Courting Death

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Summary

Mina meets the Lost Boys...how they save each other...set during the original movie. Rating T at first, M in later chapters (warnings included). F/M, M/M, Multi-pairings. Blood Play/Drinking, suicidal thoughts/actions, vampire-cannon violence. Disclaimer: I own nothing but my own OC and my poor attempts at plot insert. Hat Tip to Spider Robinson for the concepts of ‘Fivesight’ and ‘Iron’ as a person. Cross-posted on FF.net
Introductions

Blinking owlishly in the late afternoon sun, the weary travelers stepped off the Greyhound at the bus terminal. Some meet friends or relatives, happily chattering as they left the station, while others without contacts wandered quietly, aimlessly, out, looking around at the sun-drenched city that would be the next, and perhaps last, stop on the trail of their lives. One woman moves off alone, meandering towards the sound of the ocean with a distant look in her eyes. She has no suitcase, only a small backpack hung carelessly over one shoulder.

The boardwalk is full of life as she draws near, happy families moving between the surf and the many carnival attractions. Scents of deep fried food, burnt sugar and grilled meat greet her arrival, as does the clanging of prize bells and joyful screams of passengers rushing, twirling, spinning past on brightly painted rides. She moves towards the railing of the covered walkway, partially shaded from the slowly sinking sun, only to rest wearily against a red pillar by the stairway that leads down to the beach.

Time passes as she rests there, for all the world looking asleep on her feet, only her faraway stare and slow blinking to counter the notion. Only the setting of the sun finally rouses her, and she stands, slightly disoriented, moving towards the railing by the staircase to look out across the ocean at the deepening twilight. Grasping the railing she suddenly goes rigid, eyes wide, staring at the unknown. Scenes flash across her mind, snippets catching here and there. Monstrous faces with glowing eyes, fire and blood-stained beaches, dim light seen through a thick jeweled bottle filled with viscous liquid, a house filled with bones and smoke and the stench of death. A final scene passes murkily across her consciousness, misty shapes that shift between a lone figure hunched in agony and a small group huddled around a fallen comrade. The premonition phases several times before dissipating in the fog of her mind.

The lights of the boardwalk flicker above her, people milling around as unaware of her as she is of them. A quartet of men move to walk past, glancing briefly at the oddly still figure before continuing on. She gasps then, body convulsing to let go of the railing as though it was electric, and lurching back catches the leader of the group unawares, taking them both down to the ground in a heap.

The wild-haired blonde in the group is the first to break the stunned silence. “Whoa, dude, I’ll have what she’s having!” he laughs.

The other two standing figures snort in response, the curly blonde chewing on a gloved finger in an apparent attempt to refrain from actual comment, eyes flashing with ill-concealed amusement. The pale blonde on the ground turns a stare of cool disdain on the figure in his lap, much as though he’d just found gum on his shoe.

The woman turns over to get purchase to stand, drawing further ire from her erstwhile cushion. The moment she turns to face him she’s struck still again, blood clearly draining from her face and eyes wide with panic. With raised eyebrow he bends his thoughts towards hers, brushing her mind to see if he can get a glimpse of what he’s dealing with. He’s met with a confusing miasma of recognition, fear, echoing pain and a cavernous sadness that leaves him momentarily stunned. Very slowly she crawls backward and stands, for all the world as though she’s trying not to draw attention from a dangerous creature, which is perhaps not far from the truth.

He stands smoothly then, moving to tower over this odd diminutive figure. He feels no fear from her now, only that deep sorrow and a growing resolve.
“Let me help you.” She whispers.

“Excuse me?” He snidely remarks, his eyes flashing, eyebrows lifting in amusement. Behind him his men shift and chuckle, tense moment past and now eager to see how their leader will handle this clearly maladjusted person.

“I’ve seen what Max has set you to, I’ve seen how it will end. Please, let me help!” she cries. She’s becoming agitated, drawing stares from passersby. The men’s demeanor hardens at the mention of their sire’s name, the leader in particular nearly furious as he considered her statement. He grabs her arm and moves to lead her down the stairs when the boardwalk security guard interjects.

“You need help, miss?” the portly guard asks, staring hard at the leather-clad group surrounding her.

“No, thank you”, she returns, startling the leader, certain she’d use the excuse to get away. “I’m alright, thank you for asking.” She states clearly, smiling now, face calm and pleasant as she reassures the guard, arm relaxed where the pale blonde holds her.

The guard’s face shows he clearly doesn’t believe her, but he’s got no way to proceed if she doesn’t ask for help. “Are these boys bothering you?” He says, trying one more time to offer her a lifeline. He knows the gang around her is always trouble. It’d only been a few days since his buddy’s altercation with them on the carousel, and while he had nothing to prove it he was sure they were the reason his friend had gone missing.

Smiling again, she shakes her head. “Not at all, we were just meeting here so they could show me the town. Isn’t that right, David?”

The leader looks down at her, giving his most ingenuous smile, while his eyes flash dangerously. “Of course,” he drawls, turning toward the guard. “Me and the boys will take good care of our friend, won’t we?”

A chorus of assent come from the rest of the group, the looks on their faces as close to angelic as they can manage. At an impasse, the guard has no choice but to let the incident go. “I’ll be watching you!” he grumps as he glares at them before turning to walk away.

“And we’ll be watching you” David says quietly, eyes following the portly man as he wanders from view.

The girl at his side speaks up, “I think we should talk”.

He turns a predatory smile toward her. “You read my mind.”

She looks up at him, a concerned look on her face. “No, but I have seen your future.”

He pauses momentarily, before a feral grin graces his features. “Well then, let’s walk a bit, shall we?”

Releasing her, he offers her the crook of his left arm with a mocking gesture, waiting to see if she’ll try and run. He hides his surprise as she slides her right hand around it, closing her left on top and smiling up hopefully at him. Twin snorts of derisiveness come from behind him as the two golden blondes watch the interaction. A sense of questioning brushes his mind, this from the dark-haired man in the group. He sends reassurance back to them all. Whatever this girl is about, there’s no doubt in his mind they can handle it.

The small group proceed down the stairs and out across the beach, moving to a section that’s darker and less likely to have people walking past.
He turns toward her then, eyes flashing briefly gold as he draws her in front of him. His men circle her, their faces now grim and hard. “How do you know Max; how do you know us?” he says in a velvet voice laced with menace.

“I really don’t” she says, “I have seen some of what he plans, and where that plan will lead.”

“Keep talking” he snaps.

“I’ve seen him courting a lady, I know he wants you to turn her children to be like you.”

“And what would ‘like us’ be, exactly?” he drawls, voice dangerously silky.

Her face creases in distress, but she stares at him unafraid. “Vampires.”

At this all their eyes flash gold, and David grins evilly. He wraps a gloved hand around her neck, squeezing slowly. “Give me one good reason not to kill you where you stand.”

“I’ll give you three – your brothers.” She says calmly. “If you follow down this path without me, their lives will truly end.”

“Is that a threat?” He snaps, fingers tightening further. Around her his brothers faces shift, sharp teeth drawing down.

“It’s simply what will come to pass. I am not the threat, David, I’m here with you trying to help reduce it.” Her voice is soft and steady, looking up at him with clear and earnest eyes. “I know I can’t explain this well, but I ask you to believe me when I say I want to help you manage the storm that’s coming. I know it doesn’t make sense right now, give me time and I’ll show you that what I say is true!”

He stares at her for a moment. Her calm in the face of clear danger is bothering him in a way that’s difficult to pin down. He glances at his men, silently questioning them.

“For what it’s worth, she smells clean.” Paul comments through their mental bond.

Dwayne nods, adding, “she might have mental issues, I definitely felt something strange when she first bumped into you.”

Marko joins in “There’s something not quite right here, but she hasn’t given us enough to really tell.”

He glances down at he again, as she stares patiently up. Not really the usual reaction of someone faced with imminent death. “Tell me again, what’s to stop me from killing you now?” he purrs.

“Nothing at all” she says. “I couldn’t stop you even if I wanted to, we both know that. From here on, I live at your pleasure, dependent on your regard.”

He admires the turn of phrase, appreciating the subservience embedded in it. “How do you know what’s coming?” he asks, loosening his grip on her neck.

“Unfortunately, it’s a curse I’ve had for a long time. Something I call fivesight.”

Paul can’t help himself, “Fivesight? What the heck is that?”

She cocks her head to eye him, “you know, just a little bit better than foresight” she deadpans, lips twitching slightly in amusement that doesn’t reach her eyes. She turns a serious face back towards David.
“The truth is it’s a little better and worse. I can see events, sometimes clearly from start to finish and sometimes only short highlights of occurrences and the final outcome. And I’m powerless to change the full course, only lessen the impact.”

“So, you think you’ve seen us die and you can’t change it? Then why should we bother keeping you?” Dwayne asks.

“Hear me clearly – I can’t change the events but I can reduce the impact. I’ll give you an example – if I knew a friend was going to be sick, I couldn’t change that, it’s going to happen. But I can make sure he takes time off and help him get to a doctor, and bring him soup to help him feel better sooner. I don’t know how much I can do to help you, but I feel I have to try. You have no hope without me, please, please let me help!” She’s almost crying as she fists her hands in David’s jacket, looking up at him now with tears in her eyes.

Shaking his head, he asks, “why would you want to help us? Knowing what we are?” He concentrates on her, looking for deceit or any hint of betrayal in her mind.

She breathes deep, and he gets a brief glimpse of an image in her mind that could be a lone figure bent before what is somehow both a monstrous fire and dark empty space. “Because I know what it’s like to lose all you care for, have all that gave meaning to your life ripped from you with casual senselessness. And I would spare even you that if I could.” She rasps in a voice laden with anguish, heavy with remembered loss.

David stands quietly, bright eyes fading to icy blue. There is no doubt she believes what she says, that she speaks truth about her loss and her desire to help. He glances again at his pack, as they too stand down, faces smoothing to youthful charm. He raises an eyebrow in question, and sees shrugs in return. “We can always eat her later if she goes off” Marko says silently.

“So how do you propose to prove your word?” David says, addressing her once again.

“I can tell you what’s going on now, I think. Has Star met a young man with curly dark hair that was hanging around with a younger blonde boy? Did Max talk with a lady with short hair in the video store?”

Now David’s interest was piqued. He remembered the two, and the lady in the video store that was clearly drawing his sire’s regard. “That was just last night.” He said. “Did you see them?”

“No, I just got here this afternoon. Star has left Laddie to wander by himself, while she chats up the older of the brothers Max wants you to turn. I believe he got himself a leather jacket, can’t imagine who he’s trying to imitate.” She lifts an eyebrow as she glances obviously around at their attire.

Dwayne grumbles softly, concerned about the little boy.

“If this is true, we have the makings of a deal.” He said. “What do you want in return?”

“Nothing, I’ve told you that.” She said. “well, maybe something small and relatively easy to grant.”

“And that would be?” he prompted.

“An agreement to keep me alive till after the final outcome. To wit,” she said dryly, “you will agree to not ‘fold, spindle, mutilate, or perforate my person, nor cause me direct or indirect harm. I don’t think that’s too much to ask?”

“And when it’s all done?” he prompted.
“Well, one way or another, my life is done.” She said sighed wearily, shadow passing briefly over her eyes. “I really didn’t come to this city planning a vampire vacation. I was coming,” she paused, drawing ragged breath, “to end my life.”

He stared down at her a moment, once again taken aback, as the stark truth of her words echoed in her mind.

“Haven’t you wondered why I’m not frightened of you? You can’t possibly harm me more than I was planning to harm myself.” She whispered. “Feed the fishes or feed you, it makes very little difference in the end.”

Glancing again at his brothers, he straightened, letting his hand drop. “Fair enough, ah?” David asked, questioningly.

“Mina” she replied.

“Mina. I suppose we have the start of a deal.” He returned, offering her his hand as if to shake. As she took it he pulled hers close, nipping a finger with a fang to draw a drop of blood. She frowned slightly, but made no move draw her hand back. Licking the drop, he let go her hand. It was sweet and clean, as he anticipated, but it was good to confirm. She arched an eyebrow at him, her lips twitching into an almost smirk.

“You do know we’ll end you if your words prove false or you do anything against us?” he said.

“Implicitly understood.” She shrugged, “though that’s probably not as much of a threat as you’d like it to be.”

He lost his smirk, but raised an eyebrow at her. “Shall we check on our wayward Star?” he drawled, turning and heading back towards the boardwalk and their bikes. Paul threw an arm across the girl’s shoulders, pulling her along as they walked.

“So, tell me what ‘live for your pleasure’ entails, sweetheart.” He said, wicked smile on his face.

“The chasm between ‘live at’ and ‘live for’ is as broad as the galaxy” she quipped, giving him a cool glance, before shrugging out from under his arm and trailing after David.

“Wait, what?” he questioned, following along.

“That’d be a no.” Marko snarked, coming up behind Paul only to yank his hair and scoot around him as Paul turned to retaliate. Dwayne walked past the two, rolling his eyes at their antics as they climbed the stairs back to their bikes.
A young woman sauntered slowly down the brightly lit boardwalk, turning teasing glances to the boy following after her. Her long dark hair and colorful peasant skirt fluttered in the breeze, and the boy seemed completely enraptured, unable to focus on anything else. Doing his best to make admittedly awkward small talk, he grinned triumphantly when she smiled at his attempts, teasing him sweetly in return.

Securing her attention, they moved closer to his small motorbike. The sound of throaty engines suddenly echoed as David and his men appeared, encircling the pair.

"Where're you going, Star?" David drawled.

"I was going for a ride with Michael." She said softly, suddenly more subdued, glancing back and forth between the young man and David. At Michael's urging, she turned toward him once more.

"Star." David said, veiled threat cloaked in a velvet voice.

She gave Michael an apologetic look before turning to grasp David's ready hand, pulling herself up on the bike behind him.

David glanced in derisive appraisal at Michael and his bike. "Do you know where Hudson's bluff is, up by the point?" he challenged.

"I can't beat your bike." Michael said, torn between pride and bitter reality.

"You don't have to beat me, Michael." David said smoothly. "You just have to keep up." He turned a smirk towards his gang, catching the eye of Mina sitting behind Paul. Revving his bike's engine, he took off, quickly followed by the rest of his gang. The little boy behind Dwayne gave off a small yelp of excitement at the burst of speed as the group poured down the stairs and across the sand, Michael following closely behind.

Michael watched as the larger bikes danced back and forth across each other's paths, coming insanely close to clipping each other as the riders whooped and howled their glee, spraying sand on couples sitting on the beach and weaving between pillars of the pier. Onward they sped through a sandy forest, lofting over rises in the narrow path, never slowing despite the poor illumination of the thick branches and logs they sped around. Soon they were racing along a cliff overlooking the ocean, a narrow road leading towards the cliff's point. Michael and David drove alongside each other, the pale blonde smirking challenge as Michael pushed his bike to the limit. Almost too late he became aware of how close the end of the point he was, dropping his bike at the last moment to gaze in near panic at the cliff edge his bike now hung over.

David came to a smooth stop, turning to grin at the fleshie who now stormed forward in anger, eagerly throwing a punch meant to knock the smirk off David's face. His grin turned feral in response. "How far you willing to go, Michael?" he said, as his gang glanced over the panting boy, predatory eyes glinting in amusement at the exchange. Michael stepped back, suddenly aware of the danger the gang around him was projecting. David turned to help Star off his bike, and she sighed, glancing sorrowfully at Michael before starting down the rickety stairway that lead towards the surf and sand below. He sketched a sarcastic bow to indicate Michael should follow as he turned and disappeared down the stairs. Michael trailed after, followed by Dwayne and Laddie, with Paul imitating David's bow to indicate Mina should go next, and then pulling Marko to bring up the rear.
A shaft of moonlight shone down on David as he settled into a vintage wheelchair, casting an almost ethereal glow about him as he sent Marko out to get some food for the group. Paul cranked up some tunes on a battered boombox, the strains of the Doors filling the spacious cavern they now occupied. Dwayne lit a few barrels, casting warm shadows across the worn furniture, broken fixtures and draped material hanging from the ceiling and walls and strewn across the floor around a marble fountain. As he addressed Michael, Mina found a spot on a davenport that was well past threadbare and bore deep scratches across decaying velvet tufted arms. She glanced around, taking in the space, as Laddie walked past her, giving her little more than a glance before continuing over to stand off a bit behind David, watching as he took a blunt from Paul and handed it to Michael.

Marko was back with boxes of Chinese fairly quickly, distributing them around. Mina was handed a box of noodles, and after some cajoling Michael took a box of rice. As he dug in David watched with a grin bordering dangerously on evil. His comments on maggots had Michael spitting out his food and tossing his box in panic, only to stare in confusion at the plain rice now scattered across the floor. Laughing, David now turned towards Mina, catching her eye as she stirred her food with chopsticks, about to scoop some up.

"How are those worms, Mina?" he smirked. She stilled and stared at his face, aware of apparent movement in the carton at the periphery of her vision. Holding his stare, she purposefully scooped up a large helping of her noodles, only breaking his gaze to close her eyes as she got the food to her mouth. Slurping the noodles down, she smiled at him.

"Taste like dirt." She deadpanned. Next to them, Michael turned a little green and closed his eyes. "Got any soy sauce?" she quipped, waggling her eyebrows back at David as Paul and Marko cackled. Even Dwayne snorted in amusement. David chuckled and motioned to Marko, whispering in his ear. Marko stepped away, to return with a dark bottle covered in jewels and filigree. As David removed the stopper and took a swig he was acutely aware of Mina staring raptly at him, eyes wide, a frown of concern creasing her forehead.

"Ladies first?" he said, offering her the bottle. She looked almost panicked, and he frowned at her. Taking a deep breath, she dipped her head, dropping her gaze before looking back up at him submissively. "No, thank you. I'm afraid I really can't." she said in a hushed voice.

Smirking at her he turned towards Michael. "More for us then, eh Michael?"

Despite Star's warning, Michael took the bottle, drinking deep as the men around him shouted approval and chanted his name, their earlier derision turning to camaraderie. Star reached a hand out to Laddie, moving towards the back of the cave where a canopied bed sat, draped haphazardly in loose sheets and blankets and hung with sheer, moldering fabric. A few rounds of well-laced weed were passed around, which Mina also declined with determined politeness. Between passing smokes and drinks David crouched down where she sat, leaning to whisper in her ear.

"Time's gonna go by real slow if you're this much fun to be around." He could feel her tense and shiver as his breath ghosted over her neck. Turning her head slightly to add more space between them, she spoke just as quietly back.

"It's not my job to be the entertainment. I'm just here to help you keep your brothers alive." He looked her over again, still so serious, still so certain of her words.

"All work and no play make Mina a dull girl. You know, for one so determined to die, you could try living a little first." He said, liltingly, dragging a gloved hand slowly down her jawline, enjoying how she twitched as he stood and moved back towards Michael. Making eye contact with Dwayne they steered the now-addled young man up and out of the cave, luring him with talk of fun and excitement to be had out in the night. David glanced back briefly towards Mina, catching her eye and
raising an eyebrow to offer her inclusion. She shook her head gently as he shrugged and left, Michael and the gang in tow. Dwayne caught his attention as they climbed the stairs.

"You trust her in the cave?" he said, quietly enough for Michael to miss, not that the boy was aware enough to notice.

David replied just a quietly, "Star can take care of herself. And the girl trying to hurt Laddie would probably be the only thing that would actually make Star snap. That might be fun in itself." He smirked at the thought. Dwayne nodded agreement as they reached their bikes and took off into the night.

Back in the cave, Mina stood up and slowly approached Star where she lay with Laddie on the bed. Star looked up, frowning slightly. Mina did her best to look tentative and friendly. David had warned her not to tell Star what she was or knew, but she did have to find a way to interact with something approaching pleasant if possible. Wrapping her arms around herself, she dipped her head slightly at Star, before starting to talk.

"Um, Hi. I'm Mina." She said, smiling gently.

Star sighed and frowned again. "Hello. I'm Star." She said coolly. She wasn't in the habit of befriending the boy's snacks, there was no point.

"I hate to be a pest", Mina continued, "but I'm wondering if there's, you know, something like a bathroom around here?" Scrunching her nose a bit and looking exaggeratedly around the open area, she turned back towards Star.

"This place doesn't really look like it has plumbing. I'm sure the guys are fine with whatever but I'm not exactly equipped to pee on a wall." She smiled hopefully down at Star.

Star sighed again. It wasn't enough to be eternally responsible for taking care of Laddie, now she had to find a potty for the snack. Perfect. Closing her eyes, she thought about the options in the back areas, coming up with a plan. "Yeah, alright. Follow me, there's place you can use." She got up off the bed and wandered further back in the cave. Mina followed, slowing as it got darker.

"Ah, um, should I have grabbed a candle?" Mina asked. Star stopped and closed her eyes for a moment. The night just kept getting better and better.

"Stay right there, I'll grab one." She said, turning back and grabbing a bottle stuffed with a lit candle before coming back to Mina and thrusting it at her. "Here, hold this."

"Thank you!" said Mina, smiling at her. Star rolled her eyes and walked on, coming to gap in the side wall. The sound of water lapping against rocks could be heard echoing in it and the smell was something raw and salty.

"There's a crack in the floor in there." Star said. "Just, I don't know, crouch over that or something." She turned and walked back towards the main area.

"Thank you again!" Mina called after her, before turning and making her way cautiously into the space. It did have a cragged gap in the floor, large enough at one end to fall through if she wasn't careful. There were some dark pools of what she decided to call brackish water here and there, and a lone shoe off in a corner. Sighing deeply herself, she did what she needed to before gathering up the bottle light and heading back. She eyed a few unopened cans of cheap beer, but without direct approval didn't feel comfortable taking one. Curling back up on the couch again, she rummaged through her bag to find a battered paperback to settle in with.
In the back, Star made encouraging noises at Laddie's latest crayon drawings, wondering how long it would take David to return and clean up his still-breathing 'leftovers'. She felt a little sorry for the lady, who didn't seem at all like the usual types the boys brought in. She was dressed pretty blandly, nothing to indicate a beach bunny or party girl, and not drunk or high as she smelled clean even from a distance. She seemed a little older than Star herself, but she couldn't tell by how much. For all this 'Mina' was settling in over on the couch, she didn't really seem like she wanted to be there. Star couldn't blame her, she didn't want to be here either. Hearing the siren call of a beating heart wasn't making things easier, making her stomach cramp with need. She looked down at Laddie, who glanced up from his drawing to give her a slightly pained look. "You too, hmm?" she said, gently stroking the hair out of his eyes. He nodded. Star got up and grabbed the bottle that David had left on the table next to his 'throne'. Taking a swig, she took it back to Laddie so he could as well, before returning it to its original spot. Mina didn't even seem to notice her walk past, apparently entranced by her book.

The sound of loud engines reverberated through the space, announcing the return of David and his men. Playful laughter drifted from the entrance as Paul and Marko scuffled before leaping down the steps, Dwayne and David making a more sedate arrival. Sauntering past the reading girl, Paul leaned down and poked at the back of her book. "Hey there, anybody home?" he joked. Slowly refocusing her eyes, she glanced up at him, then stretched and cracked her neck.

"Dang, is your head still attached?" Paul said, in humored alarm at the noises her bones made.

She gasped, eyes going wide and grasping her neck with one hand. "Oh no, my green ribbon!" she wailed, before letting her head slump to the side at an odd angle. She gave David an amused side eye when he snorted, and Dwayne actually laughed.

"Wait, what's so funny?" Paul whined. "I don't get it?"

"Not my fault you're a philistine with no appreciation for the classics." she said, as Marko teased him.

"Bud, she got you good. That story is older than…" Marko paused, looking over at where David gave him a cool stare, eyebrow raised. "Well, it's really old." he snarked at his wild-haired brother, smacking him on the back before hopping back out reach when Paul took a swipe at him.

"Hey, I read!" Paul said.

"Playboy articles and National Lampoon." Dwayne interjected, as Paul turned to chase Marko around the fountain.

Giving the two a quelling glance, David moved to stand over her. "Walk with me." He said, clearly brooking no dissent. He turned and moved again toward the entrance. Leaving her book on the couch she followed him. They moved out to the small spit of sand outside the opening to the cave, sitting on a small rock outcropping a bit back from the rolling surf.

"You were right about Star and Michael." He stated. "Do you know where we went when we left?" He asked, tilting his head to watch her. She looked at him, her eyes glazing over briefly.

"I see you all hanging from train tracks. Falling but not falling?" she said questioningly. "It's too murky to see exactly what happened after you all let go."

He leaned back, relaxing somewhat. "And what will happen next?"

"Nothing really significant that I can see, till after he and Star get busy." She stated. "It feels like
there's a little bit of time before that happens."

David's loose smile turned predatory. "He's really hot for her, isn't he?"

She nodded. "That's partly why this whole thing comes about."

"What if we don't let that happen?"

Her calm face dropped, distress blossoming in its place. "Please, don't interfere like that!" She said, her tone turning distraught. "These events need to unfold as I've seen them."

"Why should I?" he said, tone turning hard. "Won't stopping them keeps my brothers safe?"

"No, David, changing or stopping the anchor events will only make the outcome worse."

"How do you know?!" He growled, moving to looming over her. "If I can't change things, how do I know they'll survive!" He placed a hand around her neck threateningly. "What good are your words if they solve nothing?"

"I don't know!" she cried. "I don't know yet how to help them, but I feel that I can. Please trust me on this. And I do know that if you interfere it will be so much worse for all of you!"

"HOW DO YOU KNOW!" He roared, eyes flashing yellow and fangs dropping.

She flinched but steadied herself, looking up at him with deep anguish in her eyes. She placed a hand gently over his where it wrapped around her neck. His stare was hard as his hand relaxed slightly, allowing her to breathe.

"I know because I've been there. I've had this curse for years and things don't work out well when I tried to change them, don't you think I've tried that before? It's not like this curse came with a guidebook. Even small events turned worse though, till I tried soothing the effects instead of stopping them, learning how to make the best of the fates I'd seen. It never felt like enough but it was something. And it was working, as least till my own family was involved." She paused, eyes cast downward, clearly stuck in her memories. He brushed her mind, taken aback at the almost black agony within.

"Continue." He said quietly. Her gaze stayed inward but she spoke again.

"I had a family once, David. Married to my high school sweetheart, carried his children and nursed them at my breast. He knew about my visions, loved me despite how crazy I'd get when they hit. Help me if he could when I helped those I'd seen in need. One day I saw our house, engulfed in flames, my family laying on the grass outside." She paused, gathering shaky breath before her ragged voice continued. "I couldn't help myself, I panicked, practically dragged my family out of there. I wouldn't tell my husband the details but he knew something was wrong. We told our little girls we were taking vacation, going to a hotel with a waterpark to have fun for a few days. When the visions cleared, we took them home and I went back to work thinking the danger passed. That afternoon, an announcer broke in on the radio to say there'd been an accident with some utility workers and a gas explosion had caught an entire block on fire. I knew where it was. I tried to get home as quickly as I could, holding the slim hope that I was wrong, that my family would be alright. You could see the smoke and flames for miles. All I could see when I got close was a wall of flame down the whole street, and no survivors anywhere, the rescue workers unable to get close enough to check. It took three firefighters to stop me from running into my house to burn with my family. They shot me with tranquilizer after I broke someone's nose. The entire block was reduced to ash. There wasn't even enough of the bodies left to bury." Her voice now a hoarse whisper, she curled in on herself,
wrapping her arms around her knees and resting her chin on the hand still around her neck. When her eyes finally met David's again they were red-rimmed and tormented.

"Please trust me. I really am trying to keep you from meeting my fate. There's no pain worse than being the survivor, knowing your family might be alive if only you'd listened." she rasped, her voice raw and thick with emotion.

Golden eyes bled back to ice blue as he stilled, staring back at her with an unreadable face. "You really do want to help us?" he said softly.

"You're a family too." She returned. "I saw enough to know that. And I can't turn a blind eye when there's something I can do to help. I've seen what's coming, and I'll stand with you till the end if you'll let me. I just haven't figured out what we can do yet."

He relaxed then, hand releasing, turning up to cup her chin gently, gloved thumb stroking her cheek. A small frown creased her forehead, but she didn't turn away. "You know I still don't entirely trust you." He said, finally dropping his hand.

She shrugged slightly. "I know. I don't entirely trust you either. I didn't even know your kind were real till today. Just please say you'll listen, and at least consider my suggestions?"

He smirked before turning back toward the cave. "Depends on what you say" he said over his shoulder before disappearing inside.

She watched him go, taking a few deep breaths to try and release the emotions that had flooded her as she'd talked. Watching the moonlight waves in the dark she finally noticed the sky changing slightly, lightening almost imperceptibly as dawn slowly approached. She got up then and moved back to the cave. The men all seemed occupied, barely giving her a glance as she walked past to sit back down on the empty couch. David sat, legs draped casually over the side of his chair, now reading the book she'd abandoned earlier. Noticing what held his attention, she sighed, taking off her shoes so she could curl up on the couch. She closed her eyes and drifted off to the now more muted strains of Robert Plant, singing about the queen of light.
Mina and the Boys

Mina and the Boys

(Song Credit: "Ain't no Sunshine" by Bill Withers)

Brilliant orange fire blazed across the horizon, the heat enough to sear lungs and skin at a distance. The smell of burning wood, chemicals and meat hung thickly in the air. Screaming and struggling a figure tries to reach the flames, held back by faceless arms. Twitching, the sleeping figure whined as the scene replayed endlessly in her psyche.

The four men gathered around the girl curled on the couch, listening with interest to the pained noise she made as she dreamt. David moved to crouch in front of her, mind reaching out to glimpse the bleak vision that held her. Her whimpers died out as she gasped, falling out of the dark trance and launching herself off the couch and directly on to David, wrapping around him in desperate search for comfort. He frowned at the contact, but, still connected to her mind, saw she was ensnared in wakeful-dreaming, projecting a visage clearly not his own, with kindly face and welcoming arms. Choking back a sob, she curled in to him, warm breath against the crook of his neck as she nuzzled closer, seeking remembered solace, a hand raising in habit to caress his cheek reassuringly. Suddenly she stilled, finally coming completely awake. She uncurled slowly, hand and head dropping to pull away, trapped between the couch and his body. "I'm sorry." She said, voice rough from sleep and emotion.

"I'm not." David returned, standing smoothly and offering a hand to help her up.

Around him his brothers eyed the entire exchange with varying degrees of not-veiled amusement and interest. For himself, the brief contact, laden with well-seasoned tenderness and intimacy had touched a chord. It was not so far from the bond he shared with his brothers, wrought by decades of shared lives and minds. It was, however, a very far cry from the bitter aloofness that Star maintained, stark contrast as the dark-haired girl rejected the call of blood and family. Even Laddie was more connected to them, distressing as his very existence in their world was. His turning was an infraction David would not forgive Max for, though he was careful not to show his disgust to either Max or the child. The little boy suffered enough, through no fault of his own. That Max would seek to use him to create a more obedient, responsible pack was beyond reprehensible, and utterly senseless, though that was exactly the behavior David had come to expect from his sire, and it had only been getting worse over time.

"Time to head out." David said, more for Mina's benefit, as the others were ready to go.

Releasing his cool hand as she stood, she paused. "If I could just have a moment?" she said as she moved towards the back of the cave, grabbing a lit bottle candle and calling back over her shoulder as she went. "I have to powder my nose."

Paul shared an amused look with Marko, before shrugging and moving towards a very disorderly pile of things heaped around his 'rock-box', grabbing a baggy of loose weed and some papers to stuff in a pocket for later.

She was back in a few minutes, grabbing her bag and looking to David for direction. He gestured in mock gallantry towards the entrance as the group up and out. Up on the bluff, Paul motioned her to get on behind him again as the group mounted up and headed out, Star behind David as usual and Laddie with Dwayne. Paul turned his head as they rode the trail back to town, saying cheekily, "You ever lookin', you can grab hold of me anytime, chica." He heard her snort, then yelped as she
pinched his side where her hand crossed his middle.

"That's about as close as you're gonna get." she retorted.

"Ohh, harder baby, that's what I like." He purred back, chuckling when he felt her giggle behind him. Marko whooped teasingly at them both as he sped near. They were all in good spirits as they neared the boardwalk, cruising in to park in their usual spot.

Star looked around the crowd, and barely gave David a glance. His nod of acceptance all she needed as she sped off towards a waiting Michael. They disappeared into the throng of people. Dwayne glanced down at Laddie. "Guess you're with us."

Mina spoke up "could we get some dinner?" Laddie looked up at Dwayne hopefully.

"Dwayne, take the two of them to one of the stands." David said. Mina turned a questioning look to him. "There are more than a few joints around here that provide us with food to keep us from 'causing trouble'." He smirked. "it's easier when we don't have a lot of cash on hand."

Mina paused, frowning. "There's a diner just a little back towards the main drag, how about we go there, my treat?" she said. David looked at her, then shrugged.

Laddie whooped with glee. "Can I get a milkshake?" he asked Dwayne.

Mina spoke up, "Of course you can. Maybe a real burger too?" He smiled shyly at her, but took her hand when she offered it. The gentle look on her face was marred momentarily by a flash of sadness that was just as quickly hidden as he pulled her through the boardwalk entrance towards the town's main strip and the diner. Outside the restaurant she crouched down to adjust something with her shoe, before straightening to offer something concealed in her hand to David. Eyebrow arched in question he held out his own, only to have her place several twenties there. Tilting his head at her, she shrugged, moving to enter the door Dwayne was holding open for her and Laddie.

Tucked into a booth, Laddie scooted over by the window next to Dwayne with Marko on the outside, Mina across from Laddie, with Paul squished up next to her as David sat by the aisle smoking. The waitress that came up eyed the group warily, as David grinned up at her like a shark at feeding time.

"What'll it be?" she said in a bland customer service voice, trying surreptitiously to stand back from Marko and David.

Mina pipped up, "I'll have coffee, with lots of creamer, and could you leave the pot?" Glancing down at the little boy she asked "what flavor milkshake did you want?"

"Chocolate!" he said eagerly.

"And a cheeseburger too, right?" she prompted. He nodded. "I'll have the breakfast special." She continued. Turning to her left, she looked pointedly at Paul.

"What? Oh, yeah, burger for me too, extra rare!" he said. The rest of the group ordered similarly and the waitress backed away, turning hurriedly toward the kitchen.

Watching the retreating form, Mina caught David's eye. "So, obviously, you eat, but why?"

He smiled, taking a slow drag on his smoke. "All our senses are enhanced, taste included." He said quietly. "Wouldn't do much if we never ate again but it's pleasant and kills time." She nodded, reaching for the cup and pot as the waitress returned with them and a large glass and milkshake cup.
Laddie was practically climbing over Dwayne to reach it. Dwayne smiled indulgently, passing both over after carefully pouring the drink into the glass for the boy.

Paul watched as she doctored up her first cup of coffee. "Like a little coffee with your cream?" he joked.

She made a face back at him. "I don't recall asking for comments on my food preferences." She harrumphed.

Marko chuckled as Paul put his arm over the seat back, reaching around her to try and tickle her while she sipped at her drink. She elbowed him for his troubles, though it was pretty clear his grunt was more theatrics than actual discomfort.

David watched with a smirk. "Where did you get the cash?" he asked, catching her as she set her cup down.

She made a bland face, staring at her drink. "Life insurance." She said softly. "I have enough to be comfortable for the little time I'm here. You're welcome to whatever's left when we're done." She pointedly focused on the cup as she picked it up and drank it down, the set about pouring and fixing up another one. David glanced over at Dwayne as she did so, the dark man giving him a thoughtful look. Generosity was not something they tended to experience much, particularly on the receiving end. Despite the casualness of her offering, it was oddly touching, as was the way she dealt with Laddie.

The food arrived, carried over by a bus boy the waitress had clearly shanghaied to deal with group. As they tucked in Paul commented on the size of Mina's plate. "You really gonna eat all that?" he teased. She cast him a cool look, clearly on the verge of a comment before settling for rolling her eyes and ignoring him. The table got quiet for a while, but Paul was still in too playful a mood to behave for long. Very casually he aimed his fork at some of the potatoes on her plate, only to yelp and draw his hand back when she just as casually stuck her fork in the back of his hand. Snorts and chuckles broke out as he rubbed at his injury. "You wounded me!" he howled dramatically.

"Shouldn't think so" she said, rather dryly, "I don't have so much as a toothpick on me."

Paul looked at his brothers for support, but even Laddie was giggling behind the remnants of his burger. He didn't bother looking at David, he could feel the restrained shaking next to him.

"She's got you well in hand, I may keep her just for that."

Amusement followed the comment through their mental link.

Paul just whined back petulantly. "SHE DOES NOT!"

Marko nearly choked on the soda he was drinking, he snorted so hard. Dwayne just kicked Paul under the table, eyes bright with merriment. Mina sat watching the silent exchange, drawn when Marko started coughing. Eyebrow high with amused suspicion, she turned back to her plate.

Paul slumped back, nursing clearly damaged pride when motion caught his eye as Mina casually reached over and picked a French fry off his plate. Quick as a snake he caught her hand before she could get the fry to her mouth, and with a wicked gleam in his eye gently drew her hand closer. He closed his mouth around the wayward fry, lips gently kissing her fingers before his teeth met, nipping off the length of potato and leaving her with only the tiny corner she'd pinched on to. Her face puckered, and her heart rate picked up as she watched him, and he waggled his eyebrows back at her, smiling as he chewed in triumph, letting her hand go. He picked up another fry, dragging it through the ketchup on his plate before lifting it to his mouth. Just as he did so, she caught his hand, gently
guiding it toward herself. With Marko making oh-so-helpful comments through their bond, Paul's eyes locked on hers as she mimicked his earlier actions, only to slowly draw the now-ketchup-less fry out of her mouth suggestively, then just as slowly working her mouth back over it, nipping it off as he had done, her warm lips caressing his fingers before releasing and drawing back, eyes flashing amusement as she chewed her prize.

Paul sat stone still for a long moment, so quiet that Marko prodded him mentally "Dude, did she break ya?" laughter floating in his comment.

He smiled then and wrapped an arm around Mina, pulling her close and purring in her ear, "Girl, you drive me crazy…wanna get away for a while?"

She turned to him smiling, patting his hand lightly where it draped over her arm. "Pretty sure you were crazy long before I showed up. And I'm not really into necrophilia. Thanks, but no."

David chuckled, getting up and tossing a couple of the twenties down on the table. Everyone followed his lead, getting up and heading out of diner. Paul danced around Mina, still trying to wheedle attention out of her and paying little note to his surroundings. Walking backwards, now in front of her, he continued his efforts to wear down her resolve. "C'mon chica, give me chance! You'll see how not dead I am!" he said, waving his arms and gyrating his pelvis suggestively.

Ahead of him David smoothly dodged a mother carrying a child half Laddie's size. The lady was distracted, cajoling the child to spit out a wad of gum that was a sizable lump distending his chubby cheek. Paul heard Marko call "to your right!" as he lurched, directly into the pair's path. The child spit the giant gum wad directly into Paul's hair as he backed into them. Paul froze, the sensation of a large mass weighting down the back of his head. The entire group stopped cold, David turning as he sensed his brother's distress. The lady started apologizing, reaching up to touch the offending mass when Paul spun around, eyes blazing, but thankfully still blue. Her comments died on her tongue as she pulled her child closer and hurried off.

Paul reached around to touch his hair, a clear look of horror on his face. "Dude, don't do it!" Marko said, but it was too late. Paul's hands touched the gum and everything started sticking together – his fingers, hair and the massive pink wad of wet, sugary goo.

David stood in front of him now, looking him in the eye. "Let it go now, we'll go home and fix it." He sent in calm tones, but with an underlying hint of command to ensure his suggestion was followed. Paul's face crumpled but he tried to pull his hands free. Marko had to come and help, peeling the pink goo that now stretched across the back of his head away from the man's fingers so at least his hands were clear. The four men moved towards their bikes, Dwayne glancing back to ensure Laddie and Mina were following.

Mina was calling out softly to Paul, but neither he nor the rest were acknowledging her, till Dwayne turned again and shook his head at her. He heard her huff as he continued walking, but his concern was for his brother. Getting to the bikes, Mina finally had enough of their ignoring her.

"PAUL" she said, in a tone of command that drew attention. All the men turned towards her then, David with stormy look that did not bode well for her. As he was about to speak, she interjected again. "Paul, let me help you." She said, her voice quieter now that she had his attention, but no less stern.

"I don't want you cutting my hair." He said flatly, his face closed off.

"I didn't say anything about cutting." she said softly, "I said let me help you, I know how to fix it."
"Did you see this coming?" David said, eyes flashing.

She gave him a slightly exasperated look. "Despite how tragic this event surely is, I'm sorry to say the universe did not warn me that Paul's hair would get messy."

He gave her a hard look. "how do you know how to fix it then?"

Clearly restraining herself from rolling her eyes, she blinked and huffed at him. "Experience. For Pete's sake, I had two little girls, I may have had to deal more than once with someone waking in tears because they forgot to spit out their gum before falling asleep. Now, do you want my help or not?"

A glint of hope in his eyes, Paul spoke up. "You can get it out?"

"Yes, Sunshine, I can. I wouldn't make any other plans for tonight though, I'm not sure how long it will take."

He smiled softly and still a bit shaky, looking suddenly far younger. "OK."

She turned towards David. "I'm going to need a few things, I don't know if you have them on hand?"

Marko was at her side before she finished. "Lay it on me, chica."

"The big item is quart of olive oil. Other than that, just a regular pocket comb that you don't mind having to toss and some rags or paper towels or something I can wipe the gum off on."

Paul interjected "we have oil back at our place."

She gave him a patient look. "I'm sure you do, Sunshine, but I'm not combing your hair with what, motor oil?" Paul nodded. "Oh, no. For one it'd be terrible on your hair, and for two, I'm not even sure it would work right. You don't want to end up with a buzz cut, right?" He shook his head, contrite, eyes widening at the thought.

As Marko turned to go, she touched his arm, handing him a twenty. "Go to an actual store, the olive oil will be either with flour and sugar or in the aisle with Italian stuff, like spaghetti and tomato sauce." He nodded his thanks and took off.

The rest climbed on their bikes, Mina getting on behind David this time. When Paul looked at her, she smiled sadly, "It's best if we don't get tangled together, at least under current circumstances." She winked at him and he smiled back weakly, still shaken by the weight and tightness pulling at his head.

The ride back was very subdued, and they filed into the cave quietly. Mina huffed a little. "Alright" she said. "Enough with the funeral dirge." The three men frowned at her. She walked over and put her hand on Paul's arm reassuringly. "I know, this is a terrible thing to have happen, but once Marko gets back I'll get you cleaned up and right as rain." He smiled again, tentatively and reached up towards the back of his head. She slapped his hand away. "None of that now, you know you'll only make it worse. Now, why don't you take off your jacket, no sense letting it get messy too." He looked at her, a pale hint of mischief glinting in his eyes again.

"You sure this isn't just your way of getting me naked?" he said, slowly peeling off the black coat suggestively, to reveal his nearly bare torso clothed only in an open mesh shirt. "Not that I mind."

She snorted at him. "Hair repair first, flirting after." She said, using a tone that was playfully stern.
"Yes ma'am." He smiled as she smacked him lightly with the back of her hand.

"Keep calling me ma'am and I'm gonna beat you with my cane."

"You don't have a cane." David called, smirking from his chair, clearly more relaxed now.

"I'll get one. Just. So. I. can. beat. you." She said, turning back toward Paul.

He smiled a little broader. "Promise?" She shook her head, palming her face in mock defeat.

Marko was back, with a small bag in tow. Mina smiled and thanked him as she took it, pulling out the oil tin and the comb. "Do you have some rags?" she asked.

David waved towards a low set of well-aged shelves cluttered with clothing. "Use whatever you like."

She pawed through the piles, most of which actually looked decent, finally grabbing a few white shirts that seemed a little ragged. Standing up she moved to the ancient davenport, setting the oil on the floor, laying the rags on her lap and comb by her side. Looking up at Paul she motioned him over. "Have a seat Sunshine."

He grinned. "You want me between your legs?" Around him his brothers snorted their amusement.

She glared at him, her look softened by a twitching smile. "Don't make me regret saying yes." She drawled with just a hint of warning, "or I might make you regret it too." He chuckled as he came over, dropping down and sitting cross-legged with his back to her. She gently gathered his hair, laying the now tacky pink-goo-covered locks across her lap over the rags. His brothers watched her proceedings with interest, Marko hovering off to one side of the couch while Dwayne kept Laddie busy, occasionally glancing over to see what was happening. Opening the oil, she poured out a pool into her cupped palm before setting the can down to rub her other hand in the oil and working it into Paul's hair. She could feel tension in his back as he rested against her. Repeating her steps, she worked till his hair was limp and shiny with oil from crown to tip, lifting it gently to ensure the underneath was fully coated as well. Now she started separating strands, starting from the hair at the front that hadn't really gotten stuck, slowly drawing down the strands and moving them away from gum-mass. As her ministrations continued, Paul settled in more comfortably, tension slowly leaking away.

"Mina?" Marko spoke, somewhere close behind her.

"Hmm?" she replied, still focused on her work.

"Why do you keep calling Paul Sunshine?" he continued.

She smiled as her fingers moved through the golden locks, slowly winning them free of their gooey trap. "because he's clearly the light in your family, bringing laughter and warmth into your lives. And you're all a bit darker when he's not happy."

She started singing then, in a low, honeyed voice.

"Ain't no sunshine when he's gone, it's not warm when he's away

Ain't no sunshine when he's gone, and he's always gone too long

Anytime he goes away..."

As she continued singing, David watched her, occasionally catching the eyes of Marko and Dwayne. She couldn't know how Paul's near-panic had ricocheted through their bond, the thought of sudden,
forced alteration feeling like danger and injury to people used to living as nearly unchanging as rocks in the passing stream of time. And she couldn't know how her care and gentleness, clearly calming their brother, also rippled through the link, the pleasure and trust he felt as she combed through his hair flowing to them as well, soothing frayed nerves and creating a warmth that settled in between them. Again, he found himself comparing how Mina fit into their lives with how Star did, or really didn't. It rankled that the younger girl fought so hard against them, refusing the gift Max had them share with her and refusing to even try to join in to the group. That stark rejection was a constant drag on their mental link, an irritation souring the harmony they'd built in their time together. One way or another, it was going to have to stop. Taking a long drag that burnt up the last of his cigarette, he got up, letting the others know through the bond he was off to collect their wandering halfling from her date night.

Paul draped nearly boneless on Mina's lap as she continued working the gum out, singing softly all the while and nearly done, as the large pile of oily pink goo stuck to the rags around her indicated. She was using the comb, well oiled and gliding through the nearly pink-free golden strands when Marko came around the couch to observe his blissed-out brother, eyes closed and goofy smile plastered across his face. He wasn't even pretending to breathe, as deeply relaxed as he was. Mina noticed the movement, looking up as she slowly combed a part in to Paul's hair, running fingers up his scalp to gather hair in handfuls on both sides, momentarily creating the image of pigtails, as her eye caught Marko's with a mischievous gleam. He snickered, as Paul blinked and slowly came out of his torpor, looking questioningly at his brother.

"Almost done there, bud?" Marko asked.

Dwayne snorted. "Stick a fork in him, he's way past done."

Marko snickered again. "Pretty sure Mina already did that."

"Hey, man, you should definitely try this. Mina is amazing." Paul said, ignoring his brothers in favor of tilting his head back to smile at her upside down. "And you sing like an angel."

She smiled back at him. "Thank you, Sunshine. And you're done, all that awful gum is gone."

"Aww, I don't want you to stop." He whined.

"Poor sweetie" she cooed. "Some of us still have functioning plumbing. I need to move or you'll have something worse than gum to wash off. Now up you get." She nudged him with her knees. He dragged his hands slowly up her legs, turning to kiss her thigh where it was bare below the shorts she wore. Close as he was, he easily caught the scent of desire that flashed from her at his touch.

"Or you could stay a while." He waggled his eyebrows at her over his shoulder.

"Oh, I really can't, you evil animal. Now move your oily self before I make a mess of us both!" she shoved him forward as he chuckled, crawling out behind him as she moved with purpose towards the back of the cave, pausing momentarily as she went and grabbed a candle.

"You know you want me!" he cried after her, laughing as she scuttled off.

Enhanced ears easily heard her muffled cry of aggravation "I really don't!" as she dashed into the side room.

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David prowled through the boardwalk crowds, eyes scanning for his two dark-haired lovebirds. Spying them seated at the food court, he grinned, sauntering over to come up behind them, startling the pair when he dropped his hands on their shoulders. Looking down at the surprised couple, he smirked.

"How's it going, kids?" he drawled. "Mind if I join you?"

Star dropped her gaze first, looking crestfallen, while Michael stared back in open annoyance, only looking away when David's gaze turned fiercely predatory.

"We're just fine." The boy said, a hint of petulance in his tone.

Star put her hand on his, saying softly, "He was just going to take me home." Michael stared at her, clearly, he'd had other ideas before David intercepted them.

"Well, since I'm here we can head back together. Won't that be nice? I think the boys miss Michael, don't you think so Star?" David mused, his teasing tone underlain with threat.

Star's shoulders drooped. "Yes, David."

Now Michael was looking back and forth between the two of them, frowning. "We were going to go on some rides, weren't we, Star?" he said, trying to offer her a more attractive alternative to following the gang leader's plans.

Star looked at him, eyes sad. "It's time to go." He frowned again, looking up at David. The icy blonde leaned down to face him, eyes glinting with humor and barely hidden malice, daring him to make challenge.

"You want to be one of us, Michael? Then stick to the plan." He straightened up. "Come along, kiddies." He turned and headed towards his bike. Star got up and moved to follow. Michael put his hand on her arm.

"We don't have to do what he says!" he said, tone rising in exasperation. She looked down at him and shook her head.

"I do. You should too, Michael. It's just easier." She started walking after David. Michael wouldn't let it go.

"Why don't you leave him? I could help."

"I really can't, Michael. I'm sorry."

"I just don't understand, what does he do that you can't leave?!" Michael stopped her, eyes imploring and voice breaking.

"I know you don't understand yet, but you will if you stay. You never should have followed me. Run while you still can." She pulled gently away from his hands and kept walking.
"I don't…" he started.

"JUST GO!" she yelled, her face turning stony before she melted into the boardwalk crowd.

Michael stood there for a moment, stunned at her outburst. The night had been wonderful, they'd walked along the beach for a while, finding some rocks to sit on and watch the moon shining on the ocean waves. They'd even talked, well, he talked, mostly about his family. She hadn't seemed to mind. Coming back to the boardwalk for some late dinner seemed like a good idea till David showed up and everything went to hell. Sighing in frustration, he turned back towards his own bike. He had more than enough of dealing with David for one night, and from Star's change in mood, the night was just gonna go downhill from there. As he walked through the crowds it felt like his head was pounding, or maybe it was just the music piping over the speakers? It irritated him, like an itch he couldn't reach, building as he walked on. By the time he reached his bike he was practically body-checking people in his way, anger like poison rippling through his mind. Hopping on his bike he spun it around viciously and gunned it towards home.

Star caught up with David at his bike. He stubbed out a cigarette as she walked up, eyebrows raising in question. "Where's lover boy?"

"He went home." Star said, pointed not looking at him.

"Pity. Was going to show him a good time with the boys tonight." He smirked.

"Leave him alone, David." Star said, turning her gaze to glance at him.

"Or what, Star?" he said, softly. "You think you can stop me?"

She held his gaze for a moment, before she looked away again, posture drooping in defeat. "No." She whispered sadly.

He moved closer, cupping her face gently in gloved hands and turning her face back towards his, staring deep into her eyes. "You know, it'd be easier if you opened up and joined us. We're meant to be a family. It would be so much better than facing this alone." His voice was honey, full of softness and promise. She stared back at him, swaying slightly toward him, drawn by his presence and the lure of his words. For a moment there was no one else in the world, just the two of them, bright and fiery in the darkness.

"Get a room!" someone shouted at them as the throngs on the boardwalk passed them by.

Blinking out of the moment, Star shook her head, stepping back out of David's hold, retreating into herself. "I don't want to be like you." She whispered, eyes shining with unshed tears.

David sighed and drew himself up, cool façade dropping over his features once again. "Suit yourself." He threw a leg over his bike, holding a hand out for her. "Let's go." She climbed on and they headed back on a silent ride towards the cave.

Making her way back to the main area from the rough outhouse, Mina turned to place her candle back on the shelf, nodding at Laddie coloring on the bed as she passed. Walking in to the front of the cave, she slowed, captivated by the scene unfolding in front of her. Dwayne and Marko stood together with Paul, their bodies angled around his. Marko's hands cupped Paul's face, their foreheads touching as his thumbs rubbed gently along the taller man's stubbled cheeks. Dwayne loomed behind Paul, strong hands wandering across the blonde's chest under the mesh shirt and dipping past his belt, nuzzling into Paul's neck taking soft nips as he went. Paul stood relaxed, eyes closed in pleasure at
his brother's ministrations, one hand raised to reach behind him and knot in Dwayne's hair, the other buried in Marko's curly locks.

Mina paused entranced, as Dwayne started slowly rocking against Paul, the whole group swaying together in tender embrace. The display sent a heavy rush of unexpected heat to pool in her belly. Face flushing at the sensation, she decided the best course was to go outside and leave them their peace. Moving up the stairs to the entrance she was startled when a voice called out to her.

"Where are you going, chica?" Paul asked, voice rough as he cracked an eye in her direction.

"Sorry, don't mind me, please!" she said, looking pointedly away from the group. "I didn't want to disturb you – I'll just sit outside for a while."

The men chuckled. "Come join us, Mina" Paul purred, "we want to thank you properly for your kindness." She turned in surprise, only to see Marko and Dwayne were looking at her now too, eyes glinting in hunger, smiles full of promise.

Mina's eyes went wide, as she tried to swallow her apprehension down a cotton-dry throat. "You really don't have to, I'm just happy I could help you." She croaked.

The men peeled apart, now stalking forward to corral her between them. Dwayne hopped lithely to the top of the stair above her, eyes dark and glittering as he moved down, towering above her as she stepped backwards and down towards main area. She squeaked as her foot slipped, tumbling backwards, eyes scrunched and body tensing as she expected a hard impact. Strong arms caught her instead and she grabbed at her rescuer in relief.

"Thata girl. I've got you now." Paul whispered huskily in her ear, his cool breath raising goose-flesh along her neck and down her arm. She pushed her head back, staring wild-eyed at him, heart hammering in her chest. "Don't be afraid, we won't hurt you." He murmured, smiling softly down at her.

She dropped her eyes, whispering "please, put me down", her hands gently braced on his chest. He shifted to help her stand, and the other men closed in around her. Gentle hands caressed her cheeks, as she stood among them, eyes downcast, almost vibrating in a confusing mess of anxiety and burgeoning arousal.

"You liked what you saw, didn't you?" Her face blazed bright red, palpable heat radiating off her, along with a wafting scent of desire. Paul hummed low and throaty, "Relax, chica. Tell us what you want."

Trying to catch her breath, she glanced up at him quickly, only to lower them again, repeating as she worked to speak. "I…I don't think…I don't know…I've never been with anyone but…just my husband…please…I don't know..." she stammered as she put her hands on his, working to lift them from her face, stress pouring off her in waves.

He stilled, as did the others. Gathering her hands in his, he spoke softly. "Oh, Mina. Only one partner ever?" She nodded, not looking up.

"Would you trust us?" She paused, taking a ragged breath. She glanced up at him. He brought her hands up, kissing the backs of her hands and smiling gently down at her.

"Would you feel better if I said all your clothes will stay on?" She gave him an odd look then, of cautious disbelief, relaxing slightly before nodding.

"May we kiss you?" Her cheeks darkened further, blush deep past her collar bones, but she nodded
ever so slightly again. He took one of her hands then, carefully turning it palm up, and drawing it up to his mouth. His lips softly kissed her palm, rounded teeth scraped slowly up towards her wrist, then kissing slowly up her arm. Now she stilled, breath shallow and heart galloping. A large cool hand reached to brush her hair back behind her ear, followed by lips rough with stubble nibbling gently down to her neck, sending a shiver through her that set her skin on fire. On her other side a smooth face nuzzled into the crook of her neck, cool tongue licking as plush lips mouthed a trail down to her shoulder.

"May we touch you?" he purred, chuckling low in appreciation at her slight nod, nearly buried in a deep shudder. She gasped when frosty fingers reached under her shirt, dancing trails of icy lightning across her now overheated skin. Tensing under their attention, her body shook at each soft kiss, nip and stroke. Paul tilted her face, catching her gaze with his, smiling at her glazed look and soft, panting breath. Dwayne brushed her mind with his, pleased to find anxiety fading in the face of desire. Wrapping her arms around his neck, Paul moved closer, arms circling low on her waist to hold her hips close as he positioned a leg between hers. They could feel when the embrace caught her, as she gasped and writhed as the friction touched her core, the heady scent of her need spiking and flooding their senses, making them growl softly against her warm skin. Tilting his head, Paul caught her lips, slowly working them open with his, till his tongue could slip past, tangling with hers as his body ground gently against hers. She was shaking now, faintly whimpering into his mouth as his brothers' efforts intensified, nips pulling gently against soft skin, now at her shoulder, her neck, moving behind to her nape as her hair was lifted with care, hands wandering to ghost across her flesh, sliding up to tease pebbled nipples. In concert, Marko and Dwayne bit bloodlessly down on her neck, marking her as blood pooled under sensitive tissue while cool hands kneaded tenderly at her breasts. As Paul rocked his pelvis into hers, her shaking became out-right convulsion, body rolling against his, arms locked around his neck as the tremors peaked and slowly subsided, panting moans swallowed by his soothing kisses.

Coming back to herself, Mina blinked owlishly as Paul smiled down at her, Marko and Dwayne stepped away, caressing her and Paul as they moved to go back towards the fountain area. Marko paused, pulling Paul into a deep kiss, before drawing back, smiling wickedly first at Paul, then Mina as he bit at his thumb, turning to follow Dwayne.

Untangling themselves, Paul helped Mina straighten herself out, rearranging clothes set astray in the heat of the moment. Her face was still bright, as she frowned in concern, something clearly troubling her. Paul smirked at her, "what's the matter, chica? Was that not good enough?" Her eyes went wide, she shook her head vehemently.

"No! Yes! I mean...it was fine! Good! Really, I just..." she swallowed, heat still burning her cheeks.

"Fine, good?" he mimicked her words. "That bad, hmm?"

Now she looked truly alarmed, and a snort in the background had Paul catching a smirk and mental push from Dwayne as he shook his head and went to check on Laddie. "Be nice, "Sunshine"."

"NO!" Mina barked, only to clap hands to her mouth, startled at her own outburst. She finished at a near silent whisper, "it was...really, really...wonderful. But... what about you? ...All?" she cringed slightly, clearly distraught at the implication.

Paul beamed down at her, gathering her hands to kiss them before caressing her still-warm cheek. "Always thinking of others, hmm? Don't fret little lady, we're big tough guys, we'll be ok." The look of astonishment on her face was priceless. He leaned in close, only to stage-whisper in her ear "Besides, we like to take care of each other, if you catch my drift." Her eyes popped wide again, face radiating heat anew. He chuckled, placing cool hands to catch the heat from her skin. "Red's a good
look on you."

She rolled her eyes, smiling back at him, set at ease and regaining a little of her composure. "You smell like a salad." She teased, reaching up to pull at his still lank hair, shining with oil in the light of the candles strewn about. "And you kinda look like drowned rat."

He grinned down at her cheekily. "Yeah, but you still want me."

Her mouth gaped as she tried to find a comeback, but, clearly at a loss she settled for snorting and smacking him on the chest before turning to plop down on the couch, his laughter following her retreat.

As if on cue, David entered the cave, followed by a sullen Star. She stared at Mina for a moment, more than a bit surprised to see the girl still there, and still breathing. She looked at David, who returned her glare with a cool one of his own. Turning away, she moved back towards her and Laddie's bed, turning away from the group and pulling out a small bag of earrings and jewelry she kept near her retreat to occupy herself with.

David clapped Paul on the back as the darker blonde winked at him, looking over at Mina. Taking a deep breath to taste the air, he turned to walk over to the seated girl, a wicked smile on his face. She glanced up at him, a bit taken aback from Star's entrance and still slightly flushed and disheveled.

"Sorry I missed the fun." He purred at her. His eyes twinkled in mischief as her cheeks flamed yet again. She dropped her gaze, reaching to hide her face in her hands, and he crouched down, catching her hands before she could. "Mina, look at me" he whispered, and she complied, eyebrows knit in a frown.

"Thank you for helping Paul. It means a lot to me see you take such care with my brothers."

She smiled tentatively at him, eyes suddenly watery and bright. Taking a breath, she said, "That's really all I want David, to help preserve them and the bonds you have together. You shouldn't have to suffer like I have. No one should." She sniffled a little then, a bit emotional at the unexpected praise, her encounter, and her remembered purpose.

He cocked his head, eyeing her with an appraising look. He placed a gloved hand on her cheek.

"Did they do so poorly for you? Do I need to show my brothers how to properly thank a woman?"

Her eyes widened as his look turned predatory. "Ah...no, I'm fine, really!" she squeaked.

"You are indeed fine." He drawled, moving to lean in. He stillled suddenly, eyes unfocused for a moment. His face turned cold then, and tilting his head withdrew his hand and stood. "Perhaps another time." He reached out to his pack through the bond. "Daddy's calling, don't wait up." He turned to climb the stairs once more.

Mina stood as well, a shrewd look on her face as she followed him up the stairs. Catching him just outside, she stopped him with a hand on his arm. He looked down at her. "Not a good time, Mina."

"We haven't really talked about Max. Should I see him?"

"You've seen my brothers die, did you seen him do anything to prevent it?" he growled, eyes flashing gold.

"No," she whispered, drawing back.

"That's your answer then." He turned and disappeared into the sky, a howling wind chasing his path.
Coming back inside, the mood was clearly more subdued. Paul had music on low, sharing a blunt with his brothers sitting around the fountain, while Laddie had gone over to the bed and sat with Star, talking softly about the trinkets she'd spread out.

Mina curled up on the couch, head and hands resting on bent knees, and set her mind to coming events. There was something she was missing, something that would help her help them. The lightening flash of visions wouldn't have hit her if there was nothing she could do to help, she knew that much. Staring at the flames she let herself slip into the crackling static-like stream of future events, working to focus on the thread of what-will-be that was the vampire family's fate. What little she could get was darker, coming only in short bursts of jumbled scenes, jumping at random from them to the other families involved – Michael's and those other two young boys. So much pain and anger, so many lost souls searching desperately for connection with someone, anyone to stave off the emptiness inside. Deep in thought, it took long minutes to realize someone had their hand on her shoulder, the sound of gentle inquiry slowly registering. She blinked languidly, coming out her trance and glancing around. Dwayne was next to her, Marko off to the other side, watching with curious eyes.

"You were gone a while," he said softly. "What did you see?"

She shook her head, whispering "Nothing that really helps right now. I'm sorry."

A cool finger drew a light line down her cheek, trailing through wetness she hadn't even noticed. "Who do you cry for?"

She bent her head. "Everyone."

Dwayne crouched down, looking her in the eye. "Let it go for tonight. Rest and perhaps the answer will come to you."

She nodded, taking a breath that came out raggedly, before stretching and curling back up in a more restful position, as he stood back up.

Paul came wandering up from somewhere in the back, hair now wet and smelling of salt instead of oil. "Hey, you're back!" he teased. "I was gonna offer you a smokable, but it looked you were on your own trip."

She smiled up at him. "Thanks, but I don't really tend to indulge like that. It goes really badly for me if I get confused about ..." she trailed off a moment, glancing toward the back of the cave where Star and Laddie were still huddled. "...what I'm seeing, if it's happening now or not." She gave him a meaningful look. "I almost got committed once, that was enough for me."

"Whoa, I guess that would be a bad trip." He said, face sobering for a moment. Then he grinned at her. "More for me I guess!" She rolled her eyes, smiling fondly back at him.

Dwayne started heading away from the group, touching Paul's arm as he walked past. Marko turned to follow. Paul grabbed his coat, draping it over Mina as he leaned down to kiss her forehead. "Sleep well, chica." He winked and turned to trail after his brothers.

"What about David?" she asked, and Paul paused to look at her.

"No worries, he'll be back" he said, his easy tone at odds with the slight frown marring his features, then turned and sauntered away.
Mina's sleep was disturbed by a rush of wind blowing strongly through the cave, guttering candles and barrels and leaving a strong scent of brimstone in its wake. She looked around for a moment, but saw nothing, only light starting to filter in from the clearly brightening sky outside the cave. Frowning, she grabbed Paul's coat, burrowing deeper and drifting back to sleep.
The fiery, orange sun sank slowly behind the roiling ocean, the last bright fingers of light bathing the cave before shrinking away into the deepening velvet darkness. Movement came from inside, figures waking and stretching as they sensed freedom from the weight of the blazing orb that pinned them daily to the shadows. Tucked in a dark recess, three men circled their brother, coming together to offer comfort and aid for the last lingering injuries caused by his early morning return to their shelter. Passion, adoration, trust, flowed through mental bonds, marred only slightly by shared rage at the cause of their true leader's pain.

Marko and Paul knelt in front of David, deft hands working open buckle and zipper to draw down supple leather pants, freeing David’s growing erection. Eyeing their prize with heat, Marko glanced up, holding his lover’s gaze as he swallowed David down to the root, throat working delicious pressure as he went. Drawing back and releasing, he let Paul take over, running hands up strong, pale thighs, encouraging them further apart to more easily breach his target, fingers burying deep to caress the bundle of delicate nerves with practiced ease, while he trailed blood-tinged nips and soothing kisses across hip and belly and thigh. His brother worked David to frenzy with vigor, encouraged by a hand clasped tightly at the back of his head. Dwayne stood behind a bare-chested David, supporting him and allowing him to relax into their tender onslaught. Leaving a trail of light bites that oozed briefly before healing, he brought a thick arm to the front, caressing David’s cheek before turning the wrist in offering. David’s eyes bled gold as his fangs dropped to sink into Dwayne's wrist, body clenching as he came with force down Paul's throat. Slowly relaxing, David loosened the grip he’d had on Paul and Marko, fingers trailing to brush bright faces as they pulled themselves free and stood, putting David’s clothes back together as they went. He pulled teeth back, bringing lips and tongue to bear to soothe and close the wound in Dwayne's wrist. Turning, he met Dwayne's mouth, sharing the traces of his brother's own blood with him in a passionate kiss. Swiveling back and reaching out, he gathered his blond brothers to him as Dwayne stretched to encircled them all. Stilling, they held together for a moment before slowly breaking apart to face the night.

Coming out into the common area, David noticed Mina's absence immediately. Pausing, he listened for breathing or a living heartbeat but found none. Eyes blazing gold at the thought of betrayal he flew out of the cave as his brothers gathered to follow. Flying high to scan the cliffside and the path to town, he stopped mid-flight. There on the cliff edge, right above the entrance, sat Mina, curled and still as she watched the last traces of sunset. Telling his brothers to wait in the cave, he descended, landing a bit behind her. Walking up, he stood above her, waiting to see if she would notice. Receiving no response, he addressed her.

"You left the cave." He said, his tone a statement bordering on accusation.

She sighed, shifting slightly where she sat before responding.

"I woke up a while before sundown. The waves are too high to sit down below and I wanted to see the light before it was gone."

Slightly mollified, David lit a cigarette and sat beside her. "Dwayne tells me you've been working on
our problem. Any ideas?"

Mina turned towards him, eyes sad. "Not yet. But there's time still. I think if I keep stay close to you, something may turn up."

He nodded, looking her over. "Not sleeping well?" He quipped, eyebrow arched and tone sly.

"I never do." she said quietly. "I am permanently, eternally exhausted. Tired of endless visions of pain and suffering coming to everyone around me. Tired of never being able to really prevent any of it. Tired of feeling like to I have to stretch myself thin to help those in need, tired of never having anyone give back. Tired of always being a freak and an outcast and alone. Tired of remembering the reason I'm alone now is my own fault. Tired of living like this, tired of living at all." She closed her eyes then, tilting her head to rest on her bent knees, breath flowing out in a lingering sigh.

David watched her, face a mask as he pondered her words. "Why help us then, if you just want it to end?"

"Because God is an iron."

"What?" he said, bemused.

"If someone who commits felonies is a felon, then someone who commits irony is an iron. And I can think of no greater irony than coming to the 'Murder Capital of the World' so I could join the ranks of the nameless dead, and -literally- fall into the lap of Gentleman Death himself, the one…being? … that should be the answer to my prayers, to find he has a problem only I can help with, by staying alive. God is an iron."

They sat in silence for a while, David lighting another cigarette as the sky darkened. "You didn't seem so tired last night."

She turned to look at him again, slight flush tinging her cheeks. "That'd be your fault."

"Oh, really?" he smirked, a slight gleam in his eye. "How so?"

She snorted softly. "You were the one suggesting I live a little. And I feel safe enough around you lot to actually try it."

Tossing the remnant of his cigarette over the cliff, his grin turned sharp. "How exactly are we 'safe'?"

She returned his smirk with a soft smile of her own. "Well, I'm pretty sure pregnancy isn't an issue. Outright killing me is against your own interests, as is forcing or injuring me so that I won't or can't help. Safe enough." She shrugged.

He nodded his head, bemusedly agreeing with her assessment. Leaning forward, his face now barely a breath away from hers, he purred "So how far are you willing to go?"

Her face reddened and her heart beat spiked, but she reached up to his face, a warm hand gliding softly over his features, fingers curling into his hair, before sliding down to trace the outline of an ear, palm gently rubbing into the texture of his stubbled cheek. "I don't know, but I'm willing to see where opportunity takes us."

His predatory gaze turned fond for a moment, as he closed the gap between them, kissing her softly. She responded in kind, and he smiled into the kiss as she nipped gently at his top lip. Sliding a hand up to grasp the nape of her neck, he deepened their contact, tongue now seeking hers as she leaned into him. Needing air, she broke the kiss first, panting lightly and eyes a bit glazed. He chuckled and
glanced slyly at her. "Sure you're up for this?" he drawled.

"Well, if I'm not, at least I'll die happy." She quipped. A howl that could only have come from a particular wild blonde rocker sounded not-so-distantly. They both laughed, pulling apart slightly.

"The children are getting restless." he said, standing and offering her a hand.

"Yes, they do tend to do that." She agreed, taking his hand and levering up. Brushing a bit of dirt and sand off, she looked up. "So, what's up for tonight?"

"We find Mikey and show him a good time." He said, eyes now glittering with a touch of malice, only to pause and look down at her with humor as her stomach grumbled loudly. "And, apparently, stop for dinner somewhere."

She huffed and shrugged. "Gotta keep body and soul together, at least for now." Frowning slightly, she looked up at him. "Have I been missing something? It doesn't seem like you lot have been, ahem, 'out to dinner' since I've been around?"

He smirked at the euphemism. "If we had to grab a bite to eat every night there'd be no one left in the town. But it's coming. Michael's going need a real meal very soon." She nodded.

Just then, Paul appeared at the top of the stairs, followed by the rest of the gang, Star at the rear.

"Chica!" he cried happily, practically dancing up to the pair with arms wide. Smiling at his exuberance she held out hers as well, welcoming the impending embrace, then yelping as he took the opportunity to swing her up and around, laughing all the while. "Ready to paint the town?" he said, finally setting her back on her feet.

"I suppose so, Sunshine." She said warmly, chuckling as he howled again. "I see your hair is back to its usual glory."

He preened a bit, running his fingers up to fluff out his locks. "Yup, thanks to you. It only took a bit of a wash to set it right after your help." Turning he pulled her into a side hug as they headed after the group moving towards the bikes. Mounting up, they took off for the boardwalk.

David took the opportunity of the short ride to speak with Star, his tone firm. "You're going to keep Mikey with us tonight." He felt her sigh and nod against him as they drove along. "Keep him happy, Star. Like it or not, he's going to be one of us." She tensed a moment before slumping dejectedly, nodding slightly again.

Arriving at the town, they parked in their usual spot on the midway. Looking around, David spotted Michael watching the group, brows knit in a frown and clearly torn between coming over and turning away. "Go get our boy, Star." David said, giving her a pointed look before turning away to light a cigarette. She gave him a sad look, before turning towards Michael, a bright smile that didn't reach her eyes plastered on her face as she headed his way. Reaching him, she started talking animatedly, gesturing over at the gang and reaching for his hand. He seemed unsure, but followed her willingly enough when she leaned in to him, smiling at the contact. Satisfied Star was following orders, David looked over the group. "So, dinner suggestions anyone?" Mina had crouched down again, only to stand back up, palming something.

She turned to Laddie, asking "What do you feel in the mood for?"

"Pizza!" he said enthusiastically.

"Good choice, little bud!" Paul said. "I could really go for righteous pie right now!" The others
nodded their agreement, chuckling at the little boy's eagerness.

"No fish this time, Paul." Said Marko. "That shit's just nasty."

Paul gave his brother a wounded look. "Anchovies are awesome! How can you not like them?"

Mina piped up, "I don't know, maybe 'cause the rest of us have functional taste buds? I can't believe you like those awful things. I'm with Marko on this one."

Paul clutched his chest theatrically. "Betrayed!" he cried, before giving Mina a look that was pure wickedness. "And here I thought you'd be happy to know I eat fish." Marko gave a choked snort, eyes bright.

Mina just looked at him, eyes blinking and head shaking in amused disbelief. "You're absolutely terrible, you know that?"

Wrapping an arm across her shoulders, he looked down and purred, "that's not the impression I got last night." She elbowed his side with vigor, earning a theatrical "Ooof" out of him for her effort, along with snorts of amusement from the other men.

"What am I going to do with you?” she said, humor warring with exasperation in her voice.

His evil grin tilted toward a leer. "Taking suggestions?" he said, eyebrows waggling suggestively.

"Absolutely NOT." She said emphatically, scooting out from under the weight of his arm. Looking over her shoulder as she moved out of reach, eyebrow arched, she side-eyed him. "Yet."

He cackled, only stopping as Star and Michael walked up to the group. "Mikey!" he said cheerfully. "Joining us for some pizza?"

"Yeah, sure." Said Michael, looking down at Star to gauge her reaction.

She had been looking over at David but turned to smile encouragingly at him. "Sounds great." She agreed.

Mina held out a hand to Laddie, who gladly took it. She reached her other hand to Dwayne, dropping a wad of cash surreptitiously into his. He passed it to David as the group moved toward a pizza shop on the boardwalk. Shaking his head slightly, David watched Mina letting Laddie drag her into the store, the group following as Dwayne held the door for them all.

They wound up at a round table, with David on one side of Star, Michael on the other. Mina and Laddie were next to David, then Dwayne, Marko and Paul on Michael's other side. Orders were taken as the group worked through some bread sticks the waitress had left.

David turned towards the halfling teen, smile showing a bit too much tooth. "So, Michael, looking for a little excitement tonight?"

Michael looked like he wasn't sure that was a good idea, but Star piped up "Come on, Michael. It'll be fun, you'll see." She looked at him, at little too earnest in her gaze. She placed a small hand on his back, looking up at him from under long, dark lashes. He found her eyes almost hypnotizing, and couldn't remember why he'd felt unsure of hanging with her and the boys just a few moments ago.

"Yeah, that'd be great." He said, blinking suddenly as Paul clapped him hard enough on the back to push him into the table.
"Great!" said Paul. "You're gonna love hanging with us, Mikey. We always have a good time."

Michael looked at Paul a little darkly after being pushed, but before he could say something else, David caught his attention, pulling out a flask and offering it to him. "Let's get the party started Michael." Taking the flask cautiously, Michael opened it and took a sniff. The scent wafting out was beyond delicious, his mouth instantly watering as the scent pulled him in. He took a deep swig, finding the wine tasted even better than it smelled and left a seductive burn as it traveled down his throat. Reluctantly handing it back to David, he realized he felt much better than he had all day. David grinned as he took the flask, "don't worry Michael, there's more than enough for later."

Michael nodded, smiling back at him, enjoying a pleasant buzz and vaguely wondering what the wine was spiked with that it made him feel this good after just one drink. Relaxing back, he draped an arm over Star's shoulders, pleased when she smiled at him and leaned closer.

Several pizzas arrived at once, the thick scent of hot oil, toasted cheese, meat and warm bread filling the air. Michael tucked in with gusto, suddenly hungrier than he'd realized, though he did make sure Star got a piece first. David watched Mina serve Laddie a large slice before placing two on her own plate. Paul grabbed at several himself while remarking to Mina about her appetite, earning him a hot piece of pepperoni to the face as she slung the morsel to emphasize her ire at his remark.

Delighted, Paul moved to grab up a chunk of cheese to return volley. "Paul." said David, velvet tone holding both warning and command. Shoulders slumping, he shoved his erstwhile ammunition into his mouth, chewing in dramatic defeat. Across the table Mina giggled, smiling gleefully at him when he returned her laugh with a look that said he'd find a way to return the favor.

Finishing up without further incident, the group headed out, David tossing cash on the table as they left. Out on the street, Paul produced a thickly rolled joint, lighting up and taking a deep hit before passing it to Michael. Taking a good hit of his own, he passed it along, as David once again offered the flask. Michael was feeling pretty mellow, taking the flask with a smile and drinking deep. David threw an arm around him in camaraderie, friendly smirk in place as he took the flask back once again, tucking it away.

"Enjoying yourself, Michael?" The boy under his arm nodded. "Hang with us, you'll see the party never ends." He lifted his arm and then and clapped once for attention. "All right kids, let's hit the road." He announced. "Star, why don't you ride with Michael?" Mike look surprised for a moment before he beamed at Star, climbing on his bike and offering her a hand. Everyone sorted out and they took off down the beach in the opposite direction from the bluff.

Riding for a while to get past the busiest sections of the beaches, they spied a bonfire in relative isolation. Slowing down, David led them right to the edge of a mixed group of older teens decked out in beach wear, hair styles ranging from nearly bald to towering mohawks. Michael looked at the group and back at David, trying to figure out what the plan was. Predatory smiles gleamed on David and his men as they got off their bikes and headed towards the beach-goers. Paul looked back at Mina "Stay here, chica." She nodded, slightly tense as she sat on the bike, tips of her shoes just brushing the ground. Star and Laddie also stayed back, as David motioned Michael to join them.

Walking out of the shadow into the glow of the firelight, David grinned evilly down at the partiers. "Well, well, well, looks like a nice little party you've got here. And so much booze, I'm sure you wouldn't mind sharing a little."

One of the larger boys spoke up, "No one invited you losers!" His friends egged him on, shouting encouragement. "Get out of here before we mess you up!" He and several other boys stood up, moving towards the leather-clad interlopers.

"Now boys, don't go starting something you'll regret. We're just going to help ourselves to some of
your stash and leave, no harm done. That seems fair, doesn't it?” David drawled.

"Leave or we'll make you!" The kid was standing in front of David now, his friends behind him as a few others looked on, cheering their bravado.

"I admire your bravery" David said, eyes bright with mischief. "Tell you what, I'll let you take first swing. If you can drop me, we'll go. If not, well, we take what we want." Behind him, Dwayne and the other men chuckled, even Michael joining in, as he knew first hand the boy had little chance.

"Eat shit, man!" the boy exclaimed before aiming a wild haymaker right at David's smirk. It never connected, David catching the boy's fist and stopping the swing so abruptly the kid nearly fell into him. Squeezing the fist he held in his own, he chuckled darkly as the boy crumpled to his knees.

"Anyone else care to try?” David asked. From the looks on the faces of the other kids, no one felt like taking the chance.

Tightening his grip till bones ground against each other, he bent down at the now nearly-crying figure at his feet. "No need to get up, we'll just take our share and go."

Paul and the others walked over to the partier's supplies, grabbing up a number of six packs and a few bottles, before heading back to their bikes; the girls and Laddie helping to hold on to the ill-gotten gains.

"Well, this has been fun. We'll have to do it again some time.” David drawled as he released the boy's hand and turned to go.

"Damn you to hell!” the young man sobbed from his spot on the sand.

David threw a leg over his bike before turning back to level a cool smile at the boy. "Been there. Took over." Gunning the engine, he took off back down the beach, his brothers spreading out to flank him, howling into the cool night.

Arms wrapped around Paul's middle as she steadied the booze piled up on his lap, Mina laughed at the boys' high spirits. Catching the mood, she leaned closer and started singing.

"The wild boys are calling, on their way back from the fire
In August moon's surrender to a dust cloud on the rise
Wild boys fallen far from glory, reckless and so hungered
On the razor's edge you trail
Because there's murder by the roadside in a sore afraid new world
They tried to break us, looks like they'll try again
Wild boys, never lose it
Wild boys, never chose this way
Wild boys, never close your eyes
Wild boys always…shine."

Paul howled again. "Sing it louder, chica!” he cried, and joined in on the chorus as they drove
through the night.

....
Fun with Mikey, Part II

Making nice with Mikey part II

Chapter rating M for mature/explicit sex

(Song credits – Kashmir by Led Zeppelin)

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Arriving back at the cave, the happy group filed in, lighting barrels and cranking up some music, the strains of Led Zeppelin starting to echo through the cavern. Marko made sure Michael had his own six-pack as David opened up a bottle of Jack and took a deep swig before passing it around. Paul pulled out a thick joint laced with what he dubbed 'special sauce' that had a very chemical tang on top of the pot's sweet scent when he lit it up.

Star sat near Michael on the edge of the fountain, wearing a smile that faltered whenever he turned away. She took one of the cans of beer he offered and moved closer so he could wrap an arm around her. Paul swooped past with his doobie, offering to them both, but only Michael took him up on the laced weed. He took a deep hit, Paul whooping encouragement, before passing it back. Settling back, he smiled down at Star, and taking a chance, leaned in to kiss her on the forehead. Sadness flashed briefly across her face, only to disappear so quickly he was unsure if he'd really seen it at all. She reached an arm up to caress his cheek, and feeling bolder, he bent to kiss her lips. She met his willingly, returning his advances with gentle kisses of her own. Only the teasing calls of the men around him stopped him from advancing further with the entrancing beauty in his arms. Frowning and blushing slightly, he pulled back and picked up his beer, giving Star a light squeeze with the arm still wrapped around her. Her hand drifted up under the hem of his shirt, roaming across his back and distracting him entirely from retorting to the gangs' remarks.

Laddie wandered around a little aimlessly, enjoying the good mood of the group but with little to do. Noticing, Marko brought him over to his own supply of paper and pencils, encouraging the child to help himself and draw whatever he liked. With a happy smile, Laddie curled up on the floor, immediately starting to draw the scene around him, if his glances back and forth from the paper to his brothers was any indication. Satisfied the boy was engaged, Marko wandered back over to the main area, slinging an arm around Dwayne's waist and giving a quick squeeze before moving on to grab the bottle of Jack from David.

David circled the group for a bit, smoking and sharing the whiskey bottle he held. Watching Michael get blotto was amusing, and he could tell already the boy would need help getting home. Well, at least he seemed to be getting along, even if he wasn't exactly David's first choice to join the family. And Star looked like she was enjoying him, which almost made David wistful for a different future; one where Star finally joined them properly, even if it meant Michael and his kid brother were added as well. He still didn't have enough understanding of the events Mina had warned of, but he got the sense that it didn't entail being one big happy family in the end the way Max wanted. Sighing internally, he turned to sit only to see Mina curled on the couch, accepting a can of beer from Dwayne. Smirking, he walked over to her, offering his bottle. "Care for a chaser?" She snarked, coughing slightly and taking a swig of the cheap beer to wash away the taste of the stronger alcohol. Dwayne put a full can down next to her before moving on towards Paul.

"Thanks. Always wanted to know what paint thinner tasted like." She snarked, coughing slightly and taking a swig of the cheap beer to wash away the taste of the stronger alcohol. Dwayne put a full can down next to her before moving on towards Paul.
"It's good to see you loosening up a little," David remarked. "Thought you were going to be a permanent wet blanket." She gave him a sly look from under an arched eyebrow.

"I do indulge occasionally." She shot back. "Although I've never gone on a booze run quite the way you did tonight. That was…interesting."

"Complaints?" Now it was his turn to level a look from under arched brow.

"Actually, not really. I was a little concerned at first, for those kids" she clarified. "but all things considered, you were remarkably gentle, and generous, with them. Practically a public service, given how much they still had left after our raid, you probably spared a few of them alcohol poisoning."

He glanced at Dwayne, sharing an approving glance. "There aren't many that would see it that way."

"I've seen enough of people to pay attention not just to what they do, but how they do it. You're a bit more conscientious around the locals than one would expect of the average gang. Not that I would ever call this an 'average' gang." She said, smirking up at him.

"You going to sit on that couch all night?" he said, changing the subject.

"Not really clear on alternatives?" She responded, slight confusion in her look.

He smirked then, as the songs changed and the strains of Zeppelin's Kashmir started, and offering her a hand led her to a more open area of the common room. Turning to face her, he held her left hand raised slightly in his right, as he wrapped his left arm tightly around her waist. Raising amused eyebrows at her look of astonishment, he drew her into an almost languid waltz, stepping smoothly to follow the strings, sliding and dipping her as the music hit crescendos and dropped again into tempo. She squeaked as they started moving, self-conscious and not quite getting the timing, but he was more than strong enough to keep them spinning smoothly till she found the rhythm and could match his effortless box step. Captured by his gaze and loosened by the alcohol, soon all she could feel was the rush of movement and his body pressed against hers, her heart now matching the tempo of the music, ratcheting with the tension in the disparate meters only to clench at the drop of the strings as they slid down the scales. Lost in ice-blue eyes, she felt he could see her very soul, but rather than outright rejection or even her husband's patience 'despite' her oddness, she saw acceptance and interest. Long minutes passed with them deep in the song, oblivious to all else. Coming to stop as the music slowly faded, he released her, sketching a formal bow marred only by the wicked smile that matched the gleam in his eyes. The sound of his brothers clapping and calling out in appreciation brought her out her trance, chest still heaving with exertion and emotion, feeling almost empty without his presence surrounding her. Blushing, she managed a fair imitation of a curtsy in return, denim cutoffs notwithstanding.

He turned then, casting a hand behind in invitation, and she took it following him back towards his erstwhile 'throne'. Sitting he drew her forward, capturing her waist and drawing her up to sit on his lap, back to him and facing the room. Tensing, she gripped the arm rests, her legs now splayed around his. Keeping an arm wrapped around her waist, he took the bottle of Jack from Marko, drinking deep before offering it to Mina. Face scrunching in memory of the taste, she grabbed the bottle anyway and took a far more modest swallow. Coughing again, she held it out for David to take back. Unfortunately, the motion of her coughing made her very aware of whom – and what- she was sitting on. A rumbling chuckle she could feel through her back did nothing to ease her discomfort. Nor did the straying hand that had snuck under her shirt and was rubbing gently across her ribs. Moving her hands to the front of the arm rests, she made to get up, only to feel cool lips brush the back of her neck as a sultry voice whispered in her ear. "Stay."

Teeth softly grazing her nape sent a full body shudder through her, set her heart pounding so loud in
her own ears she could hear little else. Lips broadened in a smile against her skin, as David increased the tender assault on her neck and shoulder, his other hand now wrapping around to cup her mound, slowly rubbing the front of her shorts. Eyes widening, realization of the display he was making of her sent a flush of heat across her cheeks, as she dropped her eyes to stare fixedly at the floor, hands now clenched on the armrests. Pleasure warred with embarrassment, setting her to pant and squirm as he continued unhurriedly, the hand on her ribs now roaming further up, to cup a breast and pull gently at a nipple. A muffled groan brought her eyes up momentarily, to catch Michael's. Eyes hooded and heavy with inebriation he watched entranced, one arm still locked around Star as he leaned forward, drawn in by the open display.

His attention hit her like a shock, and she froze, mood broken. David likewise stilled, before sighing softly against her neck. Pulling back his wandering fingers to grab her hips, he squeezed her gently. Chastely kissing her nape, he released her, helping her stand and step away from the foot rest of the chair. Paul was there to collect her, throwing a commiserating arm around her shoulder and guiding her back to the sofa, cracking open a beer and handing it to her as she settled. She drank down about half before setting the can down, hiccuping slightly as she did, nerves finally settling from the abrupt end to her intimate encounter. Glancing back at David she saw he was watching Michael, a cool look on his face as he lit a cigarette.

"Enjoying the evening, Michael?" he drawled. Star moved an arm across the boy's chest, whether in restraint or protection was unclear. Michael had at least enough dim awareness to look a little abashed at causing the disruption, cursing himself mentally for ending the show before it got really good.

"Ah, yeah." Michael said, glancing at Star and wrapping one of his arms around hers across his chest. David smiled predatorily. Paul came swaggering by, a fresh blunt in hand, putting it right in front of Michael's face, so that the boy had to either grab it or take a hit while Paul held it suggestively. Choosing the former, Michael took a deep drag, glad to close his eyes against David's pinning stare as he held the sweet smoke in his lungs. Finally breathing out, he offered it back but Paul pushed him to take one more hit before accepting it and moving off, hips swaying in time with the music. Dwayne smacked his ass as he danced past, and he turned, making kissing noises back, much to the amusement of David and Marko. Giggling from couch drew the men's eyes as Mina sat clearly enjoying the exchange.

A wicked light in his eyes, Marko moved closer to David, tilting his head and exposing pale belly as he upended the whisky bottle, holding it aloft while taking a deep, slow drink. Eyeing the curly-haired man appreciatively, David reached up under Marko's crop top, dragging slow fingers down his front to catch in the waist of his jeans, pulling Marko closer to him. Smiling down, Marko took another drink, leaning over to share the liquid with David in a lingering kiss. The fingers at Marko's belt slid down to cup his need, and rubbing gently garnered a soft moan as he rocked into David's touch. Coming out of the kiss, David sent a sly look towards Michael, to find the boy almost as entranced as he had been earlier, face flushed now and clearly torn between discomfort and fascination, his shifting movements betraying his hardening interest. Smirking, David decided to up the pressure, looking up at Marko and licking his lips, smiling suggestively. Dwayne appeared behind Marko, hands moving with practiced ease to free his brother's erection from the confinement of jeans and chaps. Running hands up Marko's chest to expose pale flesh, he caressed his brother as David cupped him again, running a hand up Marko's dick, thumb playing at the slit of the swollen tip, rubbing the leaking fluids around before leaning in to take the tip in his mouth to Marko's very vocal delight. Paul appeared almost magically by Michael's side, quietly offering the blunt, which Michael managed to take a hit from without taking his eyes off the scene in front of them, much to Paul's sly amusement. Star huffed, but stayed, unwilling to leave and be entirely forgotten in fray.

Dwayne moved then to take Marko's hands, bringing them around so his brother's arms were bent
and folded behind his back, pinned by Dwayne's own as his body was tilted, pelvis angled farther out as Dwayne cradled him with a supporting stance, now kissing down his neck as David continued his attentions, alternating fast strokes with taking him down to the root and pulling back slowly. Marko stretched and keened, at David's mercy and unable to thrust further from his position. Worked into a frenzy he started pleading for release with coarse words, head twisting and eyes clenched shut. Sharing a hot glance with Dwayne, David swallowed him down again, working his throat and breaking velvet skin gently with sharp teeth hidden from Michael's view by Marko's hip, as Dwayne bit hard at Marko's neck. With a hoarse shout, Marko came hard, body jerking wildly between his brothers. Swearing softly as he came down from the orgasmic high, the scent of blood and sex was thick in the air, and David side-eyed Michael, in time to see the flash of gold in pupils blown wide with frustrated need. Smiling wickedly, he licked Marko clean before releasing him, as Dwayne laved his brother's neck, releasing his arms and putting him back together, collecting a deep kiss before letting the shorter man go.

David turned his attention back to Michael, pleased with the look of need in the boy's eyes. Pulling out the flask from his jacket, he opened it, leaning towards the boy in offering. Michael took the flask, motion slow with a deliberateness that showed just how hammered he really was. Meaning to take a sip, he found himself unable to stop, draining the remainder of the flask before staring at it in a drug-addled half-sadness, head bobbing slightly and eyes flashing gold again as he handed it back to David. Grinning widely, David took the container, stowing it away once more.

The night was going far better than he'd hoped, and the boy was now deep in the clutches of his sire's blood. He looked at Star, catching her eye. He nodded to her, and sighing, she stood, pulling Michael with her and moving back towards a more secluded section of the cave, before turning and resting her back on a wall, glancing up at Michael from under dark lashes and licking full, pink lips. Michael was trapped in a moment, gathering her close and bending down to capture her lips with his. Head swimming with the haze of inebriation and pent-up need he lost track of time, senses full with the glorious creature enveloping him in warm embrace. Too caught up and impaired, he failed to really notice another body curling around his, hand trailing to dip into his jeans to find his swollen need and grasp it firmly in cool fingers. The unseen hand set a fast pace, skillfully bringing him towards climax as he groaned in bliss, breaking away from Star's attentions as he threw his head back, eyes sliding closed and hands braced on the cave wall. Dimly, he felt teeth grazing his neck, sending electricity coursing right to his aching erection. Swiftly hitting peak, he cried out as he came, a final fierce pinch at his neck sending waves of pleasure coursing through him as he painted the inside of his jeans with his release. Body going slack, he descended into unconsciousness as the effects of the evening finally overtook him. Rolling his eyes, David held the slumping figure, wiping his hand on the boy's jeans before scooping him up and depositing him on the couch. Star moved to her bed, curling up with her back towards the rest of the group.

Paul watched Star drag Michael towards the back of the cave, sharing an evil smile with David before the other man got up, slowly stalking the pair. Inhaling the last of the blunt he'd shared with Michael while watching Marko's debauchment, Paul got up from his seat on the fountain to amble towards Mina, briefly sitting only to turn and stretch out, letting his head land on her lap and smiling up at her amused snort. "Hey babe, whatcha thinking?"

She chuckled and carded her fingers through his hair, earning a pleased purr for her efforts. She shook her head, smiling but glancing off away from him. "Nothing much, just a little, I don't know, surprised, I guess? You all are a lot closer with each other than I was expecting."

"Is that a problem?" he asked, reaching up to place a cool hand on her cheek.

"Not really? I mean, when I think about it, I guess it makes more sense to be that way than not? Never really thought about what your intimate lives might be like. Honestly, it's kinda nice to see.
Love is a good thing no matter where you find it."

Paul chuckled. "I knew I liked you for a reason. You're so cool with everything, we can really relax around you. Now if you'd just light up with me a little you'd be super fun." He looked up hopefully.

She shook her head, smiling still. "Sweet words, Sunshine. I'm glad I put you all at ease. But I'm really not a smoker of any sort. I'm afraid I don't even know how. And I still don't want to touch whatever weird stuff you seem to be adding in, it really would be dangerous for me."

Paul scoffed. "No worries pretty lady! I got plenty of the plain stuff, I'd be happy to pop the toking cherry with ya." He grinned, waggling his eyebrows at her.

She sighed, looking down at him, nose scrunching a bit in uncertainty. "Well, I suppose I could try a little…"

"WOOHOO!" Paul shouted, leaping up to grab her hands. "Come on sweet stuff!"

"Paul, you've got to make sure it's just pot, alright? I know you've been passing something really strong around all night."

He smiled down at her. "Trust me, chica. I won't do you wrong. And I'll keep an eye on you, OK?"

She nodded. "Alright, you've worn me down. So, what do we do?"

"Hang here a moment" he said, bringing her over towards his stuff, having her sit in a low chair while he searched through the mess. "Ha, here we go. You're gonna love this!" He grinned at her, before rolling a thin joint and lighting it. "Now, generally you just take a deep breath and hold, but how 'bout you let me show you the best way?" He purred, as his eyes shined with eagerness.

Still a little cautious, she sighed deeply. Looking back towards the fountain, Dwayne caught her eye. His lips twitched in an almost smile before nodding at her. Looking back up at Paul, she shrugged. "Alright Sunshine, let's do it."

His face turned almost radiant, beaming down at her. "Breath out now, OK?" Taking a deep toke, he held his breath, leaning down and capturing her lips with his as she finished exhaling. As she opened her mouth, his moved to cup her jaw, and breathed the smoke into her as she inhaled. He continued kissing, sealing her mouth with his and keeping her from breathing back out for a long beat as the drug worked its way into her system. When she put her hand on his arm, breaking their lock he pulled back briefly, only to sweep in and take back the smoke she as she exhaled. Grinning at her, he turned his head and blew out the recycled smoke. "How was that, chica?"

She sat for a moment, eyes somewhat unfocused as the effect of the pot piled on to the alcohol buzz. Finally catching his eyes, she smiled blearily back at him. "Good. That…was…good."

"Wanna go again?" She nodded. Snickering, he moved to kneel in between her knees, bringing his body close to hers as he turned to take another deep hit. Sharing another smoke-filled exchange, he let his free hand roam, running up under her shirt and capturing a breast, causing her to gasp and cough more than exhale, letting the smoke escape around them. He laughed outright now, ducking his head to nuzzle into her neck, biting gently and growling as she arched towards him.

Taking one more cavernous inhale he extinguished what little was left of the joint and kissed her deeply again, exhaling slowly as his hands moved to pull her body closer to his, till she was flush against him, legs wrapping loosely over his ass. Letting her exhale, he slid a hand up her shorts, and finding her clit with his thumb started rolling it gently. She moaned low in pleasure and arched against him, trapping his hand between their bodies as she ground into it. His eyes rolled gold for a
moment before he caught himself, burying his head in the crook of her neck lavering skin already marked with red and tender from David's attentions. She whined and trembled as he slid his thumb down gently, trailing it across her dripping sex and back to her nub, spreading her slick as he did. The heavy scent of her had him growling, now biting hard and slow across her shoulder as she wrapped warm arms around him and clung, shaking as her pleasure built towards peak. She nestled her head near his, her own blunt teeth dragging and pinching as she worked her way from his clavicle back to his throat, before clamping down, sucking a hard bite at the base of his neck and he was undone, eyes rolling and fangs sinking in at the top of her shoulder as he worked her to manic climax, her arms and mouth still locked on him as her hips bucked and ground against him in shuddering release. Slowly coming down from his blood high, Paul gently cleaned the wound, licking closed the marks to leave no trace save the now slightly purple skin. Still shaking slightly from her peak, Mina dropped her arms to wrap them around Paul's middle, lowering her head to nuzzle into his chest. She felt more than heard him chuckle, as he returned her embrace, wrapping arms around her and resting his head on hers.

"Not so bad, eh little chica?" He felt her nod, and moved to run fingers through her hair. He heard her breath catch then, and she sniffled as she tightened her arms around him for a moment. The scent of salt caught him, and he pulled away to gently cup her face, seeing eyes now bright with unshed tears. "Ah, Mina!" he said in soft admonishment. "Am I so bad at keeping you happy?"

She shook her head at him, jaw working as she tried to get words out. "Not you" she whispered, throat hoarse with emotion. "Not your fault. You're so kind, and I'm so afraid of failing you all, of all of this disappearing forever. I'm not sure I deserve how well you've treated me, when I still can't figure out how to help you." The tears fell then, slow drops running down her cheeks as she dropped her head.

"Well now, Paul, I see your winning streak with the ladies continues." David drawled, coming up behind the pair.

"Aw man, we were flying high a minute ago!" Paul whined. "Come on, chica, you know we don't blame you for what's going on, right?" He reached out, gently turning her back to face him. Bleary eyed and sniffing she looked up, face twisting in pain as she caught David's eyes. Her breath came in ragged hiccups as she tried to keep from breaking down, the influence of the pot and alcohol in her system adding to her fragility.

David looked down at her, face a mask as he brushed her mind, catching pain, fear …not of them but for them? And again, the crushing weight of sadness that always seemed to be present, and along with it, a steady resolve. "How long do we have?" he asked.

Frowning, she paused, the sudden change of subject derailing her outburst. Her eyes glazed for a moment, the distraction allowing her breathing to steady. "A few days? It all revolves around Michael and his brother."

His eyes narrowed, "has tonight made it worse?" he asked her.

She shook her head. "Not worse, just what was meant to be. I told you before, these things will come to pass, the question is where there's room for salvage. I just don't know how or where that will happen yet." She struggled to rise to her feet, and Paul hopped up to help her. She reached out to David, laying a hand on his arm. "I know you want a solution, to know exactly how we can keep everyone safe. I can't give you what I don't have." Tears welling in her eyes again, she looked at them both. "I know it probably seems like things are hopeless, and I know you probably look at me and wonder what use I can be, sad and frail as I am. Please believe I haven't given up, that I'll stand by you till the end if you'll let me. This isn't over yet. And please don't take my sadness as an
indication of something you've done or not done, or how this turns out – it's just how I am."

David looked at her thoughtfully. Paul spoke up though, "chica, I just like to see you happy."

She coughed out something like a sad chuckle. "Paul, you've helped me feel better and laugh more in the last few days than I have in the last couple of years. Even this…” she waved back at the chair, her face pinking slightly as she gathered courage to continue "…intimacy, has been wonderful. Please don't think your efforts are worthless just because I still get sad."

"But you still don't want to live?" he said, "I don't understand?"

"I've carried the weight of this pain too long. Paul. It's time enough for me to let go and be done. It's got nothing to do with you, any of you. If anything, it would feel good to know I could give you something useful even in death. If …if you want that from me, I mean." She glanced down, blushing and shying away from their gaze as she offered herself to them. Paul shook his head, looking at David for direction.

"You really don't value yourself, do you?" David drawled, reaching out to make her look at him.

"There any point to it, this late in the game?" she said coolly, holding his regard. "being useful is good enough. Speaking of which…” She wobbled a moment, pulling away from his hand to try and lift her right leg, before giving up and sitting back down. Fishing a large wad of bills out from inside her sock, she peeled a handful of twenties off to stuff in a pocket before holding out the lion's share of the stack to David. "That's the rest of what I have. I'm sure you'll put it to good use. I know it's a little smelly, but there was nowhere else I could keep that much cash safely."

Paul's eyes bugged a little. "That's a lotta cabbage, little lady." He said in awe.

She smiled softly at him. "Yeah, I guess so. I hope it brings you all some joy."

David took the cash and pocketed it, face carefully neutral. Internally he was still stymied by this strange little perishable that gave not even a second thought to offering literally everything she had to them. Paul seemed to feel the same way, if the confusion and concern flowing through their bond was any guide.

Somber moment passing, she yawned widely, the night's activities finally catching up with her.

David smirked, saying "and on that note, I've got to get Sleeping Beauty over there back to his tower."

"You want me to drive his bike over?" Paul asked.

Glancing down at Mina, David shook his head. "I'll grab Marko." He turned and walked back towards the couch to collect Michael, still passed out and snoring softly.

Levering herself slowly back up out of the chair, Mina wandered off a little unsteadily towards the back of the cavern, only to backtrack a few moments later to search out a candle to guide her path. Coming back to the front a few minutes later, it was clear the party was dying down. Laddie had joined Star on the bed, and music was playing lower now. Dwayne and Paul were sitting together sharing a joint and talking. Wobbling a little more pronouncedly now, Mina made her way to the sofa, sat down, reaching for the open can of beer she'd left. Drinking the rest down, she curled up and was out like a light, never noticing Paul draping his coat over her again, hand brushing her face gently before he stepped away.
Field Trip

Fire burned behind her eyes again, dragging Mina out of a sound sleep with a ragged moan. Not the fire of harrowing memories though, this fire was pain, like a thousand bouncing hammers were loose inside a head shrunk two sizes too small. Sitting up set the world to tilting dangerously, and squinting against the dim sunlight threatening to burn her eyelids she made wobbly haste towards the slit-trench bathroom in the back. And she made it, mostly. Staggering back from the gloom, she paused at the shelf of clothes, glancing sadly down at her shirt before peeling it off carefully and using it to wipe her face and hands, then wadding it up and tossing it in a nearby barrel. Reaching down she grabbed the first dark top she saw and put it on. Moving back to the sofa, she glanced around for anything to clear the bitter taste from her throat, but there was only a lone can of warm beer to be found. Gingerly she crouched down, cracking open the can and taking a careful sip. When it seemed like it would stay down, she drank a little more before putting it back down and crawling up on the couch to huddle miserably, hoping that in time the pain would subside.

The sun had just dipped below the horizon as David and his brothers came out into the main area. An acrid scent hung in the air, and raising an eyebrow in interest David looked towards the figure curled on the couch, clearly not asleep, her breathing more like slow, quiet groans. Glancing at Paul, he shared a smirk, before Paul's grin turned wide with mischief.

"MORNING!" Paul shouted, leaping on the couch hard enough to set even its ancient springs bobbing. His enthusiasm was met by a pained whine as Mina curled even tighter in a vain attempt at getting away. "Aww, come on out and play, chica" Paul whined back, voice loud as he draped himself over her. Whimpering again, she lifted a hand to weakly bat at him, smacking him lightly in the face, her sad efforts earning amused chuckles from the group. She mumbled something too soft and garbled for even their ears to catch.

"Hmm? What's that? Speak up there, chica" Paul poked at her side, laughing as she twitched and batted at him again.

"Go away" she muttered, finally catching the offending hand to end the assault on her side. "I hate you."

Paul clutched his chest, gasping dramatically. "Chica! Say it isn't so! You know you love me!" he cried, still chuckling.

"Not right now I don't." She grumbled, still talking in to the couch. "This is all your fault."

Curling around her again and whispering in her ear, "What did I do? I thought I had you feeling pretty good last night."

A pained growl rose from her as finally turned towards him, and her words came out in a low hiss. "Oh, sure, lovely night, wonderful night. And now I feel like a freight train ran me over twice and here you are chipper as chipmunk." She squinted at him, face tight with pain. "Leave. Me. Be."

"No can do, Mina. You'll be coming out with us tonight." David drawled, smirking as he watched the exchange. She winced, giving him a weak glare from the corner of her eye, before slumping back, groaning.

"Great. Sure. Why not?" She grumbled, sarcasm dripping from her tone. She went still for a moment
then, before grimacing again. "Aww, hell. Yeah, I'm with you tonight. Laddie too." She said softly, with a very subtle head tilt towards the back of the cave.

"Like that, is it?" David queried. She side-eyed him, blinking in affirmation. "Best get moving then, people to do, things to see." He smirked as she sighed, rubbing her face with a hand.

"Here, chica, have a little hair of the dog." Paul said, helpfully holding out the can of beer she'd opened earlier. The look of pained disgust she gave him had him collapsing back, practically rolling off the couch in his mirth. Slowly unfurling, she stood up, hissing quietly as the motion made her head pound.

Cool hands on the back of her neck made her squeak, till they started rubbing gently at the base of her head. Soon she was swaying gently where she stood, groaning softly in pleasure as her savior worked around to her forehead, finding spots of pain and making them melt away.

"You know, I could crush your skull like an eggshell if I wanted." Dwayne whispered low in her ear.

"Well, that would solve all of my issues. Not sure it would help yours any, but that's not my call." She returned, still resting near bonelessly against his frame as he gently massaged her temples. He glanced at David, eyebrow raised, more than a little impressed at her unflappability, and wondering if she really thought he wouldn't follow through or just cared so little if he did. David returned his glance with a shrug.

Mina reached up then, putting her hands over his, guiding one towards her mouth and planting lingering kisses up a chilly palm, only to turn and repeat on the other hand. Standing up straight again, she turned her head to catch his eye. "Thank you, that was most kind." She said softly. He smiled darkly and nodded back.

Paul stood up, coming closer. "I could rub you too, chica. Just promise you'll kiss me like that." He waggled eyebrows suggestively at her, leaning in.

She pushed him back with finger to his chest. "Ohh no, that ship has sailed for today, Sunshine. You wanted cuddly you coulda led with that instead of being a loud and bouncy pest." She moved off towards the stairs.

"Chica?" he called.

"Yes, Paul?" she groused as she walked, glancing up at Marko at the top of the stairs, watching her with his patented wicked smile.

"You know your shirt is on wrong, right?"

She paused, looking down, only then noticing it was both inside out and backwards. Sighing resignedly, she grabbed the hem, pulling the shirt off and putting it back on, staring fixedly at nothing as she did. As she pulled it down, she realized Paul was next to her, wide grin on his face, clearly about to say something. Reaching out, she gently pinched his lips together, glaring mightily through squinting eyes. "Just…don't, hmm?" she hissed. He smiled wider, eyes glinting merrily. Grumbling, she let go, climbing slowly up and out, pointedly ignoring the sources of the laughter behind her.

Dwayne came over and took Laddie's hand, leading him out and leaving David alone with Star. She watched him warily as he walked towards her perch on the bed. Smiling coolly down at her, he let her know she was on her own, but to stay off the boardwalk tonight. "Getting a little tired of your holding out, Star. You have time to make things right, but we're not going to wait for you forever."
She glared at him. "What difference does it make to you? You already have a new toy to play with. How come she's still human? Why isn't she suffering like I am, like Laddie is?"

"Don't start with me, Star. You have no place to question my decisions." He said, voice soft with threat. "If you run in to Michael tonight, you'll tell him nothing about what's happening to him, or what we are. Understood? He has to come to me if he wants answers." His voice was laced now with velvet command, and her eyes went wide as she felt the compulsion settle in. Nodding, she looked away, defeated. He chuckled darkly. "You have one last chance, Star. Finish him tonight, and finally be one of us. It's so much better than the half-life you have now."

"I'll never be like you." She choked back a sob, turning away and curling up on the bed.

Face now a mask of indifference, he turned and walked away, heading out up the cliff where his brothers waited for him.

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Reaching their usual turnoff for the boardwalk, Mina was bit confused when they kept going, heading inland instead. "What's up?" she asked Paul as they sped through town.

"Taking a little field trip first" he said, over his shoulder, chuckling.

Arriving at the outskirts of town, they stopped a bit back from a dirt path that could only very charitably be called a driveway. Way down the path was a large wood cabin, surrounded by a multitude of tree-stump sculptures, wind-spinners and chimes of all shapes and sizes. Mina sat frozen behind Paul, staring at the home, mind spinning, breath coming shallow.

David came up behind her, startling her out of her fugue when he touched her shoulder. "Trouble?"

She shook her head, swallowing thickly. "Not today." She rasped. Wary, but satisfied for the moment, he tilted his head at her, moving towards the house as his brothers followed quietly.

Laddie stayed put on Dwayne's bike, but Paul motioned Mina over to where they stood. "Gonna have a little fun, wanna watch, chica?" he said quietly. She stared at them curiously, looking towards the house and back to him before shrugging. He grinned. "Just keep listening."

The men turned to face the house, standing together quietly in the dark, hidden from the house but with a clear view. The various wind-chimes and spinners started moving, bobbing and clacking in an otherwise imperceptible breeze. Mina could hear exclamations coming from in the house, and she turned to look at Paul with confusion. Glancing at her from the corner of his eye, he casually reached over, touching her shoulder. Suddenly her vision wavered, and the house was bathed in light as ghostly visages of motorcycles rumbled around it. Wind gusted hard enough to blow open windows, rattling shutters and blinds in the house as the occupants voiced their panic. The front door started to swing open, and just as it did everything went dark and quiet again. Framed in the light from the living room, Michael stared out into the night, confusion and suspicion warring on his face. A moment passed, and he turned back, closing the door.

Bright smiles and laughter came from the David and the gang. Paul turned to Mina, eyes bright with mischief. "What'd you think, chica? Pretty cool, yeah?"

Frowning a bit, she turned to David, asking "That wasn't just seeing things, there was sound, wind?"

He smiled coolly. "We have a few tricks for when we want to play with poor human senses. Easy enough, and very fun to watch." Chuckling at the look of dismay on her face, he continued. "Not that we've done that to you. Yet." She looked at him warily. Turning away he sauntered back to the
bikes, brothers in tow. "Show's over. Back to town, boys."

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Returning to the boardwalk, David turned to Mina as they parked the bikes and dismounted. "You up for dinner?"

She looked at him, surprised he'd even think to ask. "Yeah, pretty sure things have settled enough, thank you." He nodded back, turning to head out to the main drag as the group followed.

Paul draped an arm across her shoulders, while reaching out and pulling Marko in with the other. "It's gonna be a good night, I can feel it!" he exclaimed, squeezing them both and letting out a short howl that startled the crowds around them.

Mina caught Marko's eye. "He's just always full throttle, isn't he?"

Marko snickered, eyes bright. "Pretty much."

Paul broke in, "What? That's what you love about me!"

Mina snorted, rolling her eyes at Marko, who chuckled in response.

Stopping at a Mexican restaurant, the party wandered in, the hostess pulling a few two-seat tables together for them. Mina sat between Paul and David on one side, with Dwayne, Laddie and Marko on the other. The waitress came to ask about drinks and David smirked, ordering a couple of pitchers of margaritas for the table. Mina gave him a glare before grabbing the waitress's arm as she passed by. "Do you have ginger ale?" she asked. The lady nodded. "Could you bring a pitcher for me and the boy?" Nodding again, the lady patted her arm, heading towards the bar.

David chuckled as the server left. "You gonna be no fun tonight?" he drawled.

"I had more than enough of that 'fun' to last me what's left of my lifetime, thanks so much." She remarked. "And there are more ways to have fun than just drinking oneself blind." As the words came out of her mouth, sudden realization hit her, her eyes going wide. Laughter from around the table set her face on fire, as she hid in her hands, shaking her head in exaggerated despair.

"More ways indeed," purred David into her ear. "A bit surprised you'd offer though. Was that for all of us, or did you have someone specific in mind?" Groaning in mortified agony, she slumped face down on the table, as Paul patted her back consolingly, still snickering at her self-induced predicament. The waitress came back then with drinks, ready to take their orders. Mina popped her head up and rattled off her request before getting up with haste. David put his hand on hers, eyebrow raised in question.

"Need a 'human' moment. I'll be back." She said quietly, moving his hand and heading towards the back of the restaurant.

The food had already arrived by the time she came back, freshly scrubbed and smelling of soap, with an odd look on her face. David frowned at her as she sat down. "Thought you might have gotten lost."

"My humble apologies. I was taking advantage of the perks of civilization – like actual hot, running water." She snarked back, before reaching behind Paul to yank his hair.

Yelping, he turned to her. "What was that for?!"
"My neck, you animal. I look like someone's been chewing on me!" she responded in a stern whisper.

David's eyes narrowed, and he reached over to gently pull at the collar of her t-shirt. Her neck was a patchwork of red blotches, with a singularly large, bite-shaped purple mark at side of her throat. He raised an eyebrow at Paul, who had the grace to lower his eyes and look a bit abashed. "I might have got a little carried away last night. It was just a tiny bit, I swear!"

David turned then to Mina, his face carefully neutral. "Is this a problem? I seem to recall 'perforation' being a deal breaker."

She faced him, taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly. "I appreciate that your concern. I did think about it when I was cleaning up. I know I'm little more than an antelope playing with lions, so it's not exactly a shock that I might get bit for my troubles. And I'm not feeling that droopy. Besides, pretty sure I bit him back."

At this, David's eyes narrowed again, and he grabbed her jaw, pulling her close, seeming to sniff her while looking in her eyes. "Paul." He said in a dark tone. Mina's eyes widened at the change in the atmosphere at the table.

"Relax! She didn't break skin, I swear!" Paul exclaimed. Mina's eyebrows shot up at his comment, and she looked back and forth between the men.

"I'll second that, his hide is tougher than it looks." She said. "there wasn't even a mark on him last night, not for my lack of trying." Paul coughed a laugh as David let go.

"Careful there, little 'antelope', or you'll wind up a lion." David said quietly. Her eyes widened a moment, before she hid a laugh in slight cough.

"Good to know, but I'm pretty sure my idea of 'love bite' and yours are little bit different. You might as well be warning the drowned kitten about getting out of the wet paper bag."

Now he eyed her with humor. "Point." He said, before starting in on his food.

Digging in to her own over-sized burrito with gusto, she paused only when Paul made yet another comment on her appetite. She put her fork down and turned to face him.

"That is quite enough." Her low voice, frosty with ire, made Paul look at her with surprise. "What?!"

"You heard me. I get one damn meal a day to keep me going while I'm trying to figure out how to save your sorry asses, while my own life counts down. I'll eat what I like and as much of it as I want!" she practically hissed at him, face hard and eyes bright with restrained anger.

Startled, Paul leaned away from her. "Whoa, sorry!" He said, hands up in supplication. Soft look on his face, he continued. "I didn't really think about that, just wasn't used to girls that actually eat like we do. I didn't mean it."

She stared at him a moment, before relaxing again, face taking on a kinder look. "I know, why would it even occur to you? Just give me a break, hmm?"

"OK, chica" he smiled, clearly trying to look at least a little contrite.

David cut in, "kitten is more like a little lion already."
She turned towards him, a little abashed herself. "Sorry if I overstepped."

"Not at all, Paul just does that to people. I'm actually a little impressed."

She smiled mischievously. "Well, I am used to keeping children in line."

"HEY, I'm not a little kid!"

David and Mina looked at each other, matching eyebrows aloft, before turning back towards Paul. "Mm-hmm." was all Mina said. David just watched, smirk in place and eyes bright.

Paul looked back and forth between them for a moment. "Aw, man." He sighed and started back on his food. Dwayne and Marko chuckled, and Paul, now chewing, stuck out his tongue at them.

They were part way through dinner when the men suddenly went still. Looking at each other they stood up together. Mina went to rise as well, but David stopped her with a hand on her shoulder. "Personal business." He said quietly.

Nodding towards the little boy, "Watch Laddie?"

"Of course."

He tossed some cash on table, drank the rest of his margarita and headed out the door with his brothers.

Looking across the table at the little boy, Mina smiled. "You and me again, hmm?" He smiled and nodded. "What would you like to do?"

Laddie perked up. "Can we go to the beach? Sometimes there's toys there."

She smiled again. "Of course, that's a great idea. Ready?" She took his hand as they left the restaurant, heading back through the boardwalk and out on to the beach. They walked along for a while, and he talked about his brothers and the fun things they'd do with him.

"Hey look!" he called excitedly, dropping her hand to run ahead. A few buckets and shovels lay in the sand about half-way to the pier. She was a little surprised he noticed them, dark as it was, but he happily knelt down and started scooping up sand, getting buckets of sea water to soak it and stack it up. He had a nice little castle going before too long, and he chatted non-stop as he went, an elaborate story about a white-haired King, his knights and a dark-haired princess, and how they rescued a little prince stolen from his family by evil giant. Mina's heart nearly broke listening to his tale, only knowing he at least had a happy ending coming kept her responding cheerfully as he chattered on.

The night deepened as they sat playing, and Mina wondered what Max might be up to that would keep David and the gang so long. Looking around she saw a couple of guys heading their way, their movements focused and threatening. Standing up, she moved in front of Laddie.

"Stay behind me!" she hissed at him.
"You! You were with those assholes that crashed our party last night!" The larger of the two boys shouted, coming closer to where Mina and Laddie stood.

"Whoa, OK there, it's not like we had anything to do with it, no need to get crazy!" Mina said, backing up further, hands up to ward the boy off.

He stormed up, swinging fast with a backhand that knocked her sideways, yelping as she dropped. Laddie screamed "Leave her alone!" before trying to throw a punch of his own. Unfortunately, he had a much shorter reach than the older boy, who lifted him easily by the back of his coat and threw him backwards atop the sandcastle, smashing it flat. The little boy grabbed a bucket, tossing it at the guy with a surprisingly strong arm, catching the edge of his attacker's forehead.

"Son of a bitch!" the boy pulled back to aim a kick at Laddie, only to stumble as his foot swung wide, Mina now clinging to his back. Throwing her arms around his neck, she bit deep into his right ear. Yelling, he tried to grab at her as his buddy punched her hard in the back before grabbing at her hair to try and pull her off.

Tracking Laddie through their bond, David and his brothers had walked down the boardwalk stairs and out across the beach. David lit a cigarette as they went, frowning deeply. Max's latest tirade at them about Michael and his brother was, if possible, even more unhinged than before, and they'd barely gotten out without being punished. Max was livid at his night out being cut short, only the fact of Michael's advancing change kept him from inflicting his wrath on them.

His dark thoughts were stopped short by Paul's low growl. "Mina!" he shouted through the bond.

Looking up they all saw the blow that struck Mina down, and David's eyes flashed gold as he and his men started moving swiftly towards the altercation. He reached a steadying hand out to curb Dwayne as Laddie was tossed down.

"Too many people." came David's quelling thought as the dark-haired man snarled, fangs peeking through pulled back lips.

They slowed as they closed in around the combatants, and Dwayne quickly picked Laddie up. The rest of them turned towards the fight scene, eyes flashing dark amusement. Paul grabbed the shorter boy before he could land another blow on Mina, casually tossing him a dozen feet away. The boy lay still, stunned for a moment, before struggling up and running away without even looking back. David moved swiftly in front of the taller boy, who was still hollering and flailing at the girl chewing through his ear. Blood dripped down the boy's neck, leaving a tantalizing iron tang to the air. He grabbed the kid's hands, squeezing hard and stopping his struggle, and the boy froze when he realized who held him.

"Let go, Mina" he sent, his voice in her head catching her attention. Her eyes met his and she stopped her efforts and raised her head.

"Laddie?" she rasped.
David smirked at her. "He's OK."

She slowly let go her hold and slid down the man's back, where Paul caught her, helping her as she stumbled.

David turned cold eyes to the boy in front of him. "Quite the little man there, beating up women and children." His tone was velvet and threat, and the kid's eyes widened in fear.

"You should count yourself lucky tonight." He moved closer, face now inches from the boy. "You ever even look at my family again, there won't be enough of you left to bury." He spoke softly, but the dark fire in his eyes and icy tone cut in to the youth, who lost control and wet himself, urine pooling on the sand under his left shoe. Cold laughter broke the boy's trance, and David let go of his hands, his face now a mask of haughty disgust.

"Run home little boy, your diaper needs changed."

The kid glanced down, face twisting, panting in fear. Putting a hand up to his ear he yelped and flinched hard, hand coming away covered in blood as his ear hung oddly, parts of it not quite as firmly attached as before. Whimpering, he backed away, before turning and starting a stuttering run away from them, looking back now and then as he went.

David watched the kid retreat for a moment, before turning towards Mina. The cold look melted from his face, replaced with bright eyes and humor. "Little lion indeed." He smiled gently, reaching to tilt her head up, eyeing the blood trailing down her chin. "Looks like our ideas of 'bite' aren't that different after all." She shook slightly where she stood, still panting, scent of adrenaline leaching into the air and slowly dissipating.

Blinking at him, her face scrunched in sadness. "I'm sorry, I tried to stop them. I didn't mean to let Laddie get hurt."

David shook his head. "He's fine, Mina. You did well."

Moving closer, his face now a bare breath away from hers, he caught her gaze with his own, ice blue eyes drawing her in as his hands moved to cup her face gently. She felt a sense of calm wash over her, easing jangled nerves as she relaxed into his touch. He kissed her lightly then, lips moving softly across her own, slowly mapping the traces of blood, cleaning it away as he went. All outer traces of blood gone, he claimed her lips once again, the kiss deepening as she moved closer, his hands now trailing down over her shoulders and across her back, drawing her tight, only to have her yelp and flinch away. Moment broken, he pulled back.

Panting slightly from their embrace, she looked embarrassed at her outburst. "Sorry. Something hurt when you squeezed me."

"Show me?" he asked quietly. She frowned slightly, but turned around, crossing arms to lift the edge of her shirt. He moved to grab the hem himself, lifting to see a palm-sized bruise forming across the right side of her ribs. Eyes narrowing, he looked at his brothers.

Paul was growled softly, before looking down at Mina. Grinning suddenly, he grasped her shoulders, leaning in to kiss her cheek before purring in her ear. "You are one hot mama, chica. Next time, promise you'll let me lick you clean?"

Mina's eyes widened a moment before she turned and gave him a look. "Next time?"

He chuckled, bouncing with his usual cheerful energy over towards Marko. "Never know, might
have you out there protecting one of us from those big, bad surfer chumps. Just aim a little lower, yeah?" Tapping the side of his own throat in emphasis he laughed again, clapping Marko on the arm, and the two turned and moved off.

Dwayne came over, Laddie still in his arms, head buried in Dwayne's chest and panting heavily. He exchanged a look with David, who reached into a pocket and brought out his flask, opening it before handing it over. "Here bud, have a sip." Dwayne said, holding the container close to the boy. Laddie turned his head towards it, eagerly taking a drink. "Better now?" Laddie nodded, suddenly much calmer. "Just a little more, OK?" After making sure the boy drank again, Dwayne handed the flask back over to David.

Perking up entirely, Laddie lifted his head up, eyes a clear green and a big smile on his face. "Could we go play in the arcade?" he asked.

Dwayne chuckled, lifting the boy up over his head for a moment, to Laddie's vocal delight. "You bet, you little monster!" Laughing as the boy growled at him playfully, he set him down, running away slowly as Laddie chased after him making scary noises and holding his small arms up like a movie monster.

David watched them for a moment, face thoughtful, before turning back to Mina. She looked up at him, head tilted in consideration. "He loves you all, you know."

He smiled wryly. "We do what we can. He never should have been forced to join us."

"If it helps, no matter what happens, he'll be free in the end."

David paused a moment, closing his eyes. "Good." Looking down at her again, his smile turning predatory. "Looks like we're alone." He purred.

She gave him a wary glance. "So it appears."

He turned then, gallantly offering the crook of his arm. She chuckled, hands moving to wrap around his proffered limb. They walked leisurely back to the boardwalk, to where the bikes were parked. Only his and Dwayne's bikes were there. She gave him a curious glance. "Where'd they go?"

"Just doing a little scouting for me. Tomorrow's a big night." She hummed in response. Sitting on his bike, he offered a hand to help her on.

Settling in behind him, she wrapped her arms around his middle, face nestled over his shoulder. "Where to?" she asked.

"You'll see." Came the response, as he gunned the motor and took off down the boardwalk steps and off down the beach. The bike moved down the sand and through the underside of the pier at an insane speed, and she gripped him tighter as figures and pilings flew blurrily past. He howled in delight as he felt her squeeze him, and laughing she howled back, only to yipe a moment later when he turned his head to kiss her cheek, as a bonfire loomed in front of them. He turned back and curved around it at the last moment, his laughter shaking through her as she tucked her head and tightened her grip further.

She felt the bike maneuver in a twist, leaning swiftly from one side to another, only to hear outbursts from partiers that faded quickly into the distance as he sped on. "Show off" she whispered in his ear, only to feel him chuckle again.

Speeding on, they were soon far away from the crowds, and the beach here was almost entirely deserted. David came to a stop at a small fire that burned cheerfully in the dark night. There was a
cooler, and some towels and open bottles scattered in disarray, as though the site had recently been used. Getting off his bike, he helped Mina dismount. "What do you think?" He drawled, waving a hand at the site.

Looking around, Mina asked "Are there other people here?"

David smirked back. "Not anymore."

She looked around again in concern, deciding she had to know. "You...did you actually have people killed just to get a beach spot?"

"And if we did?"

Distress etched Mina's face for a moment. Collecting herself, she sighed and looked back at David. "Nothing. It's fine." She smiled sadly for a moment. "It's a little difficult to grasp your perspective, me being an antelope and all."

He smiled a little warmer now. "Well said." Draping an arm over her shoulders he drew her towards the fire. "They're not dead though. Probably be back when it's daylight."

She looked up at him in surprise, to see an evil grin on his face. "What did you do?"

"Paul and Marko scared the daylights out of 'em. Apparently, the group took off like the devil himself was after them. Knowing Marko, that's not far from the truth."

She could feel him shaking with laughter, and she joined in. "That's terrible!"

Chuckling he said "Not to us lions. And rather convenient."

Layering a few large blankets and towels, he gestured grandly towards them, and she sat down, enjoying the warmth of the fire. He sat next to her, taking off his gloves to stuff them in a pocket. He draped an arm over her shoulders again, drawing her close. He could hear her heartbeat speed up, and she was pointedly not looking at him, face redder than could be blamed on the fire's warmth.

"Mina."

She looked at him from the corner of her eye, before ducking her head and curling a bit so her legs were bent in front of her like a barrier. He leaned in then, nuzzling into the crook of her neck, nipping softly at her neck and ear, tongue barely brushing her skin, and he smiled to feel her heart jump, breath stutter as the heat in her cheek increased. He continued his ministrations, now moving to her jaw line, free hand reaching to turn her head as he captured her lips before sliding down her side to gently turn her body towards his in a light embrace. She reached for him then, hands sliding up his arms to curl into his hair.

Breaking apart, she panted with the need for air. Her face was flushed, though the look she gave him was tentative, as though wanting more yet unsure of how to proceed, or if she should. Sensing her inner conflict, David smiled down at her, eyes bright and sharp. "You want this." He said quietly, a simple statement and challenge all at once.

Breathing in shakily as she held his glance, she agreed. "I do. It just feels so...unexpected? Unbelievable? I don't even know how to describe it. I didn't think I'd ever touch...or be touched...by anyone else, and here you, all of you, just reach out and pull me in. Your easy intimacy is...wonderful...but a little intimidating."

"Just how we are, Mina. It's how we endure." His smile was gentler now. "Paul mentioned your
past. You sure you're ready?" he teased, light tone belied by the fire in his eyes.

"I…yes. I want you, want to know you, before I let go." She reached up then, to cup his cheek with her hand. "Please?" she whispered.

"As the lady requests" he purred, smile turning predatory. He turned slightly, kissing her palm before bending to kiss her again, plundering her mouth as her heart sped up, hands tightening in their grip on his jacket collar as she sought to match his effort with heat of her own.

Pausing for breath, she pushed lightly at the lapels on his coat, eyes entreatingly him to remove it. Smirking, he slipped off his double coat easily, letting it fall behind him, before helping her to remove his shirt. Enjoying the way her heart jumped as he bared his torso, he stood up in a fluid motion, sloughing off his boots and pulling down his leather pants with practiced ease. He stood proudly before her then, naked body bathed in the glow of the fire. She looked up at him, eyes wide with wonder and the faint whiff of her desire in the air. She reached up hesitantly, and he knelt down in front of her, her hands now hovering above his chest.

Touching him, she gasped quietly, and seeing his encouraging and heated grin, she continued, running warm hands over his cool body, slowly mapping the planes and angles of chest, abdomen and hips. She blushed deeply as she glanced down, and as she went to run her hands back up his sides, he caught one with his own, sliding it across his pelvis to grasp his erect cock firmly at the base. He cupped her cheek with his other hand, coolness easing the heat under her skin. Heart beating like drum, she looked up at him, and back down, as the hand encasing hers pulled it gently up and down his length, squeezing lightly before releasing his grip. Eyes locked as she followed the motion, she opened her hand, fingers sliding across velvet skin, running up to gently touch the layer of skin pulled tight across the top of his prick. Circling him, she pulled delicately down, fascinated as it slid back slightly, exposing more of his tip. Releasing his foreskin, she slid her hand down past pale curls to caress his sac before gliding back up to the tip.

A soft growl from above made her jump slightly, looking up a bit abashed only to be caught by the fierce heat in his eyes. "Enjoying yourself?" he purred.

She flushed deeper, but held his gaze, trailing soft hands across the crest of his hips and back up his chest. "Yes. You're beautiful."

He chuckled darkly, inwardly pleased at her tender ministrations. The earnest touches were oddly enticing, and the novelty in her regard was far too endearing. Reaching for her, he lifted the hem of her shirt, and she moved her arms to help remove it. Undoing her shorts, he pulled at them, and she stood to make it easier, resting a hand on his shoulder to steady herself as she stepped out of them.

Now he looked up at her, eyes gleaming with mischief as hers opened in wariness. "You're a luscious little treat, aren't you?" He ran cool hands up her torso, as her face flushed again.

"My turn" he growled, before gently grasping her hips and bending his head to lick at her sex. The hand on his shoulder gripped tighter as she gasped in pleased surprise. A few more licks and her legs started to buckle, and he helped as she lowered herself, pushing her to lay down with her legs spread around him.

She lay panting, favoring him with a heated look as she was sprawled before him. Predatory grin back, he stroked her body, gently kneading her breasts and rolling the tips as she moaned softly at the sensations. Cool hands sliding downward, grasping her hips lightly before drifting down her legs, only to glide back up and tease her lightly, rolling her clit as she gasped and squirmed. He moved to grip her hips firmly as he lay down between her thighs, licking at her bud as she whined, twitching under his hold. This close to her heat, the heady scent of desire was pouring off her, and he glanced...
up with fiery golden eyes to catch her gaze for a moment, before attacking her sex with vigor. Her cries grew louder, hips fighting his grasp and legs sliding up, desperate for purchase as he wound her tighter. Body tense as a coiled spring she trembled tightly as he took her clit in his mouth, teeth grazing lightly as he suckled it. Face frozen in a voiceless scream, she came hard, hips trying vainly to snap in his iron grip as her body curled up and convulsed. Crest passing, she fell back nearly boneless, breathing hard.

"Pace yourself, little lion, we're just getting started." Smiling, he knelt up, releasing her hips to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand. He crawled up her body, licking and nipping, and she squeaked and twitched as he went, skin pebbling and nipples hard as he reached them, sucking one then the other as she moaned in pleasure. Covering her, he teased her entrance gently with his cock as his teeth grazed her neck, and she writhed under him. He speared her then, sliding in to the hilt as she ground herself against him, rocking and making soft cries of need at the feel and weight of him.

"Hold on to me." He growled, and his hands moved to her ass, grabbing it tight as she locked her arms around his neck. Lifting, he leaned back, settling her in his lap as she shifted her legs to wrap around his waist. Raising her easily, he brought her hips down as his own pushed up, and she cried out loudly as he buried himself in her. Maintaining his grip, he rolled gently into her, setting a slow pace as she clung to him, head buried in his neck as she moaned in time with his languid thrusts. He kept the leisurely rhythm even as she started keening, body twisting against his in effort to increase contact. Releasing her grip around his neck, she slid her arms down to encircle his chest, hands grasping his back with thin nails catching in his skin. She mouthed him, grazing over a firm pectoral with round teeth, before turning to slide her cheek against the light down covering his chest as the fire continued to build. Covered in sweat, she tried to work her own hips against his, attempts to move faster blocked by his firm grasp as he easily kept the frustratingly sedate tempo. Slow minutes passed as she whined and arched into him, driven mad with the need for release. "Are you sure you're ready, little lion?" he purred, tilting his head to graze gentle teeth below her ear, and he smiled as she whined again and tilted her head, inviting more contact, still trying to grind into him. She screamed when he snapped his hips up hard, clinging tighter, body clenching as he changed pace and plunged deep, bringing her down to meet him with faster, more forceful movements. She trembled and tensed, surging towards climax as he thrust in swift, tight motion deep to her core. Her voice rose as the intense orgasm washed over her, whole body shaking in his embrace as the sensations overwhelmed her.

Gradually the tremors ebbed away, and she loosened the grip on his back, sliding flattened palms to grasp more gently, holding him close as she nuzzled into his lightly furred chest. Cool arms slid up around her back, head resting gently on hers as he enfolded her. Her breathing slowed as she relaxed, eyes closing, comforted despite his coolness, and the almost eerie silence of his body as she clung to him.

A few moments passed, and he twitched slightly, her eyes popping open at the feel of his hard length stirring inside her. Her breath hitched for a moment and she glanced down, gathering her courage before looking up at him again. He smiled back down at her, his glance heated.

"Still hungry, I think." He growled. His lips met hers, gently at first, then growing deeper, rekindling the fire within her as he used his cock to tease her now sensitized flesh, sliding lightly, never quite pulling out or thrusting deep, and making her body shudder with renewed desire.

He pulled back out then, setting her down, before gathering her up easily and turning her around. Kneeling behind her, he moved close, and she squeaked when she felt his dick glide between her slick thighs. She could feel his chuckle through his chest, now pressed firmly against her back. Lifting and spreading her, he plunged into her cunt from behind, hands sliding around her, one to cross her torso and cover a breast, pinching and kneading lightly, while the other cupped her mound,
She keened wildly as he started a strong rhythm, hips thrusting forcefully into hers and pushing her clit against his hand. She clung to his arms as though for dear life, head rolling and falling back onto his shoulder as he nipped at her neck. Locked together they rolled now in smooth motion, as he let her rising passion wash over him, growing into her neck as he worked new marks into her skin. She moaned, pitch increasing as she neared her peak, to cry out as she crested, soft hips pressing back to his in quick jerks. Her climax drove his own as he let go, meeting her movements till his frenzy drove him to hold her tight, rutting fast before stilling them both as he spent deep inside her, sharp teeth biting with deliberate gentleness over the mark Paul had left, drawing a fresh trickle of blood. She shuddered as he drew his tongue over the bite, lapping and sucking lightly before laving it closed.

Nearly boneless in the aftermath, she slumped back against him, shaky arms reaching behind to grasp him weakly. He slid his hand languidly down to her sex and back to her mound, fingers covered in slick and gliding easily, rumbling chuckle shaking her as she mewled and twitched. "Sweet little Mina, so very hungry, how many times I can take you over the edge?"

"Aaahhh, Daavid…" She whined, hands coming back to grasp his where he played with her slowly, though she had no strength to move him away. She arched, and he purred in her ear.

"Say it again, Mina…" he whispered lowly in her ear, touching her with expert fingers, roughness from age-old calluses bringing delicious friction, to drive her towards peak again. Her body seemed to have a mind of its own, now rolling towards and then away from the maddening touch and the feel of the firm cock still deep within her.

"Hmmm…aah…Daaviid…" panting as her eyes clenched, awareness shrunk down to the feel of him stoking the explosion building in her core and silk of his voice in her ear.

"One more time, Mina. Say my name one. more. time." sharp teeth nipped a path down her neck, driving lightning straight to her center, as her whole body locked up and started trembling, tension firming her grip as her torso arched out.

At her effort to speak, he snapped his hips into her strung-tight body, fingers rolling and pinching her clit mercilessly. As he bit down once again, she began convulsing forcefully in his arms, screaming his name as her climax crashed over her.

She twitched and curled for long moments as the wave of pleasure ebbed, making soft noises as he extracted himself and changed their positions, now laying down and drawing her close beside him. As they stretched out, her head was cushioned on his chest and her back to the fire. Her eyes were still shut as she gently rubbed her cheek over hard muscle, stopping to drag soft lips across skin as she went, and her hand reached out across his chest to flex and grasp gently.

"Mina, look at me."

She slid her head languidly to an angle she could see him from. Eyelids opening reluctantly, she looked up to see him with visage rampant, eyes burning gold and face disfigured with sharp ridges and brow. His smirk seemed crueler on this face, more cutting, but she didn't falter, reaching up a warm hand to trace the new contours, fingertips skimming lightly over eyelids till finally cupping an angular cheek in her palm. Smiling sleepily, she stretched up, kissing the near cheek before settling back and closing her eyes once more. "Still beautiful." She whispered, even as her breathing evened out, her leg coming to curl over his as she drifted off. He shook his head in bemusement, not even sure what reaction he'd been expecting. He lay still for a brief time, before easing out of her grip and going to light up a cigarette. She turned over as he left, curling towards the warmth of the fire, now
burning a low dark orange in the deep night.

He stared into the fire for a few long moments, taking slow drags on his smoke. Sounds of distress made him turn, watching as Mina whined in her sleep, frown marring her brow as she curled tightly. Brushing her mind, he was caught in a wild maelstrom of blurry images, inhuman screams mixing with those of mortals, scenes of fire and glowing eyes lit with pain flashing past too quickly to comprehend. Coming to crouch over her, he put a hand to her shoulder just as she startled awake, flinching away from the fire deeper into his embrace, only to lay panicked hands on his as she turned frantically, eyes wide and caught between her visions and reality.

"Mina!" he called as he gripped her, holding her tightly against her alarm. Her eyes focused finally, breath coming in heaving pants as her tense grip faded. Raising a hand to his face she seemed to be searching, looking down, running her gaze over him as though expecting to find something that wasn't there.

Eyes narrowing, he asked, "What did you see?"

Her answer left him cold. "Marko."

Hard put to quell the unease gripping him, he nudged his brother through their bond, only to get an amused and questioning response almost immediately. Gathering himself, he looked down sternly at the woman he still held in firm grip. "Care to elaborate?"

Frowning, she relaxed further despite his hold, taking a deep breath before she spoke. "We're close now. There's only another night till the end. It starts with Marko."

"You were looking at me."

She shook her head. "Just something minor. It's always confusing when I fall out of a vision, but it was a very small." It was his turn to frown, and brush her mind again. But there was no subterfuge, she believed what she said.

"Tell me what you saw."

She looked at him, distress etched on her face. "You really don't want that, David."

"I know what I want. Tell me." He said, voice now dropping with anger.

"You don't want that, I'm telling you truly. It will only make it worse!" She tried to pull away but he held her now with iron grip.

Eyes now blazing, face monstrous, he growled low. "I will gladly tear you apart, piece by slow, painful, piece. Start talking."

She got very calm and still in his arms. Looking him in the eye, she said softly, "David, I understand why you want to know, but if I tell you now you will try and change events, and they will turn out even worse for you and all your family. I'm telling you truthfully, it happened to me, and the weight of it has crushed the life out of me after barely more than a year. How will you bear it for decades, if you even survive? Tear me apart if you must, but I am doing you the greatest kindness I can."

They stared at each other for long moments, anger washing through him, the feeling of powerlessness rekindling his ire every time his swirling thoughts let it ebb.

She watched him carefully. "You – you can sense some of what I do, sometimes, right?" she asked softly. Warily, he looked at her and nodded. "Let me share with you the weight I carry, so you can
understand why I hold back?” He paused, eyes still flaming gold though his visage was human now. He nodded again, and she gathered herself, breathing deeply before letting her constant façade drop. The look in her eyes then was something deeper than misery, her face now etched with a desolation that made her seem far older than she really was as the weight of it pulled her down. Brushing her mind now, he was nearly crushed by the wave of anguish that rolled over him. Feelings he thought he’d left far behind with his mortal life engulfed him now like shades of future past; the terrible pain of loss, the deep emotional labor and commitment given to build a family only to see every little bit of it ripped away, leaving only immense grief and a black, overwhelming self-hatred that came at seeing all that was left of them lain out as testament to his own hubris. He was shaken to the core, and pulled back out of her mind, schooling his features to hide how affected he had been. Staring at her now with cool blue eyes, he loosened his grip, momentarily regretful that he’d left bruises on her in his rage.

Dropping her own eyes, her breath came in deep shudders as she swallowed dryly, rocking slightly in his arms as she steadied herself, locking her torment and agony away again that she might be able to function, and help save the being in front of her from suffering her fate. Finally looking back up, she wiped her eyes. "You see?" she said softly.

Relaxing, he reached out to cup her chin gently. He kissed her forehead then, and took her in his arms.

They held each other for long moments, till she turned her head, speaking quietly. "I will tell you truly, there is hope for you and yours, even though I don't quite know how to work it yet. I would not have seen the visions if there weren't." She paused for a moment.

"It's not exactly easy for me, you know - you – all of you - are something beyond anything I've ever dealt with before. Helping people? That's easy enough. But the bizarre complexity of saving not-quite-dead… beings? …from being really dead? It's kind of driving me out of what little mind I have left." She huffed into his chest.

He stilled for a moment, looking down at her quizzically. "Are you trying to make a joke?"

"Hm…yes? Apparently, my sense of humor is deader than you are."

"Oh, I'm dead, hmm? And here I thought I'd proved otherwise. Perhaps I wasn't lively enough?" voice dropping as he spoke, to pour out like dark honey. His hands slid down to caress her form, catching under her ass to squeeze in emphasis. He could feel the heat bloom in the cheek against his chest, and he chuckled low, now dipping to nuzzle into her neck again, tongue and teeth working gently to bring soft yelps from Mina as she griped his body, clearly torn between pulling in and pushing away.

Finally levering herself slightly away from him, she said, "No, ah, you were plenty lively, really, I'm fine…aaAAH!" her tirade ended in a soft cry as he palmed her mound, wicked fingers sliding easily into her still slick cunt.

"You are fine. And still hungry." Voice deep as he leered down at her, as he slowly drew his fingers out, only to lick them lasciviously in front of her. Reaching down he cupped her once again, curling in to her and rolling her clit with his thumb.

"You are fine. And still hungry." Voice deep as he leered down at her, as he slowly drew his fingers out, only to lick them lasciviously in front of her. Reaching down he cupped her once again, curling in to her and rolling her clit with his thumb.

Her wide eyes tracked the movements of his hand up to his lips and back down, only to roll back as he started working her, desire like a banked fire now burning brightly once more. She moaned as he lay her back and removed his hand. And then he was bracing himself atop her, teasing her once again with firm cock while lapping at pebbled breasts, her hands clutching his hair as she squirmed under him.
Moving up, he went to capture her lips and she matched his fervor with her own. He lifted her hips with a hand, to spear her deeply, swallowing her pleasured scream as they continued to kiss. Her legs bent around him now, feet resting on his ass as he thrust deep, setting a hard pace, hips snapping in to hers. Breaking for air, she gave near breathless cries in time with his thrusts, tone rising in urgency as her peak approached. As he turned his head slightly to nip her neck, she turned hers as well, biting softly on his shoulder in time with his rhythm, cries muffled to whimpers as she clamped down, arms crossing over his shoulders, grasping with pale strength and weak nails at back and scalp. Opening his mind to hers again, he was relieved to feel nothing but lustful pleasure flowing from her now, and let it bathe him, pulling him along as she crested, his own release spiking hard as she bit soft round teeth into his shoulder while his growls rumbled deeply through her, her blood pooling in his mouth. Gradually he slowed his pace, enjoying how she continued to writhe under him.

As he lowered their hips, pinning her to the ground with his body, her efforts took on a slightly different note. She was clearly trying to wriggle free, and he watched her with amusement. "God, get off!" she said with frustration, still panting from their embrace, her cheeks turning a bit redder.

"God? Never been called that before." He chuckled, leaning up on a braced arm, to casually stroke her.

"Get OFF!" she growled, glaring at him while pushing up at his chest with her arms, wiggling with greater urgency.

"Pretty sure we just did."

With exasperation she cried "GET OFF ME, I GOTTA PEE!"

"Oh, shoulda just said so." Laughing outright now, he sat up, and she muttered darkly as she launched herself up and away. She flipped him off as she moved around the fire, splashing out into the water till she was knee deep before scrunching down, back to him.

He was half-dressed by the time she came back, still glaring at him as she bent to pick up her own clothes. Sneaking up behind to grab her waist from a kneeling position, he nipped at a hip as she yelped.

"Hmmm, salty sweet. Just how I like it."

She glowered at him but couldn't hold it, a smile breaking free as she saw the look of pure mischief on his face. She ran a fond hand through his spiky hair.

"Asshole."

"That a request? Haven't tried that yet." He smirked before biting gently into her ass, as he trailed a hand down the crest of the other cheek. "Still have a little time…” he trailed off, eyes glinting.

"NO!" she squeaked, wrenching her hips out of his hands to turn and drop quickly onto the blanket, holding her clothes in her lap. Her scowl was back and he snickered as he turned to grab his shirt.

"Pity, you'll never know what you're missing."

"Well I haven't tried jumping out of an airplane either, I guess I just have to manage the disappointment." She groused, as she put on her clothes and shoes. When she looked up, he was dressed and watching her quietly, calculating look on his face making her a tad nervous. "What are you thinking?"
He grinned with too many teeth. "Airplanes, hmm?"

Her eyes widened. "What?"

He had her in his arms in an instant, and they were shooting straight up in the next. She wrapped him in a death grip, arms and legs clenching desperately. He smirked at her, eyes flashing in humor.

Pausing mid-air, he ran his hands soothingly down her back, chuckling as he did.

"Afraid of something?"

She peeled her head up out of his chest to give him a squinty-eyed look. "That was more than a tad startling. But no, I'm not particularly afraid of heights."

"Oh, really? Have a look around then."

She turned her head slowly to get a better look. Her arms tightened further, heart pounding a little harder as she grasped where they were, hovering easily a hundred feet up over their little beach site. She could see further down the beach, but the lights of the boardwalk were out, and she could just make the shape of the coaster and Ferris wheel out as they were back-lit by the parking lot lights. Settling a little, she looked up then, squinting and glancing around. "The stars don't seem any closer."

"They never do. But skimming the tops of clouds can be fun, when little things like cold and thin air don't matter."

She smiled up at him, still clinging tightly but more at ease. He kissed her then, wrapping his arms around her as he brought them back down. Touching the ground, she jumped a little, and he rumbled in laughter. Stepping back, she looked at him softly. "Thank you." He tilted his head in acknowledgement, eyes bright.

Looking around, she asked "anything in that cooler? I'm a little parched."

He shrugged. "Didn't really think to look."

Walking over, she opened it to find it mostly full of beer, and a couple of cans of Shasta. Picking up a soda pop for herself, she offered him a beer.

"Not indulging tonight?"

"Maybe later." She popped the top and drank half of it, hiccuping slightly as she paused for breath. Seeing his amused look, she grumbled "some of us can't just tap our partners for replenishment." His attempted look of innocence at her accusation had her nearly snorted pop out her nose. Coughing to get the liquid out of her airway, she heard him laughing loudly.

"You'll be the death of me." She deadpanned.

"Wasn't that the point?" he teased.

"Timing might be a tad premature."

"Ah, duly noted."

She snorted again, doing a poor job of hiding her smile at his banter.

He moved closer. "Anything else the lady requires before we depart?"
"I don't know…can you turn in to a pizza?"

"Sadly no, perhaps madam would care for a bag of chips?"

"Chips would be great. Lead on, MacDuff."

He paused. "Lay on."

"What?"

"You've not read it. It's 'Lay on, MacDuff.'"

She blinked. "You've got me. It's how my mom said it."

"Now who's the philistine?"

She stared at him again, smile slowly growing on her face. "So, do I apologize to Paul?"

"Nope – Paul definitely needs to improve his reading material." David smirked, grabbing up the bag of chips he'd seen earlier and presenting it to her with a flourish.

"Good luck with that." She quipped, taking the bag with a nod. Grabbing a few and happily munching away, she tilted the bag his way. He took a few as well, and they sat together on the cooler, drinking and eating chips in a companionable silence for a while.

Standing up, he dusted his hands off. "Ready?"

She nodded, standing up to grab another soda pop out of the cooler before following him back to the bike. Stopping before he got on, he turned towards her. "For a perishable, you're not half bad."

"I think that's is the nicest thing anyone's said to me in a long while.", her gentle half-smile slipped away as she turned serious. "May I ask a favor?"

He smirked. "Ask away."

Gathering her courage, she asked quietly, "When it's over, would you be the one…?"

He cupped her face with his hands, kissing her forehead gently. "It would be my pleasure to set you free." He said, eyes surprisingly bright as he glanced down at her.

Mounting up, they made it back to the cave, moving in quietly at his direction, a few barrels lit here and there. Dwayne sat in his chair reading, glancing up as they walked in. Laddie was asleep on the couch. David cocked an eyebrow. Dwayne motioned with his chin towards the bed in the back. "Lover boy's still here. Alive and asleep." David's eyes narrowed a moment before he collected himself.

"So it goes." He said, shrugging nonchalantly, lighting up a cigarette.

Dwayne got up, walking towards Mina and dragging her in to a hug. She froze a moment before leaning in to it, wrapping her own small arms around his waist. "Thank you." He said, pulling back to look at her.

Slightly confused, she looked up at him. "You're welcome? For…?"

"Caring for Laddie. He told me about your night."
Smiling softly now, she glanced over at the couch. "How could I not? He's the only real innocent in all of this. And he's a treasure."

Dwayne's eyes flashed, gentle smile turning predatory. "So are you." He bent then, curling strong arms around her, face turning into her neck to lick and mouth gently at the bite mark David had left. She shuddered in his arms, breath hitching.

"Dwayne." David's quiet word stilled his attentions. "Let our little lion rest." The mental admonishment stopped him completely.

Kissing her neck gently, Dwayne released her, stepping back. Eyes dark and deep, he nodded at her. "Stay with Laddie?"

She nodded back, breath still unsteady. "Of course." He turned then and disappeared towards the back of the cave.

David dropped his smoke, stubbing it out with his boot. "Pleasant sleep, Mina." He took her hand, kissing it gallantly before turning to follow Dwayne. "Just scream if Michael bothers you." He called back.

"What'll that do?" she said.

He turned around, smirking. "Well, it'll startle him enough to leave you alone. Probably."

She rolled her eyes at him. "Thanks a bunch." He bowed and turned away, chuckling.

Glancing at Laddie, she sighed. Curling up tightly on the other end of the couch, she settled in to sleep away the oncoming day.

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What must have been only a little while later, as the darkness of night bled into the light that was dimly growing visible at the mouth of the cave, she was woken by a particularly familiar joyful yell sounding somewhere above her. A strong wind washed over her, and she looked around blearily but saw nothing. Settling back down, she saw movement from the back of the cave, as a very nude Michael got up off the bed and padded slowly around, finding his clothes and shoes and getting dressed. She closed her eyes as he moved past, only to carefully watch his exit. Feeling more secure she drifted off again.
Mina lay dreaming as the last rays of the sun bathing the cave entrance faded away. Lost in a pleasant haze, she reached out to the man leaning over her, arms encircling this strangely faceless but welcome figure. He nuzzled into the crook of her neck, softly mouthing flesh still tender even in her dreams. She sensed the person's head lifting, to feel his hands drifted down her torso, caressing at first, then moving to slip under the hem of her shorts, moving to roll and tease her clit and draw heat to her nether lips with gentle strokes.

The sudden rush of pleasure rolling through her, and an intrusive cough-like laugh, drew her instantly awake. She rose up with a jolt, forehead colliding forcefully with the very real and solid face of the person laying atop her. The cartilaginous crunch was quite loud.

"FUCK!" Paul pulled his hands free of her, moving to cradle his broken and bleeding nose.

Mina stared, a bit stunned at the sight. "Ow." She started rubbing at the pain in her forehead. Paul sat up, quickly standing and moving away, as Marko and Dwayne came over to him. Turning to look around, she heard David speak up.


Her eyes widened, heart speeding up as she saw him moving closer out of the corner of her eye. She opened her mouth slightly to lick dry lips.

"DO NOT."

Panting, she froze at the command as David bent over her, scowl on his face as he moved in. He kissed her then, very purposefully, lips and tongue working over her mouth and face, and she realized he was cleaning blood off her, albeit with far less warmth than he had the night before. She frowned slightly herself as she observed him, then glanced towards Paul, grunting as Dwayne's hand came off his nose. Dwayne licked the blood off his hand then, as Marko moved in to clean Paul's face much as David was doing with hers, though clearly with more relish.

David leaned up then, now smirking down at her. "All clear. I warned Paul it was a bad idea."

Blinking, she moved to sit up fully as he stood. She looked back and forth between David and Paul.

"Paul. Did you just…molest me… in my sleep…in front of everybody?" she blinked again, frowning.

He looked over at her sheepishly. "Um, yeah? You just smelled sooo good…I couldn't help myself."

Marko barked out a laugh. "Best laid plans, man." Now Paul just looked like a kicked puppy.

Sighing, Mina shook her head as she sat up properly on the couch. Opening her arms, she gestured at him to come closer.

"C'mere, Sunshine."
He smiled, coming over and kneeling into her embrace.

"You are an absolute idiot." She said fondly. "What were you thinking?"

"Hey! I'm not stupid." He stiffened, pulling back quickly, moving to get up. The air in the room was suddenly much cooler.

Mina's eyes got wide, and she quickly laid a light hand on his arm, her face now soft and serious.

"Paul, please, don't turn away. You're absolutely right. I'm sorry. You aren't stupid. You just misjudged how I'd react. That's easy to do. Please, don't go."

He turned to look at her warily.

"I was wrong to have said that. Please forgive me?" She said, smiling hopefully at him. Suddenly, his smile returned and he wrapped her in a tight hug. She giggled, gripping him back just as hard. "Safe to say you're a little crazy though, Sunshine?"

"Well, sure. You try hanging out with these guys for a while and see how that turns out." He huffed and released her, still smiling. "I'm sorry if I startled you."

"It's alright, it was most... of a good idea, even if I'm the one left with a bruised forehead. Maybe wake me first, seduce second...somewhere a little more private?"

His smile turned wicked, moving to embrace her again. "Sounds great – how about we give it a try now, just to see if really works?"

She took his face in her hands. "You devil. I think we have other things to do right now. Raincheck?"

"I'm holding you to that." He purred, wagging his eyebrows.

"Alright lovebirds, break it up, we're burning moonlight." David drawled, cutting through their banter.

Paul stood, offering a hand up to Mina. Dwayne had collected Laddie, helping him up the stairs of the entrance. David turned towards Star. "Come along." She frowned, but moved to join them.

Reaching the top of the cliff, Dwayne handed Laddie off to Paul.

"Whoohoo! You're with me, little dude!" Paul lifted Laddie up on his bike before hopping on himself.

Mina looked on a bit confused, till Dwayne hopped on his bike and held out his hand to her. Settling on, she slid her hands around, only to twitch a little as she felt the cool, smooth skin of Dwayne's muscular middle. He looked over his shoulder with a wicked smile. "Better hold on tighter than that." He started off with a lurch, which only made her grip tighter, and she blushed a little as she leaned closer to get a better hold, feeling his muscles bunch and shake as he chuckled.

Despite the fast start, he wound up at the back of the pack, Paul racing behind David as Laddie urged him to go faster.

"You did well with Paul." Dwayne said, turning just enough so she could hear him. "There's few things that bug him, but that's a major one."

Stretching up a bit to be closer to his ear as they rode, she continued, "I should have known better.
I'd never want to hurt him, or leave him feeling like I think less of him. Is there anything I should be careful of with anyone else?"

"Just have to take your chances and find out."

"Etiquette roulette with vampires, eh? Just perfect."

Dwayne side-eyed her with humor, patting her hands with one of his own. Gunning the bike, he caught up to the rest, easily pacing Paul & Laddie, now that they were out on the road. "Hey, Grampa – eat my exhaust!" he hollered, passing them easily.

"It is so on, dude!" Paul yelled back, and Laddie whooped in glee.

Swerving around David and Star, the two bikes dueled one another for the lead right up to the beach area below the rides. Dwayne spun with a wide flourish, spraying sand as he brought the bike to a halt. Mina had tensed and ducked her head as the boardwalk platform loomed close, until she felt the bike still as Dwayne laughed.

"You drive like an old lady!" he crowed at Paul, who'd come in just behind him, turning quickly to avoid the sand spray from his brother's bike.

"You would know, you're riding with one!" Paul replied. Mina's head turned slowly to look at Paul, and his eyes widened a little, though his smile never dimmed.

"Looks like you just lost that rain-check, little man." She purred, smirking as realization hit and his face fell.

"Aww, man!"

"So whipped." teased Marko through the group's bond, and his brothers laughed as they gunned their bikes once more, taking off towards the steps and their usual parking spot on the main deck.

David waved to the group as they dismounted, and they gathered around him. Pulling out what was surely some of the cash Mina had given him, he pulled off a few twenties, handing them to Star and Mina.

"Stay with Laddie, away from the boardwalk for a while." He said, looking pointedly at Star. She swallowed, nodding acceptance. "And stay away from Michael." He commanded through the bond. If her face could have paled it would have. As it was, her eyes widened, and she nodded again, grabbing Laddie's hand.

"Mina, why don't you go get something to eat with Star and Laddie?"

Mina looked up at David, and around at his brothers. She too nodded, face solemn. "Enjoy your dinner."

David's grin was all teeth. "Oh, we will. Just waiting for Lover Boy to join us." Star looked quickly back at him, eyes wide before her face turned sad. Turning away, she pulled Laddie along with her away from the group.

"We'll let you know where to meet us later." David said, as Mina turned to follow Star. She waved at Paul before catching up to the pair.

Paul sighed, throwing a leg over the railing as he faced David. "So, we gonna have a chance, or are you keeping her to yourself?"
David lit a cigarette, and shrugged. "It's up to her. And I'm not the one that tried to turn a quick roll into a live sex show. Don't think she's that kind of girl, yet."

Dwayne snorted. "Seemed like a long night for a 'quick roll'."

David gave him a cool look. "Didn't say that's what I was doing."

"But you had her on your lap in front of everyone!" Paul whined. "How's that any different?"

"That was just testing the waters. Wasn't gonna dive in right there. I was right though, little lion's a hot spring when you get her going." He smirked at Paul.

"Dude, you're killing me. She's killing me. At this rate she'll be gone before I even get a chance!" Paul cradled his head despondently in his hands.

"Poor baby bro. If you ask nice I'll help you forget her." Marko leaned close, sliding a hand up Paul's thigh while nuzzling his ear.

Paul's head popped up, even as he threw an arm around Marko to squeeze him fondly. "She still bent on destruction? You gonna let her?"

David looked at him thoughtfully. "She's sure. I'm undecided. Comments?"

Paul piped up immediately. "Keep her! She's fun, and she fits in."

"With you, you mean." Marko said. "I haven't seen enough to say yes. Besides being a beautician and a babysitter bodyguard, she hasn't exactly done much. And she's still talking about saving us from dying – is that even real?"

"As always, the devil's advocate." David smiled warmly at Marko. "Dwayne?" he turned to address the tawny man. "Thoughts?"

Dwayne looked, if possible, more serious than usual. "Can't think of anyone who's found out what we are and just rolled with it, without acting like they deserved to join us. Don't think she'll be happy at being turned though. She doesn't want to live now, let alone forever – might take some work to change her mind."

"Fair point. Your concerns have been noted."

"Great – now can we talk about me getting laid again?"

"Paul, I admire your tenacity." David drawled. "Take that up with Mina."

Dwayne broke in "after me, baby bro." Marko started cackling.

"Aww, man!"

David chuckled. "And on that note, let's move on to tonight's main event."

Marko piped up "Got that covered. Paul and I scoped it last night. Beach blanket bingo."

David looked at Marko. "You're sure they'll be there?"

Marko laughed darkly. "Oh yeah. After running off your beach party, we tracked those losers all the way back to the rat's nest. They'll all be out by the woods tonight, even the injured one."
"Perfect. Paul, care to call it?"

"Hell yeah! Dibs on earless!"

Dwayne grumbled a little but let it go. After all, the surfer boy had hurt Mina more than Laddie. "I'll take the little one then."

David grinned. "Now that we've got that sorted, all we need is the man of the hour – and here he comes now." He took a drag on his cigarette.

Michael stormed up, pulling Marko out of the way before grabbing David's coat to shake him. "Where is she?"

David blew smoke into Michael's face, chuckling darkly. "Take it easy, Michael."

"Where's Star, David?"

David gave Michael a cold look, gripping the boy's jacket lapels tightly. "Michael, if you ever want to see Star again, you better come with us now." Letting go, he tapped Michael's chest as he turned towards the bikes.

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Laddie reached out to Mina as he walked along with Star, and she let him grab her hand too. She looked down, smiling at him.

"So, how do you two feel about hamburgers and milkshakes?" Mina asked.

Star gave her a dry look, but Laddie piped up "Great!" He started pulling them out towards the diner they'd visited before. Mina looked over at Star and shrugged apologetically. Star just rolled her eyes and let Laddie drag them onward.

Sitting down in a booth, Laddie scrambled to the window, letting Star sit near the aisle, while Mina sat on the other side. The silence after the waitress took their orders was heavy, and Laddie turned toward the window, watching people walk past.

Mina looked over at Star. Gathering herself, she started talking.

"I admire your style, you always look so magical."

Star gave her a dark look. "Why don't you just leave. You know you still could." The words came out like a hiss.

Mina leaned away, sudden realization struck her. "Are you … jealous… of me? Because I'm not … like you?"

Star's eyes narrowed, but she said nothing.

"Star, if you really knew me, you wouldn't feel that way."

Star rolled her eyes, huffing in irritation. "You know nothing about how I feel. Go on and play the tramp for them. At least they're not bothering me anymore."

Mina gave her a sad look. "Star, what they do… it's not the same for them as it is for other boys."

"Whatever."
Their food arrived, and Mina poured some shake into a tall glass for Laddie before pouring her own. Star had only gotten some fries, and gave a side glance to Mina and Laddie's plates. Pretending not to notice, Mina put a straw into her milkshake, pushing it towards Star.

"Would you like some? I've got more than enough."

Star glared at her for a moment, but took the glass, turning her head and mumbling a "Thanks" very quietly. Pulling out another straw, Mina stuck it in the shake tin, raising it in something like a toast towards Star and Laddie. They all sat quietly for a while as they ate, but the atmosphere was a little lighter.

Laddie laughed, seemingly to himself, and Mina looked over at him. "What's so funny?"

He smiled at her. "I 'membered you stuck a fork in Paul's hand. That was awesome! I bet he'd try to steal your food again if he were here."

Star gave her an odd look as Mina laughed at Laddie's tale. "That was pretty funny, and you can be sure I'd fork him again if he tried!" She winked at Laddie, waving her fork for emphasis.

He piped up again, "Bet you wouldn't do that to David!"

"Oh, I don't know. I might try, but I'm sure he'd just catch it, probably just give me funny look."

Laddie giggled. "He's always doing that, like the way he looks at Star sometimes!"

Star looked a little alarmed. "Laddie, hush!"

Mina turned a soft look at Star. "I know it may not be what you want, but in his own way he does care for you."

Star gave her a cold look, defenses up again. "What he does is not caring or anything like it. How can you be so calm around them?! How can you stay when you don't have to?" Hissing again, she looked around, making sure they weren't attracting attention.

Mina sighed, leaning back in the booth slightly. "Star, I stay because I want to. I know I don't have much time left."

Star's face scrunched for a moment, eyes slitting as she tried to make sense of Mina's comment. Very softly she said, "You know what they're going to do…and you're OK with that?" She eyed Mina in shock.

Mina just shrugged sadly. "Pretty sure you're right about that."

"I prefer this option."

"No wonder they like you. You're out of your mind."

Mina smiled sadly. "I'm just sick."

"I'm just giving myself to them."

"Well…yes."

"So, you're just giving yourself to them?" She shook her head. "I'd rather jump off a cliff."

"I prefer this option."

"No wonder they like you. You're out of your mind."

Mina smiled sadly. "Pretty sure you're right about that."
Star looked away. "I'd leave if I could."

"I know. I understand why."

"How can you possibly understand?"

"I know I haven't been here long, but I have seen glimpses of how they really are, when they're not trying to blend in. It's something completely different. Completing that transition can't be easy."

"It's terrifying. It feels like I'm losing my soul. I never wanted to be like them!" Star looked ready to break down right there, head in her hands as she tried to avoid making a scene.

Mina sighed, reaching out to gently cover one of Star's hands with her own. "Would you like to go somewhere outside where we could talk more?" Star looked up, eyes wary, but she nodded. Sniffling, she picked up her napkin to dab her eyes and wipe her nose.

Mina turned to Laddie. "Did you want to go to the arcade again?"

"Yeah! Bet I can beat you at skee-ball!"

"I'm not sure that's a bet I want to make my little dude, but lead on anyway."

Laddie put his hands on Star's arm, pushing eagerly. "Come on Star! I want to go play!"

Star turned a sour look at Mina. "It'll give us more privacy. No one can listen in with all those bells and buzzers." Star nodded in acknowledgement. They got up, and Mina left a twenty on the table.

"It's okay to go to the arcade now, isn't it?" Mina asked Star as they walked.

Star's eyes drifted for a moment before she smiled tightly. "Yeah, they're gone." She dropped her head, hugging herself as moved along.

Mina eyed her. "Don't give up hope. Things might turn out OK."

Star shook her head. "I don't see how. David always gets what he wants in the end."

"Perhaps. But that doesn't mean everything turns out how he expects it to all the time. Michael might be stronger than he thinks."

"I wish I could believe that. It's the only thing that might keep me hanging on."

"I really admire you, Star. You've been through so much, and look how strong you are, how kind and brave despite it all. You probably feel like you're being dragged through hell, but I think if you can hold on a little longer, things really might get better." Star looked at Mina, face brightening slightly at the unexpectedly kind and hopeful words.

"Come on, guys, let's go play!"

Mina laughed and let Laddie grab her hand. "Easy there, buddy. We're coming." Looking at Star, she held out her other hand. Star paused a moment, then reached out, grasping Mina's hand with a cool one of her own, letting herself get pulled into the group and smiling at Laddie's enthusiasm as they stumbled into the arcade.

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Some time later the group wandered away from the games, Mina ruffling Laddie's hair as he held
tightly to the plastic sword he'd won with his game tickets.
"Laddie, how'd you like to go get an elephant ear?"
"A what?" the little boy looked at her, face scrunched. Even Star gave her a strange look.
"You know, those giant fried cakes covered in sugar?"
Star frowned. "You mean a funnel cake?"
"Um…yeah! One of those. I feel like some junk food."
"Yes! Can we get corn dogs too?"
"You are a bottomless pit, aren't you?" Mina gave Laddie a quick side hug. "How 'bout you take us to whichever you want first?"

He laughed and grabbed her hand again, dragging her and Star toward a brightly lit booth that smelled heavily of burnt sugar and hot oil.

Paying the vendor, the three went to sit at a table, Laddie with his own giant cake while Mina and Star shared another. As the little boy lit in to his with gusto, Paul appeared at his side.

"Hey bud, you gonna eat all that?" he laughed, snatching a piece off before hopping away.

"Paul!" Laddie yelled happily. "Look at my sword!" he picked it up, waving it around and poking it at his big brother.

"Whoa, careful there!" Paul chuckled, "You could poke an eye out with that thing!" He winked over at Mina and Star. Mina smiled, shaking her head. Star started looking around.

"He's not here, Star." David said, walking up to them. "Looks like your stud's a dud." He took a long drag, finishing his cigarette and dropping it to the ground. "He ran home to mommy. Didn't even eat first."

Star's eyes went wide. "He didn't…" she stopped, shaking for a moment as hope lit her face.

David's eyes narrowed. "Guess you two have more in common than I thought. Go on, run to lover boy if that's what you want. You know how this is going to end."

Star sucked in breath for a moment, caution warring with eagerness on her face. "I can go?"

"Get out of here, run to him for all the good it will do." He sneered.

She turned to Mina, casting her a happy look that faltered slightly as she quickly got up from the table. Mina smiled encouragingly back at her.

David's cool voice cut in as she turned to leave. "Back at dawn, Cinderella. And not before." The order was unmistakable. She shivered as she nodded without really looking at him, then turned and disappeared into the crowds.

David turned to Mina. "You two seemed to be getting along well." He drawled, eyebrow raised.

Mina shrugged. "Why shouldn't we? She's doing the best she can with what she's got, just like I am. And she was desperately in need of someone to talk to."
"She should be coming to us for that." The hard edge in his words betrayed the bitterness he felt.

"Meaning no offense, but it's not exactly surprising a young girl might have difficulty discussing anything, especially something like this, with a bunch of horny old men."

"Whaddaya mean 'old'?" Paul said, laughing as he stole another chunk of sweet off Laddie's plate. David looked at her, eyebrow high in amusement. "Doesn't seem to bother you much."

"I've had the benefit of having had a mostly decent life, and a serious relationship. He certainly wasn't as...mature...and I use that term loosely..." She looked pointedly at Paul, "as you lot but it's close enough. She's had nothing like that, going from one bad situation to another all her short life. I can't imagine why you'd think she'd just leap willingly into your arms when you know she's had bad experiences with men. Particularly after how you revealed what you'd done."

"She has been chatty, hasn't she?" David pulled out a cigarette, lighting up and taking a puff before speaking again. "Well, we didn't have a lot of say in the matter either."

"I had a feeling that was the case." She looked over at Laddie. "Little pitchers, hmm?" David nodded. Mina continued. "There's been a central cause to most of the tension I've sensed. It doesn't seem to fit well with how the rest of you seem to get along."

"You've got that right. Not much we can do from our side though."

"Well, there might be an answer to that coming along. If I can make it work." She sighed, rubbing her face with her hands.

"Is that so? Care to say a little more?"

Mina shook her head. "Perhaps somewhere else." David nodded, glancing at the crowds as they passed the group by.

Mina looked over the other men. "Well, you all look a little...disheveled. Dinner put up a fight?"

Marko laughed darkly. "Not even a little. Just really enjoyed digging in, know what I mean?" He grinned wickedly at her before biting a gloved thumb, eyes glinting with restrained malice.

"I'm sure I don't." Mina countered smoothly. "I'm beginning to see why Dwayne goes shirtless though, considering you and Paul managed to lose yours somewhere."

"I really liked that shirt, too!" Paul complained. "Worth it though – your chew toy won't be bothering you or Laddie anymore." He grinned wickedly, winking at Mina.

Her eyes went a bit wide for a moment before she caught herself. "I see." Breathing deep, she turned a calm and serious face towards David, bowing her head slightly at him. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it." He smirked, nodding back, before glancing over at Dwayne with a raised eyebrow. The darker man's eyes flashed with approval.

"Hey, chica – you know we take care of our own." Paul said, coming over to sit down between her and Laddie.

Dwayne came and sat down on the other side of her, as Paul grabbed a chunk of fried cake off Mina's plate, stuffing it in his mouth. Snorting at his manners, she tore a piece off herself, holding it out to Dwayne. Reaching out to hold her wrist, the darker man leaned in, carefully nipping at the
piece till there was nothing left, only to gently lick her fingers clean of powdered sugar. Mina's eyes were locked on his, heart beating quicker and blush blooming in her cheeks as he took her sugar dusted thumb into his mouth, drawing blunt teeth slowly along the pad as he released it.

A childish giggle broke the tension, as all eyes turned to Laddie. "You look like Rudolph all over!" he said, laughing again, as Mina's face turned even redder.

Turning her head, she started to laugh too. "I'm sure I do, and it's all Dwayne's fault." She smacked him lightly on the chest with the back of her hand, and he caught it, smiling darkly at her. He lifted her hand to his lips, kissing the knuckles with just a hint of tongue as he held her gaze again.

Breathing a bit raggedly, she withdrew her hand, finally breaking free from his thrall. She glared down at her plate and paused. All that was left of her cake was a small chunk and a few crumbs. She glared up at Paul, who sat chewing with a Cheshire grin, shaking slightly with ill-contained laughter.

"Might as well take it all." Grumbling, she picked up the last piece and chucked it at Paul's face, only to have him snap it up from the air easily, laughing at her surprise. The rest of the gang broke in to laughter as well, with Laddie nearly falling of his chair. Mina was left shaking her head, trying not to laugh along with them.

"Animal." She teased, glare softening to fondness. Paul gave a short howl, startling passersby, and Laddie started laughing again.

"Well kids, this has been fun but it's time to blow this joint." The men moved in sync, gathering up Laddie and Mina and trailing David as he headed towards the bikes. Laddie was put on Marko's bike, as Dwayne put a light hand on Mina's back, directing her once again towards his bike.

She leaned forward as they rode off. "I feel like I'm missing something?"

Dwayne turned his head slightly, to give her a mischievous smirk. "No worries. You'll see."
The Night Deepens

Rated M for explicit sex (F/M, M/M, Multi-pairing)

Arriving back at the cave, the group scattered as they filed in. Marko took Laddie off towards his nook, and they sat together, pulling out sketch pads and chatting amiably. David splayed out in his chair, lighting a cigarette and reaching for a nearby whisky bottle.

Dwayne guided Mina along, moving towards the back of the main area and continuing on, pausing to grab a candle for her benefit as they left the well-lit spaces behind. Paul followed, a bit more calmly than was his usual. Reaching a section that was far more a deep cave than demolished hotel, he finally stopped, putting the light down on the ground before turning to lean against a wall and pulling her close.

Mina moved in cautiously, resting her hands on the lapels of his jacket as he wrapped his around her waist. Paul moved in behind her, resting his hands on her shoulders and squeezing lightly. "Hey, chica, it's alright. We just wanted a chance to get a little closer before we lose you." His voice was soft as he bent down, kissing the back of her neck.

The way Dwayne smiled at her looked dark and hungry in the flickering light of the candle, and her breath hitched as he leaned down to kiss the other side of her neck. He mapped a slow path up to her jaw, to find her lips, kissing gently before diving in.

Mina's heart beat faster, and she started to shake as the men continued their ministrations. As Paul's hands roamed down her body, the sudden tang of fear souring the air was unmistakable.

Paul was first to speak as he and Dwayne paused, his voice gentle in her ear. "What's wrong, chica? Why so shy now?"

She swallowed audibly, working to calm herself as she turned her head away. "I'm sorry…I…don't know…I'm not sure I can handle you both…” her breath hitched again as a shudder went through her.

Dwayne's hand was light as he caressed her cheek, gently turning her back to face him. His smile was softer now, as he bent and kissed her forehead. Paul massaged her shoulders, easing some of the tension out of her as Dwayne spoke up, his voice a low rumble that she could feel as he held her.

"Mina, it's alright. We know you're new to this, let us show you how good it can be."

"We've got years of experience, chica. Just trust us, please" Paul whispered at her ear, before nipping softly at her neck again. "We want you to make you feel so good."

She blushed lightly at Paul's words, and Dwayne lifted one of her hands to his mouth, mouthing the back of her hand slowly, tongue and lips working with along knuckles to draw enticing sensations. Her breathing turned ragged, tension draining from her as their combined attention gentled her concerns.

Dragging her eyes from Dwayne, she turned towards Paul. "But, what do I do?"
"Anything you want, Mina. Anything or nothing at all." Dwayne said.

She bent her head again, struggling to say something, and Dwayne could feel her cheek heating under his hand as he cupped it.

"What…if I want you to do something?" She whispered.

Paul purred in her ear, "Tell us, chica. There's very little we won't do."

"I like…when you were touching and kissing each other. Would you share that with me?"

"Girl, you make it too easy." Paul chuckled. "We got to show you some things so you can make it hard on us."

Mina started giggling. "Pretty sure it's already hard on you."

"Hmm, you might be right…wanna check?" He ground his hips against her. She yelped, grabbing on to Dwayne as she was smushed into him, ducking her head and laughing into his chest. She missed the glances the men gave each other, pleased to see her more at ease.

Paul stroked lightly up her back and down her arms, nipping playfully at her shoulder as he did. Turning her head to the side, she opened a hand, and he slid one of his into it. She traced along his fingers till her hand was now across the back of his, gently grasping it and bringing it towards her lips. She traced the lines in his palm slowly with lips and tongue, dragging bottom teeth slowly up his thumb. He moved closer, growling softly in her ear and she sucked his thumb into her mouth, rolling her tongue against the pad, only to jump slightly at the shock of something sharp as she trailed over his fingernail. As she let go with a 'pop' the faint scent of blood hit both of the men.

"Paul." Dwayne's tone was dark.

"Mina! I'm sorry, chica! Are you OK? Girl, you just drive me so wild." Paul chattered in her ear, trying to turn her towards him more so he could see the damage.

"Well, I might need a little help."

"Anything, chica, just name it."

Mina turned sly eyes towards him, smile twitching at her lips. "Kiss it and make it better?"

He looked at her with glittering eyes and a toothy grin. "Hell yeah, lemme pour some sugar on you babe."

She turned a bit more and he laid a cool hand on her cheek, leaning in to capture her lips. His hand slid gently into her hair as the kiss deepened, and he sought her tongue with his own to seal the cut, even as he thrilled in the teasing trace of blood.

Dwayne was busy, shucking his jacket before moving to trace lightly across her ribs, teasing the underside of her breasts, sliding down her stomach to graze soft curls and across a hip to grip and drag across the curve of her ass. Mina arched into his touch even as she broke from Paul's kiss, her chest heaving as she caught her breath.

Paul turned her back towards his brother, removing his own long coat. He resumed his gentle attack on the sides of her neck even as he ran cool fingers up the insides of her thighs, following their curve to trace across her mound and slide towards her hips, chuckling as she gasped.
Dwayne ran his hand through her hair, caressing down her back as she held on to him. She looked up, her smile turning from light to something deeper before turning to rub her cheek gently against his chest. A quick flash of a glance up to see the heat in his gaze, and she began using teeth to gently scrape up the curve of a firm pec, working her way over to drag slowly across a firm nipple, biting and sucking before continuing down as both he and Paul caressed her. As her mouth and tongue traced over taught stomach muscles, she opened his jeans, sliding them past his hips and over the curve of his ass, stroking as she pushed the fabric down. She was nearly crouching in front of him now, nipping lightly at his navel, then kissing down the dark trail of hair as her hands moved to encircle his hard cock.

She looked up again, questioning, seeking reassurance, and he smiled down with hooded eyes, hand coming to rest gently on the back of her head, fingers curling tenderly through her hair. Placing a steadying hand on his chiseled hip, she bent and took little more than the tip of him in her mouth, letting her tongue slide down part of his length, as he groaned with pleasure. She worked him lightly with her other hand, sliding up his silky skin towards her chin before stroking back down to curl around his sac, rolling it gently. He rumbled so deep she could feel it vibrating in his cock and thighs. Pausing to look up she was caught by the heat in his eyes, and the waft of desire coming from her enveloped them.

"Ah, fuck that's hot." Paul groaned as well, now moving to crouch behind Mina, nipping harder at her neck as he slid one hand onto a breast while the other slid up her thigh to dip under her shorts, rubbing across her slick sex.

She moaned as he fondled her, suddenly taking more of Dwayne's length than she was prepared for. She released him, coughing and ducking an embarrassed face towards his hip. Paul chuckled and moved his hands, now guiding her to stand up again.

"Don't feel bad, chica. He takes some getting used to." He whispered in her ear.

Dwayne lifted her chin. "I liked that." The dark look in his eyes had her blushing even as she smiled back.

"I know something else you'll like big guy" Paul leaned to the side, running his hand into Dwayne's hair and pulling him close to enough to kiss. Mina watched rapt as their lips met, pulling apart just enough to show tongues before moving closer again. Their hands slid down to wend around Mina, pulling her close just as they parted.

Dwayne turned to look at her, eyes shining as he bent to kiss her, wrapping his arms around her waist. Paul was kissing and nipping at her neck in a way that had her squirming even as his hands went to unbutton her shorts, sliding them down till they dropped at her feet. She stepped out of them as Dwayne broke their kiss, working gently to lift her shirt over her head.

Paul moved close, front pressing against her back as he purring in her ear. "Relax, beautiful. Let us take care of you." He wrapped an arm around her middle, sinking slowly to one knee, balancing her so that her left leg lay draped over his, letting her right hang loose. The bit of space between her hips and his allowed him to lean her back slightly, putting her on display for his brother.

Dwayne knelt in front of her, moving in to kiss her deeply. He pulled back, smiling darkly and stroking her cheek gently as he kissed down her throat to her chest, laving one breast as he pinched the other gently, switching as her breath hitched and she rolled her chest up, pulling him close as she gasped in pleasure.

Paul's free hand caressed up her leg, cupping her mound teasingly as she ground her pelvis in vain, her hungry sex meeting nothing but air as he ran fingers all around where she wanted them to be.
Whining, she curled and stretched in frustration, earning rumbling chuckles from her tormentors.

Moving down her body, Dwayne mimicked her earlier attentions, trailing slowly down her stomach to finally crouch down to face her nest of curls. Placing a hand on her hip and moving her loose leg with his free hand to spread her wider as he dipped in to her mound, first running a cool tongue over her clit, then licking slow stripes down to her cunt and back. She moaned, hands winding in to his hair. She tried to grind up into his mouth, only to be pinned back by his steadying hand as he kept a maddeningly slow pace.

Keeping one hand around her middle, Paul trailed the other around, coming up to run across her cunt lips from behind. He slid a finger into her slick, curling gently insider her before pulling out to repeat with two fingers, then three.

She was moaning and writhing under their efforts, hands locked in Dwayne's hair. Sucking gently before he bit with flat teeth against her neck Paul whispered in her ear. "Just relax now, Mina. We've got you."

He curled fingers in her dripping sex, slowly stretching her and coating his fingers heavily in her slick. Pulling out, he dragged the trail of wetness back to her ass, coating her well before sliding a finger easily inside. She whined a bit, and Dwayne increased his attention, driving his tongue up into her cunt before sucking lightly on her clit. Her gasp and roll had Paul growling as she squeezed down on his finger. As she rolled back, he slid in another finger, curling and stretching slow as Dwayne plied her front.

Pushing against Dwayne's hold as she tried to rock into him, frustration and need driving away any sense of discomfort. As she arched again, Paul slid a third finger into her as Dwayne sucked on her clit again, edging her close to release, leaving her moaning, body covered in sweat and the air thick with the scent of her desire.

They slowed down then, working her gently till she tensed and rolled between them, body twitching as she reached back, finding Paul's arm and squeezing tightly in time with his fingers slipping slowly in and out. Pulling his fingers free of her, he loosened his pants. Working with Dwayne, they moved Mina back on his leg, and Paul slid his length into her sopping cunt from behind.

She gasped, throwing her head back as she reached back to grab his hip. He wrapped both arms around her tightly, curling in to her and holding them both still for a long moment.

"Breath deep, Mina. Here we go." She whined as he pulled out, only to cry out as he buried himself to the hilt in her ass. She trembled, making soft noises as he held her, and her hands gripped his. Dwayne moved up to pepper light kisses on her cheeks, across her forehead to her lips and trailing down her throat.

"Keep breathing, chica. You're OK. I've got you." Paul spoke low and gentle in her ear.

Dwayne caressed her, slowly spreading her legs again. Dipping down to take her clit in his mouth, he suckled it as he ran a finger in to her slick. Her gasp turned to a wail as he worked her quickly back to frenzy. Paul barely moved at all as she twisted between the two of them, and as her climax hit, he held her tightly, groaning deeply as he held back despite the delicious feel of her clenching around him.

Dwayne moved closer as she came down off her high, gently lifting her arms off of Paul's to drape around his own neck. Looking up, Mina was pinned by the feral look in Dwayne's golden eyes, as he ran his hands to her hips, lifting slightly as he ducked his own to spear her with his rigid cock.
Her breath stuttered out as she gripped the crests of his shoulders, the top of her body rocking ever so slightly. Giving her time to adjust, the men caressed her, teasing at pebbled nipples and nibbling down her ears to the base of her neck to suck new marks in skin already liberally speckled.

Her breathing changed as they went, breathy sighs that dropped and lingered. Dwayne was the first to move, slowly rocking his hips to draw out and glide back in. She gasped at the first few rolls, only to moan low and arch as he sheathed himself inside her.

Taking that as their cue, they moved together, holding her gently between them. The sensations rippled through her till she was mewling, hands flexing and grasping on Dwayne's shoulders. He growled, speeding up and moving off tempo from Paul's thrusts. As he continued, she flung her head back, supported on Paul's shoulder as she braced her hands on Dwayne's chest, fingers digging in as she wrapped her legs around his waist, cries of pleasure spilling from her lips in time with his thrusts.

The change in angle let Dwayne drive deeper, bottoming out again and again as he gripped her hips. Paul kept a gentler pace with a hazy smile, hands teasing at her breasts as he nuzzled her cheek, his breathy growls sending shivers through her. He turned her head more and he kissed her loosely as her cries turned to long moans, her body tensing up as she rushed towards a new peak. Dwayne slowed, pumping gently in time with Paul, and leaning in to the crook of her neck as they crested with her, sharp teeth biting with care despite the ferocious roar that poured out of him as he came.

They cradled her as she trembled with the aftershocks, kissing and stroking her gently. Dwayne lifted her hips as Paul pulled out, moving to sit cross-legged so Dwayne could seat Mina in his lap. She reached for him, sliding a warm palm over his cheek to tangle in long, dark hair, pulling him close for a deep kiss, as his hand reached to cup her face as well.

Paul kept stroking her, hands sliding teasingly across her skin, fingers trailing to dip down and play with her clit. She jumped slightly, arching up and gripping Dwayne tighter as Paul quickly brought her to orgasm again, mouth open soundlessly as her hips rocked against his hand. His eyes flashed gold as he bit gently into her shoulder. Licking the mark closed, he gathered her close as Dwayne released her with a kiss to her forehead.

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David glanced down towards the back of the cave, smirk twitching at his lips. "You planned on getting to know her a little better, now would be your chance."

Marko looked up from playing hangman with Laddie. He shrugged, but stood up. "Hey bud, why don't you finish this with David?" His eyes flashed amusement as Laddie gathered up the paper, eager to keep the game going.

He took his jacket off, draping it on the davenport before stalking towards the dim light flickering in the darkness way in the back.

Dwayne stood up, leaving Mina curled up in Paul's lap. She and Paul continued kissing softly, as she stroked his chest and his hand ran freely over her back from shoulder to thigh and back. Marko appeared suddenly, kneeling down next to the cozy pair.

"What would your husband say?" he said, playful smirk turned dark in the dim, flickering light.

Lifting her head, she gave him a thoughtful look.

"Well, certainly not much in his present condition." She sighed. "And it's not like I'm cheating."

"Oh, how do you figure that?"
"Pretty sure being a widow covers that." Smirking, she added, "And technically, I haven't slept with another living soul." Marko and his brothers chuckled, and Paul nuzzled into her neck.

"I thought we were past that talk of us being 'dead'?' he whispered, biting softly as he talked.

She shivered a little, goosebumps running down her arm at the feel of his lips.

"Animal" she said, fondly. "Are you a 'living soul' though?" He shrugged, and kept working on her shoulder.

Marko's eyes glittered, and he reached a hand to run through Paul's hair. Paul and Mina looked up then, Paul smiling as he leaned towards the curly-haired man to collect a deep kiss that turned more heated as it kept going. Finally, Paul broke away, smiling warmly at his brother. The scent of sex lingering on Mina was still strong, but it couldn't mask the fresh wave of interest wafting from her as she watched them.

"I don't suppose you actually were a model for classical statues?" she whispered, smiling up at Marko.

The men laughed. "I'm not that old, babe. I take it you like what you see?" She nodded, dropping her eyes for a moment before meeting his again. "How 'bout you show me how much?" he purred, eyes now half-lidded and dark as he smiled hungrily at her.

Paul whispered in her ear "Be bold, chica. He likes a firm hand."

She smiled back at Marko then, matching him with heated look of her own. She slid off of Paul's lap, moving so only one knee was bent under her, and reached for Marko, one hand sliding into his hair as she laid the other on his chest.

She twitched suddenly, a slight jump that had her leaning in and drawing back in a breath, and Marko's eyes went up in question. A quick intake of breath and her hands turned claw-like, grip tightening as all her muscles locked up. Her eyes went wide, and Marko's did as well, his own hands coming to grip her arms as emotions and sensations flooded into his mind. "David?!"

David's head snapped up. He lifted Laddie up, setting him in the wheelchair with a "STAY!" before disappearing into the back. He knelt, putting hands on the pair, catching just a bit of the exchange before Mina gasped loudly, hands releasing only to pull Marko into a tight embrace.

"Mina." David's voice sounded loud and harsh, echoing slightly around the group.

She jerked, pulling herself away from Marko. She turned, panting hard, glancing at David before casting her eyes down, bending her head till she was bowed before him, still naked, hands flat on the ground. The men around her exchanged concerned glances. Marko was quiet, eyeing her warily.

Shakily exhaling a deep breath, she spoke. "I almost did it again. I was wrong, David. So very wrong. Please forgive me." She laid a tentative hand on his boot, her breathing hitching as she tilted up to look at him where he crouched beside Marko. Bending his mind towards her now, he sensed pain, guilt…and hope?

"You were right all along. You do need to see what's coming, what should be happening. You all need to know it, all of it, every detail. Not so you can change it, so you can make sure it happens."

"You mean make sure my brothers die?" he growled.

She sat up further, resting a hand on his bent knee and shaking her head. "Marko, when I touched
him, I saw, I finally saw what I've been missing. It's you, all of you together. This only works if you know what should be happening."

"You keep saying that – what should be happening. What do you mean?" Dwayne cut in.

"I mean, what appears to happen, what I've seen happen."

Dwayne looked at David, who frowned, looking back down at the girl sitting in front of him. She looked around at them all. "Don't you see? What I saw happen, what appears to happen, but maybe not what really is happening."

David's eyebrows went up. "You mean…"

Mina broke in. "What you did with the maggots, and at the cabin…I saw what you wanted me to see, not what was real." She reached now for David's cheek, resting her hand lightly. "It's what I was missing, thinking like me and not like you, why there was something about the visions that kept bothering me. I didn't count on what you can do. The images I've seen were real…felt real…but could be, will be? …illusions." She turned to cast a worried look at Marko quickly before turning back. "You can do that, even in the daylight?"

David was quiet for a moment. "It would take all of us to make a convincing illusion during the day."

Mina nodded, turning then to Marko, gently taking his hand in hers before letting go. "I'm sorry for what you felt before. I'm afraid it's going not going to get any easier." Turning back to David, she continued. "I've never known anyone that could sense what I'm going through. Can you actually see it, or just feel it?"

David looked at her, considering. "I've seen flashes of images from you. The others only get feelings."

"I need to you all to see what happens to Marko, what happens to you all. Can you share with them if I can share with you?"

He nodded again. She shivered a little then, rubbing hands up her arms to ease the chill before looking at the men that surrounded her. "Is it OK if I put some clothes on first?"
To Dawn and the Day

(warnings – slight blood play)

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David's gaze lingered on Mina's bare form as he smirked. "You look fine to me."

She arched an eyebrow at him, tinge of humor in her eyes. "I'm sure Laddie will think so too."

Tilting his head in acknowledgement, David stood up. "I'll take care of him." Dwayne gave him a look, which David returned till Dwayne dropped his gaze. "He doesn't need to be a part of this."

Reaching for her clothes, Mina agreed. "The less he knows, the more real it will be for him, and for those around him."

Dwayne grunted in reluctant agreement.

Still kneeling, Mina pulled on her shirt. As Marko moved to stand, she put a hand on his arm. Frowning, he covered it with his own, ready to pull free if things went strange again. When nothing happened, he relaxed slightly. She gave him a soft look. "I'm sorry. We really haven't had time to get to know each other. I want you to know, as much as I can, I'm here for you, willing to help you through this any way I can."

The look he gave her was frosty at best. "There's nothing you can give me that I can't get from my brothers. Nothing I'd want, anyway."

She smiled kindly at him despite his words, patting his arm gently before standing up and getting her shorts and shoes back on. Still scowling, he stood as well and turned away, only to have Paul reach out through their bond.

"Dude, what gives? Give her a chance, man."

Marko shook his head, walking away. "Gonna take more than being a good lay to make her one of us."

Dwayne shook his own head, turning toward Mina. "Sorry, Mina. He's a tough nut to crack. He'll come around."

Paul laughed. "Choice words, my dude. Dwayne's right though, that's just how Marko is."

Mina smiled gently at them both. "It's OK. I'm pretty sure what happened when we touched didn't add to my appeal."

Paul looked at her. "What did happen? It didn't seem like much but you both looked pretty wired when it stopped."

Mina placed a hand on his shoulder. "Let's just work with David on this, you'll understand better then."

"All right, chica. Let's get this over with." He slung an arm around her waist, giving her a squeeze as they moved back to the main area.
David was just laying a deeply sleeping Laddie down on the bed. Joining the group, he moved back to his 'throne', sitting down with legs stretched out. He tilted his head, looking at Mina. "Well?"

Mina frowned at him. "I'm not exactly sure how to start, I've never been able to share this before. Would it help you see better if we're touching?"

David grinned wickedly. "Couldn't hurt to find out."

She came closer and he scooped her up, settling her sideways on his lap, chuckling as she squeaked. On cue, his brothers closed in around them. Mina glanced at them all, taking a deep breath. She turned more fully towards David, and cupped his face in her hands, and he mirrored her, laying his loosely around the base of her neck. She felt the hands of the other men as they moved in to touch them both.

"Brace yourselves." She stared directly into his icy eyes, her gaze slowly unfocusing as she dipped in to the hazy wave of static that lived in her head. Finding their thread, she brought it near, concentrating on the events closest to now and rolling forward as slowly as she could. Dimly she could feel the tension in her hands increasing where they griped David's face as his grasp tightened as well, and gasps of shock turning to deepening growls sounded faintly in her ears.

In her mind, images of fire and smoke and the echo of an unearthly roar faded slowly, and she climbed back up out of herself and into the here and now. David's face was in full display, eyes red-gold and features sharp, his lips drawn back in a soundless snarl. She heard his sentiment echoed around her, and she was sure if she looked, she'd find them all with monstrous features rampant. With exaggerated care, David lifted her off his lap, setting her to stand aside as he stood and turned away, air around him practically humming with his barely contained rage.

Mina stood quietly, waiting for the outburst or for the storm to pass.

"You said the vision was unclear?" David growled at her.

"It's changed a bit already, with your knowing. The future is always in motion."

"Max. What we saw. Did his actions or words change, now we know?"

Pausing, she tried to think back to what had been and what was now. "I don't think so, from what I can recall his part, actions and words haven't changed much at all."

David roared, his anger echoing through the cavern, answered in the growls and snarls of his brothers. "That bastard." He hissed, seeming to deflate, anger replaced by something closer to melancholy. His head bent a moment, and turning, she saw them all standing, sad and quiet. The sudden silence was deafening, disturbed only by Mina's steady breathing.

"He's already cast us aside." His words coming out softly then turning harder. "Well, two can play that game."

Moment gone, he turned about, looming over Mina. Clawed hands grasped her shoulders as he grimaced wickedly down at her. "And now?"

Steeling herself, she met his fiery eyes. "Now you know, and by your own words you'll have to work together and make those kids think they've succeeded, here today, and at the cabin this evening."

"We're just going to let them in here, let them attack Marko?" Paul growled, moving closer to his brother.
"And take Laddie?" Dwayne added.

"You knew all along that Michael would bring those kids into our lair, that it could mean our death, and you did nothing." Marko came stalking up behind Mina as he spoke, low growl rumbling like a lion hunting its prey.

She sent a desolate look towards David. "Can you help them understand?"

David stared at her for a moment before turning his gaze on Marko. The curly blonde snarled his displeasure, but backed away.

"She says we couldn't have stopped them without making things worse. I believe her." David said, tone flat, addressing them all.

"Why?!" Marko snarled, "Why should we believe her words at all! She would see us dead."

"No, Marko. I would see you live. I've told you this. That's why I'm here, that's what I've been trying for all along."

"You'll let them near us as we sleep!"

"I'll be there, if you'll let me. Show me how to wake you so you can be prepared when they come. I don't want you to get hurt, not any of you. You have to show me how to help you." She looked up at David. "How do I wake you without alerting them?"

On his transfigured face, his grin looked truly feral. "Just shout." He tapped her head. "And bleed a bit."

She nodded solemnly. "Is that really all?"

"We'll all be on alert, now we know they're coming." He gripped her throat then, glowing eyes glinting in a hard face. "If Marko comes to harm, I'll personally tear you apart."

Placing a hand on his arm, she looked up at him with sorrowful eyes. "I can't promise he won't get hurt. I don't know how what you do and what those kids try to do will work together. I can only promise that I'll do what you tell me will wake you, so you can work your illusion. It'll be up to you to make sure anything that happens is survivable."

Marko broke in, body stiff and voice hard. "Why not just kill them here, before they can do anything?"

Mina turned her head slightly, and David let her, loosening his hold. "You're not the only family fighting to live. Michael and his brother are just as close to each other, and their mother, as all of you are together, and so are those odd boys. If you do something here, those left may come back with more people, and a better plan. Another day and you'll again be vulnerable, and this time you'll have no warning. They wouldn't have to stake you up close, they could burn everything, and you with it."

David growled down at her. "This is quite the test of your little story."

She smiled sadly, but stood resolute. "I know. But I'm here and I mean to keep my word, and keep your family safe."

Releasing his hold, he stepped back slightly, face smoothing back to human appearance.

Dwayne spoke up then. "There were…remnants of us, in your vision. If we survive tomorrow night,
there won't be. Won't they know then that something's up?"

David nodded at him, looking back down at Mina with raised eyebrow. "Well?"

She sighed. "That is a concern. There should be something left but I'm not sure what to do. In the old movies, the vampires just dissolve into dust when destroyed." She wrinkled her nose, pondering solutions. "Is there anything you have...laying around...here, that you could...I don't know...bring with you? Some real...parts... they'd think was you?"

The group paused a moment to consider, when Paul pipped up "Dude, the bonfire!"

His brothers turned questioningly toward him. "You know, we pitched all the leftovers into the fire last night. I bet if we grabbed some of that it'd work...aren't there usually a few bones 'n shit left?"

"Good idea, Paul." David said approvingly. "There enough time for that tomorrow?" he tilted his head towards Mina.

She shrugged. "You saw as well as I did...it's not really clear how long after sunset you make your appearance. They don't remember the dog till he barks at you, so it's plausible."

He chuckled a little. "I can't wait to see them running in fear."

She hummed a bit. "This is where some of the grey areas show up." He quirked an eyebrow at her in question and she continued. "Do they really see you coming, or just think they do? We know Dwayne comes through the chimney...but does he really fly down it, or just break through from the back? There's nothing to show exactly how Paul and you get in. And if things go as we plan, Marko will be there, but obviously not directly involved. Paul will have to be careful with his words to the kids – 'you killed Marko', not 'you tried to kill', there's a chance they'll remember that later. There's a lot going on that's not clear, it'll be up to you to figure out how to make it work. My ability is useless in the moment, you'll be on your own."

David looked thoughtful. "And Max will know I'm faking when he finds me. He'll be able to tell the rest of gang is alive too. You're sure it won't change what he does, what happens to him?"

Mina gave him a bleak look. "This isn't an exact science, David. Everything's still moving, till the moment itself passes. But the words and actions he takes, you could read that he's playing along with you. He seems to want Lucy badly enough to say or do whatever he thinks will get her. But if you do something radically different during your fight, there will be no way to know till it's much too late." She frowned a moment. "If Max can tell, what about Star and Michael? She knew you were messing with him?"

David chuckled. "She knew because I didn't try to hide it. They'll see what I want them to see. They haven't been around long enough to know the tells. And by the time they can check, we'll be gone, and they'll be human."

"They should be dead." Marko growled. "Traitors. Just wait till she gets here tonight."

Mina shot a significant look at David. He nodded slightly. "Marko, go to bed."

Marko turned towards David, eyes fierce in rebellion. David stood, placid but implacable. They stared at each for long moments before Marko's gaze flicked away for a second. Looking back, he finally dropped his eyes, breathing out as he did. He turned away, heading towards their nest. Paul caught David's eye, and getting a nod, set off after his brother.

Dwayne's gaze followed the pair, before he turned back toward David. "I don't blame him for being
Neither do I. But we're sticking to the plan." Dwayne nodded, then turned and followed the others. David turned now to Mina. "You'll need to come with me to our nest. We won't feel safe with you there, but you'll have to be close to wake us before it starts to go down."

She nodded. "It's better if I'm not here for them to find anyway." She made a face, looking up at him questioningly. "I'm sure you've had...pets...before. Is there some way to make it seem like you've finished with me? So they won't look for me?"

"You think of everything, don't you?" He grinned, moving close. "You're not getting out of this yet."

She shook her head. "I know, I'm not asking for you to end me now. But while my not being in my usual spot will help, it might be good to leave traces...if that's what you usually do."

He reached out quickly, grabbing a wrist in an iron hold. She barely had time to gasp as he ran a razor nail down her arm, angling the quick spray of blood out away so it spattered the floor around his chair. Just as swiftly, he pulled the wound to his mouth, trailing the cut with a cool tongue that soothed and closed the wound as it went.

She gave a slight shudder, paling slightly as she stared at her own arm, eyes wide.

"Problem?" He smirked down at her.

"I'm not big on the sight of my own blood. Or anybody else's, really."

He barked out a laugh. "I guess your god really is an iron."

Her lips twitched. "I did tell you."

"You're be able to wake us? It will take more than just some noise in your head."

"Yes. For your family I will." She looked at him squarely.

He nodded, proffering a gentlemanly arm. "Allow me to show you our inner sanctum." She gave him a soft look, taking his arm as they walked together towards the back. Turning, he directed her to a broken opening mid-way up in one of the walls. He made a bit of a face. "I'm afraid we'll have to crawl a bit; this section isn't made for easy access."

Looking up at the hole, she made a face as well. "You do this every night?"

He chuckled. "I've got other options, but that path isn't really made to drag in a body I want to keep intact. This is it."

"You know I can't see a thing, right?"

He sighed. "I'll go first then. You can just keep a hand on my leg. Or my ass. Your preference."

She snorted. "I don't know who's worse, you or Paul. I'm sure I can manage to keep a hand on your leg."

"No fun, right till the end." He smirked before diving in to the tunnel, and she made haste to follow.

Coming out into a larger space, David picked her up, dropping down a bit before moving up and placing her off toward the right side, in what felt like a bit of an alcove. She still couldn't see
"David, where am I, exactly?"

She heard his voice in the blackness. "A little ledge behind where I'm hanging. If you're careful, you can reach out and touch me. That should help you wake me before they get to us."

There was a disgruntled snort from somewhere off to her left.

"You sure you'll be able to wake us?" Marko's voice was flat with disapproval.

Mina felt around. "The rock is rough enough. I should be able to break skin on it. You don't need that much blood, right?"

"Oh no, we'll need quite a lot to wake us up." Marko deadpanned.

"Dude, cut it out, she's trying to help."

"And I'm telling her how."

"Marko" David's voice held finality. There was a bit of shushing and whispers before it was quiet again.

"It's a wonder you get any sleep at all." Mina whispered. "They're as bad as little kids."

"Hey! Whoops." Paul was clearly still listening. "Ow, quit it, man."

David let out a sigh next to her, and she giggled.

"It's a wonder indeed." He sighed again. "Can you reach me?"

Gripping the rock near her tightly with one hand, she reached out with the other, pawing at empty air till suddenly she felt his coat. Patting around she felt the edges of it, and his stomach.

"Feel free to move a little higher if you like."

"What?" She followed his suggestion, till she realized she'd found his pants, and a distinct bulge. She made a noise of exasperation. "David!"

Laughs echoed in the small space. "Well, it would wake me up."

"I can tell you're already up. Or down. Whatever. I assure you that will be the last resort." She snorted.

"Kinda makes me question your commitment, Mina."

"I'm crouched in the dark, over a blind drop, in a place that smells like a charnel house, and probably is. And I get to stay awake here for hours to keep watch for you. Exactly what part of that is lacking commitment?"

She heard his deep chuckle. "Good point. Catch you later."

"Rest well, David. And the rest of you. I'll be watching out for you."

She shuffled a bit in the nook, getting as close to comfortable as she could. She went over her memories of the next event to keep herself occupied, trying to pinpoint when the kids would arrive,
but the time of day was frustratingly vague. She listened a moment, but the silence was deafening in the nook they were in. Every movement she made sounded like a bull in a china shop.

It seemed as though her eyes were finally adjusting to the dark, and she realized a very faint glimmer of sunlight was shining in the distance. Its slight illumination made the area she was in seem that much darker, and she had to really crane her head around the rock outcrop to even see it. Which was probably for the best, she thought. If the kids saw her, they might try to rescue her, or stay to fight and try to kill more of her charges. That would change everything, might ruin it all.

She felt around the edges of the space she was tucked in to, making sure she could curl up and be out of sight when they came in. Satisfied, she started to sing in a very soft whisper, going through as many songs as she could think of to keep herself active and awake as the time passed, trying to estimate the hours by how many songs she'd gone through.

She hit a wall at one point, eyes drooping as she fought to stay awake. She considered scraping her hand just to have the pain wake her up, but realized it might come across as a false alarm for the men she watched over. She scrubbed her face with her hands, and shrugging, threw her head back against the rock with a thud that jarred her skull and sent sparks floating in front of her eyes. That helped a bit, even if it did make her a little dizzy.

Sudden noise coming from the far end of the tunnel made her snap to attention. Hearing whispers, she quickly scraped the back of her hand hard against the rocks. Reaching out with the now raw, wet and painful hand, she angled down, finding a solid chest and gripping it as hard as she could. Taking a deep breath, she screamed David's name in her mind, imagining it loud enough to shake the walls.

A cold hand griped hers, and she could see his eyes glowing in the darkness. The sound of the intruders got closer and she saw him blink, and heard slight rustlings from the men around him. She pulled her hand back, scrunching herself into the alcove as best she could.

"Good luck." She thought to him, and saw him blink again as his head turned toward the children bent on bringing death to his pack.
Courting Death

(warnings for mild gore)

[author's note ...i'm back...]

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The three boys (children, Mina noted, actual children. Could they even comprehend what they were trying to do?) crept into the inner part of the cave, bickering and joking as they went, oblivious to the bodies hanging above them till the last moment. Mina heard them yelp in surprise (not even children, more like toddlers, really), their lights flashing over the apparently vulnerable men hanging like bats from a crosshatch of pipes. She cringed at the callous remarks, fighting to stay still and quiet as she listened to the infant hunters climbing the wall near Marko, knowing if she turned to watch she’d lose control.

The last thing she heard before all hell broke loose was "No, don't even!"

Suddenly the hollow was shaking with the sound of Marko's screams, followed by the other vampires. The high-pitched notes of the young boys jumped in, punctuated by the wet thud of Marko's body hitting the cavern floor. Mina shook where she hid, tears pouring down her face, hands wrapped tightly across her mouth to keep from adding to the cacophony.

The voices of the children started moving away rapidly, followed by David's roar of rage. Mina uncurled, looking down to see Marko still writhing and screaming while cradled in Paul's arms, the dreaded stake protruding not from his chest but from his stomach. Fluid continued to bubble from the wound as Paul tried to hold him still. Nearby, Dwayne was cradling his own hand, the flesh red and blistered.

Mina tried to gauge how far up she was, but still couldn't see enough to tell. Giving up, she closed her eyes and jumped, hoping she'd manage to land on some softer rocks. Right when she was sure she'd hit hard, she was caught, by Dwayne if the hiss was any indication. She opened her eyes as he set her down, his golden-eyed visage frowning at her before turning back towards Marko.

Dwayne reached again for the stake, only to nearly jump as it burned deeply into his skin once more. Moving closer, Mina looked at Dwayne and Paul, their transformed faces bent in shared agony, vibrating with frustrated need to help their fallen brother. Reaching out, she put a tentative hand on the stake. The two men immediately covered her hand with their own, watchful eyes burning in to her. Gripping it tight with ease, she slowly pulled it out, Marko crying out again as she did.

She tossed the object away, swallowing a sob as she looked at the damage. The sting of salt bit her as she wiped her eyes, and she glanced at the raw skin on her hand. Squaring her shoulders, she leaned forward till her bloodied hand brushed Marko's lips. He grabbed it, instantly sinking sharp fangs in her wrist just above her palm. Yelping, she turned her head, fighting to hold still despite the pain shooting up her arm.

"Mina!" Dwayne put a hand on her arm but couldn't bear to try pulling it free. Paul moved so he was at Marko's head, resting his hands on his brother's arms, ready to hold him back as Dwayne called for David.

David put a hand on Mina's shoulder, coming to crouch down as Dwayne moved out of the way.
"Still throwing yourself in harm's way, eh little lion?" His voice was rough under the attempted drawl, his sunburned hand still bright with pain.

"Marko, LET GO." The strength of the command pushed past the injured vampire's frenzy, bringing him back to stare clear eyed at his leader. A moment passed and he pulled back from Mina's wrist, giving one last lick as he released her hand.

Mina's arm trembled as she pulled it back, and David reached out, gently taking her hand in his. The bite still oozed, blood trickling around to drip down the back of her hand. He held it over Marko's wound for a few moments, leaving a small pool of human blood that suddenly drained down, disappearing into slowly healing flesh. He lifted her wrist to his own lips, tenderly kissing the bite closed, and licking clean the drying trails of blood and the rough scrapes when he found them.

Marko was lay panting with eyes half-closed, the wound no longer weeping fluid but still raw and ragged around the edges. Paul stroked his hair absently, his own head listing as the shock and danger passed and the day-induced stupor crept back on him.

Dwayne knelt near David, eyes moving from Marko to Mina and back. Mina was starting to shake, a combination of the day's events, blood loss and the chill air catching up to her.

"She needs to get out of here." Dwayne whispered.

David nodded, reaching to brush Mina's cheek. "Still with us, Mina?"

Wrapping her hands around herself for warmth, she spoke around chattering teeth. "I…think…so…wh…at…Mm..arko?"

David smiled softly, shaking his head. "He'll be better than you will by tonight, if you stay down here with us." He threw an arm around her, chafing her arms gently before pulling her close to his chest. "I'm afraid I've got little warmth to share. You'd be better off in the main area now, if it's safe."

She nodded, slightly warmer for his efforts, though still shaking. "They won't be back. But I can't make it to the ledge we came in on."

Dwayne moved closer. "I can get you up there. Can you make it back through?"

"There's enough light to see by, I think. I might be slow, but I'll make it."

Dwayne picked her up, easily lifting her to the narrow tunnel, eyeing the distant shaft of sunlight warily. "You're on your own from here." She crawled forward, turning when he put a hand on her leg.

"Thank you for helping Marko. You didn't have to."

She smiled wanly back at him. "He needed it, and you all need him. I've only got to get through today. Sorry if I'm a little short of a snack later on." She patted his hand, crawling away down the tunnel.

Dwayne watched her for a moment, finally turning and dropping back to his brothers.

"Marko won't make it back up to the roost today." David said quietly.

"I'll stay with him." Paul picked up his brother, moving to the cleaner side of the pit. He laid Marko down gently, curling around him and pulling him close with a protective arm before they both quickly succumbed to day-sleep.
Dwayne gave David a deep look. "It went down pretty much like she showed us."

"Looks that way." David lifted off, flipping to hang from the bars. Dwayne followed suit.

"She didn't hesitate to give herself to Marko. He'd've drained her to a husk and she didn't even flinch."

David turned to look at his brother. "What's your point? She's been ready to let us take her all along."

Dwayne shrugged. "Not sure myself. She's given everything to us, and for what? A couple of quick tumbles she doesn't want to live long enough to recall? Makes no sense."

"Speak for yourself there, quick-draw. I made sure our night was unforgettable, however long she's here to remember it. Now if you're done flapping your gums, I'd like to get a little more rest before sundown." David relaxed, eyes closing.

Snorting, Dwayne settled as well. "I'm with Paul. She would fit in with us."

"Let's hear what Marko has to say tonight. It's all or none."

"If he's still pissy about her after today, Paul will be first in line to beat sense into his ass. I may help."

Dwayne felt more than heard David's answering chuckle in his head as he drifted off.

…. Mina moved slowly through the tunnel, finally making it to the end to slide down to the floor of the main area. The space felt eerily quiet now that she was the only one in it. Shuffling over to the dilapidated davenport, she slumped down, patting around the base for the can of soda pop she'd left. Grabbing it up she chugged down most of the can before setting it down and taking a deep breath. The sugar rush from the pop was greatly needed, helping her feel a bit less hollow after the harrowing morning. The pale rays of sun that made it through to the space made it a bit warmer than the alcove she'd spent the last few hours in, and she was finally able to get the chill out of her bones, relaxing back against the aging settee to close her eyes for a few moments. The moment she did, she was bludgeoned by visions of the night to come flashing behind her eyes in graphic detail, all the way through to bitter end, the leading vampire impaled and exploding in flame in the battered fireplace.

As the scenes passed, she bent over, groaning, head spinning enough to leave her dizzy. Hunched as she was, she tried to relax and steady her breathing, waiting for the wave of discomfort to pass. Something came back to her, words and implications that bit into her brain, refusing to fade. Sighing, she slowly levered herself up off the couch, stumbling towards Marko's supply of paper and pens.

Writing a short note, she folded the paper up and paused, frowning. Going to grab a candle, she dripped some wax to seal the note. Moving quickly to slide a finger along the edge of the paper, she smeared blood from the paper cut on the wax before pressing her thumb into it to provide a seal. Sucking absently on the cut, she dropped the note in David's chair. Sighing deeply again, she started up and out of the cave. It was going to be a long, long walk.

…..
It was still early in the evening as Sam and the Frog brothers were rushing around his house, closing and locking windows and putting up barricades where they could when they heard someone knocking on the door. They looked at each other in confusion before Sam finally shrugged, going over to open the door. Alan and Edgar picked up their holy-water guns, following him to see who or what it was.

The girl at the door was ragged, sweaty and a bit grey looking. With a glance at each other the two Frogs immediately sprayed her with their water pistols. She yelped and coughed, wiping at her face as the boys glared at her suspiciously, but when she put her hands down, she actually looked a little better, if slightly confused. Sam rolled his eyes at his friends. "Can we help you?"

"Can I come in? I need your help." She looked at Sam hopefully.

"This is a really bad time, maybe you can come back tomorrow?" He started to close the door.

Sticking her foot in to block him, she said, "I know it's a bad time – that's why I need your help." She pulled the collar of her t-shirt out, showing the boys the deep purple marks on her neck. Edgar shot her with his water gun again.

"Edgar!" Sam said, exasperated. "She's not one of them!"

"Don't trust her, Sam. She could be like your brother!"

"I'm not a vampire, I promise! They wouldn't use me like this if I was."

Sam looked at her, and stepped back a moment. "Guys, she can't be one of them – the other girl had a smaller top and her neck didn't look anything like that!"

Alan and Edgar looked at each other again. "Well, I still say we shouldn't let her in." Edgar growled.

Sam rolled his eyes again. "Aren't we supposed to help those in need? Come on in, ah?" he asked, opening the door to let her pass.

"Mina. And thank you. It was a long walk from the cave." She came in, sitting down on a nearby couch with a sigh.

This time all the boys yelped. "You were in the cave?!"

She nodded. "I was…way in the back. I woke up when I heard screaming. By the time I made it to the front, Star and Laddie were gone, and I was all alone with them." Her shudder left little doubt who she was referring to.

"Wait. How did you know to come here?" Sam asked. Alan & Edgar looked at her again, reaching for stakes and water guns.

Star and Michael appeared at the top of the stair. "Mina?" Star called down. "Is that you?"

"Star!" Mina waved tiredly from the couch. "Hope you don't mind me crashing the party."

Star came down the stairs quickly, Michael following, shooting Mina an odd look. Sitting beside Mina, Star gave her a quick hug. "You look terrible! Are you all alright? How did you get here?"

"I'll be fine. I got lucky and a nice lady gave me a lift past town, only been walking about an hour. Can I get myself a glass of water? Despite the quick shower from your friends, I'm still a bit thirsty. Just show me where to go."
"Are you sure? Michael, can you help her?"

Michael looked a little surprised to be asked. "Yeah, sure. Follow me." He motioned for Mina to follow. Sam went after the pair, grabbing on to Mike to pull him aside as Mina filled a glass from the sink.

"Tell me Mike, is she one of you?" he whispered.

The brunette shook his head. "Nah. She's like you, bro."

"Why did she come here? What did they do to her?"

Mike hesitated, staring at Mina's back as she chugged the first glass of water and went back for seconds. Thinking back to the party in the cave, what little he could remember, he threw an arm around Sam's shoulder, giving him a serious look. "Ask me after this is over, OK? It's a little heavy."

Sam looked at Mina as she put the glass down, turning back to them. She gave them both a sad smile, looking grey and worn in the light of setting sun. "Yeah, I'll ask you later." He patted Mike's back as they went back into the living room with her.

Star was waiting, taking Mina's hand and leading her back to the couch. "Just rest, the boys can get the house ready for tonight."

"How did you know to come here, Mina?" Michael was looking at her, frowning.

Mina met his eyes looking slightly embarrassed. "I've been by this place before. That night the gang harassed you here."

"Really? And what were you doing when they did that?"

"Sitting there? Do you really think there was anything I could do to stop or help them?"

"Why did they take you with them?"

"They kinda kept me on a real short leash. Can't let the pet go telling tales now, could they?"

"Then how'd you get away today?"

"Michael! Stop being so mean! Mina's sick, leave her alone." Star put an arm around her as everyone turned toward them, staring at Mina in surprise.

"Please don't look at me like that." She ducked her head, embarrassed. "They didn't just let me go, but you left, so I figured I had to try too. Is everything ready?"

The Frog boys jumped. "That's right! What time is it?" The younger boys started working on their stockpile of weapons – stakes, a few bows and a pile of arrows, and of course, their trusty squirt guns. Mina listened to them talking about how vampires died, shuddering at their graphic descriptions.

She glanced around before asking, "Is anyone else hungry?" There was a chorus of agreement from Sam, Laddie and the Frog brothers. Looking at Michael she said, "I can help make some sandwiches, or spaghetti if you have it?"

"NO SPAGHETTI!" the boys all yelled.

"Alrighty…sandwiches it is, I guess. Michael, is it OK if I do that?"
Michael looked at her. "You're not going to get them sick, are you?"

"Michael!" Star punched his arm, exasperated. "Do you want help, Mina?"

"No, I'd like a chance to help out and keep busy." Mina gave Michael a very bland look. "Don't worry, it's not something they can catch."

With that, she got up and went to the kitchen, taking her time to find the bread and sandwich fixings, which turned out to pretty much be peanut butter and jelly. She made up a quick stack, snagging one for herself as she worked.

Cutting the sandwiches into nice triangles and piling them high, she took the plate out to the team of children bent on death and destruction. They quickly started in on them, before Michael asked Mina why she wasn't having any. The room got quiet, and everyone looked at her.

She snorted, "I ate while I made them, but you can hand me another if there's one to spare." Edgar singled one out, handing it to her with a frown. She munched it down, licking her fingers clean of jelly when she was done. Edgar looked at Michael and shrugged before sitting back down. The rest of the plate was inhaled in a few minutes.

By the time the boys had had dinner and were finishing up their weapons check, the sun had gone down, leaving the cabin in darkness.

…

Four pairs of golden eyes opened as the sun set behind the rim of the ocean. Flying out of their breached nest to gather up their guide they were met by silence and emptiness in the main area. David was stunned for a moment, till the faint scent of human blood caught his nose. Turning he saw the note, and picked it up, his brothers coming close as he examined it before breaking the seal.

"What's it say?" Paul asked, bouncing slightly while keeping a hand on Marko.

Dwayne frowned. "Where did she go? Does she say why?"

Marko just looked confused, wondering why the same person that bled for him had vanished when his brother's lives were about to be on the line.

David crumpled the note, looking around at his brothers. "Marko, you still got those cherry bombs?"

"Yeah, still have a few. Why?"

"Bring 'em with you. We're heading out to the beach now."

"Wait, what about Mina?" Paul asked, concerned.

"Don't worry about it. We're sticking to the plan. Get the ashes, get to the house."

"But…"

"We stick to the plan. We know enough to handle this." David swept out of the cave, ending the conversation.

…..

David and his pack pulled up their bikes away from the Emerson's house, cutting lights and engines to ensure they weren't noticed. Dismounting, the men gathered around their leader, looking for
"We have to split up" David drawled, "Dwayne and Paul, I want you to go to back of the house, see if Mina's there to let you in."

"Mina! What's she doing at the house?" Paul growled. "Did they come back and grab her too?"

"Just do what I say, and watch for traps. You both know the story, stick to it."

"What are you going to do?" Dwayne asked.

"Marko and I are going to be the distraction, make 'em think we're all flying in to get them. We'll meet you at the back of the house. You two go on ahead now – by foot, and don't let the dog know you're near. I need you in place before Marko and I do our fly-by." Dwayne and Paul quickly took off, making a wide berth around the house to avoid the lonely dog tied to the wooden fence.

Giving the others a few minutes to get in place, David turned to Marko, laying a hand on his shoulder. "Ready for this?"

Marko's eyes gleamed, and he smiled wickedly back at his brother. "Pranking a bunch of wanna be hunters, and maybe ending Max on the same night? Haven't had a chance at this much fun in ages."

David tilted his head and lifted an eyebrow, subtle movements to convey his concern for the recently injured vampire.

Marko huffed, rolling his eyes. "I'm fine. Better than I should be, really. I knew the girl had a death wish, but I'd never have pegged her to be one to literally jump at it, or me." His face sobered a moment. "Up till she disappeared today, she really has been fighting for us. I just didn't want to see it."

David nodded. "I'm reserving judgement till we see how the night plays out. But she's been true to her word, and her visions, so far."

Marko made a face at him. "That's the freakiest thing I've ever encountered, and that's saying something. Having that in her head her entire life? No wonder she's messed up."

They suddenly turned towards the house in unison, their attention caught by unspoken alerts coming from their brothers.

"That's our cue. Ready to cloud the minds of men?" David smirked.

"Men? Michael barely has his pubes, let alone the rest of them." Marko chuckled. "Let's go."

Paul went up to the back door, moving quietly with Dwayne at his back. "What are we supposed to do? Knock?"

Dwayne shrugged, trying to peer through windows to scope if anyone was there. They could both hear multiple people chattering, but the voices weren't in the kitchen. A squeaky swinging door sounded, and then familiar footsteps were moving closer. Mina's face peeked through the window on the kitchen door, and Paul rushed up, waving like a madman. Her eyebrows shot up, and she turned to look over her shoulder before sliding the bolt on the kitchen door with excruciating care. Opening it slowly and silently she held a finger up to be quiet. Leaning out she whispered "Tell David to go now, we need the distraction."
Dwayne nodded, while Paul moved to come in, only to be stopped by Mina's outstretched hand as she shook her head. She held up a finger, motioning him to wait.

From the other room came an exclamation "Oh my God, I forgot Nanook!" There was yelling and the sound of a door thrown open.

Mina beamed, pulling the door open wide with a flourish. "Good evening! I am inviting you in, please make yourselves at home." She winked as the two men grinned, swaggering in past her.

"Thanks, chica!" Paul gave her crushing hug. "I knew you were still with us!"

"Paul! We don't have time!" Mina wheezed, trying to breath. "Dwayne's got to dive through the chimney in a moment, and I've got to get out of here!" Paul quickly let her go.

"You're a step ahead, aren't you?" Dwayne chuckled appreciatively.

"That's kind of my thing, I think?" Mina said, still wheezing slightly. David and Marko appeared at the door. "Come in! and then, somebody get me out!"

David grinned wickedly, bowing slightly and motioning to Marko. "Marko, help the lady." Marko grinned as well, waving gloved fingers at Mina.

She moved closer to the curly haired vampire, taking off a shoe to drop it on the floor. "Make it quick, it has to look like I was attacked as Dwayne makes his entrance."

Marko snickered. "You got it. Take a deep breath, you'll scream better that way." Wincing, she did as he suggested, going to wave just as Dwayne leapt at the kitchen wall. Marko pulled her out the door into the night with such swiftness she didn't even see them passing through doorway itself. One moment she was in the bright kitchen and the next in the darkened field behind the house, a fierce breeze ruffling her hair and clothes. Her scream trailed off as she stood in shock. Marko snapped his fingers in front of her and she shook herself out of her surprise.

"You've got to get back to them. Paul has a tall order making those kids think he's melting in the tub!" Mina whispered fiercely, trying to shoo Marko back towards the house. "And you've got to be there to pitch the cherry bombs down the sink. Go on, they need you!"

He reached for her, pulling her close despite her efforts to hold her for a moment before stepping back. "Thank you for today. And for inviting us in tonight."

She smiled, laying a hand lightly on his now-healed stomach. "You and your family deserve happiness too. I'm glad that I could help you all. Take good care of each other."

Marko lifted her hand, kissing it gently. "Don't go leaving us before the night is over. We want a chance to say goodbye."

"Wouldn't dream of it. Besides, I've made a deal with the Devil."

Marko chuckled, waving her off in the general direction of the bikes as he turned back towards the house to help his brothers.

Paul was the first one out of the house, slinking out a bedroom window as the wannabe hunters powwowed in the other room. Marko's cherry bombs were a resounding success, exploding in the drain pipes with enough pressure to blow the fixtures in the upstairs bathroom into pieces. They
Meeting up with Mark outside, they snuck around to the side of the house, checking in to see if Dwayne or David wanted a boost on their powers of illusion. Dwayne needed cover, he was pinned in a corner as he pushed the image of being blown to pieces to the two Emerson kids cowering on the floor. Timing it carefully, he was able to use his brother's help to hide his movements as he dumped his pockets of borrowed ash, and snuck up the wall and across to the same bedroom window Paul jumped out of, making sure to close it behind him.

That left David, battling Michael and literally getting the shaft. Projecting the angelic vision was easy, but staying put while skewered was a challenge.

Max came in to look at him, and it was the first time in ages he'd touched him with anything resembling gentleness. His projected words were anything but, however. Max knew the two halflings were behind him, how could they possibly have hoped to hide themselves from their sire? And David, playing dead in the demolished house of the woman he hoped to own for eternity, was going to face the brunt of his displeasure.

Leaning in, Max raged through their mental connection, stark contrast to the placid and almost sad look on his face. "Play your game, David. Once I'm done with Lucy, I'll make sure the only brothers you'll have to look after are her children. I'm done with you and your gang of delinquents, it's time to make a fresh start."

It took everything David had to stay still and quiet as Max turned back towards Lucy and her sons. If things didn't go as Mina had said, Max would end his brothers before the next dawn came. He could feel questions and concern coming from them through their bond, and he deliberately closed them off, biding his time to make his move.

Michael and Star followed Max out of the taxidermy room, and they were all stunned as Max revealed his true nature. Peeling himself off the antlers as the children fought in vain against the ancient and powerful being, David steadied himself, straining against the injury and waiting to lunge at Max in a moment of distraction. As Max beckoned to Lucy, David gathered his reserves, only to jump aside as the rear end of the old man's rusty jeep plunged through the front of the house, hiding himself as Michael leapt to hold Max in place as the wooden fence poles skewered the ancient vampire, sending him into the fireplace to explode in final, fiery destruction.

The dissolution of Max's presence and the sire bond in his mind left David stunned, only the push from his brother's minds cleared it, and he let them help hide his presence as he waited for the family to move down the hallway to the ruined kitchen. Moving quietly, he snuck through the shattered front wall and out in to the night, leaving the group of perishables to celebrate their apparent victory.

His brothers waited for him a bit away from the house, grinning as he made his way to them. They closed in on him, relief at his arrival tempered by apprehension at what would come next now that Max was out of the picture. David struggled to restrain his own reactions, almost overcome at how close to final death his brothers had come, whether at the hands of the children or Max making little difference.

Dwayne seemed to have a sense of the way his leader was grappling with emotions, speaking up to break the silence. "Just can't get rid of you, can we?" Paul and Marko chuckled, though the sound had a sharp edge to it, rattled as the two still were.

David smirked, relieved to have a shift in focus. "Guess not. Looks like you're stuck with me, boys."

He pulled out a cigarette, lighting up.
Marko came closer, running a hand over David's chest. "Got pretty close though, didn't they?"

David captured his hand, holding it tight. "Not like you. This wasn't even wood, let alone consecrated."

The curly haired man smiled at up at David, eyes shining at his leader's regard.

Paul broke in to the moment. "What about Mina?" The other three turned towards him. "We're not just gonna let her go, are we? She saved Marko."

Dwayne spoke up. "She saved you, too. Without that invite, you'd've been soup."

David looked at Marko, eyebrow lifted in question.

Marko grinned wickedly, biting his thumb for a moment, letting the anticipation build. "Up to me, really? We sure she's not gonna be another Star?"

"Only one way to find out." David drawled. "Might play it a little differently this time around."

"Well, I don't know…"

"Dude! Don't make me kick your ass!"

Marko chuckled at Paul's comment. "You'd like to think you could."

"DUDE!"

"Alright, alright. She can stay, as long as you stop whining about it."

"Woohoo! Let's go!"

David stopped them all. "Marko, you sure?" The others turned expectantly.

"Yeah, I am. She does kinda grow on ya after a while. And she was right about Max and everything else."

David paused, face going serious for a moment. He started moving, heading past his brothers towards their bikes, stomping the cigarette out and speaking as he went. "That she was, Marko. That she was."
Epilogue

Warning – Explicit/Mature sex M/M/M/M

…

Author's note – A most happiest of holidays to everyone, no matter who you are or what you celebrate!

'Courting Death' is now wrapped up, but fear not! Mina's adventures with the boys will continue in 'Finding Home'.

…

"Sleep now" he pushed in to her cloudy mind, and feeling Mina's vague thoughts still, had Dwayne lay her on the bed.

Dwayne turned to David as he rose, "she'll be shocked when she wakes up".

David smirked. "Good thing she'll stay asleep till sundown then."

He turned away, moving automatically towards their roost before he caught himself. The others moved in behind him, waiting for direction. "Gonna need a new place to rest. Let's check around the back while we still have time. I want something perishables can't get to, but still has more than one way out." His brothers dispersed quickly, melting in to the back of the cave.

Paul was back first, bouncing excitedly. "Come look!" David followed him into the back recesses, lifting off to fly into a moderate sized crack high up in the cavern ceiling. The space was fairly sizable once they climbed inside, easily able to accommodate the newly expanded pack. Moving through the space, Paul hopped upwards, clinging easily to rough stone before swinging from a lattice of thick pipes. "I think this was part of the boiler system! There's not even that much rust!"

David smiled warmly. "Good so far. What about another way out?"

At this, Marko's head popped out of a hole a little way off to the side. Crawling through upside down like spider, he joined Paul to swing down from pipes, grabbing at his brother's legs with his own as they both laughed.

"Great job, Paul."

Paul beamed down at David, then yelped as Marko used the moment of distraction to pull him free of the pipes. Instead of dropping, he grabbed on to Marko's waist, biting hard on his brother's side. Marko squawked and let go, sending both of them down to the floor of the space in a heap of limbs and wild blond hair.

David just shook his head at their antics and Dwayne crawled into the space to join the group. Moving close to David, he stood stiffly, placid look on his face.

"So, you're our pack master now?" he said quietly.

David turned as Marko and Paul got quiet. "I would think so. There a problem with that?"
Dwayne stared resolutely into David's eyes. "Think you ought to prove it, don't you?"

David snarled, blind rage erupting unbidden to flood his mind and transform his features. "Maybe you're right."

With startling speed, David had Dwayne pushed face first against one of the walls. He bit hard into the crook of Dwayne's neck as he reached down, roughly opening Dwayne's pants as his brother grunted in pain. Freeing himself he thrust deeply, Dwayne hissing at being breached so violently.

Feelings from their shared connection pushed into David's mind; pain, sadness and almost resignation coming from all his brothers, caused the madness to ebb enough for him to regain awareness. Standing flush behind Dwayne, he stilled. Gently disengaging his teeth, he licked the wound, ensuring it was sealed. Breathing out, he rested his forehead against his brother's shoulder, the anger draining out of him leaving him hollow and brittle. He pulled himself out of Dwayne, far more gently than he'd entered.

David wrapped his arms around Dwayne, turning him around till they faced each other. Dwayne's eyes were lowered, his body pliant to David's will. David laid a light hand on Dwayne's cheek.

"Look at me." David's words carried no compulsion, just a soft request. Dwayne's eyes met his reluctantly. "Not like this. I'm not him." David closed the space between them, his mouth meeting Dwayne's, leaving a gentle kiss before moving on, kissing lips, eyes, cheeks; working across a chiseled jawline. He glanced up at Dwayne, pausing to gauge reaction. Seeing wariness in his brother's face, he stepped back, straightening up.

"I will not be like him." David opened his mind to his brothers, sharing his own feelings of the pain and rage he'd felt as the threats to his brothers' lives were revealed, his resolution to do better by them than their sire had.

In front of him, Dwayne relaxed, a twitch to his lips that might almost become a smile. David grinned back at him, with lots of teeth and a wicked glint in his ice blue eyes.

"Mind if we start over?" David's words were the closest to apology he could manage.

Dwayne cocked his head, returning David's glance with a dark and heated look of his own. He opened his arms invitingly, and David sank into his embrace. Rough kisses were returned enthusiastically, and he rocked his hips into his brother's, both of them growling at the friction as their still-bare flesh brushed enticingly against each other.

David pushed Dwayne's jacket open till it slid off and down to the ground. Much gentler this time, he eased his brother's pants down and off, till he knelt on one knee, eyes bright with mischief as he glanced up. Dipping his head, he took Dwayne down to the root, his tongue rolling as he pulled back. Dwayne tipped his head back as he moaned, his body bowing towards David.

Setting a fast pace, he quickly worked the dark-haired man to frenzy, pausing at odd intervals to suck his own fingers to prepare his brother properly. Dwayne writhed at David's touch, whining quietly when fingers and tongue were withdrawn.

Standing up, David favored Dwayne with an inquiring look. His brother looked at him with pupils blown dark with lust, to smile darkly and nod. Slicking himself with his own saliva, David lifted Dwayne easily, spreading him and seating himself in one smooth motion.

David started slow at first, picking up speed and force as his brother fell apart around him. Laying a gentle hand on the back of Dwayne's neck, he guided him towards his own, bent invitingly as he
continued to fuck his brother into the wall. Dwayne's features turned demonic as he lunged forward, wrapping strong arms around his new master. Sinking sharp teeth deep, he came hard, painting both their stomachs as he shook. David bit down far more lightly on his brother's exposed neck, holding his own release in check as Dwayne peaked.

The two let go as Dwayne came back to himself, licking bites closed and cleaning stray drips of blood off each other. David put his brother back on his feet, cupping the back of his neck again as they bumped foreheads, resting there for a moment.

Stepping back, David shed his clothing, turning now towards Paul and Marko. Catching Paul's eye, he gave a wolf-hungry grin that Paul returned, clearly delighted. The wild haired blond stripped quickly as Marko looked on, eyeing the two with interest and biting a half-gloved thumb.

Coming together, Paul pulled David down as he laid out underneath him. Open mouthed kisses turned to rough nips and licks as David moved down Paul's body, his teeth and light, scratching touches leaving his blond brother a whimpering, squirming mess, sinking gladly under the wave of sensations. His panting moans rose to a scream as David swallowed his need down, throat working as he pulled up, tongue swirling around the tip before sliding back down so deep he was able to lave Paul's sac.

Paul tossed his head back and forth as he panted, hands grasping in David's hair as David worked him into a lather. Letting go with a pop, David knelt up, grasping Paul's legs and pushing them up till the blond was nearly bent double. Lining himself up, he caught his brother's eye, raising an eyebrow in question. Paul groaned, reaching to grab at David's face to pull him closer.

With a sharp grin, David sank down into his brother with measured patience. Paul was shaking with tension, hands grasping at David's face and shoulders, willing him to move faster as he curled up towards him in need.

David sheathed himself fully, pulling almost entirely back out just as slowly as he'd entered, repeating as Paul nearly wailed in frustration, squirming as David toyed with him. Sinking down again, David leaned further over his brother, lifting Paul's hips so they were canted up and his back curved tightly. Paul keened as David hit his prostate, only to cry out repeatedly as David picked up the pace, rutting hard and fast into his sweet spot.

Reaching down, David pulled his brother close, and Paul met his embrace, nestling into the crook of his neck to bite down as Dwayne had done, his golden eyes rolling back as he climaxed, spilling between them. David sank gentle teeth into his brother's neck, clinging to his resolve as he kept himself from tipping over the edge. Feeling Paul calm beneath him, he loosened his grip, letting their bodies separate slowly. Paul sat up, wrapping arms around David's neck for a moment before letting go, only to pause as David cupped his cheek and kissed his forehead.

Standing again, David turned as Marko came up beside him, the curly blond wrapping him in eager arms, bare body pressing close. David carded slow fingers through his brother's long hair, his features turning solemn. "He's gone, Marko. From here on, it will always be your choice."

Marko's face softened a moment, before a truly wicked grin blossomed. "I've made my choice." His hand slid down David's body to wrap around his red and leaking cock, working it slowly as David's eyes closed in pleasure.

A strangled moan escaped before David caught himself, placing a hand over Marko's to still his efforts. Smiling down he lifted Marko's hand to his lips, kissing softly before drawing rounded bottom teeth across the palm and working with languid tongue and teeth gently up the arm till he was nipping at the curve of bare shoulder. Marko gasped, eyes bright with joy.
David continued, working a slow path up to Marko's face, gently kissing across eyelids and smooth cheeks till he captured his brother's lips with his own, with a soft and lengthy focus enabled by a casual disregard for oxygen. Reluctantly breaking away, he smiled down in to clear green eyes filled with trust and low-burning fire.

Running fingers gently against Marko's jawline, he tilted the angelic face up, diving down to graze teeth along a pale throat, tracing the line down the center. David sank sharp teeth gently into the skin at Marko's chest, where the once red and beating heart lay still and silent, drawing a soft moan. Pulling back, he laved the bite, grinning in to it as he moved on, now assaulting a pale nipple to the sound of whining and a hand grasping the back of his head. Slowly he mapped the beauty in front of him, with such soft care that Marko trembled and whimpered where he stood, transfixed by the attention and the sense of worship flowing from David's open mind.

Working his way up a toned thigh, David glanced up, catching Marko's eye with such heat it brought the shorter man down to his knees, to meet David's lips again as he was caught in strong arms. David lay him down gently beneath him, nipping a light trail to his brother's cock, now nearly as red with need as his own. Laying at Marko's side he took it in his mouth, swallowing down till his lips met the nest of curly blonde hair, working with tongue and teeth while he massaged the sac with a gentle hand.

Marko squirmed, soft panting interspersed with coarse words as David plied him expertly. David slid his fingers up to suck them alongside Marko's dick, slicking them to then breech his brother slowly. Marko groaned, hips curling up towards the hand now working first two, then three fingers deep inside.

Stretching and curling with care, David found Marko's sweet spot, as Marko arched and thrust, the litany of whined 'fuck's getting higher in pitch and more urgent. Grinning around a swollen cock, he set a faster pace, head and hand moving in time, teeth grazing lightly on the upstroke as fingers caressed nerves on the down. Marko had a hand clutched tight at the back of David's neck as he canted hips down and back, tension driving each roll tighter.

David spared a side glance towards the angelic face now tossing above him. A golden eye met his, suddenly pinned under his stare. As Marko started shaking, his climax overtook him, body convulsing and hips snapping up, pushing him deeper into David's throat as he came, a steady chant of coarse words falling from his lips.

Curling to sit up as the wave of release ebbed, he pulled at David's hair, dragging him in to a deep kiss. David turned, embracing Marko fully before directing him towards David's own neck, and Marko bit deep as David held him. Licking the wound, Marko lifted his head, moving to share David's own blood with him in another kiss.

David pulled back, standing up and pulling Marko up with him. Dwayne moved in, pulling David in to a deep kiss. Paul broke in, claiming David's lips as Dwayne started mapping the planes of David's chest with his tongue. Paul nipped down a scruffy chin and neck, now working down David's other side as the object of their attention wrapped arms around the two, groaning softly.

Marko moved in behind David, teeth grazing the nape of his neck and moving down his back to take soft, lingering bites on a plump ass cheek, as a hand cupped the other, massaging it firmly.

Dwayne knelt before David, sucking on the crest of a hip and drawing a strong hand up the inside of the near thigh, to cup a sac already tight with need lightly before caressing velvet skin, the cock bobbing high and hard against his hand. David's eyes rolled back, blue fading as red-rimmed gold took its place.
Paul joined Dwayne, to look slyly at his dark-haired brother as they moved in tandem to lave David's need with eager tongues. David hissed and gripped them with forced gentleness, fingers tangling in long, wild hair of gold and black.

Marko slowly nudged David's legs wider, encouraging with a light hand till he was quite well spread as he stood between the three kneeling men. He ran his hands teasingly up the insides of David's legs, before gripping the firm ass tight, spreading the cheeks and diving in to tongue his target vigorously, spurred on as his leader tried to clench, slow hiss turning to high pitched moans.

The two in front took turns, kneeling up to suck David down to the root, dragging rough teeth up before releasing, or mouthing his sac, taking in as much as they could with gentle pressure and curling tongues.

David stood now with trembling legs locked, head bent and eyes closed as he was lovingly assaulted by his brothers. He reached a hand around to caress Marko's head and forced his eyes open, to stare at Paul and Dwayne with soft eyes even as their combined attentions drove spikes of pleasure through him til he was near shaking with need for release.

Marko stood, pressing his body flush against David as he entered him smoothly. Gripping hips firmly and starting a fast rhythm, he soon had David grunting in time with him. Dwayne wrapped his lips around David again, now letting Marko's tempo drive David deep as he swallowed hard around the thick erection, pushing with his tongue to increase pressure.

David was shaking now, his whole body straining as his climax built with the strength of a volcano. Paul stood, turning David's face gently to nestle in crook of his neck, the offer clear. David wrapped his arms around him, sharp teeth sinking in carefully. As his brother's blood seeped past his lips the orgasm broke over him with a roar of thunderous pleasure that washed through bonds to draw them all in.

David came back to himself as Dwayne stood, thumb catching an errant drip on his cheek as Marko came around to join the crowd.

"Master?" He whispered.

David scowled a moment. "No." He looked all of them in the eye. "Leader." They nodded, eyes bright with approval.

"Brother." Marko wrapped arms around David and Paul as they stood together. Dwayne smirked, moving in to join them on Paul's other side. They held for a moment, minds open and bodies close, reveling in the strengthened bonds and their survival after the wild events of the last day and night.

Sensing the pull of the sun, David sighed, slowly pulled free, caressing bodies as he did. He moved to his pile of clothes, pulling on pants and shirt, leaving the rest.

"So, what happens now?" Paul piped up as he threw his own pants on.

David grinned at him. "Tomorrow night, we give our sister a proper welcome. After that," he shrugged "we work out the dirty details. This is all ours now."

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