating that she wanted the witch to take a seat in one.

“No, sorry, but I’m not….”

“No need to apologise ma’am,” the woman interrupted again, beaming towards Freya. “Usually I insist that my client’s book in advance for a therapy session, but as you can clearly see, business is a little slow as of late. Besides, you certainly look to be in need of a good chat!”

“No, I’m not here for…. wait, what do you mean I look like I need a good chat?!” Freya asked, suddenly looking down at her own posture questioningly.

“Oh, come now,” the youthful looking woman chided in amusement - still smiling as she made her way back to where Freya stood and began to slowly guide the witch over to the waiting chairs with open arms, “your whole body is practically screaming with tension and anxiety. And don’t even get me started on that woeful aura of yours! Why you could practically suffocate a person with all of the oppressive misery radiating off you!”

Finding herself being steered into one of the two facing chairs, Freya felt her confusion slowly begin to ebb away as she could not help but be enamoured by the sense of “calm” radiating off the upbeat store owner.

“Well, I guess I have been a little tense as of late,” the witch heard herself saying before she had even fully registered her intent to speak. “But I really must speak with you about….”

“You know”, the store owner interrupted once more, “this session will go a lot smoother if you
Freya stared blankly at the woman sat facing her, as she quickly tried to discern whether she should take offence at the accusation thrown her way – or begrudgingly accept the words and the uncomfortable truth that they represented.

“How about I help you get started,” the store owner said, seeming to note that her guest was struggling with the concept of telling all to a stranger.

Leaning forward, the woman took a brief moment to search Freya’s gaze with her own green eyes.

“You’ve suffered a serious trauma recently,” she began after a few heartbeats – her stare remaining unwavering as she studied the witch closely. “One which has left both your mind and body at odds with your soul.”

As the words washed over her, Freya found herself strangely lulled by the soothing tone of the woman’s voice – despite the unnerving truth of the statement that had been made.

“And you feel like you are now drowning in a sea of expectations,” the store owner continued after a brief pause – angling her head slightly as she continued to study Freya’s eyes. “The expectations of your family for you to be the strong willed and resilient person that they believe you have always been. And… and the expectations of your lover. He…. wait, no…. she…. believes that you are bottling everything up inside, and expects that you would be able to cope better if you opened up to her about your ordeal!”

“… how are you….”

Freya’s sluggish and dazed question was cut off by the green-eyed woman shuffling further forward in her seat as she slowly raised her hands towards the witch’s temples.

“May I?” the store owner questioned, gesturing with a quick flick of her eyes towards hands that now hovered just centimetres away from either side of Freya’s head.

As the woman’s words of truth continued to float soothingly around in her mind, Freya felt only the briefest of objections flicker through the comforting fog of serenity that had now encased her in its warmth. Finding that expressing herself by the means of speech seemed like a concept that was entirely too energetic and unnecessary, the witch gave her consent to the store owner with a sluggish yet simple nod of her head.

A pleasant warmth quickly began to unfurl through Freya’s mind, as two soft skinned hands lightly connected with her temples. Finding that her vision was beginning to blur out of focus, the witch let her eyes slowly fall shut as the relaxing sense of calm and serenity that had been slowly blanketing itself over her ever since she had first encountered the store owner - began to intensify.

Only partially aware that she was still in the presence of someone other than herself, the witch’s breathing evened out into a peaceful rhythm as tranquil words laced in thick honey slowly floated their way into her conscious.

“Show me what happened”, the soothing voice coaxed gently – its presence continuing to fill Freya with nothing but amiable serenity, despite the seriousness of the request made. “Let me see what it is that is plaguing your being.”

Wanting nothing more than to please the warming voice currently caressing her mind, Freya found her thoughts wandering back to the moment she had first awoken in the dark and damp catacombs that lay deep beneath the barren wastelands on the outskirts of New Orleans.
To the moment when she first realised that her power had abandoned her, and she was left completely and utterly defenceless at the hands of the Jarls Of The B....

**NO! GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT!**

A deep, malevolent tenor suddenly boomed through Freya’s mind, instantly ripping through the calm and serene feather-like quilt that had wrapped itself tightly around her psyche.

Through no conscious effort of her own, a glutinous pulsating tendril of power lashed out of the witch’s reserves, like a brutal whip brandished by a cruel and heartless slave master. Only instead of radiating out from Freya’s body like her magic usually did, the lash of obsidian magic aimed straight for the confines of her own mind - striking out at the strange, calming presence that had taken up residence there.

“Argh!”

Both Freya and the Store Owner cried out in discomfort at the same time, as the two instinctively jerked their bodies away from each other’s personal space.

Eyes flying open, Freya’s gaze landed on the woman in white sat across from her, whose hands had quickly fallen away from the witch’s head, only to take up residence on the temples of her own.

“Wha…. what are you?!” the woman cried out brashly, as she shook her head in clear discomfort.

Gone was the soothing and tranquil accent that had been lacing the store owner’s voice only moments ago, leaving in its wake what appeared to be a thick creole drawl.

A powerful surge of anger washed over Freya, as she deftly pushed herself up and out of the ensnaring white chair. Sensing more of the strange yet formidable dark power surging out of her internal well, the witch readily submitted to its dominance and let it flood throughout her whole body.

This time it was different from when she had been appalled of what her mutating power had intended do to Alanna. This time it was different from the disgust and revulsion that she had felt at the knowledge of what she was becoming under the influence of the Blood-Bond.

This time it was different.

This time.... she revelled in it.

“What am I, Seer?!” Freya snarled towards the store owner, as the obsidian power began to pulse and swirl in her vision. “I am someone that you will regret ever trying to deceive with your cheap, parlour mind tricks!”

Lashing out this time with a physical form of her roiling magic, Freya whipped its acrid tendril around the woman’s neck and pulled back hard on its length. A high-pitched scream filled the room as the store owner was wrenched out of her chair and down onto the floor – coming to a rest in a kneeling position just in front of where Freya stood.

As the cloying scent of burning flesh began to fill her nostrils, the witch cast her eyes down towards the woman in white, who was now squirming in pain as the skin on her neck began to blister angrily under the influence of Freya’s ministrations.

The hint of a sneer began to form on Freya’s lips as she slowly crouched down and fixed black and
red irises onto her victim.

“Do you not think it rude, Seer, to try and coerce a person into revealing their innermost thoughts and feelings, before even having a proper introduction?!”

A pained whimper of discomfort was the only response that Freya received to her rhetorical question, as she tightened her magical grip around the store keeper’s throat even further.

“So please, allow me….” the witch continued, her voice having now dropped an octave. “You, are Julietta Assell! A worthless and vastly incompetent Seer, who I believe is a direct descendant of the late Karille Asselin of France. And I - well I am someone who is seconds away from wiping your pitiful existence off this plane if you do not immediately give me the information that I came here for!”

A strangled gurgling nose was the only response that came from the store owner, whose eyes had now scrunch shut in pain as the skin and muscle surrounding her neck continued to burn.

“There is a certain object that I am searching for. One which I believe you will know of well, Seer!” Freya remarked, bringing her face even closer to that of the store owners.

Studying the woman’s features for a moment, the witch felt a cruel rush of excitement inject into the anger that continued to fill her veins.

“The Nazirul – where is it?”

Despite the discomfort that the store owner was already in, Freya observed as a distinct expression of panic fleetingly passed over the whimpering woman’s expression.

There one second, and gone the next.

“Don’t make me ask you again, Seer!” the witch continued after a few heartbeats of nothing but muted struggling from her victim. “For I can promise you will not like the outcome!”

A second tendril of obsidian-stained power flung out from her and lashed itself tightly around the store keeper’s waist – instantly burning its way through the material of the woman’s white tunic to find skin to scorch.

“ARRGH…p…please…..stop!”

“Tell me what I want to know, and maybe I will spare you your life!”

Freya’s voice continued to rumble with the gravelly tones of the blood-bond, despite the disturbingly calm and expressionless appearance of her face as her roiling eyes bore into the store keeper.

“I…. I don’t know what…. you’re talking…. about,” the suffering woman stuttered out between teeth gritted together in pain. “I don’t…. know…..”

“LIES!”

The witches cry of fury boomed out across the room as she quickly rose to her full height and yanked fiercely on the pulsating power radiating out from her. Instantly the store owner was hauled off the ground upon which she had been knelt, and flung violently through the air.

Shattering glass exploded across the white tiles of the floor, as Julietta Assell crash landed on top
of the counter that stood near the stores boarded up entrance. Within a heartbeat Freya was upon the woman once more, a large pulse of kinetic magic flinging the bloodied store owner off the destroyed kiosk, and down onto the shard littered floor.

Before either woman had chance to draw in another breath, Freya lashed out yet again – this time powerfully shoving the store-owner along the glass covered tiles, eventually causing her to collide into the nearest wall with a muted “thud”.

A smirk fleetingly tugged at the witch’s lips, as she studied the trail of blood that marked the path which the store owner had taken. The bizarre sun-like light within the room glistened off the shattered glass that had mixed in with the crimson stain, giving the blood a macabre glittering quality.

As she slowly made her way over to the unmoving, crumpled form of Julietta Assel, Freya could feel a smug ambience start to radiate off the mutated power filling her body.

It was enjoying this…. she…. was enjoying this!

Coming to a stop only a foot away from the store owner’s body, the witch pushed out another snake like coil of power. Forcing it to slither around the already raw remains of the woman’s neck, Freya effortlessly pulled the limp body up off the floor and brought Julietta’s face level with her own.

Several cuts now littered the injured woman’s bloodied face, some of which still had the shards of glass that had caused them firmly lodged in the torn tissue. Pink tinted spittle bubbled on the store owner’s lips as her lungs laboured to draw breath in and out of a slightly parted mouth.

She was still alive.

And despite her attempts to appear helplessly unconscious, Freya’s power could sense that the woman was still very much aware of what was happening around her.

“I know you can hear me, Seer!” Freya crooned - a smirk contorting her lips as she continued to study the woman’s ruined face. “And I know that you must have realised by now that the small slither of power that lives within you, is no match against my own!”

Pulling on her magic, Freya slowly twisted the dangling store-owners body around by her neck, bringing the woman’s ear within millimetres of her own lips.

“So, I will ask one last time,” she whispered coldly, “before I stop being quite so civil! Where…. is…. the…. Nazirul?”

A wet, wheezing sound gurgled out of the injured woman’s mouth, prompting Freya to twist Julietta’s face back into view. Pain filled eyes fluttered open and rolled briefly from side-to-side, until they finally found focus upon the witch’s own.

“Go…. g…. “ the store owner attempted to speak - her voice hoarse and strangled thanks to the thick coil of power twisted around her throat.

“Do try and speak up! I can’t hear you over all of the blood in your mouth!” Freya mocked, never taking her eyes off the store-owners’.

“Go f…fuck yourself?”

The Seer spat the words out with as much venom as her crushed windpipe would allow, causing a
small amount of blood laced spittle to splatter over Freya’s nose and cheeks.

Sighing theatrically, the witch pulled her face away from her victims and shook her head gently in mock disappointment.

“Such a shame,” Freya cooed, looking over the dangling woman in an almost sympathetic manner. “This could have gone so differently for you!”

Letting her eyes fall shut, Freya actively searched out her internal well of power for the first time since her horror at discovering its mutating contents whilst down in the depths of the wiccan “Fore de Konnen et Puissance”.

Back there, deep under the New Orleans Public Library, she had been horrified to discover the effect that the Blood-Bond appeared to be having on her magic. And had desperately tried to pull away its frightening presence when it had called out to her in its strange and malicious voice – beckoning her to accept her new fate at its hands.

But now, as she mentally strode into the dark depths of its slick, oil-like core, a smile spread across her face as Freya felt it begin to swallow her whole.

When her eyelids opened once more, gone were any traces of the witch’s own emerald irises that had served as a gateway to a fierce, yet loyal soul for most of her existence. And as Julietta Assell’s own pain filled gaze came into focus on Freya’s face again, pure terror quickly blanched the store owners face white as she was met with the soulless, churning orbs of pure, malevolent sin.

“I am going to enjoy this!” Freya sneered, delighting in the fear now radiating off the trembling woman in her grasp.

With a subtle tilt of her head, the witch thrust several more, thick vines of throbbing power out towards the store-owner - forcing them deep into the woman’s flesh as they landed on various points of her suspended body.

Screams of agony filled every nook and cranny of Assell’s Store of Wellbeing, as wave after wave of Freya’s tainted magic pounded mercilessly into her victim.

“Yes, Seer….”, a deep gravelly voice remarked over the store owners cries of terror, “…. I believe I am going to enjoy this very much!”

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Chapter End Notes

....eeek! I mean, Freya was never someone you wanted to piss off. But now..... fuck!

Hope you all enjoyed this short update, and I'd love to hear your thoughts and questions. Not least of which because, I've missed you all :-)

**************************************************
Chapter 26.

Chapter Summary

**Previously on What Lies Within**

1. Freya willingly submitted herself to the controlling Blood-Bond after several days of being tortured and assaulted by the immortal Jarls.
2. Keelin found out that she was somehow pregnant, despite her and Freya not having planned for it, nor having any relations with a man.
3. After discovering that the witch was being controlled by the Jarl's, Alanna swore to Freya that she would do whatever it took to protect Keelin from harms way.
4. Freya infiltrated Julietta Assel's store in the 7th quarter, after learning that the woman was possibly connected to the fabled artefact of protection - the Nazirul. The confrontation turned deadly.
5. Keelin set out on a hunt to find one of the last remaining Wolf Sage's, after learning from the Elder Mary that her baby might have connections to the tragic events of Lena, and her unborn child.

Chapter Notes

Howdy folks.... and welcome to Chapter 26 of my tale.

So, as promised, I managed to get this chapter finished a lot quicker than the last one. Granted - it still took just under a month to complete, but I can safely say that this time it was because it has genuinely taken me that long to write it. At just over 22,000 words, its my longest update to date.

As promised, here is where you will find out about how Keelin's baby has come to life. Please - bear with it. Theres a lot of "folklore" to fit in, and I know if you guys are anything like me when reading fan-fiction, you tend to skim read over the lenghty, descriptive paragraphs. But please, try and make sure to read it all - as its going to be very important in the upcoming chapters, and indeed, in the 3rd and final installement of this Trillogy!

**IMPORTANT** Also, before you read the last scene of this chapter (scene 4.) make sure to go back and re-read the Epilogue of "The Evil Within" - as the events that happened with Freya and the Ominous Seer under the loud nightclub - take place right before scene 4. of this Chapter! It will help save any confusion.

Now, be warned - there are some potential ***TRIGGER*** moments in the final scene of this chapter. Its no where near as bad as the abuse scene / flash backs of Chapter's 11 & 12, but I still feel the need to forewarn folks, just in case.

Right - now that's all said and done, all thats left is for me to do is wish you a happy "early" Halloween! I hope you enjoy this cram packed chapter!
Chapter 26.

1.

“Seriously…. him?!”

Alanna’s low whisper carried through the humid sticky air of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi to reach Keelin’s ears, as the two wolves stood side by side staring at the spectacle ahead of them.

“Yeah, that’s him!”

“Huh! Guess I was expecting someone a little…. well…. taller?”

It had taken just over an hour for Keelin to finally find her intended destination within the lesser known area of the New Orleans Bayou, after Alanna had made the pregnant wolf jump by her unexpected appearance. The brunette had definitely seemed irritated by her presence at first, but as the two of them had slowly pushed forward through the dense thicket and vegetation of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi, Alanna had been relieved to detect a change in the scent markers being given off by her friend.

The sharp fragrances of annoyance and frustration had gradually given way to the more palatable aroma of determination – although the Neivera wolf had also detected tones of confusion radiating off her friend as well.

Alanna had not had time, however, to further question Keelin on the fact that she had not appeared to be able to scent her approach, as the older wolf had quickly launched into explaining exactly who it was she was searching for in this creepy part of the Bayou.

“So, you think this old, magical wolf-dude will know how it is you came to be knocked up?!”

Alanna asked, as Keelin finished giving her an overview of what Mary had told the Malraux wolf earlier that afternoon.

“Could you please not use the term Knocked Up!”, Keelin quickly berated, whipping her head around to scowl at her younger friend. “You make it sound like I went out and had unprotected teenage sex with some random guy in a bar!”

“Sorry!” Alanna muttered, holding her hands up in supplication as she continued to follow in Keelin’s wake. “My bad!”

“And he’s not magical!” Keelin continued irritably, as she turned her attention back to pushing through the latest thorned bush attempting to block her way. “At least…. I don’t think he is. Mary said that Wolf Sages are still pure-bread wolves, with no actual intrinsic power of their own. They are just well read on the whole subject and history of witches and their magic.”

“Right, so they’re like…. the nerds of our species then!”

Alanna could practically hear the older wolf roll her eyes at her remark, as Keelin continued on ahead of her without acknowledging the comment.

“I have to admit though - the closer I get to this Wolf Sage’s cabin, the more I’m beginning to think that just going home and coming clean to Freya would be the safer course of action. She’s a powerful witch after all, and may well know of something herself with regards to…..”
“NO!”

Alanna’s sudden outburst caused Keelin to stop dead in her tracks and turn towards the younger wolf with her eyes wide and mouth slightly ajar.

“No?!"

“Er, well…. w-what I mean is....” Alanna stammered, as her mind raced to find a plausible explanation for her negativity. “I’m sure Freya has a lot on her plate right now…. you know…. bad ass witch trying to protect her family from the world n’all…. and trying to come to terms with everything she’s been through…. I…. I just think that she probably already has way too much on her mind…. you know....”

The Neivera wolf’s words trailed off as she finally looked up from the ground that she’d been staring at intently, and met Keelin’s perplexed gaze.

“Since when have you cared so much about Freya’s wellbeing?” the older wolf asked as she continued to stare at Alanna in confusion. “And wasn’t it only yesterday that you were telling me that Freya had a right to know about the new life now growing inside of me?!”

“Oh…. y- yeah, well…. of course she does!” Alanna quickly back tracked, as she felt her neck begin to flush a deep shade of flustered red. “I mean, she’s your partner n’all, of course she needs to know eventually. But I guess…. well I guess I’ve just had more time to think about it since then, you know. I... well, you kinda caught me off guard yesterday with the whole “I’m pregnant” declaration. You’ve gotta give a girl sometime to process that kind of g-bomb!”

“G-bomb?!?”

“Yeah, you know – gossip bomb!”

“Riiight!” the older wolf drawled, her look turning to exasperation. “Alanna, you were the one who said that you had already guessed I was pregnant. Something about my wolf’s pheromones changing – which I’m still not convinced about by the way! And now your saying that I surprised you?!”

“Fuck…. I did say that didn’t I…. ha, of course!” Alanna laughed nervously. “I guess what I mean is…. um....”

“Alanna!”

Keelin’s stern voice quickly brought the younger wolf’s rambling to a halt.

“Just stop for a second, and take a breath!” the older wolf sighed, clearly irritated by the turn of conversation. “I already have a headache coming on, and your nonsensical rambling is doing nothing to help it!”

“Right…. sorry!” Alanna muttered, cursing herself internally whilst drawing in a deep, steadying breath. “All I mean, is that I think you should listen to your Elder’s advice and talk to this Wolf Sage dude first – before approaching Freya. The more information that you have on the how and why of your pregnancy, the more equipped you will be to answer all of the questions that Freya and the Mikaelsons will no doubt have when they eventually find out about it. And what with all of the chaos and turmoil that blondie has been through recently, I think it would be best for both you AND her if at least one of you was fully clued up when it comes to the inevitable “we’re having a child” conversation!”
A few seconds of silence passed between the wolves as Keelin stared at Alanna with raised brows.

“You know,” Keelin finally began as a small smile started to tug at her lips, “I think that’s the most sensible thing that I have ever heard you come out with!”

A huff of nervous laughter escaped over the younger wolf’s lips as a small flush of heat spread across her cheeks.

“And I can’t believe I’m actually going to say this”, Keelin continued as she turned back to face her intended destination, “but I think that you’re probably right. Freya deserves the truth – whatever that may be – and not another mysterious issue to be worrying her already troubled mind over.”

As the two of them had begun to push forward through the Sa Ki Mal Peyi once more, Alanna had felt a wave of nervous relief wash over her as she had let out a shaky breath.

And now – as she stood gawking at the short, aging, grey-haired dwarf that Keelin claimed to be the Wolf Sage whom Mary had been referring to – she hoped that whatever this strange guy’s story turned out to be, it would keep her friend occupied and away from the city for a good period of time.

She had to try and prevent Keelin from being alone with Freya – at least until the blonde managed to find the protection Amulet that she was searching for. Alanna knew that it was her only hope of protecting Keelin from the powerful dark magic that appeared to be digging its claws into the Mikaelson witch.

*God only knows she wouldn’t have a hope of stopping Freya in person, if the witch totally lost herself to the darkness and tried to harm her fiancé. She’d try though…. for Keelin’s sake, she’d try!*

“It is just you two wolves?”

Alanna was abruptly pulled from her thoughts as the questioning, crackled voice of the old Wolf Sage caused her to startle.

Keelin glanced briefly to her side at Alanna, before scanning her gaze over the trees and bushes that surrounded the small clearing in which they now stood.

“You…. were expecting someone else?” the Malraux wolf questioned slowly, caution licking at her words as her brow creased towards the Wolf Sage.

“Hmmmm,” the dwarf hummed thoughtfully, as his eyes narrowed in assessment over Keelin. “Perhaps not.”

A low growl began to rumble deep in the back of Alanna’s throat as she watched the Wolf Sage studying her friend with what appeared to be keen interest.

Keelin had told her on their way here, to be on the lookout for a small wooden hut. One that was apparently so densely covered in thick moss and leafy foliage, that it could be easily missed as it hid in amongst the rest of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi’s thick undergrowth.

It had turned out, however, that neither wolf had had to concentrate too hard on their search, for they had practically bumped into the Wolf Sage as they emerged from a particularly troublesome thorned thicket that had managed to snag a piece of clothing on each of them.
He had just been stood there – outside of his small, poorly constructed shack – stoically staring out into the Bayou as though waiting on the arrival of someone.

*Or something!* Alanna had thought to herself, as she had taken in the dwarf’s haggard appearance for the first time.

And now, as the Wolf Sage continued to scrutinise Keelin with his small, grey beady-eyes, Alanna’s growl began to intensify.

_She did not have a good feeling about this…. this…. whatever he was!_

“I see that you brought a guard dog this time!” the Wolf Sage mused at Keelin as he continued his inspection of her. “And here was I thinking that our last meeting went well!”

“Last meeting?!” Alanna questioned quietly, tilting her head in Keelin’s direction despite not taking her alert eyes off the dwarf.

“I was told by an Elder that you might be able to provide some answers for me”, Keelin addressed the dwarf in a firm manner - appearing to ignore both the Wolf Sage’s and Alanna’s remarks completely. “About a…. predicament, that I have come to find myself in.”

Despite the confident tones of her voice, Alanna began to pick up on anxious scent markers slowly beginning to mix into Keelin’s sweat.

Something that the Wolf Sage across from them appeared to notice as well.

“Tell me - what has you so nervous, my dear?” the man croaked, as the deep pocketed wrinkles lining his forehead creased in thought. “Have the stakes been raised since we last met?”

“Seriously, who is this creep Keelin?” Alanna blurted out, no longer attempting to keep her voice low. “And why is he talking like the two of you are old acquaintances?!”

“Enough!”

The Malraux wolf’s sudden outburst caused Alanna to momentarily tear her eyes away from the aging dwarf, and glance cautiously at her friend.

“It has already been a very long day, and I am not in the mood for mind games!” Keelin stated, glowering at the Wolf Sage. “Can you help me or not?!”

“Um…. Keelin”, Alanna whispered out of the side of her mouth, despite knowing the vertically challenged wolf in front of her could probably still hear her words just fine. “I’m not so sure we should trust this…. erm…. guy, with the details of your pregnancy. He seems….”

“Pregnant?!” the Wolf Sage exclaimed loudly, cutting Alanna off.

The dwarf’s whole posture suddenly seemed to change, as Alanna watched his face light up with apparent enthused curiosity. Gone was the hunched, arched pose of an old aging man well into his twilight years – only to be replaced with a stance that would have been better suited to a young, vibrant adolescent.

All be it a short one.

“Yes yes, tell me about your pregnancy my dear”, he continued directly to Keelin, once again ignoring Alanna’s presence. “Tell me!”
Throwing a quick scowl towards her younger friend, Keelin let out a heavy sigh before addressing the Wolf Sage with the same no-nonsense tone as earlier.

“It would seem that I have somehow managed to conceive a child, without having had any relations with a male partner,” the Malraux wolf stated, as hardened eyes bore into the dwarf. “And after hearing the tale of “La Legende Du Lou Honteux” from an Elder, I believe…. or rather I suspect, that the common denominator between the pregnancy in that tale, and my own, is the presence of magic at the point of conception.”

Alanna briefly quirked an eyebrow towards Keelin, before turning her alert scrutiny back on the Wolf Sage.

*Does she think that Freya somehow…. whoa…. what?!*

“Magic?” the Wolf Sage croaked, as grey eyes glistening with childlike excitement came to rest on Keelin’s stomach. “What kind of magic?”

“Keelin, I think we should lea……”

“My female lover is a witch”, the Malraux wolf stated, cutting off Alanna’s whispered protests once again. “And the two of us were…. were making love on the night that I suspect the new life within me was conceived.”

Alanna watch on as the excitement that had been present in the old dwarf’s eyes quickly diffused – replaced with what looked to be disappointment.

“I am afraid you are mistaken,” the Wolf Sage sighed, before slowly turning away from the two wolves and slowly beginning to make his way back to his hut’s entrance. “No single mortal Witch is powerful enough to satisfy my liege’s needs.”

*His liege’s needs? What the…?!*

“Awesome, we were wrong. It happens! Now can we leave?!“ Alanna implored, turning to Keelin and placing a hand on the older wolf’s arm.

Quickly shrugging off her friend’s touch, Keelin took a determined step towards the retreating Wolf Sage - seemingly desperate to stop him from disappearing inside of his hut.

“What if that mortal witch was a Mikaelson?!” the Malraux wolf called out.

Stopping in his tracks, the old dwarf’s body went rigidly still.

“Freya Mikaelson?” he questioned, without turning back to look at Keelin. “First born witch of Esther and Mikael?”

“Yes,” Keelin replied quickly.

Alanna watched on apprehensively as the Wolf Sage twisted his short frame back towards her and Keelin – excitement once again building within the grey-eyed gaze that fell back upon her friend’s stomach.

“And this conception – it happened on the night of the recent Harvest Moon?”

“Yes, it…. well, I suspect it did,” Keelin confirmed, as she brought one of her hands to rest over her belly.
Once more studying Keelin’s stomach with intense scrutiny, the aging dwarf began to slowly walk over to her – causing another deep growl to begin rumbling in the back of Alanna’s throat.

_Her animal spirit was agitated! It did not like this one bit… something about this ancient, creepy wolf just didn’t smell right! In fact… nothing about the Sa Ki Mal Peyi had smelt right since the moment she had first found herself ensnared within it, trying to locate Keelin._

“Surely not…. can it be?”, the Wolf Sage muttered, apparently to himself as his focus remained on Keelin’s belly. “Can it finally be, after all these centuries?!”

“Can what be?” Keelin questioned, throwing Alanna a quick look of confusion before returning her stare down to the dwarf that now stood just a foot in front of her.

“Qui natus es Lunam!”, the Wolf Sage said in obvious awe.

“Oh great, Latin!” grumbled Alanna, as she once again placed an imploring hand on her friend’s arm. “Nothing good ever follows when the creepy weirdo’s start spouting Latin, Keelin! Let’s go!”

“Go?” the old dwarf scoffed, as he finally tore his eyes away from Keelin’s stomach to look up at her face. “Why on earth would you leave, when I am the one who can give you all of the answers you have been searching for?!”

Noting that doubt had started to bleed into the Malraux wolf’s chestnut eyes, the Wolf Sage began to reach out a small, arthritic riddled hand towards Keelin’s stomach.

“Back off!” Alanna growled loudly, lashing out in a blur of speed to shove the old dwarfs withered hand away.

Jerking his arm back towards his chest, the Wolf Sage took an unsteady step away from his two visitors.

“Of course, if you’d rather listen to your rabid friend”, he croaked as he began to turn back towards the moss covered shack, “you can feel free to leave without the knowledge of how you came to be pregnant with the majestic legacy that I suspect now grows within you.”

“Majestic Legacy!?” Alanna scoffed, rolling her eyes towards the dwarf. “Oh please…. surely you don’t think that just because you use some grandiose words, we are going to….?”

“Tell me!” Keelin interrupted, pulling away from her friend’s side and taking a step towards the Wolf Sage.

It was now Alanna’s turn to scowl at her companion.

“Seriously…. are you kidding me?! Keelin, this vertically challenged douchbag will say anything that he can think of to keep you here! So, he can…. can…. well, no doubt do something evil and sinister!”

“Quite a bold statement”, the dwarf cackled, looking directly at Alanna for the first time since they had arrived outside of the old man’s hut. “Coming from someone who sold their soul to be in league with the Hollow!”

“What?!” Alanna growled - her hands instinctively bunching into fists at her side.

As the yellow tones of her wolf’s sight began to bleed into her irises, she took a determined step towards the Wolf Sage.
“Alanna, enough!” Keelin barked, throwing up an arm to block the younger wolf’s advance towards the dwarf. “I came here for answers, and I am not leaving without them! Let the man speak!”

“But…” she began to protest, only for the remaining words to die in her mouth as she turned and saw the underlying pleading look in her friend’s eyes. “Ugh… fine! But if he makes one wrong move towards you, or starts mumbling some hee-be-jee-be voodoo crap in Latin again, I swear to God I will rip the freaky midgets throat right out!”

“Quite the pleasant one, isn’t she!” the Wolf Sage mused – narrowed eyes smirking at Alanna.

“Please, just tell me what you think it is that you know about my pregnancy!” Keelin sighed, lowering her arm away from Alanna and turning her full attention back to the dwarf. “How is this…. this life growing within me possible?”

“It is possible my dear,” the old dwarf began, turning his full attention back to Keelin, “because you have been chosen by the almighty goddess herself, Selene!”

“Selene?” Alanna questioned, her eyebrows rising. “As in the lunar goddess, Selene?”

“It would appear that the adolescent whelp is not as completely obtuse as she first seems!”

“Hey!” Alanna protested, scowling fiercely once again at the old man.

“Yes,” the Wolf Sage continued, locking eyes with Keelin, “Selene - our magnificent lunar deity! As I am sure you both know, werewolves have always been ruled by the cycle of the Moon, thanks to a curse placed upon the very first of our kind centuries ago by the powerful spirit known as the Hollow. However, what most pack members do not know – even the so-called Elders that live amongst us – is that the lunar goddesses’ rule over wolves began thousands of years before the Hollow even came into existence.”

Smiling knowingly at the now blank expressions upon Keelin and Alanna’s faces, the old dwarf slowly hobbled over to a large moss-covered rock that lay just to the side of the small hut’s entranceway. Heaving himself up onto the rough stone surface, the Wolf Sage made a show of attempting to smooth out the numerous wrinkles in his grey pants, before continuing with his address.

“To understand Selene’s iron gripped regime over the wolves, however, one would first have to go back to the time of the start of the fierce sibling rivalry between her, and her twin brother - Helios. Born as a result of the love between the two Greek Titans - Hyperion and Theia - Selene and her twin brother could not have been more opposite in nature, and notoriously competed for their parent’s affection from the very moment that they came into existence. Helios - a fiery and passionate god, who’s energy was so bright that it burnt the eyes of mortals whenever they gazed up at Mount Olympus in an attempt to see their gods – was tasked by his Titan parents with providing the heat and energy required by all living creatures that resided on earth. Whilst in contrast, Selene – who’s paled skinned beauty was able to light up the whole night’s sky with an ethereal glow – was tasked with watching over the mortals of the world during the sleeping hours of her twin brother. Hers was to guide and steer all of the creatures that walked the planet, during the dark and cold hours of her brother’s absence.”

“Yes yes, the gods of the sun and the moon,” Alanna sighed irritably, whilst rolling her eyes at the Wolf Sage. “Two opposite lights destined never to rule at the same time, and never to cross paths save for the brief moments each day when one begins the climb to their throne, and the other begins their descent. Every young pup worth their hide knows this legend, old man!”
“Really?!” the dwarf countered, a slither of irritation beginning to leak into his raspy tone. “And does every pup also know of the moment that Helios condemned his twin sister to an eternal existence of loveless misery and anguish?!”

“Um…. well…. ” the Nievera wolf began, before quickly trailing off as a light shade of red flushed her cheeks.

“You see, despite having been warned by the Titans not to interfere or interact with the mortal beings that she watched over at night, Selene fell hopelessly in love with a human male by the name of Endymion. Enchanted by both his almost god-like beauty, and legendary prowess as a skilled hunter - the lunar god would steal time away from her throne up high to spend with her human lover, down upon the very land she was meant to have been watching over. Endymion, of course, was not aware that the elegant and beautiful woman who had so captured his affections, was in fact one of god’s that he and his tribe worshipped and made sacrifices to on a daily basis. The two lovers would spend time together in small the hours just before sunrise - when Endymion had finished his hunt for the night, and Selene thought that her absence from her throne would not be noticed by the slumbering beings across the world. But of course, the Lunar God’s absence was noticed! By the twin whom she crossed paths with each morning when descending from her throne. After eventually discovering where his sister had been spending the illicit hours spent away from the havens, Helios become incensed with uncontrollable, burning outrage. Instead of reporting his discovery to their Titan parents, however, Helios is said to have bided his time and waited until he knew that his sister’s love for the mortal had reached its peak. Until the two lovers had begun planning on having a child together. You see Helios knew that the one thing Selene craved more than anything else, was to be able to produce a child. And it was the one thing that had been denied to both he and his sister, when they had been bestowed with the task of lighting up the world for all of eternity. Thus, one morning, when Selene had entered into her daytime slumber, Helios guided a pack of feral wolves to where Endymion had also fallen into a deep slumber after a particularly taxing hunt. Unconscious and caught unaware, Endymion was easily overpowered by the hungry wolves, and killed before having any chance to fight back, or cry for help.”

“Sounds like wolves just being wolves to me!” Alanna huffed - shrugging her shoulders when Keelin threw her a disapproving glance. “What? It does! They are wild animals after all…. natural born hunters! Any pack of untamed, starved wolves who came across a meal just lay there - fast asleep - would have done the same. They still would!”

“Yes”, the dwarf continued, waving off Alanna’s remark with a creaking wrist, “but not every pack of wolves discovers and kills the true love of a God! Especially one who always took great precautions to mask his whereabouts to any predators that may pass his resting place during his daytime slumber. Endymion was a well-established hunter – the best of his time. No wolf pack would have just happened to come across his cave, unless they had had a helping hand of someone who knew where to look. The helping hand of someone who was determined to punish his twin sister for going against the eternal laws of the Titans.”

Clearing his throat, the Wolf Elder turned his attention back to Keelin.

“That very next evening, unaware of her brother’s betrayal, Selene arrived for the planned meeting with her lover - only to discover that same pack of wolves lay feeding on Endymion’s remains with his life blood spilt all over their pelts. Enraged with grief and sorrow, Selene slaughtered each and every wolf present – tearing them apart limb by limb as her howls of rage echoed out across the night sky. It is said that the Lunar Goddess did not return to her throne for over thirty nights following the discovery of her lover’s decimated body – plunging the world into an abyss of impenetrable darkness during the hours that the Sun was not high in the sky. Finally growing concerned over the new imbalance of the world of which they ruled, the Titans summoned both
Helios and Selene to the celestial kingdom, high at the top of Mount Olympus. Demanding an explanation for the disruption, Hyperion and Theia eventually heard the sordid confessions of both of their children. One telling how she had engaged in a forbidden love affair with a human mortal, whilst the other confessing his part in orchestrating the barbaric death of that same earth-bound being. The Titans were appalled at the twins, and executed punishment in equal measure to both siblings. Helios and Selene were forbidden from ever returning to Mount Olympus, and condemned to a life permanently sat on their celestial thrones. No longer would each God get a period of rest whilst the other ruled true - instead now having to govern over a different half of the world to their sibling, on a rotational basis. Whilst Helios’s fire burnt bright over one half of existence, Selene’s ethereal beauty would light up the night’s skies over the other. Never again would they descend down from the heavens that they ruled. And never again would either be allowed to meddle with the heart of a mortal.”

“Sounds… extreme!” muttered Alanna, more to herself than to either of the two wolves near her.

“I am still confused”, stated Keelin – speaking for the first time since the Wolf Sage had begun his tale. “What has any of this got to do with my impossible pregnancy?”

“Ah, we are getting to that part! You see, whilst Selene may have been forbidden to interact with the lives of any human mortals that walked the earth, the Titan’s had not stripped her or her brother of the powerful Astral-Influence that they had both been born with. Nor had they been forbidden from using that influence on any other living creature that roamed the planes. Still enraged at Helios and the animals that he had used to slaughter her lover, Selene is said to have cursed every remaining wolf that existed, into forever being in her debt and servitude. You see, she planned on eventually using her brother’s own tools of destruction against him, and vowed to spend her immortal existence waiting for the right moment to strike. And she did get that revenge in small ways over the centuries, whilst continuing to plot her brother’s overall demise. Any time Selene discovered that Helios was favouring a particular tribe or clan with a healthy harvest to feed their young and livestock, she would draw upon her curse over the wolves and have a pack infiltrate the mortal village – slaughtering livestock and children alike, whilst the farmers and villagers slept soundly in their beds.”

“Eeesh, nice! Guess that’s where our kind got the “Big Bad Wolf” rep from then!” Alanna grumbled, whilst rubbing at the back of her neck with one hand.

“Of course, to Selene - the livestock and children’s deaths were just mere petty entertainment”, the Wolf Sage continued. “A way to help keep the burning hate for her brother under some semblance of control. But she was always on the look-out for a way to hurt Helios’s reign over the daylight hours further. A way to make her brother suffer the heartache and loss that she had been forced to endure after the murder of Endymion. And that chance first presented itself to her one night during the human century 500AD. A particularly powerful witch that had been betrayed by her own tribe, called out to the Lunar Goddess with her dying breaths – begging the deity to help her curse those who had murdered her, and every generation of their descendants from that day forth. In exchange for the “wolf” curse, the Witch promised to relinquish all of her ancient power and fuse it with the God’s, instead of taking it with her to the grave. The result of this proposed union of the Witch’s primordial power with the Celestial Force living within Selene, would have been the birth of a new species. The birth of a child in the Goddesses own image – something that the dying Witch knew Selene still craved more than anything else.”

“Let me guess,” Alanna scoffed, scowling as she remembered the Nievera pack’s own foolish pact. “This Witch was the Hollow – and she didn’t hold up her end of the bargain?!”

“No,” the Wolf Sage sneered, distaste clearly evident in his voice. “The Witch did not. After the
Werewolf Curse was successfully cast, the witch shut down all access to her power reserves, and took every ounce of it with her to the grave – thus becoming the powerful spirit known these days as the Hollow. Naturally, Selene was outraged. Not only had she been betrayed by her brother, Helios – she had now also been tricked by a dying mortal. And with no access to the spirit world to exact her revenge on the Witch, Selene once again turned to taking out her frustrations on the creatures that she felt had been instrumental to her torment.”

“The newly cursed werewolves!” Keelin muttered quietly.

Steeling a glance away from the withered dwarf, Alanna saw that her friend was no longer looking directly at the Wolf Sage. Instead her downcast gaze appeared to be fixed solemnly at some point on the foliage covered ground between herself and the dwarf.

“Yes, I am afraid so. You see, despite popular belief, the curse cast by the Hollow had originally only specified that the tribespeople and all future generations would be forced to change into wolf form one night a month. But in her fit of rage at the Hollows betrayal, Selene saw fit to alter the curse, so as to bring even more suffering to those who had been connected to the witch. Instead of just one night a month, the Goddess forced the tribespeople into their wolven forms for the full three-night duration of her monthly celestial peak. And instead of the cursed humans seamlessly changing from their two-legged bodies into a four-legged beast, Selene made sure that they would feel every single bone in their body break. Every single muscle tear that was required for the transformation, and every single tendon rip!”

“So, you’re telling me that our whole transformation process was originally going to be pain free?” Alanna asked incredulously. “Well…. fuck!”

“But Selene’s brief encounter with the Hollow had not been completely fruitless,” the Wolf Sage continued, ignoring Alanna’s brief outburst. “The Witch and Selene’s minds had combined for only the briefest moment, during the few seconds that it took for them to forge the Werewolf Curse. But it had been long enough for Selene to see that the Hollow had been telling the truth – if enough concentrated primordial power was combined with the Goddesses own celestial force, it would forge a new species of being. A new genus of life.”

Oh…. boy….

Taking a step closer to Keelin, Alanna saw that although her friend’s gaze had not wavered or lifted from the ground, the Malraux wolf’s face had blanched several shades lighter at hearing the dwarfs last words.

“Of course, that did not mean that such a union was going to be easy for Selene to orchestrate”, the Wolf Sage continued with a sigh. “Not only did she have to find another Witch gifted with the same high volume of primordial power running through their veins, but the Goddess quickly learnt that the fusion of life would only be successful if both parties submitted their power willingly, and if the union was facilitated via flesh and blood.”

“Via flesh and blood?” Alanna asked, finding herself suddenly confused. “I thought you said that all Selene needed to produce this…. this new species, or whatever…. was to combine a whole load of witchy power with a dollop of celestial glitter, in some kind of magical mixing bowl, and VOILA…. baby-a-la-god!”

The old dwarf flashed her a quick look of pure disdain, before continuing.

“The new life would still have to be nurtured. Still have to be developed and cultivated before it could be born into the world. Even the Titans themselves had to go through the process of being
“pregnant”, before the birth of their God children. Selene knew from seeing into the Hollows mind, that the fusion of primordial power with her celestial energy would create the new spark of life – but that life would still need a mother to carry it to term!”

“Lena.”

Keelin’s whispered statement was so softly spoken, that Alanna would have missed it were it not for her enhanced hearing.

“Yes,” the dwarf confirmed, nodding gravely towards the Malraux wolf. “After centuries of trying, and failing, to find another witch powerful enough to facilitate the life-forge, it occurred to Selene that perhaps the vast quantity of power required did not need to come from just one being. That if a coven of witches - each formidable in their own right – were able to combine their power with her own celestial energy via a willing carrier, then it might just be enough for the creation of life to be successful.”

“But…. I thought you said that everyone involved in this celestial booty-call needed to be totally on board with it?” Alanna glowered. “Because I got news for you, fella - I might have only heard snippets of that whole “Shameful Wolf” story on the way over here, but it sure didn’t sound like that Lena chick was a willing participant to me!”

“Ha, is that what your Elder told you?!” the Wolf Sage scoffed, his attention remaining solely on Keelin. “They always think of themselves as such righteous know-it-all’s! Omitting facts, and twisting the truth to better suit pack-integrity!”

Finally breaking her troubled stare away from the ground, Keelin lifted her head to frown warily at the dwarf.

“Are you implying that she lied to me?”

“Oh, I have no doubt that she probably told you some semblance of the truth,” the Wolf Sage replied, making a show of sniffing the air indignantly. “But I can assure you - Lena’s tale has been twisted and distorted so many times over the years by pack Elder’s, it is almost unrecognisable to those of us who know the truth!”

“Oook then…. so, what’s “your” version of events?!” Alanna sighed, feeling herself becoming more and more irritated by the old man with every condescending word he said.

She hadn’t even met the Wolf Elder, Mary – but she knew damn well that she’d trust what the old lady had to say over this weird creep. Any day!

“Lena was not quite the innocent virgin that todays documented version of the legend tries to portray! Far from it in fact!” the Wolf Sage said with a frown, as he re-adjusted his position on the moss covered bolder. “The wolf had taken several male lovers, during her time spent in the camps on the front-lines of the Great Pack-Wars. All of her sordid trysts, however, were cleverly concealed from her father and the rest of the pack - both by the young woman herself, and the men whom she chose to take to her bed. Not that it was that hard for Lena to convince her male suitors to remain quiet about their love making – every male in the North East Atlantic pack lived in equal parts of awe and fear of their Alpha – Baudet. His was an iron-gripped rule over both the male and female wolves within his command. None dared to step out of line, or be cause for his anger, as the repercussions for doing so often ended in death. As I am sure his own daughter, Lena, could attest to – had she not been killed by his order!”

“Hold up – so if what you claim is true, surely Lena’s baby could have been sired by any number
of wolves from her own pack?” Keelin questioned, as her scowl deepened. “It was probably not magic induced at all!”

“Ah, you see my dear wolf – that is where you are wrong!” the Wolf Sage chuckled, clearly enjoying the moment. “For unbeknownst to her own father – and indeed anyone else in the pack, other than their own “esteemed” Elder – Lena was barren!”

“Barren?” Alanna inquired. “What’s the hell is that meant to mean?!”

“It means that she was incapable of having children” Keelin answered quietly, before the old Dwarf had chance to respond. “That her ovaries didn’t produce eggs.”

“Ooooh….” Alanna mouthed, as her brows raised in understanding. “Well…. fuck!”

“So, you see, Lena could have had over a hundred male lovers,” the old dwarf continued, as he shrugged his shoulders, “and it would have made no difference!”

“Ok, so the girl enjoyed to have a little fun in the sack – so what?!” Alanna scoffed, throwing her arms up in the air. “That doesn’t mean that she consented to being tied-down on an alter to have several witches and a God shove some mystical baby up her hoo-hoo!”

“No! But her nightly prayers begging Selene, the Goddess of the Moon, to aid her in bearing a child despite being barren - did!” the Wolf Sage retorted, without missing a beat. “And believe me, there was absolutely no objection on Lena’s behalf. She welcomed the influx of power that flowed into her with open arms – coveted it in fact! Selene had asked over and over again for Lena to open up to her. To surrender her body, and bask in the glory of the union of power within her. And so, Lena did…. eagerly!”

“The voice…. Keelin whispered weakly, seemingly to no one other than herself. “….it promised the world.”

“Huh?!” Alanna said, turning to face her friend. “What voice?”

Getting no response from the Malraux wolf, who seemed to have retreated deep into her own thoughts once again – Alanna turned back to the haggard old dwarf, just in time to see him smirk knowingly at Keelin.

“Ok ok…. let’s say for one second that we believe any of this crap. Your…. what? Implies that this is what has happened to Keelin? That Freya fused her magic with the energy of an actual God…. inside of Keelin…. to make the baby that’s now in her belly?!”

No response came from the Wolf Sage, as he continued to stare shrewdly at Keelin.

“See, now I know for a fact that’s not possible! Because I don’t know if you’ve ever met Freya Mikaelson fella, but she sure isn’t someone who can be tricked into doing anything that she doesn’t want to! And there’s not a chance on this earth that blondie would have agreed to aid some crazy-ass-bitch God in her bizarre Frankenstein experiment. Especially knowing it would involve hurting her fiancé. And besides all of that, you said that ALL parties had to be willing participants. Keelin sure as hell didn’t agree to any of this! Right Keelin?”

When no response came from the Malraux wolf, Alanna turned to face her head on.

“Right Keelin??” she repeated again, a nervous urgency edging into her voice as she implored her
friend to agree with her.

Slowly raising her gaze, Keelin met the Wolf Sages stare.

“I…. didn’t know….” the Malraux wolf breathed shakily - eyes wide and full of fear. “I…. just wanted to feel Freya’s power rushing through me…. I…. didn’t know what it meant…..”

“Didn’t you?!” the old dwarf countered, smirking at Keelin as he pushed himself up off the boulder and took a step towards her.

“No…. I…. I was just…. we…. were just…. lost in the moment,” Keelin continued, now shaking her head as though to try and clear her thoughts. “….and the voice, it…. it begged me to surrender myself to it…. but…. but I didn’t agree to…. I…. at least I don’t think I agreed to…. oh god…..”

“Keelin?”

Alanna’s voice had lost all of its previous edge, as she watched her usually head-strong and confident friend start to unravel right in front of her.

Humming shrewdly to himself, the Wolf Sage came to a stop in front of Keelin and pointed towards her stomach with a crooked, twig like finger.

“You wanted your lover’s power to fill and saturate you. You wanted it to fuse with your wolf spirit’s own essence”, he croaked with almost child-like reverence. “And as you should know by now my dear, a werewolf’s essence is merely just an extension of the great Lunar Goddesses energy. Of Selene’s essence!”

Alanna could see tears beginning to shimmer at the edges of Keelin’s eyes, as she stood staring down at the dwarf in stunned silence.

“Ok…. this is the biggest load of crap I have ever heard!” the Nievera wolf exclaimed loudly, letting all of the contempt and mistrust that she now held for the dwarf bleed into her voice.

“Titans…. Gods…. Magical babies made out of fairy dust?! Is that the best you can honestly come up with?! Cos I gotta tell you short-ass, I’ve heard more sense being spouted by the drunken bums being thrown out of Delilah’s Strip Club at 4am in the morning! Besides, if the tales passed down by Wolf Elders can get distorted and warped over time, what’s to say that the ones you Magic Geeks tell each other don’t too?! What makes your bullshit any more believable than theirs??”

“Because you foolish, insolent, poor excuse for a wolf…..” the Wolf Sage sneered, as his mouth widened into an impossibly sharp grin, “…. I was there!”

Faster than the eye could register, the dwarf suddenly lashed out with fingers topped with razor sharp talons. A shrill cry of pain ripped from Keelin’s throat, as the claws sliced effortlessly across both of her shins – slicing open skin and muscle, and causing blood to spray out across the ground.

Before Alanna’s mind had time to fully register what was happening, the Wolf Sage had stepped around the Malraux wolf in a blur of speed as she collapsed down onto her knees. Repositioning himself at her back and now level in height with his prey, the dwarf grabbed a fist full of Keelin’s hair and yanked back on her head.

A fierce growl ripped forth from Alanna’s throat as her mind finally caught up with the sudden turn in events. Eyes instantly sharp in focus, the Nievera wolf bared sharp canines of her own as she made to lunge for Keelin’s attacker.

“DON’T!” the Wolf Sage snarled loudly, locking feral red irises onto Alanna’s own amber eyes.
“Or I’ll tear out her throat right here!”

Growling ferociously, Alanna’s gaze immediately fell to Keelin’s neck, where several long talons now rested as they applied pressure over the Malraux wolf’s jugular artery.

As her mind began to whirl with a mixture of outrage and panic, Alanna glanced rapidly between the small dots of blood beginning to form under the dwarfs’ claws, and Keelin’s pain riddled gaze.

She needed to distract the tiny shit somehow…. just long enough for her to get Keelin out from under his grasp…. long enough to…. god she looks so scared…. if he so much as….

“I’m going to rip your fucking head off!” Alanna spat, feeling her wolf-spirit’s anger bubbling to boiling point within her.

“I’m sure even an imbecilic whelp like yourself, can grasp that you’d never make it in time!” the Wolf Sage warned, tilting his head at her. “She’d be dead before your feet even left the ground!”

He was right…. gods be dammed, the little fuck was right. She knew she was fast…. even amongst her kind, she was faster than most. But the dwarf’s claws were already digging in to Keelin’s flesh. Fuck…. FUCK!

“What the hell can you possibly hope to gain from this?!” Alanna tried to reason, whilst attempting to keep her raging wolf at bay.

Not now…. not yet….

“The delivery of Selene’s child, of course!” the sneering dwarf laughed, as he flexed his talons on Keelin’s neck. “You think that it is co-incidence, whelp, that your friend here has found her way to me twice since becoming pregnant?!”

Ignoring the Wolf Sage’s goading, Alanna locked eyes with Keelin and tried her best to convey a sense of hope over to her friend.

You’re going to be ok…. I’ve got this…. I swear I’ve got this…. urgh, somehow….

Fear and panic mixed with pain in Keelin’s eyes, as Alanna watched her friend try not to swallow or move a muscle - no doubt in fear of pushing the talons digging into her neck further in.

“Well let me tell you, there is no such thing as co-incidence!” the red-eyed dwarf continued, laughing harshly. “My liege has guided her…. sent her to me for safe guarding until the child’s birth. I have waited centuries for Selene to finally find another. Waited and watched, as she searched and scoured the lands for a witch with enough raw power within her to make the union work. Ha, and would you believe…. that witch has been right under my nose over these past few years! Freya Mikaelson…. first born witch of Esther and Mikael. Of course…. OF COURSE! Any Sage worth his salt knows that she is the most powerful of her kind to have walked the earth since…. well since The Hollow! And she went and took a female wolf as her lover…. ha, it could not have been more perfect!”

Alanna was pretty sure that the Wolf Sage was just ranting to himself now, rather than to her or Keelin. Crimson eyes ravenous with radicalism and greed flitted rapidly from side to side, as he ran a tongue over canines far too large for his small mouth.

“Let her go, and maybe we can talk about this….,” Alanna implored, fighting off the urge to wince at her own panicked tone.
Keep it together…. she needs you…. dammit she needs you….

“Ha, what could you possibly offer a God, whelp?! You couldn’t even uphold your end of the bargain that the Nievera pack made with the Hollow! Your worthless to me! You’re not even going to be able to save your friend here from what’s to come. What kind of useless, weak wolf does that make you!?”

“Mmmph…”

A weak groan of protest pushed its way out of Keelin’s throat, causing the tips of the Wolf Sage’s talons to push further into her flesh.

“Now now, easy there!” the dwarf cooed into Keelin’s ear, as a loud whimper of pain escaped over her lips. “You wouldn’t want to harm your little bundle of joy’s chance of fulfilling its destiny now, would you?! You and I are going to take a short walk into my shack, where I can get in touch with the others and….”

“I’m not letting you take her anywhere!” snapped Alanna, edging a step closer as she bared her canines.

“Oh, that’s precious!” the Wolf Sage cackled, as his red eyes honed in on Alanna. “You think that you can stop me!? There is not a werewolf alive who can match my strength and speed. None of your kind could possibly hope to….”

The dwarf’s words were cut off sharply, as his neck and head suddenly twisted violently to the side with a sickening crack.

As Alanna watched on in surprise, one of Keelin’s hands flew up to her throat as the Wolf Sage’s body dropped lifelessly to the ground – revealing the form of a brunette-haired woman who had been knelt behind him.

“How about a Hybrid Wolf Queen, asshole!” the newcomer quipped, as she looked down at the Wolf Sage in disdain.

“H…Hayley!” Keelin coughed, twisting around to look at the woman who had released her from the dwarf’s deadly grip.

The brunette cast a concerned eye over Keelin’s injuries as she helped to pull the Malraux wolf up off the ground, before looking over to a wide-eyed Alanna.

“So…. would someone care to explain what the hell is going on?!”

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2.

Heavy rain splashed relentlessly in Freya’s eyes, as she stood staring blankly at a storefront’s large glass window. Having long since lost any semblance of that mornings style, her sodden blonde hair lay plastered flat against her forehead, as Storm Gelda’s tears ran tiny rivers down her face.

THE MYSTICAL BONE MAN

Large calligraphy letters sprawling across the shops window, spelt out its name in bright golden
yellow – no doubt with the intent of drawing the attention of passers-by to the otherwise dowdy looking building.

Several non-descript artefacts that all appeared to be in varying degrees of decay, were strewn haphazardly across a display shelf on the other side of the glass.

A cracked human skull lay knocked on its side. A tuft of old rabbit’s fur held together with what looked to be twine. A long thin spear, who’s metal tip had long ago been snapped clean in half – leaving just a jagged piece of rusting metal in place of what should have been a sharp arrow head. Half of an old tribal headdress that had lost any semblance of the bright, vibrant colours it must have once been painted in – now just looking grey and tattered in appearance.

Everything seemed as though it would have been better suited for the trash dumpster stood up against the shops side wall, rather than sat on display for potential customers to want to buy. And as Freya scanned her rapidly blinking eyes over the poor selection of goods on offer, it occurred to her that the owner probably thought they served to give the store an “old-fashioned”, shabby-chic charm.

The owner was wrong.

_How had she got here…. to this…. this…. voodoo store??_

Sluggishly turning her head, Freya scanned up and down the storm beaten street in an attempt to try and gain her bearings, and stave off the severe disorientation clouding her mind.

_The Seventh Ward…. she was still in somewhere in the Seventh Ward, where she had…. had…. urgh…._

The witch’s eyes quickly scrunched shut as her mind was bombarded with a sharp, painful memory – one filled with harrowing gut-wrenching screams, and the gory red hues of blood.

So much blood.

_Urgh…. those screams…. those screams were not…. not her own….._

Ever since she had awoken to a world of pain and confusion in St Theodora’s hospital, Freya had been relentlessly plagued with the memories of her own screams echoing out across the dark catacombs of the Blood-Bound Jarls.

Several times a night she would find herself jolting awake with the echo of those tormented cries filling her head, and a sheen of cold sweat covering her body. Even when sat eating breakfast, trying her best to engage with her fiancé in an attempt to ease the worried wolf’s concerns – she had heard them.

Almost every minute of every day, they rang out in her mind - serving as a reminder of what had happened to her at the hands of the Blood-Bound Jarls.

And every minute of every day, she had been forced to relive them.

Until now.

Now…. all she was hearing was the screams of someone else.

_Julietta…. Julietta Assell…. the screams in her head were hers!_
Opening her eyes once more, Freya’s emerald gaze came into focus on her own reflection as it stood staring at her from the voodoo store’s front-window. Rain had long since saturated her clothes, washing away all remnants of what had happened in “Julietta’s Store of Health and Wellbeing”, from the nylon and cotton fibres. But she could still feel it there – the blood and the gore - clinging on to her soul like a sticky, crude oil that would never wash away.

It had been her – stood laughing maliciously at the petite shop assistant as she had screamed and shrieked whilst her body was torn apart.

It had been her – roaring in delight as Julietta’s blood had splattered across her face and clothes, creating a sharp coppery tang in her open mouth.

It had been her – willing more and more of the dark pulsating power to tear into the woman’s flesh, despite Julietta having already screamed out the information that Freya had been looking for.

It had been her – smirking in satisfaction, as she had looked down upon what little remained of the Seer’s body once the obsidian power had had its fill and retreated back into its well.

It’s had been her.

Yet…. not her.

Liar…. it was all you…. you could have stopped at any time…. but you wanted it…. you wanted to hear her suffer… to revel in her pain….

Freya’s eyes scrunched shut once more, as the maleficent voice of the blood-bond began to whisper seductively in her mind.

You are one of them now…. you are like them now…. you belong with them now….

“No….” she breathed out in a whisper, trying desperately to deny what a part of her already knew to be true. “That wasn’t me…. I…. I am not like them…..”

It was you…. you killed her…. her blood is on your hands…. and you enjoyed it!

Heaving out a shaky breath, Freya focused in on her reflection within the shop window once more. A small wave of relief washed over her, when she saw that the eyes staring back at her were the familiar emerald coloured irises that she had known all her life.

“You are in control….” the witch muttered to her mirror image in quiet defiance, despite the continued jeers of the Blood-Bond inside her head. “You are Freya gods damned Mikaelson, and you WILL control this!”

Looking up once more at bold lettering of the store’s name, the witch now solemnly remembered exactly what purpose she had come here for.

The last coherent words to leave Julietta Assell’s mouth before her lungs had filled with blood, had been the name of one of the many voodoo-stores that operated in the city of New Orleans - THE MYSTICAL BONE MAN.

The majority of the Wiccan and Voodoo themed stores that littered the streets of the Big Easy, were nothing more than cash generating gimmicks, owned by human mortals who had never once had a lick of power flow through their bodies. Charlatans and imposters, that earnt their money by fooling gullible tourists into believing that the small trinkets and “spells” they sold in their stores, were authentic mystical items.
In reality, however, they were nothing more than cheap, plastic knock-off’s, made by poorly paid production line workers somewhere in the depths of China.

But there was the odd one – usually found down the lesser trodden back streets and alleys of the city’s supernatural underbelly – that was the “real deal” with regards to the wears they sold. And it was very rare that a tourist managed to find themselves wandering into one of these, just by chance alone.

Most of the genuine stores, however, Freya already knew about – often frequenting them herself to purchase the supplies required for her own spells and incantations.

This, was not one one them.

Drawing in a deep breath, the witch steeled her face into what she hoped was a determined, confident expression, and stepped up to the shops entrance. As she pushed open the storm battered door, a jingling bell fixed onto the frame above signalled her arrival to whomever lay inside.

“Welcome to The Mystical Bone Man!” a deep male voice boomed out from somewhere to her right. “A one stop shop for all of your…..”

The man’s voice trailed off as Freya turned and locked eyes with him across the small, cramped space of the shop.

“Ah…. so it’s you!”

Quirking an eyebrow, the witch tried her best to study the face of the man in the dim light of the dusty store. The tone of his voice had suggested that he knew who she was, but she could not recall having ever seen his chiselled face before that moment.

“I had wondered when this day would come”, he said solemnly, letting the professional smile fall away from his face as he nodded towards Freya. “Though I must admit, I thought you’d be a little more…..”

“More?” Freya questioned in confusion, when the shop owner appeared to be lost for the right word.

“Impressive!” the man finally said, gesturing towards her rain-soaked appearance with a large stocky hand.

Briefly looking down at her pitiful appearance, Freya let out a heavy sigh before locking hardened eyes back onto the man across the room.

“You are the second person today to try and judge me by my appearance,” the witch commented – her voice almost as cutting as the pointed look she now bore into the owner. “And things didn’t end too well for her!”

“Hmmm, clearly!” the man responded, his expression remaining neutral. “Else you would not be here now, stood in my shop!”

“You…. know why I am here?” Freya questioned, still unable to place the store owners face.

“Of course,” the man exclaimed, as though the answer should have been obvious. “Someone with your magnitude of power would only ever be here for one of two reasons. One – you are lost! Or two – the seer known as Julietta Assell has finally drawn her last breath!”
Static energy quickly began to fill the dusty space between them, as Freya narrowed her gaze at the store owner.

“Hey now”, the man said, raising up his palms in supplication, “there’s no need to go all death-dealer on me! I have no quarrel with you, Witch. I was simply making an observation. You’ll have no trouble from me.”

After a heartbeat’s hesitation, Freya began to pull back on her agitated magic, save for a small thin slither of curious power. Letting the invisible whisp float out across the expanse of the shop, the Witch began to casually scan her eyes over the various different wears of the store, as her power attempted to detect what sort of “being” the owner was.

Tentatively tasting and touching, the curious whisp curled its way around the man’s neck and pulse point, before unfurling once more and snaking its way under his open collared shirt.

*Nothing!* She could detect *nothing*, save for a slightly higher than normal body temperature. *And the bitter saltiness of a slowly fading hangover.*

“You know, I usually like to have at least bought a lady dinner before she starts feeling under my shirt!”

*Gods dammit….*

Quickly reeling back her small outreach of power, Freya squirreled away the look of surprise that threatened to betray her face, before landing her eyes back onto the storeowner.

“What are you?”

Smiling, the broad-shouldered man sat himself down onto a tall stool, and placed his large hands down flat onto the apothecary table in front of him.

“Nothing special,” he remarked, with a quick dismissive shrug. “I have no actual power of my own. Certainly nothing in the league of yours. Though I have to say, yours is a…. curious mix. I don’t think I have ever felt anything quite like it before!”

“So, you’re an empath”, Freya stated, as realisation kicked in.

“Close enough,” the shop owner remarked. “Tell me – were you born with such a divisive contrast of power, or did you…. acquire…. part of it along the way?”

The way he had placed emphasis on the word “acquire”, gave Freya the distinct impression that he believed she had obtained part of her magic through nefarious means.

*An assumption that would not have been a million miles from the truth….*

When he received no response, the store owner continued.

“I guess the more interesting question would be - which is the power that you were born with? The generations old, primal force that’s infused with the vivacious seeds of life, or the shadowy, overpowering force that seeks to snuff out all the light around it?!”

“You…. you can distinguish between the two?” Freya asked – a small tremor in her voice betraying her sudden surprise. “They have not merged into one?”

“Hmmm, not quite yet”, the man replied thoughtfully. “Though if I was a betting man, I would say
it won’t be long until they do. I am going to go out on a limb here, and guess that it is the darkness that is the unwelcome squatter in your soul.”

Letting out a shaky breath, Freya felt a small slither of hope begin to unfurl in her chest.

*Maybe there was still time after all…. maybe she would be able to find the Nazirul and ensure Keelin’s safety, before she completely lost herself to the blood-bond’s dominance. Maybe….*

*Foolish…. hope belongs in the hearts of the foolish…. there is no hope for you…. or the love that you attempt to cling on to…..*

“Enough!” the witch abruptly exclaimed, trying to push the incessant ramblings of the bond to the back of her mind.

Fixing her green eyes back onto the store owner, Freya gestured around the shop with a hand.

“Is it here? The item that I seek?” she asked directly, having had enough of beating around the bush. “Hidden somewhere amongst all of this junk and tatt.”

“Ha, straight to the point then,” the man huffed. “Fair enough. No, I am afraid it is not, Witch. As I have said - I have no intrinsic power of my own. They would never have left such a formidable item with someone unable to defend its integrity”

“They?” Freya asked, raising an eyebrow. “Who exactly are…. they?!”

Confusion suddenly broke through the neutral expression that had been resting on the store owners face ever since the witch’s arrival in the shop.

“You don’t know?” he questioned, clearly taken aback by Freya’s ignorance. “You managed to discover and kill Julietta Assell for the information on my location, but yet have no knowledge of the legacy to which she belongs?!”

Tilting her head, Freya simply threw the man a look of thinning patience as she allowed a few sparks of power to dance at her fingertips.

“Like I said, I have no wish to cause a scene!” the store owner quickly clarified, as his eyes flitted between her hands and face. “You have just surprised me, that is all. Most of the glory hunters who devote their lives to searching for the artefact, are well versed in the existence of the Naventi. Though admittedly, none have ever gotten quite as far as you before.”

“The Naventi….” Freya muttered thoughtfully, vaguely recognising the name. “Let me guess, they are a group tasked with keeping the Nazuril hidden from the rest of the world?”

“In a sense”, he said calmly. “And I guess that they are now a Seer down, thanks to yourself.”

“You keep referring to this group as “they”…. are you not a member?” she enquired, watching closely as the store owner smirked in amusement.

“No, Witch. I am not. But that was the whole point – having someone within the chain of secrecy that no hunter of the artefact would ever suspect. Someone that had no traceable lineage back to the original Pretescu tribe, or the family name Asselin. Like I said, you are the first glory seeker to ever make it this far. It is quite impressive really, given your apparent lack of knowledge.”

“I am no glory seeker,” Freya snapped, feeling her control beginning to fray as the blood-bond started to rumble with impatience inside of her. “And I have no interest in any sort of hunt. I simply
need what you have to protect someone I love.”

A heartbeat passed, as the store owner appeared to consider her words.

“...I think I actually believe you,” he finally remarked, nodding towards the engagement ring sitting upon Freya’s finger. “Given the war of power happening inside of you, it would make sense for you to want to protect your significant other from its outcome.”

Suddenly becoming all too aware of the bejewelled band of platinum and its doomed significance, Freya attempted to cover the rings presence with her other hand.

“But you should know, the Seer that does hold it within his protection is not likely to be quite so sympathetic to your cause. I myself have never had the pleasure of meeting him of course. Another safe guard put into place by the Naventi – none of the key players in chain have ever actually met. But I have heard whispers over the years. Murmurs of the man’s ruthlessness and power. He is not someone whom most would cross paths with and live to tell the tale.”

“I am not most people,” Freya stated, her tone both curt and deadly.

“Yes, I can certainly feel that!” the man laughed, though no humour reached his eyes. “Right then, I guess you’ll be needing this.”

Freya’s hands flew up in anticipation, as the store owner suddenly pushed his stool back from the apothecary table and made to jump off its seat.

“Easy there miss,” he quickly implored, becoming rigidly still as his feet connected with the floor. “I am simply getting a piece of paper to write something down for you. As I keep saying, you’ll have no trouble from me.”

Frown deepening, Freya eventually nodded for the man to continue in his actions – though her power remained primed on high alert.

**Kill him…. he can’t be trusted…. kill him before he kills you…. before he alerts the others….**

The witch quickly shook her head in annoyance, as she watched the store owner bend down and pull open one of the apothecary table’s many drawers.

*If the blood-bond was agitated by this man, then maybe he was indeed intending to help her try and protect Keelin. Maybe he….*

“Here, you will need this to be able to enter his lair.”

Breaking out of her thoughts, Freya noted that the store owner appeared to have written something down on a small scrap of paper. One which he was now pushing across the oil stained, oak apothecary table, towards her.

Power surged restlessly under her skin, as she took several careful steps towards the man.

**Mistake…. you’re making a mistake….**

Reaching the table, Freya let her eyes drop down to the piece of paper now just a few inches away from her grasp, and the four words inked messily upon its surface.

“Latin, of course”, the man commented, as he too studied the paper. “And quite harmless when spoken by most. But for someone with enough power flowing through their veins…. well, the words become something completely different.”

Raising her gaze, Freya studied the store owner's features now that she had a better view of them. With a clean-cut, chiselled face, and irises coloured the clearest crystal blue that she had ever seen, the thirty-something man seemed completely out of place in the role that he appeared to have been handed by the Naventi.

Despite his obvious empathic ability to sense the magic flowing through others, the man himself had not been lying when declaring he had no active abilities of his own. Not a lick of power vibrated through his body – something that Freya had once again made sure of, as she had stepped up to the apothecary table. And there was none of the usual tell-tale markers that would have indicated the store owner belonged to either the vampire, or werewolf factions.

Aside from the large muscles that she could see bulging under his thin cotton shirt - indicating that he could probably pack a good punch if caught in a bar scuffle or fight – there was nothing about this mortal that made him stand out as a candidate worthy of protecting a highly coveted, artefact of the gods.

So why had this group…. the Naventi…. chosen him? Why had they entrusted this apparently defenceless, human man, with such an important task?!

“You know, it would be quicker to just ask me!” the store owner said, his deep voice slicing into Freya’s thoughts.

“Ask you what?!”

“The questions that I can clearly see burning in those intense green eyes of yours!” the man stated plainly, as a small smile played at his lips. “I might be able to feel and taste the power that burns through a beings’ veins…. but when it comes to knowing what a woman is thinking, I am afraid I’m just as clueless as the next guy! You’re going to have to actually put those questions into words, if you want an answer.”

“Why you?” Freya asked, deciding to just jump right in. “Why entrust you with this responsibility, instead of a powerful Seer or Witch, who has no connection to the Nazuril’s history. And more importantly, why are you helping me? I thought the whole idea of this Naventi group was to keep the artefact hidden away from the world? Yet here you are, handing over information without the need for me to apply any pressure whatsoever! Why?”

Picking up the scrap of paper, the store owner handed it over to her before sitting himself back down onto the tall stool.

“You mis-understand, witch,” he began, once again smiling at Freya as though the explanation he was about to give should have been the most obvious thing in the world. “It has never been the Navanti’s intention to hide the artefact away from the world forever. Their role is simply to ensure that the Nazirul never falls into the wrong hands. To ensure that it’s power is never harnessed by those wishing to bring chaos and destruction to the natural balance of the world.”

“And…. what? You think yourself qualified to make that call? To judge who wants the artefact for good, and who wants it for evil?” the witch scoffed, still weary of the role the store owner played.

“I simply have the ability to sense the nature of peoples’ true essence. Be that the type of power
that flows through a witch, the mind-altering abilities of a Seer, or the integrity of the soul that remains clinging on within a vampire’s undead body. I can essentially sense the morality of a being. Or indeed, the lack of.”

“Then why aid me?!” Freya asked, her voice raising as exasperation began to leak into her tone. “You yourself said that you can feel darkness inside of me. That I have a mutating power who’s only wish is to snuff out all of the light in the world. That that same darkness will soon engulf me whole. So, what makes you think that I won’t just use the amulet for myself? To prevent anyone being able to stop me as I destroy and kill.”

“Because….” the store owner said, as his crystal blue eyes met her own, “…..there is no power greater than that of love! And I can feel your own primal force clinging onto love with every ounce of energy it has left. You are a good person, Witch – and I know that you will do the right thing when it comes choosing who will wield the amulets power.”

Unable to meet the man’s assessing stare any longer, Freya’s gaze dropped to the piece of paper that she now held in her hands.

“So where exactly am I to use this incantation,” she asked, trying desperately to ignore the blood-bonds jeers as they grew louder and louder in her head.

Love…. love has no place in this world…. love is nothing more than a weakness…. a weakness that will hold you back….

“Ah, well…. I do not actually know the exact location of the Seer’s lair,” the shop owner confessed, as a look of regret flushed over his features. “However, from what information I have picked up on over the years, I believe it to be somewhere within the ninth ward. And if I was to trust my intuition, I would bet that it is somewhere that the hunters would never suspect. Somewhere probably out in the open – public even – instead of hidden away down some dark back-alley.”

Nodding her head, Freya took one last look at the unassuming man’s open face, before turning her back to him and making her way over to the store’s exit.

“I wish you luck, Witch,” the man called after her as she reached the wooden door. “That power mutating within you is a disease. I pray that it does not consume you in the same way it has those bikers!”

Freezing just as her hand came to rest on the brass doorknob, Freya felt the blood-bond within her roar out with anger and rage.

“What did you just say….”

“That…. I hope it does not consume you.” the shop owner repeated, confusion apparent in his voice as to why his remark had caused the Witch to stop dead in her tracks.

A heartbeat of silence passed between them.

“You know - you were pretty accurate in your assessment of me”, Freya muttered darkly - still facing the door as she reached to engage its lock. “All except for one small part.”

Slowly turning on the spot, the Witch fixed her eyes ominously upon the store owner as they began to churn violently with the obsidian black and crimson tones of the blood-bond.

“I am not a good person….”
“I swear…. I never wanted her to get hurt!”

Awkwardly lowering herself down onto the same boulder that the Wolf Sage had used, Keelin winced in discomfort as a jolt of pain shot up both of her shins. Her enhanced immune system had already started healing the two large wounds that had been sliced into her legs, but they were at least a good ten minutes off being fully restored and functional once more.

“I… I didn’t even know that the Hollow’s plan was to have her killed. I…. I mean, I thought it was meant to be the rest of the Mikaelson family instead.”

Letting out a heavy sigh, the Malraux Wolf’s gaze fell to her stomach, and the hand that she had apparently lay across it in some kind of autonomic, protective gesture.

By the Gods, what had her and Freya done?! What had they…. had she…. allowed to be done?!

“Fuck…. n-not that that would have been ok…. of course! They are your family…. a-and I know now that my pack had been tricked into believing they were the enemy. But…. well, you’ve gotta admit…. it’s not like they are completely innocent…. lots of death and murder tends to occur wherever they go….”

Closing her eyes, Keelin inhaled deeply and tried to once again follow the guidance that Mary had given her earlier that day. Unlike when she had been stood by the calm waters of the open Bayou, however, the brunette struggled in her attempt to successfully zone out the out-side world, and simply focus on her own body’s rhythm.

“Um, n-not that I am trying to justify what happened to your daughter…. fuck no…. there is nothing that justifies the killing of an innocent…. and I swear…. had I known it was her that Hatch was going to try and kill, I would have never…. NEVER…. stood by and allowed it….”

Finally latching on the sound of her own heartbeat, Keelin matched her breathing to be in rhythm with its steadily slowing pulse, and let herself be lulled along by its tempo.

Lub-dub.

Lub-dub.

Lub-dub.

Lub….lubdub, lubdub, lubdub…. Dub

There…. there it was…. the fast, yet discreet heartbeat of the new life growing inside of her. Of the new…. new….

“Oh fuck…. you’re going to rip my head off, aren’t you…. urgh…. I mean you have every right to…. but honestly, I swear…. I would never…. EVER…. knowingly hurt Hope or your family ever again!! I mean Keelin can attest to that…. right Keelin?!”

Brow creasing, Keelin felt a nauseating wave of panic rush over her.

Surely it couldn’t be true…. what the deranged Wolf Sage had claimed?! How could the tiny heart
beat thrumming along deep inside of her, belong to anything other than a normal, mortal baby?
Sure - it could potentially be born with the werewolf gene…. or even gifted with the same fearsome power as that which flowed through Freya! But…. but a g-god?! No…. not possible….

“Right Keelin??”

Hearing her name called out for a second time, the Malraux wolf resentfully pulled her mind away from the fledgling heartbeat singing out its presence - and opened her eyes to the world once more.

“Alanna”, Keelin signed wearily, as she felt day’s events begging to take their toll, “for the love of god - stop and take a breath! I’m sure Hayley has no intention of relieving you of your head!”

Looking over to the Hybrid, Keelin observed that Hayley had a somewhat bemused expression on her face, as she stood studying Alanna with a single raised brow.

As far as she could tell, the Hybrid had neither moved an inch towards the Neivera wolf, nor said a single word directly to her, since arriving in the small clearing a few minutes ago.

“Well - I guess I now understand why Keelin always seems to have a headache after spending time you!” the Hybrid huffed, as a small smile threatened to break out across her features. “Are you always this manic?!”

“Only when she’s awake!” Keelin quipped dryly, unable to stop herself.

“Hey!” protested Alanna, as a look of genuine hurt settled on her face. “That’s totally unfair, and way not true!”

Keelin simply stared at the younger wolf in exhaustion – unable to find the energy required to attempt to mollify her friend’s hurt feelings.

“You try coming face to face with the totally bad-ass mother of the young girl that your pack’s Alpha tried to murder!” Alanna huffed, gesturing towards Hayley. “Oh god…. not that I agreed with his actions…. at all…. and I swear that I have been trying to make up for it ever since…. in my own way anyways…. I mean…. I guess I could probably try harder…. but….”

“Ok… STOP!” Hayley blurted out, holding her hands up in surrender towards the slender framed wolf. “You’ve convinced me, ok! You’re truly sorry for the part you played in Hope’s ordeal last year, and will never do something like that again. I got it! It’s all water under the bridge - your forgiven!”

“Really?!” Alanna asked, her eyes widening in apparent disbelief. “You…. you forgive me? Just like that?!”

Laughing, Hayley began to walk over to where Keelin remained seated and was now gently rubbing around the healing tissue of her shins.

“Alanna, if I had wanted you dead for the part you played in my daughter’s distress, I would have torn your throat out many months ago – when I first discovered you remained in the city.”

“Oh!” the younger wolf said, clearly surprised. “So, you’ve known that I’ve been in New Orleans all this time?”

“Yes”, Hayley confirmed, as she reached Keelin and bent down to take a look at her wounds more closely. “Your scent is always all over Keelin after she’s been in your company. It was hard to miss!”
Glancing over towards the younger wolf, Keelin watched Alanna’s cheeks quickly flush a deep shade of red, as she dipped her head and began to rub at the back of her neck in embarrassment.

“I err…. um…. “

Turning her attention back to Hayley, Keelin threw her a pointed scowl in admonishment.

“Sorry,” the Hybrid chuckled quietly to her with a wink. “Couldn’t help myself!”

Expression growing serious once more, Hayley began to probe gently around the edge of one of the wound’s on Keelin’s legs.

“You’re lucky that his talons didn’t take out a chunk of bone – this is pretty deep!” she muttered in assessment. “What in the world happened? Mary said that you had gone looking for a Wolf Sage, not a fight!”

“Mary?” Keelin questioned in surprise. “She told you where I was?”

“Mmm hmm,” the hybrid nodded, as she continued to study the wound.

Keelin quickly stole a glance at Alanna, who met her gaze with eye’s swallowed by panic.

Shit! Had Mary also told Hayley about her pregnancy?! Shit!”

“Did…. did she say anything else?” Keelin tentatively probed, trying to ensure that the surge of anxiety now rushing through her body, remained out of her voice.

“Well, she mentioned that…. “

A deafening loud growl suddenly rumbled all around them, cutting Hayley off mid-sentence. Deftly spinning around on the spot, the Hybrid crouched into a pounce-ready posture as Keelin attempted to lean around her to see what had caused the loud noise.

Near the edge of the clearing where the slain Wolf Sage had fallen, now stood the largest black wolf that Keelin had ever seen. With feral eyes that glowed red, and canines as long as an average human hand, the beast would have easily towered over the largest of shire-horse stallions, were the two ever stood side-by-side.

“What the fuck….?!” Hayley growled, as Keelin attempted to push herself up off the rock behind her. “Is that the dwarf?!!”

“Urgh!”

A huff of frustration came from Keelin as she collapsed back down onto the boulder once more – her injured legs still not healed enough to support her full weight.

In a blur of speed, Alanna was there – angling her body next to Hayley so as to further block the unnaturally large wolf’s direct line of access to Keelin.

“Jeez!” the young woman exclaimed, her voice beginning to rumble with the deep tones of her wolf. “Talk about over compensating for having a small dick!”

Appearing to have heard Alanna’s comment, the black wolf snarled threateningly towards the trio, as its impossibly large maul widened to reveal row after row of deadly canines. Crouching ready to pounce, the thick muscles lining its thigh’s and flank rippled in anticipation.
“Can you fight??” Hayley barked – angling her head towards the Malraux wolf just long enough for Keelin catch sight of the amber tones of her Hybrid eyes.

“I…. I don’t know,” she admitted in frustration, trying unsuccessfully to once again support herself on her legs.

“She doesn’t need to!” Alanna growled.

Before Keelin realised what was happening, the Neivera wolf collapsed down onto all fours with a yelp of pain, as the sickening sound of cracking bones began to resound out from her body. Within a few heartbeats, a slender and agile looking wolf rose up off the ground, standing on the tattered remains of Alanna’s clothes.

“What the….?!” Keelin muttered in surprise, as the wolf shook out its mottled grey fur and swished its tale in her face.

“Well isn’t she full of surprises!” huffed Hayley with a hint of admiration, before triggering her own rapid transformation.

In the blink of an eye, two snarling wolves were stood with their backs to Keelin, priming themselves for the inevitable impending fight.

Letting out a blood curdling roar, the red-eyed Wolf-Sage leapt off the ground in a blur of speed – aiming itself straight for where the Malraux-wolf was sat. Instinctively wrapping both of her arms around her stomach, Keelin flinched to the side in preparation for the inevitable collision.

But it never came.

Twigs snapped and the ground trembled as the Wolf Sage’s massive body came crashing down a mere few feet away from her. In a blur of motion too quick for the human eye to register, the massive wolf clamped its teeth down into Alanna’s pelt and effortlessly threw her across the clearing in one fluid motion. Before the slender grey wolf had even landed, the Wolf Sage whipped its massive body around to meet Hayley’s leaping advance – barging its shoulder into the Hybrids exposed flank and sending her flying across the land too.

Keelin watched in relief as her two friends quickly jumped up and shook themselves off, before her line of sight was completely blocked by a massive snarling maw lowering down to be level her face.

Fear ran cold through her veins, as violent red eyes locked briefly onto her own, before they lowered down to glare at her belly. Spittle lined gums drew back in a snarl, as the impossibly large wolf snapped its canines together just inches away from her stomach.

“No….NO!” Keelin cried out in panic, scrambling backwards off the boulder and landing awkwardly on her tailbone. “Get the hell away from me!”

A loud feral roar tore through the air, as a blur of grey fur collided into the Wolf Sage’s flank. Keelin caught a glimpse of light bouncing off pristine white canines, a split second before they clamped down into the muscular flesh of the black wolf’s hind – eliciting a low grunt of discomfort from the hulking beast.

Using the brief distraction to her advantage, the Malraux wolf finally managed to push herself to her feet as her eyes bled into their animal form. Whipping away the Kyanite rings internal barrier, Keelin rallied her inner wolf in an attempt to trigger her own transformation.
Only, nothing happened.

Frowning in confusion, the Malraux wolf’s yellow eyes rapidly blinked back and forth over her very human body, as she one again tried to forced it to shift.

Nothing.

*Shit….* *SHIT….* now was not the time for her wolf-spirit to get stage fright!!!

A loud piercing whimper of pain sliced into her panicked delirium, causing the Malraux wolf’s attention to snap back to the fight at hand.

Eyes widening in concern, Keelin caught sight of blood splattering across the ground, as Alanna’s wolf landed awkwardly on its side a few feet away. As her body instinctively lurched to try and reach her felled friend, Keelin was halted in her tracks by the nauseating sound of tearing flesh. Spinning back around to the chaotic clashing of fur and teeth beside her, the Malraux wolf watched in horror as the Wolf Sage’s large talons dug deep into the side of Hayley’s muzzle.

Falling back from the force of the blow, the hybrid crumpled down onto the floor beside its attacker, as its amber eyes momentarily scrunched closed in obvious pain.

Wasting no time, the massive Wolf Sage spun around to face Keelin once more.

Taking a few well-placed steps back from its imposing advance, the Malraux wolf felt a brief flicker of pride mix in with her fear, as she noted several bloody puncture wounds littering its ribs.

*Her friends had clearly landed a few good blows on the massive beast, before being injured themselves.*

The Wolf Sage was just too large, however, for either of the smaller wolves to be able to reach its neck or head with their leaps.

Desperately trying to rally her inner wolf, Keelin was frustrated to find its enraged fury unable to materialise into anything other than the descending of her canine teeth out from gums.

Once again seeing the advancing Wolf Sage’s feral red eyes come to rest on her stomach, Keelin instinctively snarled out a protective growl as she bared her razor-sharp teeth in warning.

*What the fuck did it want…. her unborn child?! Surely if it was indeed some prodigal baby that the goddess Selene had spent centuries coveting so badly, he wouldn’t want to harm it??! Didn’t he say he was under the Lunar God’s command??*

Taking another step backwards, Keelin felt a flash of panic as her footing became unbalanced on a slippery, moss covered log. Arms flying out to the side, the Malraux wolf crashed down onto the ground before she had chance to re-find her balance.

Within a heartbeat the unnaturally large black wolf was upon her – its front paws slamming into her shoulders and pinning her down, as its hind legs straddled the ground on either side of her.

A grunt of pain escaped her mouth, as the back of her head collided with the rough terrain beneath her – instantly sending the world into a fuzzy, unfocused haze as stars exploded across her vision.

The sickly scent of death smothered over her nose and mouth, as the Wolf Sage’s wide-open maw lowered to hover millimetres above her face. Trying, and failing, to dislodge the colossal beast off her body, Keelin quickly realised that her own supernatural strength was no match for that of the
frenzied Wolf Sage in his animal form.

_This was it…. this was how she was going to die…. pinned down and pathetically helpless under the weight of her killer…. no….NO…. she had so much more left to do…. so much more left to give…._

Desperately trying one last time to rally her inner wolf, Keelin felt a sharp pang of sorrow shoot through her heart as a crushing realisation washed over her.

_Freya would never get to know…. about the life that their love had somehow managed to create. Screw Selene and her deranged, celestial obsession…. THEY had done this…. THEY had created the tiny heartbeat now thundering away inside of her! And now, the fiercely loyal and stubborn witch…. the woman she loved more than life itself…. would never get to know._

Stealing herself for the killing blow, Keelin turned her head away from the Wolf Sage’s muzzle – just in time to see her friend’s leaping into action.

Stood crouching slightly, Alanna’s injured wolf had silently positioned itself a few feet away from the where Keelin lay under the Sage. Before she had chance to blink, Keelin watched on as Hayley’s animal form leapt out of the surrounding tree’s and bounded towards the slender framed wolf. Without pausing for thought, the speeding hybrid leapt off the ground and onto Alanna back, before using powerful hind legs to thrust itself up and forward.

Flying through the air at an elevated height, Hayley’s wolf opened its fearsome maw wide – aiming lethally sharp teeth for the distracted Wolf Sage’s throat.

Realising what was happening a split second too late, the huge black wolf attempted to twist its snarling mouth towards the oncoming attack – but where it had brute strength on its side, Hayley’s smaller form had speed and dexterity.

Twisting mid-air at the last second, the hybrid narrowly missed the Wolf Sage’s deadly canines, as her own jaw clamped down viciously around its throat.

Pain shot through Keelin’s shoulders, as the black beast pushed up onto its hind legs and began throwing its head from side to side in a vain attempt to dislodge its attacker.

As Hayley’s canines robustly held purchase on their prize, a blur of grey fur entered Keelin’s line of sight as Alanna’s wolf viciously bit down onto one of the Wolf Sage’s hind legs.

A high-pitched howl of pain rang out into the forest, as the horse-like black wolf lost its footing and came crashing down – narrowly missing Keelin as she quickly rolled to the side.

Flesh tore as Hayley forced her teeth deeper into the felled Wolf Sage’s throat, causing blood to spray out across Keelin clothes. As she pushed herself up off the ground, the Malraux wolf saw Alanna pull away from the large beasts shredded leg and nimbly twist her body around in a move so graceful, it managed to fill Keelin with admiration despite the chaos unfolding around her.

Leaping from the ground once more, the agile grey wolf clamped a slathering jaw around its prey’s neck – creating a mirror image of Hayley’s death grip on the opposite side of the Wolf Sage’s large throat.

Blood began to bubble out of the struggling beast’s mouth as it tried one last time to dislodge the two wolves biting down into its flesh. But its frantic effort was in vein, as a forceful thrust of Hayley’s jaw caused the snapping of bone to reach Keelin’s ears.
A swift jerk of Alanna’s muzzle, saw the Wolf Sage’s head tear away from its body – its tattered features hitting the ground next to Keelin with a wet, bloody thud.

Panting heavily, the remaining wolves shook their heads as they pushed up off the headless body – the taste of the Wolf Sage’s blood clearly disagreeable to them both.

As Keelin’s gaze flitted between them both, she quickly tried to assess their injuries.

“A-are you both ok?!”

Wincing internally at how unnerved her words had sounded, she moved to reach Hayley’s side after swiftly concluding that the Hybrid’s wounds looked graver than those of Alanna’s.

As the sound of cracking bones rang out, Keelin knelt down onto the forest floor to get a closer look at Hayley’s once again human face.

“Keelin, are you ok?” Alanna’s concerned voice croaked gruffly from somewhere behind her. “Did he hurt you??”

“I’m fine!” Keelin sighed, unable to hide her own frustrations at having been so helpless.

Angling Hayley’s panting head to the side, the Malraux wolf studied the three deep gashes that now marred her features. Running diagonally from the corner of one of the hybrid’s eyebrows, down to the outline of her jaw - the wounds oozed blood over Keelin’s hand as she gently probed them in assessment.

“What’s your prognosis, doctor?!” Hayley laughed weakly – the movement of her mouth causing a hiss of pain to quickly follow.

“Your enhanced healing should eventually be able to deal with it ok”, Keelin confirmed after a few more seconds of studying them. “Though I would prefer it if we could get you to a hospital to clean the wounds first!”

“No need.” Hayley said, gently pulling away from the Malraux wolf’s grasp and pushing herself up off the ground. “I’ve survived worse!”

“That…. was….. awesome!!”

Both Keelin and Hayley slowly twisted around in response to Alanna’s unexpected statement.

“I mean did you see that?! The way I stealthily snook up behind that humongous douche-bag without a sound!”

“Alanna….”

“And then Hayley taking a totally sick running jump, to leap-frog off my back and reach the creeps throat….”

“Alanna….”

“….I mean, we had hoped that it would cause him to lurch backwards off you, but when the loser actually exposed his hind legs for the biting, it was like all my Christmases coming at once! Talk about team work – we totally kicked that fuckers….”

“ALANNA!”
Keelin’s raised voice caused the younger wolf to visibly jump – her mouth clamping shut in shock.

“Do you want to explain to me how the hell you just managed to transform into your wolf? In the middle of the day…. without a full moon??”

Guilt quickly took a hold of the younger wolf’s features, as she dropped her gaze to the ground.

“Ah…. yeah…. you noticed that hey?!?”

“Hard to miss really,” Hayley commented, as she came to stand beside Keelin after collecting what remained of her clothes off the floor.

“Ha, right!” Alanna laughed nervously, still not meeting either of their gazes.

“Well?” Keelin asked impatiently, despite concern shining in her eyes as they fell to an angry looking, large bite mark that was bleeding just above one of the younger wolf’s breasts.

“Um…. with the help of this.”

Raising her right hand, Alanna motioned to a silver looking ring that was sat on her middle finger. As the Neivera wolf began to twizzle it around with her thumb, a large green jewel set into the centre of the band glinted briefly in what remained of the late afternoon light.

“Is that….?” Keelin began, as recognition quickly dawned over her.

“Yeah!” Alanna admitted sheepishly. “It is.”

Walking over to the wolf, Keelin grabbed a hold of Alanna’s hand to study it more closely.

*Her original Kyanite ring – the one that Freya had given to her back when they were barely even friends, let alone lovers. The one that she had thought had been lost forever, after her ordeal in the Carnival’s funhouse all those months ago.*

“Where the hell did you find it?!?” she demanded, scowling at her now squirming friend as she dropped her hand.

“Yeah…. about that….”

Shame shimmered in the Nievera wolf’s eyes, as they struggled to meet Keelin’s.

“….I maaay have had it in my possession ever since the night of the Funhouse! I…. um…. well, I took it off you, just before you charged in after Hope.”

As her memory flitted back to the fateful night of the French Quarters Carnival, realisation slowly began to dawn over the Malraux wolf.

“Your kiss….,” she whispered, raising her hand up to her lips, “….it was to distract me.”

Alanna’s face flushed a deep shade of red, as her eyes began to fill with emotion.

“N-no, that’s not why I kissed you…,” the younger wolf quickly blurted out, her tone laced with panic. “I mean…. yes, that’s why I kissed you right at that moment…. but no, it’s not why I wanted to! Urgh…”

Shaking her head in frustration, Alanna tried to reach for Keelin’s hand – only for the older wolf to quickly pull it away.
“Please Keelin…. don’t get mad at me!” the Neivera wolf pleaded, as tears now began to build in earnest along the edges of her blue eyes. “I…. I shouldn’t have tricked you like that…. I know that now. Hell, I knew it the instant we kissed! And believe me, I’d wanted to kiss you from the moment we first met…. god how I wanted to! I hated that Hatch was using me to manipulate you. But I swear to you, there’s not a day that goes by that I don’t regret that night! That I don’t regret what I did to you!”

Silence filled the space between them, as Keelin’s gaze slowly hardened.

“Give it to me!” she finally said, her voice filled with hurt.

“Keelin, please….”

“I said, give… it… to… me!”

Hearing footsteps in the foliage behind her, Keelin felt Hayley place a hand gently upon her shoulder.

“Maybe you should go easy on the kid, Keelin”, the Hybrid said softly. “Yes, she was in the wrong for not telling you that she still had the ring. But she did just use it to help save your life. That’s got to count for something.”

Shrugging the hybrid’s hand off her shoulder, Keelin continued to bore her angered eyes into the cowed Neivera wolf.

“I won’t ask again!”

Quickly wiping a falling tear from her cheek, Alanna pulled the small Kyanite ring off her finger, and tentatively held it out for Keelin to take.

“I’m sorry” the Neivera wolf whispered, as the piece of jewellery was abruptly swiped from her grasp. “Please don’t let this ruin our friendship.”

“Friends don’t manipulate each other,” Keelin barked, turning on her heels and starting to head for the trail that led back to the Bayou. “You’d do well to stay far away from me!”

“Keelin, wait!”

Despite clearly hearing Hayley’s plea, the Malraux wolf continued thundering away from the pair.

She’d heard enough!

Enough of the lies, and deceit from those she was meant to be able to trust.

Enough of all the shrouded mystery and convoluted folklore that appeared to govern her world.

And enough of the supposedly immortal Gods, and their selfish lust for power.

As she began once again to fight her way through the treacherous fauna of the Sa Ki Mal Peyi, Keelin suddenly found herself missing the more simplistic, supernatural free life that she had left behind in Austin, Texas.

She’d had enough!
Heavy rain drummed out a steady rhythmic beat against the glass of the bedroom’s window, as Freya stood motionless leaning against the doorframe.

Soft diffused light from a streetlamp outside gently outlined most of the furniture in the dark room - including the curvy contours of her lover, as the wolf lay fast asleep on their bed.

A small frown began to play on the witch’s brow as she noticed the fact that Keelin was still fully clothed – having apparently been too tired to get undressed before passing out on top of the duvet.

Had the wolf been waiting up for her again, worried about her whereabouts?

Glancing at the digital clock on their nightstand, a small pang of guilt tugged at Freya’s heart as she realised that this was now the third night in a row that she had returned home well after midnight. And probably the third night in a row that Keelin had fallen asleep alone, fretting about her fiancé.

Let her worry…. let her panic…. she is no longer your concern…. she no longer has any value to you….

Gritting her teeth, the witch tried to ignore the poisoned whispering of the blood-bond in her mind.

You cannot ignore your true calling any more witch…. not after all you have done…. not after the blood you have shed…. and all the lives you have taken….

A pained sigh escaped her, as Freya’s eyes fell shut.

Everything I did today was for her…. everything drop of blood shed was so that she could be safe!

A dark, cruel laughter filled her head, as the blood-bond pulsated deep inside of her.

Do you think she would see it that way…. do you think she would still be capable of still loving you if she knew the pleasure you took in torturing strangers?! If she knew what you have become….

Grimacing at the painful truth of the hissing words, the witch found her hand reaching into the pocket of her leather jacket, and clasping around the small, necklace amulet that rested there.

The smooth metal felt cold against her flesh, as the small, diamond shaped jewel set into its centre began to form a geometrical impression upon her skin.

She had done it.

She had found the Nazirul, and procured it before it was too late.

Before she was no longer able to think for herself.

Fool…. you think that you still retain your own thoughts…. your own free will? You were allowed to find the artefact…. you were allowed to follow its trail….

No! Freya’s mind retaliated in defiance, desperate not to believe the words of the bond. That was all me…. I found the amulet. For her…. for Keelin!
Did you…. did you really? You can try to lie to yourself, but you can’t lie to us…. we know the truth…. we know what you really thought when you held it for the first time…. when you felt the power within it….. we know…. we know!

As her grip on the Amulet inside of her jacket tightened, Freya found her troubled mind wandering back to the events that had unfolded earlier in the night.

To the dark and damp stone-walled room, hidden deep under the loud pulsating vibe of The Devils Way nightclub – and her interactions with the keeper of the Nazirul.

“There is no price that I wouldn’t pay Seer, when it comes to protecting the woman I love!”

“I wonder if you will still think that, once you learn of the true nature of the artefact you so desperately want to possess!” the muscular Seer remarked, a sly smile tugging at one corner of his mouth as he straightened out once more.

“It’s true nature?!” Freya questioned wearily, admittedly thrown by the bald-headed man’s comment. “All scriptures have pointed to the Nazuril being forged by a concerned demi-god to protect her human lover from harm. How nefarious can such an object really be?! ”

“Ha – always filled with sugar coated fairy-tale notions, are you glory hunters. Always wanting everything for nothing. Well let me tell you, witch – nothing that the Gods ever do, is pure of heart. Nothing!”

The witch’s emerald eyes hardened, as she felt the blood-bond within her begin to stir once more.

“Enough of your drivel, Seer. Tell me the price, and let us be done with this. I WILL leave with the Nazirul this night. Whether you live to see another day, however, is looking less certain by the second!”

“Ah yes – I have felt the tremors of your handywork all day, Witch!” the muscular Seer remarked. “First the last living member of the Asselin blood-line, and then the harmless, empathic Gatekeeper. You have left quite the sordid trail of blood on your path to find your way here. Tell me – how does your conscious fair as this day draws to its conclusion?! ”

Glancing down to the sacrificed body of the naked girl lay strewn across the cold, wet stones of the floor, Freya let a smirk play across her lips.

“I do not think you are in a position to lecture anyone on the moral costs of achieving their goals – do you?!”

“Hmmm…. ” the Seer hummed thoughtfully, as he studied the witch’s face closely, “.... so be it!”

Turning around swiftly, the man’s blood-red cloak bellowed out and rippled in the air behind him as he took several purposeful strides towards the back of the circular shaped room. Pausing to mutter a few words under his breath that Freya’s human ears could sadly not make out, the Seer tapped a hand lightly on one of the well-weathered stones situated mid-way up the back-wall.

A bright flash of light briefly filled the room – there one second and gone the next. As Freya blinked her stinging eyes rapidly, the Seer made his way back over to where she stood – a piece of Jewellery now held in one hand.

“The Nazirul!” he announced, coming to a stop a few feet in front of her as his eyes rested on the artefact in his hand. “Handed down from Seer to Seer over several Millenia, and hidden away from those wishing to use it for ill gain!”
Fixing an intense stare on the witch, he continued.

“Tell me, Freya Mikaelson…. what lies within your soul? What purpose do you have for this gift from the God’s?”

Fighting to ignore the whispers of the blood-bond, as it demanded that she simply end this charade and take the amulet from the Seer’s dead, lifeless corpse – Freya studied the man in front of her.

This was a test, she realised.

Not one composed by the Seer himself, in an attempt to stall her acquisition of the artefact.

No.

This was a test demanded by the power embedded within the Nazirul itself.

And one that she must pass, should she have a hope of being able to wield its protection.

Drawing in a deep breath, Freya attempted to clear her mind of any trace of the blood-bonds presence.

“I wish to use the Amulet’s power to help protect someone from a great evil in the world. An evil that I fear wishes to rip her heart into two, and soil her virtuous soul with eternal darkness.”

“And what makes this individual worthy of the Nazirul’s protection, witch?” the Seer questioned, as his intense stare continued to bore into her. “Why should she be protected from this evil you describe, whilst the rest of the world burns?”

The witch’s eyes began to shimmer with tears, despite the gravity of the situation.

“Because if her heart remains pure, and her soul remains whole - then there is hope that she might be able to help stop everything that is to come. That she might be able to help stop…. me!”

A soft glow of light briefly emanated from the blue diamond-shaped jewel embedded in the Amulet, as the Seer’s eyes fell to its presence within his grasp.

“You speak the truth,” he whispered, his voice laced with a mixture of surprise and stubborn scepticism. “Or…. at least you believe you do!”

Wiping the back of her hand quickly across her eyes, Freya sniffled and held out her hand expectantly.

“Enough of the theatrics. Tell me your price, Seer, so that I may pay it and be on my way!”

“Oh, the price is not one that I demand, Witch!” the muscular man smiled ominously, holding out the Amulet for Freya to take. “The price is one demanded by the Gods themselves. As payment for the wielding the power within the Nazirul. And as I have already warned you – it is a grave cost to pay. Very grave indeed!”

Freya’s hand came to a pause mid reaching for the artefact.

“How can the Amulet claim to protect its wearer, only for the Gods to then burden that person with a grave price to pay? That makes no sense!”

A deep, booming laughter filled the cavernous room, as the Seer reacted to her words.
“Oh, it is not the wearer who will pay the price, witch!” he sneered, reaching across and pressing the small amulet into Freya’s hesitating hand. “It is the one who gifts the artefact, who will bear the consequences. Why do you think the tale of Astrid and her mortal lover did not end in happiness?! Yes, the human woman bestowed with the Nazirul lived a long and harm free life – but it was one filled with both sorrow and the misery. For the price that Astrid had to pay – the price that the power of the Nazirul demanded of her for protecting the woman she loved – was the very thing that robbed both them of their love!”

Heat began to spread across Freya’s palm, radiating out from where the Nazirul now rested against her skin. The small blue jewel at its centre started to glow once again, as the witch felt a strange, ancient power pulsing at its core.

Yes…. yes…. the Seer speaks the truth…. the cost of protecting the useless wolf would be too great…. keep it…. keep it for yourself…. for the master…. for our lord!

Shaking her head at the corrupted whispers within her mind, Freya’s fist closed around the amulet as she shoved it into a pocket.

“Oh, the Gods will be sorely disappointed!” the witch stated coldly, abruptly turning on the spot to leave both the Seer and damp cavern behind. “For there is nothing left within me to take!”

And now, as she stood watching her wolf lover sleeping peaceful on their bed, Freya remembered ominous parting words that the Seer had called out to her, as she had made her way back up to the nightclub’s main floor.

“There is always something left to take, witch. There is always something!”

Letting out a deep, heavy sign, the witch pushed herself off the bedroom’s doorframe and walked slowly over to where Keelin lay. Carefully lowering herself down to sit on the edge of the bed, she reached out for one of the sleeping wolf’s hands and gently interlaced their fingers together.

A familiar warmth spread quickly spread through her from the contact, causing a small sad smile to tug at her lips.

By the gods…. how she wished everything could just go back to how it used to be! Back to before the Jarl’s and their dammed blood-bond. Back to before her whole world had been turned upside-down. Back to when it was just her and her beautiful, kind wolf – lay entwined together and surrounded by nothing but love and hope for their future.

Love? Love?? the blood-bond sneered in her head. It was never love! You kidnapped and tortured her for weeks. Systematically subjected her to a world of pain, all for your own selfish pleasure and needs! Love?! No witch…. what you did to her was not love!

“No…. Freya breathed softly, as her eyes fell shut. “No…. that’s not true. I only did what I did to save my family. Keelin knows that. She knows how sorry I am for what I put her through.”

Does she witch?! Does she know how you continue to only use her for her body? How you only keep her around in case the day comes when her venom is needed once more? How she is nothing more than a means to satisfy your sexual needs?!

“That’s not true!” she whispered into the darkened room, as tears began to form along the rims of her closed eyes. “That has never been true! I love her…. I……”

You have always been like us, witch! You have always thought the same way as us, even before
submitting to the bond! So, take what you need from the bitch one last time, then kill her and be done with it. Kill her, and be free….

“No…. gods, please, no….” Freya groaned quietly, her fingers tightening around the wolves.

“Freya…?”

The soft tones of her lover’s sleepy voice pulled the witch out from the dark depths of her mind, and back into the moment. As she opened her eyes, shadowy whisps of the blood-bond quickly dissipated from her vision, leaving emerald green irises to fall onto Keelin’s waking face.

“W-what time is it?” the wolf muttered, rubbing at her face with her free hand.

“Late”, Freya said softly, relieved to hear no traces of the blood-bond in her voice. “I’m sorry, I did not mean to wake you.”

“It’s ok,” Keelin said groggily, as she propped herself up on her pillows. “I’m glad you did. I’ve been worried about you!”

“I know. I…. I’m sorry, Keelin”, Freya breathed, her watery gaze dropping away from the wolf’s in shame. “I have not meant to cause you so much distress. I just….”

The witch’s words trailed off as she noticed the stains on her lover’s clothes for the first time since entering the bedroom.

Blood – there was blood splattered all over Keelin’s jeans.

“What happened?” she asked sharply, steeled anger seeping into her tone as she gestured to the wolf’s legs. “Are you hurt? Is that your blood? Who dared to…."

“Freya, calm down!” Keelin interrupted, leaning forward and placing her hands on either side of the witch’s face - forcing her to make eye contact. “It’s not my blood, ok. I’m fine! I just got into a small scuffle with a wild boar in the Bayou, that’s all. Nothing to worry about!”

“The Bayou?” the witch questioned, as confusion began to seep in. “I thought that you were meant to be in work today?”

Dropping her hands away from Freya’s face, Keelin pulled her knees up to her chest as she attempted to find a comfier position on the bed.

“I was, but I needed to see Mary first…. and I felt that it couldn’t wait.”

Pausing, the wolf bit anxiously on her bottom lip as she appeared to contemplate her next words carefully.

“Freya, there’s…. there’s something we need to talk about.”

Pointless babble…. wasted time and pointless babble…. kill her…. kill her before she wastes any more of your time….

The witch grimaced as the blood bonds words rang out loudly in her head.

“Hey, are you ok?” Keelin asked, leaning forward once more and cupping Freya’s cheek. “Is your head hurting you again?”
“No….” Freya muttered as her eyes fell shut, “….no, I’m ok. It’s just been a long day.”

*Kill the bitch…. kill her before she asks too much…. kill her before she finds out what you’ve done….*

“You feel like you’re getting a fever,” the wolf said in concern, as she placed the back of her hand against Freya’s forehead. “I’ll go get you some tramadol to….”

“No, Keelin please, I’ll be ok!” Freya quickly interrupted, pulling her lover’s hand away from her face. “I…. I just wanted to give you something, before I jump in the shower.”

“Give me something?” the wolf frowned, clearly not expecting the change in conversation. “What do you mean?”

Smiling weakly, Freya pulled the Nazirul out of her pocket, and held it up for Keelin to see – its short silvery chain dangling down from her fingers as the small bejewelled amulet twisted around in the air.

“I wanted to get you an early Engagement present,” the witch lied, willing her unsteady voice to even itself out. “Something that you could wear to remind you of how much I love you.”

*Lies…. LIES…. you don’t love her…. you never have…. keep the amulet…. keep the amulet and kill her…. now’s your chance…. kill her….*

“Oh….” Keelin exclaimed, surprise widening her tired eyes.

“And I know that the party isn’t for a few days yet”, Freya rushed on, trying her best to talk over the cloying words of hate that hissed in her mind. “But I wanted this to be a more personal gift from me – away from the chaos and madness that will no doubt be Rebekah’s idea of fun!”

Emotion began to well in the wolf’s chestnut eyes, as she studied the crystal clear, blue diamond at the centre of the necklace.

“Freya…. its…. it’s beautiful!”

“Can I put it on you?” the witch asked, trying to maintain the smile on her face despite the spiteful roar of the bond in her head.

*You’re a fool…. you are weak…. we can use the amulet for our cause…. she doesn’t deserve it….*

Meeting Freya’s eyes with her own, a loving smile burst across Keelin’s face, chasing away the tiredness and stress that the witch had seen plaguing her fiancés features when she had first awoken.

Leaning forward, the wolf dipped her head and pulled aside her hair as Freya wrapped the chain around her slender neck – fixing its small clasp together before sitting back once more.

Gently holding on to the amulets jewel, Keelin carefully swivelled it around the chain until it sat perfectly in the dip of her collar bone – the blue diamond glowing slightly as it reflected the soft light of the streetlamp outside.

“I love it”, the wolf cooed, as she gazed down at the amulet sitting against her skin. “It’s perfect – thank you so much.”
Looking back up again, a small frown suddenly chased away the smile on Keelin’s face.

“But I don’t have anything to give you!” she panicked, biting her lip again. “With…. with everything that’s been going on recently, I’ve not had chance to go and look for…."

“Hey”, Freya soothed, lacing their fingers together once more, “you have already put a ring on my finger - I don’t need anything else! Well…. except for one thing!”

Smiling at the witch once more, Keelin cocked a suggestive eyebrow and pulled playfully on their adjoined hands.

“Me in my birthday suit?!” she laughed cheekily, as mischief shone in her eyes.

**Kill her…. kill her and be done with this nonsense…. it’s not too late…. she has not yet made the promise…. KILL HER….**

A small moan of discomfort escaped from Freya’s lips before the witch had chance to contain it, causing the smile to instantly fall off Keelin’s face.

“Shit, Freya…. I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to suggest we should…. you know. That was insensitive of me, please, don’t take it the wrong wa…..”

“NO!” the witch blurted out harshly, before drawing in a deep steadying breath. “N-no, you’ve…. no need to apologise. I just need you to promise me that you’ll always keep the amulet on you. That no matter what happens, you’ll always wear it as a reminder of how much I loved you. Of how much you meant to me!”

“Er, why are you talking in the past tense all of a sudden?” Keelin frowned, as she studied Freya’s face closely. “Are you saying that you’re not going to always love me?!”

**Kill the bitch…. kill her now…..**

“No, that’s not what I meant,” Freya quickly tried to rectify. “I just meant that even if I…. I struggle some days to show you how much you mean to me. Or if you ever doubt how deeply I feel for you because I’m having a bad day! I want you to promise that you’ll always have this amulet on you - to serve as a reminder that no matter what, my heart will always belong to you…. forever!”

Tears began to shimmer in the wolf’s eyes once again, as Freya’s unexpected heart-felt words blanketed over her.

“Always,” Keelin whispered emotionally, leaning over to gently rest her forehead against Freya’s. “I promise that I will always treasure and wear your gift, baby. My heart has been yours for a long time now, and nothing will ever change that. Nothing!”

**FOOL….. you’re a fool…. that could have been ours…. that could have served the master…. FOOL!**

Despite the blood-bonds enraged shrieks, relief flooded over Freya like a crashing wave, as she felt the strange power held within the Nazirul momentarily pulse in acknowledgement of Keelin’s promise.

*It was done. Thank the gods…. it was done!*

“Can…. can I kiss you?” the wolf asked tentatively, her hot breath brushing lightly over Freya’s
lips thanks to their close proximity.

Not allowing herself or the blood-bond time to think, Freya quickly closed the remaining distance between their mouths, and kissed the woman she loved.

A soft moan escaped both of their throats, as Keelin slowly began to move her lips against Freya’s—cautiously at first, before gaining in confidence when the witch did not try to pull away, or freeze.

Threading her fingers into the wolf’s thick curls, Freya ran her tongue along Keelin’s bottom lip as she became pleasantly surprised by small flames of desire beginning to ignite inside of her.

_It had been so long since the two of them had shared any intimacy…. so long since she had felt the wolf’s skin pressed up against hers as they…._

_Make love?!_ the blood-bond finished for her – its jeering snake like presence laughing cruelly in her mind. _Why make love, when you can fuck instead…. you remember how that feels, right witch?! To be fucked…. to be ridden by a wild untamed stallion…._

Breathing out heavily, Freya leant forward and pulled the wolf closer to her, eagerly meeting Keelin’s tongue as it slid into her mouth.

_If she could just loose herself in Keelin’s heady scent one last time…. lose herself in the feeling of having her lover’s body come undone underneath her own…. maybe…. maybe it would be enough to silence the blood-bond for just a few blissful minutes…._

Tentative hands began to slide under her jacket and along her ribs, as Keelin’s feather-lite fingers betrayed the wolf’s nervousness of pushing Freya too far.

“Harder….” the witch breathed seductively into her mouth, nipping at Keelin’s bottom lip as she raised a hand to the side of her face. “….I want to feel your touch!”

Pulling back momentarily so as to be able to see Freya better, the wolf’s deep brown eyes quickly flitted back and forth as they searched her own – no doubt looking for any hint of hesitation or discomfort on her part.

“Please Keelin,” Freya whispered, trying hard to keep the desperation out of her voice. “I need this…. I need you….”

With a small nod of her head, the wolf leant back in and brought their mouths together once more.

“We can…. stop at…. any time….”, Keelin panted between each fevered kiss, despite Freya’s best efforts to tangle their tongues together. “….just say…. the word…. and we’ll…. stop!”

_Pathetic…. _the blood-bond sneered in Freya’s mind, as the witch tried to dismiss Keelin’s concerns with a quick shake of her head. _….she is nothing but a pathetic weak bitch, begging to be fucked! Take her…. take what is rightfully yours…._

Pulling off her jacket without so much as breaking their kiss, Freya began to tug at the hem of Keelin’s shirt as the need to feel the wolf’s skin against her own became almost too much to bear. Clearly sensing the shift in dynamic, Keelin made quick work of popping the top’s buttons before whipping the material away from her body, and throwing it onto the floor. A lustful moan left the wolf’s lips as Freya broke their kiss and quickly latched her mouth onto Keelin’s pulse point – sucking hard on the skin as she pushed the wolf down onto her back with her body.
“Fuck…. that feels good…..”, Keelin breathed heavily, her head rolling to the side on the pillow to give Freya better access.

Running her tongue up the side of the wolf’s neck, Freya nipped and sucked along Keelin’s jawline as her hands reached under her lover’s back in search of a bra-clasp.

As the laced garment finally came away in her hands, she quickly sat back and removed her own thin hoody – crashing back down against Keelin’s naked chest before the wolf had chance to blink. Feeling her lover’s exposed breasts break out into small goose-bumps as they rubbed against her skin, Freya started to weave a trail of desperate, open mouth kisses down the wolf’s chest.

A thick moan of pleasure sounded in Keelin’s throat, as Freya finally latched her tongue around the wolf’s taught nipple and began to tease the bud into her mouth.

Claim her body…. the blood-bond howled loudly in her head, causing a small groan of pain to escape up her throat and vibrate against Keelin’s nipple. …mark it so that everyone else will know who the whore belongs to!

Mistaking Freya’s discomfort for a sign of pleasure, the wolf arched her back off the bed – pushing her breast further into the witch’s mouth for her to devour.

“Oh god…..”, Keelin moaned, as the witch squeezed harder at her taught bud with her teeth.

See how she wants it…. see how she’s begging for it…. they’re all the same…. they all want to be put in their place in the end….

Panting with a fiery desire that she thought she would never feel again, Freya scraped what little fingernails she had down the wolfs ribs, as her teeth nipped roughly at the delicate skin underneath Keelin’s breast.

“Tssss…”, the wolf hissed quietly in discomfort, “…careful around….there….”

Not hearing her lover’s words of caution over the thundering lust banging out an intoxicating rhythm in her ears, Freya’s hands made deft work of unbuttoning Keelin’s jeans, as her mouth travelled back up to the wolf’s neck.

Rip them off…. rip them from her flesh and bury yourself in her…..

Feeling one of Keelin’s hands begin to stroke down her back, Freya reached around and grabbed at it – twisting the wolf’s wrist around and pushing it down onto the pillow above her head.

“This is my party…..” the witch breathed heavily into Keelin’s ear, before biting at her earlobe.

“You’re going to do as I say…..”

“O….ok….” the wolf muttered lightly, her voice a strange mix of desire and uncertainty.

Yes…. that’s it…. take control…. take everything you need from the whore…. then take her life…..

Kissing roughly back down to Keelin’s pulse point, Freya thrust a thigh in between the wolf’s legs and pushed them apart so that she could lower her body between them. Sucking deeply on the already bruised skin of her lover’s neck, the witch used her free hand to cup over the wolf’s clothed sex and squeezed down hard.
“Urgh…. Freya, honey, go a little easier…. that hurts….” Keelin breathed out, in response to the witch scraping her teeth over her discoloured skin covering her pulse point.

*Shut the bitch up…. put her in her place…..*, the blood bond roared out in Freya’s mind, coated in a frenzy of dark desire.

Lost in the moment, and no longer able to distinguish between her own want and that of the bond’s, the witch let go of Keelin’s wrist and clamped her hand forcefully over the wolf’s mouth. Frantically fumbling to dip her other hand under her lover’s panties, Freya bit down hard into Keelin’s neck - drawing the coppery tang of blood into her mouth.

“Argh!”

Both wolf and witch cried out in pain simultaneously, a split second before one of Keelin’s hands found purchase under Freya’s chest and firmly pushed her off.

Tumbling back towards the bottom of the bed, the witch’s hands flew up to her head as a sharp, electrostatic pain fizzled through her skull. Eyes scrunching shut in discomfort, Freya attempted to ride out the discomfort as it slowly but surely began to dissipate.

“What the hell, Freya?!” Keelin exclaimed incredulously, as she clamped a hand over the bleeding bite-mark now marring her neck, and pushed up into a sitting position. “What’s got into you?!"

Forcing her eyes open once more, Freya breathed heavily as the obsidian swirls of the blood-bond slowly began to dissipate from her vision.

*Was that…. that the amulet…. lashing out at her with its power?!*

“Freya?”

The wolf’s voice wavered with uncertainty, as she reached out an unsteady hand towards her fiancé.

“Your eyes…. a-are you ok?”

Shaking her head in horror as the realisation of what had just happened crash over her, Freya leapt off the bed and frantically stumbled backwards.

“I…. oh god…. Keelin I…. I’m so sorry!”

Tears of shame quickly began to blur her vision, as she continued to try and put distance between her and the wolf.

“Hey…. it’s ok” Keelin attempted to reassure her, seeing how distressed she clearly was. “It’s just a flesh wound. It’ll be gone in a few minutes.”

Pulling her hand away from her neck, the wolf turned to show the Freya that the flow of blood from the area had already ceased.

“See, I’ll be fine!”

Unable to meet the wolf’s eyes, Freya felt an almost overwhelming bolt of guilt slice through her as the blood-bond’s wicked laughter rang out in her head.

*Weak…. you’re so pathetically weak…. we were just getting to the good part….*
“I…. I need a shower….”, the witch claimed, unable to bare looking at poorly shrouded hurt and confusion swirling in Keelin’s eyes any longer. “D-don’t wait up for me!”

Twisting on her heels, Freya quickly dashed over to their en-suite bathroom and threw herself into its tiled embrace. Quickly closing the door behind her, the witch collapsed back onto the wooden panel and let her head fall back against its support.

By the gods, what had she done…. what had she…. almost done….

“Freya, are…. are you ok?!?” Keelin called out to her- the wolf’s voice muffled by the barrier closed between them.

You were finally going to take what was yours…. the blood bond snickered triumphantly in her head – its smug satisfaction vibrating through her body like the demon cat that got the cream. Next time we will school her properly…. next time we will destroy that whoring body of hers….

“No….” the witch gasped in horror, as tears filled her eyes. “No, I would never….”

Wouldn’t you….?!?, the snake like voice hissed gleefully in her mind, as its snickers of delight reverberated through her soul.

Sliding gradually down the door, the witch’s bottom hit the bathroom’s floor with a thud, as tears of shame and despair finally began to flow freely from her bloodshot eyes.

“Freya?” Keelin’s concerned voice called out again from the bedroom.

It’s time witch…. it’s time to complete your task, and come on back to where you belong!

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Chapter End Notes

....ooooh, things are about to get interesting!!!! Haha.

Please hit me up with your thoughts and comments guys - I’d love to know what you think about the events that unfolded in this Chapter :-)

****************************************************
Chapter 27.

Chapter Summary

Previously on "What Lies Within"
1. Keelin discovered that she was pregnant & her search for answers led her to a mysterious Wolf Sage in the middle of the Bayou, who tried to kill Alanna & Hayley as they strove to protect the "un-able to phase" wolf.
2. Freya left a bloody trail on her search for the Nazirul artefact, as the blood-bond within her started to further influence her actions.
3. Alanna & Keelin came to blows, after the Malraux wolf discovered that her younger friend had been in possession of her old Kyanite ring ever since the night of the carnival - 1 year ago. She parted ways with the wolf declaring she did not wish to see her again.
4. Freya returned home to her & Keelin's apartment late at night, and gifted the newly aquired Nazirul to her fiance - claiming it was an early engagement gift. Keelin promised to always wear it, triggering the ancient magic inside the amulet to cast its protection over the wolf.
5. Despite a tender declaration of love, Freya came dangerously close to attacking Keelin as the two of them started to make love. Unable to distinguish between her own thoughts & the whisperings of the blood bond, the witch ran away from Keelin distraught.

Chapter Notes

Hey there guys, here's Chapter 27 of my tale up for grabs.

Hope that you all like this wee update, and please feel free to let me know your thoughts and theories once you have read it. Its a very conversation heavy chapter, so apologies if this bugs some folks.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 27.

1.

Quickly dashing under the shelter of the Mikaelson Compound’s entranceway, Keelin lowered the hood of her bright yellow jacket and shook out her thick mane of hair. Turning back to face the street, the wolf let out a sigh of frustration as she peered up at the domineering grey clouds that continued to rule the New Orleans skies with an iron-tight grip.

*It was days like today that she wished it was sociably acceptable for her to travel the streets in her wolf form. It would be so much easier to shake the water off of her wolf’s weather-resistant pelt, than to try and move in sopping wet clothes that determinedly clung to every inch of her skin!*
Even using her supernatural speed, Storm Gelda’s never ending deluge of rain had still managed to soak her through during the short journey over from her and Freya’s flat.

“Damned weather!” the wolf muttered to herself irritably, as she turned away from the street and twisted the large iron knocker on the Compounds wooden door.

As she slowly made her way into the lobby, Keelin’s senses were bombarded by a chaotic torrent of loud noises and scents – creating a frenzied picture of activity that was a far cry from the usual majestic calm of the Mikaelson’s courtyard.

Stepladders seemed to rest against every wall surrounding the large open space, as men that she didn’t recognise balanced atop of them whilst hanging various types of decorations.

Loud hammering came from just to the left of her, where Keelin observed a team of shirtless joiners busily constructing what looked to be the framework for a large, curved bar – complete with plumbing to allow several casks of ale to be housed under its counter-top.

Equally just as shrill to her right, buzzed the sound of an electric drill, as a half-naked, muscular man looked to be fixing together the pieces of some sort of stand – no doubt to support the two large vinyl decks and mixer table that the wolf noticed lying just to the side of the structure.

“Amazing, aren’t they!?”

Jumping slightly, Keelin whirled her attention to the blonde vampire suddenly standing right in front of her.

“Well…. I guess so!” the wolf said with a weak smile towards Rebekah. “Though to be honest I don’t really know much about DJ equipment to be able to…..”

“No silly!”, the Original vampire chuffed, swiping lightly at Keelin’s shoulder with a hand. “I meant the deliciously edible muscles rippling all the way across that hunks body! Don’t they make you want to just scoop him up and tie him to a four-poster bed with silks!”

Turning her head back towards the topless man who remained bent over his work, Keelin’s nose scrunched a little as she observed the thick droplets of sweat running down between his well-defined Trapezius muscles.

Thank god her sense of smell was still on the blink!

“No really my thing!” Keelin observed wryly.

“Oh, come now, love,” Rebekah laughed, her eyes warm with mischief, “surely even you can appreciate a fine male specimen when you see one?! Or has my darling sister now got you so wrapped around her little finger, that you can no longer recognise another mortal’s potential?!"

The wolf huffed in bemusement, as she quickly took a second glance at all of the work-men littered about the Courtyard.

“And I suppose that the recognising of this potential required you to compel all of them to conduct their work shirtless – when its freezing outside!?"

“Well….” Rebekah chimed with a roguish wink, “…. there’s no harm in knowing the exact “quality” of service that I’m paying for, is there?!"

Shaking her head at the blonde vampire, Keelin gestured to the whole room as it continued to jostle
with activity.

“Is all this really necessary, Rebekah?” she asked, a hint of exasperation in her voice. “I mean, it seems a little overkill! There’s only going to be myself, Freya and your immediate family. But this looks like you’re preparing to entertain the whole of Bourbon Street!”

As if to highlight her point, both Keelin and Rebekah had to quickly step aside as a stream of people began to push past them - all entering the Compound carrying what looked to be large platters of cooking ingredients.

“Oh my god, Caterers too?!” Keelin whined, eyebrows raised as her gaze tracked the professionals as they headed towards the kitchen’s archway. “Seriously, Rebekah….”

“My dear Keelin,” the Rebekah began, as she took one of the wolf’s hands into her own, “you are betroved to marry my sister, which officially makes you family. And as part of this family, there are a few things that you are going to have to come to terms with!”

“You mean besides the constant life-endangering madness that seems to come with hand-in-hand with you all?!” the wolf deadpanned.

“We are Mikaelsons!” Rebekah stated, pointedly ignoring Keelin’s remark, “And Mikaelsons never do anything half-heartedly!”

“I can already tell I’m not going to like where this is going,” Keelin muttered to herself, as the vampire continued.

“Your and Freya’s engagement is a momentous occasion – and shall be celebrated as such!”

Keelin scrunched her eyes shut as she pinched her nose with her free hand.

“It’s not just immediate family, is it?!” she sighed heavily, already knowing the answer.

“Gods no!” Rebekah laughed. “There are at least a hundred guests coming to help you two love birds celebrate!”

Pulling her hand out of the Original’s grasp, Keelin shook her head in disbelief.

“A Hundred!? Rebekah, we don’t even know that many pe…."

“Alejandro!” the blonde vampire suddenly shouted, holding up a hand in apology to Keelin as she began to storm over to one of the work-men by the unfinished bar. “I said less casks, more optics! We are bourbon drinkers – not Neanderthal’s! By the God’s, must I oversee absolutely everything…."

Keelin shook her head in exasperation, as she watched the Original vampire unabashedly placed her hand on one of the muscular worker’s biceps. Rebekah somehow managed to ooze charm, whilst simultaneously berating the poor, unsuspecting guy.

Urgh – tomorrow is going to be a disaster! the wolf thought to herself, as she listened to Rebekah’s tone turn from berating to flirting. Freya doesn’t even seem mentally fit for a small gathering of people right now, let alone a full-blown party!

Realising that she had now probably lost the attention of her future sister-in-law for a good chunk of time, the wolf began to make her way over to the sweeping staircase that lead to the Compound’s family rooms.
“But why aren’t we doing more to help!?”

Hope’s juvenile voice carried its way to Keelin’s ears as she slowly made her way along the Mikaelson’s first floor corridor. Frustration was clearly evident in the young witch’s tone, despite the closed door of the drawing room filtering out some of its volume.

“Surely with all the power that our family has, we could help to put a stop to the needless destruction?! It’s serious mom!”

“Hope, honey, it’s just not as simple as that!”

Frowning to herself, Keelin felt a small drop of anxiety begin to cool her veins as she drew closer to the large family room.

Great - what new drama had reared its ugly head now?! Didn’t they all already have enough to deal with?!

“But why not?! Why isn’t it that simple?!”

Rapping her knuckles lightly on the large oak door, the wolf gently pushed it open and stuck her head into the candle-lit room.

“Hey guys, hope I’m not interrupting anything too serious?”

Both Hayley and Hope twisted their heads around towards her as they sat perched on a large chez-long, near the drawing-rooms roaring open fire. The ornate coffee table in front of them was littered with what looked to be several open text-books and half scribbled notes, giving Keelin the impression that she had possibly just interrupted one of Hope’s home tutoring sessions.

“Hey, Aunty Keelin!” Hope called out as she eagerly gestured for the wolf to join them. “You agree with me, right?! That we should be doing something!”

“Err….” Keelin began, as she opened the door fully and took a few steps into the room. “…. what exactly am I agreeing to again, kiddo?”

“That with all the supernatural power at our family’s fingertips, we should be using it to stop the murder of our planet! It’s just not right!!”

“Oh… well, I guess….”

Keelin flashed Hayley a silent wide-eyed plea, as her tired mind tried its best to catch on to what had got the youngest Mikaelson so riled up.

“Hope’s tutoring session today was all about The Human Impact on the World’s Ecosystems” Hayley offered calmly, smiling sympathetically towards the wolf. “It appears that her tutor focused quite heavily on the current climate issues our planet is facing!”

“Ah!” Keelin breathed, feeling relieved. “Got you! Yes, Hope - I believe there is probably more
that we could all be doing. Not just the supernaturally gifted members of your family.”

“Our family!” Hope stated.

“Sorry?” Keelin asked, still not entirely sure that she had indulged in enough caffeine that morning for the current conversation.

“Our family! You’re a part of our family too, Aunty Keelin. Right momma?!”

Catching Keelin’s eye, Hayley smiled warmly towards the wolf as she nodded in agreement with her daughter.

“Yes baby, she is.”

“Did you come to help me with my studies?”, the young witch continued, enthusiasm seeming to easily replace the ire that had been in her voice only moments ago. “Because I think…..”

Hope’s voice tailed off as her eyes slowly dropped from Keelin’s face - eventually coming to rest on the wolf’s stomach.

“Ooooh….” Hope mouthed as her gaze widened.

“Everything ok sweetheart?” Hayley asked of her daughter, as she looked between the youngster and Keelin.

Abruptly jumping off the Chez-Long, Hope reached to grab one of the text-books off the coffee table into her small hands. Gathering up her roughly scribbled notes as well, the youngest Mikaelson started to make her way over to the room’s exit.

“Hope?” the Hybrid questioned again, clearly confused by her daughter’s sudden desire to leave.

“Aunty Keelin’s here to speak with you, mom - not me!” the young witch chimed, throwing a conspirator’s smile at Keelin as she passed by her to reach the door. “I’m going to my room to work on a spell that will stop deforestation!”

Hayley’s brow furrowed as she started to rise up from her seat. Keelin could only offer the Hybrid a confused shrug when she looked over to her for help – the hybrid seemingly at a loss as to the reasoning behind young witch’s actions.

“Hope!”

Twisting around, Keelin saw the young witch stop dead in her tracks in response to her mother’s firm voice.

“Yeah mom?” the youngster asked innocently, throwing Hayley a sickly sweet “butter-wouldn’t-melt” expression.

“Are you sure that you’re ok? I’m sure that your Aunty Keelin didn’t want you to just up and leave. Right Keelin?”

Once again finding herself at a loss as to what exactly was happening, the Malraux wolf looked back and forth between mother and daughter bewilderedly.

“I, err….”

“Trust me, mom” Hope interrupted, as she grinned widely at Keelin. “You’re gonna want to hear
what she has to tell you!”

And with that, the witch was gone – the sound of her skipping footsteps indicating that she was indeed happily making her way to her bedroom.

“I’m sorry about that!” Hayley sighed, as she gestured for Keelin to join her in the seating area. “I really don’t know what’s got into her as of late. One minute she’s a happy, carefree little girl – and then the next, it’s like a mysterious, secretive, broody teenager has taken over her body!”

“Well,” Keelin began nervously, as she took a seat on the sofa across the coffee table from Hayley, “I guess she wasn’t entirely wrong – there is something I need to talk to you about!”

The hybrid hummed thoughtfully towards her, before pushing off the Chez-Long and stepping towards the roaring fire that was currently serving to stave off the cold from the raging storm outside.

“Is this about your pregnancy?” Hayley asked quietly - her voice purposefully low as she picked up a fresh log out of a large wicker basket, and threw it into the flickering flames.

“You already know too?!” Keelin said, mouth gaping at the hybrid’s back. “Christ, just how strong are my pheromones?!”

“Ha,” the hybrid laughed, as she turned back to face her. “Well, I can’t personally comment on your pheromones?!”

“Ha,” the hybrid laughed, as she turned back to face her. “Well, I can’t personally comment on your pheromones, but Alanna certainly had plenty to say about them.”

“Alanna told you??”

Keelin closed her eyes and drew in a long deep breath, in an attempt to calm the animal spirit within her before any physical signs of her anger started to show.

“Unbelievable! She really is going all out to betray my trust!”

“To be fair to the kid, it wasn’t exactly her fault,” Hayley commented, her voice remaining low. “I did sort of pressure her into telling me.”

The wolf let out a sceptical huff as she continued to try and concentrate on the Kyanite barrier within her - its calming, steady presence reminding her that she was the one who was in control, not the beast.

“Why?” she eventually asked, relieved to hear only the slightest rumbling of a growl in her tone.

“Because I was worried about you,” Hayley declared in a level voice, as she made her way over to the sofa and sat down beside the wolf. “Mary said that you had careered off into the Sa Ki Mal Peyi all by yourself looking for a Wolf Sage - but when I asked why, she refused to say! Now I know that you don’t know Mary all that well yet, but believe me Keelin – her tongue might be able to hold a secret, but her expressions tell a tale all of their own. She was nervous for you. And Mary hardly ever does nervous!”

Keelin sighed as she remembered her and Mary’s parting words, just before she had set off on her hunt for the deranged dwarf’s hut.

“Please be careful, child! The Sa Ki Mal Peyi is a particularly treacherous area of these marshlands, even for those of us who are usually the predators that other creatures are scared of. Are you sure that I can’t convince you to take someone else along with you? Hayley perhaps?”
“No! Please, Mary – I don’t want anyone else knowing about this pregnancy until I know exactly what I am dealing with.Honestly, I will be fine. I can more than hold my own should anything decide that I look like a tasty meal.” Keelin stated confidently. “Promise me that you won’t tell anyone until I have had a chance to talk with the Wolf Sage. Please?”

“Ok, my dear – if that is what you wish, then I promise!” Mary conceded reluctantly. “But let it be known that this does not sit well with me. No pregnant wolf should be left to wonder off alone into unknown, dangerous territory. You have a young pup’s safety to think of now – not just your own!”

As it had turned out, Mary’s concern had been more warranted that Keelin had first thought. “And then that Wolf Sage seemed awfully fixated on you, despite wanting the rest of us dead. He had ample opportunity to end your life during that scuffle – yet he didn’t. It wasn’t hard to figure out that something more was at hand than first met the eye!”

“I’m so sorry that you got caught up in all of that,” Keelin groaned.

“Well, apparently it’s a good job that I found you when I did!” Hayley said calmly. “Considering that you were struggling to shift! Another reason that I knew something had to be going on with you. We’ve spent months training and sparring Keelin, and I’ve watched you develop into quite the formidable fighter. You’re now able to shift into your wolf without a second thought! But when threatened by that deranged Sage, I could see the panic in your eyes. Something was wrong!”

“I couldn’t change,” Keelin admitted quietly. “I don’t know if it’s because I’m pregnant, or something else – but when I removed the Kyanite barrier, nothing happened.”

“That’s common amongst our kind,” the hybrid remarked as she nodded her head. “Once a pregnant wolf reaches their second trimester, she is unable to shift – no matter how strong the pull of the full-moon. It’s our bodies way of protecting the baby growing inside. When the foetus reaches a certain size, there’s a high chance it would be injured when its mothers body re-shaped itself into a wolf. In the third trimester it would surely be killed by the shift. Curse or not – evolution still ensured the survival of our species.”

“But I’m nowhere near the second trimester!” Keelin stated, looking down to her flat stomach. “I’m not even showing yet – but I’ve been getting all of the symptoms of someone who is months into their pregnancy. It doesn’t make sense.”

“And I suppose being the mother to a potential demi-god, does?!” Hayley laughed softly.

Keelin’s eye’s widened in exasperated surprise at the hybrid’s words.

_God dammit Alanna!!_

“Urgh - I swear I’m going to kill that girl the next time I see her!!” she groaned, dropping her head into her hands.

“Hey, like I said, it’s not Alanna’s fault,” Hayley stated again. “After you stormed off, I demanded that she spilled the beans on what had happened with the Wolf Sage before I arrived. And not just out of concern for you - I also needed to know if there was going to be any repercussions from our actions that afternoon. The Bayou is home to a lot of werewolves Keelin, not just Mary. And they look to me as their Queen. It’s my responsibility to ensure that any potential threats to their community are dealt with appropriately.”

A weary nod of her head was the only response that she could offer to the hybrid, as she continued
She’s worried about you, Keelin. As am I. If what the Wolf Sage claimed is true, I doubt that you are going to have a “normal” pregnancy. Which probably explains why your body is experiencing everything out of synch.”

“How can it be true though!?” the wolf asked, throwing her hands up in exasperation. “We’re talking about Gods and Titan’s here for Christ’s sakes! About a supposed celestial Deity using my body to produce a baby made from pure magic! How the hell can any of that be real!?”

“Keelin, you and I are able to morph into wolves,” Hayley stated in a matter-of-fact manner. “Actual four legged, furry tailed, wolves! Klaus and his vampire siblings are thousands of years old, and survive by drinking other people’s blood. Your fiancé is a witch who has so much power at her fingertips, that it genuinely scares me sometimes when I see her taking down multiple foe’s with just a simple flick of her wrist. And my own daughter has the potential to be a Tribrid one day, should she ever trigger the werewolf curse within her.”

Placing a reassuring hand on the wolf’s knee, Hayley smiled sympathetically as Keelin met her eyes once more.

“None of it should be possible. None of it! Yet here we are, living out our supernatural lives in a world full of maddening mystical mystery! So, who’s to say that the God’s we were all told stories of as small pups, aren’t real too?”

Keelin let out a small huff as she shook her head at the hybrid next to her.

Hayley was right of course. No matter how much the reality of her situation filled her with fear – the hybrid was right.

“I don’t know what to do,” she quietly admitted to her friend – emotion bubbling in her voice. “Everything is just so damn messed up right now, and I don’t know what to do about any of it.”

“Have you told Freya about the baby?” Hayley asked tentatively.

“No, not yet.” Keelin admitted, pushing herself up off the sofa and walking over to the comforting heat of the fireplace. “I was going to the other night, after our confrontation with the Wolf Sage. But she…. well she’s not in the right place mentally. To be honest Hayley, I’m really concerned about her.”

“Well, after everything that she went through, I’m not surprised that she’s struggling”, the hybrid said. “She might be a powerful witch, but she’s still a woman who’s trying to deal with the aftermath of being subjected to prolonged, systematic torture. It’s probably going to take a long time before she’s back to her normal, feisty self!”

“Which I totally understand,” Keelin stated, turning back to face Hayley. “God, I’ve helped treat enough victims of violent abuse in my time Hayley – I know all too well the impact it can have on them and their lives. But with Freya, it…. I don’t know, it just seems like there’s something more to it. Something she’s not telling me.”

“Like what?”

“That’s the thing, I can’t quite put my finger on it exactly. I just know that there’s something bothering her. Something more than what we already know about her ordeal. It’s like, one minute she is so damn adamant that she doesn’t want any of us seeking revenge on the bastards that hurt her – talking as though what happened is no big deal. Then the next she’s screaming with night
terrors, and spending hours locked away in the bathroom sobbing uncontrollably.”

The wolf shook her head as she thought back to the bizarre way in which her fiancé had been acting on the night after the encounter with the Wolf Sage.

“And I…. well, I keep seeing glimpses of a dark, almost sinister side to her personality that I never knew existed before. Or…. maybe it didn’t exist before, and her ordeal at those biker’s hands has triggered something within her.”

Keelin sighed to herself as she recalled how uncharacteristically rough Freya had been with her two nights earlier, despite having just gifted her a beautiful necklace in a tender declaration of love.

“Something’s changing in her Hayley. And I’m scared that whatever it is, it’s going to push her into a place that she’s not going to be able to return from.”

A frown had taken route on the hybrid’s features as she had been listening to her friend’s words intently.

“Have you raised this with Freya herself?”

“I’ve tried to, but she either shuts me down and claims that I’m over reacting, or she storms out of the apartment and spends hours up in her bell-tower, isolated away from the rest of the world. I’ve not actually seen her for two days straight now. The only reason that I know she’s been home at all, is the mess of discarded clothes and unwashed plates that she leaves in her wake. It’s as though she waits until I’m out of the apartment, before returning just to see to her body’s basic intrinsic needs.”

Tears began to sting the corners of her eyes, as Keelin felt all of the frustration from the past few weeks started to swell in her chest, like a big emotion-filled balloon stretched taught and ready to burst.

“I feel like I’m losing her,” the wolf finally admitted to herself – her voice barely audible over the crackling of burning wood coming from the open fire.

“Hey,” Hayley said, pushing off the sofa and walking over to the wolf. “I’m sure that you’re in no danger of losing her.”

The hybrid placed a comforting arm around Keelin’s shoulders as she stood with her in front of the fireplace. A reassuring gesture that the wolf gladly leaned into – allowing herself a brief moment of emotional support.

“Freya is, and has always been, a complicated character”, her friend continued as she rubbed her hand up and down the top of Keelin’s arm. “She is a Mikaelson afterall – and in case you haven’t noticed, none of them exactly cope well when it comes to handling their feelings. Heaven only knows I’ve had my own share of confusion and frustrations to deal with on that front! Elijah and Freya might as well be twins for how frustratingly alike they are when it comes to shutting down their emotions in favour of “doing whatever it takes” for family.”

A small huff of laughter absconded from Keelin, as Hayley’s words rung true.

“But something else that they all share in common, is a fierce sense of devotion. Of loyalty. It might take a lot to actually break through the defensive barriers that each of them has cocooned themselves in over the centuries - but once you do, their faithfulness knows no bounds.”

Giving the wolf’s shoulder one last squeeze, Hayley pulled her arm away and moved to perch
herself on the arm of the Chez-Long.

“Freya loves you, Keelin!” the hybrid continued. “And whilst she may be struggling with some things as a result of what happened – I would bet my life on the fact that her love for you will not be one of them!”

Wiping away the tears that had collected in the corner of her eyes, Keelin offered a weak smile and nod of her head to the hybrid.

“Why don’t we go and speak to Rebekah with regards to maybe toning down the festivities that she has planned for tomorrow evening?” Hayley offered, as if being able to read her thoughts and concerns about the engagement party. “Whilst we all love to let our hair down and party every now and then – maybe it would be wise to reduce the number of people that Freya will have to interact with. We can always have another celebration further down the line.”

She nodded in agreement with the hybrid, as they both began to make their way over to the drawing room’s exit.

Not that she harboured much hope of Rebekah changing her plans for the party. The Original Vampire seemed steadfastly determined to toast her and Freya’s engagement with as much fanfare and frivolous pomp as physically possible.

“Besides,” Hayley continued, cutting into Keelin’s thoughts, “it’s not like you can enjoy any of the bourbon and champagne that she’s been ordering in over the past week. You’re now carrying the next addition to the great Mikaelson legacy! Klaus would probably skin you alive if you even sniffed an alcoholic drink whilst pregnant with his kin!”

“Oh god….” Keelin whined as they reached the door, “…. here was me thinking that being part-God was going to be the kid’s worst burden to bear. I totally forgot that Klaus will be its uncle!”

2.

“My dear sister, if you think that I am going to wear a suit that has already adorned countless other gentlemen – you are gravely mistaken!”

Elijah’s pristine crisp accent filled the bustling courtyard, as Hayley and Keelin made their way down the Compound’s sweeping staircase. A cornucopia of different scents teased at the hybrid’s nostrils, intensifying in concentration with every step closer to the ground floor, and providing her with a delicious sensory preview of the edible delights that the caterers were preparing for the next day’s festivities.

“Don’t be so bloody ridiculous, Elijah!”, Rebekah responded to her brother curtly. “Of course I haven’t arranged a hire suit for you! Honestly…. what do you take me for?!”

Both she and Keelin came to a stop as they reached the grand dining table in the middle of the courtyard, and Hayley nodded her head in greeting towards Klaus when she noted his presence next to his bickering siblings. The hybrid had a somewhat bored expression on his face, as he sat at
the head of the table listlessly twirling a steak knife between his hands – giving Hayley the impression that the argument unfolding must have been going on for quite some time now.

“You declared that the suits had been delivered by Alejandro Bastend. A gentleman who is well known within the Quarter for providing pre-owned wears for hire!”

“Yes, but had you actually let me finish, brother,” Rebekah countered, frustration clearly simmering under her flawlessly smooth complexion, “you would have heard how he is the only tailor currently still operating in the midst of this never-ending, gods forsaken storm! I had him create three new suits from scratch, using only the finest materials available. Kol is already upstairs trying on his, so that Alejandro can make any necessary adjustments this evening, before tomorrow’s party!”

“Kol is home?” Hayley asked, surprise causing her to interrupt the bickering duo. “I didn’t know that he was returning for the occasion!”

“I invited him!” Klaus declared nonchalantly, not taking his eyes off the spinning knife in his hands. “Despite mine and his differences, I thought that it would be a pleasant surprise for our sister to have her full family in attendance!”

“Wow, Klaus, that was…. actually very thoughtful of you!” Keelin observed, clearly surprised by the hybrid’s uncharacteristic consideration of someone else’s feelings.

“I can play nice every now and then, wolf!” Klaus remarked, throwing his sisters fiancé a quick challenging smile before turning his attention back to the blade in his hands.

“Is Davina with him?” Hayley asked, hopeful that the witch might have made the journey back to New Orleans with her fiancé.

God only knew the more magical protection that they could have for the Compound whilst Freya’s unknown attackers were still at large – the better!

“No, sadly not,” Rebekah answered, tearing her irate gaze away from Elijah. “Apparently she is busy trying to establish herself as the new Regent of the witch faction in the city where she and Kol currently reside.”

“And which city would that be, sister?” Klaus asked loudly, his brows raising in interest.

“Come now Nik, you know as well as I do that our brother would not be foolish enough to divulge such information,” Rebekah replied, rolling her eyes at the hybrid “He has been lucky enough to forge a life far away from you and your paranoid grip over this family! He wouldn’t jeopardise that quite so brazenly!”

“Hmmm, quite!” Klaus muttered, turning his attention back to knife in his hands.

“Enough time wasting!” Rebekah declared, rounding her attention back on Elijah. “Your newly tailored, never before worn, very chic suit is waiting in your room for you to try. As is yours too Klaus. So, for the love of the gods, will the both of you please get yourselves upstairs and try them on. I will not have you ruining Freya and Keelin’s big night by turning up looking like a pair of fashionably challenged ruffians!”

“I hardly think that you can call my usual choice in attire that of a ruff….” Elijah began before throwing his hands up in supplication at Rebekah, as the blonde flashed him look so deadly - Hayley feared for the Original’s continued immortality. “…never mind!”
The already suited Original began to make his way over to the courtyard’s grand staircase, gracefully sidestepping around a shirtless workman on his way, and nodding in acknowledgement to Keelin as he passed her.

“Nik!” Rebekah said sternly, turning her attention back to the still seated hybrid. “Don’t make me enlist your daughter’s help in making you move!”

Laughing, Klaus slammed the tip of the steak-knife into the wooden table-top, before rising out of his seat.

“Well, I know when I have been out matched!” the hybrid declared, smiling broadly at all three women now stood watching him. “I shall leave you ladies to co-ordinate what colour lipstick you shall all be wearing tomorrow evening! If you’ll excuse me.”

Initially setting off in Elijah’s wake, Klaus came to a stop as he neared where Keelin stood.

“Tell me wolf, how fairs my sister?” the hybrid asked, all presence of mirth having now left his voice. “Is sleep finding her any easier at night?”

“She…. well, she’s still struggling to be honest”, Keelin admitted, as Hayley watched on. “She has been spending most of her time up in the bell tower, no doubt trying to take her mind off everything.”

Klaus nodded in apparent understanding – his gaze softening with a rare glimpse of sympathy.

“Then let us hope that a night being surrounded by family will help to ease her troubled mind.”

Before Keelin had chance to respond any further, the hybrid resumed his ascent up to the living quarters of the Compound, in search of his own freshly tailored suit.

“Urgh, men!” Rebekah declared, coming to stand beside Hayley. “Why do they have to make everything so bloody difficult!”

“Oh, I don’t know, Rebekah,” Hayley mused, as she gestured around the busy Courtyard, “its looks to me like you have quite a few “men” making things very easy for you around here!”

Following the hybrid’s gaze with her own, Rebekah’s frown rapidly turned into a smile as she let her eyes linger on some of the more well-toned builders’ bodies.

“Aren’t they just delicious!”

“Rebekah,” Keelin cut in, clearly unphased by the gratuitous display of masculinity that was currently distracting the Original vampire, “Why in the world have you hired a tailor for Freya’s brothers?! I thought that tomorrow’s party was meant to be casual attire only?”

“Casual attire?” Rebekah scoffed, turning back to face the wolf. “Who on earth put that silly idea in your head, love?”

“You did!” the wolf exclaimed, throwing a look of exasperation at the blonde vampire. “You said to not worry about buying anything fancy, or scouring my wardrobe for something exquisite!”

“And nor do you have to! Your dress arrived this morning, at the same time as the boys’ suits!”

“My dress?! You’ve bought me a dress?” Keelin asked, staring wide eyed at the Original.

“Well…. I’ve acquired you a new dress for the occasion,” Rebekah corrected the wolf, smiling
shrewdly. “Bought is not a word we Mikaelsons have to use often!”

Groaning, Keelin threw her arms up in the air in exasperation and turned to Hayley – her eyes pleading with the hybrid to jump in and help her.

“Rebekah, whilst I’m sure Keelin and Freya appreciate all of the effort you are putting into this party,” Hayley said, making sure to keep her voice calm and free of any cynicism, “don’t you think that it would be wise to maybe tone it down a notch or two? Given how fragile a state Freya is still in, I’m not sure she’s quite ready for a full-scale party just yet!”

“Nonsense!” the vampire declared, waving her hand in a shoo-ing manner at Hayley. “Freya is the one who suggested that we go all out and make this a momentous celebration! It was even her who came up with the idea for the Compound’s colour scheme and dress code!”

“Colour scheme…?!” Keelin murmured, seemingly struggling to take her future sister-in-law’s words. “Freya suggested a colour scheme?!”

“Yes - red and black! The boys shall be in black suits with red ties, whilst you two beautiful love birds shall be in contrasting dresses. I went with red for yourself, as I thought it would really make the deep russet brown of your eyes pop. And then Freya’s….”

“Hold up….” Keelin interrupted irritably, “…. when in the world did you plan all of this with Freya? I thought that she had been holed up in her bell tower over the past few days!!”

“My dear Keelin, do I need to remind you that we live in an age of advanced technology!” Rebekah laughed warmly. “There are these small devices these days called Cell Phones. Amazing things!”

The wolf just stared at her future sister-in-law with rapidly blinking eyes, seemingly lost for words.

“Keelin has just been saying how withdrawn and troubled Freya has been over the past few days,” Hayley offered to Rebekah, seeing that Keelin was struggling. “Have you noticed anything unusual in your interactions with her at all?”

“Unusual?” the blonde vampire repeated, her brow creasing. “No, not at all. If anything, I would have said she has been sounding more like her old self on the phone – focused and determined to finish her protection spell for the compound. Actually, whilst we’re on the subject of my dear sister, would you mind taking her dress back with you to your apartment Keelin. Its sealed in a tailor’s bag, and hanging on her old wardrobe next to yours. No peaking at it though, love! And don’t let Freya see….”

“Don’t let me see what?!”

All three of them twisted their heads towards the Compounds entrance, as Freya’s voice suddenly appeared over the loud racket of hammering and drilling.

Wearing a leather jacket covered in a glistening film of rain water, and sodden black jeans clinging tightly to her legs, the eldest of the Mikaelson siblings strode purposely across the stones of the courtyard – heading towards where her family stood.

“Freya!” Rebekah called out cheerfully, clearly happy to see her sibling. “We were just discussing tomorrows party and the finer details of everyone’s attire. Be a dear whilst you’re here will you, and try on your dress! I need to know if any adjustments are needed before tomorrow!”

“Actually,” the stony-faced witch began, as she came to a stop next to Hayley, “I am here to see Kol. Is he upstairs?”
“Kol?” Rebekah half laughed, and half coughed – Freya’s declaration clearly taking her by surprise. “W-what on earth makes you think that Kol is here!!”

“I spoke to him a few minutes ago on the phone!” Freya stated, as Hayley noted that the witch had yet to acknowledge Keelin’s presence amongst them. “His is the last sample of blood that I need to complete my spell, and I want to get it finished well before tomorrow night’s party.”

“So much for Klaus’s surprise!” Hayley remarked, smiling towards the witch as tired looking emerald eyes locked onto her.

“Fine! He is upstairs in his room, trying on his suit”, Rebekah said, waving her hand in the direction of the staircase. “I had hoped, however, that you and Keelin wouldn’t see everyone else’s attire before tomorrow’s soiree. I wanted it to be a nice surprise for you both.”

“I’m sure everyone will look perfect,” Freya remarked half-heartedly, as she turned and began to make her way towards the grand-staircase.

“Freya?” Keelin called out warily – the wolf looking more than a little perturbed by her fiancé seeming to ignoring her presence. “Can we talk?”

Hayley watched on as Freya appeared to grimace in pain, as though Keelin’s cautious words had dealt a physical blow somewhere upon her body. As the witch’s eyes fell shut for a heartbeat, everything about her expression seemed to scream mental exhaustion - like she was an overworked accountant who had been relentlessly crunching numbers for the past forty-eight hours straight, without a break.

“N-not now,” Freya muttered tersely, barely turning her head in Keelin’s direction as she began her descent up to the Compound’s second level.

“But I really need to…”

“I said not right now!” Freya barked, coming to an abrupt stop on the last step of the staircase as her thunderous words reverberated out across the courtyard.

Silence quickly fell over the Compound, as even the workmen busy with their various tasks halted their actions in reaction to the witch’s outburst.

Hayley’s brow creased as she looked up to where the witch now stood motionless with her back to them – one of her hands clasped onto the staircase railing with a tight, white knuckled grip. From the corner of her eye the hybrid could see that both Rebekah and Keelin were also staring up at their loved one, both with somewhat startled expressions on their faces.

“I’m sorry,” the witch eventually breathed, without turning to face her startled audience. “I just really need to get this spell finished. I’ll speak to you later.”

Keelin opened her mouth to call out to her lover again, but before the wolf had a chance to articulate her thought’s, Freya resumed her quick pace and disappeared out of sight.

“Well,” Rebekah huffed, as the hustle and bustle of the construction work in the courtyard once again resumed, “that was rude!”

“Are you ok?” Hayley asked Keelin, as she moved to stand beside the crestfallen wolf.

“I…. I need to get to work,” was the only response she received, as Keelin’s chestnut brown eyes began to shimmer in the soft light of the courtyard.
Quickly turning on her heels, the wolf started to make her way over to the Compound’s exit - wrapping her arms tightly around herself as she moved.

“Should I send someone over with your dresses later today, love?? Because I really need to know if they fit ok!” Rebekah called after Keelin’s retreating form. “Keelin?”

“Let her go,” Hayley murmured to the Original vampire, as she watched Keelin reach the large wooden doors that lead out of the Mikaelson’s home. “She’s got a lot on her mind right now.”

“Haven’t we all!” Rebekah exclaimed, throwing her hands up in exasperation as the Malraux wolf raised her hood and disappeared out into the torrential rain. “This bloody Engagement Party isn’t organising itself you know! A little co-operation from at least one member of my family would be nice!”

Sighing, the hybrid shook her head at the seemingly oblivious vampire stood next to her.

If Freya didn’t start making time for Keelin soon, she doubted there would be an engagement left to celebrate!

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3.

The boisterous racket of laughter and heckling easily overpowered the music being belted out from Barracuda’s 1950’s jukebox, as the bar’s various undead patrons steadily drank themselves into drunken stupors. Animated conversations swirled in dirty clouds of smoke, as the stagnant stench of cigars barely covered up the unsavoury aroma of days-old sweat that clogged the material of the unwashed bikers’ clothes.

As he irritably weaved his way in-between the numerous tables of rowdy Thralls, Halvar found his mind wandering back to the small Nordic village that he had grown up in as a young boy – many centuries ago. To a time and place where fresh, crisp air had been in abundance, and breathed in by a naive young boy sat in the back of his father’s wooden cart, as it trundled its way to market.

Things had been much simpler then, back when he had been nothing more than the unimpressive son of a hard-working farmer. Back before the barbaric clan-wars had descended on their people, and forced all men – no matter what their age – into the bloody battles waged on the rolling hills surrounding their homes.

Back before the Master and his offer of everlasting life.

Back before the Blood-Bond!

Not that he would have changed the hand that life had served him of course.

It had been an honour to serve under the Great Lord, during his time spent purging the lands of all the unworthy vermin and half-breeds that dared to breathe the same air as him. And an even greater honour to continue serving his master over the past one thousand years of the Great Lord’s
desiccation.

Halvar wielded the power of the Blood-Bond with pride, and the self-esteem of someone who had been born to become more than his original lot in life. Someone who had been born to lead, and not simply exist whilst following the rest of the heard like a mindless, purposeless sheep.

Yes – he was immensely proud to be one of the seven mighty Blood-Bound Jarls. And immensely Proud to be feared by all those unworthy souls who dared to cross paths with he and his brethren.

But there were definitely days when that very role he was proud of, also saw his patience and quick-temper stretched out to a dangerously perilous breaking point.

Today being one of them.

“By the Gods, now is not the time for indecision!!”

Jarl Colborn’s gravelly voice boomed out from where he sat leaning his bulky frame on the tavern’s wooden bar-top, at the centre of the establishment. The rumbling baritone of the overweight biker instantly served to sour Halvar’s mood even further than it already was, painting a deep scowl on the Jarl leaders face.

“We should have grabbed the witch’s wolf-bitch days ago! But instead we sit here like incompetent fools, whilst the Mikaelson wench no doubt rally’s her immortal siblings against us!”

“SILENCE!”

The Jarl leaders command reverberated across the whole of the tavern, effectively muzzling everyone that sat drinking within its well-worn four walls.

“The hour of our Lord’s resurrection draws ever closer”, Halvar continued, as he reached the bar and addressed the five of his brethren sat drinking along its length. “Yet all I can hear is your insolent, snivelling voices sullying the momentous occasion with petty words of grievance!”

“Apologies Halvar,” slurred Leaf - his unsteady voice and blood-shot eyes betraying just how long he and his fellow Jarl’s had been sat propping up the Tavern’s bar. “We meant no disrespect to our Master! Or to yourself.”

A brash huff of disagreement came from Colborn, as he slammed his half-drunk tankard of ale down onto the bar-top in reaction to Leaf’s words.

“It’s a gods damned fucking joke!” the bearded biker roared, swivelling around on his bar stool so as to fix his black beady eyes on Halvar. “You talk of respect for our Master, yet command us to sit here and do nothing whilst the clock ticks away to our next impending cycle of petrification! Were he here right now, he would be ashamed of YOUR weak cowardice, Halvar!”

“Silence, Colborn!” the Jarl Leader commanded, as the ominous dark tones of the blood-bond began to bleed into his cobalt blue irises. “I will not have you question my authority any longer!”

“Our b-brother does have a point though”, said Fiske from where he sat beside Colborn.

The baby-faced Jarl’s intoxicated words were almost too incoherent for Halvar to make sense of, serving to only stoke the flames of his fury even higher.

“The witch has been left to run amuck in the city for weeks now,” Fiske continued slowly, as he peered barely open, bleary eyes into the empty tankard in front of him. “Who’s to say that she
hasn’t found a way to navigate around the blood-bonds control.”

“Or if the bond even took root properly in the first place,” Vidar commented, his voice equally as slurred as his brethren’s. “After all, her wounds did not heal immediately after consuming your blood. We knew that something was wrong from the start!”

“We need to drag the witch’s lover in here by her mongrel tail, right now!” Colborn sneered at the Jarl leader. “And show the Mikaelson wench the exact consequences of her delay! That should spur her on enough to….”

“ENOUGH!” Halvar roared, wrenching the tankard of ale out of Colborn’s fleshy fingers, and throwing it down onto the wooden floor with all his might.

Glass shattered out across the room - the force of impact so great, it caused several shards to imbed themselves into the flesh of the surrounding Thralls legs and arms, like speeding bullets fired from a gun. Several grunts of discomfort came from the revellers, though none were foolish enough to put voice to their irritation given the rage now radiating off the Jarl leader in tangible ripples of dark energy.

“So, do you all dare to challenge my word?!” Halvar continued - the intensity of the blood-bond in his voice physically pushing down upon the bodies of the rest of the Jarl’s sat along the bar. “Do you all DARE to challenge the will of our Lord?!”

“N-no!” Ake grimaced, the Jarl baring his teeth as a thick trickle of tainted blood began to ooze out of one of his nostrils. “W-we are just concerned, J-Jarl Havlar. Concerned for our m-master.”

“W-we don’t… urgh…. want him t-to have to spend another hundred y-years waiting for r-release!” added Leaf, whose hands were now clamped on either side of his head in clear discomfort.

Glaring at each of his cowed brethren through the obsidian swirls of the bond, Halvar’s incensed gaze came to rest on Colborn. The overweight biker’s own eyes remained stubbornly locked onto the Jarl Leader in a display of sheer disdain, despite the pain evident in the rest of his strained features. Several tense heartbeats passed between the two Jarl’s, as Halvar refused to relax the blood-bond’s iron-tight grip on his brothers until Colborn bowed down in acknowledgement of his authority.

Something that the bearded biker eventually did - but not without spitting on the ground at Halvar’s feet first.

“Listen to me very carefully!” the Jarl leader snarled angrily as he increased the level pain being inflicted by the blood-bond. “There will be no more talk of deviating from our plan! There will be no more questioning of my commitment to our Great Lord’s return! And there will be no more leniency should any of you even think to step out of line and jeopardise our current course of action! Is that clear?!”

A chorus of strained and grunted acknowledgements came from the suffering Jarl’s, with even Colborn eventually huffing out a pained breath of resignation after a delayed heartbeat.

“Good!” Halvar stated, throwing each of his brothers one last pointed stare, before releasing his hold over them. “Now…”

He was cut off by the loud clattering of Colborn’s bar stool crashing to the floor, as the overweight biker threw himself off its seat and began stomping his hulking frame over towards the Tavern’s
“Colborn, where exactly do you think you are….”

“I’m heading out on my bike!” the gruff Jarl shouted back over his shoulder, as he yanked open one of Baracuda’s double doors to reveal the night’s raging storm. “There’s a little too much sodding oestrogen flying around in here for my liking!”

“Colborn, get your gods damned ass ba….”

“You should let him go, Halvar”, Ake said, shoving a full tankard of ale into the Jarl Leaders chest - as both a distraction and a peace offering. “He just needs to burn off some steam. You know how having to wait for anything gets under his skin!”

“I’ll damn well get under his skin, if he doesn’t fall into line soon!” Halvar grunted, glowering at the Tavern’s door as it slammed shut in Colborn’s wake. “I’ve spent a thousand years having to deal with that piece of shit’s mutinous ways. I doubt our Master will be quite so tolerant, upon his return!”

“Not that I am doubting your strategies, Halvar, but what if the witch doesn’t actually deliver?” Leaf dared to venture, as Halvar finally turned his stare away from the exit and hauled the upturned bar stool off the sticky floor. “Are we really going to have to endure another cycle of petrification, when we are so fucking close to succeeding this time?!”

Sighing heavily, the Jarl leader dropped himself down onto the stool, and took a long swig of ale from the tankard that Ake had given him.

“No,” he finally muttered, rubbing at the thick coarse hair covering his chin as he studied the amber liquid in his glass. “Because the witch has not failed us!”

From the corner of his eye, Halvar could see his brethren look at each other sceptically in reaction to his statement.

Drunken idiots, the lot of them!

“In case you have forgotten, it is my blood that now taints her veins! My will, and my and commands that drive her. And just as we hear the whispered demands of our Masters blood within us – so too does she hear mine.”

“Whispers?!” Vidar scoffed, after draining the last of his drink. “More like fucking roaring! You’d think that our Lord was stood right next to you screaming into your ear, his blood’s will is that damned loud in your head!”

“But what you drunken fools will not know”, Halvar continued, deliberately ignoring Vidar’s complaint, “is that like our Master, I can “feel” the bond running through the veins of those who have consumed my blood. I can sense their submission, as the bond consumes everything that they once were and shatters their free will!”

“Damn, where can I get some of that action?!?” Fiske sneered, clapping Ake on the back as he laughed darkly with his fellow Jarl. “I’d love to have been able to “feel” the terror flooding through that witch, as I flooded into her!”

Taught tendons could be seen pushing up against the skin of the Jarl Leader’s neck, as he clenched his teeth together in an attempt to contain his contempt at his brethren’s lack of focus.

“Every day that has passed, the Mikaelson witch’s resolve has weakened,” Halvar continued,
returning his stare back to the tankard of ale in his hands as he began to swirl its contents around. “Though I will admit, even I had my doubts at first. Her’s was one of the fiercest life-forces that I have ever felt take on the bond. Even after her time spent being broken in our catacombs, her soul’s determination to hold on to some semblance of self – to hold onto the love that she felt for her family and lover - remained strong!”

“And now?” Leaf asked, as his amusement at Fiske’s earlier remark remained etched on his face.

“Now….” the Jarl Leader began - a small smile of his own beginning to tug at his lips, “…. now the power that burns within her is as black as our Masters soul!”

“But what of her loyalty to her family? To that wolf?” Ake demanded, clearly still agitated at their lack of progress. “If her soul is a strong as you say it is, who’s to say that her love for those close to her won’t override the bond and stop her from betraying them?!”

As the biker’s words trailed off, the sudden shouts of a commotion could be heard coming from just outside of the Tavern’s exit. Halvar’s smile deepened as he watched each of the Jarl’s sluggishly swivel around on their bar-stools - their attention drawn by the muffled yelling that now competed with the Juke-Box’s wails and beats.

“Well, my brothers,” the Jarl leader said, as he too turned to face the large double doors barring the way out to the New Orleans barrens, “why don’t you ask her yourselves….”

The two wall-fitted lights that flanked either side of the exit suddenly flared far brighter than their bulbs should have allowed. Both began to emit an uncomfortably high-pitched screeching - causing several of the Thralls sat closest to the exit to throw their hands over their ears in clear discomfort.

A particularly loud cry of pain came from outside, before silence seemed to claim the night once more.

“What the hell was all th….”

Ake was cut off as Baracuda’s doors violently flung open, giving birth to what looked to be a badly burnt biker flying through the air. Every pair of eyes in the Tavern followed the scorched mass of flesh and bones as it came crashing down onto the floor – the bloodied corpse landing a mere foot away from where the five Jarl’s sat.

The vibrations of wood scraping against wood filled the bar, as thralls and Jarls alike jumped out of their chairs readying for action.

All that was except for Halvar - who remained calmly seated as he drained the last of the ale from his Tankard, and admired the formidable sight of the slim figure now filling the Taverns entranceway.

Stood with balled fists at her side and legs slightly apart, the top half of the woman’s face was hidden under a thick, pulled down hood – denying the inhabitants of Baracuda the ability to see her eyes. But even without her full face on show, it took less than a heartbeat for the thralls stood closest to the newcomer to begin backing away from her imposing form – all pretence of bravado having well and truly left their features.

The unmistakable dark whisps of the tainted blood-bond’s power swirled all around the figure’s body, marking the woman for exactly who she was.

What she was.
And every leather wearing vampire there, knew they were no match for such a being.

“Here’s your gods damned blood!” the woman’s voice boomed, its tone almost as low and gravelly as one of the Jarls. “From all four of my Original siblings!”

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Chapter End Notes

.....right then guys, it time you all re-read the "prologue" of this 2nd installement of my tale, as that scene is where the next chapter picks up from! In fact you will see some of it re-written again in the nxt chapter, but from a different persons point of view.

The "Master" is on his way..... be worried! Be very, VERY worried!! ;-)

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Chapter 28.

Chapter Summary

Previously on What Lies Within....

1. Freya willingly submitted herself to the Jarl's blood-bond, drinking Halvar's blood after enduring several days of torture at their hands.
2. Keelin discovered that her pregnancy was likely due to the Lunar God, Selene, fusing her celestial power with Freya's witchy power, inside of her body.
3. The blood-bond was becoming increasingly harder for Freya to keep hidden from her loved ones, as she started to succumb to its influence more and more.
4. The night of Freya and Keelin's engagement party drew close, as Rebekah went all out to ensure the evening would have as much grandure and pomp as possible.
5. Freya obtained the final sample of blood from her siblings that she needed, turning up to the Jarl's tavern out in the wastelands with it in hand.

Chapter Notes

Howdy all, and welcome to Chapter 28 of my tale.

***PLEASE MAKE SURE TO RE-READ THE PROLOGUE OF THIS 2nd INSTALLMENT BEFORE READING THIS CHAPTER*** - as this chapter picks up in the middle of that scene!

As expected, I have been struggling to find time to write over the past few weeks due to Christmas rapidly approaching - so I have split what would have been a large chapter encompassing the whole Engagement party, into two halves instead. This ensured that you have something to read before Christmas and the New Year celebrations!

So whilst its not the full Party scene, I still hope you enjoy this little teaser as to what fun and games are about to happen during Keelin & Freya's Engagement party. (FYI - it will neither be fun, nor game like! ha).

I hope that you all have a wonderful Christmas guys, and that Santa is a generous jolly fat man to all, haha.

Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 28.

1.
“Ohhh little girl – by the time I am through with you, you will be begging for me to end your life!”

Fear lanced through Freya’s veins like cold icicles falling off a roof’s edge. The hard, unyielding wall behind her pushed unforgivingly against her back, as she futilely tried to put more distance between herself and the advancing Jarls.

The power within her had not retreated this time – she could still feel its oppressive mutated presence staining her soul, like an oil slick that was determined to suffocate the light out of every corner of her being. Yet no matter how hard she tried – no matter how hard she begged – the magic refused to unleash itself upon the overbearing frames of the men now glaring at her with sin in their eyes.

_Foolish girl…. you are bound by the bond…. by the commands issued by your master…. you cannot hurt them…. foolish girl…. foolish…._

She had hoped that it would be different this time. Had hoped that the twisted transformation of her magic with its overwhelming compulsion to snuff out anything and anyone that could get in her way - would mean safety from the men whom had broken her both in body and spirit.

Hopes that had been even further stoked by the realisation that she was able to wield the obsidian tendrils of the blood-bond against the vampire bikers that had been stood guard outside of Baracuda’s entranceway.

But the moment she had tried to turn the throbbing, snake like twists of magic upon the bearded Jarl’s as they had stood gaping at her from the centre of the Tavern, the power had simply ceased to listen to her commands.

Ceased to listen to her commands - but commenced sneering at her sardonically, deep within her mind.

_You are nothing but a pawn in the Masters game…. nothing more than a slave, allowed to live to serve his needs! You were allowed to get this far…. but now your usefulness has expired!_

Freya’s heart began to race at a painfully fast rate, as Colborn took another step in her direction – the Jarl’s eyes now completely consumed by the shadowy wisps of the blood-bond.

_No… no…. no…. not again…. not again…._

“Colborn, by the God’s!” Halvar sighed from somewhere behind the advancing brute. “Get your sorry excuse for a Jarl’s ass back in formation! There is no way that she could have betrayed us, and you know it! She is…..”

“Halvar…. look!”

The Jarl who she had recognised least upon her arrival - the one that their leader had been referring to as Balder since their descent down into the catacombs below Baracuda’s bar - shouted out with a particularly awed fervour in his voice.

All of the bearded bikers that had been advancing upon her turned instantly in response to his alarm, causing a shaky breath of short-lived relief to escape from the witch’s lips. Curiosity soon took over, however, as she witnessed all of the Jarl’s expressions blanche with what looked to be anxious reverence, as they quickly re-took their places around the stone altar.

It was a look that she had never expected to cross the otherwise cruel and heartless faces of the
men whom had tortured her.

“My Lord? Can you hear me?”

Realising that Halvar was speaking to the lifeless, desiccated body that she had seen lying on the slab upon her entry into the chamber, Freya cautiously lent forward in an attempt to see in between the huddled Jarl’s. Her eye’s quickly widened as they locked on to the sight of one of the corpses arms – its dehydrated, skeletal length now raised up towards what had once been a human-like face.

What the hell….

THE MASTER…. THE MASTER AWAKENS…. THE MASTER RETURNS…. 

The blood bond screamed in her mind like a wailing banshee - its deranged voice violently vibrating through her whole body and causing every muscle lining her limbs to painfully tense. Gasping in discomfort, Freya doubled over and flung her hands up to either side of her throbbing head.

“My Lord? Can…."

Each of the Jarl’s stumbled a step back from the altar, as the torso of the desicated corpse jerked up into a sitting position.

THE MASTER ARISES…. THE MA…. 

“RAAAAARH!”

A second cry of pain escaped from Freya, as her whole body was vehemently shoved down to the ground by an unseen force. Landing roughly on her knees, the witch just managed to catch sight of the seven Jarl’s also collapsing onto the cold, gravelly floor, before her head was forced into a cowed position.

Heart racing, Freya swiftly realised that no amount of effort on her part could dislodge the fierce hold being exerting upon her.

KNEEL…. KNEEL, AND BEG FOR YOUR SALVATION WITCH…. FOR THE MASTER HAS RETURNED…. AND HE WILL END ALL OF YOUR KIND…. 

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2.

“I’m not so sure that this was a good idea!”

Joel’s raised voice struggled to contend with the loud, rhythmic music coming from inside the Mikaelson family home - making it hard for even Alanna to hear what he was saying clearly.

“Remind me why I let you talk me into this again?!”

“Because you care for Keelin’s well-being just as much as I do!” the Nivera wolf reminded her flatmate, for what must have now been the tenth time that day.
Alanna didn’t need to scent her friend’s body as they stopped just outside the Compound’s entrance, to know that he was nervous. The male nurse had been liberally vocalising his concern over their attendance at the event ever since she had finally convinced him to make an appearance earlier that morning. And it had been a close toss-up as to which matter had been bothering him the most - the fact that he now knew most of Keelin’s soon-to-be-family-in-law were deadly, supernatural creatures - or the fact that Alanna had insisted that he took her along with him as his “plus-one”.

Unlike her, Joel had actually received an official invite to Keelin and Freya’s engagement party when they had been issued out just over a week ago. The delicate and intricately designed card had been hand delivered to their flat by an actual, honest to god, messenger boy, on a night that both of them had been spending a rare evening “in” together. Neither of them had quite known what to make of the messenger when Alanna had first opened the door to his knocking – the sight of the young teen dressed head to toe in a red and black page-boy outfit causing a surprised “Err… huh?!” to tumble out of the wolf’s mouth before she’d had time to catch it.

The boy’s intentions had quickly become clear, however, when he had pulled a rather large bugle out from behind his back and begun blowing upon it with such force, that his face had quickly turned purple from the effort.

“Hear ye, Hear ye!”, the juvenile messenger had bellowed - his voice surprisingly loud despite his short, slight stature. “Joel is accordingly invited to attend the festivities taking place in seven days’ time, to celebrate the momentous engagement of Miss Freya Mikaelson to Miss Keelin Malraux. Details of which can be found in the invite hence with!”

A perplexed looking Joel had joined Alanna at the door just as the messenger had finished his speech. Gingerly taking the exquisite looking invite out of the young boys extended hand, the male nurse had tried to engage in a conversation with the lad. Attempting to ask who had sent him out into a stormy night dressed so frivolously, and all alone, the nurse had rapidly got frustrated when he received neither an answer or any further acknowledgement from the young lad.

Realising the situation for what it was, Alanna had stepped in front of Joel and thanked the messenger for his delivery – sending the boy on his way and closing the apartment door in his wake. And when Joel had expressed confusion at the bizarre event, the wolf had simply stated that the messenger clearly had many more deliveries to do that night, and he was probably just a little tired from his task.

She had thought that Joel wasn’t quite ready for learning of the existence of vampire compulsion just yet – and all of the horrific implications it held. Especially given how he himself had been so heavily compelled after the events in St Theodora’s Hospital a few weeks’ back.

The wolf had to admit though, a little compulsion could have worked in her favour during the week leading up to the Engagement Party.

Convincing Joel to allow her to tag along as his “date” to the event, had been quite the arduous task.

Keelin had returned to her post at the Hospital the day after their confrontation with the Wolf Sage in the Sa Ki Mal Peyi, and told Joel under no uncertain circumstances did she want to talk about his flat mate, or see her in any capacity.

According to the male nurse, the Malraux wolf had practically spat on the floor when saying Alanna’s name, and had out right refused to discuss the matter any further with Joel when he had tried to question what had happened between the two of them.
That night he had returned home to their shared flat and demanded that Alanna spill the beans on what “she had done now?!”. Despite his choice of words, however, there had been no malicious tone or accusation in his voice. As he had pointed out later that same evening, it was not the first time that he had witnessed Keelin annoyed at Alanna. And knowing just how exasperatingly frustrating his flatmate could be at times – he had claimed that it probably would not be the last either.

This time, however, Alanna had a hard time agreeing with him.

There had been something in the way that Keelin had looked at her, whilst demanding the Kyanite ring back, that had left the Nivera wolf feeling like she had well and truly messed up their friendship this time. A level of hurt and betrayal that she had not witnessed on the Malraux wolf’s face before. Even during their fraught interactions that took place in the immediate weeks after the Funhouse incident.

She had fucked up big time, and her heart had been hurting ever since.

Regardless of his ill-placed optimism, however, Joel had been stalwart on the issue of even attending the party – let alone allowing Alanna to tag along with him.

“I’m not so sure it’s a good idea for me to go at all,” the nurse has said on the first night that she had tried to convince him otherwise. “I mean, we’re talking about a party that’s going to be full of vampires, and witches, and werewolves, and…. well, God only knows what else! I’ve watched enough horror films in my time, Alanna, to know that it never ends well for the token human at these events!”

“Well, so long as you don’t wear a red-shirt, you’ll be just fine!” the Nivera wolf had quipped, attempting to appeal to her flatmate’s geeky side.

An attempt that had sadly fallen flat.

“I have nothing but love for Keelin!” Joel had continued. “And since discovering that she is a werewolf I have tried my best not to jump to any of the pre-fabricated assumptions that years of reading horror and Marvel comics has instilled me with! But attending a party where I am more likely to be seen as a tasty meal, than a welcome guest - may just be pushing my open-mindedness a little too far!”

“Well if it’s of any comfort, I’m sure there will be plenty of blood-bags provided by the Mikaelson’s, for their un-dead guests to feast on! They’ll be too full to be interested in you as a snack!”

Joel’s resulting look of horror, had been enough to tell Alanna that her tongue-in-cheek remark had been anything but comforting to the male nurse!

“Look, Joel…. I need to be at that party!” she had continued more seriously when she received no further response from her paled flatmate. “There are things happening…. scary, bat shit crazy things…. that are putting Keelin and her unborn baby’s life in danger. And I made a promise to Freya that I would try my best to protect her fiancé from those things…. no matter what!”

“Is that why I’ve spotted you skulking around the corridors of St Theodora’s over the past few days?!” Joel had deadpanned, with a raised brow. “You’ve been stalking Keelin whilst she’s at work?”

“Not stalking – protecting! Urgh…. you’ve seen me?!” the Nivera wolf had groaned as she had
dropped her head into her hands.

“You were a little hard to miss Alanna – the hospital is still seriously understaffed, and overrun. If you’re not running around in scrubs, or lying on a gurney half-dead, then you’re ganna stick out a mile right now! You are lucky that Keelin has been too rushed off her feet to notice – she’s remained one of the only Doctors available the past few days thanks to the storm! Though I am kinda surprised that she hasn’t smelt you! Isn’t your kind supposed to have some sort of enhanced ability to scent things?!”

“Mmm hmm,” Alanna had continued to groan into her hands, “we do! Hers has been on the blink lately though – along with a whole host of other weird issues that seem to be related to her pregnancy. Which is why I need to protect her now more than ever, Joel! Her abilities are compromised, and if Fre…. if someone was to try and harm her, Keelin would not be able to defend herself.”

“So, let me get this straight,” Joel had said after a few moments of staring at Alanna in open-mouthed disbelief. “You want me to go to a party full of deadly, supernatural monsters, so that you – someone whom is currently on the most-wanted list of the vampiric party hosts – can tag along to protect our pregnant werewolf friend from being harmed by “scary, bat-shit crazy” things?! Did I miss anything off there?!”

Um…. no…. I think that just about covers it!” Alanna had laughed nervously, before looking at Joel with the best puppy-dog eyes she could muster.

Several moments of silence had passed between the two of them, as the wolf had waited anxiously for her flatmates response.

“Urgh…. fine. Maybe!” the nurse had finally conceded, throwing his hands in the air.

”Really??”

“Like I said, maybe! I need some time to process all of this, Alanna. It’s a lot to ask!” Joel had sighed, walking over to their kitchen’s fridge and grabbing a fresh beer out of its cold embrace.

And time it had certainly taken.

A full week of it to be exact, of Joel going back and forth between wanting to help Alanna keep their mutual friend safe – and wanting to stay as far away from the Engagement Party as physically possible.

“I’m still not sure how us being here is going to help Keelin, given the fact that she’s very likely to throw you out the minute she sees you!” Joel argued, as the two of them continued to hover in the Mikealson Compound’s entranceway.

“You are assuming of course that she’ll recognise me!” Alanna quipped back, undeterred by her flatmates continued apprehension as she flashed him a devilish grin. “It is after all, a masquerade party!”

Winking at Joel, the Nivera wolf raised the ornate mask that she had been carrying up to her face and secured it in place.

Elaborately decorated with delicate swirls of black and white paint, the red mask completely covered the top half of Alanna’s face - save for two small gaps that her mischievous blue eyes could be seen glistening through. Several small rhinestones were intricately set into the tips of the painted whirls, sparkling sharply in the colourful light coming from the main Courtyard ahead of
them. And thanks to the mask’s angled brow, broad nose, and cleverly positioned feathers on either side of its façade, the whole disguise was clearly intended to give its wearer’s appearance a distinct “wolf-like” quality.

Rolling his eyes at his flatmate, Joel began to secure his own masked disguise into place.

“Oh yeah, there’s not a chance of you being recognised now!” the male nurse huffed sarcastically, shaking his head. “Come on then, let’s get this over with before I finally come to my senses and leave this monster-riddled city for good!”

Flashing a wolfish grin at her friend, Alanna hooked her arm through his and lightly clung on to the black material of his hire-suit’s sleeve.

“You’re the best, Joel” she squealed, as they began to make their way towards the loud music of the lively courtyard. “And I promise - I won’t let anything bad happen to you!”

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3.

“Arrrrgh!”

Muffled screams of terror seeped down through the thick layers of sandstone and shale that separated Baracuda’s Tavern from the vast catacombs that lay beneath its boozy façade.

Crouched down on her haunches with her hooded head bowed low, Freya tried her best to conceal the jolt of fear that rushed through her body in reaction to yet another blood-curdling shriek of pain coming from the bar high above.

As she drew in a deep breath and attempted to steady her racing heart, the witch once again reached out with her mind in search for the familiar well of power that resided deep within her body.

There…. it was still there…. the dark, malignant force that now dwelled where her own vibrant power had once lived. It had not disappeared, nor shrunk away like her natural magic had done the last time that she was unfortunate enough to be ensnared within the Jarls’ lair. It…. was still there!

Flinching at another stifled screech of agony that chillingly mixed with the shouts and yells of panic from overhead, Freya’s grip on her arms tightened, as they lay wrapped defensively around her torso.

Is that how her own screams of torment had sounded, when she had been stripped bare of her soul at the Bikers hands…. Had the louts drinking in the bar above been able to hear each of her cries of agony…. each of her pleas for mercy…. just as she could now hear theirs?

“Music to the ears, isn’t it!”

The low, gruff voice coming from across the chamber, held a certain amount of revere in its tone,
despite the undercurrent of distaste that Freya could detect in the words.

“Too many years has it been since our lord has walked among us,” the Jarl continued, undeterred by the lack of response he had received from his one-woman audience. “Too many years he has spent desiccated and locked away within a prison of unrelenting starvation and weakness. His hunger will be insatiable! So much so, I am no longer certain that we have gathered enough food to meet his needs!”

Turning her head in its hooded confines, Freya glared towards the only other being besides herself who had remained in the room that the Jarl’s had seemingly resurrected their Lord within.

Stood with his back towards to her, the bearded man appeared to be busying himself by preparing some form of potion on a large, wooden apothecary table. Shoved up against the far wall of the chamber, the ancient looking piece of furniture was one of only two fixtures found in the damp, dimly lit space. The other being the smooth, stone Alter on which the Jarl’s “Master” had been originally been lain.

“How’s feeding?” Freya heard herself ask with a slight tremor in her voice.

Turning from his work, the Jarl known as Balder fixed his grey eyes down towards where was Freya crouched on the ancient, slippery stone floor. As a sneer of disdain began to twist the man’s features, the witch briefly noted how he was not dressed like his six other brethren had been. Instead of the well-worn leathers and black t-shirted uniform that Freya had come to associate with the sadistic thugs who had tortured her, this particular member of their group wore what the witch thought looked something akin to ceremonial robes.

Very old ceremonial robes…. Freya thought to herself, as she let her shrouded gaze drop away from the smirking Jarl…. not unlike the ones she used to see her Aunt Dahlia wearing, many centuries ago.

“Yes, witch. Feeding!” the Jarl confirmed, with no shortage of wicked humour in his tone. “Why do you think we have encouraged and tolerated the presence of quite so many vampiric baboon’s in our dwelling above ground!? The Great Lord’s thirst cannot be sated by pure human blood. His needs are more…. specific! And the thralls were recruited to see to those needs.”

“They were nothing more than cattle?” Freya asked solemnly, thinking of all the leather clad vampires that she had seen sat drinking in the Tavern when she had first arrived that evening.

“How should you wish to put it so crudely,” Balder said, angling his head so as to try and get a better look at the crouched witch’s shadowed features. “Though they were not without their uses. Vampires are brutes at best, but their enhanced strength does come in handy when it comes to keeping the city locals in check. Not that their might could ever hope to match that of my brethren and I, of course. But for times when we were otherwise occupied, the Thralls served their purpose in keeping the riff-raff off our backs. Your own abduction being a prime example – whilst your lover was pre-occupied fighting off a handful of our Vampire “cattle”, my brothers were able to disappear into the night with you. Unseen and untraceable.”

Freya’s eyes fell shut, as images of that fateful night quickly flashed before her mind.

“I hear she put up quite the fight – that wench of yours.” Balder continued, as he turned his attention back to the apothecary table and busied himself once more. “Cost us several of our strongest Thralls, much to Halvar’s annoyance. She must be a formidable specimen of a wolf to take on so many vampires alone, and live to tell the tale. What I would give to….,”
“If you so much as lay a hand on her, I’ll rip your rotting heart out!” Freya snarled, whipping her head in Balder’s direction as her voice taking on the rough gravel of the blood-bond.

Despite now knowing that the obsidian power pulsating within would not listen to her will where the Jarl’s were concerned, it did not stop the witch stoking its corrupted flames with her rage.

“Ha,” Balder laughed, glancing back towards her with a somewhat bemused expression. “You should know by now, witch, that you cannot hurt us. The blood-bond’s will is absolute. You are of no more threat to us than a new born babe still suckling on its mother’s milk!”

Freya’s hands clenched into tight fists, as she slowly pushed herself up from her crouched position. Drawing in deep breaths of stale air, the witch narrowed her now blackened eyes upon the Jarl’s back and took a determined step in his direction.

“Besides,” the robed biker continued, seemingly unaware of Freya’s change in stance as he began to pour the contents of one beaker into another, “unlike my moronic brothers, I have no interest in defiling your lover’s body. My fascination lies purely in the study of her genetics. Analysing the animal spirit that dwells deep inside of her, and seeing if its primal power could be harvested for….”

The Jarl’s words were cut short by a sudden loud duet of splitting wood and screeching metal, caused by the chamber’s door tearing off its hinges and colliding with the stone alter.

Instinctively throwing her hands up in readiness to unleash a spell, Freya’s wide eyes cleared into their natural, emerald form, as her gaze fixed on the intimidating form that now filled the space where the decimated door had once lived.

Standing at what Freya guessed to be at least seven-foot tall, a broad-shouldered, bereft of clothes male, completely blocked all line-of-sight out of the chamber – proving to be more of an effective blockade than the old, rickety wooden door could ever have hoped to be. Thick, wavy blonde hair cascaded down from the man’s scalp, framing his well-chiselled face perfectly as the locks came to rest just above his sternum. Engorged, faultlessly defined muscles covered every inch of the naked male’s body, making the imposing figure look like someone who had spent the last thousand years relentlessly pumping iron and popping steroids – instead of lying on an altar desiccated, and at deaths door.

Surely that couldn’t be the same being as the shrivelled, burnt out carcass that had been sprawled out on the stone slab less than twenty minutes ago?!, Freya thought to herself as she took in the newcomer’s impeccable physique.

A cloudy mist of heavy, laboured breaths could be seen mixing with the cold air of the catacomb, as the man stood panting breathlessly and looking as though he had just been engaged in a heavily exertive sport.

A sport that had involved the slaughter of the numerous vampires that had been drinking in the tavern above, judging by all of the fresh blood that covered almost every inch of his pale-skinned body.

“My lord, you are whole once more!”

From the corner of her eye, Freya caught sight of Balder bowing his head and torso down low, in what appeared to be a gesture of submission and respect. She instantly felt her own muscles tense, as the anticipation of being forced into a similar stance of obedience by the blood-bond washed over her.
Only it didn’t happen.

“Balder….”, the man’s deep baritone voice boomed, seemingly unaffected by the centuries of dust that must have built up in his vocal chords, “….my clothes!”

“Yes, my Lord” the Jarl responded. “I will have one of the other’s fetch them from…."

“You, Balder. Not another!”

“But…. m-my Lord, the witch…. she is not of our cause! It would be wise if I remained to watch over her whilst you are still….”

“Get me an Ale too!” the overbearing man continued – his rumbling tone seeming to reverberate through every cell in Freya’s body as he locked vibrant, crystal blue eyes onto her. “Now, leave us!”

Rapidly flicking his gaze between Freya and the muscular male, Balder opened his mouth as though to protest once more, before appearing to think better of it.

“Yes, my Lord. As you wish.”

The Jarl’s Master took a single step into the Chamber, allowing space for Balder to make his way out of their presence.

Watching the robed biker disappear out of sight, Freya was surprised to find herself wishing that he had been allowed to stay.

Something about this the Jarl’s Master and his unfltering stare that still bore down upon her, had her skin crawling even more intensely than when Colborn had returned to the Catacombs, an hour earlier!

“You are bonded.”

The man’s weighted words were more of a statement than a question, as his piercing eyes began to slowly wonder up and down Freya’s frame.

“Halvar’s blood runs through your veins.”

Unsure whether the Jarls’ Master was expecting a response or not, Freya simply gave a quick nod of her hooded head, as a cold shiver wrecked her whole body.

It had to be as low as twenty-five degree’s fahrenheit down in the catacombs – how was this guy not shaking in the absence of any clothes?!

“You hood – remove it!”

Feeling the blood-bond’s rumbling demand for compliance within her, Freya slowly pushed the fabric away from her face. She raised a hand to ruffle away the static from her tousled blonde locks, but stopped mid-action when she caught sight of the Jarl’s Master’s eyes suddenly widening.

“You…. of what lineage are you?” the man asked, taking a step closer to her as his words echoed around the chamber.

“Lineage? I…. I’m not sure I understand what you….”

“Your ancestors, who were they?”
As she took a step backwards from his advance, Freya would have sworn that she could feel the mutated power within her begin to vibrate with some sort of twisted excitement.

“I – I do not know”, she found herself admitting honestly. “They lived a very long time ago, as did my parents. I…. I was not born of this century.”

Stopping dead in his tracks, the Jarl’s Master’s posture straightened as Freya witnessed every well-defined muscle in his body simultaneously tense.

“Your family name?” he eventually asked in an almost hushed tone, after a few tense seconds of weighted silence passed between them.

Every instinct that she had been born with screamed at Freya to withhold the information that the blood-covered man had requested. She couldn’t exactly pin-point why, but she sensed that the words confirming her family legacy would also be the words that would condemn her fate.

“Don’t make me ask twice, witch!” the Jarl’s Master glowered, his voice once again filling the room with its undeniable authority.

A gasp of discomfort escaped her mouth, as the blood-bond’s presence flared far stronger than she had previously experienced – its flames scorching through her veins like molten lava.

“M-Mikaelson…” Freya stammered in pain, as black spots began to dance in her vision. “My name is Freya Mikaelson.”

Surprise visibly took hold of the Jarl’s Masters features, as his stubble covered, chiselled-jaw tensed.

“It cannot be!” he proclaimed in disbelief, quickly closing the remaining distance between them to less than a metre. “There were only five. Five others, forever burdened to lead immortal lives thanks to her spell. Besides, you are…. human.”

Panting in short, pained breaths, the witch found her gaze being drawn up to meet the Master’s intense scrutiny.

Now within touching distance of the towering man’s firm physique, Freya could feel heat radiating off his body in tangible waves, as though she was stood in front of a large, roaring fire.

Another shudder ran the length of her body, as she began to feel the mutated magic within her thrash its pulsating tendrils in a tumultuous frenzy. The blood-bond’s ire ravaging its way through her veins somehow seemed to intensify even further, threatening to pull unsteady legs out from under her.

“I was taken from my f-family at a young age”, Freya declared, her voice wavering as she continued to breathe in uneven, strained breaths. “By my mother’s sister. Cu…. cursed by her to…. urgh…. to an unnaturally long life….”

“Dahlia…. of course!”

The fact that the Jarl’s Master knew of her Aunt’s name barely registered, as Freya’s body continued to be assaulted by both the blood- bond’s aggravated wrath, and the insidious whisps of mutated power lashing out from her reserves.

“Clever of Frode, to have Dahlia hide your existence away from me!” the muscular man mused to himself, as he continued to study Freya closely. “The wily old man’s final blow of betrayal!”
Unable to meet the overbearing man’s gaze any longer, the witch doubled over with a loud grunt of pain, placing an unsteady hand on each of her thighs to stop herself from completely losing her balance.

“W-hat are you… doing to me….”

Tilting his head, the Jarl’s Master studied Freya for a moment - seemingly intrigued as he stared down at her cowed form.

Seemingly searching for something.

“It is not I who causes your pain, witch,” he exclaimed, appearing to be fascinated by whatever he must have finally found. “What is left of your soul is striving to fight the bond in Halvar’s blood. My presence will simply be aggravating the bond’s ire at not being in complete control of you. Aggravating its anger at the remaining fragments of your core self. I can feel them, buried deep within you. They are desperately trying to hold onto their place within you. Trying to hold on to…. hmmm…. love.”

“Arrgh…” Freya cried out, feeling like a thousand hot knives were slicing through every muscle and organ in her body. “M-make it stop…. please….”

“As I said witch, it is not I who is tormenting you. Only you can cease the suffering that you endure”

Wild panic began to flood through Freya’s mind, as her body started to go into shock. Short, rattling breaths, started to sound more like choking as they struggled to escape from the witch’s spasming lungs.

“How?? How can I…. urgh…. I can’t…. I can’t breathe…..”

“Give yourself over to me, witch,” the Jarl’s Master simply stated, with no trace of command or directive in his voice. “Drink of my blood direct, and let go of all that pains you so.”

“W-what?!” Freya groaned as her legs finally gave way beneath her – bringing the witch crashing down onto her knees. “I…. already took t-the blood bond…..”

“You drank of Halvar’s blood, not mine,” the naked man continued calmly. “Your bloods oath is to him, which in turn binds you to me. And that would usually be suffice to rid a human of their mortal-ties to life. To rid them of their soul. But you, daughter of Esther, have something that no other human mortal alive has. An anomaly that is weakening Halvar’s hold, and allowing the love held in your heart to continue its fight against the bond.”

What was he saying…. what about her was special…. why did he suddenly sound so revered to be in her presence…. why was he…. he....

The surprisingly soft fingers of a powerfully built hand hooked under Freya’s chin, and gently coaxed her head up from its pain-cowed position. Emerald eyes filled with pain locked onto the Master’s gaze once more, as the witch strove to fight against the beckoning cold-embrace of unconsciousness.

She was going to die…. she knew that now…. down under the wastelands of the Big Easy…. the black-flamed liquid fire consuming her body from the inside out, was going to kill her…. the apparently faulty bond was going to be....

“Give yourself over to me fully, Freya, and I swear on the lives of the Gods themselves that you
will never feel pain again. Give yourself over to me, and I will finally set you free to fulfil the
destiny that you were meant for!”

.... the death of her. Unless.... unless she....

Raising his free hand to his mouth, the Master swiftly bit down into his wrist with what looked like
vampiric fangs, before lowering the bleeding appendage back down in offering to Freya.

“Accept my offering, witch – and I will free you from the all of the weighty shackles of your
mortal life!”

Another groan of agony forced its way out of her mouth as the pulsating dark power within her
lashed out again, pushing her even closer to oblivion’s cliff edge.

Dropping her eyes to the man’s bloody wrist, Freya let out a small sob of desolation and sent out a
silent prayer into the universe.

_Forgive me.... please.... forgive me._

A small smile of triumph settled on the Master’s lips, as the witch grabbed onto his arm and pulled
his wrist up to her parted lips. Sucking down on the torn flesh’s offering, Freya almost gagged on
the sharp coppery tang of blood, as it began to flood into her mouth and down her throat.

“Yes....” the Master moaned out from somewhere above her. “Drink.... drink deep, and let us be
bonded absolute.”

The obsidian lava incinerating its way through her body quickly intensified in heat, as though the
Master’s blood had flipped some kind of boost-switch on a mystical thermostat. Tissue that had
already been burning, quickly turned to ash, as every part of the witch began to succumb to the
unstoppable force of the blood-bond in its purest form.

Freya’s lips ripped from the spurting blood as her whole torso was suddenly thrown into spasm.
Arms jerking wide and spine arching backwards, the witch let out a harrowing cry of agony that
violently bounced off each of the underground chamber’s four walls.

Smile widening, the Jarl’s Master took a step back from her convulsing form and let his eye’s fall
shut.

“Let go, Freya,” he said, as a deep, commanding authority laced his words once more. “Let go of
all that binds you to the lives of those who demand your love!”

Another ear-piercing scream ripped forth from Freya as her whole body crashed down onto the
damp stone floor in a frenzy of spasming limbs.

“Let go of all the responsibilities that have been thrust upon you since the day you were born. Let
go, and be free from the suffocating shackles of a family that you know have never truly accepted
you as one of their own!”

The whites of the witch’s eyes began to flicker under twitching lids, as they rolled back in their
sockets.

“Let go of the love that has been preventing you from becoming all that you were meant to be. Let
go of all of those who would fear and despise you, if they knew of your power’s true potential.”

Opening his eyes once more, the Master bore a gaze swirling with the black and crimson whisps of
the blood-bond down upon Freya’s convulsing body, as his lips stretched even further into an ominous, toothy smile.

“Let go of your wolf lover, with her suffocating expectations and false claims of loyalty! Let go of all the insignificant human ties that are forever holding you back.”

Crouching down on his haunches, the Master’s eyes widened in anticipation as he watched his blood break down every last barrier that the witch’s soul had left.

“Let go of it all, Freya…. and embrace your destiny!”

Silence quickly fell over the dimly lit chamber, as the witch’s body became limp on the cold, damp floor.

After several heartbeats of carefully studying the woman lay unmoving at his feet, the muscular man stood tall once more.

“Rise, witch! Rise and take your rightful place by my side!”

As a drop of water fell down from the sandstone ceiling above and landed on her face, Freya’s mouth suddenly opened wide with a loud gasp for air. Jerking upwards, the witch wasted no time in pushing herself off the ground – nimbly finding her feet despite the vicious seizures that had been wrecking her body only moments ago.

“Tell me, who are you?” the Jarl’s Master demanded expectantly.

Freya’s tongue quickly flicked out over plump lips, as she opened eyes that were as black as a bottomless well.

“I am yours, my Lord,” an unnaturally deep voice declared with unwavering conviction. “Now, and always.”

The naked man before her hummed in satisfaction, clearly appeased by the submissive response. Placing a hand upon the witch’s shoulder, he puffed out his well-toned chest and squared off his broad, powerful shoulders.

“You, Freya Mikaelson, second born child of Esther…. may call me Magnus.”

What was she doing here?!

Stood studying herself in an old ornate mirror that had once belonged to Freya, Keelin let out a low groan of apathy into the bedroom’s familiar surroundings. Tired, weary eyes wandered up and down the image being presented to her by the dusty reflective glass, as she couldn’t help but wonder why she wasn’t currently back at home, curled up in bed.

Why had she even let Rebekah talk her into this?!

The last few days had more than taken their toll on the wolf, as she worked back-to-back shifts at
St Theodora’s in an attempt to cover the severe staffing shortages caused by the never-ending storm. Each morning she had been arriving in the E.R. department at around six in the morning - blurry eyed and running on nothing but a cold mug of coffee that had been grabbed as she darted out of the apartment. And each evening she had not returned home until way past the witching hour – barley managing to shrug off the day’s soiled scrubs, before collapsing into a cold, empty bed.

By the end of the third day of her new gruelling, self-imposed routine, Joel had finally put voice to the concern that she had seen swirling in his eyes every time they had had a spare second to breathe.

“You’re pushing yourself too hard, Keelin”, the male nurse had muttered quietly, as the two of them had stood watching a patient be wheeled out of their Trauma Room. "You’re going to collapse from exhaustion if you’re not careful! And the last thing this place needs is another patient clogging up the corridors!"

She had, of course, immediately attempted to brush off his concern. Forced out her best “nonchalant” laugh, and told her friend to be more concerned about the hospital’s rapidly depleting supply of essential drugs, than her ability to do her job.

But Joel had not been so easily deterred, and had pushed on with his words of worry despite the look of warning that she had flashed him.

"I’m serious, Keelin,” he had continued - turning to face her and placing a concerned hand on her arm. “You need to slow down and take a breath! You’ve not just got yourself to think about now – there’s your unborn baby’s health to consider too. And quite frankly, I do not want to be on the receiving end of Freya’s wrath, if you end up having a miscarriage on my watch!"

Keelin’s face had blanched even more grey than it had already been, at her colleague’s words. Something that had not gone un-noticed by the male nurse.

“Oh my god, you still haven’t told her have you?!" Joel had said incredulously, despite attempting to keep his voice low so as not to draw the attention of the other clinicians in the room. "Keelin, you need to let her know what’s happening with you! Maybe then she’ll stop being so damn selfish and realise that her fiancé needs her!"

Grimacing to herself in the mirror, the wolf groaned once again as she remembered just how hurt Joel had looked when she had irritably snapped back at him in response.

"How about you concentrate on your own shit for once, Joel – rather than always sticking your god damned nose into mine!"

Looking back, she wasn’t really surprised that the male nurse didn’t speak to her for the rest of their shift – save for the necessary communication required to perform their jobs.

In hind-sight, she knew that her words had been both harsh and unwarranted - especially given that it was she who had been the one to confide in Joel about her pregnancy and worries with regards to her deeply troubled fiancé. But after three whole days of Freya not returning to their home, and three whole days of Freya not responding to her concerned texts with anything other than the two worded answer “I’m fine” - it was fair to say Keelin’s temper had been frayed at best.

Sighing heavily, the wolf pulled irritably at the top of the strapless dress that she was wearing, as she once again attempted to adjust to the feel of its unfamiliar fabric against her skin.

“Careful love, or you’ll end up ripping a seam!”
Rebekah’s voice contended with the din of loud music drifting up from the party downstairs, as the Original Vampire strode purposefully across Freya’s old bedroom. Meeting the wolf’s eyes through their reflections in the mirror, the blonde vampire offered up a berating expression as she curtly slapped Keelin’s hands away from the dress.

“Urgh, the material is just so… so….”

“Decadent and divine?” Rebekah quickly finished for her, raising a brow at the wolf’s irritated manner. “My dear Keelin, you are wearing a one-off, bespoke, designer gown, that has been handcrafted from the finest silks and satins that money can buy. And whilst I am aware that it is a far cry from the drab, and quite frankly barbaric scrubs that they force you to wear at the hospital, I would have thought that even a fashionably challenged doctor like yourself could appreciate the feel of pure luxury kissing your skin!”

“Luxury!?” the wolf scoffed, gesturing to her own reflection in the mirror. “Rebekah I can hardly move in this thing! The back has had to be laced so tight I can hardly breath, and there’s more material contained in the ruffles of the skirt than in the whole of my wardrobe put together! Add to that the 4-inch heels you’ve put me in – and I’m a trip to the Emergency Room just waiting to happen!”

“Oh don’t be so bloody dramatic!” the blonde vampire admonished, rolling her eyes at Keelin’s reflection. “Besides, all good fashion comes at the cost of a little comfort, love. A cost that is well worth paying, I might add. I mean…. look at you! You are positively breath taking!”

Huffing impertinently at her future sister-in-law, Keelin attempted to rearrange her chest in the dress’s tight-fitting bodice one last time, before letting her arms drop so as to once again scowl at herself in the mirror.

Much to her irritation, Keelin had to concede that Rebekah was not entirely wrong in her gushing assessment.

Not that she would admit as much to the vampire, who was now stood next to her silently gloating!

With a modern-day corset sitting atop a ruffled, yet somehow slender skirt, the strapless number managed to elegantly accentuate the wolf’s natural curves, whilst providing a little boost in areas where her athletic frame was at its slimmest. Dyed a vibrant colour of deep blood-red, the satin and silk material glistened in the room’s modest lighting, whilst gold stitching glinted every time the wolf twisted her frame – the combination of which gave Keelin an almost magical glow in the mirrors reflected image.

Coupled with a hairdo pinned into an elegant “up” style that allowed the necklace she had been gifted by Freya to be shown off to the world, the whole outfit screamed grace and sophistication – with an added hint of sass.

A small smile threatened to tug at the wolf’s lips, as she witnessed Rebekah’s smug satisfaction turn into candid admiration.

“Freya is positively going to lose it when she sees how gorgeous you look, love!”

Hearing her absentee fiancé’s name being uttered, swiftly brought Keelin crashing back into the sombre reality of the past few days.

“That’s if she even turns up!” the wolf sighed - dejection clearly evident in her tone.

“Of-course she is going to turn up!” Rebekah stated with no shortage of conviction, as she began to
fuss over her own reflection in the mirror. “It’s her engagement party!”

Wearing a black, figure hugging cocktail dress that had been paired with a stylish, cropped rolled-sleeved blazer, Keelin couldn’t help but admire the natural beauty of Freya’s younger sister, as she watched the vampire preen. Despite having been born well over a thousand years ago, Rebekah always somehow managed to keep up with all the modern day fashion trends gracing the catwalks.

The blonde-haired vampire somehow made it appear so effortless – no matter what deadly threat the Mikaelson’s were facing that week, or which undead creep’s ass she was off to kick.

*Beauty and grace just seemed to be an intrinsic part of the Mikaelsons gene-pool!* Keelin mused to herself, as she flashed Rebekah a cautious look of uncertainty.

“I don’t think our engagement has been on top of her list of priorities over the past few days, Rebekah”, Keelin admitted quietly, as she let her eyes drop away from the mirror. “I doubt she has even thought of me at all.”

“Hey,” Rebekah admonished, turning to face Keelin head-on, “that simply just isn’t true! My darling sister thinks the absolute world of you, Keelin, and would not hesitate to move the heavens and earth themselves to keep you safe! You make her happier than I have ever known her to be, love. And she will one hundred percent be here tonight to show the whole of the French Quarter who it is she intends to betroth her life to!”

“You can’t know that,” the wolf whispered, as the beginning of tears threatened to ruin her perfectly applied make-up.

“Actually, I can!” Rebekah stated chirpily, nudging Keelin lightly with her shoulder. “Considering that she messaged me only minutes ago to say that she is on her way!”

“What?!” Keelin asked incredulously as she fixed Rebekah with glistening wide eyes. “She messaged you? Just now?”

“That’s what I said! See…..”

Pulling her cell phone out of a blazer pocket, Rebekah tapped a few times on its screen before turning it around to show Keelin the display.

Sure enough, under the conversation header of “Witchy Sis”, the wolf could see a message from Freya’s phone that had been received less than fifteen minutes ago.

*Will be at the party soon, Sister. Can’t wait to set the night ablaze!*”

“Huh!”

“So, as you can see,” Rebekah chimed cheerfully, as she placed the cell back in her pocket, “you have absolutely nothing to worry about, love! Freya will be right at your side, as you two beautiful love birds show those revellers downstairs exactly what true love should look like!”

A frown began to crease Keelin’s brow as she struggled to match her future sister-in-law’s enthusiasm.

“Why didn’t she message me then? Or respond to any of my voicemails over the past few days? It’s like she’s purposely been shutting me out of absolutely everything ever since….”
“Who’s been shutting who out?”

Both Keelin and Rebekah twisted around just in time to see Hayley entering the room, looking flawlessly perfect in a long, flowing halter-neck dress. Cleverly designed to look as though it had been pieced together from several different “patches” of black and red material, the outfit was complimented by black kitten-heel shoes that Keelin imagined must have cost more than the dress itself.

“Wow, Keelin, you look…. wow!” Hayley exclaimed, before attempting a mock wolf-whistle as she came to stand next to them both. “Although you do realise that you’ve now totally ruined your future wedding day – as no other dress could possibly compare to that!”

“I’ll take that!” Rebekah said proudly, once again nudging Keelin playfully with her shoulder. “My work here is done!”

“Are you two both ready?” Hayley asked, looking them both over with an assessing eye. “As the party is now in full flow downstairs, and everyone is starting to ask when the two guests of honour will be showing their faces! Elijah looks like he might actually combust into flames if he has to keep on fending off questions about which of you will be wearing a wedding dress, and which will be wearing a suit! Speaking of which, has Freya arrived yet?”

“She’s on her way!” Rebekah quickly answered, purposely not giving Keelin a chance to question her fiancé’s attendance any further. “And as for us….”

Turning to the bed, the blonde vampire picked up two masquerade head-pieces off the thick quilted duvet and held one out for Keelin to take.

Constructed from materials that had been matched to the colour of her dress, the wolf’s mask had been hand-crafted to portray the illusion of a phoenix being rebirthed from fire. Vivid red and gold feathers adorned the corner of one eye, to resemble a grand plumage emerging from flames, whilst the opposite had been shaped into the silhouette of a bird’s head – majestic and looking skywards.

Smiling softly, Keelin took the mask off Rebekah and gingerly secured it place over the top half of her face.

*She had to admit - whomever the blonde vampire had no doubt compelled into designing the outfit she now wore, they clearly had an exquisite eye for extravagance and fineness.*

As both Rebekah and Hayley adored their own equally as impressive head-pieces, Keelin drew in a deep breath and attempted to steel herself for the evening’s festivities. Despite feeling like she sorely needed a good night’s sleep and at least several weeks off from the world, the wolf couldn’t help but feel a small flicker of hope after reading Freya’s recent message to her sister.

_Maybe her love really had just been over stressed about the protection spell that she had been so diligently working on over the past week. God only knew the witch already had enough emotional turmoil to deal with after her horrific abduction. It was entirely possible that the added pressure of preparing for a large, public party had been what had soured Freya’s mood towards her so badly?!_

“Ladies…. shall we?” a masked Rebekah grinned, gesturing towards the bedrooms exit. “Let us go show the world just how beautiful the union between our two brides-to-be really is!”

Rolling her eyes at the vampire in bemusement, Hayley turned to offer Keelin her arm in escort.

“Come on you”, the hybrid whispered out of the corner of her mouth, “with any luck this will all
be over in a flash, and we can then get down to the more serious business of booking into a Spa, for some much needed RnR!”

Laughing at both Hayley’s remark, and the resulting look of disapproval on Rebekah’s face that not even a mask could hide, Keelin nodded and began to make her way down to the party with her family-to-be.

Yes…. maybe the night wasn’t going to be quite as terrible as she’d envisaged after all….

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Chapter End Notes

So….. opinions? Thoughts? Anyone still thinking the party is going to go smoothly without any hiccups?? Haha.

Hit me up with a comment guys, and I’ll try my best to answer whatever questions you have.
As the title of suggests, this is not an actual chapter to my tale - but rather a shout out to the readers to try and gather some feedback.

Hey all - I hope everyone has had an awesome Christmas and didn't over-indulge toooooo much on Turkey!

So, I am after a show of hands (so to speak) from everyone who regularly reads this tale - and those who may have only just discovered it too - to see if folks are still interested in me continuing with the story?

Over the past few months, I have been finding it increasingly difficult to find time to write for pleasure. And with new up-coming work commitments, that time is only going to become even more elusive for me to pin down. I have also noticed a dramatic decline over the past 6 months, of people reading "The Originals" fanfiction on AO3. And I don't necessarily mean just my tale - this is across the board. I think it's probably just a natural evolution of interest - with new and current shows like Legends, Atypical, Wynonna Earp etc etc still on the air and providing new content, it kinda makes sense that folks interest in The Originals is going to wane.

Thus I'm asking for your feedback please guys - do you want me to continue with What Lies Within (ands its sequel - the third part of the trilogy), or are folks not that arsed?

If you guys aren't that bothered about reading more of the story in full, I can always email out a short bullet-point summary of how the tale ends to people, on request. Least that way I won't leave anyone hanging thinking "but what the hell happened with everything??"

However if enough people do want me to continue, then of course I will - and make sure to try and fit in some writing time in my stupidly busy schedule. (Damn life - adulting is hard!!!).

Please let me know guys - it'd be much appreciated :-)

Chapter 29

Chapter Summary

Previously on What Lies Within.....
1. Keelin discovered that she had somehow become pregnant, thanks to her and Freya making love under the watchful eye of Selene - the fabled Lunar God.
2. Freya found and acquired the mythical "Nazuril" amulet, gifting it to Keelin in order to protect the wolf from harm.
3. The Jarl's finally managed to resurrect their "Master" using the blood provided to them by Freya.
4. Freya met the Jarl's lord for the first time, willingly agreeing to drink his blood in an attempt to save herself from Halvar's "faulty" bond as it came close to killing her.
5. Joel and Alanna turned up to Keelin's engagement party - the nurse taking Alanna along as his plus-one, despite knowing Keelin and her were not currently on good terms.
6. Rebekah received a text from Freya to say she was on her way to the Engagement party, as the Original Vampire helped Keelin prepare for her entrance.

Chapter Notes

Hey guys - HAPPY NEW YEAR!! And welcome to Chapter 29 of my tale.

So, here it is. The Engagement Party in all its glory. I'd advise to buckle up and batton down the hatches - for the ride is about to get a little choppy!

This er.... might sting a little.

But hey, feel free to shout/rant/cry/be relieved (who knows, some of you might be!) at me when you've done reading. I'd love to hear how this chapter has gone down - because believe me, it took some writing (I've been full of flu for well over a week now. Turns out all creatively leaves my brain when I'm ill!!!!!!)

Enjoy guys.....

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 29.

1.

“My God, exactly how many people did you invite?!”

The loud beat of dance music playfully filled the Mikaelson Compound, as Keelin carefully descended the courtyard’s sweeping staircase one step at a time. Between the ridiculously high
heels that Rebekah had made her wear and the numerous ruffles of her dress’s skirt, the wolf was glad that Hayley had offered to escort her into the party. Without the hybrid’s arm to cling onto, Keelin had no doubt that she would have been making a grand entrance to her own engagement party by rolling head-over-tail down the stairs.

“Oh, not that many, love”, Rebekah replied from two steps down – twisting her head around briefly to flash Keelin a toothy smile. “Just most of Marcel’s vampires, Tobias and his ever-growing coven of witches, a few prominent figures from the human faction, oh and of course – several of the wolves from Hayley’s pack, out in the Bayou.”

“Is Mary here?” Keelin asked, sounding more hopeful than she had wanted.  

*Heaven only knew she could do with a little of the Wolf Elder’s innate calming presence right now.*

“No,” Hayley confirmed – the hybrid’s voice raised to be heard over the loud music. “A big party like this isn’t really her scene.

“I’m not so sure it’s currently my scene either….”

“She sends her well wishes to you and Freya though,” Hayley continued, flashing Keelin a sympathetic look despite Rebekah rolling her eyes at the wolf’s remark. “And wanted me to remind you that you are welcome to drop by her cabin any time you want.”

“Yes yes, Mary’s a bloody saint”, Rebekah huffed as she reached the bottom step and turned to face Keelin. “But as she is not here, and you are – tell me, what do you think….?”

As the blonde vampire slowly turned and sweepingly gestured to the whole of the Courtyard, Keelin cast her eyes over the party proper for the first time since beginning to descend into its midst.

The sight that met her, almost stole her breath away.

Gone was the prestigious and peaceful appearance that the wolf had come to associate with the Mikaelson compound’s large courtyard – it’s sophisticated ambience having been replaced by what looked like a well-choreographed, vibrant club scene from a film that had blown over half its multi-million-dollar budget on this one shot alone.

Red and black decorations of every size and shape hung down from the enclosures support beams and walls, their materials ranging from delicately folded crepe paper, to the robust reflectiveness of hand worked metal that had been shaped into various twisting ribbons. Strobing lights that had been filtered red, flickered and danced off every dangling ornament twisting in the air, bringing alive a majestical collage that looked fit to be hung in the most-regal of palaces.

Gaze dropping from the captivating decorations, Keelin noted how she was unable to see a single inch of floor due to the wall-to-wall hoard of revellers that danced, chatted, and laughed with one another as they allowed the rhythm of the DJ’s music to lift their spirits and carry them away. Glamorous dresses and well-tailored suits that were styled from every era of the last century, adorned numerous men and women – all accompanied by frivolously ornate masks that cleverly hid half of their faces. The clandestine appearance of each guest gave the whole Courtyard a charged air of mystery, as though every person there was an enigmatic stranger - prowling and preening in an attempt to find a new lover to seduce.

The music pumping out of speakers dotted all around the ground floor space, thrummed through Keelin’s body like a second heartbeat that was determined to take-up life within her. The unique
sound - an interesting blend of modern contemporary pop tracks that had been cleverly laid over classic melody’s born in the late 1800’s - provided the perfect tempo for the many dancing couples, all of whom laughed and squealed with delight their hips swayed in almost perfect unison.

The resulting effect made the whole courtyard look as though it had taken on a life of its own – its red and black skin thrumming and pulsating as the enchanting music breathed life into its new-born soul.

For a fleeting second, the whole scene made Keelin want to let go of every self-imposed inhibition that she had ever felt growing up as a werewolf, and lose herself completely in the throng of mysterious, dancing revellers.

“You’ve got to hand it to my sister – she sure knows how to throw a party!”

Snapping out of her awestruck stupor, Keelin quickly refocused on the sight of Freya’s youngest brother, Kol, as he appeared from behind a large group of chattering revellers, and stood at the bottom of the staircase.

Smiling broadly at all three of the women as they reached the last steps, the suited vampire chivalrously held out an arm in Keelin’s direction as he took a deep, theatrical bow.

“If it so pleases my lady, I would like to escort my sister’s fiancé to the bar for her first drink of the evening!”

“Why Kol, I didn’t know you had a chivalrous bone in your body!” Rebekah scoffed at her brother, teasingly nudging him with her hip as he rose up from his bow. “Careful Keelin, I’d say he’s most definitely after something!”

Both Keelin and Hayley laughed at the two siblings, as Kol’s eyes flashed with mock hurt behind his ornate mask.

“You wound me, sister…..” the vampire huffed, despite trying his best to hide a smile, “…. can’t a gentleman simply want to charm his soon to be sister-in-law and get to know her a little better?!”

“If you intend on trying to charm me in the same way that you attempted with Freya when the two of you first met…. I think I’ll have to pass!” Keelin quipped with a smile, not missing a beat.

Both Kayley and Rebekah failed in their attempts to hide their amusement at the wolf’s remark - each letting out a small huff of laughter as Kol himself also grinned – his amiable eyes never leaving Keelin’s face.

“Something tells me that my enigmatic sister may have met her match in you, wolf!” he mused warmly, turning to face the crowds as his arm remained up for Keelin to take. “In both beauty, and sharp-witted tongue!”

Looking back over his shoulder, the vampire winked playfully at Keelin and gestured to his offer of escort.

“Shall we…..”

“Why, it would be my pleasure kind sir!” the wolf declared with pomp, performing a small theatrical curtsey before linking her arm through Kol’s. “Please, do lead the way!”

Bowing his head at the wolf’s acceptance, Kol quickly threw Rebekah a victorious smirk, before beginning to guide Keelin around the outer edge of the throbbing mass of dancing revellers.
“God’s help her!” Keelin heard Rebekah declare to Hayley as she was led away - amusement clearly evident in the Original’s voice despite her mocking of Kol.

“Pay no heed to my, sister,” Kol laughed, clearly having heard Rebekah’s remark himself. “I can be the perfect gentlemen when I want to be!”

“And when you don’t want to be?” Keelin challenged in good humour, eyeing Freya’s brother’s profile as the two weaved their way in-and-out of masked guests stood chatting animatedly.

“Oh, I am that sure my colourful reputation proceeds me just as well as that of my siblings’!” the vampire smirked, as the two of them reached the bustling bar that had been built near the Compound’s entrance. “I think the more pressing question, my dear Keelin, is why you – a well-rounded, beautiful, intelligent, and seemingly sane woman – would ever want to marry into this messed up, toxic family!”

Twisting her head towards him, it took only a second for Keelin to note that despite the serious undertone to his words, Kol was still smiling warmly through his masquerade mask, as he gestured to gain the attention of a passing bar-man.

“Well, that might have something to do with the fact that I am hopelessly in love with your sister!” she remarked, shrugging nonchalantly as though it was the most obvious answer in the world. “Besides, all families have their quirks!”

“Quirks?!?” Kol huffed over the loud music pumping around them, as he shook his head in bemusement at Keelin’s off-the-cuff statement. “You have met my brother, Klaus - right?! Tall, brooding, good father…. likely to thrust a dagger into a family member’s heart at any given moment!”

Keelin grimaced lightly at the vampire’s last words, as the memory of a conversation that she and Freya had engaged in several months ago came flooding back.

The two of them had been spending a rare free-afternoon getting coffee in their favourite Jazz-bar, on the musically saturated Frenchmen St.

Somehow the topic of conversation between the two lovers had turned to the subject of why Kol hardly returned to New Orleans, to visit his niece – and Freya’s face had taken on a rather sombre expression as she had begun to explain the tumultuous history between Klaus and their youngest brother. Of course, the witch herself had only heard the tales second hand, since she had been kept hidden away from her family until recent years. But Freya had assured Keelin nonetheless, that all of the Mikealson vampiric siblings had experienced a dagger to the heart by Klaus - at least once in their unnaturally long lives.

“I’d just maybe consider your living options,” Kol continued, pulling Keelin from her memories, “for when you two love birds have finally tied the knot! It is no co-incidence that Davina and I chose to plant roots many states away from New Orleans, Keelin. If you and Freya want true happiness and freedom in your married life, you might want to consider relocating far away from my brother and his paranoid delusions of family!”

“I’ll…. keep that in mind,” Keelin said, her smile waning faintly despite her best efforts to remain polite.

“But where are my manners!” Kol suddenly declared, no doubt noting the subtle change in Keelin’s manner. “I promised my soon to be sister-in-law a drink, and a drink she shall have! What will it be – something fancy and deliciously sweet, much like yourself? Or have my kin already
converted to into a hardened Bourbon drinker?”

Forcing her smile to widen once more at the Vampire’s obvious attempt to continue his charm offensive, the wolf found herself almost forgetting her current predicament.

“You probably won’t believe this, but I was already a bourbon drinker before your sister crash landed into my life!”

“Excellent!” Kol declared, motioning for the bar tender once again. “Two ridiculously expensive, yet probably not paid for, Bourbon’s coming right up!”

*Shit…. what was she thinking?*

“Urg…. actually Kol,” Keelin shouted over the music, quickly trying to rectify her mistake, “can you make mine a Soda Water. I err…. already had a few drinks upstairs, and I don’t want to get too drunk before Freya arrives.”

Grimacing inwardly at the weak lie that had tumbled out of her mouth, Keelin hoped that Freya’s brother was too caught up in his uneasiness at being back under the same roof as Klaus, to notice his future sister-in-law’s suddenly flushed cheeks.

“Ha – and here was I thinking that you wolves were meant to be hardened drinkers!” the vampire mused, before correcting his order with the bar tender. “That is something you’ll definitely have to work on if you want to become a Mikaelson!”

A somewhat nervous laugh escaped Keelin’s throat before she had chance to catch it.

A Mikaelson…. Keelin Mikealson…. was that what her future name was going to be? Mrs Mikaelson…. Doctor Mikaelson….

“Ah…. I’m guessing that you two ladies haven’t discussed who will be taking whose name yet?” Kol half laughed, half grimaced, as he passed a tall glass of iced Soda Water to her. “That’s my bad, sorry.”

“No, it’s ok”, Keelin reassured Kol, as she sipped her drink and started casting her gaze over the surrounding crowd. “There’s nothing to be sorry for. I guess with all that’s happened, we’ve just not had a chance to talk about anything like that yet. Freya’s understandably been a little pre-occupied as of…..”

The wolf’s words trailed off as her eyes came to rest on a particular duo of guests dancing close to the DJ’s stand. They appeared to be keeping themselves slightly apart from the main throng of revellers gathered more towards the centre of the Courtyard. And judging by the male’s stiff movements and awkward grimace as he chatted to his smaller dance partner, he was anything but relaxed.

“Joel!” she muttered to herself in surprise, recognising her colleague despite his lack of scrubs, and the ornate mask covering half his face. “He came!”

“What’s that love?” Kol asked, turning his attention back to Keelin from the two particularly slim and well preened ladies stood on his other side.

“Oh nothing – I just recognised one of my work colleagues dancing over there. I didn’t think he would actually come.”

Peering over Keelin’s shoulder, Kol nodded his head in Joel’s direction.
“Ah, you mean the human male dancing with the wolf?” the vampire observed, sniffing the air as he did so. “I smelt him as soon as the pair entered earlier. As did many of the other vampires here tonight, I would wager. His blood has a particularly appealing aroma to….”

“Wolf?!” Keelin interrupted, eyes narrowing as she zoned in on her colleague’s dance partner for the first time.

Shorter than the male nurse by a good few inches, the petite woman was wearing a 50’s era apron dress – it’s red and black polkadotted material pulled in at the waist with a thick band of dark crimson silk. Paired stylishly with red kitten heeled shoes that perfectly showcased the revellers well-toned legs, the skirt of the dress flared out every time the masked woman twirled around, as she chatted and danced to the rhythm of the music.

Had a fiery ball of anger not started flaring up in her chest at that very moment, Keelin might have made an off-hand comment to Kol on how attractive the young masked reveller looked, as she danced with apparent carefree abandonment.

But as it was, all she could focus on was the snarling of her wolf-spirit as it snapped at the Kyanite barrier within her.

“Allanna….” she growled, as her hand tightened around the glass it held. “Would you excuse me for a moment, Kol….”

Not waiting for an answer from the now bewildered looking vampire, Keelin quickly abandoned her drink on the bar and began to make her way over to the DJ stand.

2.

“So exactly how long do we have to stay for again?”

Joel’s nervousness at being at Keelin’s engagement party had not diminished since he and Alanna had arrived just over an hour ago. In-fact if anything, he felt it had increased by at least tenfold.

“Come on Joel, we’ve only been here a short while. Relax a little – have another drink. Everything’s fine!”

The calm, off-hand way in which his flatmate continued to brush off the concerns that he had been raising ever since they had stepped foot into the lavishly decorated courtyard, was slowly starting to grate on the nurse’s nerves.

“Well of course you’re ok with being here!” he grumbled, rolling his eyes at the dancing wolf. “You have the ability to turn into a four-legged killing machine should any of the supernatural monsters here tonight take a disliking to you! But in-case you’ve forgotten, Alanna, I’ve only got exceedingly good looks and witty charm to defend myself with!”

Casting nervous eyes over the guests dancing closest to them, Joel felt a small shudder vibrate its way down his spine.

“And none of them are looking at you as though you are a midnight snack, like they are me!” he
pointed out, lowering his voice despite the loud music all around them. “I swear I’ve caught that vamp just to your left licking his lips whilst staring at my neck - at least three times now!”

Throwing a quick glance to the male he was referring to, Alanna laughed before shaking her head at him.

“Joel, he’s human – just like you!”

“He is?!” the nurse exclaimed in surprise, taking another look at the guest.

“Well, not 100% the same as you – he is a witch after all. But he is definitely human, and definitely not looking at you because he’s sizing you up for dinner! He probably just thinks you’re hot or something.”

“Huh,” Joel huffed, feeling a little less on edge than a few minutes ago. “How can you tell all that from just a glance?”

“Like you so tactfully pointed out - I’m a wolf!” Alanna laughed, twirling around to the music as she did so. “I can smell a vampire a mile off. Other wolves too. And some witches, pending on their level of power. Oooh, and there was this one time that I even managed to sniff out…..”

“Oh wow!” Joel suddenly exclaimed as his attention was drawn to the courtyard’s large sweeping staircase. “Is that Keelin?!”

Accompanied by two other women, his work colleague was almost unrecognisable as the doctor he saw day-in-day-out at St Theodora’s hospital.

Gone were the blood-stained scrubs, and sick covered crocs that more often than not served as Keelin’s well-abused uniform. Gone was the messy hair bun, often quickly tied up on top of her head as the two of them ran into a trauma room. Gone were the worn out, shattered eyes gained from having worked several fifteen hour shifts back-to-back because the Emergency Department was once again understaffed.

Were it not for the familiar smile that Keelin currently wore - dazzling a male guest whom appeared to be waiting for the doctor at the bottom of the staircase - he believed he would not have recognised his work-friend at all!

“I tell you what – if I was straight, Freya would have some serious competition right now!” the male nurse joked, nudging Alanna with his shoulder. “I mean, that dress!! Wow.”

After a few more heartbeats of watching Keelin carefully navigate the numerous steps in her high-heeled shoes, it dawned on Joel that Alanna had not said anything in response to his remark. In fact, she hadn’t said anything since he’d drawn both of their attention to the staircase.

“Alanna?”

Turning to face his flatmate, Joel discovered that the wolf was stood gawping at the stairwell - open mouthed, and looking like a spell-bound, lovesick puppy.

The poor girl clearly had it bad!

“You know, you could just tell her how you feel!” the nurse remarked to his flatmate whilst nodding in Keelin’s direction. “Get it all out in the open, and let the chips fall where they may!”

Expecting the wolf to scoff at him and shrug off his remark - declaring once again that she didn’t
know what he was talking about - Joel was surprised when Alanna simply let out a heavy sigh and continued to look longingly towards their mutual friend.

“There’d be no point,” the wolf eventually breathed, her voice full of dejection. “She only has eyes for one person, Joel. And I could never hope to be a match against Freya, when it came to Keelin’s affections!”

Offering his flatmate a sympathetic smile, Joel thought for a moment about the mysterious woman that Keelin was engaged to.

He had only ever met Freya a handful of times, and each of them had been a fleeting encounter as the tall blonde had rocked up to St Theodora’s to meet Keelin after her shift finished. That was, of course, apart from the witch’s short stay in the Intensive Care unit, just over two weeks ago now.

Not that that particular encounter really counted – Freya had been unconscious and at deaths door after all!

But if there was one thing that Joel was good at in life – it was being able to quickly read the people he crossed paths with, no matter how brief their encounter.

He used to call it his own little “superpower”, whenever family or friends would comment on his uncanny ability to accurately peg down a stranger’s personality within one brief meeting. A comment that had often earnt him a light hearted “you’re such a geek!” remark from those around him.

Nowadays, however, he was no longer sure that the term “superpower” was one that he could legitimately use – given his recent discovery that all the fairy-tale creatures and monsters that he had read about as a young boy, were in fact, very real.

Nethertheless – his renamed “party-trick” still served him well in most social situations.

And when he had first met Freya on a cold winter’s morning as the blonde had been stood keeping warm in St Theodora’s main foyer, he had got an immediate impression of someone whom you did not wish to get on the wrong side of!

Someone who would stop at nothing to ensure that you regretted the day you first crossed paths with her, should you ever do anything to piss her off!

And someone whom was deeply committed to the few people in her life that she allowed herself to love.

Thus, as he now watched an infatuated Alanna continued to gawp at Keelin as she moved across the courtyard to the large bar near the entrance, Joel couldn’t help but agree with his flatmates dejected statement.

She may be a werewolf, but something told him that Alanna would be six feet under faster than the blink of an eye, should she ever attempt to make an unsolicited move on Keelin. Freya was.... intimidating!

“Do you know what you need?” the male nurse piped up, hoping to try and distract his friend from spiralling any further into her own thoughts. “A fuck buddy!”

“Excuse me?!” Alanna coughed, turning back towards her flatmate with brows raised high.

“You know, someone to help take your mind off Keelin, and bring a little sexy-time into your
“life!” he continued, smiling at Alanna as though it was the most obvious solution in the world. “Like, whatever happened to Holly? You two seemed to be going well – especially if the noises I heard coming from your room were anything to go by!”

Quickly blushing a shade of red that almost matched her dress, Alanna swiped at Joel’s arm with her free hand whilst being careful not to spill any of the champagne held in her other.

“Hey - we were never that loud!” the wolf proclaimed defensively, before seeming to think twice about her answer. “Um, were we? Oh god… were we??”

Laughing at how easy it was to ruffle his friend’s feathers and send her into a panic, Joel shook his head before taking a sip of his own bubbly.

“I’m only ribbing you Alanna, you weren’t that bad. Well – most times you weren’t anyways”, he added, winking at her as he began to sway in time to the latest song beginning to drop over the party’s speakers.

“Urgh!” the wolf groaned. “If that’s the case, then you may well have heard the reason that she and I are no longer a thing!”

Quirking an eyebrow in interest, Joel grabbed Alanna’s free hand and proceeded to pull the masked wolf into a dancing twirl.

“I err…. well…. I may have said the wrong name during…. well…. you know….”

“Noooo! Really?” the male nurse coughed out in surprise, as the two of them continued to jive to the music. “Whose name did you…. wait, please tell me it wasn’t….”

“Keelin’s!” Alanna finished for him, wincing in embarrassment as they rotated around each other, gracefully bowing to the melodies demands.

Joel couldn’t stop the laugh that fell from his mouth at his flatmate’s awkward confession, despite knowing that he probably should have aimed for sympathy instead.

Sighing heavily at his reaction, Alanna quickly downed the rest of her drink before moving to place its empty glass on a small table next to the DJ’s stand.

“It doesn’t matter anyway,” the wolf declared, as she threw herself back into dancing next to Joel. “Once everything here has calmed down, and I know that Keelin and her baby are going to be safe from harm’s way, I’m planning on getting myself the hell outta dodge!”

“I don’t follow?” he remarked with a frown. “What do you mean?”

“I mean that I’m going to leave New Orleans, Joel,” the wolf confirmed, raising her voice so as to be heard over the songs building climax. “Like I should have done a year ago! Like I was actually going to, until…. well until I realised how much Keelin was struggling with aftermath of what happened in the Funhouse.”

“What Funhouse? What happened” Joel asked, suddenly feeling like he was majorly out of the loop on something concerning Alanna and Keelin’s history.

“I initially stayed to try and help her see that none of what happened on that night was her fault,” Alanna continued as she danced, seemingly too lost in her own thoughts to have heard his confusion. “To try and make up for the actions of my pack, and atone for our damned reckless alliance with the Hollow. And to try and make amends for my own stupid behaviour.”
“Ok, now you’ve completely lost me. What are you on about? What’s a Hollow?”

“But then I guess…. I guess in the end, I continued to stay because I realised that at some point…. somehow…. I’d fallen hopelessly head-over-heels in love with her! And that there was not a chance in hell I was going to abandon her as a lone wolf, in a city full to the brim of vampire scum!”

Realising that he wasn’t likely to get the answers to any of the burning questions now buzzing in his mind, Joel offered up another sympathetic smile to Alanna as he watched her shake her head as she danced.

“I’d do anything for her, Joel. Anything!” the wolf stated ruefully - her usually carefree voice having taken on a sombre tone. “But all she sees when she looks at me, is someone who betrayed her. Someone who lied to her and abused her trust. And do you know what…. she’s right! I don’t deserve to have her friendship, let alone her love. I don’t even deserve to breathe the same air as her.”

“Hey, come on now”, Joel said, placing both his hands-on Alanna’s shoulders and halting their dancing. “I might not know what happened in the past between you two, but I do know that you’re…. oooh boy…. fuck!”

Frowning at her flatmate’s sudden change in words and tone, Alanna twisted her head around to follow Joel’s line of sight as it fixed on something - or someone - behind her.

“What the HELL are you doing here?!”

As the DJ’s decks began to mix a new tune into the speakers lining the Courtyard, Joel grimaced at the anger clearly radiating off Keelin as she marched right up into Alanna’s personal space.

“K…Keelin, hey…. the younger wolf stuttered out, stumbling backwards thanks to being caught off-guard. “A-mazing party…. and you look…”

“What part of “I never want to see you again” did you not understand, Alanna?!” Keelin barked over the music. “And you!”

Joel raised his brows as the doctor suddenly rounded and pointed her wrath towards him.

“I explicitly told you that I didn’t want anything to do with her anymore – yet you go and bring her as your plus one?! Seriously?!”

“Keelin, look, I’m sorry, but…. “

“No, I don’t want to hear it!” the doctor yelled, cutting Joel off before turning back to Alanna. “Why the hell would you even want to come here, Alanna?! This is mine and Freya’s Engagement Party, for Christ’s Sakes! What purpose could you possibly have for being here?!”

“Keelin, please…. ” Alanna began, her whole posture screaming submission – even to a non-pack human like Joel. “If you just give me a second, I…. I can explain…. ”

“Or have you come here to try and ruin our big night - just like you’ve ruined absolutely everything else in my life since you lied your way into it?!”

Even with the decorative mask fixed onto her face, Joel could see the hurt that flashed in his flatmate’s eyes in reaction to their mutual friend’s words.
Is now really the time and place for this, Keelin” he tried, attempting to diffuse the escalating situation as a couple of revellers stood nearby started to look their way. “Can’t this wait until….”

“No, Joel – apparently it can’t wait, because YOU insisted on bringing the trash in with you, when you arrived at MY party!”

“Hey!” Alanna hit back, seemingly not liking the way in which Keelin had spoken to Joel. “That’s a bit unfair….”

“Unfair?!” Keelin growled, rounding back on the younger wolf once more. “Do you want to know what unfair is Alanna?? Unfair was my fiancé storming away from Lafitte’s because YOU couldn’t keep your god damned interfering nose out of the French Quarter like I’d asked you too! Unfair was Freya being abducted by a bunch of sadistic, motorcycle-riding bastards because I was too occupied trying to defend YOU instead of sensing their approaching ambush! Unfair was her being tortured for days because I had to save YOUR reckless ass from dying, instead of immediately following the bikers scent to…. to their h-hideout!”

The doctor’s voice broke with emotion as she attempted to grapple with the last words of her incensed tirade.

“Unfair, is…. is knowing that Freya and I may never be the same again…. whilst you…. you prance around like it’s all just one big meaningless game - not caring whose life you destroy along the way!”

Joel’s breath caught in his throat as the callousness of Keelin’s words starkly contradicted the happy melody of music surrounding them.

Tears began to brim in the blue eyes behind Alanna’s ornate wolf’s mask, as his flatmate’s mouth opened, then quickly closed again – the strobing red lights of the courtyard highlighting a small tremble in her jaw.

Shaking her head, the younger wolf’s shimmering gaze fell away from Keelin’s glare as she quickly turned on her heels and disappeared into throng of dancing revellers around them.

Watching his flatmate weave her way in and out of people as she rushed to put distance between them, Joel’s teeth clenched with anger.

“That was uncalled for!” the male nurse snapped, rounding on Keelin.

“Was it?!” the wolf bit back, her own shrouded gaze glazed with the presence of angry tears.

“Yes - it was!” he immediately retorted, refusing to back down to his work colleague’s anger despite the primal streaks of amber that he could see beginning to churn in her irises. “I might not know what supernatural bullshit the two of you went through when you first met…. but I do know Alanna, Keelin! And there is not a malicious bone in her body!”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about, Joel. You don’t know what she did…..”

“No, I don’t!” the nurse snapped uncharacteristically, interrupting Keelin’s flow and causing the wolf’s brows to raise above her mask in surprise. “And quite frankly, I don’t care either! That girl has spent the whole time I have known her worshiping the ground you walk on! Everything that she ever does, is for you, Keelin! Everything!! And she’s so god damned hopelessly in love with you, that she’s completely blind to the fact that all YOU ever do is treat her like a piece of shit!”

The anger in Keelin’s face quickly began to diffuse, as Joel’s words seemed to hit home.
“I…. I don’t…..”

“You want to know why she begged me to bring her along tonight – even though it would mean watching the woman she loves celebrating being engaged to someone else?!” he continued, uninterested in listening to anything Keelin might have to say at that point. “It’s because she’s worried for you and your baby’s safety, and is determined to try and protect you! She’s once again ignoring all of her own emotions and feelings, so that she can make sure that no harm comes to you!”

“I don’t need her protection!” Keelin stated, despite her voice quieting due to having lost all of its previous ire.

“Well you certainly don’t deserve it, I know that much!” Joel huffed, still seething at the doctor’s attitude. “Nor do you deserve to have someone as selfless as Alanna as a friend! And do you know what – I’m glad that she’s finally going to leave New Orleans! Because that girl deserves far better than…. than…. you!”

Drawing in a shaky breath, the nurse turned and threw himself into following Alanna’s wake – pointedly ignoring the calls of his work colleague as he pushed past the numerous jiving revellers.

“Wait, what…. she’s leaving? Joel……Joel??”

Trying his best not to think about how many hungry vampires he was now pissing-off by unapologetically barging his way through the crowd, Joel felt a rush of adrenaline flood through his system as the realisation of what had just happened began to sink in.

He’d just stood up to an angry werewolf! Him…. a defenceless, vulnerable human…. had just stared down a pissed-off, growling werewolf, and given her a piece of his mind! And it had been…. been…. utterly terrifying!

A huff of laughter made its way out of his throat, as the absurdity of the moment hit home in his mind.

Alanna better be as good a fighter as she claimed to be!, the nurse thought to himself, as he paused to search for his flatmates distinctive dress amongst the crowd. Because he was pretty sure that it was no longer just the vampires in the room that wanted a shot at his throat….. there was now a pissed off werewolf that probably wanted to rip his head off too!

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3.

“Well, I for one think that you’ve been doing a great job, Tobias!”

Hayley struggled to make herself heard over the party’s loud music, as she stood leaning in towards the Witch Regent’s ear.

“And I wouldn’t take anything that Klaus says too personally”, she continued, attempting to smooth over yet another simmering row between the head of the New Orleans’s covens, and her daughters hot headed father. “You must know by now that his temper has a habit of getting away from him!”
“Be that as it may, Hayley, I am getting tired of the ungrateful accusations that he continues to so liberally throw about!”

Sighing to herself, the hybrid quickly downed the contents of the champagne flute in her hand, before signalling for one of the many waiters mingling through the crowd to fetch her another.

There was not enough bubbly in the world right now, to get her through the never-ending stream of complaints being thrown her way!

From the moment that she, Keelin and Rebekah had reached the bottom of the Mikaelson’s sweeping staircase, Hayley had been inundated by various members of the New Orleans Council approaching her to air their grievances. And every complaint that she had attempted to remain calm and neutral through, had been of the same manner – annoyance over Klaus’s un-grateful attitude towards the help being provided to search for Freya’s abductors.

From day one, the Mikaelson family had called upon the different factions of New Orleans to aid them with hunting down Freya’s kidnappers. The Vampires, the Werewolves, the Witches, and to some extent the Human faction as well – all had been approached in the immediate days following the blonde witch’s disappearance. And all, surprisingly, had willingly offered their aid in some form or capacity.

Even after Freya had finally re-appeared at St Theodora’s Hospital, the leaders of the factions had pledged to continue their help with locating the mysterious motorcycle-riding monsters who had tortured one of the New Orleans community members.

Whether that be from genuine concern for Freya’s wellbeing, or from a fear that it might well be one of their own whom next fell afoul of the leather wearing gang’s ministrations – Hayley did not know.

But one thing that had become clear, as the days spent searching for the bikers had turned into weeks, was that no matter how hard the residents of New Orleans looked, Klaus was never satisfied that their efforts were enough.

“Yesterday he grabbed Greta by the throat and called her a “dead witch walking”, simply because she dared to suggest that maybe the gang whom abducted your kin had moved on to torment the residents of a different city! Greta’s only fifteen years old, Hayley! Fifteen! I had to spend the whole of last night trying to convince her wiccan parents not to perform a hex on young Hope, in retribution.”

A growl rumbled up Hayley’s throat as she instinctively flashed the amber tones of her Hybrid eyes in reaction to Tobias’s remark.

“Now you know that I would never let that happen!” the Regent quickly remarked, holding his hands up in supplication. “They were just angry parents having a knee jerk reaction to their daughter being threatened – as I am sure you can understand.”

Continuing to glare pointedly at the witch, Hayley slowly pulled back on her inner animal – allowing her sight return back to its human state.

Tobias was right, of course. She too would have reacted in a similar way had anyone dared to grab Hope around the throat in such a manner.

“But this can’t go on, Hayley!” the Regent continued once her posture had relaxed once more. “I might be able to smooth over the odd disgruntled witch here and there, but I cannot be expected to
reign in the anger of all the factions combined! Josh has had several fights break out in Rousseau’s over the last week, all of which have involved Marcel’s vampires arguing over whose orders they should be following – Marcel’s or Klaus’s! And even members of your own pack have been turning up on my doorstep – demanding that something is done about Klaus’s insistence on ordering their ranks around like they were nothing more than insignificant foot-soldiers.”

“They have?!" the hybrid asked, quirking a surprised eyebrow.

“Yes! It appears that they feel like you are too…. close…. to the matter at hand, for them to be able to raise their concerns with you. That your relationship with Freya and the rest of the Mikaelson’s would cause you to be bias in Klaus’s favour, should they attempt to rally your help with dealing with the out-of-control hybrid.”

Feeling another flare of anger heat her veins, Hayley drew in a weary breath and closed her eyes.

“Listen – Tobias – whilst I appreciate your concern for the members of my pack, I can assure you that my commitment to them remains as stalwart as it has always been! I am their Queen, and I will not see any of them come to harm. But please – try and remember that Freya is my daughter’s Aunt. More than that – she is my friend. What happened to her has angered and shocked us all, not just Klaus. And whilst I agree that his methods may be questionable, at the end of the day, he is still just a brother trying to avenge a savage attack on his sister!”

“Which I understand!” Tobias declared, once again raising his hands in a mollifying manner. “I am simply trying to warn you that I do not know how much longer the rest of the city’s community will continue to “understand” his erratic behaviour.”

Sighing once more, Hayley offered up a nod of her head to the Regent.

“I will try and speak with him about it. I can’t promise anything, but…..”

The hybrids words trailed off, as she caught sight of the courtyard’s wooden doors bursting open – giving way to a rather flustered looking Marcel Gerard. Noting that despite being dressed in the tailored black suit that Rebekah had finally convinced the King Of New Orleans to wear for the party, Hayley could see that the vampire had appeared to have left its accompanying mask behind.

Catching the hybrid’s eyes, Marcel motioned with his head for Hayley to join him, as he made his way through the throng of revellers towards her.

“Tobias, please would you excuse me”, the hybrid said, smiling at the Regent apologetically. “It seems that Marcel is in need of my time!”

“Of course,” Tobias stated - the masked witch bowing his head slightly in respect. “Please do not forget our conversation though, Hayley. Tensions are reaching boiling point.”

Nodding in agreement, Hayley quickly manoeuvred her way in and out of the dancing guests, to meet Marcel at the bottom of the Compounds staircase.

“Is everything ok, Marcel?” she asked by way of greeting, frowning as she noted the troubled look on the agitated man’s face.

“Is Klaus here?” the vampire asked, his focused eyes sweeping over the crowded courtyard.

“I believe he is currently upstairs with Elijah. Why?”

“Good, I need to speak with you all immediately. Grab Rebekah and meet me up there ASAP!”
“Ooook”, Hayley said, her frown deepening. “But what’s the rush? What’s happened?”

“It would appear that we can call off the search for Freya’s abductors,” Marcel said gravely, locking troubled eyes with the hybrid. “A large group of unruly bikers have just been spotted entering the city limits, and they are heading in the Quarter’s direction as we speak!”

4.

The muffled sound of music filled the Mikaelson’s drawing room, as its floorboards gently vibrated in time with the latest songs thrumming base.

Despite the courtyard downstairs being full to the brim of both guests and the catering staff that had been hired to see to their every need, the upper quarters of the Compound had so far remained unbreeched by anyone who did not call the building home.

A fact that Rebekah was currently grateful for, as she watched her agitated brother pacing back and forth in front of the room’s large, roaring fireplace.

“And you are sure it is them. Our sister’s abductors?” Klaus asked for the second time in as many minutes, as he continued to wear a groove in the wooden floor with his relentless marching.

“Yes Klaus, my boys were certain,” Marcel confirmed once again, irritably rolling his eyes at the hybrid as he stood next to Rebekah. “They have been looking out for the exact model and registration of the motorcycles that Keelin described from the night Freya was abducted. We all have. And all three of the bike’s that the wolf saw that night, crossed the city’s borders just over ten minutes ago now. Along with five other additional riders and their vehicles. It’s them Klaus. And they appear to be heading directly for your home!”

“I say we head out there right now, and cut them down before they even have chance to step foot in the Quarter!” Rebekah declared, feeling her body begin to fill with a frenzied exhilaration at the prospect of exacting revenge upon Freya’s attackers. “Rip off their rotting heads, and return to the party before anyone even notices we’re gone!”

“What possible purpose could they have for revealing themselves though?” Elijah asked, as he stared thoughtfully at the ground. “After remaining hidden from us for so long – why would they suddenly waltz into the city, so brazen and obvious?”

“Who bloody well cares!!” Rebekah proclaimed loudly, looking back and forth between her two brothers. “We are talking about the bastards that tortured our sister! I say we dismember first – ask questions never!”

“Elijah has a point though,” Hayley said, offering her ex a weak smile when he flicked his gaze over to her. “Freya’s attackers have been completely un-traceable for weeks now. They have clearly been going out of their way to remain hidden. So, to suddenly reveal themselves quite so openly whilst knowing that Freya’s immortal family will be actively looking for revenge – it seems a little…..”
“Too convenient!” Elijah finished for the hybrid, returning her smile as she nodded in confirmation.

“I don’t give a damn what their motives are,” Klaus growled, coming to a stop in front of the fireplace and locking his eyes on his youngest sister. “Rebekah is right – we shall slaughter them like the pigs that they are, and mount their heads on spikes for what they dared to do to our kin!”

Sighing, Hayley began to walk towards the drawing rooms exit.

“I’ll go and warn Keelin of what’s happening. I imagine that she will want to ensure that Freya is safe and kept as far away from the approaching gang as possible.”

“Actually, there’s something else you need to know,” Marcel said wearily, his tone turning more apprehensive. “Something else that my boys said they noted about the group of bikers!”

“Well spit it out then, Marcellus,” Klaus barked irritably, moving to join Hayley at the room’s exit. “The longer we stand here talking, the longer those deplorable scum keep on breathing!”

“According to one of my lieutenants, the bearded men were not alone as they crossed our city’s border. They err…. well they were accompanied by a woman, riding on the back of one of the bikes.”

“A woman?” Elijah asked, frowning. “Another victim of their brutal hospitality?”

“It would appear not, no”, Marcel confirmed. “They said that not only did the blonde-haired woman seem to be with the gang willingly, but that she was the one directing them through the streets, and showing them which route to take.”

Rebekah suddenly felt the blood running through her veins freeze as cold as ice, as the horrifying realisation of whom Marcel was referring to hit home - a mere heartbeat before the vampire spoke the name.

“Klaus – my boys said that the woman riding with the gang, was Freya!”

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5.

“You are kidding me, right?!”

Joel’s voice rose in volume as Alanna watched the nurse become even more agitated than he had already been.

“After the way that Keelin just spoke to you - you still want to stick around?!”

“I don’t really have a choice”, the wolf sighed, staring dejectedly at the bottle of beer that she now held. “I made a promise – and I never break a promise!”

“For crying out loud!” Joel yelled, throwing his hands up in exasperation. “Alanna – honey, enough is enough already! You need to let go of this obsessive infatuation you have over Keelin
and move on with your life. You do not owe her anything, ok?! Certainly not after the way she just acted! Besides, she’s got the whole Mikaelson family here to protect her should anything bad happen. And her fiancé is an actual bonified witch! I think she’s got the whole protection thing covered!"

Chewing on her bottom lip, Alanna studied Joel’s frustrated expression for a moment, as she contemplated his words.

Should she tell him…. drop the bombshell news that it was actually Keelin’s own fiancé, that she was trying to protect the pregnant wolf from? Confess to him that she was the only one – other than Freya herself of course – who knew of the dark power that was trying to take over the witch. Would he freak out and rush to tell Keelin? Would he…. even believe her?!!

Eventually shaking her head to herself, the wolf downed the rest of her beer and tapped on the bar next to her to grab the attention of a passing worker.

“Look, Joel…. there are some things that I can’t tell you right now. Things that mean Keelin and her baby might be in more danger than either she or the Mikaelson family currently know about. And I refuse to just walk away whilst that remains the case – no matter what she might think of me!”

Grabbing the new bottle of beer being offered to her by the bar-tender, Alanna let out another heavy sigh as she replayed in her mind the upsetting exchange that had just happened with Keelin.

The Malraux wolf had looked at her with such anger in her eyes. Such rage. Was Keelin right to blame her for what had happened to Freya?? Sure…. she had ignored her friend’s request to stay clear of the Quarter on the night of Freya’s abduction…. that much was true. But she had done nothing but try and help from that moment on…. hadn’t she??

“Well I for one think that you’re an idiot for remaining here…. just so you know!” Joel huffed, turning to the bar staff and ordering a cocktail that Alanna had never heard of before. “But I can hardly let you be an idiot on your own now, can I? What kind of friend would that make me?!”

Turning his head in her direction, the nurse offered Alanna a weak smile as confirmation of his reluctant solidarity with his flatmate’s decision.

“A totally awesome one, that I love very much!” she declared warmly, feeling a potent surge of gratitude for her chiselled jawed flatmate. “Thank you, Joel. Not just for this, but for everything that you’ve done for me since we became roomies! I…. I genuinely don’t know how I would have survived living in this city without you.”

Holding back another surge of tears from escaping down her masked face, the wolf leapt forward and flung her arms around the male nurse’s neck - pulling him in for a hug.

“Right, well…..” Joel said, genuinely smiling as he pulled out of the hug after a few moments. “…. we might as well make the most of this free-bar whilst we are here then. God only knows I need to get my fabulous self drunker if you expect me to continue dancing amongst these “Joel-thirsty” vampires!”

Laughing, Alanna began to scan her eyes over the boogying revellers once more, as Joel began explaining to a bar-tender exactly why the cocktail had been served was most definitely not the Strawberry Daquiri he had ordered.

Did Keelin even know half of the people here?!
Drawing in a deep breath, the wolf held the air in her mouth and nose – letting her heightened wolf senses both taste and scent the vast array of different aromas in the room.

Much to her dismay, the most prominent scent marker that she picked up on was the distinctive unpleasant reek she associated with Vampires. A lot of vampires! The knowledge of which sent an unexpected shudder through her body.

But there were other smells also mixed in with the potent stench of the undead. Most notably that belonging to other members of her own species – wolves. Not that she recognised any of them personally, which didn’t really come as much surprise to the Nievera wolf. After all, other than Keelin, she had not had contact with another pure-breed wolf since her own pack had been slaughtered at the hands of the Hollow.

Keelin.

As always, she found her thoughts wandering back to the Malraux wolf who Joel had claimed was “blinding her judgement”.

She had heard him, of course – angrily giving Keelin a piece of his mind as she herself had been pushing through the crowds of guests to try and get away from it all. She had heard every heated word that he had said. And despite the embarrassment that now flushed her cheeks red as she thought back to the nurse’s tirade, she had to admit - the things he had proclaimed were true.

She did worship the ground that the Malraux wolf walked on – and had done right from the moment that they had very first met in St Theodora’s Emergency Clinic, after she had been knifed by members of her own pack to ensure that she was thrust into the doctor’s world.

She did always put Keelin first - even if that meant having to ignore the love that filled her heart with equal parts joy and sorrow whenever she was in the doctor’s company.

And she did probably let that love cloud her judgement, when it came to making decisions about her own life’s path and happiness.

She did.

She loved Keelin.

And there was no getting away from that.

“Urgh…. get a grip Alanna. Get a grip!”

Groaning to herself, she continued scanning the crowd, until her eyes came to rest on the very person plaguing her thoughts.

Walking somewhat determinedly around the outskirts of the main throng of dancers, Keelin was with a masked male that Alanna did not immediately recognise – but going off his distinct jawline and strong Nordic nose, she would not have been surprised if the guest was in some way related to the Mikaelsons.

Or indeed, a Mikaelson himself.

As she watched the two of them near the large staircase that swept up from the courtyard in a rather grandiose fashion, Alanna’s attention was caught by the sudden appearance of the rest of the Original family, beginning to ascend down the steps from the floor above.
Hayley, Rebekah, and Klaus, she recognised immediately – and there were two other smartly dressed males with them too whom she could not immediately place. But there was one thing that was easy to see on all of their faces, regardless of the masks that most of them wore.

Alarm.

Something was wrong.

“Honestly, I don’t know how you can drink that stuff,” Joel said, turning his attention back to her after winking coyly at the barman who had been serving him. “Beer is just so harsh on the palate!”

“Mmmm hmmm,” the wolf murmured absentmindedly, not taking her attention away from the scene that was now unfolding at the bottom of the Compound’s staircase.

Narrowing her eyes, Alanna rallied her inner wolf-spirit as she attempted focus her enhanced hearing on the conversation happening between Keelin and the worried looking Mikaelsons. Pushing the throbbing beat of the party’s music deep into a corner of her mind, the wolf tried to single out Keelin’s familiar tone from the rest of the chaotic noise bombarding her ears.

It certainly was no easy task, especially without the Kyanite ring that the older wolf had taken back from her. But sure enough, the wolf managed to eventually latch on to the voice she sought – all be it in a broken manner thanks to the party’s roaring racket.

“They…. way here? Are…. sure??”

Even battling with all of the other sounds around it, Alanna could hear the anxiousness in Keelin’s tone - causing the younger wolf’s animal spirit to instantly tense.

“Yes, my sources…. eight bikers…. also a…. directing them....”

Squinting with frustration, Alanna tried to make sense of the broken words that she could only just hear being spoken by a male’s she did not recognise. With a stubbled beard and pristine white teeth, the unknown reveller was the only one of the group who was not currently wearing a mask.

“Given their location…. time of sighting…. ten minutes....”

Joel’s broad shoulders suddenly filled Alanna’s line of sight, as the male nurse stepped in front of her.

“Err…. hello, earth to Alanna?! Have you been listening to a word that I’ve been saying??”

Quickly moving to the side of her flatmate, Alanna struggled to once again pick up whatever it was that Keelin was now saying – but to no avail. The older wolf appeared to have lowered her voice as she tensely gestured to the Mikaelsons, making it now impossible for even Alanna’s enhanced hearing to pick up on.

“Dammit!”

“What’s wrong?” Joel asked, raising a brow in reaction to her outburst.

“I’m not sure,” Alanna admitted with no shortage of exasperation, as she continued to watch the tense exchange by the staircase. “I can’t hear what they’re saying anymore!”

Following his flatmates line of sight, Joel quickly located the person she was staring at.

“You could hear what Keelin was saying?! From all the way over here?! Over all this music??” the
“Urgh…. they’re speaking too quietly now”, Alanna groaned, shaking her head in irritation. “But I think…. I think they were talking about the biker gang who abducted Freya.”

“What gang?” Joel asked, turning his attention back to Alanna. “I think he said that there were eight… shit…. eight of them on their way here”, she continued muttering to herself, ignoring Joel’s question. “Christ, just one of those sleazy scumbags managed to incapacitate both me and Keelin without even breaking a sweat! There’s now eight of them?? Fuck!”

“Alanna, seriously – what’s going on??” the nurse asked, panic now beginning to seep into his tone. “Why do you suddenly look like you’ve seen a ghost?!”

“Shit…. she needed to get Joel away from the party. And quick! He wouldn’t stand a chance if the same bikers that attacked Freya were coming to pick a fight with the Mikaelsons!

“Um, you need to leave!” the wolf stated, trying to keep her tone neutral as she grabbed onto her flatmates elbow and began tugging him away from the bar.

“Leave?” Joel asked, his initial panic turning to confusion as he allowed himself to be pulled along through the crowd. “But I thought you said that you “refused to walk away”, or something similar?! That you wanted to protect Keelin?”

“Not me, Joel – you! YOU need to leave!”

Fuck…. what had she been thinking?! Why had she ever let him come here?! He’d been right - he was just a defenceless human, and she’d practically thrown him into a pit of warring supernatural monsters by insisting he took her to the party. God dammit!

“What? Why? What’s happening”

“Look, there’s no time to explain”, the wolf said hurriedly as she roughly nudged yet another reveller out of the way. “I just need to get you out of…. Oooffffph!”

Walking straight into an unmoving figure, Alanna fell backwards and collided into Joel. Swearing to herself, the wolf quickly jumped back up and attempted to straighten her dress as she apologised. “Shit, I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to barge into you like….”

Alanna quickly blanched, as her gaze met the face of the woman still blocking her path.

“Freya?! Oh fuck…. I’m so sorry…. I didn’t see you there…. urgh…. please don’t fry my brain….”

It didn’t take long for her to realise that the blonde-haired witch was not even looking her way, let alone paying any attention to what she was saying.

Frowning, Alanna took a moment to study Keelin’s fiancé properly.

Stood unfaltering, and with an air of confidence about her that Alanna had not seen in the witch since her abduction, Freya was dressed more like she was attending a Joan-Jett convention, than a formal-dress masquerade ball. Black ripped skinnies were coupled with a skin-tight black vest, and
blended seamlessly with the witch’s trade-mark leather jacket and heeled boots.

The whole outfit gave her a distinct “bas-ass” vibe that Alanna may well have found attractive – had it been worn by anyone other than the terrifyingly powerful witch who had a tendency to rain down pain upon her.

_Had someone forgotten to give Freya the memo on her own Engagement Party’s dress code?!_

“Um…. Freya? Are you…. ok?” Alanna asked tentatively, as the witch continued to ignore her.

It took a good few heartbeats before Freya finally tore her intense emerald scrutiny away from the other revellers, and fixed it down on the wolf.

“Alanna!” Freya declared with apparent bemusement - a smirk beginning to play on her lips. “Of course YOU are here – always popping up where you’re least wanted, like a scurrying diseased cockroach!”

“Ha….” the wolf laughed nervously, unsure how to take the scything remark.

“A little rude, don’t you think?!” Joel’s voice suddenly piped up, as the nurse stepped out from behind Alanna to berate Freya. “Considering she’s my plus-one!”

“Of course, Joel....” Freya sneered, as she gave Alanna’s housemate a once over with her eyes, “…. how silly of me to forget that Keelin would have her favourite lackey here. Tell me, human - are you to be an entrée, or part of the evenings main course?!”

Feeling the nurse tense beside her, Alanna slowly reached out and grabbed onto the sleeve of his suit – gently pulling on the material to manoeuvre him back behind her.

A move that the now visibly nervous male did not offer any resistance to.

_Something was off…. something was very off…._

“Freya are you…. um…. still you?! You kinda smell…. different”, the wolf dared to venture, her voice low and cautious as she felt the wolf-spirit within her begin to growl with warning.

_The oppressive, cloying scent of death that she had associated with the power Freya had unleashed upon her down under the New Orlean Library, now seemed to be emitting off the blonde in droves._

Freya’s expression turned thoughtful as she briefly used her hand to flick at the silky material that served as a belt on Alanna’s dress.

“You know wolf, I can’t decide if your insistence on being here to follow Keelin around like a dog in heat, makes you brave - or extremely stupid!”

Slowly reaching an arm behind her and pushing backwards on Joel’s chest, Alanna forced both of them to take a step back from the leather wearing witch, as the party’s music continued to swell and thrum all around them.

“It was you who told me to protect her, Freya. Remember?! I’m here, because you told me to protect her…. from you!” the wolf stated wearily, her voice starting to rumble with a low growl.

“Ha!” Freya laughed callously, clearly amused by Alanna’s declaration. “Good luck with that wolf!”
Without a further word the witch confidently side-stepped around both Alanna and Joel, and began to stride her way through the crowd of dancing revellers.

“Did you find the Nazirul?” Alanna shouted after the witch, praying to god that Freya had managed secured the artefact and give it to Keelin. “Freya? Does Keelin have it??”

No answer came, as the eldest Mikaelson continued to advance through the party, ignoring the wolf’s yelling.

“Fuck…. FUCK!” she cursed, turning back towards the Compound’s exit and letting out a shaky breath.

“Alanna?” Joel said, grabbing the wolf’s hands and forcing her to lock eyes with him through their masks. “What’s going on? Why was she acting like that?”

Staring at Joel’s expectant gaze, Alanna suddenly felt like the whole room was beginning to close in on her – the crushing reality of her situation almost making it too hard to breath.

*What should she do…. hell, what could she do?! If Freya was indeed now fully under the control of that monstrous power, what hope did she - a lone wolf - have of stopping the witch?? She’d be no match against the powerful destruction that the witch had at her fingertips!! Freya could kill her with just a god damned look for Christ’s sakes! Urgh…. but it was Keelin…. she couldn’t just walk away…. could she?!*

“Alanna? Did you hear me?”

“Yes, Joel, I heard you....” the wolf barked tensely, twisting her heard first in the direction of the Compound’s staircase, and then over to the wooden doors that lead to the outside world. “God Dammit! Look, I need you to leave, now!”

Shaking his head, the nurse grabbed onto her wrist and forced her to look at him once more.

“Not without you!” Joel stated with determination. “If something bad is about to happen, then you’re leaving with me!”

“I… I can’t Joel. I’m sorry.”

“Yes, you can! This isn’t your fight Alanna!”

“But Keelin....”

“Isn’t yours to protect!!” the nurse asserted forcefully, dropping her wrist and placing his hands on either side of her face. “Wake up Alanna – she doesn’t want, nor need your protection, ok?! She doesn’t love you!!”

Jerking her head out of Joel’s hands, Alanna’s eyes scrunched shut as her inner wolf howled its outrage inside of her.

“I know that Joel – ok! I know!” she growled through gritted teeth. “But I love her! I love her with everything I have – and I can’t just walk away when I know she might be in danger!”

Opening her eyes once more, the wolf swiftly grabbed hold of Joel’s shoulders and shoved him in the direction of the Compounds exit.

“Now go - get the fuck out of here before I….˝
The rest of her words died in her throat, as Alanna watched Joel clumsily collide into the body of a large, bearded man, who was stood glaring at her with eyes as black as midnight. Quickly looking beyond the newcomer, the wolf felt her blood run cold as she watched several further burly, leather wearing figures begin to file in through the Compound’s doorway, one by one.

*Oh god…. it was too late!*
“Keelin, wait!!”, Hayley shouted, grabbing hold of the wolf’s wrist and stopping her mid charge. “We don’t know anything for certain as of yet!”

“Are you calling me a liar?!?” Marcel snarled, rounding on Hayley.

“What she is saying, Marcellus”, Elijah offered in Hayley’s defence as he placed a calming hand on the King of New Orleans shoulder, “is that we must not jump to any conclusions! Freya might not have been helping them at all! It may well have been….”

“Wait… what?!” Keelin interrupted, turning back to face them all in shock. “Freya was helping them??”

“Not a bloody chance!” Rebekah huffed, throwing Marcel a critical scowl. “Our sister would never…”

“ENOUGH!”

Klaus’s raised voice drew the attention of all those stood arguing at the bottom of the staircase – including a few of the party guests dancing nearby. Pushing past Marcel as he stepped off the staircase, the hybrid flung out his arms in a show of frustrated anger.

“Might I remind you all that the bastards who harmed our sister are currently flaunting their whereabouts in the city! So, if you are quite done with your petty bickering, I intend on heading out there and bloody well ripping every organ from their bodies, and ramming them down their sodding throats!”

“I believe Niklaus is right”, Elijah commented, as he moved to stand next to his hybrid brother. “We can worry about Freya’s actions after we have eliminated the threat posed by the gang that she rides with!”

“For the love of the gods, Elijah – our sister is not bloody well riding with them! Freya is…..”

“Here!” Keelin interrupted the arguing siblings, as she stood staring wide-eyed towards the centre of the courtyard. “She’s here!”

As all of the Mikaelson’s whipped their heads round to follow Keelin’s line of sight, the wolf felt a wave of relief wash over her as she watched her fiancé stride towards them – seemingly unharmed, and uninjured.

She was ok! She was here…. and she was ok!

“See, what did I tell you!” Rebekah declared triumphantly. “Freya is…. what the bloody hell is she wearing?! Keelin, did you not give her the dress that I had made for her?”

“Our darling sister, ladies and gentlemen,” Kol quipped as he shook his head at Rebekah. “Someone you can always rely on to find the fashion faux-pas in any grave situation of impending danger!”

“Well, you certainly can’t rely on her to throw a decent party!”

All eyes were drawn to Freya as the smirking witch emerged from the crowd. Coming to a stop directly in front of the group, the tall blonde gestured to the thriving party bustling all around them.

“Honestly Rebekah, could you not have at least tried to be a little more original?!”
“I…. err…..” the Original vampire stuttered, flustered by her sisters cutting remark. “…. you approved the theme yourself!”

“Oh, I think not, dear sister!” Freya scoffed, before plucking a tumbler of bourbon from a passing waiter’s tray and downing its contents in one swig. “I would never agree to something quite so dreary and tedious! I mean, fuck…. even the bourbon tastes like its lost the will to live!”

Frowning at her fiancé’s out-of-character crassness and apparent loss of manners, Keelin quickly stepped forward and took Freya by the arm.

“Where have you been?” the wolf asked quietly, casting a concerned eye over the witch. “I’ve been worried about you. We all have!”

Roughly pulling away from the contact, Freya took a step back and raised an eyebrow as she made a show of slowly looking up and down Keelin’s attire. Emerald green eyes that were usually filled with nothing but love and affection when they swept up and down the wolf’s body, now sent a shiver of unease across Keelin’s skin as they brazenly undressed her in public.

“Well now, would you look at you!” Freya commented, smirking as she continued to shamelessly leer at the wolf. “Who knew that a low-life wolf would be able to scrub up quite so well! You look positively fuckable!”

“Freya!” Hayley scolded, quickly stepping up next to Keelin as the wolf blinked rapidly in shock at her fiancé’s words. “What the hell has gotten into you⁉️”

“Enough of this charade!” Klaus irritably declared, as he moved closer to Freya’s side. “Sister – we have reason to believe that the wretched low life’s who harmed you have entered the city and are on their way here as we speak! I suggest that you remain in the safety of the Compound, whilst the rest of us relieve the sodding bastards of their heads!”

The knot of unease that had begun twisting in Keelin’s gut, quickly thickened in girth as she watched a wicked smile unkindly twist Freya’s features.

Something was wrong…. she had never seen Freya look at her with such cruelty before!

Even when the witch had been holding her captive for her venom, Keelin had only ever seen steely determination and resolve etched in Freya’s features as she had worked tirelessly to save her brothers. The centuries old Mikaelson could certainly come across as unnervingly focused and severe at times, but never once had she been given cause to believe that Freya could be intentionally mean to the people she loved.

Until now.

“Oh, I think you’ll find that the Compound is anything but safe – dear brother!” Freya remarked coldly – hardened eyes still locked unwavering on Keelin. “But you are right about one thing….”

No sooner had the witch’s words trailed off, a shrill scream pierced through the party’s music like the high-pitched whistle of a locomotive train. Tearing her gaze away from her fiancé, Keelin turned just in time to see the body of a masked reveller flying through the air, before it lifelessly collided down into a group of guests near the centre of the courtyard.

“…. the fight is definitely being brought to you!” Freya declared, grinning at the look of alarm on Keelin’s face as the wolf whipped her head back towards her.

A second scream tore through the air, as yet another person was flung across the dancefloor,
causing panic to begin to spread like wildfire through the mass of party guests. Bodies collided and yells of confusion filled the air, as too many people tried to vacate the dance floor at the same time.

“What the bloody hell is happening?!” Rebekah shouted, trying to make herself heard over both the music and shouts of panic.

“Rebekah, Elijah, Marcel – with me!” Klaus roared, as the sickening sound of tearing flesh began to reach the groups ears from somewhere over by the bar.

Cracking bones snapped in time with the music’s bass, as the body of a masked vampire violently collided with the staircase’s post – the force of its impact spraying blood over both Hayley and Rebekah’s outfits.

“Ooooh, someone’s going to regret the day that they ruined my dress!” Rebekah snarled, flashing newly grown fangs as her blue eyes rapidly began to bleed into their vampiric form.

Narrowly managing to jump back as a panicked masked woman stumbled in her direction, Keelin lunged towards Freya and grabbed onto the witch’s arm.

“Upstairs, now, away from….”

Yanking her arm out of Keelin’s grasp, Freya quickly took a step back and flung a hand crackling with dark energy out towards the wolf. An almost blinding flare of blue light suddenly blazed between the wolf and witch, as a blow to Keelin’s chest both knocked the air from her lungs and her feet out from under her.

As the animal-spirit within Keelin roared with rage, finely honed reflexes had her body instinctively twisting as she fell. Landing crouched on all fours and ready to pounce, the wolf’s feral eyes locked back onto Freya, who appeared to be doubled over and gripping onto her wrist as though in severe pain.

_Had Freya…. just tried to lash out at her with her power??_

“SILENCE!”

Pain seared through Keelin’s head, as a deep baritone voice boomed across the whole courtyard with ear-splitting volume. Flinging her hands up to her ears, the crouched wolf just managed to catch sight of everyone around her falling to their knees, as the deafening one worded command floored vampires, wolves and witches alike - violently rattling every bone in their bodies.

Everyone, that was, except for Freya.

Shaking off the remnants of the deafening yell, Keelin and the Mikaelson’s slowly pushed themselves up off the ground, as the music that had been filling the Compound abruptly disappeared – causing an eerie silence to blanket over the room.

“There, isn’t that better!” the same deep voice rumbled from near the courtyards entrance, now several decibels quieter. “A little peace and quiet so that we can all get to know each other better!”

Turning to face the intruders, a rumbling growl began to vibrate in Keelin’s chest as she finally locked eyes upon those responsible for the violent chaos that had broken out.

Despite several party guests beginning to rise back up and shake themselves off, a clear unhindered view now existed between the intruding bikers and the stairwell where she stood, giving the wolf her first clear look at the men whom had systematically tortured her mate.
Blood and gore dripped down from the beards of a few of the large leather wearing brutes, as they all stood in a near perfect line blocking the way out from the Compound. Seven pairs of eyes swirling with bleak, obsidian whisps of smoke stared in her and the Mikaelson’s direction, sending a cold shiver of apprehension down Keelin’s spine despite the snarling outrage of her inner wolf as it snapped its bared teeth at her Kyanite barrier.

Slowly casting her gaze downwards, the wolf could see the bodies of several guests lay slain in bloody heaps at the men’s feet – some missing limbs, whilst others had had their throats torn clean from their necks. The doctor within her wanted to rush over and assess to see if any of the felled could be saved – but primal instincts told the wolf that she would probably just end up joining them as another massacred casualty, if she dared to make such a bold a move on her own.

Cruel and heartless – there was no humanity visible in any of the biker’s expressions as each of them stood sizing up their competition from across the courtyard.

Each of them – except for one.

Stood front and centre of the hells-angel wannabe’s line-up, was a well-built muscular male who towered at least a good two feet over the rest of them. Dressed in apparel that looked to have be lifted straight out of a book titled “The History of Viking Warriors” that Keelin had read as a child, the long-haired man’s vibrant blue eyes sparkled brightly in the flashing lights that illuminated the party – providing a stark contrast to the malicious, black irises of the bikers who flanked him.

A proud sort of smile was plastered on the chiselled, beardless face of the colossus male, as he appeared to be stood appreciatively admiring something just to the left of Keelin – that “something”, the wolf quickly realised with no shortage of alarm, being Freya.

“You dare to come into MY house, and threaten MY family!” Klaus snarled, spittle flying from his mouth as he bared his teeth at the intruders.

The biker stood immediately to the right of the enormous man – a particularly baby-faced lout whom Keelin recognised as having been present on the night of Freya’s abduction – jerked forward in an attempt to lunge for where Klaus stood seething.

His advance, however, was immediately stopped by a thick, broad hand that quickly moved to block his path.

“All Fiske, where are your manners?!” the same deep voice from earlier thundered out of the tall man’s mouth with undeniable majestic presence. “The Mikaelsons have a right to know whom it is that graces their presence!”

Standing down without any show of resistance, the baby-faced biker stepped back into line and resumed his scrutiny of Keelin and the others.

Whoever the overbearing, Nordic throwback was - he was clearly the one in charge! Keelin found herself thinking, as she continued to run her sharply focused eyes over the whole the line-up.

Just as her gaze came to rest on the overweight bastard whom she had bitten a chunk out of in Freya’s hospital room, the wolf’s attention was caught by the slightest of movements registering in her peripheral vision. Briefly flicking her eyes over to its source, the Keelin felt her heartbeat quicken with alarm as she saw a slight-framed masked reveller crouched near to the bikers, slowly repositioning themselves into a “pounce-ready” stance.

Alanna…. the wolf realised with no shortage of concern as she recognised the younger wolf’s
dress. …. god dammit, what was the Nievera wolf thinking?! She’d not stand a chance against all eight of them…. especially if they were all as unnaturally strong as the asshole who’d attacked them at St Theodora’s!

“I don’t bloody well give a damn who you are,” a crimson-eyed Rebekah called out vehemently from where she stood next to Klaus – snarling and poised for attack. “None of you will leave here alive!”

“I am Magnus of Kallekot!” the tall blonde-haired man loudly declared, blatantly ignoring Rebekah’s taunt. “First born son of a Viking Witch, and King of the Blood-Bound Clan! And I have returned, after countless centuries lost to desiccation, to finally achieve my legacy!”

“Your legacy?!” scoffed Klaus, as Keelin watched the hybrid take a confident step closer to the intruders. “The only thing that will be achieved this night, stranger, is your excruciatingly painful death! No one harms one of MY family, and lives to tell the tale! NO ONE!”

“Hmmm, I believe you refer to the rather un-hospitable actions of my Jarls whilst I was slumbering,” the self-proclaimed leader of the bikers - Magnus - remarked knowingly. “A rather unfortunate turn of events that I…”

“ENOUGH - I will have your heads!” yelled Klaus, baring his fangs at the bikers as he readied to leap towards them.

“Freya”, Magnus called out calmly, despite Klaus’s impending attack, “why don’t you show our mannerless sibling exactly what happens to those who interrupt me!”

Quickly twisting her head towards her fiancé, Keelin let out a small gasp of horror as she watched the witch’s emerald green irises quickly become engulfed by the same bleak, obsidian whisps that currently swirled in the eyes of all seven of the bearded bikers.

“It would be my pleasure…. Brother!”

The air in the courtyard had quickly become saturated with the coppery scent of gore, as pain filled screams and sickening sounds of tearing flesh had easily contended with the loud music of the party.

It had all happened so fast – one moment she had been stood confused and concerned about Freya’s attitude towards her sister and fiancé, and the next, the tyrannical spectre of death had swept unforgivingly into their home and begun picking off guests by the dozen.

And it had taken them all off guard.

An almost preposterous notion in itself. They were, after all, a family whose members were all very experienced killing machines! Original Vampires, Hybrids and Witches – all well trained and experts at using their abilities to swiftly intercept and put down their enemies! Nothing should have
been able to slip by or surprise them anymore.

But it had.

It had taken them all off guard!

And now, as Hayley stood staring in open mouthed shock at the sight of Freya’s face contorting into a malicious mask of oily darkness, she realised that all the signs had been there for a while now.

They just hadn’t been paying attention.

“It would be my pleasure…. Brother!”

The deep gravelly words had barely finished leaving the witch’s mouth, when the she flung out an arm towards her younger brother, and unleashed her wrath.

Thick, pulsating tendrils of raging power gushed out of Freya’s hand – aimed straight for the unsuspecting hybrid, whose snarling attention was still fixed on the leather clad intruders near their home’s entrance.

An ear-splitting roar of pain ripped from Klaus’s throat as the witch’s mutated power whipped its acrid vines tightly around his waist and lifted him clear off the ground.

Utterly stunned by what she was witnessing, Hayley’s nostrils quickly filled with the cloying scent of burning flesh, as a snarling Freya violently jerked her hand – sending both her oily twists of magic, and Klaus, soaring across the courtyard.

Never once taking her eyes off her hybrid brother, the witch let out a grunt of exertion as she brought him crashing down onto the unforgiving stone floor of the courtyard – mere centimetres in front of the towering form of the intruding gang’s leader. Barely a second passed before one of the bearded bikers was upon Klaus, wrenching the dazed hybrid up off the ground by his hair as the black tendrils of Freya’s power released their grip on his waste.

As the wolf within her let out an outraged roar, powerful hormones surged through Hayley’s veins and brought her vision into sharp pin-point focus. Whipping her head round, the hybrid instinctively made to lunge for the witch – all human reasoning having momentarily been overruled by the reactive, primal compulsions of her animal spirit.

“Hayley, NO!”

No sooner has her feet had left the ground, the hybrids vision was filled with blur of red silks, as Keelin flung herself in her path. Feeling the hard press of an unyielding hand against her chest, the hybrid snarled at the wolf with spittle laced fangs as enraged amber eyes met troubled yellow irises.

“It’s Freya!”

Another roar of anger suddenly commanded both the hybrid’s and wolf’s attention, as they turned around in tandem just in time to see a fiery-eyed Rebekah lunge for her sister.

The fanged vampire did not make it far, however, as Freya unleashed another vine of her insidious power – this time aimed directly at her enraged sister. A scream of agony peeled forth from Rebekah as the pulsating tendril whipped around her neck and effortlessly tossed the vampire through the air, like she was nothing more than an unloved rag-doll.
Keelin’s hand weakly dropped away from Hayley, as both women watched in horror as Rebekah collided head first with one of the courtyards concrete walls – the snapping of the vampire’s neck clear for all to hear.

A sudden blur of motion registered in the hybrid’s peripheral vision, as Elijah and Marcel sped towards Magnus with supernatural speed. Clearly aiming to attack the hulking man from either side, neither vampire managed to reach their goal, as the two bikers stood either side of their target lunged forward to intercept them.

As Marcel’s neck snapped – crushed by the single hand of the baby-faced biker, in a move that looked so effortless the brute might as well have been yawning – Hayley watched in horror as the other leather clad lout opened his mouth wide and bit down unforgivingly into Elijah’s throat.

Blood spurted across the courtyard, as a large chunk of flesh was torn from the suited Original’s neck, before he too was flung across the room – crashing through the wooden bar that had been constructed for the party and taking out two bar-staff as his body collided into them.

A loud, deep growl suddenly roared out, immediately drawing Hayley’s gaze over to the DJ’s stand where she saw a female guest spring up from the ground and lunge for the biker stood nearest to her. A wide, snarling mouth revealed the sharp canine teeth of a wolf a split second before they triumphantly sank into the flash of the leather-clad brute’s shoulder.

Roaring in apparent anger rather than pain, the biker whipped his uninjured arm around and gripped onto his attacker’s neck – effortlessly yanking the woman’s bloody mouth away from his torn flesh.

“Alanna!”

Keelin’s shout echoed across the courtyard, as the injured brute violently flung the masked wolf towards the dancefloor - her body crashing down into several other guests who had remained crouched to the ground.

Whipping around to face where Hayley, Keelin and Kol now all stood staring at the felled wolf, Freya’s mouth twisted into a sneer as she began to raise her arm in their direction.

“That’s enough!” Magnus’s voice boomed out, once again managing to rattle every bone in Hayley’s body.

A strange look of calm instantly washed over Freya’s face – seemingly in reaction to the thunderous, commanding words. Dropping her hand, the witch slowly turned to face the group of bikers, appearing to not spare her fiancé or remaining family a second thought.

Sensing Kol’s muscles tensing in readiness for attack, Hayley quickly found his wrist with her hand and squeezed it gently – her hybrid eyes never once leaving Freya’s profile.

“Don’t”, she whispered, too quietly for any human ear to pick up on.

Glancing quickly at the staircase that lead up to the Compound’s living quarters, the hybrid subtly drew Kol’s attention in its direction.

“Get to Hope. Get her out!”

She didn’t need to be looking at the Original Vampire to know that indecision now coursed through his veins, tearing him in two directions.
Stay put, and try to avenge the brutal attack on his siblings – or concede to her request, and ensure his niece’s safety from whatever the monsters currently terrorising their home were

“Please….”

A quiet frustrated sigh fell from the vampire’s lips, a split second before he sped up the Compounds steps in a blur of motion.

Every muscle in Hayley’s body tensed, as she caught sight of the overweight biker stood furthest from Magnus break formation and lunge towards the staircase in pursuit of Kol – his bulging, obsidian eyes fixed on the first floor’s landing.

“Let him go!” Magnus hollered, bringing the leather clad brute to a juddering halt just as he reached the first staircase.

“But my Lord, he could….”

“Did I not speak clearly enough, Colborn?!” the towering male asked, voice full of warning as he flicked crystal blue eyes over to the bulky biker.

Snorting in an apparent display of frustration, the overweight gang member gave one last look towards the first floor’s landing, before reluctantly stomping back towards his fellow bikers.

“We did not come here tonight to kill any of my family,” Magnus continued, turning his attention back to Klaus - who’s struggling form was now being held in place by the thick muscular arm of a biker wrapped tightly around his neck.

“Rather – simply to deliver a message!”

Moving a step closer to Keelin, Hayley attempted to reign in her animal spirit’s wrath as her eyes softened into their human focus. Placing a hand lightly on the wolfs arm, she hoped the brief contact would convey both the heartfelt apology and declaration of solidarity that currently rushed through her mind.

Of course Keelin would try to protect Freya - despite the shock of seeing the witch attack her own brother. Freya was her mate, after all – even if there was no bite yet properly officiating that primal union.

“I am going rip out your eyes and feed them to the dammed crows!” Klaus snarled, spitting blood at the feet of the gang’s leader as his voice strained hoarsely against the muscular arm squeezing his throat.

“You certainly have spirit, brother”, Magnus huffed, staring down at crimson spittle now staining his cattle-hide boots. “I’d forgotten just how strong willed you are!”

“I am no brother of yours!” the hybrid declared, struggling once again against his restraint – to no avail.

“That, I’m afraid, is where you are wrong!” Magnus said, a small smile of amusement spreading across his broad features, as his towering figure began to slowly pace back and forth in front of Klaus. “As I am sure you of all people can remember, Niklaus – the witch who birthed you and your siblings, had somewhat of an issue keeping her virtue in tact!”

“You know nothing of our mother!” Klaus spat venomously, his face reddening from the effort.
“Silence!”

As the one worded command resonated out across the courtyard, the baby-faced biker lurched forward and brought his fist crashing down into Klaus’s face. Blood splattered out from the hybrid’s nose as it instantly caved in – bones and cartilage crumpling like paper under the force of the biker’s strength, as Klaus’s head dropped down in a pain-fuelled daze.

This time it was Keelin who had to caution restraint, as Hayley’s muscles instinctively tensed in readiness to attack.

“Not now,” the wolf whispered shakily, clearly distressed by all that was unfolding before them. “We’re grossly outmatched!”

“Now, where was I – ah yes, the promiscuous whore that was our mother!” Magnus continued, as he resumed his pacing. “You see, whereas it was common belief that Esthar had been born barren, leading her to beg Dahlia to aid her in conceiving a child - that was in fact a lie, that she herself had encouraged people to believe. The deceptive wench was extremely fertile and ripe, right up to the night of her sixteenth birthday!

“L-lies….”

Klaus’s spluttered declaration was almost too incoherent for Hayley to decipher - the blood from what remained of the Hybrid’s shattered nose already congealing in his throat.

“During her coming-of-age birthday celebrations, the witch slipped away into the nearby woods, and tricked a young male warrior into taking her virtue. She of course fed him lies of a loving family, and a fulfilling, plentiful life spent together in happy union – but as soon as they finished their sordid act, the witch fled into the night, using what little sorcery she knew at that time to wipe the unsuspecting male’s memory of the deed.”

Halting his pacing directly in front of Klaus, Magnus stretched out a hand and hooked it under the suffering hybrid’s jaw – pulling it up so that their eyes could meet.

“Of course, Esthar returned back to her sixteenth party thinking she had gotten away with her filthy indiscretion”, Magnus continued, studying Klaus closely as he spoke. “Even her sister had not noticed her absence. But several months later, the witch came to realise that her night of wanton sin had left her burdened with far more than just the memory of the carnal pleasure she’d partook in. She harboured a child in her womb – one that she neither wanted, nor wished anyone to know of. So, frightened that her sister would soon notice her expanding belly was not just born from the sin of gluttony, Esthar went to the clan’s witchdoctor and begged him to cut the unborn baby from her body - offering her services as an apprentice in return for his silence.”

A sickening wave of disgust flooded through Hayley, as she all too easily pictured what was coming next.

“The witchdoctor, of course, reluctantly agreed.” Magnus continued, dropping Klaus’s chin once more to resume his pacing. “He sliced Esthar’s belly open and removed the seven-month-old foetus from its mother’s womb. The witch was stitched back together, and the whole procedure was finished with small concealment spell cast over her stomach - to forever hide the resulting wound from prying eyes. Of course, being the over confident zealot that she was, Esthar thought that she had gotten away with it – unburdened by an unwanted child, and free from any accusations from her family. That was, of course, until later on in life, when she fell in love with Mikael, and tried to bare him a child. It was only then did Esthar discover that the time spent under the witch-doctor’s blade, had left her incapable of conceiving another child.”
Turning back to face Klaus once more, Magnus let out a somewhat jaded sigh as he lightly shook his head.

“Of course, you know the rest – Dahlia’s spell, the birth of your siblings, her affair with Ansel… so on and so forth!”

“So, what of the…. b-baby,” Elijah’s croaked, broken voice suddenly piped up, causing all eyes in the room to look towards the remains of the destroyed bar.

Shattered planks of wood and broken glass tumbled to the ground, as the injured Original unsteadily pushed himself up off the floor – one hand tightly gripped over the bleeding wound on his torn throat.

“Ah Elijah – still the brains to Niklaus’s brawn, I see!” Magnus remarked in amusement, before turning his attention back on Klaus. “Overrun with guilt for his actions on that fateful night, the witch-doctor used his extensive collection of potions and spells to nurse the premature baby to health. Once the child had reached its full nine-months of expected “birth” age, the old man took it to the local slavers market, and sold it into a life of servitude for several silver pieces.”

Crouching down onto his haunches, Magnus levelled his face with Klaus’s as he spoke his next words.

“I was that child, Niklaus! I was the boy that our whoring mother happily forgot ever existed, as she played happy families with you and your siblings!”

“I d-don’t know what historical records you’ve b-been reading,” Klaus sputtered, as Hayley watched him try his best to stretch his head towards the biker’s leader, “but t-they’ve misled you g-gravely if they claimed our family was h-happy!”

“But all that was wrong, will soon be made right!” Magnus declared, rising back up to his full imposing height.

Muscles tensing once more, Hayley glanced first to where Rebekah’s crumpled form lay unmoving on the ground, before quickly looking over to Marcel. Both vampires were obviously still alive, but their accelerated healing clearly had more work to do before they regained consciousness.

With Elijah’s full strength compromised, and Klaus seemingly unable to break free from the biker’s hold despite his hybrid abilities – that left just her and Keelin able to launch any decent offence.

*Dammit, they wouldn’t stand a chance! As a hybrid, she knew that she was faster than most vampires and wolves – and vastly stronger too! But Keelin was pregnant, and thus unable to phase. And whatever these…. men…. were, they had bested Marcel and Elijah without even breaking a sweat. And just one of the bikers was managing to contain Klaus with what seemed little effort on his part. She couldn’t take on all eight of them, plus Freya, alone…. unless…. unless she wasn’t as alone as she first thought….*

Being careful not to draw the attention of the eldest Mikaelson, who remained standing just a few feet away, Hayley subtly began scanning the clusters of party guests that were now scattered around the edges of the courtyard. Quickly finding the particular reveller she was looking for, the hybrid was relieved to see that his gaze was already trained in her direction – seemingly also weighing up his options.

“I am a reasonable man, however!” Magnus continued procrastinating, his attention still intently
fixed upon Klaus. “It has, after all, been nearly a thousand years since I last walked amongst the living! And the feeling of fresh air once again filling my lungs has left me feeling somewhat… good-natured!”

Faintly nodding her head in Freya’s direction, Hayley attempted to silently convey the idea formulating in her head to her new growing audience.

“So, the message that I came here tonight to deliver”, the biker’s leader declared, “is simply this…. you, Niklaus, and your immortal siblings, have two days to get your affairs in order and say your goodbyes. For when the clock strikes midnight at the end of the second day – I will be coming to complete my legacy, and finally rid the mortal plane of all remnants of Esthar’s wrong doing!”

“S-sorry to disappoint y-you,” Klaus muttered with his head cowed, seemingly having given up on his struggle against the arm wrapped around his neck, “but I’m a-already going to be pretty busy o- over the next few days…. washing the remnants of your innards from the walls of my home!”

Letting out an enraged roar, Klaus suddenly threw his head up - slamming its back into the face of the biker holding him captive. As the two of them stumbled backwards, the hybrid wasted no time in using the momentum to his advantage – twisting around in the biker’s loosened grip and biting razor sharp fangs down into his neck.

Before the leather wearing brute had even finished hollering out in pain, an amber eyed Klaus snapped the biker’s neck with a jerk of his hands.

Seizing the moment, Hayley rushed behind Freya in a blur of speed, quickly pulling witch’s hands behind her back and hollering her battle cry at the top of her voice.

“TOBIAS, NOW!”

Jumping up from their crouched positions, the Regent of New Orleans and several members of his coven all turned in Freya’s direction. Rapidly chanting in a language that Hayley figured to be Latin, the witches closest to Tobias all quickly placed their hands on his shoulder, as he threw his own appendage up towards the eldest Mikaelson and shouted an incantation.

“Alliges Duplicia et Subicite!”

As the sounds of snapping bones rung out from over by the Courtyards entrance, Hayley felt the judder of Freya’s arms against her chest - the witch seemingly breaking into laughter.

“Nice try!” Freya’s voice rumbled - its tone so deep that Hayley barely recognised it. “But no cigar!”

The hybrid quickly flicked her gaze over to Tobias, just managing to register the look of utter confusion on both his and his covens faces, before her whole world descended into a furnace of white-hot pain. Crying out in agony, she lost her grip on Freya’s arms as a thick wave of dark power pulsed out of the witch’s body, hitting Hayley with full force and instantly scorching her skin into bubbling blisters.

Stumbling backwards, the injured hybrid felt Keelin rush to her side – the wolf nimbly preventing her from collapsing down to the floor.

Screams once again filled the air, as Hayley watched with pain filled eyes as several tendrils of obsidian power shot out from Freya and ploughed directly into Tobias. The shocked Regent barely had chance to react before he was launched upwards – the twists of magic slamming the him head-first into one of the crystal chandeliers hanging over the courtyard.
As Tobias’s body lifelessly crashed down to the ground, another roar of pure rage burst forth from Klaus as two more bikers leapt towards him. Using his enhanced speed to duck and twist under the grabbing arms of one, the hybrid grabbed onto the leather jacket of the second and lifted him off the ground – throwing the muscular brute’s body into the biker he’d just dodged.

Both men fell to the floor, as Klaus quickly rounded on Magnus. Drawing back his gums to reveal razor-sharp hybrid fangs, the Mikaelson patriarch roared once more before leaping for the gang leader’s throat.

“Klaus, watch out!”

Keelin’s cry of warning came too late, as a thick vine of obsidian power slammed into the hybrid’s back – effortlessly piercing through material and flesh like a hot knife through butter. Momentum instantly halted, Klaus collapsed down onto his knees mere inches away from Magnus’s towering form as a cry of anguished frustration and pain roared out from the hybrid’s mouth.

“I can’t imagine that feels pleasant,” the gang’s leader smirked as he observed Klaus rigidly arching backwards thanks to the pulsating tendril of power now wrapped around his heart.

“Freya, please…. stop!”

Keelin’s emotion filled plea appeared to fall on deaf ears, as Hayley watched the witch’s face twist with morbid amusement at the pain she was inflicting on her hybrid brother.

“Should I end him, brother?”

Freya’s words sent fear lancing through Hayley’s heart, as she pulled away from Keelin’s support and looked around the courtyard with panic in her eyes.

Nothing…. there was nothing left for them to try…. if Magnus gave the word…. could the new power that Freya seemed to have acquired actually end an Original…. would the witch actually do it…..

Appearing to contemplate Freya’s question for a heartbeat, Magnus eventually let out a sigh before waving his hand dismissively towards her.

“Two days is what I said I would give them, and two days is what they shall have!”

Shrugging her shoulders, a look of apathy quickly settled upon the witch’s face as she jerked the hand from which her destructive power was flowing. Relief flooded through Hayley as she watched the thick vine of obsidian energy quickly withdraw from inside of Klaus’s body and reabsorb back into Freya, causing the hybrid to slump down the ground the second he was free from its hold.

Klaus was unconscious – but he was alive!

“Come, Sister,” Magnus called, holding his hand out in an apparent show of chivalry towards Freya. “Let us leave our siblings to begin their preparations!”

At the issue of his command, Freya began to confidently stride her way over to the compound’s exit, as Hayley witnessed the few bikers that Klaus had managed to best, quickly push up off the floor and pat themselves down.

It was like their scuffle with the hybrid had never happened! Hayley silently observed with no shortage of dismay. Even the leather-clad brute who’d had his neck torn into by Klaus fangs, now appeared wound free and back to full strength as he re-joined the group….
“Freya, wait….” Keelin called out, tears brimming in her eyes as she took a few steps towards the retreating witch. “Wha…. what have they done to you??”

Turning to face her fiancé as she continued to walk backwards towards the exit, Freya cast her once again emerald eyes over the wolf.

“They’ve done nothing!” the witch drawled in contempt, as a look of disgust settled over her features. “I just finally realised what a fool I was to ever think someone like you could make me happy!”

Hayley could practically hear the impact of Freya’s callous words on Keelin’s heart, as she watched the witch turn her back on her fiancé once more and take the hand being offered by Magnus.

A splutter of coughing suddenly coming from the centre of the dancefloor drew the hybrid’s attention, as Alanna slowly emerged from under the unconscious body of another masked guest. Gingerly prodding at a particularly nasty looking cut on the side of her head, the dazed Nievera wolf pushed herself up off the floor and removed her ornate mask as she groaned in pain.

“Oh, Alanna…. Ffrey called out over her shoulder, as she and Magnus neared the Compound’s exit.

Jjerking her gaze back to the witch, Hayley’s inner beast snarled in warning as she watched Freya raise her free hand and theatrically flick her fingers.

Static energy immediately filled the air, as three large steak knives quickly rose up off the catering table situated at far end of the bar, and instantly propelled through the air at speed – their sharp pointed tips aimed directly for the centre of Keelin’s chest.

“NO….”

Alanna’s cry registered in Hayley’s ears a split second after a blur of motion caused the hybrid’s hair to whip around her face. Tandem gasps of pain and alarm rang out, as the sound of tearing flesh accompanied the foreboding dull thud of three percussive strikes.

Fearing the worst for her wolven friend, Hayley’s stomach dropped in panic as she made to reach for Keelin – only to come to an abrupt stop as she fully registered the sight before her.

Keelin’s wide and frightened chestnut gaze was rapidly flickering back and forth over Alanna’s features, as the two wolves stood facing each other mere millimetres apart. What looked to be tears of pure love shimmered in the Nievera wolf’s eyes, as she raised a hand to Keelin’s face and tenderly stroked her cheek - a weak smile struggling to take root on her lips as she did so.

“Alanna, I…. ”

Keelin’s words faltered as Alanna’s legs suddenly gave way – the Malraux wolf instinctively reaching out and catching her friend before she could hit the floor.

Eyes quickly filling with tears of her own, Keelin lowered them both to the floor and cradled Alanna her arms. Rolling the younger wolf briefly towards her chest, she confirmed the presence of the three steak knives buried to their hilts within Alanna’s back.

“Hayley…..” Keelin quickly cried in desperation, “…. your blood…. I’ll pull the knives out whilst you…. ”
Crouching down next to them, Hayley’s heart lurched for both of the wolves as she tried to find words for what her enhanced hearing had already confirmed.

“Keelin - one of the knives…. its pierced her heart….”

“No…. NO!” the Malraux wolf spat emotionally - tears now liberally falling down her cheeks. “Your blood – it can heal her! Please Hayley, you have to try!”

Despite knowing that it was already too late for the Nievera wolf, Hayley quickly bit down into her wrist. The look of desperation on Keelin’s face was so heartbreaking - the hybrid didn’t have it within her to deny her friend’s request.

Quickly bringing her severed veins to Alanna’s lips, Hayley sent a silent prayer out to the heavens as she watched her friend painstakingly remove all three knives from the younger wolf’s body – the doctor tossing them across the floor as soon as each one was out.

One second passed.

Two.

Running her hand carefully through Alanna’s short hair, Keelin tearily shook her head from side to side.

“Come on…. come on!! Don’t you dare do this to me, Alanna. Don’t you fucking dare!!”

Eyes barely managing to open, the younger wolf’s body suddenly convulsed in a fit of spluttering coughs – splattering blood across Keelin’s neck as her mouth jerked away from Hayley’s wrist.

“Is it working??” Keelin asked desperately, looking to Hayley.

The hybrid let out a heavy sigh as she placed a hand on Keelin’s shoulder and shook her head gently.

Another fit of coughing drew both of their attention back down to the limp wolf in Keelin’s arms, as Alanna’s bloodshot eyes appeared to be trying to focus on something.

“Th…t-tha…..”

“Shhhh”, Keelin tearfully coaxed the younger wolf as Alanna burst into another spluttering fit of coughs. “Don’t try to speak ok…. save your energy! We’re going to get you to the hospital…. you’re going to be ok…..”

“Th-that’s a…. p-pretty n…. ne…. necklace…..”, the Nievera wolf wheezed, trying - and failing - to lift her hand towards the delicate bejewelled amulet that Hayley could see hung around Keelin’s neck.

No sooner had the last word bubbled on Alanna’s blood-stained lips, Hayley’s enhanced hearing picked up on the wolf’s failing heart stuttering – the torn muscle managing only half of a beat, before stilling for the last time.

“Alanna?” Keelin called, as her tear-filled eyes widened. “No, no, no…. Alanna??”

A brash huff of laughter suddenly drew both Hayley and Keelin’s gaze over to the Compound’s entrance, where the hybrid was surprised to see Freya still standing in the open doorway – the witch apparently having hung back after the rest of the gang had departed.
Even with her sight having returned back to it’s soft, human focus, Hayley could easily see the malicious amusement that shone in the witch’s emerald eyes as she smiled and winked at Keelin - before slowly turning and walking out into the stormy night.

Turning back to the Malraux wolf, Hayley tried hard to swallow down on the fiery ball of anger that instantly began swelling in her chest, as she watched Keelin stare open mouthed after her departed fiancé - tears of heartbreak shimmering in the wolf’s eyes.

*What had Freya done….?

***********************************************************************

Chapter End Notes

Um..... sorry :-(

Let me know what you think/feel about it all guys - I'm here to answer any questions/rants you may have.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!