Liaison

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Summary

Prophetic dreams of destruction and hope overshadow Mystic Falls. It all starts with Elijah turning up on Elena's doorstep with an unpleasant request. Elejah. AU.

Notes

This story is AU, set after 3x12. I have included canon from the show as it aired. Un bet'd so excuse any mistakes.

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Chapter 1

"Wow! Like the hair Eli." Rebekah smiles approvingly at her older brother as he comes into the room. He flicks a smile and brushes his fingers at his shortened hair.

"About time mate. It was a bit 90's boy band for awhile there." Klaus grins wickedly. Elijah gives him one long suffering glare before moving towards the drinks cabinet.

"Don't listen to him. I missed the 90's but I'm sure you looked smashing. They can't expect us to keep up with all these shifts in fashion. Every decade!" She sighs and slumps back, as if tired at the prospect.

Elijah pours two glasses of whiskey and offers one to Klaus as he comes up behind him. Klaus lifts up the glass with an apple cheeked smile. "Cheers."

Elijah hesitates, staring at his brother for a long moment before the glass clinks against his. Klaus' eyes narrow, never leaving his older brother, as he drinks. When he sets the glass down his expression is meek.

"I am grateful that you've decided to stay Elijah. I know we've had our disagreements but I've never wanted you to leave. You're my older brother; you've always looked out for us. You kept us together, in more ways then one."

Rebekah strides up to them, reaching for a glass. "Poor Eli. It must have been like feeding time at the zoo; cleaning up after us. I think we drove you spare."

Elijah smirks. "Worse." He pours whiskey into her waiting glass. His sister is overtly cheerful and he knows it's an act but he says nothing. He's just happy to see her after so long. She's their only sister and he's always felt protective of her. No matter her assertions that she can take care of herself. She can but old habits die hard.

"You have the patience of a saint." She kisses the side of his head and moves off.

"That you do..." Klaus adds, who had been silent and watchful. He waits until Rebekah is out of the room before speaking again. "I have a... proposition for you."

"Proposition?"

Klaus nods and moves towards the window. The sun is setting and it bathes the room in a soft orange hue. The house still smells new and his brother had shown him the wood he had carved himself, proud of his work but awaiting his opinion. Now there is no trace of trepidation. "You might not like it but seeing as you've decided to stay here you've accepted what I do."

Elijah says nothing and waits for Klaus to continue. His brother smiles at his retentive stance.

"Simply put I need more blood to make hybrids." He flashes him a quick grin. "I think you know whose."

Elena. A flicker of unease passes over Elijah's face. "We had a deal that no harm would come to her."

"What harm? All I want is one measly pint of blood. People do it everyday."
"She'll never agree."

"I don't need her to. If I hadn't agreed to your demand and if they didn't have the bloody coffin I'd be draining her dry. So you can see my predicament. I'm respecting your request Elijah, I won't go near her. But maybe you'll have more luck."

"I don't see how I can be of any help."

"You were on her side once. She trusts you."

"No longer. I only worked with her as a matter of convenience."

A slow lazy smile spreads over Klaus' face and Elijah immediately tenses. "Oh come on. I know Elijah; you can't hide it from me. She's gotten under your skin, into your heart. She always does."

If it's possible Elijah's face becomes even stonier. "She won't agree."

Klaus' face suddenly matches his brother's. "Again she doesn't need to. If you can pursued her all well and good but I need that blood Elijah."

Suddenly a span of years stretches out before him. Elena will be forced to give up her blood for the rest of her life and he'll always be the one to take it. He shakes his head at Klaus. "This is folly. The curse is broken, you have no need of her any longer."

"Did you not hear what I just said? She's still of us to me. Without her I can't create more hybrids."

Elijah sneers. "Hybrids? Is your family not enough for you?"

Suddenly his brother is in his face with a growl. "Don't think for one moment they're like us. They're tools, soldiers, an army. Nothing more."

Elijah shakes his head sadly. "An army and no war to fight."

Klaus smiles suddenly, backing off. "Oh there are always wars to fight brother; we've both lived long enough to know that." He turns and lifts his glass. "Get me that blood or I'll send someone else."

Elijah exhales a shaky breath once he's alone and stares at his shadow cast by the setting sun.

It's a test of course, one to prove his loyalty. Klaus has suspected him since he agreed to stay at the mansion. No one knows of his true intentions, not even Elena. Keeping her in the dark is for the best, as much as he'd like her to know. He just can't risk it. Not yet.

He closes the door on his car and straightens. The hybrid that had followed him here has stopped across the street, brazenly leaning against a tree. He doesn't even bother to hide anymore. They have been following him for days. They are not only soldiers but his brother's eyes and ears.

Clenching his jaw he walks up the garden path. He presses his finger against her doorbell and braces himself as it opens. As expected she stares at him in surprise but that is quickly replaced with something more cautious.

"Elijah?"

"Hello. I hope I'm not disturbing you?"
She blinks at his cordial manner. Maybe she was expecting him to attack her. A stab of regret passes through him but he suppresses it. "What are you doing here?" She looks behind him, likely expecting Klaus to be at his heel.

"I'm alone, in manner of speaking..."

She crosses her arms over her chest and gives him a look of stony judgement. "Have you come to apologise?"

The question trips him and he falters. Of course he wants to, he's wanted nothing more but it's been impossible. Instead he smiles sardonically. "Would you accept it if I did?"

She shrugs. "I don't know until you do."

He can't stop a bemused smile. He exhales, contemplating her before answering. "You have my condolences. Jenna was a lovely woman."

Elena nods, the harsh lines softening into sadness. "She liked you..."

He stares at her intently, keeping his voice very low. "I broke our deal and I'm very disappointed that I had to. I am truly sorry...But I would do it a thousand times over if it meant seeing my family again. I hope you can understand that?"

Her mouth thins and she looks aside. Finally she gives another small shrug. "I do but I'll never understand why you've sided with Klaus. For years you've wanted him dead, you were prepared to kill him. You probably would have if he hadn't baited you."

It's the truth. Baited and he fell for it. He keeps his face blank. "I'm aware of what I said and what happened. I've made my choice."

"He deceived you!" She gestures in exasperation.

"As I've deceived him. I don't expect you to understand and frankly I don't need you to. It's none of your concern." The words are harsh and he winces but it is an unfortunate necessity. Nothing must give him away.

She purses her mouth and raises her eyebrows. "I see. Well if you're finished?" She moves to close the door but he easily slips past her. She turns sharply as he stands in the hallway. She glares at him, grinding her teeth before she flicks around.

"Fine!" She strides out of the door and down the garden path.
"Elena..." He moves to her side but doesn't attempt to restrain her. Not yet. She ignores him and resolutely continues walking down the street. He shakes his head. "Remember when I told you that I'm a patient man? Well Klaus is not."

"What do I care? I'm sick of hearing his name." She hisses it, finally looking at him as she comes to a stop at a crossing. He lays his hand gently against her arm and she jerks as if burnt. He doesn't let go.

"If you don't consent it won't be me that turns up tomorrow but one of his hybrids. If that doesn't work it will be him and he will not attempt the formality of knocking at your door. I don't need to tell you the lengths my brother will go to. He needs you alive but only you."

"Jeremy..." The lights change but she does not cross. She stays still, glaring into the distance. Elijah gazes at her with a soft attentiveness before turning her towards him. She comes reluctantly. She stares up at him wearily. "If I run?"

"I won't let you go. I am asking you to do this. I want you to agree."

She snorts. "Would it leave a bad taste in your mouth to force me?"

"Yes." Inwardly he's pleased at her surprise. "If this had been when we first met I would not be so accommodating."

"I remember." She snarks back before growing contemplative. Her eyes narrow in thought and then she moves closer. "I also remember that we used to negotiate."

He smiles at her determination. "I don't think you have anything to offer me this time Elena."

"I give over my blood and you give us information about Klaus' plans."

His eyes flick across the street. The hybrid is seated on a garden wall, looking down at a cell phone. Listening to every word they say. He looks back at Elena. "Why would I tell you anything?"

"Because despite everything you've just told me I know you don't want Klaus here anymore then I do."

He stares into her eyes sombrely. "Maybe you don't know me as well as you think."

Not to be defeated she continues. "You said it yourself that hybrids are an imbalance, that Klaus had to die before he could create them. I can't believe you've changed your mind."

He shrugs. "Be that as it may all this talk is pointless. Klaus is unstoppable. And," he adds softly, "this is the first time in centuries that my family is back together. I won't jeopardise that."

Finally defeated Elena slumps. She stares at him with a retched look of dismay. "I don't want to be chained to him for the rest of my life. Because that's what will happen; he'll always need more blood."

He cups her face before he can stop himself. "I am sorry Elena, truly."

"Not sorry enough." There is no anger in her voice, just disappointment. It hurts more then any cruel words. He thinks then, madly, of taking her out of Mystic Falls, hiding her where Klaus will never find her. But he banishes the notion quickly. It wouldn't be fair to her. None of this is.
He sighs, removes his hand and gestures for her to follow him. The antique Porsche is parked outside of her house. By the look on her face Elena hadn't noticed it before.

"Where are we going?" Her voice is dull.

He opens the door for her. "The hospital."
As her blood surges through the tube and begins to drip into the bag he fights the need to tell her the truth. He has every intention of toppling Klaus but just not yet. He has to make him believe that he's completely on his side and then find a way to kill him. He has to create a distance with Elena to accomplish this. She's his one weakness, as his brother knows.

The nurse that Elijah compelled to draw Elena's blood sets a cup of apple juice down for her. He didn't even have to ask. "Drink this while you wait. It should take about ten minutes."

Elena stares at her blood with something akin to loathing. "How much are you taking?" She directs this to Elijah who perches on the side of a bed.

"A pint; as is recommended."

The nurse nods before leaving.

"Well I guess I should be glad you're not draining me dry..." she sighs, letting her head fall back against the chair. "I feel so disappointed for giving in. And then I think I'll still be doing this when I'm sixty. If I live that long..." her words are loaded and he gets to his feet.

"It may not reach that point."

She smiles up at him humourlessly. "No, I'll probably crack before then and -" she draws her fingers across her throat.

He frowns at her. "Don't be so nihilistic. You don't know what the future holds. Klaus could be stuck in a coffin next week."

"I wish...Bonnie did dream of it though."

"What?" He leans over her.

"Bonnie dreamt that Klaus was in the coffin we can't open. Maybe it's a premonition? Maybe the coffin is empty and waiting for him?"

He allows himself a brief smile. "Well it would be ironic..."

She considers him softly. "You're more forgiving then I imagined. After what he did..."

The dagger. "It's not the first time. And I forgave you for doing the same thing."

Elena frowns in confusion and opens her mouth to speak when the nurse bustles back in. She removes the needle from Elena's arm and tapes a cotton wool bud to the crook of her arm.

"Press down hard on it to prevent a bruise."

"Thanks." Elena smiles at the nurse and gets to her feet. She staggers, head dizzy from the blood loss and feels a hand gripping her arm. Elijah stares down at her.

"I'll take you back home."

Elena nods, saying nothing and allows him to guide her from the room and through the hospital. Before they leave she sees him pocketing the blood bag.
Mystic Falls flicks past empty and still as Elijah drives. It's well past midnight and only a few people are still on the streets.

"Here," Elena turns to find Elijah offering her a carton of orange juice, "to keep your strength up."

She takes it, confused at his manner and also a little bemused despite herself. "If this is going to keep happening I prefer blackcurrant."

"Elena..."

"Yes?"

He shakes his head and remains silent. He presses his lips together, trying to stop himself from speaking. Elena narrows her eyes at him as she drinks, mind going back to their conversation at the hospital.

"You said that you forgave Klaus for stabbing you?"

His eyes flick to her quickly. "Yes. Unfortunately it happens a lot within my family. It's become something of a farce."

"So that's all you've forgiven him for?" He nods, looking mildly confused. Elena lowers the juice, staring at him intently. He doesn't know about his mother.

"I have a feeling that you're deliberating something Elena. What is it?"

"I do have something to tell you but it's going to be difficult to hear."

"Really?" He smirks at her but then lets it fall at the sight of her face. She's deadly serious.

"Yes. You might want to pull over."

After a moment of Elijah staring at her incredulously he parks a few streets away from her house. He lifts his hands off the stirring wheel. "OK, I've done as you've requested. What's so urgent?"

Elena inhales and exhales deeply, desperately thinking of a gentle way to break this to him but there isn't. She begins hesitantly. "It's about your mother."

He frowns. "My mother? She's been dead a thousand years or more."

"I know. It's just that you don't know the truth about how she died. Klaus lied to you." Elena pauses, waiting for him to comment but he keeps deathly still and quiet. She continues in a small voice. "Your mother wasn't killed by Mikael, she was killed by Klaus."

When Rebekah had heard the truth it had destroyed her. Elena had left the thousand year old vampire to weep like her heart had broken. Now Elena watches the other sibling, the eldest, and sees a blaze of utter fury in his eyes and it is terrifying. But just as quickly as it appears the emotion is gone and she stares into a vacant gaze, devoid of any feeling.

"Are you OK?"

He nods, still with that dead expression and Elena finds herself almost hypnotised by it. Rebekah had been overtaken by her emotions; Elijah has smothered them to the point of apathy. Not sure what to say and unsettled by his stillness she takes his hand and holds it tightly. He stares down at
their hands and blinks in surprise. He gently laces his fingers through hers.

"How do you know this?"

Elena explains as quickly as she can about the cave and the drawings in it. When she mentions Rebekah something flickers over his face, like understanding. When Elena had told his sister she had vehemently denied it but Elijah does not. Maybe he knows that she would not lie to him about this. Her hand still clasped in his she leans closer.

"What are you going to do?"

"I have to return...I need to go." The dazed expression is gone, now replaced with something else. Elena is reminded of a fire raging behind glass; enclosed but it could crack at any second. He is restraining whatever turmoil he is experiencing, possibly because she is alone in a car with him or because it's all he knows to do.

"Elijah? Will you be all right?" She squeezes his hand and he stares as if finally seeing her. He cocks his head, his gaze softening. He doesn't respond. Instead he lifts her hand and kisses the back of it once. It's an act that conveys so much without words: appreciation, understanding, tenderness. He lets go and starts the ignition again, staring straight ahead. Elena doesn't need to be told this is her drop off spot. She nods at him in understanding and gets out, bending down to stare at him as she closes the door.

"I am sorry, Elijah."

He nods and glances at her. "I'll speak to you soon."

"Don't - don't do anything rash."

The first sign of a smile surfaces since she told him the truth and it's awful. "Oh don't worry, I won't."

Elena steps back as he pulls away and drives up the street. As he reaches the junction he puts his foot to the gas and roars down the street and out of sight.

Gasps of pain puncture the air, one after the other and Rebekah takes a peek out of her window. What she sees below makes her race out of her room and through the front door. A group of hybrids lie dead at Elijah's feet, their hearts beside them. Some still beat.

Hands slick with blood he pants like an animal. When her bare feet crunch against the gravel he turns sharply. His eyes are clouded and his fangs bared. For as long as she had known her brother she has been witness to a handful of occurrences where his steel strong restraint has snapped. He almost never shows the beast within, not even when he feeds. Something awful has happened and she knows immediately what.

"Elijah? What's wrong?"

"You know, don't you? What Niklaus did?" His voice is strained and wavering. She moves up to him and takes his arm, pulling him away from the carnage he has wrought.

"Know what?"

He stops her suddenly. "Don't," he hisses. "Not you."
She stares at him with pity. "Just come inside and we'll talk Eli."

He shakes his head slowly, looking at the open front door. "I can't." He looks back at her, deeply confused. "How can you stay there? Knowing what he did to our mother?"

Rebekah purses her lips. "He didn't, it's not true. Can't you see that? It's her, spinning lies, trying to break us apart."

His expression grows stony. "She was not lying." He stares at her hard and she feels like she's being turned inside out. "I could see you were withholding something. Covering it up with a smile. You know it's true."

Her composure cracks and she shakes her head angrily. "He would not have lied to me for so long! I – I just don't want to talk about it anymore." She grips his shoulders and pins him with a stare. "For the first time in god knows how many years we're finally together. I won't let some prattle from a teenager or finger paintings on a wall hinder that. I just want us to be a family again."

"Me too." He leans back, staring at her sadly. Their relationship has always been a tenacious one but he knows they share the same desire. "I'm sorry for disturbing you."

Rebekah smirks and looks down at the bodies. "I think you're the one who's disturbed. Such a mess..."

He smiles as she pulls a handkerchief out of his coat pocket and offers it to him. He cleans his hands, looking at what his rage has created with distaste. "I lost control..."

"It's all right. You can't always keep it bottled up Elijah." She takes his arm again and jerks her head towards the mansion. "Come on."

Elijah shakes his head. "Not right now. I need some time to think."

She nods in understanding. "All right. But not for too long." She leans forward, mouth pinched in a conspiring smile. "I know sometimes it might not seem like it but you're my favourite brother."

He scoffs and this time the humour is genuine. "Goodnight Rebekah."

"Goodnight." She kisses his cheek before heading back into the mansion. Once she's gone he stares down at the dead hybrids. He thinks about cleaning them away but instead takes the blood that he had cajoled from Elena and lets it fall amongst them.

Let Klaus take that as he will.
Water splashes up her legs as she runs and by the time she reaches the canopy of trees her socks are soaked through. Grimacing she looks up. Dark grey clouds hang low and the branches offer little shelter. Droplets land on her upturned face, fat and heavy.

"Great..."

She runs every morning, through rain or shine but this is threatening to become a downpour. Glancing through the trees she begins to jog deeper into the wood, towards the caves and the shelter they provide.

As she crosses the threshold she says a wish under her breath, not for solitude but for company. Zipping up her jacket against the cold she walks on, her path lit by her cell, the ground growing steeper as she descends. Walking around a bend she comes to a stop, feeling relieved.

"Elijah. How have you been?" It's been a week since she last saw him.

"Fine..." He doesn't turn but his voice is as calm as ever. He stands at the mouth of the cavern, unable to go any further. "The last time I visited this place I was human. It hasn't changed much, except for this..." He presses his hand against the invisible barrier before letting it fall. She comes to his side and he regards her softly; there is regret in his eyes. "I'm sorry Elena. I should never have come to you. Should never have asked..."

"Then why did you?"

He turns to her fully, staring intensely into her eyes. "I needed to convince Niklaus of my loyalty. He has me followed and he knew that asking me to collect your blood would be a test."

"A test?"

His mouth quirks at the corner, amused at her confusion. "You're a...weakness. Now that I have my family back."

Elena's eyebrows rise and she suddenly wishes that they were above ground, in the open air. She feels exposed by his confession, trapped within the confines of rock. To hide her embarrassment she fumbles for her pocket.

"I actually hoped I'd find you here. I wanted to give you this." She hands him a small memory stick and he takes it from her curiously. "You only have my word about the drawings in the cave and seeing as you can't see them for yourself I made that."

He flips the stick over his fingers like a magician doing a coin trick before enclosing it in a fist. "There are pictures in here?"

She nods. "Ric took photographs." She gestures to the memory stick. "There's your proof."

He smiles sadly. "I believe you were telling the truth, you don't have to convince me."

"Oh..." she trails off awkwardly. "So what are you going to do?"

He pockets the stick and inhales, looking towards the barred entrance again. "Something I should have done weeks ago. Shall we?" He gestures towards the tunnel leading out.
They head up to the surface, his hand at the small of her back as they walk through the near dark; her cell phone offering a dim light. The sound of falling rain grows louder as they reach level ground and Elena sees that the rain has become a deluge. It has turned the mouth of the cave into a waterfall.

"Maybe we should wait?" Elena watches him retrieve an umbrella she had overlooked and come back to her side. "Or you can go if you need to?" She suddenly wonders what he does all day. Does he work?

He smirks, as if he just heard her thoughts. "I'd prefer to stay here, if you don't mind? It's the first time in days I've managed to shake off Klaus' hybrids."

"They've been following you to?"

He nods, clearly annoyed. "He trusts me as much as I trust him."

"But you want him to believe you're on his side?"

"Yes. I couldn't tell you before, not with his eyes and ears everywhere." He stares at her plaintively. "Even us being here is dangerous. They could compel you to tell them anything."

She shakes her head. "I take vervain." She smiles at him. "I knew you were pretending before, you're not on their side."

Elijah stares at her hard. Not angry but firm. "They're my family. I will always be on their side."

"Excluding Klaus?"

After a long troubled pause he nods. "I used to hope that he would come to see things as I do but that time is over. I broke our deal but if you're willing I would like to make another."

She smiles, cocking her head to the side. "Are you sure I have anything to offer?"

Bemused he steps closer. "I think you might. Now that my brother is a hybrid he is almost impossible to kill. You told me that Bonnie had dreamt of Klaus in a coffin?"

"Yeah. She said he looked asleep. He was also holding your mother's pendant."

Elijah hums, running his fingers along the umbrella handle in thought. "Witches can foretell the future in dreams and we both know your friend is exceptional...has she had anymore?"

Elena feels a flush of pride for her friend. "Not that I know of. I'm actually going to see her at noon. I'll ask."

"Good." He pulls the fastening away from the umbrella and shakes it out. Elena moves to the mouth of the cave and pulls her hood up. She regards him seriously.

"I'll give you information about Bonnie's dreams, in addition to my blood. What will you offer me?"

His eyes gleam. She hasn't known him for that long but she's deduced that he likes to negotiate. "Any relevant information. My brother has waited hundreds of years to break the curse and start his army. But I fear he will soon grow bored."

"I guess he won't just go away?"
"No. He wants to use his hybrids to oppose his enemies."

"Us." She looks out at the wet wood, dejected. She feels something ruffling against her leg and looks down to see him offering the umbrella. She takes it gratefully, knowing that he will not take it back.

"Us is debatable. He will go out of his way to maintain your safety, and that of your children."

Elena snorts before she can stop herself. "Children? No, the Petrova line stops with me."

He stares at her sadly but she keeps her gaze fixed ahead. "You're young."

She shrugs. "Maybe but right now it's my choice."

He nods respectfully and looks out at the rain. "I have decided to stay at the mansion under one condition: that you will be left unharmed. Klaus says that he will respect my wish but..."

"But he's not exactly the most honourable of men."

He surprises her with his answer. "I believe him, as strange as that sounds. He won't hurt you but your friends and family are a different matter."

She sighs in exasperation. "Why? I'm giving him my blood. What else does he want?"

"Control. I told you he's building an army."

"An army against a handful of people? It's insane."

He narrows his eyes at her. "Think bigger. We're unable to kill him but there are those that can."

Her mouth falls open as it clicks together. "Witches? He's building an army to fight witches?"

Elijah nods. "That's my suspicion, yes. He's terrified of dying and the servants of nature are the only true threat to him."

Her mind whirling at this information she grasps for understanding. "But he'll lose. He's no match against them."

"I know." A Machiavellian expression comes over his face and she suddenly wonders what he was like before he found control over his nature.

Bonnie almost chokes on her coffee. Rain falls steadily, patting against the kitchen window. Elena had explained her deal with Elijah and Klaus' possible long term plan.

"He can't be serious?" Bonnie stares at her friend incredulously.

"Elijah thinks it's true. He wants a war with witches." It still sounds too bizarre to be true.

The shock on Bonnie's face twists into something more bloodthirsty. "I'd like to see him try. How exactly does he plan to do this? There's no witch directory, no place that we all gather...I've been to a few covens with my family but that's it."

Elena shakes her and sips at her drink. "I know, it doesn't make much sense but witches are the only thing that can kill Klaus; so it stands to reason he'd fear them."
"And that fear has made him reckless. Hybrids against witches? If it was one on one it would be tough but if it's against a group of us...they'd be toast." Bonnie gets to her feet as the microwave beeps. "I'll let the others know but I don't think he's a serious threat. If he does try anything he'll just get himself killed in the process."

"That's what Elijah said." She takes the warm cookie hungrily that Bonnie offers her. "So...anymore dreams?"

Bonnie sighs as she sits back down. "Same old. Trying to get the coffin open, Klaus bites me, I wake up in said coffin instead. You don't have to be a genius to work that one out."

"You don't have to get it open. Not if your dreams are warning you."

Bonnie shakes her head, catching crumbs with her hand. "I know the risks but I think those dreams are just that, dreams. Morbid ones but still..." she trails off, looking contemplative.

Elena leans closer. "What is it?"

"I told you about the other dream I had, the one with Klaus in the coffin? I had it again but this time it was different. There was someone behind me."

"Who?"

Bonnie shrugs. "I wake up before I can see them. That dream feels weird. Maybe it's my wishful thinking but I think it's of the future."

"Elijah thinks it might be to." Elena catches sight of Bonnie's knowing smile and cocks her head. "What?"

"You know you've mentioned his name a dozen times since you got here? I don't think you're even aware you're doing it."

"I have not." Flushing she takes a bite out of her cookie.

Bonnie shrugs, still smiling. "I'm not complaining. It makes a change from the Salvatores."

Elena gulps down the last of her coffee, flustered by her friend's assertions but not sure why.
Chapter 4

He could leave Mystic Falls behind. He has many residents dotted all over the world so it's not as if he would be homeless. But after so long apart his family is together and as raucous as they are he won't miss it.

The gardens stretch out extensively until they reach the tree line that is the border of their property. He finds Klaus on the terrace, sitting before a canvas. A watercolour landscape of the grounds is in progress. It's beautiful.

The paintbrush stills in his hand but he doesn't turn. "I thought I'd have a crack at it, now that the gardens are finished. I missed this, it's calming..."

"I remember..." For certifiable psychopath his little brother enjoys surprisingly normal hobbies. At least this one keeps him out of trouble, for the most part. Elijah watches as he dabs the paintbrush over the paper. "Did you get the blood?"

"Yes. Along with your other gift." Klaus looks at him, a smile stretching his lips but his eyes glitter darkly. "I had to use half of the blood to replace them."

"Pity." Elijah trails his fingers along the back of a deckchair nonchalantly but he is wound tight. If Klaus makes a move he is ready for him.

But Klaus does not move. Instead he swishes a brush in a jar of cloudy water. "I know you're upset. You think you've broken some honourable rule that you adhere to but - "

"But nothing. You don't think I killed them in a fit of pique do you?" Elijah stalks up to him, his eyes intense. "What might have angered me so? Enough to make me leave for a time?"

Klaus' jaw moves from side to side. "I don't know but if took a guess I'd say Elena Gilbert is involved."

"No, Niklaus this is all you. I'm going to ask you something and I want you to tell me the truth."

Klaus narrows his eyes. "Have you been talking to Becca? Because Elena told her some rubbish about - oi!" Klaus shouts as the water jug suddenly explodes. Annoyed and also wary he steps back, paint brush still in hand. Elijah glares at him.

"Tell me."

Klaus sighs, his shoulders slumping. "You'll just leave again or worse."

"I'm here aren't I?"

His brother nods and then stares down at his feet. Elijah keeps still and silent as he waits for Klaus to speak. When he does his voice is guttural. "I told you that I had something powerful in the coffin, something deadly."

Elijah frowns. "You said a witch is in there."

Klaus looks up with a sad smile, his eyes teary. "Not just any witch..." he bites the inside of his mouth before continuing. "I didn't mean to do it; I can hardly remember what happened. I was so angry, so hurt...but I had to save her. Ayanna kept her suspended, in a state between life and death."
"Say her name."

"Mother. It's mother." Tears do not spill but cling to his eyelashes. "I had some witches spell the casket shut; I thought Mikael had found out the truth. I just - I just wanted to keep her safe. All of you safe, that's all I've ever done." He looks up, miserable.

Elijah stares at Klaus, his face impassive but his eyes burn. "And now they have the coffin."

Klaus nods slowly. "Stefan..."

"Why haven't you tried to get it back?"

For the first time since confessing a weak smile forms. "Why would I do that? When the witches spelled it shut they made it so I'd never be able to get it open again." He shakes his head. "I shouldn't have told them who was in it..."

"So...only a witch release her?"

"Yes." His lips twitch. "And just who happens to be working her arse off trying to open it for me?"

"Bonnie..." Elijah stares into the distance, mind whirling with what Klaus has told him. As Klaus goes about mopping up the spilled water Elijah frowns. "So if Bonnie can get it open what then?"

Klaus shakes his head "I've been asking myself that for hundreds of years."

"We have to save her." The thought of his mother existing in some sort of purgatory for the last thousand years sets his teeth on edge. It's an awful prospect.

Klaus nods and inhales shakily. This must have been the first time he's confessed. Elijah wonders if it's a relief. "I don't know what will happen but I want her forgiveness. As I want yours."

Elijah looks into his brother's pleading eyes for a beat before looking away. "You lied to me for a thousand years. To all of us."

"Can you blame me? I didn't want you or Rebekah to hate me. We promised each other that we would stick together forever. No matter what. Do you remember that?"

Brown eyes pin to blue. "You once told me that we do not care, or love. Do you remember that?"

"Yes." His jaw clenches.

"Do you still feel the same?"

"No." He says simply, eyes shinning with conviction. "Stay, Elijah. Please."

He sighs, staring at his brother's painting to avoid that stare. "I'm not going anywhere, for now...but you need to give me some space." He casts a flinty gaze on him. Klaus bows his head respectfully before sadly watching Elijah leave.

Even in dreams the house is in a dilapidated state. Floorboards warped with age creak underfoot and shafts of light fall through broken panes of glass. The gloom is persistent and magnifies the sense of being watched. A witch could hide in the shadows and there are many to choose from. Awake or dreaming the house is watchful.

It's a comfort to Bonnie, that she is not truly alone. Reassured by this she wanders through the
corridors, whispers and mutterings rising and falling around her. As she comes to a circular alcove the whispering intensifies and she comes to a stop. Two doors stand before her and above each is a rusted brass plaque:

*Bonnie ~ Elena*

Her door sits to the left, Elena's to the right. Confused she takes a step towards her door and grips the handle firmly. It's ice cold and she is flooded with a choking fear. Whatever is through the door is something terrible, something just for *her*. Bonnie rips her hand away and finds herself standing before Elena's door. She hesitates and the witches mutter encouragement. The handle twists in her fingers and she opens the door and walks through.

She finds herself in another circular room. This time there are three doors, with numbers above each. She feels no fear or anxiety but instead is pushed with a sense of anticipation. She opens the first door.

Elena stands in a dark room, caught between the Salvatores. Damon has her by one arm and Stefan by the other. As Bonnie watches they begin to pull, tugging at Elena as dogs do with a piece of meat. Elena's expression is blank, drained of any feeling or resistance. Horrified Bonnie watches as the brothers give a sharp tug and her friend is suddenly torn in two like paper. Wide eyed she watches as they fight over the pieces of her friend until there is nothing left of her at all. Stumbling back out of the room Bonnie catches a glimpse of Stefan and Damon scrabbling sadly for what remains of Elena before the door closes with a click.

Unsettled she looks towards the next door and finds that she can't move. Soothing whispers sound in her ear and she feels something brushing her hair tenderly. Squaring herself up she reaches for the handle to door number two.

In a pristine white hospital room Elena lies on a high backed chair, looking strangely regal. In the crook of one arm is a small pink bundle. Mewing noises come from it but Elena just stares down at the baby as if wondering how it got there. In the other arm is a needle, attached to a tube. Blood runs along it, glaringly red, to stop dripping into the upturned hand of a man.

*Klaus.*

He stares down at the blood with an ecstatic smile, insane joy dancing in his eyes. Proud, like a father. The whole scene is a mockery and this is intensified as she watches him move to a window and look out. A blasted heath stretches out as far as she can see. Trees have been reduced to charred sticks and blackened buildings poke up from the ash like jagged teeth. The only thing that lives in that wasteland are creatures with fangs and flashing gold eyes, wretched but obedient.

Bonnie only realises that she's run from the room when the door clicks shut behind her. The images she had seen race through her mind: Elena with a child, giving up her blood and the apocalyptic wasteland that was Mystic Falls.

"Is that what's going to happen?" Her voice wavers and it echoes back to her in a multitude of voices. They whisper things she can't understand but she can feel their insistence that she carry on. There's only one door left, another possible outcome. Feeling that nothing can be worse then what she has witnessed she turns the handle numbly.

A warm summer breeze blows through a window, making the net curtain lift for a moment before falling. As it rises again Bonnie sees an expanse of grass and big, old trees in full leaf. Dawn is approaching. As she watches a lone red bus trundles up the street below before turning out of sight.
She's in London.

Blinking she turns as something shuffles behind her. A woman gets out of bed, ties a dressing gown absentmindedly around her waist before sitting at a desk before the window. She powers up a laptop, yawning widely.

Bonnie creeps forward, her mouth open. The woman is in her thirties but it's unmistakably Elena. Feeling slightly giddy at seeing her friend over ten years older she watches Elena as she slips on some glasses and begins to type. The silence of the bedroom is broken by the click-clack of keys.

"It's...4:30." A man's voice drifts sleepily from the bed, a man Bonnie hadn't even noticed.

"The older you get the less sleep you need. So you really need like five minutes."

"So why do I sleep four hours a night?"

"Lazy."

"Ah..." He chuckles and gets up, pulling a t-shirt over his head. Bonnie feels like her brain has fallen to her feet. Elijah reaches Elena's side and kisses the top of her head before walking out of the room. She can hear a kettle being filled, the click of cups being set out. All the while Elena works; her focus completely on what she is typing.

A shelf of books catches Bonnie's eye and she reads the spines, amazement coursing through her. She looks back at Elena.

"You're a writer?" She points towards the kitchen. "And you're with Elijah?" Elena carries on, unaware of her presence. Bonnie laughs in delighted disbelief. When she wakes in the morning a vestige of a smile is still on her lips.

**note**: Originally Klaus liked to garden but after he was revealed to be an artist on the show I had to change it lol. I hope any Elejah shippers liked that last part ;)}
Chapter 5

Klaus seems to have taken his request for space seriously. Not a hybrid in sight as he walks through the wood leading towards the town. The crackle of leaves further down the path brings him to a stop and he watches glimpses of a running woman flickering through the trees. As Elena reaches the bend in the path she stops and pulls out her ear-buds. Music pulses faintly into the air.

"Hi..." Her eyes flick around them nervously as she walks forward.

"You're playing a dangerous game. Rebekah could easily see you running here."

"Is she still mad?"

"You stabbed her in the back. And she informs me it was in a dress she rather liked." Elijah smirks. "It may take some time before she gets over that."

Elena winces as she steps closer. "So...any news?"

"I think we should discuss this somewhere else. I'm no longer followed but better safe then sorry."

They begin to walk along the path together. For the first time in days the rain is gone and a spotless blue sky can be seen above, patchwork through the branches. At the sight Elena suddenly feels restless with energy. She could walk for miles, right out of Mystic Falls and keep going. She eyes him peripherally, wondering if he would call her coward or reckless if she voiced the desire to leave. Or would he meet her step for step?

As the trees begin to thin out and the main road becomes visible they are suddenly stopped in their tracks.

"Damon." She eyes him warily, trying to squish a sudden stab of guilt. She has nothing to hide, not from him. But still the half smirk on his mouth sets her on edge.

Damon stares at Elijah. "I was on my way to see you. Thought you might want to say thanks for the whole dagger out of your chest thing. But it seems Elena's found you first."

Elijah straightens his coat, his mouth set into a sardonic smile. "I found your note. I would have come to say thank you but I've been pressed for time." He eyes Elena.

"Sure, understandable, what with the company you keep." Damon looks at Elena and comes forward, speaking in a low voice. "So...I take it you're working together to take down Klaus. Again. Mentioning it would have been nice."

Elena had thought about including him but the less people know the less chance they have of getting hurt. But she realises in that second that her actions do not stem solely from a place of altruism. There is a part of her that enjoys dealing with Elijah on her own. Relishes the autonomy of it, as dangerous as it is.

She exhales in exasperation. "There's nothing to tell. I was running and we bumped into each other."

"You're a terrible liar." He seems bemused rather then upset. He shrugs. "It's OK, Elijah is my favourite original to."
Elijah looks down, straitening his coat again whilst trying to hide a smile. "Elena is telling the truth. We have an arrangement, nothing more." He lies smoothly, not a flicker to give him away.

"An arrangement?"

"Klaus is sending Elijah to collect my blood. In return he promises that we'll be safe."

The smile on Damon's face disappears in a blink. "You're giving your blood? Willingly?"

"Yes. I don't like it anymore then you do. But if it means that you and everyone else are safe then I'll do it till the day I die."

Damon eyes swivel angrily between them. Elijah steps forward, speaking softly.

"You have my word; no harm will come to her."

"Well sorry but your word doesn't mean squat. If you had just killed Klaus we wouldn't even be having this conversation now."

Elijah's face turns to stone and Elena feels something crackling in the air, waiting to strike. Tentatively she moves forward and stares plaintively at Damon.

"Look, we've already been over this. I've forgiven him. He's made it clear that his family comes before anything and I can respect that. He's not on our side but he's still honourable."

Damon scoffs but doesn't attempt to speak. If it had been anyone else but Elijah he probably would have argued until he was blue in the face. Instead he glares at him.

"I must have been insane undaggering you. Your whole white knight thing was screwing with my mind."

"Be that as it may I am grateful for what you did. Elena is right; I don't wish to harm any of you."

"It's not you I'm worried about." He narrows his eyes at Elijah. "Just because I can't read you like Elena doesn't mean you're not lying."

"Maybe it's not that I'm lying. Maybe it's that none of this concerns you." Elijah stares at him, his face still and unreadable. Damon rolls his eyes.

"Whatever. We'll talk later Elena." He gives them one suspicious glare before getting into his car and driving off.

Elena sighs with relief once he's gone. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. He's very protective of you."

Elena shakes his head. "I know but it's becoming too much. I feel coddled. I have to lie to him because otherwise he'll feel he has to keep me safe, whether I want that or not. I wish he would respect the decisions I make, no matter how dangerous or stupid he thinks they are."

"I find that when you love someone reason tends to flee."

Elena gazes at him softly before she smirks. "Even you?"

"Once, a long time ago." He begins to walk up the street, which is in the wealthiest part of Mystic Falls. As they head towards the end of the block he speaks up. "Has Bonnie made any progress
with the coffin?"

"No but her dreams are more persistent. She says the spirits really want her to get it open." He makes a noncommittal humming noise and Elena narrows her eyes at him.

At her expression his eyebrows rise in query. "Yes?"

"Do you know something?"

He leans down to her ear as they pass some people on the street. "Possibly. Here we are." He stops at a door and takes out a key. Elena looks up at the Art Deco style building.

"Do you live here?"

"Sometimes..." He opens the door and gestures for her to enter first. She looks up through the gap in the stairwell and sees that the building has a vaulted glass ceiling.

"Wow."

"Yes, it usually gets that reaction. Though the tenants inform me that it can become quite hot during the summer. Shall we? My apartment is at the top."

Elena flourishes her hand. "Lead the way."

His apartment is beautiful and furnished with priceless antiques. The rug she stands on probably costs more than her house. She steps around it to stand before an impressionist painting on the wall. No doubt the real thing. But for all the lavish pieces the apartment is surprisingly bare. A couch, an armchair, bookcases, a desk. It paints a man who likes the finer things but not to the point of excess. It's not a place that feels lived in.

"Would you like a drink?"

"Um, sure."

He takes off his coat and hangs it onto a stand before disappearing into the kitchen. "Excuse the mess; I haven't had enough time to clean."

Frowning Elena looks over the spotless room and then smiles when she sees what he's referring to. Notes litter his desk and numerous journals lie open. She moves over for a closer look and sees that one of the journals has a date embellished over the cover. 1900.

"A diary..."

"Something we have in common, I think?"

She turns to find him offering her a glass of coke. She takes it with thanks and sits in the armchair by the window. "I haven't written anything in mine for awhile."

"It's easy to be sidetracked. I missed the 1700's." He pulls a chair out from the desk and sits, sipping at his own drink. "I find it helps when researching."

"Researching?"

His lips quirk. "Being a historian wasn't a cover story. I write journals, some even get published." He nods towards a bookcase and Elena gets to her feet curiously. The books range from the Anglo
Saxon period right up to the present day. At least she knows what his day job is now.

"Must help if you've lived for a thousand years." She says sardonically, turning to him.

"And in some cases I was even present."

"Your sources must be interesting."

He flashes a rare grin. "Yes, that can be a problem. Helps if you write under a pseudonym."

"I'll bet. So..." She sits back down and taps her fingernails against the glass. "What did you want to tell me?"

He nods and puts his glass down. He leans forward to stare at her intently. "I spoke with Klaus and he confessed to killing our mother." His voice is level but he averts his gaze from her as he says it. When he is flustered he looks away, she remembers that from their past dealings. "He was...regretful."

"And you believe him?"

His eyes flick back to hers. "Yes. We're monsters but we're not without heart. She was his mother."

Reprimanded Elena nods. "So have you changed your mind? Do you want to break off our deal?"

She says it tentatively, trying not to show her disappointment.

He smiles sadly at her. "No, I do not want to break our deal. He still poses a grave threat, one he won't be swayed from." He leans back in his chair with a sigh. "He told me something that...complicates matters."

Not liking the sound of that Elena frowns. "What?"

"He's told me who is in the coffin. I told you before that I believed my family were disposed of into the sea. Obviously that wasn't the case but it's only recently that Klaus informed me about the other coffin. He told me there was witch in it, a powerful one."

"A witch?"

"I thought he had locked her in there as a preventative measure. He has made himself some enemies with the servants of nature over the years. But this is not the case."

"Who is it?"

"My mother." He says it so softly that she barely hears it.

Elena blinks. "But...she's dead?"

He nods. "Dead but, according to Klaus, also alive. My mother had a friend, her mentor. An ancestor of the Bennett witches in fact. She kept her in a state between life and death, never able to move on or live."

Elena scowls at how morbid it sounds. "That's awful."

He nods and then goes about tidying up his desk. "Now we have the opportunity to spare her from that. Klaus has been misleading Stefan and Bonnie with the notion that he wants the coffin back."

"He doesn't?"
"No. He's been unable to open it but he hopes that Bonnie's efforts will do the trick. He hopes the she will wake her up." Hearing this Elena pulls her cell phone out of her pocket. "Who are you calling?"

"Bonnie. If Klaus wants it open then we're playing right into his hands."

"Please don't."

Elena pauses, her thumb hovering over the call button. She stares into his plaintive gaze, confused. "You want her to open it? Shouldn't we be doing the opposite of what Klaus wants?"

"Normally I'd agree but..."

"It's your mom." She stares into his dark eyes and wonders if she would do the same if she had the chance to see her mother again. There's no question, not even if a thousand years had passed. Elena puts her phone away and inhales deeply with a nod. "OK, I get it. But I'll have to tell Bonnie."

"As you wish." He stands. His notes and journals are now ordered into neat stacks.

Elena gets to her feet and he takes the empty glass from her. She gestures towards the street. "I should go." He smiles gently and sees her to the door.

Elena turns to him on the threshold. "Um it might be useful to have your phone number. If you have one?" She adds, unsure.

He chuckles. "Unlike some of my siblings I didn't miss the 20th century." He gives her his cell number which she stores into her phone. She smiles at him, feeling awkward. With a friend goodbyes come easy but what are they? Allies? Comrades? What affection comes between people like them?

"I better go talk to Bonnie..."

"Of course. Until we meet again." He smiles at her, eyes twinkling. As she walks down the stairs Elena wonders if he gets a thrill out of her awkwardness.
Chapter 6

Finn stands in the clearing, gazing up at the clear sky. He attempts a smile before looking down with a resigned sigh. He tightens his fist over the dagger and holds it towards his chest. The ash dusted point hovers over his heart.

"I wondered where that dagger had got to."

Finn looks up to see Elijah standing a few feet away. A light smile is on his face but his eyes are incredibly dark. Finn's hand tightens around the handle.

"It's the same one. It's been my constant companion over the years, so it's only fitting that it should be so again."

Once they had been close. Only a year separates them, if he thinks about it in human terms. It had been the two of them together for years before their other siblings had been born. They had grown alike in temperament, much to the pride of their parents. Once Finn had been joyous, with a quick wit and a wicked sense of humour. He had married first, been the first to become a father. He had been the first to build that internal dam to his conscience and the first to knock it down. His heart had been the first one speared.

A span of months separates their birth but now a nine hundred year gulf exists, one he's not sure he can breach but he has to try. Elijah's eyes flick to his brother's hand then back to his face.

"What will this accomplish? You won't die."

"True but I won't be alive either. This is my choice Elijah, it always has been."

Elijah takes a step forward but stops when Finn makes a jabbing motion with the dagger. Elijah shakes his head sadly. "You've only been awake a few weeks Finn. There's so much you still haven't seen."

Finn smiles suddenly. "I have seen plenty brother. The world has moved beyond my comprehension. I find myself constantly defeated by contraptions I can barely understand." He looks up at the branches overarching them. "That's why I came out here, at least this doesn't change." Rebekah had taken him out to see the little town but even that had proved too much. At the advancements in technology Finn had marvelled but harboured a deep confusion that bordered on superstition.

Elijah tilts his head in sympathy. "I understand that all this must be incredibly peculiar but you have to give it time."

Finn shakes his head. "I am an anachronism Elijah, I do not belong here. None of us do."

Not to be dissuaded Elijah grasps for other options. "Then live in seclusion, away from all this. I have an estate in the Scottish Highlands, stay there."

"And then what? It's not just my displacement. I want to feed; I crave to hunt because of this cursed state. And I will not do it." He emphases, an almost crazed light in his eye.

Elijah looks away, pained. Finn had slaughtered his entire family and tried to live with the consequences of that act for a hundred years. But he could not. Being stabbed through the heart was not an act of betrayal for him but a mercy. He never wanted to be awoken.
"You do not have to kill. You've seen the other means we now acquire blood. The drive to pursue prey is something that can be overcome with time, if you try." Elijah moves forward, palms outwards. "Try Finn, please?"

The dagger lowers but he does not drop it. Instead he stares at Elijah curiously. "Why are you fighting so hard for this?"

Elijah blinks, surprised at his confusion. "Because we're family. I had dreamed for the day that we could all be as one. Now we can actually *live* it."

Finn smiles sadly. "That is where we differ, brother. I do not call this living."

Elijah realises then that it's not enough to just exist; you need something to live for. His brother needs hope. He has informed no one of his dealings with Elena but as he takes his brother's poised hand he knows it is the right decision, the only one.

"I have something to tell you. I hope after hearing it you will drop the dagger and come away. If you don't then I will not stop you. I'll convince the others to let you sleep."

Finn narrows his eyes. "What do you think could possibly persuade me?"

"Mother." He answers simply and waits for the dagger to fall.

She passes through beams of light, the graves of her descendants at her feet, until she reaches the casket. It is not the coffin she has been working so hard to open, it never has been.

"I figured out how to open it. Can you?"

Bonnie turns to Klaus, who smirks at her. As is the nature of dreams he slowly races forward. The stab of fear and panic is acute and it renders her helpless. He suddenly slams into her and forces her back against the coffin. She only has enough time to screech before he bites into her throat and darkness sets in around her like a fog. Encased in the dark she battles to stay calm. She balls her fists up and bangs on the lid of the coffin. With this rising hysteria comes another sensation: familiarity.

*I've done this before.*

With this realisation there is a sudden sharp clicking noise and a crack of light lines her on all sides. Breath hitching Bonnie pushes the lid up and jumps out of the coffin and races blindly through a doorway. She turns in time to see the door she had run through close softly. She looks up and spots a very familiar brass plaque above it:

*Bonnie.*

She stares at the door, the door to her future, the door she had been too scared to open and feels a bubbling hysteria welling up. The door leads to her death.

She stands before Elena's doors. Three possibly outcomes for her, one for Bonnie.

*I escaped from the coffin, I got out. My fate is not set.*

The last thought runs through her mind like a mantra but it does little the quail her rising fear. She looks to each door in turn, thinking hard. Maybe Elena's possible futures will give insight into how
to prevent her own. The first two doors hold horrors, things that she can't stomach yet. Instead she strides to the last door and prays that it will reveal something to her.

The oak trees lining the path are a combustion of golds and browns, the leaves pushing for one last brilliant display before dying. In the distance Bonnie can hear music issuing from a large white tent which sits on a lush lawn. Beyond that a massive glasshouse dominates. She appears to be in a park.

She spots Elena coming towards her. Again it is surreal to see her friend mature of age and so prepossessed. Elena is dressed for a formal occasion, one that seems to be almost over as dusk falls. She pads barefoot along the path, a finger curled around the heels of her stilettos as she passes Bonnie. Again she gives no sign that she can see her. Bonnie follows, curious as she deviates from the path and steps into the grass.

In the distance is an oak, massive with age and Bonnie is momentarily awed at the sight. It must be hundreds of years old.

"Is that what I think it is?" Elena walks up to Elijah who is looking up at the vast canopy. Like Elena he is dressed formally but a bowtie hangs loose around his neck. He turns to Elena and nods.

"Remember when we went travelling looking for them?"

"I'll never forget." she answers dryly, stepping gingerly through fallen acorns.

"According to one of the gardeners the sapling was brought here many, many years ago." He runs his hand over the cracking bark. "This is it, the last one."

Elena moves to his side, looking thoughtful. "Are you going to destroy it?"

He smirks, eyeing her. "This is a royal park Elena, they'd have our heads." His smile falls and he gazes up again. "I think its fitting; now we're both the only ones left."

Elena reaches for his hand and he looks down. She speaks softly. "You miss them?"

"All the time."

She pulls him into her arms and plants soft kisses against his cheek until he turns to capture her lips. As the embrace becomes impassioned Bonnie steps back and turns, feeling voyeuristic at witnessing their intimacy. An open door is embedded in the trunk of an ash and she steps through it.

Bonnie hesitates as she comes to stand before the middle door. Elena's future with Elijah has given her no clues about what may happen to her but she feels that what lies beyond this door will. It's a morbid certainty. As she twists the handle a mummeration of voices suddenly well up and then are hushed as she steps through.

Before the images she had seen had been a surreal montage, different from the third. Now the scene before her is rooted in harsh reality. She wonders fleetingly if the more abstract the future the less likely it will happen? Or is it the complete opposite? Banishing these unanswerable questions she moves forward.

The noise is the first thing to hit her, a constant roaring in the darkness. Bonnie hedges forward and looks out. She's at the top of a waterfall and below the land is dark, still and dead. The only sign of life here is the rushing water cascading over rocks and a gibbous moon above. The last time she
had been here was as a child but she recognises the waterfall that her town is named after. Or what had been her town. To the east a few spots of light shine, the only sign that anything still lives there. Forlorn and confused she sits back against a rock for a time before she notices movement below.

A woman walks hurriedly along the bridge, leading a boy by the hand and stops halfway. She looks over her shoulder nervously, bouncing from one foot to the other. Intrigued Bonnie finds herself standing a few feet away and recognises Elena. While the Elena that may go on to live in London had been older she did not have the worn and faded face of this woman. The boy looks to be about seven or eight and he watches his mother with a quiet vigilance.

Elena looks up at the waterfall and for a moment a nostalgia comes over her features, softening them. But then she looks down, shaking her head and moves to the wooden railing to peer over. Her gaze is fixed determinedly downwards but then a dreamy cast comes over her face and it sends a shiver through Bonnie. She stands close to her friend, knowing that she can't help or hinder her.

"Don't."

For a second Bonnie thinks she spoke aloud but then with an awful realisation sees that it had been the boy. Elena looks down at him, horrified.

"I wasn't Grayson, don't think that." She gets down onto her hunches and stares intensely at her son. "I'm fine Gray. I don't want you to worry, OK?" She looks up and sighs. "I wish you didn't have to be here for this. Ten minutes tops and then we'll be heading home."

Gray nods gravely and then shrugs. "I wanted to be here. I wanted to see it for myself." He looks out at the ruins of Mystic Falls. "What happened?"

Elena straightens, still looking shook up. "You know what happened."

"But I want to hear it again. About the witches and the trees."

Elena sighs and pulls the boy to her side. "My friend channelled all the magic there was and tried to suppress the werewolf side of the hybrids. It backfired." Her voice catches and she looks down. His large brown eyes stare into the distance, thoughtful. "Why the werewolf side? Why not the vampire?"

"Because hybrids need to die to become what they are. Suppressing the vampire aspect would have killed them."

"But it didn't work," Elena's son continues, "she ended up suppressing magic. That's why there are no more witches now." He recounts as if reciting a fairy tale. Horror-struck Bonnie moves closer to them, desperate to hear more but they fall silent.

"No, you need to tell me what happened!"

"It's a ghastly sight, isn't it?" Bonnie turns to see Klaus standing on the bridge, looking down towards Mystic Falls sadly. A few hybrids hover behind him. Elena stiffens and moves in front of her son before speaking.

"And whose fault is that?"

Klaus cocks his head in disbelief. "I never wanted that." He points at the ruins below. "This was my home as well as yours." He moves closer, his frown fading. "Bad history aside it's nice to see
you again. Your boy is getting bigger. All right mate?" He smirks at Gray who says nothing but
stares wide eyed at the vampire.

Elena's mouth thins. "I'm here and I want to get this over with as quickly as possible."

"As do I, come along then." He sweeps his arm out and moves aside to let them pass. He walks
behind Elena, speaking low. "I was watching you earlier. You know if you do attempt anything
foolish I'll be forced to go back on our agreement."

Elena looks back but doesn't stop walking. "Foolish?"

"Yes, foolish, stupid, thoughtless. I continually need your blood and that won't be possible if
you top yourself." He mouths the last few words, flicking his gaze to Gray for a moment. "You
know there's plenty of room with me? I can keep an eye on you; make sure you're not up to any
mischief."

Elena scoffs. "Your concern is touching but the deal is still on. You leave us alone in return for my
blood." She exhales shakily as a car comes into sight.

Klaus shrugs. "I'll keep my end of it if you do. I want you to live to a ripe old age my girl, to be
comfortable and watch him grow up. That's what Elijah would want."

Elena stops, glaring at him. "Don't mention his name."

The vampire looks down and has the grace to look shamed. "We've both lost just about everyone
that mattered to us and I'm not in the mood to lose anymore."

He leaves Elena to blink at his statement before following him, Gray's hand in hers. Bonnie
watches as Elena's blood is drawn and the darkness of the night seems to deepen. A door appears in
the distance, supported by no walls, and Bonnie walks through it in a daze.

She wanders through the house, the spirits of the dead around her. Maybe she's one herself? Who
can say in dreams, especially those of a witch? The dreadful revelations has numbed her. She
welcomes it. The door to the basement swings open and she walks through it and down the steps
without a care. The basement is empty but for one thing. The sight of it is like a crack of light
through the dark. She approaches the coffin and lifts the lid off. It gives her a deep sense of
satisfaction knowing she helped take the Original down. She has no proof but she feels it to her
core.

Klaus sleeps on, never to wake.

"Bonnie." A woman says and she turns.

She wakes, gasping for breath. She stares into the darkness of her room, focusing on nothing. Her
dreams flood through her and the morbidity of it sends her scrabbling to her feet and towards a
lamp. Light bathes her room and she blinks against it, moving towards the window. The street
below is quiet and empty but for a single person. A woman stands directly across the street looking
up at her. As the woman catches sight of Bonnie she crosses the road and heads towards the house.
Frowning Bonnie quietly leaves her room, careful not to wake her dad.

She draws the curtain aside as she reaches the door but doesn't recognise the woman. Thinking that
she might be lost and in need of assistance Bonnie opens the door.
"Can I help you?"

The smile on the woman's face slips and she blinks. "Don't you know who I am?"

"Sorry." Bonnie shakes her head, a strange crawling sensation in her belly as she does. The woman smiles sadly.

"It's me, Bonnie. I'm your mom."
"She said that she had been dreaming about me in danger. She came to see if I was safe."

They had met up at the Grill before school and its here that Bonnie had broke the news about her mother. Elena and Caroline stare sympathetically at her. She cradles a mug between her hands and sometimes as she speaks she'll look down into it. Bonnie is not one to wail and scream, she harbours her emotions but now cracks are running through her calm surface. Elena feels like her heart is breaking.

"Are you OK?"

Bonnie shrugs and flicks her eyes up. "I guess. It was rough...I just feel weird. I didn't even recognise my own mother."

"Hey, don't blame yourself for that. You haven't seen her since you were three." Caroline takes her hand with a smile.

Bonnie nods. "She told me that she couldn't stand the dreams anymore and drove in the middle of the night to get here. She - she seemed really relieved that I was still alive." She picks up her tea and takes a gulp before continuing. "It was the middle of the night and dad was asleep so I didn't want to invite her in. She's staying at a hotel. I told dad and he's...not happy." Her eyes are glossy with tears.

"I'm sorry Bonnie. Just know that me and Caroline are here for you."

"Yeah." Caroline pulls Bonnie into a hug and manages to force a smile out of her. Elena looks up and blinks in surprise. Elijah stands at the bar, looking at them. He seems to be debating whether or not to come forward but after looking at a tearful Bonnie he heads out.

Bonnie breaks away from Caroline, looking in the same direction as Elena. "Was that Elijah?"

"I think it was." Elena turns back to them, looking a little confused.

Sitting back down Bonnie suddenly snorts. "I dreamt about him to. That one was much nicer."

"You did? What was it?" Elena sits down, staring at her curiously.

The smile fades from Bonnie's lips and averts her gaze as if embarrassed. She shrugs. "It's probably nothing." She drinks some more, expression becoming thoughtful. "Abby has been having the same dreams, the one with Klaus in the coffin. She offered to help me."

"Do you want her to?" Caroline asks.

Bonnie stares into the middle distance. "This is not how I pictured meeting her again but we've been having those dreams for a reason. The spirits want us together."

Elena tilts her head. "But do you?"

Bonnie shrugs again. "I don't know. I just want to focus on freeing the original witch and stopping Klaus."

Elena and Caroline nod and share a brief look of understanding. Bonnie would rather focus on this task then deal with the painful relationship she has with her estranged and absentee mother. They
can't blame her for that.

The girl lies at the foot of his door. Kol must have let her fall there after he had finished, tossed aside like a rag. By the size of the blood stain soaked into the carpet he hadn't even drained her.

*Like a midnight snack,* Elijah thinks and sighs, disgusted.

"Well that's a pleasant sight. Brings back memories, doesn't it?" Klaus comes to stand by his side and they stare at the body.

"I had forgotten how...frivolous he is. I used to hope he'd grow out of it..."

Klaus scoffs. "A thousand year old teenager." His smirk disappears as he stares at the creeping bloodstain and glares. "That carpet is brand new and it cost a bloody fortune. This needs to be nipped in the bud." He strides forward and bangs a fist against Kol's door. "Oi! Wake up and clean your mess."

There's an audible groan from behind the door. "Piss off."

"Don't give me lip you ungrateful little twerp. This is my house in case you've forgotten."

The door opens and Kol stares blearily at Klaus. "I thought this was our house?"

"It is and it always will be but you have to follow the house rules. One of them being: clean up after yourself. You're a thousand years old for crying out loud! Stop acting like a child. We're the originals; you know the offspring look up to us. But they'd lose all respect if they saw that you behave no better then a hundred year old baby."

Elijah comes forward. "I think what Niklaus is trying to say is that you need some standards."

Kol gasps and clutches at his chest, mock offended. "How impertinent! Like I could live up to your standards Elijah." His eyes shine with a cruel mischief. "Or want to." He looks at Klaus. "What happened to you? You used to be fun."

Klaus grins. "Oh Kol, don't think for a moment I've lost my edge." He moves forward and grabs the back of his neck. "I just don't piss on my own doorstep. Go on, tidy up and we'll go have a drink later."

Kol had stiffened when Klaus grabbed him but now he smiles, relaxing. "All right. I'll use one your hybrids to remove this." He waves a nonchalant hand to the dead girl and Elijah has to hold back a curse. Instead he turns and leaves as Kol closes the door. Klaus sighs behind him.

"You hold him down and I'll stab him?"

"I'm tempted daily," Elijah throws his brother a quick smile as they head down a flight of steps. Klaus stares at him, wondering.

"I'm not blind you know. I've told my hybrids to back off but I'm aware of what you've been up to."

Elijah stops at the top of the grand staircase and looks at Klaus openly. "And what have I been up to?"

"Spending time with Elena, likely to share information."

"And what information would I be passing?"
"About mother." He says this quietly, his eyes sweeping around them. They're alone.

Elijah glides his palm along the smooth banister. "I have been meeting with Elena; I've done nothing to hide that from you. I told her about who is in the coffin."

Klaus smiles, tight and knowing. "You're conspiring."

"That is what she thinks, yes." He moves closer to Klaus, eyes never leaving his. "I'm helping them towards something that we all want: mother free. Originally they hoped to use whatever was in the coffin against you. I don't think this has changed."

"They want to use my own mother against me?"

Elijah looks at Klaus sharply. "Are they presumptive to think this or are we to think it's foolish? We do not know what her mind will be once she's free."

Klaus nods gloomily. "I know. She could very well join their side but..." he trails off, his misgivings getting the best of him.

"But blood is thicker than water. The memories I have of mother is of a woman absolutely devoted to her family. She will listen to us, I'm sure of it but what happens after that is up in the air."

Klaus nods, leaning against the banister. "I'm grateful for your discretion Elijah. You could have told the others the truth but you haven't."

Elijah stares at his little brother, face unreadable. "We've only just started living here; I won't be responsible for ripping this apart. It will be impossible for them to exist together if the truth is revealed.

Klaus looks up at a family portrait that consists of all of them, excluding Finn. It had been commissioned over two hundred years ago. "Those were simpler times."

Elijah looks up at it and snorts. "You threw a sword at me after that was done, as I recall."

"It was a bad day. And I missed." He looks at Elijah carefully. "Whose side are you on? I believe you want this family to work but you still have this affection for Elena. You say you're playing spy but that's never been you Elijah. Far to dishonest."

Elijah shrugs. "My family comes first; it's as simple as that. Assisting them to get the coffin open is a price I'm willing to pay."

Klaus laughs. "I doubt it's much of a price when you get to cosy up to Miss Gilbert."

Elijah gives his brother a stern hooded gaze. "I wish you would drop it. I admire her, nothing more."

Klaus throws up his hands with a smirk. "I'll say no more. So what are you doing next?"

Elijah cocks his head. "Over the years I have been working on assembling and translating mother's grimoire. It may help to open the coffin."

Klaus widens his eyes. "You're going to give mother's spell book to Bonnie Bennett? She'll be unstoppable!"

Elijah smirks. "You almost sound jealous."
"Jealous? She tried to kill me. On more then one occasion. We can't let her keep it. Not a good idea to tool up your enemies." He says it jokingly but there is a strain to his voice. He fears witches and he has every right to. If he does make a move against them then his brother better be ready.

"I doubt she'll even accept it. I better go; I have to conspire with the enemy." He jerks his head towards the door. Klaus narrows his eyes thoughtfully.

"I can't stop who you associate with but I hope you remember that when all this is said and done your family will remain constant. Forming attachments to mortals is not a wise choice Elijah, they are ephemeral and we are forever. Remember that." He nods at him before ascending the stairs.

Elijah stares back up at the painting, at the Regency era image of himself, and shakes his head. "If I was wise I'd leave this town." And take her with me, he thinks before banishing the outlandish thought.

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Elena knocks on the door, Bonnie at her side. It swings open and a man she has never seen before appears. His eyes widen at the sight of Elena.

"Remarkable..." His English accent is smooth and soft.

"Uh...Elijah sent me a text to come here with my friend. Is he here?"

"Elena, Bonnie." Elijah comes to the door with a smile. "This is my brother Finn." The aforementioned smiles politely at them before moving aside so they can enter.

"Forgive my staring. I had heard of your physical similarities to Tatia but it is something else to see it with my own eyes." Finn stares at her in wonder while Elijah clenches his jaw.

Elena frowns. "Tatia?"

Elijah sweeps forward. "Forgive my brother, he's been stuck in a coffin for the last 900 years and it shows." He gives him a tight smile that threatens maiming. Finn, apparently in a good mood, snorts and moves towards the armchair where he sits.

Bonnie and Elena sit on the couch, feeling not a little self conscious in the company of men whose combined ages tallies that of two millennium. Elijah sits at his desk and stares intently at them.

"So, I believe you are closer to freeing our mother?"

Bonnie clears her throat. "I think so. There is a spell that we will do tonight. Abby thinks it might work." She stares at each of them in turn, gaze stern and Elena is impressed. "If we do manage to get it open and wake her up what are your plans?"

"Honestly I don't know. I'd been left to believe that she was dead and buried for most of my life...I can barely recall her face." Elijah says with a wistfully sadness. Bonnie stiffens beside her.

"I remember what she looks like." Finn says lightly and there is an affectionate weight to his words.

Elijah stares at him. "You roamed for only a hundred years. Your recollection would be fresher then mine."

"A hundred years was more then enough. I pity you." He says to Elijah sincerely and his brother looks down with a smile.
"It wasn't all bad. I did things you can barely comprehend."

Finn laughs and there is a crack of madness in his voice. "My entire existence is incomprehensible! Everywhere I look is something strange." He flourishes his hand around the room. "I'd call it magic if I didn't know better."

Elena and Bonnie stare at each other with the same bemused expression. Elijah sees this and smiles.

"My brother is going through a severe bout of culture shock."

"At least you still have beer." Finn gets to his feet and heads towards the kitchen.

Bonnie watches him go and then looks back at Elijah. "You saved Klaus' life before, how do I know you won't do it again?"

"Klaus used the one thing he knew could sway me: my family. He does not have that option anymore. I planned his downfall for over five hundred years and that hasn't changed, as you can see."

Bonnie cocks her head. "You say that family means the most to you but he's your brother. He doesn't count?"

"Not anymore." He says it softly and Elena wants to ignore the conflict that dances in his eyes but can't. "Sometimes Klaus can seem like the most wonderful person you've ever met but that doesn't negate the fact that he wants to build his own race. It doesn't seem like much now but he's a vampire, we do not plan short term."

"And he wants to destroy witches..." She trails off, thoughts inward. By her drawn expression they're not pleasant ones.

Elena gets up and moves to Elijah. "Is he trustworthy?" She whispers, casting a quick look back at Finn who she can hear in the kitchen.

"Is anyone?" Elijah lets his smile fall. "He wants our mother back and will help us to do that. He always cherished her more then my other siblings. Certainly more then Klaus."

Elena tilts her head. "You told them what he did?"

Elijah shakes his head, picking up a pen. "No. For now I'm withholding that information."

"So you can hold it over Klaus?" Bonnie asks and he nods.

"He fears retribution from my siblings as much as the threat you pose, I think. I actually have something to give you." He gets up and moves towards a bookcase. From it he takes a thick leather bound journal and offers it to Bonnie. She looks at it with a frown.

"What is it?"

"My mother's grimoire. Not the actual one of course. I managed to retrieve it before we left for the old world. I've translated it into English and Latin. It may be useful. Do you want it?"

Desire is clear on her face but she narrows her eyes suspiciously. "Is there a catch?"

Elijah stares plaintively. "No. It's a simple show of thanks. If you do not wish to take it I will put it back on the shelf, where it will sit unused. I think you may find some of the spells...interesting.
Certainly none you have seen before."

Elena looks at Bonnie and shrugs. "I'd take it."

"I know you would..." Bonnie mutters as she takes it from Elijah. Elena frowns but before she can ask what she means Finn comes back into the room carrying a tray of cups.

"I'm not completely useless."

As Bonnie pours over the spell book Elena looks around Elijah's apartment and stumbles upon a terrace. She slides the glass door open and steps out. It's small and in the style of a Japanese water garden. Elijah finds her leaning against the banister, looking out over Mystic Falls.

"It's not much."

"I like it. It's peaceful." She eyes him curiously as he stands beside her, running his fingers over the wooden railing.

"I'm Tatia's doppelgänger, aren't I?"

Elijah's hands stop moving. For a moment she thinks he's won't answer but he nods stiffly. "She lived in our village. My mother used her blood in the ritual that turned us into vampires."

Elena looks out at the sky. The setting sun has cast the clouds into deep reds and purples. Like blood and bruises. "Why her?"

Elijah inhales deeply and looks at her. His gaze is at once soft and heavy, full of something that Elena can't name. For a moment there is a push-pull of resistance, like two opposing magnets almost touching. The first time they had met had been charged with something similar, but she had been terrified at the time. Now all she feels is anticipation, taut like a piano wire that suddenly snaps as he looks away.

He clears his throat. "Once my mother is with us you can ask her yourself."

"Right..." She moves back to sit, feeling strangely limp. He turns to stare down at her.

"You don't seem too enthused."

"She did try to kill me. At least I think it was her."

He makes a humming noise, thinking. "My mother wanted to prevent the curse from being broken and if you were no longer part of the ritual she would have succeeded." He smiles at her for a moment. "I'm glad she failed."

Elena shakes her head with a dry smile. "So am I...but I know it would be safer if I had died. Lots of things could have been prevented."

"Don't feel guilty for wanting to live."

"It's morbid but it's also the truth."

"What do you want to do?" He asks suddenly, moving to sit beside her. Trying to lighten the conversation she thinks.

Elena is stumped. "Um, well I used to think about being a writer but for the past few years I can't
do it. Writer's block." She taps her temple.

Elijah narrows his eyes. "You'll be going to college?"

She nods. "Yeah, I'll have to make a decision soon."

"Will you study here?"

"No." Elena startles herself. There was no hesitation in her answer. "I'm not sure if I want to do creative writing or psychology or whatever but if I'm going to study I can't do it here."

He nods, staring at her softly. "If you need to leave this place then do it. I know you have been through a lot Elena but you have a drive that few people posses. Especially for someone of your age. Mortal lives are fleeting but some can be remarkable. That's one of the benefits of living for so long, I get to witness it."

If anyone else had said this she would have found it condescending but the sincerity in his words rings clear. "Well don't get your hopes up, I'm no Mozart."

A dreamy look comes over him and he sits back with a smile. "He was extraordinary, a true genius. I have turned my hand to things in the past but I could live another thousand years and not touch his achievements."

Elena smiles at his self deprecation. "I'm sure you have other accomplishments."

"I could build you a house from scratch."

"Yeah? I can't see you ditching those suits for anything."

"You'd be surprised."

"Elena?" Bonnie arrives to find them smiling coyly at each other. She blinks and quickly looks down at the spell book in her hands. Elijah gets to his feet.

"Is everything OK?"

Bonnie nods, looking between them. "I need to speak to Elena alone for a moment. Girl stuff."

The corner of his mouth quirks and he nods. "Of course. I'll be inside. I promised Finn I'd show him how the microwave works." He smiles and leaves them.

Bonnie sits down beside Elena and stares at her intently. Elena looks back and frowns.

"What?"

"You do realise that he's totally crushing on you, right?"

Elena's eyebrows rise almost into her hairline. "That's ridiculous. He's a thousand years old and I'm still living in my parent's house. Look at him, he's probably attracted to aloof Amazon type women." Suddenly she pulls a despairing face. "I just said he's out of my league, didn't I?"

Bonnie manages a smile. "Trust me; you are very much in his league. You're like front and centre."

Elena shakes her head with a laugh. "Where is this coming from?"

Bonnie inhales and clutches the spell book to her chest. "I didn't tell you before, couldn't. I was so
shocked about Abby turning up...I had more dreams."

The small wavering voice sends a spike of worry through Elena and she immediately feels on alert. "What's wrong?"

"I'm not sure where to begin. I guess I should start with my coffin."

As Elena listens she feels a cascade of shifting emotions: horror, sorrow, confusion and hope. The last she clings onto as much as Bonnie does.

"You're going to be OK Bonnie; I'm not going to let anything happen to you."

Bonnie smiles weakly. "I'm still wigged out by it but I think the shock is passing. I think the fact that I got out of the coffin is a good sign. That doesn't have to be my fate."

"It won't be." Elena says determinedly, hugging Bonnie to her side as the light begins to fade. "We'll do whatever we can to prevent it."

Bonnie nods, staring at the violet clouds for awhile, just content to be with her friend. Finally she sits up and looks at Elena. "There's one future I didn't tell you about. The first door, you being pulled apart, is pretty straight forward."

"Stay away from Damon and Stefan. I care about them, more then I should, especially after what Stefan did. But I know how destructive it is. I've felt, for some time now, that I'm moving past them. I feel like I'm moving onto something new." It feels slightly terrifying admitting it aloud but also exhilarating.

Bonnie nods, looking relieved. "You're growing up. I never judged you for it, no one has control over their hearts, but I think it's for the best."

"And the second door?"

"That future is the one that we're heading towards, I just know it. I do something that causes the suppression of magic and possibly the destruction of Mystic Falls." She falls silent and Elena doesn't know what to say. The thought that all of them are now walking the path to that eventual outcome is petrifying.

"You said there was one other possible future?" To Elena's surprise Bonnie perks up.

"I wasn't sure if I should say anything, it's kind of awkward. Especially after what you just said."

"What are you talking about?"

"You said that Elijah is out of your league. Well in fourteen or so years you'll be proving yourself wrong. If that future happens you'll be living with him." She points towards the apartment.

Elena stares at Bonnie and her mouth drops slowly open. "What?"
She examined and deconstructed everything that Bonnie could tell her about the dreams, like a bank teller holding up a note for signs of forgery. Out of the two possible futures the one where she becomes a personal blood bag is more credible then the notion that she and Elijah would one day fall in love. She knows her friend is telling the truth but she finds the notion impossible to accept. She respects him and his desire to maintain his steadfast ideals, despite what he is. But she does not feel that way about him.

_Do I?_ The doubt flutters into her mind and no matter how much she bats it away it refuses to go.

"You look a thousand miles away." Caroline says with an inquisitive smile.

"You have no idea." Elena sighs, following the torch beam as she and Caroline make their way through the woods. Bonnie and Abby had made a head start with the spell to open the coffin and within the last hour Bonnie had sent her a text message to come. They were getting close.

"So what do you think will happen if this all goes to plan?"

"I'm not sure but I hope she'll listen to us."

A grimace of disgust suddenly comes over Caroline's face. "What if she's all dead-dead in there?"

Elena throws her friend a disparaging look. "That's gross."

"What? You said she's been dead for a zillion years. She might be a skeleton for all we know. Maybe she'll be like one of those...Oh!" Caroline's nervous babble trails off as the caves come into sight and they both freeze.

In the swinging beam of the torchlight the bodies of Stefan and Damon appear sprawled on the ground. Elena tries to run forward but her feet are rooted to the floor. Caroline makes no move to assist and Elena manages to make her out peripherally. Her blue eyes are wide with shock and fear. Neither of them can move. As the shaking beam of light bounces upwards Elena sees the reason for this.

A blond woman in a floor length green dress stands at the mouth of the cave, staring at them. Her gaze is sharp and powerful. When she looks at Elena she feels the force pinning her intensify. The woman in green steps forward and, after giving the brothers a considering look, simply vanishes.

Elena inhales a thin breath, one that had been trapped in her throat, and stumbles. The restrictive force is gone.

"Was - was that her? Was that the Original witch?" Caroline's voice shakes.

"I think it was." She pulls on Caroline's arm and runs forward. She gets to her knees and rolls Damon over and feels a wave of relief when he groans.

"They're alive," Caroline says, checking Stefan. Elena gives him a tormented stare. The last time she had seen him was on Wickery Bridge, after his failed attempt to kill her. She jumps to her feet.

"Stay here while I see if Bonnie and her mom are OK."

Caroline nods and worriedly watches as Elena disappears into the caves.
"Seeing as we're all back together again I'm thinking about having another family portrait done."

There's an audible groan around the table and Klaus narrow his eyes at his siblings. Elijah smiles down into his dessert before speaking.

"There's a reason we don't have our image captured. It leads to too many questions." A myth has been populated that they have no image to capture but it is quite the opposite. For beings that do not age having a recordable proof of that fact is an unneeded complication.

Kol, slouched back into his chair, shrugs. "I like blowing their little minds but sitting for hours on end is a complete bore."

Rebekah nods, swirling a spoon into her ice cream. The chef had added a dash of blood to it. "And the last artist that did the portrait ended up going mad."

Klaus waves a dismissive hand. "That won't be a problem this time because I'll be the one painting it. I'll have it done in no time."

Finn, who had been quiet for much of the meal, speaks up. "It won't be a true family portrait. I suggest waiting."

Kol frowns, sitting up right. "Waiting? For what?"

Elijah meets Klaus' eye for a moment. There is a blazing look of suspicion there. Elijah stares back, unflinching.

"What's going on?" Rebekah asks Finn.

"Niklaus is craven, which is crux of the issue." Finn stares unblinking at Klaus. Everyone at the table stiffens.

Klaus leans forward with a tight smile. "You're calling me a coward? What's brought this on Finn?" Again he shoots Elijah a suspicious glare.

"Do not blame Elijah for this, he's said nothing. Instead cast your suspicions on me." Finn looks at each of his siblings in turn as he speaks. "You believe that I was stabbed to prevent our father from killing me. That is what Klaus has told you, is it not?" The others nod, confused. Finn smiles with little warmth. "I think even little Nic has convinced himself this but it's not the truth. Unlike the rest of you I never believed our father took mother's life."

Rebekah stirs uncomfortably, a spoon trembling in her hand. "What are you saying?"

He turns to his sister and his harsh gaze becomes soft. "I think you know. Father had no reason to kill her but he did." His gaze flicks back to Klaus. "That is why you put a dagger through my heart and painted it as an act of affection."

"You killed her?" Kol asks and every ounce of his usual bravado is gone. For a moment he looks no older then the teenager he appears to be.

Klaus shakes his head, unable to speak. The frigid air begins to coil up, like a cyclone about to unleash its destruction. Elijah places a hand on Finn's shoulder.

"Is this wise? I wanted them to know but is now the time?" He can see Finn's reasoning. If she is set free the sordid truth would come out eventually. He just wished Finn had forewarned him.
"I will not play game to his deceptions any longer. I know you wished to have peace but the truth was a malignancy at the heart of this family. He is." He points at Klaus who suddenly gets to his feet. Kol and Rebekah do the same.

"Listen to me. I don't know what -"

"No more lies Nic! Is Finn telling the truth? He is, isn't he?" Rebekah shouts, fury in her eyes.

Finally finding himself on his own Golgotha the denial drains out of him. He looks desperately at Elijah as Rebekah and Kol creep forward. "Don't let them do this."

Elijah gets to his feet and throws a napkin onto his empty plate. "This is out of my hands. But, by all means, try to explain. I'm sure they'll listen."

With a roar that's reminiscent of lions Kol and Rebekah pounce on their brother and he goes down without a sound. Screams and broken curses that issue forth disguise the sound of the door opening and the soft pad of feet against the floor. They're so caught up in their act of revenge that not even Elijah realises they have company until she speaks.

"Stop this now!"

The sound of her voice, like an echo from a dream, sends shock waves through the room. Elijah and Finn turn to watch their mother stride forward as Kol and Rebekah gawp, struck at the incomprehensible sight. Klaus gingerly unrolls from a foetal position and with a growl rips out a spoon Rebekah had stabbed him with. Bleeding and in pain he looks up at his mother and blinks.

"Am I dead?"

"No, Niklaus."

Tears fill his eyes as his face suddenly screws up with grief. "If you want to kill me I won't stop you."

She bends down and stares deeply into his eyes. "That is not what I want. I came here to forgive you." She pulls him to his feet and he leans against her, in a daze. Esther looks at her family and there are tears in her eyes.

"I have missed you all so much. All I want is for us to be a family, for as long as that is possible."

The Mikaelson family gather together slowly, like people in a dark room wary of obstacles.

It has been days since she saw the witch in the woods. Bonnie had told of a great surge of power that had blasted through the caves when the coffin had finally been sprung open. That surge of power had rendered her and Abby unconscious and knocked Damon and Stefan off their feet.

"I've only felt that power once before, when I channelled a hundred dead witches. She's unbelievably powerful."

She has made no attempt to approach them. Elena resigns herself to the fact that whatever hopes they had for Esther are probably dashed. Elijah has made no attempt to contact her either but she will not give up hope where he is concerned. Not until he tells her face to face that their deal is off.

It is this fragile conviction that drives her to buzz the intercom to his apartment one misty morning.

There is no response. She looks up and sees no movement from any of the windows. A doubt starts
to grow and creep and with it a surprisingly intense stab of disappointment. She wanders away, taking a short cut through the trees.

*He's chosen his family. I don't know why I'm disappointed; he's always made this clear. And we would have become a couple? Maybe she really was dreaming.*

Lost in her own thoughts she looks up and sees the outline of a hulking mansion through the skeletal trees. She's at a safe distance but the sight of it besets her with conflicting emotions. She turns on her heel and walks in more haste. As she does she hears something cracking behind her and turns, half expecting it to be Elijah. But it's Klaus, who stands there half naked.

He beams at her. "There's my girl. I thought that was you."

Elena remains still, her limbs unresponsive. She stares at him as he pulls a sweater over his head, not the least bit embarrassed. This is the man responsible for her aunt's death, her birth mother's and countless others. He's the root of so much pain that the very sight of him sends a wave of nausea through her. Elijah had been adamant that Klaus wished her no harm but she has no desire to test that. She walks away, ignoring him.

"I was never here."

"Oh don't be like that. I'm sorry you found me like this, it was a full moon last night you see." He follows her.

"Leave me alone."

"Well you're the one on my property love; I could say the same to you."

Elena whirls around. "I get that you find all this amusing but I don't want anything to do with you. I don't want to speak to you; I don't want to see your face. The only reason I'm complying is because I want my family and friends to be safe."

"They will be. Look, I know there's bad blood between us but I want the best for you Elena. I need you, as you're aware, so I'll do everything in my power to make sure your life is a good one."

Elena laughs. "Are you serious? I don't want anything from you."

"Well it's a bit late for that. I'll leave you alone, if that's what you wish. The only time you'll have to deal with me is when you're handing over your blood."

"You? What about Elijah?"

"Ah yes, that." He slides forward with a comical wince. "We're in a bit of a pickle there. He's refusing to make you do it."

"He's not making me do anything. I'd just rather deal with him then you."

Klaus smiles. "He'll be chuffed to hear that. I don't know if it's escaped your attention but my brother is smitten with you."

Elena tries not to blush and fails. Not wanting to talk about this with Klaus of all people she changes tack. "Is your mother staying with you?"

He nods, smile fading. "Yes. She's settling in. That's why you haven't seen much of us for awhile, if you were wondering."
"She forgave you?"

Something fragile flickers over his face before disappearing. "Yes. I explained and she understood." Elena had suspected as much but it doesn't make the disappointment any easier. Klaus smiles knowingly at her. "So it seems your little plan failed. If it hasn't become apparent yet family comes before anything, even Elijah will attest to that."

"Elena?" She and Klaus turn to see Caroline making her way towards them. She stares warily at Klaus. "You didn't turn up and I got worried. Is everything all right?"

"Fine. I got sidetracked." Elena gives Klaus one searing glare before turning away.

Klaus looks at Caroline and smiles politely. "How are you darling?"

"None of your business."

"I was just asking. It's not easy, you being so young. If you need to talk I'm here."

Caroline scoffs. "Yeah, I'm sure I'll take you up on that in opposite land. Crazy Eurotrash." She mutters before she and Elena walk away, casting mistrustful glances back to make sure they're not followed.

Klaus mouth drops open as Kol appears at his side. "She just called me Eurotrash! Me!"

Kol shakes his head disparagingly. "Americans."

He finds his mother outside Kol's room. She's peering down at the dried blood stain, a delicate line between her brows. The cream carpet is now tinged pink.

"We tried to remove the stain as best we could. We're become quite accomplished at it."

"From my observation butchers and vampires are equally matched in that regard." She turns a shrewd gaze on him and he tries not to let it faze him. She is not the woman he remembers but he can't expect her to be unchanged.

"Kol has been reprimanded."

"Now that I am back I hope that this will not happen again. That goes for the whole town, not just our home." She narrows her eyes at him and it conveys much without words. She's counting on him.

"Of course." He smiles briefly before fixing her with an intense stare. "There's something I need to know."

"About Elena Gilbert? You have nothing to fear. I wish her no harm."

"But Klaus needs her blood to create his hybrids. I was tasked with getting it but no more." Now that his mother is back it seems foolish to carry on doing something he abhors when his mother will no doubt put a stop to it.

The serene air around his mother seems to simmer. "I plan to deal with that complication but not at this minute. Do not worry Elijah." She smiles briskly. "I not only want to settle in here with my family but also with the rest of Mystic Falls. I would like to showcase our goodwill."

He smirks. "And how do you plan to do that?"
"By throwing a ball."
Three invitations lay neatly on the garden table before Caroline sweeps them up and begins to shuffle them like cards.

"I can't believe Klaus invited me." She says for the fourth time that morning. Her astonishment has moved onto disgruntlement.

Elena is still on amazement which is slowly hedging towards anxiety. That morning she had woke to find an invitation from Elijah requesting her presence at a gathering. A grand ball. She had contacted her friends to find that they to had received similar requests.

Bonnie slips her invitation out of Caroline's hands and squints down at it thoughtfully. Her invitation is from Esther who had included a small note.

"She wants us to meet with her." She says to Elena, a line creasing her brow. "What do you think she wants?"

Elena shrugs. "We won't know unless we go."

Caroline shakes her head. "I don't know guys, it seems risky."

"The way I see it she could have killed us all by now without breaking a sweat. She's powerful." While Elena and Caroline are perplexed by their invitations Bonnie is determined and curious. "All those dreams I had were to get her out. Now that she is I'm not leaving it at that. I want to speak to her."

"Ok so I can understand why she invited you two. Klaus sending me one is obviously his idea of a bad joke but I don't get why Elijah asked you." She looks at Elena curiously.

"Not a word." Bonnie presses her lips together as Elena points a warning finger at her but she can't help smiling. Caroline frowns.

"What? Tell me!"

Sighing from embarrassment Elena tells Caroline haltingly about her possible future with Elijah. When she falters Bonnie chips in. Caroline listens with a greedy excitement, her eyes growing ever wider.

"She's going to be this big shot writer." Bonnie finishes and Caroline beams.

"Successful and rooming with a suave sugar daddy." Caroline and Bonnie laugh while Elena sinks down into her chair in mortification.

"Oh my god…"

Still giggling Caroline heads into her kitchen to get them more drinks. Bonnie stares at Elena and while a smile still lights her face her gaze is more serious. "I know you're embarrassed but, and I'm not playing matchmaker, I hope you consider it. Out of all the futures I saw it's the only one you were happy in."

Elena sits up and rakes her fingers through her hair. "Every time I think about it I feel like I hit a wall. I can't envision it. And then I start to think what if what you've told me affects the way I feel.
Do you know what I mean?"

Bonnie nods, serious. "Like a self fulfilling prophecy. You do things to make it happen. I said I won't push you to do anything but we have to get off the path where Mystic Falls is destroyed." And I die. The words are unspoken but they both think it.

Elena stares at her with a soft concern. "How have things been?"

Bonnie shrugs. "OK, I guess. I'm trying to stay positive you know? I want to make it work with Abby but then I can't stop thinking of what she did. She selfishly abandoned me, she admitted it." Her eyes grow glossy. "That hurts. And then those dreams…"

Elena reaches over for her hand. "I've been thinking. Remember that elixir that Elijah had?"

Bonnie blinks and sits up straight. "It has resurrection properties." A light of hope is now in her eyes.

"You'll be OK."

"I'm not afraid to die Elena. I don't want to but it's not a fear I have. I guess because I know what's beyond. I know there is one." She says this without a trace of forced conviction or hopelessness. Elena has never met anyone so brave, or so selfless.

"You might not fear it but you're not allowed to die until you're a hundred, at least."

Bonnie smiles. "That goes for you to…That elixir is convenient isn't it? Just when we might need it…"

They ponder in silence until Caroline waltzes into sight with a tray, humming The Blue Danube. Elena smiles as Caroline moves around gracefully, handing each of them a drink.

"I thought you said you weren't going?"

"I'd like to but not because he invited me." She keeps her voice steady but they know their friend well. She's desperate to attend.

Bonnie flicks the invitation against her fingers. "This says you can bring a guest." She gets to her feet and flourishes a bow at Caroline. "Would you do me the honour of being my plus one?"

Caroline gasps in mock surprise. "I most certainly will Miss Bennett." She grasps Bonnie's hand and pulls her forward. "Now these people are old and classy, when they say ball they mean ball. We'll be expected to dance like people in one of those Jane Austen periods pieces."

Bonnie smirks. "You've really thought about this, haven't you?"

Caroline ignores this remark and holds her arms out and moves Bonnie into the correct starting position.

Elena looks at them with a growing dismay. "They're not really expecting us to dance like that are they? What are we gonna wear?"

"Ball gowns!" Caroline ejects excitedly and Bonnie trips over her feet.

Elena's worry about attire is solved when she comes home to find a glittering black and gold ball gown hanging on the outside of her wardrobe. A note is attached to it.
Dear Elena,

If you do decide to attend then please accept this as a token of my appreciation. If not then the dress is, of course, still yours.

Deepest Regards,

Elijah M.

She plucks at the mesh covering the skirts and a thousand tiny lights flash from the numerous sequins sown underneath it.

The dress is not off the rack, he somehow had it tailor-made to fit her exact measurements. If this had been at any other time she would have found this disquieting but she's too nervous for that now. The Mikaelson mansion looms overhead and she looks up at it, gathering herself before moving towards the doors. As she does two people step out from the shadows.

It's Damon and Stefan.

When she had received the invitation Damon had found out and forbade her to go. He had even snatched the card out of her hands. Then she had battled down a flare of aggravation but now it threatens to crush over her like a wave.

"You can't stop me."

"I knew you weren't going to listen so we're here to make sure you don't do anything stupid. Look we're all tuxed up and ready to mingle." He motions at himself and his brother who stands back a little, quiet.

Elena grinds her teeth. "I don't need you here, either of you."

"So you're just gonna go in there alone surrounded by a bunch of ancient, deadly vampires and the Wicked Witch of The West?"

"She's not alone," says a voice from the dark. Elena turns to see Abby leading Bonnie and Caroline forward. All three look resplendent in their dresses. Caroline in a billowing blue and white, Bonnie in a figure hugging green and Abby in streamline and elegant red.

Elena smiles and, picking up her skirts, moves forward. As she does Damon grabs her arm. "I know you think you're being mollycoddled but I don't want to see you get hurt."

"I understand but I need to talk to her, even if there's a possibility I could get hurt. I have to take that risk."

"Elena's right." Stefan says softly and she looks at him. He hasn't come near her since leaving her on the bridge. After that she had been determined never to speak to him again. "I need to know if there's a possibility that she'll defect to our side. Me and Bonnie spent too much time on that coffin to just sit back now and do nothing." Bonnie nods grudgingly in agreement.

Damon rolls his eyes at his brother. "You were meant to be on my team. I need a drink, come on Stef…" He lets go of Elena's arm and slinks inside. After a solemn nod Stefan follows him.

Elena turns to the others and sighs. "I knew they'd be here but I hoped it would be just us."

Caroline nods. "Are you ready?" She asks and the others mumble and shrug nervously. Abby
laughs softly and leads the way in, acting as chaperone.

It's as grand as she expected. There's a very thin line between taste and tacky but the mansion is sparse enough to be elegant. An impressive marble staircase is festooned with fairy lights and they catch the sequins on her dress and send out splashes of light in all direction.

"Do I look like a disco ball?" She asks aloud self consciously and her friends look at her as if she's mad.

"You look amazing. No one would guess you're a high school student." Caroline whispers, scanning the crowd before them. She spots Klaus staring at her in open admiration and with a look of a soldier jumping into the fray she heads towards him.

Elena sees Damon and Stefan by a buffet table. Damon holds a flute of champagne up and smiles at her. She smiles back mockingly and then feels her smile freeze. Elijah is stood on the staircase. The last time she had seen him had been at his apartment. After Bonnie had told her of their possible future together she had practically flown past him, giving a breathy goodbye, unable to look him in the eye. She can only imagine how odd she must have seemed.

He catches her eye and his face lights up. Seeing him has an electric affect on her body, one that intensifies as he descends the staircase and makes his way towards her. Trying to keep her composure she smiles friendly at him as he finally reaches her.

"Elena. You look beautiful." His eyes sweep her figure once before settling on her face. "I hope it wasn't presumptuous?"

She manages a laugh. "I don't just have ball gowns hanging up in my closest. How did you know what size to get?"

He opens his mouth to speak but hesitates. It only lasts for a moment but it's noticeable. "One of my accomplishments. I was trained as a tailor, many years ago."

"You made this?" As soon as she says it she feels foolish. But where Elijah is concerned she doesn't know what to think.

He smiles. "No. I just have an eye for detail."

"Well, thank you." She looks down with a smile, wondering how they got onto discussing her body measurements. It's oddly intimate and that only reminds her of what may happen in fourteen years. Her heart races.

"Are you all right? You look a little flustered." He picks up two drinks from a passing waiter and gives her one.

She grips the glass tightly. "I'm here to meet your mother. I'm nervous."

He eyes her intently. "Yes I know. As of yet I'm unsure of her intentions. She's forgiven Klaus but..." He trails off, looking sceptical but after seeing her nervous gaze he smiles. "Don't feel frightened. Nothing will harm you under this roof."

"I'm not scared of being hurt. I just don't like being uncertain."

"That makes two of us." He gazes at her deeply for a moment before looking away. "I had better make an introduction. If you'll excuse me?"
"Sure." She watches him go with a smile but her heart still beats like a drum. Telling herself to get a grip she watches as Elijah makes a short but charming speech, instructing everyone to head towards the ballroom where the first dance of the night will commence.

"They have a ballroom?" Bonnie appears at her side, Abby trailing behind her.

"We play football in there most of the time." A young man says with a mischievous, practically deviant, twinkle in his eye. "It drives my brothers mad."

"Only because you don't follow the rules Kol." Klaus says, a stiff looking Caroline at his side.

"Fuck the rules. Oops, 'scuse my French." He winks at Bonnie who gives him a particularly scathing stare before turning away. People line up under a huge crystal chandelier, men on one side, women on the other. Elena hovers by the wall, watching the couples face each other. A group of musicians in the corner warm up.

"They have an actual band." Bonnie says in amazement, appearing at her side as Abby takes a seat. "Do you see her?"

Elena squints at the numerous faces but doesn't see Esther. "No. Maybe dancing isn't her thing."

The band in the corner strike up their violins and the couples begin to dance. She can see Caroline and Klaus moving in and out of other couples, Caroline's face a picture of concentration. All of the Originals dance with an easy grace, including Elijah. He spots her and smiles before turning away.

"I call first dibs on your dance card." Damon sidles up to her and offers his arm. Elena stares at him and back to the perfectly choreographed people and shakes her head.

"I can't dance like that and that's not why I came here."

"Please, in that dress?" He scoffs and takes her arm. "Most of those people out date me by a few hundred years. I don't know the dance either." He leads her onto the floor as she looks at the quests more closely. She hadn't realised it before but there are too many guests for them all to come from Mystic Falls. Many of them must be vampires.

They dance. The steps are similar to the ones they have danced before which makes her feel a little more at ease. As they rove around she sees Stefan approach Bonnie and ask her to dance. She reluctantly accepts.

"You shouldn't go in there alone."

"I'm not, Bonnie will be with me."

Damon clenches his jaw. "You shouldn't be here at all."

"Well I am. Move on." She says, more sharply then she intends. He smirks at her and spins her around as the dancers suddenly change couples. Spinning she feels someone catch her and she looks up at her rescuer.

"Gotcha." Elijah places one hand on her waist and the other reaches for her hand. Elena smiles, placing the other hand on his shoulder.

"I'll warn you I don't know what I'm doing."

"Just follow my lead. When I squeeze your left hand spin in that direction. The same goes for the
right.” He nods at her, pushing her gently away so that there is a respectable distance between them.

"All right but it's your toes."

He smiles as the band begins to play another tune. He pulls gently on her waist, indicating they should step forward. She looks down, getting a handle on the steps. It's simple but staring at him is anything but.

"I haven't been to a ball in years."

Elena looks up with a light smirk but she is genuinely interested. "Been to a lot?"

"Hundreds." He squeezes her left hand and twirls her around before resting his hand back on her waist. "When the season was in there'd be numerous balls in London. But if you were anyone you attended Almack's. That's where you'd find the ton."

"The ton?"

"Le bon ton, the high society."

"Aristocrats?"

"Yes. The gentry right up to the monarchy. Almack's was mixed sex and it's where men and women of the time could socialise freely. Matches were made."

Elena stares at him in bemusement. "Sounds like something from Austen. Except for you it was real. There's so much she doesn't know about him, she's barely scratched the surface. She realises then she wants to find out, even if it takes years. "You lived a life like that but now you find yourself here. It must be so bizarre."

"It is but times change. That can be a difficult concept for someone like me. You're never changing in a world that constantly is. It's easy to get left behind." He squeezes her right hand. Coming back around Elena misjudges the distance and ends up bumping into his chest.

"Sorry!" They stop, breathing laboured. "Do you mind if I sit this one out?" She's embarrassed but he does not make a mockery of her. Instead he joins her at the back of the hall and sits beside her.

"You'll want to see my mother soon?"

She nods, turning in her seat until their knees touch. "Do you have any idea what she wants?" She keeps her voice low.

He shakes his head. "No. I think Finn might but he's become retentive since she came back. They're as thick as thieves." He leans down to her ear but masks the action by brushing a curl of hair off her shoulder. "They're up to something. I said I was unconvinced of her forgiveness."

She stares into his troubled eyes intently. "I'll tell you what she says."

He blinks before straightening. "Thank you." He stands and offers his arm to her. "I'll take you and Bonnie to her rooms."

Arms linked they move to Bonnie who is sat beside her mother. Elena is pleased to see that they're both smiling about something. As the Bennett's see them approaching their amused faces become blank. Elena realises with a stab of frustration that they had been giggly at her and Elijah dancing
together. Maybe the times of Austen are not so far away.

"Bonnie, I think it's time."

She nods, growing serious. As she prepares to stand the band strikes up a lively tune and Finn walks up to Abby.

"It's Abigail, isn't?"

Bonnie's mother blinks. "Yeah."

"Would you allow me the honour of this dance?"

"I'm afraid I don't know the steps."

"Neither do I but I'm sure we can manage together." Elena and Bonnie watch in amazement as she gets up and takes his arm. She shrugs as they pass; a what-the-hell gesture. Elijah, bemused at this little courtship, motions for them to follow. He leads them up the marble steps and through a large hallway. As he reaches the doorway at the end he stops and turns to them.

"I'm unsure of what her intentions are but I don't think she has any nefarious plans for the both of you."

"That's a relief." Bonnie says dryly. "I'm not sure what she wants but I know there are things that I need to tell her."

Elena looks at Bonnie, brows raised. "Are you sure?"

She nods. "I think she's part of it. She must be otherwise I wouldn't be here now."

Elijah looks between them, perplexed. "I'm missing something, aren't I?"

Bonnie eyes him intently, as if assessing him for worth. He must past the test because she leans forward and whispers. "I've been having dreams of the future. One of them is bad, like apocalyptic bad. I think I had those dreams about her coffin for a reason, I think she's meant to help me."

"Help you do what?"

"Prevent it from happening. Elena can fill you in on the details. She's asked to see me first alone and then you. She looks at Elena and takes her hand. "I hope I'm right about this because I don't want to trust this woman only for her to stab us in the back."

"A word of advice: be careful of what she says and how she says it. She taught us all from her knee to be cautious with words and that hasn't changed. Be simple and to the point."

Bonnie nods at him and walks through the doorway.

"I hope she'll help us." Elena leans against the wall, waiting. Elijah leans across from her, his head tilted.

"She says she wants us to be a family but the way she looks at us sometimes, like we're strangers. Which we are, we must be to her." He falls silent, lost in thought until he pins her with an inquisitive stare. "What are these dreams she talked about?"

Elena leans off the wall and moves to his side. "She dreamt of three doors that showed her my future. Each one was a possibility. The second showed her Mystic Falls totally destroyed, like a
nuclear bomb had hit it. She said that at some point magic had been suppressed. There were no more witches. She thinks she might have been responsible. She - she's dead in that future…"

He looks aghast. "The imbalance that would create would be catastrophic."

"We can't allow it to happen. Do you still have the elixir that you were going to use on me?"

He nods, brightening. "You're thinking of using it on Bonnie if the worst comes to the worst?"

"Yes. I don't know what leads up to that future but one thing has happened already."

"What?"

"You've decided to stop taking my blood. In that future Klaus is the one to do it. You're nowhere to be seen."

He blinks in surprise before his gaze turns grave. "I stopped because I hate it. It's only a matter of time before my mother does something about those hybrids."

"You might hate it but not as much as I do. I had a son in that future and I took him with me to see Klaus." She shakes her head in confusion while his face transforms into a look of guarded wonder.

"You have a son?"

"Apparently. I try not to think about it, not when we're trying to stop that future from happening."

He nods, his gaze fixed on her. "You said there were three doors."

She rouses herself, plucking at the mesh over her skirts. "Yeah. The first one showed Stefan and Damon pulling me apart. Pretty self-explanatory."

The corner of his mouth quirks. "And is that future a possibility?" He asks it lightly but his gaze is heavy.

Elena doesn't speak for a long time but when she does her words are chosen carefully. "I don't want it to be. I loved Stefan but he's lost to me now. I want him to recover but I can't wait for that to happen. Damon…" She trails off, unsure. She inhales deeply and shrugs. "Right now I just want to be alone. I want to pass my exams and go to college." Suddenly she smiles at his attentive face. "I can't believe I'm telling you about my relationship woes."

He smiles dryly, straightening. "It all sounds very familiar actually. I and Nicklaus fought over a woman once, a long time ago. We both loved her but finally decided that family came first." He stares at the wall opposite as he speaks, averting his gaze.

"Did you ever regret it?" She suspects who this woman is but says nothing.

He gazes at her with deep longing, one that she's seen before. He had been telling her that he wouldn't make the mistake of caring again. "She lived, that's what matters in the end. She wasn't pulled apart."

Elena takes some strength from that. "I won't happen to me and I won't be a blood bag for Klaus."

He runs the back of his fingers down her arm softly as an act of comfort before lifting his hand away. "And the third door?"

"Oh, that one." Her heart rate spikes and she can feel blood rushing to her face. He narrows his
eyes at her and cocks his head, as if listening to far off music.

"You OK?"

"Fine. That future was different, better. Bonnie says that I become an author and I'm living in London. I uh, I was living with someone. A man." He must hear her heartbeat; it's pounding in her ears.

He smiles fondly. "That doesn't sound too bad." He looks at her more closely. "Or is it?"

Elena opens her mouth but no words come out. She can't tell him, not now not ever. "No it just sounds too good to be true right now."

"Well I hope that future comes to pass, for all our sakes." He leans down to her ear as footsteps click behind them. "And whoever you're living with is a lucky man."

Chocked by the irony of his words she practically tackles Bonnie when she appears.

"Bonnie! Are you OK?"

"Fine. I told her about what might happen to witches and she's going to do everything she can to help us. She said it was one of the reasons she's here in the first place. The witches knew something awful was coming."

"How was she?" Elijah asks.

"Like every scary school teacher you've ever had rolled into one." She looks at Elena. "You ready?"

"As I'll ever be." Elena nods at Elijah before she and Bonnie make their way towards Esther.
Bonnie's assertion about Esther Mikaelson becomes apparent as soon as Elena enters the room. Shrewd eyes follow her calmly as she walks forward and Elena feels like she's just been shown into a headmistresses study, unsure of why but feeling guilty non the less. When she speaks, brusque but polite, this only reinforces the notion.

"Elena. It's nice to finally meet you." She reaches for her hand and Elena hesitantly offers it. She grasps her fingers once before letting go. "Please, sit." She gestures to a couch where she sits herself, looking up at her with a smile.

Elena sits back against the armrest; trying to create some space but her billowing skirts make that impossible. She sits rigid as Bonnie takes a seat in an armchair. She seems at ease and Elena tries to imitate her. She looks at Esther pointedly.

"Why do you need to see me?"

Esther clasps her hands together. "I needed to see you for a number of reasons. The first is to apologise."

"For trying to have me killed?" She says bluntly, surprising herself.

Esther's smile becomes thinner. "Yes. I wanted to prevent hybrids from being made. As Elijah has already told you they are an imbalance. I thought of you as a means to an end and that was wrong. You do not deserve to pay for my mistake. I will find another way to deal with that, with him."

"Klaus?"

Esther nods and gets to her feet. "I believe Rebekah filled you in on our history? I wanted to protect my family and our town. It was an act instigated by grief and desperation. Bonnie has probably informed you of the importance of balance to witches and that does not just mean in nature. It's important to maintain it within ourselves. To have equilibrium of emotions is vital; it stops us from acting on rash impulses. We hold a lot of power and it is paramount that the one wielding it does not abuse it. But," she holds a flame to a bundle of herb and wafts the smoke around, "that is easier said then done. I was always far too curious for my own good. I liked to experiment and push boundaries…"

Elena looks up at her thoughtfully as she leans against the table. "You had no idea what would happen?"

"No, unlike Bonnie I lack the gift of foresight. I had to watch them wreak havoc and shed blood for a thousand years. I felt every life they took, every torment they inflicted…" A haunted look appears in her eyes and she looks down. "That is why I am here, to put my wrong to right."

"How?" Elena asks and Esther raises her head. A small smile appears.

"With your help. Both of you." She looks at Bonnie who nods. She turns around and picks up a bundle wrapped in velvet. From it she pulls out a very thin blade. She turns back to Elena. "I will need your blood."

Elena tenses. "What for?"

"For the ritual I want to perform. Tonight I will link all of my children together. At the moment
Klaus is impossible to kill but the ritual should dissolve that obstacle.

"How?" Elena watches the blade flash in the light warily.

"Because if I succeed he won't be a hybrid anymore. Neither will my children be vampires. I want to turn them human."

Elena feels like she's been struck with lightening. Her mouth falls open as she tries to process what she just heard. "They'll be human?" Her mind immediately flashes to Elijah and her heart starts to beat with an indefinable excitement.

Esther looks at her sadly. "Human and vulnerable. The spell I will do tonight will link all of them together. Whatever happens to one will happen to all. Do you understand?"

Suddenly she does and experiences a terrible conflict. "If Klaus dies they all will. Including Elijah…"

Esther nods and there are tears in her eyes. The sight of them makes Elena jump to her feet, propelled by desperation. "There has to be another way! Why all of them?"

As if she had heard her unspoken question Esther comes forward and touches her arm gently. "I love my children but turning them human is not an act of compassion. You have not seen, nor felt the horrors they have inflicted. They are but five but from them thousands of vampires have been sired. They are an abomination. Even Elijah." She says firmly.

Elena shakes her head. "He's not like that, not now. I know he wants to be better. He strives for it."

Esther nods, conflicted. "I know. He was the most moral out of the family. It's an aspect that he carried with him always."

"He still does. Please reconsider? I understand why you feel it's your responsibility to correct your mistake but you're a thousand years too late."

Esther blinks and Elena is relived to see the conflict intensify in her eyes. "I only have a short time here. My objective was to make them human and then Finn would kill himself and by extension the rest of them."

"He's volunteered?" Bonnie asks, speaking up for the first time since they entered the room.

Esther nods. "Eagerly. He does not want to remain here any longer, as a human or a vampire."

"The others don't get a say? I don't care about Klaus, I want him dead but the others…Elijah should be told."

Esther stares at her wonderingly. "You care for him?"

Elena blinks, feeling put on the spot. "He's my friend."

"He could be more then that." Bonnie says bluntly and they turn to look at her. Esther frowns.

"What do you mean?"

"I told you of the two dreams I had, one where magic is suppressed and the other with Klaus in the coffin. I haven't told you about the third." Bonnie looks at Elena, as if for a go ahead and Elena nods. "In that future Elijah is alive and living with Elena. They're in love."
"In love?" Esther looks at her and she feels her cheeks burning. She averts her gaze and says nothing.

"In that future Elijah says he was the only one left. I think the rest of his siblings are dead. I don't know about you but out of all the futures I have seen that one seems like the one we should be working towards."

Esther says nothing but stands still and ponders. Elena moves over to Bonnie as the older witch thinks. Finally she stirs and looks at them.

"Aside from Finn and maybe Elijah my other children will not agree to being mortal again. Especially not Klaus…"

"Then don't tell them."

"But you wish to inform Elijah? Do you think you could convince him to keep this secret? Or would his conscience dictate the honourable thing to do is to warn his siblings?"

Elena frowns in thought. He had made it clear that his family is the one thing he truly values. But Klaus is the exception. "He told me that he worked towards stopping Klaus for five hundred years. That hasn't changed. I think keeping them in the dark is a small price to pay if it means that Klaus will finally be killed."

Esther nods and lifts the blade again. "So, do you agree?"

"Will you promise not to kill them while they're all linked?" She has nothing else to go on but her word. She hopes that she is cut from the same cloth as Elijah.

"The link lasts for a week. I will turn them human during the next full moon. I will make no move to kill them. What happens before the ritual is anyone's guess."

"So you won't kill them?"

Esther smiles at her determination. "I will not kill them. We will work together to eliminate the threat that Klaus possesses. The dream you had Bonnie," she turns to the younger witch, "is interesting. You believe that you managed to neutralise him?"

"He was in a coffin. Dead or asleep I'm not sure. He was holding your pendant."

Ester reaches for her throat, where it must have hung many years ago. "Is that all?"

Bonnie nods and stands up beside Elena. "So you'll need a drop of Elena's blood to make the linking spell work?"

"Yes. She moves up to Elena and raises her brows. "Are you ready?"

Elena looks at Bonnie who looks on seriously. "Is this the right thing to do?"

"I think so but I can't make up your mind for you." She says it with a smile.

Elena nods and after a pause pulls her glove off and offers her hand.

Esther smiles brightly and pricks her fingertip. "Wonderful."

Pulling her glove back on Elena watches Finn walk into the room and hand his mother a small
cloth bag. He whispers something into her ear before leaving. Bonnie looks between mother and son with a frown.

Esther smiles as she pulls open the bag. "Noting a discrepancy?"

"Uh well…" She trails off awkwardly.

"Our ages do not match up?" Elena and Bonnie nod. Esther upends the bag and more herbs fall onto the table. "I said I liked to experiment and this," she points at her face, "was one of them."

"You're older then you look?" Bonnie asks, a light of interest in her eye. And something more: a desire.

"I look forty but I'm actually nearing sixty…" She turns and they see that she's caring a bowl in her hands. She places it over flames and turns to them and speaks briskly. "You have both told me about these dreams but I would like to do more then just hear. I wish to see them."

"See them?"

"Yes. If you are wiling we will share the dreamscape. I'm sure you are curious to see what things your future holds?" She says to Elena.

Unbidden an image of a park at sunrise and a man kissing her good morning flashes into her mind. She wants to see that future at least. Maybe if she does the possibility will not seem so foreign. Elena nods. "I want to see it for myself."

Bonnie moves over to the bowl and peers down at the simmering contents. "I'm OK with it. What do we have to do?"

"Just sit and relax. Inhaling the fumes will help us to reach the dream state. A spell will connect us all to it." She seems excited, in her calm way.

Bonnie and Elena sit beside each other on the couch while Esther takes the armchair. Elena closes her eyes, certain that sleep will evade her when she starts to feel a heavy softness fall over her. Mutterings in another language follow her into sleep.

She opens her eyes to a persistent gloom. She stands in a windowless, circular room. She looks behind her and sees a curving smooth wall. No door. She looks back to find three doors before her. The first - likely the future where she is destroyed by the Salvatores – has no handle. She brushes her fingers down the peeling paint, wondering. That future is becoming less of a probability. Soon there won't even be a door. The second door is closed but has a handle. She can go in and see how awful that future is but she can't make herself move forward. The third door is ajar.

- time is a tree with many branches.

Elena looks around for the source of the voice and suddenly realises that she is alone. She tries to concentrate on who should be here but their names elude her.

- each branch represents things that could or will happen. Or doors in this case…

The savant voice, one she thinks of as a teacher, drifts away. Elena looks back at the waiting third door. Because it is waiting for her, that much she feels certain of in this strange place. Her blood
singing, her mind whirling she reaches for the handle and walks through into her future.

Snow covers the narrow street, virgin and untouched. The sky above is dark and a few stars twinkle. The city throws up too much light for the stars to truly shine.

Icicles hang off windowsills but she does not feel the cold. She does not feel the snow crunching under her feet. She is no more then a phantom here. A couple turn into the street and head towards her. They take no notice of a girl in a ball gown, she is truly invisible, but when she catches sight of their faces she gasps and steps back.

A heavy coat is swaddled around her body, jeans tucked into a pair of wellington boots. A woolly hat is pulled down low over her head and a scarf is wrapped around the bottom half of her face. But she is unmistakable.

"That's me..." Elena watches them, open mouthed. She rips her gaze away from the older version of herself and looks at Elijah. Unlike the woman beside him he's not so bundled up, just a stylish winter coat and a pair of walking boots. One gloved hand is grasping hers as he leads her through the snow.

"Look." He stops, looking up at a modern office building. "Almack's."

"I don't think anymore dancing goes on in there."

"You'd be surprised. Dancing and gambling. Office parties can get out of hand." He smiles and touches a hand to the wall. "The old building was destroyed during the Blitz."

"I know. I probably now more about the building then you do." Her voice is muffled and mordant. "I did write a novel featuring the place in case you've forgotten."

"It might have slipped my mind." He suddenly pulls her forward and she comes willingly into his arms. "Do you want to go inside?"

"Break in? So the police can catch us dancing?"

"Who said anything about dancing?" He pulls down the fabric covering her mouth and leans down. "What do you think?"

"I think I'm freezing." She leans up and kisses his mouth. "Let's get to the hotel and you can show me all the dancing you want. I mean that literally. Remember when you showed me your memories in my dreams? Do that tonight."

He nods. "What do you want to see?"

"Surprise me." She leans up for another kiss and he returns it enthusiastically before picking her up and spinning her once. He sets her down and they make their way up the street, smiles on their faces.

Elena follows them, not wanting to lose this happy picture.

"She says that her flight gets here for eight in the morning. I'll pick her up."

"How is the High Priestess of the east coast?" He says it with a tiny smirk. Older Elena eyes him scornfully.

"Fine. Don't say that to her face. It's her official title but it makes her feel embarrassed."
Elijah draws a finger across his mouth but there is a light of mischief in his eyes.

Elena continues. "Jeremy is arriving an hour later but at Heathrow."

"I know. I'll escort him back here." They turn a corner and the Ritz comes into sight. "Your brother is still suspicious of me."

"He's a policeman, he's suspicious of everyone."

They head into the hotel, talking faintly but Elena does not follow them. Across the snowy street is a red telephone box but instead of a phone it houses her door out. Grudgingly she looks back but they have gone. She heads across the street, picking up her skirts and walks through the door.

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The circular room is still empty. She wonders briefly where the others are but it is a faint concern. She turns to the doors and this time the second door stands ajar. The silence around her is complete but she feels that if she resists something will push her forward. Steeling herself she moves towards the second door and opens it.

An empty bedroom is before her. The bedspread matches the curtains and cheap prints are hung on the wall. This is certainly not the Ritz.

Elena looks around, wondering where she is when the motel door opens. Elijah stumbles in, followed by another. Elena cranes around and sees that again it is herself. But the girl opposite is not over thirty. She is young, looks exactly the same age, wearing a blue sweater and chucks. The same can not be said for Elijah.

His usually neat hair stands up in all directions and he looks like he hasn't shaved in awhile. Even his suits are gone, instead opting for jeans and a shirt. He wobbles on his feet, a bloody hand to his head and Elena pushes him down onto the bed. She points at him.

"Don't move."

Elena in the chucks heads towards her and she hastily moves aside. She races into the bathroom and emerges with a towel. She places it against his head and kneels between his legs.

"Thank you." His voice is low and slurred. An English accent sounds more pronounced now for some reason. He takes the towel away from his head and looks down at the blood soaked into it with confusion. Then he laughs, looking at her wonderingly. "My blood. I don't heal anymore…"

Elena rises up on her knees and places the towel back over the cut. "You bleed and you can get drunk."

"I could always get drunk." He stares down at her, the dazed look in his eyes clearing. Maybe the pain had brought clarity. "I was stupid tonight."

Elena shakes her head. "You just have to get used to your…limitations."

He smiles dryly. "One of them being if someone picks a fight I will not be the victor."

"They had the element of surprise."

His smile grows into something gentler. "I know when I'm bested. Right now I could sleep for a hundred years."

"You might have a concussion. You should stay awake."
"I'm fine. I just need to rest. We'll move onto the next town in the morning." He gets up and sways alarmingly. Elena shots to her feet.

"What are you doing?"

He points at the bed. "This is yours. We had an agreement."

"Screw it. Tonight it's yours. You're the one in pain."

"I've weathered -"

"Nope. I'm having the floor, no discussion." She pushes him down and he sits with a weak smile. Elena stares down at him smartly. "Know when you're bested."

Suddenly the scene before her changes. The other Elena and Elijah disappear, along with the room. With an odd swirl full of colour and noises another room reforms. For a moment she thinks it is the same one but the curtains and pictures are different. But it's still a motel room. The door opens.

They stumble in again but injury is not the cause of their inelegance. The Elena before her – still the same age – is wrapped around Elijah. Pale hands grip his hair as they kiss passionately. He picks her up and kicks the door closed behind them. He moves towards the bed, breaking away from her mouth to kiss a line down her throat.

"Elijah…” The other Elena moans, her eyes closed. He lifts his head and stares at her, eyes filled with lust but also trepidation.

"Are you certain?"

"Yes, right now I am. I am." She repeats forcefully and her eyes are certain. He nods and this time kisses her slow and soft. The hands holding her move down her body and she watches with bated breath as he begins to hitch up the dress the other Elena is wearing.

Elena in the ball gown, who is an unseen observer, seems to feel every kiss and caress and her body sears with want. Along with that desire is a powerful sense of voyeurism. She is watching herself being undressed but it still feels like an intrusion.

Her body thrumming with untapped lust she turns as they fall naked onto the bed and steps through the door without looking back.

Her cheeks are still flaming with warmth when she wakes. She blinks, groggy and unsure where she is. She turns to Bonnie stirring beside her and it all comes flooding back.

"Bonnie! What happened?"

They sit up; wide awake. Bonnie stares at her in confusion and also a little fear. "You weren't there. Are you OK? Did you see anything?"

"Yes, I saw both futures." She looks over at Esther who is already on her feet. "Why was I alone?"

"I think the spirits wanted each of us to see different things. Which makes sense; we can cover more ground that way." She looks down at her watch suddenly. "Look at the time!" She ushers Bonnie and Elena to their feet and to the door. "I have to give a speech in twenty minutes. That is when the drinks will be poured."

"I need to speak to Elijah." Even saying his name makes her breath catch and lick of passion stir.
Esther nods. "Yes. He trusts you but he will need persuading. I am hopeful that you will succeed. Later we will talk of the things we have seen but it is not this night." She opens the door and they walk out in a light daze. The door closes with a sharp click

Bonnie turns to her. "This just might be the most surreal night of my life."

"Tell me about it."

They make their way down the hallway, Bonnie eager to find her mother and to check on Caroline. At the grand staircase they part ways, promising to tell each other what they have seen.

Puffing out a tense breath Elena looks down at the crowd below but doesn't see Elijah. About to make her way down she feels something soft brushing her arm and turns to find him staring at her.

"Elena." He is still possessed of the same sang-froid but now Elena sees him in another light. A light that makes her blood thunder and breath hitch. His eyes widen and he takes her arm in concern. "What's wrong?"

"Can you hear my heartbeat?" It was a suspicion until now.

"Yes and its racing like a cornered animal's."

She inhales, trying to calm herself and looks at him anxiously. "Is there somewhere private we could talk? I have something important to tell you."
His 'wing' is situated at the back of the mansion, with a view of the grounds and trees beyond. That view is an opaque black now and only their reflections can be seen in the windowpanes. He leads her into a beautifully furnished suite which immediately reminds her of the motel rooms she has just seen in her dreams. Everything seems impersonal. He gestures towards a lovers couch but she's too full of nervous energy to sit.

"What happened?"

Elena's mind freezes for a moment, lost on where to begin. She licks her lips and forces herself to speak. "Your mother wants to perform a spell tonight and I've agreed to help her. I've just participated."

He frowns, moving forward. "What are you talking about?"

Elena inhales, telling herself to be concise. "You were right to be suspicious. She hasn't forgiven Klaus. She wants to stop him. The spell that she'll do tonight will help us towards doing that."

His anxiety is less now, he seems curious but alert. "And what spell is it?"

"She wants to link all of you together. She needed a drop of my blood to do it."

"And what will linking us together accomplish?" He says it pleasantly but there is a steel lurking underneath that exterior. She must approach carefully.

"Whatever happens to one of you happens to all." She moves forward before he can speak and grips his arm. Her eyes are large and dark and she speaks as soft as someone breaking news of bereavement. "She wants to turn you all human."

He blinks once and then becomes very, very still. At that moment she has no idea what he is feeling or what he might do. He could lose control or remain frozen like this forever. When his mouth twitches she feels a flush of relief. Finally he smiles.

"This is a joke."

"No, she's serious. She says that on the next full moon she will perform the ritual. That way Klaus will be possible to kill."

"Mortal?" He says, as if the word is some bemusing, nonexistent thing that she is teasing him with. He stares deeper into her eyes and the smile slowly drips off his face. "God, you're serious aren't you?"

Elena nods and pushes him down onto the couch and sits beside him. He's compliant in her hands, his shock total. For a time she says nothing, just lets him think until the words have sunk in. She keeps an eye on the time, aware that Esther is working to a timeframe. She leans forward, trying to peer at his lowered face.

"Are you all right?"

"No." He looks at her and she's never seen him look so lost. He's always the picture of composure. "Even if she can do this there must be a catch."
Elena feels a flush of heat prickle her skin and smiles, shaking her head. "There isn't."

He squints at her and his eyes darken. "You're lying."

Her eyelashes flutter, her dry mouth parts. "I'm not, I...just haven't told you everything. You're not going to like it."

He straightens, as if preparing himself for a blow. "Say it."

"You can't tell the others. The spell is in the champagne that you'll drink. If the others know that it's part of a plan to turn them human they'll never drink it."

He nods stiffly and looks at her intensely. "Why tell me? You could have let us consume the champagne and I would be none the wiser."

"I...I didn't want to keep you in the dark. We're friends, aren't we?" Even now, after everything she has witnessed, she is still unsure.

He smiles dryly and says nothing. His sharp eyes take in her appearance again and he becomes thoughtful. "Your heart is pounding but I'm not sure if it's because you're lying or from something else."

This time it's Elena's time to frown at him. "Are you going to listen to my heart every time we talk?"

He averts his gaze. "No but now is the exception. You're asking me to trust my mother and become mortal, all the while keeping the others in the dark. I don't need to listen to someone's heart to know if they're withholding something."

"God..." Elena exhales loudly and gets to her feet. She is withholding part of the truth. If he learns that his mother planned to have them all killed he will never agree. She looks back at him, scowling in confliction. He gets to his feet and his expression is much softer. He brushes a hand down her arm and speaks calmly.

"I'm sorry. I do consider you to be my friend. To tell you the truth you're the first true friend I've had in years. I trust you and I hope that I still have yours. But I do not want to venture into this without all the facts. I will not, do not, blame you for wanting Klaus to die at any cost but I need to know the truth. Does my mother wish us ill?"

Elena stares up into his calm eyes but there is a tension in the way that he holds himself, in the repeated caress of his thumb against her gloved arm. Unable to deny the truth under his scrutiny she relents.

"She did but I talked her out of it."

"She wanted all of us dead? Not just Klaus?"

Elena nods and stares pleadingly into his eyes. "She feels responsible for what happened. She – she felt everything that you all did, the pain and death. But she's reconsidered Elijah."

"Why?" His voice is low but he's angry, she can see it burning in his eyes. Angry and disappointed. "She's probably planned this all along."

"Because deep down I don't think she wanted to. Look, I'm not your mother and this will have to be something you discuss with her. But I know this will work."
He stares intensely at her, still unconvinced. "How can you be so sure?"

"Because I've seen it. I just saw those dreams that Bonnie has been having and so did Esther. In the future, maybe not even a month from now, you'll be human again."

He gazes at her fixedly, searching for a scrap of duplicity but she regards him sincerely. He exhales and weakly leans back against the wall.

"You mean it…" He stares into the middle distance with a deep scowl and she hedges forward to touch his arm.

"Don't you want to be human again? Like before?" She knows it's a hard, complicated issue but that it what it boils down to.

"I spent thirty four years as a man and a thousand as a vampire. Those years are like a dream to me now; I have faint images and feelings but it's unreal. With every passing year my time as that man just got further and further away. I had a certain way of living – rules and ideals - that I still try to uphold but human nature compared to what I am now is alien…” he shakes his head, eyes still fixed in the middle distance. He talks aloud and she wonders if he's even aware of her presence when he suddenly looks at her in bewilderment. "Do I want to be human? The question is can I be?"

She has to confess she hadn't thought of how much of a change it would be for him. He's spent so much time as a vampire that any connections to his mortal life must be almost, if not completely, severed.

"Maybe you shouldn't try to reclaim something that's long gone. You'll be human but with all your years if experience. You'll be different, that's all."

For the first time since they entered the room a smile grows over his face and he gazes at her with an intense look of admiration. "Wise for one so young."

"Not so wise or so young." She smiles and cocks her head. "So will you do it?"

His expression grows troubled. "I don't want to deceive them. It shouldn't be my choice to take their immortality away from them. They have a right to know."

"I know how much they mean to you but right now this is the only option we've got to take out Klaus. You said you worked for years towards this end."

"But at such a cost?"

"Is it a cost?" She steps back, aware of the time. "They'll be human, not dead."

He smirks sardonically as he leans off the wall. "Kol will inform you that they're the same thing." He stares at the clock. "How long do I have?"

"Ten minutes."

He nods and turns away from her. "I'll meet you downstairs. I need to think."

"OK." She heads toward the door and catches a final glimpse of him staring at his twisted reflection in the dark window before swinging the doors closed.

As a maître d' passes her she swipes a glass off the tray and takes a long drink. The champagne
will go straight to her head but she welcomes it. Anything to take the edge off the gnawing
anticipation.

"One of those nights?"

Elena turns to Stefan who's holding his own glass. It's a long time before she weakly smiles in
greeting. She has more pressing matters to deal with then her complicated relationship with Stefan
tonight.

"Something like that…” She looks up at the staircase, waiting for either Elijah or his mother to
appear. The other siblings she spots easily, her eyes drawn to them like fillings to a magnet. Stefan
follows her line of sight and frowns but does not press her for an answer. Instead he speaks low, his
head bowed.

"I'm sorry Elena. What I did to you on Wickery Bridge was unforgivable. I should never have
threatened you."

He had forced her to drink his blood and then almost drove them off a bridge. Threatened is putting
it simply. For all the ineptitude of his words she knows he's being sincere. It's the first time in
months she's seen a sign of the old Stefan but it's too late for apologies or reconciliations. Maybe
it's the futures that could await her that's firming her resolve but she does not want to build bridges,
not in a romantic sense. She loved him, he was her first but she's moving on. All she can do is hope
that he will do the same and recover what was lost to him.

"I know how much you want Klaus…dealt with." She looks around the guests quickly. "Well you
might just get your wish. If we're successful maybe you'll find some peace. I hope...No, that's all I
can say. I have to go." She smiles briefly and walks away, leaving him to stare after her.

Stefan looks into his glass and smiles humourlessly before throwing the alcohol back into his
mouth. He wanders around, looking for a sign of Klaus but he seems to have absconded. Who he
does find is Elijah who is standing outside.

A curl of blue smoke drifts upwards before being pulled apart by the wind.

"Never took you for a smoker."

Elijah doesn't turn as he comes to his side. He stares at the cigarette in his hand with a small smile.
"I gave up...oh must have been 1898 or so. Like all addicts I was always on the look out for
substitutes..."

"Is that what we are, addicts?"

Elijah shrugs. "We are predatory, craving creatures but I don't need to tell you that." He looks at
him out of the corner of his eye for a second. Even briefly it's a heavy, hard gaze.

"You care about her, don't you?"

Elijah lips quirk and averts his eyes. That smile says it all and will be his only answer. "You're no
longer consuming human blood." It's not a question.

"How can you tell?"

"It's obvious; to someone like me at least. I was the first to do it myself and then passed on that
knowledge to others."
"Lexi?"

For the first time Elijah turns to him fully with a wide smile. "Alexandra! I invited her here tonight but she has not yet arrived. I'm hoping she's just fashionably late. She's not one to miss a party...I was her mentor." There is a far off look in his eye, remembering far off times.

Stefan shifts uncomfortably. "You don't know...Lexi is dead."

The nostalgic expression falls from Elijah's face like a stone. He sighs and flicks his cigarette to the ground where he grinds it under his shoe. "How did she die?"

Stefan opens his mouth to answer but then stalls. Damon killed Lexi. But he can't make himself say it. Elijah looks at him sharply but before he can speak someone behind them clears their throat. It's Finn.

"Mother is about to make her toast. Better not miss it..." He walks back in and Stefan takes this opportunity to follow him inside.

"Nothing is truly immortal," Elijah mutters, watching the dying embers turn into ash at his feet before heading back in for the toast.

Esther stands on the staircase, smiling down at her guests. She raises a flute filled with pink champagne.

"Cheers."

Elijah watches his siblings sip or gulp down their drinks. Klaus even turns to him and lifts his up in a toast before drinking. Elijah stares down into the glass where bubbles rise and burst. He could throw it aside and prevent the link from even being formed. Tell his family the truth. Or he could say nothing and sentence them to a life of mortality and a death that they will no longer be able to escape. He looks up at the young woman before him. She is paused in anticipation, eyes trailing from the glass in his hand to his eyes.

"Would it change things between us?" He asks unbidden, surprising the both of them.

She deliberates for a moment, eyes flicking between his before nodding. "Yes." That simple word that could mean anything propels the glass to his lips and he drinks before he has time to change his mind.

There, he thinks, it's done.

The two weeks that follow crawl by and for everyone initiated into the plan they feel every second. Bonnie spends her time talking – and learning – with Esther as they both get prepared for the ritual ahead. Elijah spends more and more time with Elena and less and less time with his family.

"I can barely look them in the eye. The only person I can confide in is Finn."

"How has he taken the change of plan?" They're seated in his kitchen, a mug of tea before her and glass of scotch for him. He's started the day early, as he has for the last week.

"He was not pleased at first but he's coming around." He smiles. "You have Abigail Bennett to thank for that. He seems to have taken a shine to her."
"So he doesn't mind becoming human?"

"He told me that he wanted to die and he still gets his wish. It will just take another forty or so years to happen."

"Have you spoken to your mother?"

He smiles, a dark curling thing, and downs his drink. "Yes. She confessed to wanting us dead but assured me that she has changed her mind. She even apologised. I was angry, extremely angry but I can see her reasoning. She looked at us and saw monsters, beasts that she had created that went on to sire more monsters. She feels responsible but she shouldn't, not on that regard. She did not make us kill and torment or dam off our humanity, we did that. We're monstrous." He stares off into the distance, morose in reflection.

Elena says nothing on this. She will not excuse the things he has done or justify them but only takes comfort in the fact he is shamed and regretful. Maybe he has to focus on the negatives of his immortality to make his upcoming change more bearable.

"Are you nervous about being mortal?"

The glass heading towards his mouth stills. "It still seems unreal. I try to envision it – getting old and everything else that befalls mortals - but it's still difficult to grapple. But," he adds with stress, "I'm trying not to see it in terms of a regression. As you said it will be different. I have always cherished humanity where I have seen it flourish. It would be hypocritical of me to discredit it now." He looks into space before gulping down the alcohol.

"It seems unreal but I've seen it, it's a reality."

He stares at her quizzically. "Those dreams, I'd like to hear more about them."

Her mouth parts and she fussily tucks her hair behind her ears. Her mind flashes to the motel room, to Elijah pulling a dress over her head and kissing her throat. "Uh, well, I only saw snippets. In one of the dreams I think we were travelling. You got into a bar fight and was hurt."

"A bar fight?" He says incredulously.

She nods, amused at his snobbish disgust. "You were wearing plaid."

He scoffs and gets to his feet. "Now I know it's a fantasy." He drains the last dregs of scotch before washing his glass. "And the other future? I confess I find it interesting that there appears to be two. Throws some doubt onto the solidity of human, plaid wearing future me."

It's a doubt she has to concede to. "I guess it shows us that the future is not fixed. It could go one way or the other."

"And in this other future was I human?" He turns to her, calmly leaning against the draining board.

She opens her mouth to give an affirmative but then stills. She tries to remember what he had looked like, if he was aged, but the recollection is faint. She actually has no idea if he's human or not in that timeline. Along with this doubt comes another, sly and startling. She has no idea if she was human either.

For all she knows in fourteen years time she could be a vampire herself.
Chapter 12

The day of the ritual dawns bright and clear. Spring is in the air and it is only fitting for what is about to happen. New life will emerge from things dead and dormant. Her children will once again have a life that was snatched from them and maybe they will make it good, not rave at their new found vulnerability.

She is reminded of a poet who urged his dying father to rage at death, to fight but that is the opposite of what she wants. When the time comes they should go gently, as she will. She has but little time left but her children can grow old as they should have and know that when the time comes they have lived a life and cherished it because it is ephemeral. That is what she wants for her children.

All her children but one.

He stares at them through the window as they walk around the garden. His mother and Bonnie. Witches. They conspire out in the open, before his very eyes. They've been doing it for days. She told him that she is mentoring the Bennett girl but he is no fool. They are up to something. But he lets it continue, not wanting to challenge his mother, not when she's forgiven him.

He clings to that forgiveness, more then he will ever admit. If that forgiveness was tarnished or proved false then he would not be held accountable for his actions. All he has ever done has been for his family. He had protected them from Mikael - not that they thank him for that – and now provided a place of refuge. They are now a family, more complete then he ever envisioned. That reality is now being corrupted from within.

Something odd is happening to them, one that he can't quite understand yet. At first the occurrences were barely noticeable but with his suspicions raised he became more attuned. One day his fears were confirmed when Kol, in a fit of petulance, pulled Rebekah's hair. They were all in the room at the time and each of them winced in pain. They had felt her pain. Elijah had been quick to change the topic but it had solidified his suspicions.

Something is going on and he has to find out what.

A full moon is tonight and his blood surges. Hyper alert and quick to anger he follows Bonnie as she parts ways with his mother and heads towards the gate. She senses him coming and turns.

"What?"

He smiles. "Just wanted to know how the lessons with my mother are going? Learning a lot I hope?"

"Not that it's any of your business but yes. She knows her stuff."

"I bet she does," He steps forward, his hands behind his back. "I'm having something of a predicament and I was hoping you could help me?"

She laughs nasally and turns to leave. "Sure…"

"You see for some inexplicable reason me and my siblings seem to be connected." He smiles as shefreezes, back to him. He moves closer. "The others haven't taken much notice but I have. The only deduction I can make is that it must be supernatural in origin. Magical, in fact."
She turns to look at him over her shoulder and her expression is blank. "Sorry, can't help you."

"Oh I think you can." He runs forward, twists her around and slams her against the wall that fronts his property. He grabs her face and looks into her eyes. "Now then sweetheart, why don't you tell me what's going on?"

"Get off me!" She glares at him and then just as quickly becomes calm. She is getting into the state to perform magic; he has seen it done many times. He feels a tickle against his mind, an annoying one.

"I'm afraid your little brain squeezing trick won't work on me. But I have a trick of my own that will work on you." He stares deeply into her eyes and drops his voice a register. "Tell me what you and my mother are up to."

She fights, even now she fights. But his compulsion is too strong. "We're working on a spell." Her voice is dreamy and detached.

"What spell? What will it do?"

"We will bind your life force to another. It will turn you human. All of you..."

That is the last thing he expects to hear and he's left reeling. He had been so focused on the idea that these witches were plotting his downfall that he never stopped to think of an alternative. The anger and suspicion is rolled back by a wave of fragile hope.

"She – she wants to make me human? Has she truly forgiven me?"

Even under compulsion Bonnie manages a small smirk. "No."

He blinks. "No? What do you mean?"

"The only reason she's turning you human is so we can kill you. She hasn't forgiven you."

Hope is snuffed out in an instant but he feels the loss of it and it stings terribly. Growling he breaks eye contact with Bonnie and shoves her aside. She straightens and prepares to make a run for it but he grabs her arm again at the last moment.

"Wait!" He peers into her eyes and commands her again in a rough voice. "You said that you will bind our life to something. What is the binding agent?" This time she really tries to struggle, twisting her head away but he holds her in a bruising grip. He repeats the question again and again until she finally relents, exhausted.

"The white oak."

Again he is hit with another wave of surprise. "The white oak burnt over a thousand years ago. The only thing that's left of it now is ash." But even as he says it an old suspicion rises. They had left this land for the old world, taking the ash with them. It could be possible that a vestige of the tree was saved. He opens his mouth to ask where it is when someone speaks up behind him.

"Niklaus?" Esther approaches with Finn at her side. Klaus' grin is a lupine thing.

"Mother! I trust you're having a pleasant morning? I was just having the most enlightening conversation with Bonnie here." He swings her around and she shouts at him to let her go.

Finn steps forward. "Unhand her Klaus."
Klaus narrows his eyes at his older brother. "You're in on it, aren't you? You and Elijah?" Finn's stoic silence tells him all he needs to know. He has been suspicious of saintly Elijah for months so his treachery does not surprise him. "Do you care for me so little?" This he directs towards his mother who visibly pales.

"This is not about what I want Niklaus. This is for the greater good."

"Spare me your magnanimous bullshit. I have always been less in your eyes, always a symbol of your unfaithfulness. I am still a bastard and nothing has changed. I know what you plan to do and I will stop you witch."

She flinches for a second before gaining composure. Flinty eyes regard him and she speaks coldly. "Whatever affection I had for you is put aside. I will not allow you to walk a path towards destruction. The ritual will go ahead as planned. You will have no assistance from the others. I have put a spell around the house so that they can not leave until they are human. You are outnumbered and fighting a losing battle. Now let go of Bonnie or I will make you."

His mouth curls and for a moment the world stops, waiting for someone to make the first move. Esther stiffens as Klaus suddenly bares his fangs and moves to bite Bonnie's neck. Esther and Finn race forward within a blink of an eye and once they have Bonnie they simply disappear.

Klaus stumbles slightly as he finds himself alone. He looks back at the mansion where the rest of his siblings are. They're trapped but safe. The only sibling who is not is Elijah and he knows just where he is.

Dusk settles over the town, turning the tops of budding branches orange. He stares at the sun and twists the gold ring on his finger. By tomorrow he will be able to face the sun unprotected for the first time in a thousand years.

"Penny for your thoughts?"

"You better have deep pockets..." he looks at her as she joins him on the bench. For the last two weeks Elena has been his confidant and he hopes he has been hers. "I was thinking that by tomorrow I will not longer have to wear this thing."

He holds up his hand she takes it, brushing her finger over the red stone set in the centre. "Your mother made this?"

"Yes, she made one for each of us..." he trails off, lost in thought before he suddenly rouses himself and stands. "I have something I need to show you." He leads her back into his apartment and to a laptop. He gestures for her sit and look at the screen. Images of cave drawings appear and she frowns.

"Ok, what am I looking for?"

"You gave me a memory stick some time ago filled with numerous pictures of the cave drawings. Last night I took another look and spotted something strange." He leans down over her shoulder and clicks the mouse. An image of a tree appears with figures worshiping beneath it.

Elena stares at the image, searching for anything odd but she's baffled. "OK you're gonna have to give me a clue."

He points at the image. "This drawing was done a few hundred years after the others. See the difference in colour and style? We destroyed the original white oak but there must have been
Elena turns in the chair to stare up into his face. "If what you're saying is true then that tree could be long gone by now. It could sit in someone's dining room as a table or something."

Elijah manages a smile at this but his unease is strong. "I know it could mean nothing but I have learned not to ignore coincidences." He sits on the arm of the couch across from her.

"OK it is a little weird but even if there is another tree out there it doesn't matter. Tomorrow you'll be human and the tree will be harmless." She gets up and stands before him. "This is your last night as a vampire, an original. Don't you want to do something?"

He grins. "You think I should do something to mark the occasion?" He watches Elena shrug and on impulse reaches for her hand and pulls her forward gently. "There are things that I will miss, I confess it."

"Never getting old, healing, super fast and strong. Compelling people…" She trails off suddenly with a stricken expression.

He frowns. "Compulsion has always been something I avoid if I can. I use it, as you are well aware but I have always battled with it. To take away someone's will and force your own…" he shakes his head. "It's has always been the easy, convenient option but lately its usefulness is being tested. Before we could just compel someone to forget about us if they become aware of our nature but the development in technology is making that hard…I will be glad to be rid of it, the temptation was always too much."

Elena listens to him and with every passing second she seems to shrink in on herself. She looks down at his hand that holds hers and speaks quietly. "I told you that Jeremy is staying out of town with friends but I didn't tell you everything." She looks up and her gaze is filled with guilt. "I had Damon compel him to leave. Klaus almost had him killed and I just couldn't risk Jeremy being hurt. He's all I've got left."

"Ah…" He says and she thinks for a second that will be all but he continues after a pause. "If you are expecting a morality lesson from me you won't get one. I have used and abused compulsion more times then I care to count. All I can say is that if you meddle with someone's freewill be prepared to face the consequences."

Elena nods, ashamed and avoids his gaze. "You think I'm some noble person but I'm not. I want to be those things but I screw up and make choices I regret." Her lashes flutter when he stands and kisses her forehead.

"You are someone I greatly admire but do not think I hold you on a pedestal or expect you to be some paragon. I think you try and that is enough for anyone, vampire or human." He looks into her eyes with a soft smile. "We are not so different."

"Should I give you another minute or two? Don't want to interrupt this touching moment."

Elena and Elijah spin around to see Klaus standing out on the terrace. He must have climbed – or jumped – five stories to get there.

"What are doing here?"

"Oh just wanted to see you before the big night. I had a little run in with Bonnie – oh don't worry she's fine." Klaus says after Elena stiffens. "I know what they're planning and I know you're in on it. So much for familial love."
"There's nothing you can do to stop it." Elijah says, standing close to Elena.

Klaus smiles. "You actually want it to happen? You know you can't take that woman on her word. Has she promised you clemency?"

Elijah nods stiffly. "I believe that she wants to undo what she has created. She wants to give us another chance."

"Except me…she will not spare you Elijah or any of us. She spent a thousand years on the other side plotting our end and you think her mind can be changed so swiftly?"

Elena looks at the trouble on Elijah's face and moves to stand in front of him. "Don't listen to him; he's just trying to get you on his side."

Klaus laughs. "On my side? Elijah has been plotting to kill me for hundreds of years and has never stopped. Oh you played a good game Eli but I'm no fool. I don't need you on my side; I don't want you to be. I thought we could live as a family but that is past. The only word of advice I will give you is that mother is more conniving then you can believe. She will kill you if she has the chance, even precious Elena here and that is something that neither of us wants."

"All this talk is pointless. I will not be swayed and there is nothing you can do to stop her."

Klaus moves back toward the railing with a bigger smile. "You know I learned a thing or two about curses over the years. Just as with my old curse there needs to be a binding agent to hold it."

"The moonstone." Elijah says.

"Correct. This is no different. I managed to get Bonnie talking and she told me what they are using to bind our forthcoming humanity to. Even if she does succeed in turning us human there's still a way to defeat her. There's a white oak tree out there Elijah with our names on it and I'm going to burn it to the ground." With that he jumps over the railing and disappears. Elena races to look down but he is nowhere in sight. In the violet sky a pale moon is rising. Elena looks back at Elijah with worry.

"The white oak, do you think it's the same one?"

He smiles morosely. "Like I said, I never ignore a coincidence and this one is blaring." He leads her back into his apartment where they put on their coats and make their way to his car. The ritual will be performed in the woods, where the others are already setting up.

A salt pentagram is sprinkled out onto the ground and torches blaze against the dark. The wood is cold and silent but for a few mutterings in a language she can't understand. Elena stands rigid, half with the cold and half with anxiety. She looks at Elijah who must be feeling even more nervous then her but he does not show it. He watches as the witches – Esther, Abby and Bonnie - stand at the corners of the pentagram while Finn stands in the middle.

"We're ready."

"What will happen?" Elijah asks his mother.

She smiles faintly. "We will channel the Bennett line for power and cast the spell onto Finn. Because you are linked whatever happens to him happens to you. By the end of this night you and your siblings will be human."
"How long will the link last?"

"A week or so."

"And is that a certainty?" He asks, his eyes dark and probing. Maybe Klaus' words had gotten to him.

"Nothing in life is certain. This spell has never been done before. I and my sisters here had to create it." She smiles and moves forward but stops at the salt line. "Do not worry Elijah, all will be well."

He nods and walks into the wood and Elena follows him. He stops and leans against a tree trunk and blows out a pent up breath. "I can't stand to watch them any longer."

"You just want it over with?"

He nods and pulls something out of his pocket. It's the memory stick. "Take this and keep it safe. If anything should go wrong we can't have it falling into the wrong hands."

She takes it. "Nothing will go wrong."

He smiles. "I wish I had your conviction. I wish I could see those dreams for myself…"

"You don't need to; soon you'll be living them. Klaus is trying to find the white oak and I think that's what we're going to do. We have to stop him and we will." She smiles at him encouragingly and then turns when Bonnie calls out for them. They're ready to begin. Elena walks forward but Elijah shakes his head.

"I'd prefer to do this alone, if you don't mind?"

"I don't mind but you're not alone. Once it's finished I'll be right back."

"Thank you Elena. I don't really have the words…" He trails off and gazes at her deeply. He hopes that look says it all.

Elena nods once and heads back towards the pentagram. Chanting begins to rise and fall and a pulsing energy that she can actually feel runs through her body. The magic that they are creating calls to her, it makes her blood sing and her breath catch. She walks forward, marvelling at the magic that seems to match the rhythm of her heart. It is the last thought she has before a total and complete darkness settles over her mind and she knows no more.

The cold is the first thing he feels, a cold that is bone deep. He moves and immediately stops with a groan. His body is racked with pain, every muscle and joint aches. He lifts his head and sees that he's lying on a carpet of leaves. Gritting his teeth he rolls himself onto his back and blinks at the dim morning light that shines through a canopy of trees above. It's raining lightly. No wonder he's so cold. He manages to sit up and look around. As he does something else begins to nag at him and he forgets his pain for a moment.

Where am I? Who am I?

The thought eclipses his pain and brings with it an onslaught of panic. He tries to remember how he got here or his name but his mind is blank.

Its ok, must have got lost and hit my head. Keep calm. Get up.

Focusing on that command he pulls himself up using a tree and sways to his feet. He looks around
but he appears to have wandered off the path. All he sees in any direction is spindly trees. Running a hand through his hair he looks at the tree he leans on and sees that one side of it is covered in green moss. A memory comes back to him then. He's leading a group of women in massive dresses and covered in lead makeup through a wood and telling them what they should do if they get lost. It had been in France, when he's not sure but it's real.

"North should lie that way." He begins to walk, teeth clenched as his muscles protest. As he walks he tries to remember how he ended up alone in a forest but again his mind is not forthcoming. A void is the only thing that answers him and it strikes a sharp fear into his being. He walks on, trying to keep his mind blank but there is a building panic that threatens to drown him.

After walking for half an hour he rests, wishing he had some water. But the image that flashes into his mind in not water but blood. Disturbed he trudges on and shouts for anyone that can hear him. Not five minutes later he hears something in the distance but it is not a voice. It's a siren. Frowning and unsure he heads towards the sound and soon sees flashing lights through the trees. A man in an orange coat stands before a large white vehicle and comes forward when he sees him approaching.

"Sir, are you lost?"

"I believe I was...Where am I?" He stares at the bright iridescent coat and the flashing lights in wonder. Before the other man can answer a blur shots past him and almost bowls him over.

"Elijah!" A young woman wrapped in a blanket grips the front of his coat tightly. "I couldn't find you! Are you all right?"

He blinks repeatedly, looking at her face. A tingle of recognition grows. It is warmth of feeling that rings something that is somehow connected to this woman. He loves her, whoever she is. He gently takes her hands in his.

"Do I know you?" He asks and the relief that had been on her beautiful face fades. The blanket around her shoulders slips to the ground and lands at her feet.
Chapter 13

They sit at the back of the ambulance as it drives towards the hospital. A paramedic sits back down after giving Elijah an examination. The man himself sits beside her, wrapped in a blanket and shivering. He looks at her every few seconds, as if reassuring himself that she's there. She smiles but inwardly her emotions are in turmoil. After the spell had been cast Elena had woken to find everyone lying on the forest floor. She got to her feet and scrambled over to Bonnie and Esther. They both breathed evenly and deep but no matter how hard she shook them they remained sleeping.

Abby and Finn stirred and rose feebly. Finn, who had remained within the protective boundaries of the pentagram, appeared unhurt. He tended to his mother and Bonnie, a distraught Abby at his side. At that point the question if the spell had been successful was the furthest thing from anyone's mind. Elena called for an ambulance and roamed the woods for Elijah but to no avail. She had journeyed to the hospital with the others but had told them that Elijah was still out there. Hours later she ventured out with a search and recue unit, after being assured that Bonnie was completely healthy if sunk into a total sleep.

The paramedic brings out a clipboard and a pen. "Sir I have a number of questions that I'd like you to answer."

"If you insist but I don't know how forthcoming the answers will be." His accent, usually a transatlantic amalgamation, sounds distinctly English. Elena gazes at him, deeply confused.

"Can you tell me your name?"

"Elijah…Mikaelson?" He turns to Elena for confirmation and she nods.

"Your date of birth?"

He opens his mouth but then shuts it. He thinks, scowling in thought until he shakes his head. "I don't know, sorry."

"That's OK sir. Do you know who the current president is?"

"Of this country? Obama."

"Your address?"

"19 Church Drive, SW13." He rattles off the address quickly.

The paramedic frowns. "Never heard a zip code like that."

"You wouldn't have, it's in London." Elijah's face lightens as he remembers and he turns to her again. "That's where I live in England. At least its one of my houses…"

"Are you a British Citizen?" The paramedic asks.

Again Elijah is stumped. "I, um…I'm from all over." He frowns in concentration and it has a visibly exhausting effect on him. Elena leans forward.

"He's tired. Can't you ask him later?"

The paramedic nods and gets up. "Well give you a full check up once we're at the hospital but
physically you appear to be fine."

"Except I can only remember bits and pieces."

The man smiles. "Don't worry; in most cases amnesia is only temporary." He nods at them and sits with the driver. Elijah sighs and looks at her, his head leaning back.

"I know you."

"And I know you." She says with a smile but it feels jittery.

"Are we friends or more?" He question is blunt and she is left gawping. Seeing this he winces. "Forgive me that was too direct."

"No it's OK. We're friends; let's just leave it at that…" She leans close to him and speaks softly. "What's the last thing you remember?"

"Before I woke?" He leans back, waiting for anything to jog free. Suddenly he sits up with look of understanding. "My mother. She was performing a spell." He blinks in confusion. "She's a witch?"

"Yes. She was doing a spell on you and your brothers and sister."

A salt pentagram, flames. "I remember, sort of…" The knowledge that his mother appears to practise witchcraft does not surprise him as much as it should.

"Do you…" she stalls, not sure how to frame the next question. "Do you feel…different?"

"Different? I could sleep for a hundred years and I'm hungry. Is that different?" Somehow he suspects it is.

Elena nods after a pause and then breaks into a watery smile. "I think it really worked."

He's unsure of what worked but she assures him he will have his answers once they're at the hospital. He lounges back, tired but he can't seem to keep his eyes off her.

Elijah listens carefully as nurses' bustle around him. The more he listens to her talk the more he remembers. He would like to say the more like himself he feels but that's a joke.

"Where is Finn?"

"With your mother. Once they're done here we can go see her and Bonnie."

A nurse approaches and rolls up his sleeve. "I'm just gonna take a blood test honey."

He smiles at the nurse and then at Elena. "You don't have to wait on my behalf. Go and see your friend. I'll be fine."

Elena nods and, after giving the needle being prepared a long stare, leaves the room. Elijah offers his arm and watches with a strange fascination as the needle pierces his skin and the nurse swiftly draws his blood. It's the sight of the red fluid filling the tube that causes a strong and instant
reaction. For a moment he tastes blood, can almost feel it running down his throat and he chokes. His body stiffens and wave of goosebumps spreads over his skin. He should be disgusted at this strange reaction but he's not. Not at all.

The nurse looks at him in concern and quickly takes the needle away. She places a cotton bud against a tiny bead of blood. "There, all done."

With a gasp Elijah presses down against the crock of his arm and jumps to his feet. The nurse coos at him but he's already running from the room. As he slides into the empty hallway he bumps into someone who takes him by the shoulders.

"Elijah!"

"Finn!" He stares at his brother with the most acquit relief. "I remember what we are, or what we were." He stares at him in disbelief. "It's insane."

"It is but now all that is over. I'm glad that you have been found safely, even with your wits addled. Come." Finn leads him down a hallway. "It seems that you're not the only one with this affliction. I checked on the others and they appear to have some memory lose. I have been spared that, the pentagram offering protection. The amnesia seems to be an unforeseen side effect." He leads them into a room where two women lay asleep. Elena gets to her feet when she sees Elijah but does not approach him. He offers her a smile before moving to his mother's side.

"What happened to them?" He asks.

Finn shakes his head, looking at Esther's face. "She completed the ritual successfully and then we were all rendered unconscious. I and Abigail came to but mother and Bonnie remain as you see them. I can only assume they have been the most effected because they were the ones drawing the most power."

Abby nods, her daughter's hand in hers. "The doctors said that there's nothing wrong with them. Everything checks out OK. They just won't wake up."

Finn goes to her and lays a hand on her shoulder. "Using that amount of magic comes at a cost. The body needs time to replenish. I have no doubt that they will wake when they are ready."

Abby inhales a shaky breath. "I pray that you are right. I've called her dad, he should be here soon..." She looks up at him as if remembering something suddenly. "Is it back?"

Finn smiles and with a miniscule nod towards the curtains they fly apart. Elena's jaw drops. "You're a witch?"

"A servant of nature, yes. Becoming a vampire took my ability away but now it is back. I wanted to die but I think I can help to restore balance, to make amends."

Elijah, who had been silent, speaks up. "There is something that I have to do. I can feel it but it's eluding me...."

Elena walks over to him and nods. "Klaus. He was trying to find the white oak tree and destroy it. If he does..."

"We'll be vampires again." Finn says darkly. "He can search until he is grey and bent over with age but he will never find it."
Elijah frowns. "How can you be so sure?"

Finn's mouth twitches. "Because it will be like trying to find the provable needle in a haystack. It's not just one simple tree, it's in a grove." He looks fondly down at Esther. "She knew he would try to find it and she has not made it easy."

"All the same we must find him."

Finn nods. "We must. For the next week the linking spell is still in effect. If anyone finds out that Klaus is now vulnerable there will be a price over his head by the end of the day. If he dies, we all will."

"So what should we do?" Elena asks.

"I will do a locating spell to find Klaus but you will have to bring him back home Elijah. The others are in a state of bewilderment and I think I am the best person to explain."

Elijah nods and then looks at Elena with a bemused smile. "I seem to recall faintly that we are destined for a road trip?"

Elena tilts her head and exhales a long breath. They are and so much more.

The man that found him is kind but there's something a little sharp about him to. Klaus gets the distinct impression that he doesn't like him. But he is relieved to have met someone who actually knows who he is.

"So we're mates then?" Klaus smiles at his rescuer as they drive North. He had woken at the wheel of his car with no idea where he was or where he was going. Truth be told he couldn't quite remember who he was either. But he had a cell phone and a name he saw there seemed to elicit a feeling of familiarity. One like kinship in fact.

Tyler turns to the man that killed and sired him with a smile. "That's right, friends."
The misty garden is old and the gravel path running alongside the hedge is pitted and covered with weeds. But there's something soothing about the place, a hint of something grand that's fallen into disuse. Elena comes to a stop and faces the hedge where two rectangles have been cut into the foliage. She sees now that a wall is underneath, hidden by leaves and vines.

Two garden doors, wood panelled and covered in a peeling green paint stand beside each other, both with numbers on them. She steps closer and notices that a third door is there but almost completely hidden behind creeping vines. Whatever that door leads to is now impassable.

"Only two outcomes remain."

Elena turns with a gasp to find Esther standing next to her. "Esther? What…? Where am I?" She looks up and along the path and for the first time feels that something unbelievably massive is behind her but she can't make herself look.

Esther smiles. "I have pulled you into my dreamscape."

"I'm dreaming?" She looks around, marvelling at the detail.

"Yes. Witches have the ability to share lucid dreams, as do vampires. But servants of nature can access far more in dreams, as you have seen."

"Bonnie's dreams of the future…Why isn't she here? Is she OK?"

"She is fine. The spell had a greater draining effect then I had foreseen. We are…how do you put it? Recharging our batteries? We are weak at this point, Bonnie especially, but do not think we are lying idle." She nods toward the doors. "In time we will awake but for now we're trying to find out what happened through there," she points at the second door, "and how to avoid it."

Elena closes her eyes, working it out. "OK so witches can access different timelines a person might have in their life? Bonnie's looks like doors in the witch house and you…have a garden?"

Esther smiles primly. "Yes. Think of a person's life like a garden of forking paths. The different choices we make create different routes. Through dreams we can see all paths."

"These are my future? Same as before? The first door is gone." She walks over to it, brushing her fingers down the leaves. The hedge seems to stir lightly at her touch.

"Yes, it seems that one is no longer a viable future. The second door on the other hand…"

Elena walks up to it and notes with an ominous feeling that it's ajar. "It's open."

"Yes, not a good sign. It means that the future through that door is still a possibility. Magic will be suppressed if we do not find a way to stop it from happening." Her voice is low and it catches with a surprising show of emotion.

Elena looks back at Esther and then freezes, her mouth dropping open. She had felt that something huge was looming behind her and she was right but she could never guess at the size. The tree is so gargantuan that it seems to fill up the sky and go on for miles to be lost in the mists. Branches sprout out from its trunk – too vast to be real - and grow upwards to twist and twine with other branches.
"Wha…what is it that?"

Esther smiles, clearly enjoying her astonishment. "That is the life of my family. My family tree, if you like…Can you see that there are five main boughs? Each represents one of my children …The longer they live the more it grows."

"It's unbelievable."

"Time is a tree with many branches. Each branch represents things that could or will happen. Or doors in this case…" Esther drifts off and Elena is hit with an intense feeling of déjà-vu. She's heard that said before but not sure when. The witch looks back towards the hedge and Elena has to rip her gaze away from the breath-taking sight before her. Her two simple doors look laughable in comparison.

She stares at the second door, focusing on the space between the wooden planks but its dark beyond. A doubt gnaws at her and she wishes that it was Bonnie beside her and not Elijah's mother. But she needs advice.

"Elijah and I are going after Klaus…should I go with him?"

"Do you want to?" Her question is light but again Elena is reminded of a school teacher, leading her student to something they already know.

"I know in that future," she points at the second door, "we travel together and…and." She pauses, not able to voice her worry. They travel together which leads to her having a child in the future. She does not know who the father could be but she can guess.

"What is on your mind?"

Elena shrugs. "Bonnie said I had a child in that future…a son."

"Yes."

Elena turns to her, moved by desperation. "Do you know who the father is?"

Calm but sharp eyes stare at her for a long moment before she nods. "I think you know who he is but do not wish to believe it. The decision is yours but I think Elijah will need your help at this time. Just because you travel together does not mean you are making that future happen. Like I said our choices change the future. You might not become a mother at all and that could be the thing that stops Mystic Falls from being destroyed."

Elena nods, thinking about the butterfly effect. Small changes can have large repercussions. "The future is not set in stone."

"Precisely. Now I can't take you through the doors at the present time, I'm too weak. But in a few nights time Bonnie or myself will visit your dreams again. Or rather you will visit ours." She smiles and gestures down the path where a mist is gathering.

As she walks towards the swirling cloud Elena can't help looking at the tree again. As she does she notices something she missed before. The ground under the tree is littered with fallen branches and one of them is massive. She squints and can just make out something scored into the bark: runes. She does not understand what it says but she wills herself not to forget.

The next morning Elena wakes late and is still in her pyjamas when a knock sounds at her door. Ric
answers it, beating Elena to the punch. Elijah and Finn stand there, smiling pleasantly.

"Good afternoon." Elijah says to Ric and then eyes Elena behind him.

She winces. "Sorry, I over slept."

"Not to worry. I also had a restless night." His eyes are red and he still looks tired but he's decked out as impeccably as ever. Elena invites them in but Ric hesitates. The night before they had talked at length, with Elena trying to convince him that it was OK for her to go. She would be safe with Elijah. Finally she had to pull out the 'eighteen and an adult' card. But he had remained wary.

"You're really going on a road trip with Elena?"

Elijah's eyes flick to her and then back to Ric. "Yes, if she wants to accompany me. It's her choice."

"She says that she trusts you but that's not the same as being safe."

"It's not, no. All I can say is that I will do everything in my power to protect her." Elijah smirks with a thought. "But we both know how capable she is. How tough. She'll probably be the one who will guard me. I – uh – I'm not 100% at the present time."

"Yeah, I heard…" He eyes Elijah suspiciously again before reluctantly allowing him and Finn to pass.

They head into the kitchen while Elena races back into her room to change, a feat she manages in less than one minute. She comes back down, running a brush through her hair and deposits a rucksack at the foot of the stair. A map is spread out over the kitchen table and she walks forward, Ric handing her a cup of coffee.

"How are you feeling?" She asks Elijah but Finn answers.

"It was touch and go for awhile, was it not? He was out there all night in the cold and rain. Imagine if he caught pneumonia and ended up dying his first day back as a human. The irony."

"Ha. Along with magic my brother seems to have reclaimed his awful sense of humour." Elijah turns his scathing stare from Finn to Elena where it immediately softens.

Elena sits and looks at Elijah carefully. "Are your memories back?"

"Not all but I'm remembering more. Not all of them pleasant..." He falls silent, looking aside to Finn. "My brother has managed to locate Klaus." He points at the map and she leans forward to look.

"Harris Pond; never heard of it."

"It's a simple pond beside a road in Virginia. That was his last location." Finn gets to his feet and rolls up the map. "If he moves I will contact you."

"Use this." Elijah holds out a cell phone which Finn stares at with distaste.

"No thank you, I have other means I can use..."

They head out towards Elijah's waiting car. It's a Lincoln MKZ, which she immediately thinks is the perfect car for Elijah. It's sophisticated and obviously very expensive. She looks at him as she pulls on her coat. "So you remember how to drive?" It's a valid question; god knows what he's forgotten.
He smiles. "Yes it appears I still have that skill." He watches Finn walk down the path and moves closer to Elena. "You don't have to accompany me. Don't you have school?"

"I want to. In fact Esther said I should." She explains about the lucid dream she had experienced as she puts her rucksack into the trunk of the car and closes it. "And now it's Spring Break. I was gonna go visit Jeremy in Denver but…"

"You still can. Like I said you're under no obligation to come. It could be dangerous."

"More dangerous then staying here? Then it has been for the last year?"

He smiles. "Good point. Thank you, Elena. It's not easy to accept help but I'm grateful." He stares at her sincerely before saying goodbye to Finn.

"Be safe and bring him home before he ruins us all."

Elijah nods and steps back, staring at Finn with clear affection. "I am relieved that you've stayed your hand."

Finn smiles, "I never thought I would serve nature again but now that I can…" he trails off, the notion too wonderful to put into words. "I will make them proud."

Elena isn't sure who he means but the conviction in his words rings loud. She nods at him and gets into the passenger seat. She turns to Elijah as he buckles up.

"Ready?"

"As I'll ever be."

Dense forests give way to fields and then encroach back again. They pass through small towns, each becoming more unfamiliar the further they travel. Sometimes it seems as though they drive through nothing but wilderness.

"Back in the ambulance you gave the paramedic the wrong address." She has been wondering if it is the same house that they might live in one day. She's finding the concept a little easier to accept now that she's seen it.

"First thing that popped into my head. When I'm not here I spend most of my time there or in upstate New York." He smiles, eyebrows raised. "Another puzzle piece falls into place." He keeps his gaze fixed on the road. In fact he seems to be concentrating very hard.

"Do you want me to drive for awhile?"

"When we reach the next town, if you don't mind? Being a vampire came with certain advantages. Some of them being reflexes and improved vision." He shakes his head with a sigh. "So many things to get used to…"

Ten minutes later he pulls over at a gas station. A diner called Al's– no more then a silver truck housed on bricks– stands beside it.

He stares at the place with a frown. "Do we dare risk it?"

She rolls her eyes and walks over to the door, throwing a smile over her shoulder at him. "I'm too hungry to care about food poisoning. Maybe later…"
The sun shines through cheap blinds and the seats need reupholstering but the food is surprisingly delicious. Sitting opposite each other they eat cheese burgers and fries.

"How do you feel? I mean does it feel like a burden has gone?"

He pauses in thought before nodding slowly. "In a way…If you lift a weight, especially a heavy one, it leaves a hollow behind. It feels like there's something missing now, like a tried up sea. It should be there but it's not and it's made conspicuous by its absence."

"So you...miss it?" She sips on her drink, eyeing him thoughtfully.

"Yes and no. I lived with it for so long, trained myself to control it to a degree that I didn't pose a threat. I had a life…" he looks into the distance and then suddenly laughs. "Listen to me. This should be freeing but all I can do is lament that it's gone."

Elena shakes her head, picking up her burger. "It's just something you gotta get used to."

He takes a sip from his drink and shrugs. "If it lasts."

"It will. We'll stop Klaus." Elena says firmly and he nods but she's left wondering if he's only doing it for her benefit. As he takes a bite out of his burger she sees that he's still wearing the gold ring on his middle finger. He follows her line of sight and spreads out his fingers.

"Forgot I was even wearing it…" He looks at the sunlight slanting across their table and twists the ring before he pulls it down his finger and she holds her breath, the air thick with anticipation. The ring comes off and he looks at her, the silence heavy. Elena suddenly bursts out laughing at how anticlimactic it is and he smiles, offering the ring to her.

"For me?"

"If you'll accept it? I've been wearing that ugly thing for centuries…but it was a large part of my life as a vampire." He adds in a voice low. "I'd be honoured if you'd keep it."

Elena takes the ring offered to her and runs her fingers over it. "Only if you're sure?" He nods and continues eating. She unclasps her necklace and strings the ring through the chain before clasping it back around her neck.

He stares at her as she does it, his gaze filled with troubled longing.

He stands in the doorway, swaying back and forth lightly. Elena pokes him into the room and towards a bed. They have been steadily heading north for hours – Elena doing most of the driving, Elijah giving directions – and had only just managed to find a place to stay as the clock strikes one in the morning. The last forty eight hours seems to have finally caught up with him.

"You're exhausted."

"A tad…" He yawns, cracking his jaw and sits down on the mattress with a smile. "I don't think I've ever been this tired. Not that I can remember." He looks at the two single beds and nods, as if satisfied. He's almost asleep on his feet but she knows he would lie on the floor if there was only one bed to share.

"Get some rest." She watches him fall asleep, too tired to even change out of his suit. Not that she would watch that happen. She pulls a blanket over him and heads back to the car to get their bags. She changes in the bathroom and comes to stand before her bed, looking at him awkwardly. They
had agreed to separate rooms but this room was the only one available. Telling herself not to think about it she dives under the covers and shuts her eyes, willing sleep to come. Maybe she will dream and speak to Bonnie.

The doors appear but are gone before she can even blink. She is pulled through the second door by a great force and finds herself standing in a hallway of an unfamiliar house. Sunlight floods the quiet room, the wooden floors and cream walls shining. Everything is still and clean, almost clinically so and Elena wonders where she is. The only thing that breaks the silence is the faint plink of piano keys. The timid, intermittent sound sometimes turns into a melody that seems familiar before ending abruptly. She walks towards the sound, down the spotless hallway to a door that stands ajar. She opens it slowly.

A dark haired boy, about six or seven, sits on a stool before a piano. Bonnie stands behind him and turns to her when she enters. She says nothing but jerks her head to come forward. Elena does, her breath caught in her throat.

"That's him?" She stares at his back, unable to look away.

Bonnie nods. "That's your son, Grayson."

Elena suddenly turns, tearing her gaze away. "I can't do this. I can't look at him."

Bonnie touches her shoulder. "Why? What's wrong?"

"If I look at him then he's real. He's not just some kid you've told me about, one that might never happen. He's my son, maybe not right now but if I let things play out…"

"Do you want things to play out?" Her voice is soft and non-judgemental.

Elena stares at her desperately. "I can't, can I? If he never gets born it might prevent this future from happening."

Bonnie frowns deeply in thought. "I don't know if you having a son changes things or not but this might be the only time you see him. You might not get another chance."

Elena nods and, after a tense pause, stands at the end of the piano and looks at her son. Brown eyes are concentrating hard on the music sheet before him and his fingers hover nervously over the keys. Finally he begins to play, humming something under his breath.

Elena, who has covered her mouth with a hand, lowers it and stares at Bonnie with huge eyes. "He looks so much like him."

Bonnie nods. "I didn't want to saw anything. I thought at first I was imagining the similarity but…"

"He's beautiful." Her eyes prickle with tears as she gets down on her hunches and watches him as he becomes more confident in his recital. She notices then that he's seated on the left hand side of the stool, playing those keys while the right side is untouched.

Grayson finishes playing with a small flourish and looks to his right with a smile, as if expecting someone to offer him praise but the seat opposite is empty. The smile fades from his face and, with an obvious effort not to cry, he picks the music sheet up and lowers the cover back over the keys gently. He leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

Elena stares after him, pained and hollow at his loneliness. "Why is he so sad?"
Bonnie shakes her head dejectedly. "I don't know. I'm sorry Elena; maybe I shouldn't have shown you this."

"No, even though it hurts I'm glad I got to see him. He seems great, doesn't he?" Pride swells up within her but a small voice at the back of her head tells her to be careful, not to grow attached.

Bonnie smiles. "He's talented. He didn't get that piano playing skills from you that's for sure."

"No, maybe he got it from his father. I bet -" She stalls suddenly as something touches her shoulder and shakes her.

"Wake up Elena, it's nine and they stop serving breakfast in half an hour." Elijah says and stops shaking her gently when she groggily blinks awake.

"What?" She groans and slumps back into her pillow.

He smiles, pulling on his boots. "I'll get you a bagel and some coffee."

She muffles her thanks as he leaves and she lies there, trying to remember her dream. A boy, a piano and his absent father…

Finn's assertions about the rest of his siblings 'having some memory lose' is not strictly accurate. The truth of the matter is that all of them have memories; it's just ones that don't pertain to the here and now. However something's never change.

"Ouch! I swear to god if you continue to flick your teeth once more I'm going to grab that thing and shove it -"

"Rebekah," Finn warns lightly as his sister glares at Kol. He had been tapping a pencil against his teeth, well aware that they can all feel the unpleasant vibrations. The closer they are to each other the more noticeable the link is. She swipes the pencil out of his hand and gives it to Finn who has been using it for the locating spell. He looks at Kol. "You're human now, be mindful of your limitations."

Kol's grin drops like a rock. "It's all I can think about. As soon as this blasted link is gone I'm going to find the nearest vampire and command them to turn me. I will not remain in such a boring, feeble state."

Rebekah stares at her brother, knowing that Kol's irritability is down to more then just physical weakness. They no longer have the ability to dam away their conscience and the harrowing effect is unavoidable. Over the years she's switched hers off every now and then but Kol was different. He is a ripper and never showed a flicker of remorse for all the carnage he has wrought because he never allowed himself to. Now that pain he could have so easily ignored is eating him alive from the inside. The memory loss is a blessing. Who knows what horrors are yet to be revealed?

Finn places the pencil on top of a map. Rebekah stares at it, hit with a sudden memory that makes her smile. "Nic is an artist?"

He nods and holds out his hand for Rebekah to take. He has been channelling her energy to locate Klaus. He inhales deeply and closes his eyes. The pencil on the map stirs and rolls lazily before suddenly standing up on its tip. She watches fascinated as a granite line slowly draws upwards, heading north. After a few seconds it stops with a shudder and falls. Finn opens his eyes and points at the map. She leans forward.
"Charlottesville." He writes the name onto a scrap of paper and then places it into a dish.

Rebekah gets to her feet and Kol joins her. "We should be out there looking for him." Out of all her siblings she is closest to Nic and his absence unsettles her.

Finn shakes his head. "We can not take the chance while the link is still in effect. We're safer here."

Kol grinds his teeth and with a curse walks from the room. Finn looks after him sadly and then back at Rebekah. "Talk to Kol, he'll listen to you. I think I'm still something of a stranger to him…"

Moved by a swell of pity she takes his hand in hers, surprising each of them at the show of affection. She moves back, straightening her spine. "I'm not his mother but I have no wish to die because Kol ticks the wrong person off." She steps back but he grips her hand, stopping her.

"How are you taking it?"

Rebekah smiles thinly. "I would have liked a warning or, you know, an actual say in what happens to me but…" she falls silent and then shrugs. "I'm confused. I wake up thinking I'm back in Paris two hundred years ago but I'm here. All these little memories coming back, haunting me…” She trails off, her expression dark before looking at him again. "To put it bluntly it's utter shit. I liked being a vampire, it's what I've been for a thousand years but now I have menstrual cycles and then the menopause to look forward to. Once mother is awake I will show her my thanks."

"You are angry, I understand but this is for the best. We were unnatural."

"Maybe but it was better then this." She slips her hand out of his and walks out after Kol. Finn sighs wearily before turning back to the dish. He mutters a spell and the paper catches fire, curling into ash.

They drive for much of the day and reach Harris Pond just as the sun sets. A car is parked beside the pond and they get out, looking around.

"It's Klaus' car." Elijah stares through the window. "Car key still in the ignition." He straightens and looks at her with a confused frown.

"Why would he leave his car and not come back for it?"

"I'm not sure." He looks across the large pond, his expression dark and Elena shivers. He could have drowned.

"You don't think…?"

"No, I'd know if he was hurt or worse."

Elena shakes her head, feeling a little stupid. "Right, if one of you dies you all do." She moves to him, head cocked. "The link is only in effect for a few more days."

"Four days." He says quietly and heads back to his car. They leave the mystery of Klaus' car where they found it and head to the next town, this one just as tiny as the one that preceded it.

"It's kinda dead."

"He must have just passed through, using a different car. I see no reason for him to stay here; it's so inconspicuous. Unless that's what mother planned…” He stops the car outside a motel, where a sign flashes vacancies. They get out and check in – separate rooms this time – and then head
towards a nearby café.

At this time of night it's almost empty save for an elderly man, a waitress and the chef. The food is edible but not as nice as Al's. She watches him sitting back in his Armani suit and has to hold back a smile.

"What?"

"There's an old guy back there who's dressed like a lumberjack. And now you've just walked in like..." She waves a hand up and down.

He looks down at his suit. "It is a little out of place...I admit I don't usually frequent these kinds of establishments."

"I never would have guessed." She says as the waitress brings them their food. They thank her and begin eating. She eyes him curiously as she sucks milkshake through a straw. "I'm interested to know the places that you do frequent."

He taps his temple. "I have memories of lots of places but some are still missing."

"Tell me what you can? It might help."

He nods, cutting up his steak before speaking again. "The thing that comes readily to mind is about my family. I remember when Rebekah was stuck up a tree and I had to get her down. She went missing for hours and the whole village was out looking for her..."

Elena smiles, batting down a memory of stabbing her in the back. "How old was she?"

"About ten or so. She was spoiled, being the only girl, so she wasn't punished like we would have been."

"What did you do? I mean did you have a job?"

He nods, taking a sip of coffee. "I traded mostly. I told you that my father was a wealthy land owner? Well when the plague struck he moved, bringing a few other families with him. One of them being the Patrova's." He looks at her but then averts his gaze.

"Tatia..."

He nods. "The other main family was the Olson's. Most of us married into that line."

Elena almost chokes on her milkshake. "What?"

He has the tiniest hint of smirk around the mouth. He is becoming more like his old self. "Finn was married first and had many children...Rebekah was betrothed at birth, as was Klaus and Kol. But they were turned before it could happen."

"And – and you?"

He nods. "I was married at eighteen and widowed at twenty three. Her name was Astrid." He says all this conversationally.

Elena stares at him, not sure what to say. The thought that he could have been married never really crossed her mind. Which is ridiculous, he's over a thousand years old; he could have been married a dozen times for all she knows.
"You look a little startled." Which he's clearly amused at.

"No, I just didn't think. You were widowed?" She asks gently.

"Yes. She died in childbirth." His says very quietly and he doesn't look at her for awhile. Finally he smiles. "It was an arranged marriage but we got on, for the most part."

The next question buzzes around her brain, demanding to be said but she can't form the words. He stares at her cannily and she manages to blurt something out. "Did you…?"

"Have children? Yes…I had a son." Again he averts his gaze, clearly uncomfortable, and gets to his feet. He smiles down at her briefly. "I'll be right back." He heads towards the restroom, eyes lowered.

"Wait!" She turns and asks him on the spur. "Can you play the piano?"

He smiles at her odd question. "One of my many accomplishments." He walks into the restroom with a smile still on his face.

Sometimes there is a synchronicity to life, where things mirror each other in such a way it feels otherworldly. Elena feels that now, picturing a little boy at a piano staring at a vacant seat as she stares at one now.

Both waiting for the same man to return.

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Once it had been reservation land but it had been abandoned some years ago. Now all that remains is a few dilapidated buildings and a huge, tangled forest behind it. He had been bemused to find out that it's called the Lock Wood. The mountains that they had drove through lie behind them, green and hazy in the dawn light.

Tyler stares at Klaus as he draws, lost in his own head. When he had received the call he had been suspicious but also curious. For the last few days Tyler has felt…free. The sire bond that connected him to Klaus had simply disappeared. At first he had thought that Klaus was dead but the phone call had changed that. Bill Forbes had told him not to go, that it was a trap but Tyler had a feeling that it wasn't. And he was proved right.

Klaus, the fearsome and renowned Original, doesn't know who he is.

"We're here." Bill stops the truck and gets out. Caroline's father was helping Tyler towards transforming painlessly and to break through the sire bond. He still has some ways to go with transforming but the fact that Klaus just fell into their laps makes the pain all worth it. But then he realised with a stab of bewilderment that Klaus was no longer a hybrid but human. He doesn't even appear to be a werewolf, as if the gene is dormant again.

Klaus gets out of the pickup and looks at the chain link fence that surrounds the compound. "This is the place? Bit rundown."

"Yeah…it used to be where a group of Native Americans stayed but they got cast out a few years back. But some stayed. There are people like us here."

"Werewolves?" He had seemed to know this fact about himself without being prompted.

Tyler nods and looks over Klaus' shoulder as two men approach quietly from behind and hit him over the head. As he collapses they throw a bag over his head and drag him away. Bill watches this
with an impassive stare but Tyler hangs back, looking a little disgusted. Bill sees this and approaches.

"We're doing the right thing. He's responsible for turning werewolves into creatures that shouldn't even exist. I don't need to tell you that werewolves are almost extinct without him lending a hand to kill you off."

"Except I'm not one of them anymore, I don't belong to any pack." He turns with a scowl but then sees something on the floor. It's the sketchbook that Klaus dropped. He bends down to pick it up as Bill speaks.

"Except you do, there are other hybrids out there and I'm willing to bet the same thing that's happened to you has happened to them. They're no longer under his influence. Klaus turning werewolves into hybrids hasn't gone unnoticed and people want him stopped. He poses a great threat."

"Does he? You've seen what he's like, he's different. He's human. I was up for killing him but now…” He falls silent as he flicks through the pages. He had begrudgingly noted that Klaus is an amazing artist but hadn't taken the time to really look. Portraits of people he doesn't recognise and some he does appear before his eyes. One of them makes him stop, eyebrows raised.

It's Caroline, looking beyond beautiful. Tyler lifts it up and shows Bill whose face becomes like stone.

"He might be human now but he's still dangerous. He's over a thousand years old and you don't reach that age without a lot of cunning. Don't be fooled by his simple, nice guy act. If he has the chance he'll kill us all, hybrid or not."

"What are they gonna do with him?"

"Keep him prisoner until the end of the week. After that he's toast."

Bill walks away, heading into the compound while Tyler stares down at the picture of Caroline, his features softening.
They drive into Charlottesville, heading along route 250 towards the Appalachian Mountains. The only way to their destination is through a mountainous valley. Elijah holds up a napkin where someone has crawled in a looping hand the name of their next destination – Monterey. Finn had found his own way of contacting them.

"So that's where Klaus is?"

"For now."

"How does he know where to go? I mean he didn't even know the tree existed until a few days ago." She had been worried about what may happen but maybe her trepidation is premature.

"It did seem at first that he was heading down a dark alley but maybe not. I recall something. The Native Americans that used to live in Mystic Falls were pushed further west and were given reservation land to inhabit. I kept track of them over the years but before long they…dispersed. Their last reservation was a place just outside of Monterey which has since been disestablished."

Elena mulls this over. "So the Native Americans who moved to Monterey were the descendents of the people you used to know?" She's thinking of what Rebekah had told her.

Elijah nods, driving them into another small town. "Yes. The people I knew were werewolves but that may not be the case now. As a species they are almost extinct. But it would be convenient if they were…"

"Werewolves protecting a tree that can kill Originals." She answers for him.

"Exactly, the perfect defence. Klaus said that mother was conniving and she is but she's also smart." He pulls into a motel parking lot, the night advancing. Across the street is a lively bar and Elena can see a few people milling about outside. Some point at Elijah's car and hoot in appreciation.

"Son, I think you got lost on your way to New York." An old guy shouts out.

"Never trust sat nav." Elijah calls back with a bemused expression. As they make their way into the reception area he rubs his head with a frown.

"You've been rubbing the back of your head since this morning you know."

"I thought it was a headache at first but now I'm not so sure. I think one of my siblings is injured and I'm feeling it through the link. The others are too far away so it must be Klaus."

"What do you think happened?"

He shrugs, lowering his hand. "I can't be sure but the fact I'm still walking is a good sign."

He stops at the reception desk and asks for separate rooms but is told that only one is available. Elena had noted a few funny looks in the past when they asked for a room, the desk clerks no doubt wondering what she and Elijah are to each other. Elijah haggles with the clerk for something else but is met with resistance.

Elena takes the key before Elijah can argue. "Don't worry, there's a sleeping bag in the back of the
trunk. It's just for a night."

She twists the key hard, trying to open the door but it won't budge. "It's stuck."

"Let me try?"

She hands him the key with thanks and while he fiddles with the lock she goes back to the car to get their bags. The men that had been hanging outside the bar are gone, no doubt to get another drink and to dance with their friends and loved ones. She looks in that direction, listening to the faint music with longing. She's opens the trunk, mind still across the tarmac, and she doesn't realise that a man is beside her until he clears his throat.

"Excuse me?"

"Oh shit!" Elena spins around, hand flying to her chest. He smiles apologetically. He's a respectable distance away but she still looks around the dark lot. Elijah is gone, the door to their room successfully opened. He must be looking around.

"Sorry, didn't mean to startle you. Just wondering if you have the time?"

Her heart still racing she manages to offer him a weak smile and lifts up her arm to look at her watch. As she does something peripherally catches her attention and she turns to see another man lifting her bag and Elijah's out of the trunk.

"Hey!" She shouts and twists around. The man who had asked for the time pushes her and runs away. She stumbles but manages to grab a bag strap. She glares at the thief, panting. "Let go. Now." All the self-defence sessions that Ric has taught her flash into her mind and rule number one is to run. But she can't, her fingers frozen into a death grip around the strap.

"Elena…?" Elijah's voice, sounding far away, is blissful to hear. The thief looks up and then suddenly drops the bag. They had each been pulling it fiercely so when he lets go Elena flies backwards and smacks into the back of the Lincoln. Wincing at the white hot pain the flares up from her shoulder she looks up to see Elijah running into view. He glares at the running thieves, his gaze incredibly predatory.

"I'm sorry, your bag…"

He stops and blinks before kneeling down to her level. "Are you all right? Did they hurt you?"

She shakes her head, angry at herself. "The only thing hurt is my pride. I can't believe I fell for that. I should have known something was wrong."

Elijah reaches down and gently helps her stand. Elena flexes back her shoulder blades and bites back a whimper. Elijah stares at her, his face white with a guarded fury.

"If I wasn't mortal…"

"Forget me; they stole all your stuff. Your clothes…"

He suddenly cups her face. "They are replaceable, you are not." He brushes her hair back before retrieving the sleeping bag, closing the trunk and locking the car. Hand in hers he leads her back into the motel room. Seated on the edge of her bed she pulls off her sweater to reveal a pink vest. She looks awkwardly into a mirror, trying to see the damage as Elijah stands behind her. He looks her over but does not touch. In fact he seems to be holding himself back.
"I don't think anything is broken. It's quite red though. You'll probably have an impressive bruise in a day or two." He speaks lightly but there are harsh white lines on his face.

"Great." She grounds out, slumping back down onto the bed with her sweater rolled into her lap.

"I told Ric that I would protect you." He looks disappointed in himself but it's more then that. Before he could have so easily stopped those thieves but they got away. There's a helplessness that he can't accept and all he feels is frustration.

Elena shakes her head. "It's not your fault." He smiles briefly but his eyes are troubled. Elena stands, head cocked to the side. "I'm fine, honest. You're the one with nothing to wear now."

He shrugs. "Like I said: replaceable. I had a town house that went up in the Great Fire. Lost everything."

"The Great Fire of London?" His age will never cease to amaze her.

He nods, lips quirked. "So on a scale of trivial to lost all my worldly possessions a sack full of suits is not much when I put it into perspective. I'm sorry you got hurt." He brushes the back of his fingers down her bare arm softly. The touch, one that he has done a few times now, makes her shiver. She licks her lips and smiles.

"I'll survive. We should get some rest; we'll be heading into the mountains soon."

He nods and rolls out the sleeping bag while Elena gets dressed for bed. It's still odd, this level of intimacy that they have to share. Exiting the bathroom she crawls under the covers and lies on her belly. She peeks down to see him on the floor. His hands are behind his head and he's gazing up at the ceiling. He looks at her and smiles.

"Never thought I'd end up doing this the first time I met you."

"Ditto. I thought you were gonna…" She goes silent, eyes widening in embarrassment.

"Thought I was going to what?"

"Bite me." It's half the truth. Before he moved down to her throat he had lowered his lips to hers and she had thought in alarm and great confusion that he was going to kiss her. Why he had done that she is still not sure. One day she will ask but not tonight.

"Ah. Well I usually get to know someone before I do that. Did that…"

"Did you feed from people?" She rests her head against the pillow and looks across the dark room, thinking that he won't respond when he speaks again quietly.

"At first but as you know vampire blood has healing properties. Over the last few centuries I traded my blood for others. They quenched my hunger and I cured them of all disease. It seemed a fair deal."

"You like making deals, don't you?"

"I could easily take what I wanted and oftentimes I did but I always found it…dishonourable."

Elena smiles against her pillow. "Rebekah said that you were the moral one."

He snorts in laughter. "That's generous of her. She's usually calls me a sanctimonious prig." He falls silent and she can picture him staring into the dark introspectively, thinking of his long past.
She could spend night after night asking him questions about his life and only ever scratch the surface. It's appealing but right now she's too tired.

"Goodnight." She says softly and he whispers it back to her below.

The next morning Elena wakes early, her shoulder now a garish purple, and slips out while Elijah still sleeps. On the way into the town she had spotted a few clothes shops – mostly thrift stores - and fuelled by guilt about his lost possessions she heads out to do some shopping. Half an hour later she knocks on their door, loaded down by two plastic bags. He lets her in with an amused frown. He is dressed in the same black trousers and white shirt as last night but they look crisp. His hair on the other hand has not seen a comb this morning or his face a shave. It's not a disagreeable sight she thinks.

"Ta da!" She offers the bags to him which he takes, his frown growing heavier.

"You really didn't have to do this. We agreed that I'd pay for bed-and-board while you pay for the gas. I can buy my own clothes."

"I don't think they have Savile Row tailors in Charlottesville." Elena dead pans and he flashes a grin, looking down into one of the bags. He pulls out a pair of jeans. He squints at them with mild distaste and she shrugs. "Told you."

"If I find a plaid shirt in there then I know you're enjoying this."

"Humour me and my sore pride and shoulder? This way you can blend in a little better with the locals."

"I'll bet." He pulls out a floral patterned dress as he says this, his eyes practically glowing with mischief. Elena grabs it from him with a small gasp.

"That's mine."

"Good, it's not really my colour." He says and disappears into the bathroom to change.

Now decked out in a chequered grey shirt and jeans he walks along with her and catches reflections of himself in passing windows. He looks like a completely different person. He had to roll up the jeans but she had managed to get clothes that fit him for the most part. He rubs at his stubbled face. They stole his shaving kit, his last bit of armour. He never really thought of himself as vain but now that his usual attire is gone he realises how much his well coiffed appearance meant to him. There was a degree of control about it that is now missing, one that was important as his life as a vampire. Now that control is superfluous.

They had agreed to stay for one more night, to see if they can reclaim his stolen possessions. The police had been informed but Elijah is not concerned with their retrieval and only goes along with it for Elena's peace of mind. He leads her through the quiet town. The motel is uneventful so he had asked her to accompany him on a walk. In the distance the bar is in full swing, music and light spilling out onto the tarmac. She stares at it with visible longing and he looks at her in query. Elena shrugs.

"I'd like to go in but I'll probably get carded."

"You don't have to drink…unless you want to? Can you? I forget the age restrictions."
She follows him as he pushes the door open for her to enter. The bar is not as crowded as she guessed but it has the right atmosphere, lively and a little dangerous. She sits at a small table and Elijah gets them drinks. He comes back with a beer and what appears to be a coke for her. She sips it and feels rum burning down her throat.

"Thank you. Don't tell the police."

He zips his lips and drinks. They watch couples move onto the dance floor, swaying to country music. Most of the occupants of the bar appear to be locals letting off some steam after work. As she watches the dance she's immediately struck with an odd memory and reaches for a napkin.

Elijah watches her scribble in bemusement. "Struck with inspiration?"

"No, it's something from a dream I've just remembered. Do you know what this is?" She holds up the napkin and shows him the rune she has drawn. He takes it, his eyebrows drawn together.

"…This means Mikael." He looks up at her, confused.

"In the dream I had with Esther there was this unbelievably huge tree. One of the branches had fallen off. It had your father's name written on it." Now that she knows what the name means it makes more sense to her now. His branch had fallen because he is dead. She wonders what connection the dream tree has to the one Klaus searches for. Maybe it is a clue.

Elijah looks down at the rune, his expression troubled. "My father was a complicated man."

"Did you get on?"

"At first. He implemented the virtues that I still try to uphold today but he hunted me and the others down for centuries."

Elena sets her glass down and takes the napkin from him. "Wasn't he the one that wanted you all to be vampires in the first place?"

Elijah nods his expression downcast. "He did but he had no idea what we would truly become. He would have let us all die if he had. Strange that so much has resulted from one desperate decision." He falls silent, thoughtful. Not wanting to see him in low spirits she reaches across the table and touches his hand.

"Are you all right?"

He looks up and straightens. "I'm no longer a vampire but it seems I can still brood with the best of them. Not the best course of action when in company." He lifts his beer and downs it.

They consume more alcohol, Elijah leading the race, as they talk. After an hour she convinces Elijah, who proves to be a jovial drunk, to let her get a round in. As she lines up she spots a man, around her age, surrounded by admiring people. They pluck at his black coat, pulling it open to read the designer label. Curious, Elena moves closer.

"Did you sale your mamma to pay for that Harry? Is that why I haven't seen her around?"

Harry laughs a little red in the face with the attention. "Nah I got it for $30." He lifts a hand and waggles his fingers. "Five finger discount." He winks and the others laugh, asking who he bought it off. Harry points passed Elena and she turns. The man he points at is not one of the thieves but it would be a long shot to expect them to be here.
"What can I do for you sweetheart?" The bartender asks her suddenly, wet cloth flung over his shoulder. She turns to him.

"Oh, sorry. A beer and a coke please." She finishes, not knowing how much of a push over this man is. He eyes her shrewdly.

"How old are you?"

"Old enough to drink here, even if it's not alcohol. The beer is for my friend." She looks back to point at Elijah only to find him behind her. Vampire or not he still has the ability to creep up soundlessly on people.

"Is there a problem?" He asks the bartender politely who shakes his head.

"Nope."

He goes about fixing their drinks and Elena moves closer to Elijah, speaking low. "That guy behind me, does his coat look familiar?"

Elijah looks up, squinting. A small tight smile appears on his face. "Yes it does." He attempts to move in that direction but Elena presses a hand to his chest.

"Not him. Guy over there, with the beard and string tie." Elijah turns to stare at their target. "He's the guy that Harry here bought your coat from."

The bartender sets their drinks before them and Elena hands over the cash. When she turns back Elijah is already talking to string tie man with a dangerous smile. As the man gets his feet Elena feels an intense sense of doom. This is the night that Elijah gets into a fight and she had just let him happily walk into it. Cursing loudly she sets the bottles down and moves forward, snaking through people but by the time she reaches him string tie man has thrown a punch at Elijah who steps back from it smoothly. Even drunk he manages to take the man down with a sharp jab to his solar plexus. String tie man crumbles to the floor with a wheeze. Elena stops, relieved that the fight is over before it had even begun.

"You son of a bitch!" The screech is so loud that it carries over the music and the mummeration of voices. Elijah turns, already in a defensive position but freezes when a middle aged woman comes at him. Centuries of courteous behaviour are ingrained into his very being and he is rooted to the spot. In this moment of indecisiveness the woman barrels into him and he falls back, hitting his head against the corner of the wall.

"Elijah..." Elena moans and runs forward. She finds him sliding down the wall, his face a picture of confusion as he places a hand to his head. His fingers come away bloody and he stares transfixed at the sight. She falls on her knees beside him. "Elijah!"

"That asshole killed my Bobby! My husband!" The woman who had attacked Elijah wails and comes at him again, a bottle raised. Elena stands up and punches the woman square in the face. Anger floods through her and the intensity of it surprises her. But they've both been attacked in the span of a few hours and she's had enough.

"Step back or I'll break your nose." Elena warns and the woman stumbles away, more stupefied then in pain. Elena helps Elijah to stand and they pass the woman and her groaning husband.

She manages to support a much disoriented Elijah back to their motel. As she deposits him onto the bed she finds herself acting out a scene she has already witnessed, feeling like an actor reciting lines. She half expects to find an apparition of herself wearing a ball gown standing in the corner.
"Know when you're bested." She says, staring at him sharply as he sits back down, defeated. He looks down at his shirt which is splattered with blood and unbuttons it slowly, his eyes opening and closing tiredly. She plucks it from his hands and then helps him to get into bed. She pulls his boots off and he looks at her wretchedly.

"I feel like an invalid. Being human is horrible, how do you cope…?" He mumbles, speech slurred, mostly from the alcohol she suspects.

"You just do."

"No more beer either…" He whispers, his head on the pillow. Elena bends down and strokes a gentle hand through his hair.

"I never thought I'd see you like this."

"Don't get used to it. I'm just testing my limitations…" He mumbles and closes his eyes. Elena smiles and acting on impulse bends down to kiss the corner of his mouth. She straightens, waiting for him to wake up but he remains still. She smiles as a tingling feeling emanates from her belly and spreads warmly through her body.

"Goodnight Elijah."

"…night…Tatia…"

She freezes at the bathroom door and turns back to look at him but he's already fast asleep. Fighting down a wave of confusion tinged with annoyance she heads into the bathroom to change into her pyjamas. She then rolls out the sleeping bag and gets in. A restless night passes, one filled with much introspection.

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"I'm sorry."

"What for?"

"I called you Tatia last night. I was half asleep but that's no excuse." They are putting the tiny town of Churchville into the rear-view mirror and Hankey Mountain approaches. Elena is at the wheel for the first driving shift, something they take in turns. The day is overcast but mild and there's a promise of rain on the air.

"Don't worry about it. I'm not really mad…I just couldn't stop thinking about her last night. About what I am."

She's known that she is a doppelganger for awhile now but last night she had stayed awake, mulling it over. Her disappointment at being mistaken for another woman – not the first time – had given way to a weary acceptance. Twins must get aggravated at being mistaken for their sibling but Elena's predicament is different. Twins are human, natural while she is supernatural. She is the exact copy of a woman who lived a thousand years ago and for the handful of people who had known her that fact can not be ignored. She can't hold a grudge for unthinking slipups.

"You're not Tatia, you -"

"I know I'm not, just like I'm not Katherine. We've lead different lives and those experiences shaped us into different people but…I'm a doppelganger, I'm supernatural."

"Yes…?" He stares at her with a mild curiosity, patiently waiting for her to carry on.
She does, haltingly trying to get her thoughts across. "I only exist because of a spell, because of your mother. Klaus needed my blood, Tatia's blood, to break the curse and to create hybrids. That's the last thing your mother wants so why create a doppelganger in the first place?"

He mulls it over before answering. "Maybe she didn't? I told you before that everything in nature needs to have a weakness to maintain balance. Vampires have werewolves but it appears hybrids are unmatched. Except that a doppelganger gets born every five hundred years, the key to their existence but maybe their destruction to."

She stares at him sceptically. "You think I can stop Klaus and his hybrids?"

He shrugs. "I'm just throwing out ideas. I've had centuries to think about the nature of the doppelganger."

"Unless I wake up tomorrow with some kickass powers I don't see what damage I could do to them."

Elijah smiles at her in disbelief. "You can do plenty of damage, which I can personally attest to." He seems a little too amused that she threw a grenade in his face and stabbed him not so very long ago. Not wanting to think about it she switches on the radio and classical music fills the car and with it the gentle patter of rain.

The path snakes through the valley, the curves and bends in the road becoming more frequent the higher they ascend. Elena drives slowly through the rain, concentration divided between the road ahead and Elijah's quiet voice. He tells her of places that he has been and people he has met, from royalty to beggars and she listens in rapt attention.

When they had first started to become acquainted she had been hesitant to talk of herself, of her ideas and dreams. To express them to someone like Elijah, who has experienced the passing of history, her aspirations must seem small. But he doesn't see it that way; he wants to hear what she thinks and feels and does not regard her with an air of condescension fitting someone of his age. Driving through those green valleys she relishes the chance to talk about everything and nothing and he is equally enthusiastic. She realises on that winding journey that even if they never become romantically entangled she has a friend for life, an odd one true but one she does not want to part with.

"That is a sight."

"I wish I had a camera." Elena whispers, looking before her. They had reached the summit of the road and stopped the car to step out and look. The sun is out, the rain clouds having sailed off into the west and the mountain tops are spread out below them, their roots hidden in mist. It's a breathtaking sight.

"If we document everything we see then what are memories for?"

"Says the historian." She turns with a smirk as he opens the passenger side door for her. He smiles.

"Still my memories. Come on, there should be an inn a few miles ahead. If there are no vacancies we're facing the prospect of sleeping in the car."

Elena grimaces and they drive onwards. They had passed a few houses but for the majority of their trip then had seen nothing but grass, trees and a few deer. They come upon a house set back from the road, almost hidden by trees. A porch runs alongside the bottom and a balcony at the top. A
wooden trellis frames the verandas. It's certainly a far more pleasing sight then the other inns they have slept in.

The clerk, a grey haired woman called Sue, smiles as they walk forward. "Welcome."

"Thank you. Do you have any rooms vacant?"

"Just the one. There's a convention happening tonight at the local hall – a dance – and people have come up for it. You're lucky you got here in time."

Elena turns to Elijah who is clenching his jaw. Probably thinking of another night sleeping on the floor. But that's better then a night in the car. She turns back to the woman with a smile. "We'll take it."

"Can anyone attend this dance or is it invitation only?" Elijah inquires and smiles at the woman charmingly. Elena sees a blush creep over Sue's cheeks and has to bite back a smile. He can switch on the charisma when he needs to and with devastating effect.

One room and two invites later they head into their bedroom. Elijah deposits their bags into a chair while Elena hangs back by the door, her eyes wide. The motel room is one that she has seen before. The floral patterned curtains match the bedspread and the prints on the wall are verging on the tacky.

Elijah turns to her, eyebrows raised. "Something wrong?"

"No…just déjá vu."

"Ah. I met a man once who thought that he was in hell and repeating his life over and over again. Déjà vu was just to remind him of it. He was in Bedlam so I can't vouch for the validity of his belief…"

Elena sits down on the edge of the bed, feeling a little weak. She stares down at a spot on the carpet where, possibly only a couple of hours from now, Elijah will pull a dress over her head and let it fall to the floor.

Elijah stares at her as she gazes into space with a light concern. "Elena?"

She looks up, shaking her head out of a daze. "Sorry, miles away."

"You looked like you saw a ghost."

"Something like that…" She says wryly and stands. Elijah gazes at her, obviously waiting for an explanation. Elena pauses, fingers playing with his ring that hangs around her neck. "I'm…unsure about something."

"OK, what is it?" He says calmly and sits on the corner of an ornate desk.

"Hypothetically speaking?"

He smirks. "Of course."

"OK, so…hypothetically speaking what if you knew something was going to happen, would you let it?"

"Depends what it is. Is the outcome good or bad?"
"...Both? It's complicated. I just feel like I'm making this stuff happen because I know about it. Like a self fulfilling prophecy." So much for hypothetically, she thinks.

"Are we talking about Bonnie's prophetic dream?"

Elena stills before nodding. "We both agree it's a future we want to avoid, right?"

"Countless people die and the servants of nature are rendered powerless. That's a certifiable yes." He narrows his eyes and comes closer. "You think that you're doing something that will lead to that?"

"Maybe not right now but soon." She pulls the ring back and forth along the chain nervously.

"You're being confusingly enigmatic. I take it there is something you don't want me to know?"

She lowers her hand with a sigh. "I'm sorry it's just...you find it hard to talk to me about Tatia, well this is the same."

He nods stiffly and steps back but his eyes are still intently on hers. "I can't pretend to know the details but if I were trying to prevent a cataclysm from happening I would do everything in my power to that end."

Elena nods, her expression serious. She can't be sure that not spending the night together will save countless lives but if there is even the smallest chance that it will how can she go ahead with it with a clear conscience?

She only has to lose the prospect of a child.

She is downcast and her thoughts inward. He had gleaned enough information to know that her melancholy is to do with the future but the full picture is still frustratingly obscure. She had mentioned Tatia as a counterpoint to her silence and he toys with the idea of telling her about his past just to hear what she's withholding. But that would be juvenile. She'll tell him when she is ready, just as he will. He sits back in an armchair, watching her scribble onto a pad of motel stationary. Her mysterious story, one she had not plucked up the courage to tell him about. But he feels it, her need to divulge. Or maybe that is just him. He just wants her to speak to him, about anything.

When he had woken in that forest in Mystic Falls with his memory in tatters he had come upon Elena with one simple but profound certainty. He loved her. That has not changed with his returning wits, if anything the feeling has just grown stronger. He remembers telling her that caring was a mistake and that he would not do it again. He had been referring to her but even then he was deluding himself. He loves her and it is unprecedented. For years he has avoided the softer emotions, never allowing himself to grow attached but she has slipped past those restraints, to his ever lasting bewilderment.

He can't be certain of her affections and he will not pressure her for them. It would be unfair to divulge what he feels and expect her to deal with them on top of everything else. She cares for him, that he is sure but love? Better that she doesn't, not with the life he leads. Had lead, he corrects.

I'm human now; our lives will grow and end more or less in tandem. The voice is soft and fragile with hope but he pushes the thought away and stands.

"The dance is approaching."
Elena stops writing and turns in the chair. "You really want to go dancing?"
"If you'll accompany me? If not Sue the desk clerk will probably take pity on me."
Elena rolls her eyes and smiles. She looks down at her jeans and sweater. "I don't really have anything to wear…"
"I seem to recall a dress you mistakenly bought me."
This gets a guffaw out of her and she stands. "Ok, as long as it's not like the bar in Charlottesville."
"I very much doubt it. I believe the guests are veterans so if there are any fights it will be between geriatrics." He looks down at her softly. "We'll likely catch up with Klaus tomorrow so we might as well make a night of it while we can."
Convinced and spirits roused Elena agrees.
Chapter 16

The dance takes place in a hall behind a white steeple church and most of the guests are already there. The path is lined with paper lanterns and moths flutter around the lights in the breeze. The dress she had picked out a few days ago had been a spur of the moment purchase but she had chosen wisely in hindsight. The floral cotton dress falls below her knees and a line of cloth buttons run down to her waist. It's old fashioned but she fits in perfectly with this dance, where music from the 40's floats out from the hall.

"You weren't lying about geriatrics." Elena whispers to Elijah who is dressed in a light blue shirt and dark pants, simple enough to come from any period in the last century. Unlike the numerous dances that they hold at her school this is not a costume or themed dance, it's authentic. The guests are all well over sixty and she and Elijah are the youngest couple there. By appearances at least.

"They might forbid us to enter without an OAP card." He whispers against her ear and she can feel his breath against her neck and the smile that accompanies it. Luckily they are not carded and she and Elijah find a small table to sit at. The dance floor is set out in the middle of the hall, a disco ball twirling overhead throwing out speckles of light. Tables dot three sides of the hall, the fourth occupied by a buffet table. Couples, the youngest probably a sprightly seventy, dance slowly with their partners and the love is clear. These are people who have probably spent half a century together and that longevity has a life affirming effect to see.

"This is nice. Thank you for convincing me to come."

He inclines his head. "Thank you for agreeing to. If things go to plan tomorrow we might have to spend a few days with Klaus and that won't be pleasant." He rises and goes to get them drinks, leaving her with that image.

She hadn't really thought about what might happen if they actually managed to bring Klaus back but the thought of spending days with him is not a welcome prospect. In fact she hopes it never comes to that and by some stroke of luck the man dies before it can. Pushing these dark thoughts away she gazes at the dance floor and listens to the music. It's all tunes exclusively from over fifty years ago so most of it she does not recognise but a few tunes by Glenn Miller and Louis Armstrong catch her attention. When Elijah returns she's tapping her foot to In the Mood.

"Where were you during the 40's?" She asks, taking a plastic cup and sips from it, tasting fresh apple juice. No hooch here.

He sits across from her, thinking. "Here at first but then London. I heard that one of Klaus' residences had been destroyed during a Zeppelin raid so I had to see. That was in 1941 but I stayed in Europe until the war was over." He sips from his cup before continuing. "We ran into each other a few times over the years but we were estranged for the most part."

"Why stay in a war torn place? You could have come back here."

Elijah nods. "I could have but I had a responsibility to stay. When wars happened vampires would converge on that place. They'll pick off the wounded and those near death and then leave. But some overstep themselves."

"You mean rippers? And you had a responsibility to stop that? Why?"

"I'm an original. I was..." He corrects but then goes into more depth. "There is, in thought at least, a
hierarchical vampire system. The originals are at the top and then our captains follow and so on. For the first few centuries this worked but as more and more vampires were created the system grew almost useless. As the years went on and we grew more secluded we became like myth. They don't know who we are unless told and even then some still have no clue."

Elena frowns in thought. "Stefan never told me this."

Elijah flourishes a hand. "My point proved. The younger vampires, especially those made within the last century, are a law unto themselves."

"So what would you do?"

"Depends on the situation. If word got to me about a ripper, for instance, then I would enlist someone to take care of it. If that proved difficult I would step in. Our anonymity was and still is paramount so we can't have someone drawing attention to the fact that vampires really do walk the earth."

"So there was a…council?"

He makes a so-so gesture. "My ultimate aim was to create a partnership between vampires, werewolves and the servants of nature. A peace could be declared between species, with the servants of nature acting as a neutral party. A council is a good word for it but it wasn't to be…" he falls silent, in thought.

Elena imagines getting a witch, a vampire and a werewolf into a room for peaceful negations and even in her mind that meeting ends in destruction. It's a noble idea and would be incredibly beneficial if it happened but right now it looks like nothing but a pipe dream.

The Andrew Sisters give way to Billie Holiday and more couples get up and move onto the floor. Elijah stands and asks her to dance, not wanting to dwell on broken plans and lost aspirations. She takes his hand and moves with him onto the floor. Unlike the intricate dances at the ball this proves to be much simpler. She places the other hand on his shoulder, while he lowers one against her waist. They dance in slow, easy circles.

"Are you going to tell me what you were writing back in the inn?"

Elena looks at him and shrugs. "It's a story. Or more an overview for one. Ever since you told me about that old club in London I just had it in my mind and it wouldn't go away."

"Well you're welcome to ask me any questions about the period."

"Thanks…I did wonder about one thing," she says softly and he lifts his brows. "You said that people would go there to find potential partners. Wives and husbands."

"Yes?"

"Well…why did you go there?" Her not so subtle question into his past love life gets a brief smile out of him.

"I went there to chaperone Rebekah. You see you had to be invited to these things by a group of powerful women and my sister was amerced in said group. Although you won't find her name in any history records, I made sure of that. When she wasn't alone she spent most of her time with Klaus but I tried to keep in contact with her. That club…my sister is aggressive but she also wears her heart on her sleeve."
"So you went with her to make sure she didn't get into any trouble?"

He grins. "That's was the crux of it. At the time we were more prominent figures in society so sometimes we did have to form engagements and marry. Most of my siblings did."

"Did you?" The hand at her waist moves to the small of her back and she leans into him instinctively.

"I remained a bachelor, for the most part. Sometimes I had to fool people into thinking I was attached. I said I had a wife tucked away somewhere but on the whole I avoided those types of entanglements. It just led to too many questions."

"So you were…unattached? Sounds lonely."

His lips quirk and he lowers his face near to her cheek. "Do not think I was, or am, a monk. I avoided emotional attachments to women but I courted. I just made it clear that any affection was temporary and advised them not to become committed because eventually I would leave or they would. I wanted to avoid any complications."

"Right…" Elena frowns at his shoulder, a disappointment bubbling through her. Elijah cocks his head at the clear annoyance on her face.

"I've said something that's angered you? I know it sounds cold but as someone who had to consume blood to survive and ultimately outlive them I wanted to avoid pain on both ends."

Elena shakes her head and stops dancing. "No, I'm not angry. I understand why you would do that, it makes sense I just…I dunno, forget it." She tries to step away but he pulls her back to him and stares deeply into her eyes.

"I don't consider what we have temporary Elena, not even if I wanted to and believe me I tried."

"What do we have?" She asks boldly and she can feel the future balancing on a tip. Right now it could go one way or the other.

His gaze is calm and steady. "Whatever you want it to be. You've asked me about my past exploits and now I have one for you, dealing with the future."

"Yes?" She blinks, thrown at his question.

"You told me that there was another future, a happier one, many years from now. You live with a man. Who is he?"

Her lips part, an 'I don't know' on the tip of her tongue but she hesitates. At that moment a realisation hits her, one that has been hovering at the back of her mind but she has never acknowledged it. She wasn't ready. Whatever the outcome of the futures she saw one thing was the same: Elijah. No matter what happens their lives are entwined and they will always be connected. For the first time in months a pure, unadulterated happiness courses through her. It's not heady but bone deep, an acceptance that leaves her supple and ready for anything. Her future is in her hands and her choices shape what is to come. It's not the future she has to change, it is the present and she can only do that now.

The inward effect of this determination must be visible because he suddenly holds her closer, blinking in confusion. Elena smiles at him and, before she can reconsider, slowly leans up press her mouth against his. His lips are warm and they part under hers. She's so close that she can feel his eyelashes brushing in confusion against her skin and she pulls back.
"That's your answer."

He blinks, speechless for a long moment. He stares deeply into her eyes, as if wondering if the kiss had actually happened. Finally he manages to speak up. "It's me?"

Elena nods and seeing that he's struck dumb with this revelation leads him to a chair. She sits beside him, her body thrumming with energy. She had kissed him, something she should not have done, not this night, but now that the truth is finally out she feels elated with relief and light-hearted. Elijah stares at her with a frown. Visions of a passion that will literally sweep her off her feet seems unlikely. But the night is young.

"It's you. I think it's always been you." She believes in free will and the control she has over her life but a romantic part of her wonders if all this is predestined. She takes his hand before speaking again. "In the future we might live together."

"In London?"

"Yeah. In both futures we're...connected. Are you all right?"

He shakes his head and sits up right. "It's a lot to take in..." The surprise is fading and he begins to look at her in doubt and she can almost feel his self control breaking. "You've known about this for months?"

Elena winces in guilt. "Yes, I'm sorry. I was so confused and in denial. I couldn't accept it, not then."

"And now?" That restraint cracks finely and she can see glimmers of hope in his eyes. It makes what she has to say next even more painful.

"I always want to be honest with you, even if I sometimes fail at that. The truth is I'm not ready for something serious. I've just moved on from a relationship, which you know. I'm not in the right head space for more...not yet." She leans forward and places a hand against his cheek. "With all that said I'm not going to pretend this thing between us doesn't exist or ignore where it might lead. I'm not ready yet but I'm open."

His lips curl up in the corner and the hand in hers tightens. "Elena..." He leans down and she holds her breath, anticipating his kiss but he stops, his eyes widening. He blinks and inhales. "I remember something."

"What?"

"At the ball you told me that you had a son in the future." He stares at her in disbelief and Elena feels something shrivel up inside. She wants to be honest but that subject is something she can't bring herself to discuss. It's too raw. So she just stares back at him and lets him read what he will on her face. It must be clear because he stands suddenly.

"Elijah?" She follows him through the hall and to the door where he steps out. Halfway down the empty church path he turns.

"Were you ever going to tell me?" He voice is low but it cracks, unable to hide his hurt from her.

Elena blinks at his surprisingly emotional reaction. "I've been trying to avoid that future and everything in it. I didn't want to concern you with something that will never happen. I'm sorry; I never wanted to upset you."
"I'm not angry. This is just a lot to accept. A son..." He remains there, letting it sink in, before he moves to her, his brown eyes intense. "Earlier you were talking to me about self fulfilling prophecies. You were worried."

She nods. "I was. I've only seen glimpses of what happened but us travelling together, you getting into a fight are steps on that path and tonight is another." She finishes, breath caught in her throat.

"What happens tonight?"

"Let's just say we probably shouldn't go back to the motel room now." A hot flush spreads up her neck to her cheeks.

He moves closer, more self possessed. His eyes gleam with understanding. "Something happens between us?"

Again she nods. "We can't, I can't. I saw it and I looked certain, I even said I was but I think if we resist it might change the future for the better. I'm sorry." She blurs all this out in a hitching voice.

For the first time since she told him the truth he smiles. "Why are you apologising? Nothing will happen if you don't wish it to."

He's not just referring to sex but the possibility of a child. It's her choice, one he has and will always respect. Reassured she gingerly takes his arm. "I've been so focused on preventing that future through whatever means but it's simple. The future is only determined by our choices and right now I can change mine." She looks down the path that splits apart in three directions. "Esther said that life is a path and our choices create forks. I have the advantage of knowing where mine could lead and I have an opportunity to change it. It might be small, it might do nothing but I have to try."

He looks down at her gently. "And how will we change it? We can't spend all night out here."

"I know. Let's just walk." She laces her fingers through his and they make their way slowly though the trees. It's dark but a few lights lead the way. He stares at her in consideration and she eyes him peripherally. She's feels comfortable with him but now there's an undercurrent, a frisson of excitement that makes her breathless.

"You said you weren't ready for anything serious but you were open. What do you mean?" He stops as Elena turns to him.

"It means..." she trails off to think, choosing her words carefully. "It means I'm not ignoring what we have. What I feel for you."

He leans closer, eyes fixed onto hers. "And what do you feel?"

She doesn't tell him but demonstrates. Standing on her toes she leans up to kiss him again. Before he had been too surprised to respond but now he kisses her back. The kiss is tentative at first, a gentle contact but soon it grows fervent. Elijah, who has perfect control, has wanted to kiss her for months but was resigned to the fact it would never be. Now that it is his restraint is holding on by a thread. He pulls her against him as he coaxes her lips apart and kisses her deeply. Elena moans into it, her hands buried in his hair.

She breaks away, surprised by the heady rush she had been swept away by. It had just meant to be a small kiss to convey her growing acceptance but the lust she had felt astounds her. She wants him, despite everything. She brushes her fingertips down his face and he captures her hand and kisses the centre of her palm. Burning eyes pin her to the spot.
"I had no expectations. I was and still am fully prepared to let you live your days separated from mine if that's what you wish. I won't hinder you from living your life the way you want. If you're never ready or tomorrow you wake thinking this has been a mistake -"

"It's not and I won't."

"I won't hold it against you." He declares. "If not...I'll wait until you're ready."

"You would? I don't have a complete road guide to the future; I don't know what else may happen. You might fall for someone else or I might. Anything could happen. I told you before that I want to leave Mystic Falls, go to college. I still want that. I'd like to travel on my own, see those places you told me about and be independent…" Her impassioned reasoning lags off and she shakes her head resentfully. "Listen to me. I sound so selfish. I tell you that I feel for you but I'm expecting you to wait until I'm ready. I'm sorry, just forget it." She shakes her head and moves back but he draws her to him.

"You're not selfish for wanting those things and I don't begrudge you for it. I love you and it doesn't depend on whether you return it, it never has. My feelings won't change. I'll wait."

His declaration is simple and sincere and Elena doesn't know what to say. People have told her on numerous occasions that he loves her but she had never wanted to accept it or take it seriously. Now she has no excuse.

"Even if its ten - fifteen years down the line?"

He smiles and brushes her hair back. "Not to sound over sentimental but I feel like I've been waiting a millennium for you. A few more years are nothing. Travel, see the world and do what you must. It's your life and it's yours to do as you wish."

Overwhelmed at this she wraps her arms around him and crushes her lips to his.

They walk back slowly, a journey made long by the number of times they stopped and kissed. By the time the inn comes into view the sunrise is a few hours away. Every kiss and embrace just seems to make her feel even more unfettered and her assertions that she's unready dubious. She had been sure that revealing the truth would be nothing but awkward and bring conflict but she is wrong. She feels like a weight has been lifted and they can truly be themselves now.

They pass through the empty reception and make their way quietly up to the room. Elena's heart races and she holds her breath as they reach it. She turns and he immediately presses her against the door, leaning down to her mouth. She feels just the tiniest brush of his lips against hers before he moves down to her throat and presses his mouth there.

Elena smirks. "This seems familiar."

He leans up, looking confused for a second before he lifts his eyebrows. "Oh, that. Honestly I have no idea why I did it; I had just met you. I lost my head."

Elena smirks, eyebrows rising. "I thought you did that to freak me out."

Elijah shakes his head, face falling. "No. I regret how menacing I was. Seeing you unsettled me… I'm sorry."

Elena shakes her head with a smile. "And I'm sorry for throwing vervain in your face and stabbing you."
He inclines his head in a wry acceptance. "We're a funny pair." He wraps a strand of hair around his finger and lets it spring free. She turns and opens the door and they walk in. They do not stagger and fumble at each other, like she had seen. They have changed the present and created a new path. She turns to him as he closes the door softly and they spend a stretch of time gazing at each other. Finally she looks at the bed and then back to him. He's staring at her very seriously, even though he must be feeling the same powerful yearning she is.

Elena holds out her hand. "Share the bed with me?"

He cocks his head and comes forward to take her hand. "If you're sure?"

"I trust you, now more then ever. I don't know what will happen tomorrow but tonight I want this." She slides her hands up his chest and smiles. "Unless you want to sleep on the floor again?"

"No thank you."

He leans down to capture her lips and his stubble prickles her face. She presses herself hard against him, twining her arms around his neck. She can feel his arousal and how ready he is for her and an ache answers his need. They break away and toe off their shoes and Elena reaches over to turn on a lamp. The room is bathed in a dim, warm light. He comes to her and she stills, expecting him to reach down and hitch up her dress but he lifts his hands to her chest, trailing his finger along the neckline. He looks at her for assent and she nods. Nimble fingers undo the row of buttons slowly and the top part of her dress folds open to reveal her bra. Chest starting to heave she shakes her shoulders and the dress falls to her feet.

Half naked she stands there, her heart pounding. He gazes at her with adoration, unguarded and intense. She should feel vulnerable but she doesn't. She knows he will respect her wishes and her choices and not impose his own. He won't take advantage. It's a trust that she still can't pin or understand where it came from but it's there and she believes in it.

"You're exquisite." He whispers in admiration and she looks down shyly. He lifts her chin up and kisses her once before unbuttoning and pulling off his shirt and unbuckling his belt. She pulls a nightgown out from under her pillow and slips it on as he folds his pants neatly over a chair. She looks him over in appreciation. She has seen him without a shirt on a few times but always in quick, furtive glances. Now she lets her eyes linger. He pulls a t-shirt she had bought him over his head and she can see him biting the inside of his lip in a strange smile. She stares down at her nightgown and realises he probably wants to pull it off her again. Exhaling an exhilarated breath she pulls back the bed cover and looks at him squarely.

"We have an understanding?"

"Always. You have nothing to fear. I will only do as you direct." Again that strange smile and Elena's head is suddenly filled with the most lascivious thoughts. They have no contraception and she does not wish to make love yet but that doesn't mean they have to lie with a sword between them. They get in and he wraps his arms around her with a sigh. Elena stares up at him from his shoulder, eyes narrowed in thought.

"If I hadn't kissed you would you have made a move at all?"

"Only if I was sure of your intentions. I didn't want to add any pressure to you, not after the Salvatores and everything else…did you expect me to fight over you like a prize?" His lips quirk.

Elena pulls a face. "No. I thought if you wanted something you'd be tenacious."
He smiles and it looks a little dangerous in the half light. "I am but I also happen to be very patient." He kisses her temple.

Elena lies there in contentment. "I think we've created a new future now, at least I hope so. The next time I dream I'll know for sure." She almost laughs at the thought. It's unlikely she'll be getting much sleep tonight. She leans over him to turn off the desk lamp and settles on top of him, her breasts pressed against his chest.

He rubs his hand up and down her back and stares suggestively into her eyes. "What happens next?"

Elena smiles coyly. "Surprise me."
He rolls her onto her back and rises up on his knees, trailing his hands down her hips. She brings her knees up, rubbing her legs together and a quiet rasping noise fills the air.

"My tights…"

Hands move to ring her ankles and he pulls her down, so that she lies flat on the mattress. She watches from under her lashes as he slides his hands up her legs and under her nightgown. She lifts her hips as his fingers hook into the hem of the tights and pulls them down her legs and throws them over the side. Her skin free and her night gown rolled up to her waist Elena gazes at him, waiting.

"Anything else?" His voice is smoothly suggestive and Elena begins to breathe more heavily. This is a man who's had more lovers and certainly more experience then her. What tricks does he know?

"Everything else remains on." She says, not as a dismissal but a challenge. She knows how important wording is to him and waits to see how he will get around this test.

Elijah smiles and spreads her legs further apart and leans over her. She threads her hands through his hair until it stands up in tufts. She likes to see him in disarray. His hand hovers over her chest, following the rhythmical movement of her breathing before lowering. His fingers skim the tip of her nipple and it hardens from his touch, clear through the white cotton. He is teasing her and he gets his own thrill from that. She places her hands under the pillow and fists it as his hand cups her breast lightly, the under swell melding to his palm. His dark eyes have been fixed on her body but now he looks at her red swollen lips with lust. She moans when he takes his hand away but immediately stops breathing when he slides it under her gown to squeeze her breast firmly, skin finally on skin. Her fingers dig fiercely into the down of the pillow.

He lowers his head and presses his lips to hers and they part from the pressure of his tongue. The force of the kiss becomes heated, their tongues moving against each other more fiercely until she is moaning deep in her throat. He kisses until she can't breathe anymore and he brakes away. He nestles his face into her neck and sucks and bites gently at her skin and Elena bucks under him. His head moves down to lick her collar bone before stopping at her breast he has been fondling. He kisses her other nipple through the fabric and gently bites down.

"Elijah…" She moans and he looks up at her with a playful smile. It's maddening, boarding on smug and it only makes her wish for his restraint to snap and take her more powerful. But he likes this slow burn, the delayed gratification more pleasurable then the ultimate release. He is a man with most of his sensibilities rooted in the past and it shows now. He may have trained himself to withstand for hours but she can not. He cocks his head at her hot, hooded gaze.

"Not enough?"

She chokes out a laugh and rises to press her mouth to his forcefully. Straddling him she can feel
his erection under her and grinds down and he growls into her mouth. Maybe his control is not so firm, she thinks. He kisses her throat, gathering her long hair to tug and reaches forward to pull a pillow down the mattress. Then he suddenly pins her beneath him before rising up on his elbows and gazes down at her, their breath mingling. The pillow is under her hips and it arches her body up into his. She eyes him curiously.

"What are you going to do?"

"You said you wanted to be surprised..." his voice is low and gruff and she feels a thrill pass through her at the sound. He moves down her body and spreads her knees apart. He kisses a path along her skin until he reaches the apex of her thighs. Elena looks up at the ceiling and bites her lip in anticipation. The touch of his fingers is so light she almost doesn't realise he's caressing her clitoris through the thin fabric of her underwear. His fingertips brush repeatedly, feather light and her stomach tenses as a small but intense pleasure rises. When she feels that it's going to strike he takes his hand away and Elena whimpers and fists the sheet below her. She has to, otherwise she will have to take matters into her own hands.

"Stop teasing me." She stares at him, almost pouting and he ducks his head in assent. A yell almost erupts from her mouth when he knuckles her clit in firm circling movements and her hips jerk off the bed. Again he takes his hand away but rubs at her gently with his fingers but this time does not stop. He pleasures her until she has to turn her face into the pillow and muffle the moans with her hair. Wet and sensitive she thrusts up into his touch, riding a wave to a release she can almost grasp when he sits back up suddenly. This time she does not attempt to keep quiet and shouts out his name in frustration.

"I have an idea." He says, staring at her for a long moment, which drives Elena mad. Finally his considering gaze turns into something more predatory and he leans over her. "Get on your hands and knees. Please." He adds, drawing the word out.

Elena, hypersensitive and sprung tight, trusts him. She sits up and moves around on her knees and he presses against her back, his arms ringing around her. She turns her face to him, her breasts heaving. "Whatever you're going to do make it fast. I can't take much more of this." Which is half a lie, she's never been so aroused.

"Have you been able to reach an internal orgasm?" He asks conversationally and Elena almost laughs at the tone.

"During sex? No." She unwittingly thinks back to her past experiences and while they had been enjoyable she had never been able to come without being touched. "A lot of women can't." He makes a strange humming noise that turns into a scoff. Elena cocks an eyebrow. "You think you can?"

"I know I can, if you catch my meaning? That's why I'm asking for your permission."

It dawn on her, what he is referring to. He has made a woman with her body orgasm before and she should be able to reach the same release. Elena stares at the headboard with a frown, not sure if she should continue. He's always been the one to make a clear distinction between her and the other duplicates, from the second they met and it's no different now. He just wants to give her pleasure. Her body throbs with unreleased desire and her curiosity wins over any reservations. She looks back at him with a pursed smile.

"If you think you can do it, try." Another challenge.

He kisses her shoulder tenderly and Elena leans forward to grip the headboard. His hands glide up
her bare legs to grip her hips and pull her back a little. His fingers then move over her twitching stomach before laying his hand flat against her mons pubis. Elena thrusts back against him unthinkingly as another spike of pleasure shoots into her belly. She can feel his fingertips trailing over the wet fabric between her legs, pausing for a moment before sliding his hand up and into her knickers. Elena throws her head back with a gasp as his fingers move downwards, scraping against her clitoris before he pushes a finger inside her slowly and then adds another. She's wet and pliable but he asks her quietly if it's all right. Elena makes a garbled noise of consent and he smiles into her hair.

He begins to thrust and rub his fingers in and out slowly, while his other hand moves around to cup a breast. He pleases her like this for a long time and she can almost feel something inside her responding to his touch. Elena rocks back against him, feeling how hard he is and a continuous whining noise issuing from deep within her throat. He flicks his thumb over her clit quickly and she yelps, the orgasm that it could give her spiking but he pulls away, removing his fingers. She doesn't have time to complain when he suddenly jerks her down onto the bed so that she rests on her side, the pillow under her hip. He melds himself against her back again and lifts her leg up before quickly pushing his fingers under her knickers and deep inside her. She's so wet at this point that he enters with no resistance. Panting, Elena opens her mouth to ask what he's doing when his fingers rub against a spot that has, until now, been undiscovered. Elena's moans shift to a disbelieving laugh which in turn become an unintelligible wail. She grips at Elijah desperately, her hips jerking back against him as an orgasm builds and builds until it breaks over her and she comes screaming out his name. She moves against his hand until sated and weak and slumps forward onto her belly.

Dazed with satisfaction she manages to turn over and look at him and finds a burning, pleased gaze. He has succeed, has passed her challenge. He has made her orgasm without even taking her clothing off. Elena smiles and places her hands over her flushed face.

"That was unbelievable."

"You don't find how I acquired that skill awkward?"

A small jealous part of her does but she's far too sated to care. He could have done it to hundreds of women – and for all she knows he probably has – but it doesn't matter. She reaches out for him and he rests on top of her, weight supported by his elbows. She kisses him slowly and leisurely trails a hand down his body to brush her fingers against his erection. His self control really is amazing, she thinks. He gazes at her intensely and stops breathing when she starts to rub her groin against his hardness.

"Thank you," she smiles and adds huskily, "now it's your turn."
The garden door is covered in vines but the green wooden panels can still be seen below the leaves. Elena looks at the door next to it, a door free from foliage and feels a thrill of triumph. The outcome through door number two is still there but now unlikely to happen. Even as she watches more vines grow over it and the metal handle rusts and falls off. Even so her curiosity gets the best of her and she places her hands against the door and pushes. It remains closed, stubbornly refusing to open but she can feel it will give if she puts more effort into it. Suddenly someone appears at her side and pushes their shoulder against the door and it opens with a scream of protest. She turns, expecting Bonnie or Esther but is it Elijah. She stares open mouthed at him.

"How did you get here?"

"The same way you did I expect." He stands back and surveys the garden they stand in. "This is mother's dreamscape." He says, as if from experience.

"Yes, I've pulled you both into it." They turn to see Esther standing behind them. She is flanked by Bonnie and Finn. Esther's mouth curls. "I thought it was rude not to include you Elijah when this also pertains to your future."

Elena looks back at him. At that moment they are curled around each other, fast asleep. He gives her a small shrug, clearly more at ease with how surreal it is. They both look through the doorway and Elena can hear voices emitting from the murky depths beyond.

"That future, it's becoming…unstable?"

"Yes," Finn says softly. "Every minute it seems to fade into obscurity. Something has happened to make it dubious."

Elena and Elijah give each other a quick, knowing glance but say nothing. Elijah steps forward, head tilted.

"Can we still look?"

"Yes but there isn't a lot of time left. I and Bonnie have gleaned enough information to steer away from the mistakes of that future. But if you are curious…look."

He gives his mother one intense, searching stare before nodding. He turns to Elena with a small smile. "Shall we?"

They step through together and Elena feels something hinder her, like an elastic band that only gives way when she forces herself forward. The room she and Elijah find themselves in is shadowy and oddly vague. Before the scenes she had witnessed had been clear and lucid, now everything is dull and blurred. It is a future loosing focus. They are in a wood panelled study and a fire crackles in the hearth. For a moment Elena think she's in the Salvatore Boarding House but quickly dismisses it. The house would have been destroyed with the rest of Mystic Falls. A very pale light shines through diamond paned glass, a strange grey fog swirling beyond.

Elijah frowns. "Did it look like this before?"

Elena shakes her head and explains the loss of clarity. As she does a door creeks open and two people enter. A thin, harried looking woman and a boy. At the sight of him Elena stiffens and eyes Elijah peripherally. He is like stone and the only emotion that can be detected are in his eyes. He
looks at Grayson in awe.

The woman shows Grayson to a seat and speaks. "Well, good luck. I'm sure you'll feel at home in no time." Her Scottish accented voice echoes, like she's speaking from the end of a deep tunnel. Grayson says nothing and does not move. Elena realises that he's a few years older now, in his preteens. The woman squeezes his shoulder and leaves. Their son drags the tip of his shoes along the floor and then stills, his feet slanting inwards.

A flicker of a smile passes over Elijah's face. "He sits like you do." The smile fades and he looks on with a crushing sadness.

Elena smiles weakly. "I think you would have taught him to play the piano…" She falls silent. Conflicting emotions of sadness and joy at seeing Grayson hang over them like a cloud. She turns to Elijah, about to speak when the door opens again and someone enters. Her words die in her mouth.

It's Klaus. He walks over to Grayson slowly and pulls up an armchair to sit opposite. He looks at the boy with a solemn gaze, one that Elena has never seen.

"Hello," he says with a brief smile. "See you got here in one piece. First time in an aeroplane?"

Grayson shakes his head, his eyes twitching to Klaus and away. "I flew to Canada once, with my mom." He speaks quietly, looking a little shy. He looks at his lap and Klaus leans forward.

"I am sorry for your loss."

Grayson looks up sharply, his dark eyes pinned to blue. "No you're not. You're just sad that you can't make anymore hybrids now."

A wince flashes over Klaus' face and he shakes his head. "That's not the case. At first that is what I wanted but well, things change, people change..." He trails off, looking introspective before gazing softly at Grayson. "I don't expect you to believe me but I am deeply sorry. I wanted both of you to be safe and I failed but I promise that I will make it up to you."

"You can't bring my mom or dad back." His voice, muffled and faint, is laced with pain.

Klaus nods. "I can't bring them back, any of them...but you're all the family I have left now and I'm all you have. I'm your uncle."

Grayson nods slowly and sighs. "I know..." He turns to look out of the window, at the murky whirling clouds and then back at Klaus with a frown.

Elena stares ahead, almost not hearing or seeing what is before her. She ends up dead in this future, something happens and she is dead leaving her son to Klaus. She turns to Elijah and sees that there's an almost vicious look of dissent on his face. Without looking he takes her hand and laces his fingers though hers.

Grayson tilts his head, his wariness passing. "Tell me what happened? My mom told me some of it but I want to hear it from you."

Klaus sits back with a sigh and remains silent for some time before speaking. "There was a witch; a friend of your mother's called Bonnie. She planned, with the help of your grandmother, to suppress my werewolf side again. They captured me but I knew what they planned and worked to stop it. It was quite simple really: the curse needed my blood and your mother's to work. I created a divergent and switched my blood for Bonnie's."
Grayson nodded. "She ended up suppressing all magic instead of your werewolf gene."

Klaus nodded regretfully. "I only intended to suppress her magic, make her vulnerable but it backfired, to a humongous degree. It was a mistake, I didn't intend for that to happen or any of what followed." He flourishes a hand to the window and slumps in his chair. "I wanted to build an empire but there's nothing left to build on. There is no more balance and the world is, to put it eloquently, screwed." He glares at the fire, depressed and self loathing.

Grayson stares at his uncle thoughtfully. "If you could go back and change what happened would you?"

Klaus stills, thrown at the question before staring at his nephew in deep sincerity. "In a heartbeat."

For the first time a small smile appears on the boy's face. "I believe you."

Klaus blinks, as if he had never heard the words before. "Thank you...people say you're the spiting image of your dad, and you are, but you've got your mother's heart. Don't lose it."

The words echo hollowly and the room seems to suddenly stretch away and blur into nothing. Elena and Elijah find themselves back in the garden, facing the door that is now almost completely obscured by vines. Elijah whirls on his mother, his teeth bared.

"Why would you show me that?"

"Because it was the only chance you had of seeing your son. A son that you will never have now. We have all but prevented that future from happening but all victories come with a sacrifice. I'm sorry."

Elijah snarls and turns away and says no more. Elena come to his side and looks at Bonnie.

"Klaus didn't intend to suppress all magic, just yours. Something went wrong." Like her son she does find herself believing him despite what he has done.

Bonnie nods sadly. "I've seen what happens and I'm not going to let it. The mistake was mine and I won't repeat it, I'll die first." She does not clarify but her shame is almost a visible thing.

Esther walks up to them, staring keenly. "The time is approaching, the link will fade." She looks at Elijah who is staring at the third door curiously but his jaw is still set stiffly. "I have given you all your mortality back but from here on out your life is in your hands. Your choices are yours. I can die knowing that."

Elijah looks back at his mother and the hostility lessens. "Die?"

Esther nods. "Of course. I was sent here to put my wrongs to right. It did not go as I had planned but once the greater good is served I can die and finally move on." There's a weight of relief to her words, for all her aloofness. She reaches over to touch her son's cheek. "You will have a choice to make soon and I know it will be the right one."

What this choice is they do not find out because at that moment a trilling noise fills their ears and they wake up together in bed, disoriented and confused. The birds sing in the dawn chorus, loud enough to wake them. They stare at each other, the night before now like something from a dream.

"Once I get out of here I'm going straight to the police and probably the British Embassy and make sure the full force of the law rains down on all of you. This is ridiculous! Do you hear me? LET
ME OUT!

The shed shakes as its occupant slams against the wall and yells. Klaus has been shouting non stop since he had woken up in chains and Tyler has had to hear his pompous complaining for hours. He almost considers releasing him just to have some peace and quiet. Steeling himself he unlocks the door and enters.

"Don't you ever shut up?"

Klaus stands, the shackles around his wrists and ankles clinking.

"I will when you release me." He offers his chained hands but Tyler ignores him and sets a tray on the floor. Klaus looks down at his breakfast and kicks it away with a growl.

Tyler steps back, smirking. "You know that's the only meal you're gonna get for hours."

"I don't care. You can't do this to me. Do have any idea how long they throw people in jail for attempted murder, kidnapping and forced imprisonment?"

Tyler shrugs.

"Thirty years. A life sentence. By the time you get out you'll be an old man and your life will have passed you by." He strains forward, eyes beseeching. "But that doesn't have to be the case if you just let me go."

A strange smile passes over Tyler's face. "I won't ever be an old man, you made sure of that."

Klaus blinks and seeing that threats aren't working goes for a different angle. "I know you think this is wrong. Please Tyler, you have to help me. I heard them talking, they're planning to kill me. Please help me." The desperation and fear looks and sounds real but Bill had warned him not to be sucked in.

"I'm not falling for it. You act like you have no idea what's going on but you do."

Klaus groans in annoyance and slumps back against the wall. "For the last time I have amnesia. I truthfully don't know what I have done to warrant this."

Tyler narrows his eyes and steps closer. "You know I can tell when someone is lying."

Klaus shrugs weakly. "Then you know I'm telling the truth. I might have done something awful, it's possible, but I feel like I'm innocent."

"Feeling something doesn't make it true."

"Be that as it may I don't want to be executed for crimes I have no memory of. I just want to go home."

Tyler moves to the door and looks back at Klaus with a scowl. "You might not remember but I do. You killed me and turned me into a hybrid and if you get out you'll do it to someone else." He slams the door shut and locks it.

"HOW CAN I CREATE HYBRIDS IF I'M HUMAN YOU MORON?" Klaus roars in frustration and Tyler skulks away.

Guilt is eating at him, so much so that he wonders if the sire bond is still intact. He looks up at the mountains in the east and feels a pang of home sickness and something else. Taking a cell phone
out Tyler makes the call before he can change his mind.

"Hi Caroline. I'm OK. Seriously, I'm fine. I have some good news."

The say goodbye to the Inn and continue to travel towards Monterey. If they make good time they should reach it before the sun sets. Elijah sits in passenger seat and gazes at the passing scenery for hours. He has hardly spoken a word since they had woken up and has responded to her questions with monosyllabic answers. What he has seen in the dream has shaken him profoundly and she leaves him to deal with it in his retentive way. An hour passes before she realises that he has been gazing at her softly and she cocks an eyebrow.

"I understand why you didn't want to mention him when I asked before." His voice is quiet and calm but with an underlining sadness he can't mask.

Elena nods, steering the car around a tight curve in the valley. "The first time I saw him I could hardly bring myself to look. If I saw what he looked like then he wasn't just some boy in a dream but real, in some world…" She trails off before smiling sadly. "How can I miss someone that doesn't even exist?"

He reaches over and runs the back of his fingers down her face tenderly. Elena leans into his touch but then jerks when her cell phone buzzes and Elijah picks it up for her. She had put it on silent but that hadn't stopped Damon from leaving half a dozen messages demanding to know where she is and informing her bluntly that she's insane. She knows he cares for her but he shows it in the most irritating, rudest way possible. She looks over at Elijah, who's reading the text, and steels herself.

"It's a message from Caroline. She says that Tyler contacted her this morning. He has Klaus and they're planning to kill him tomorrow. Kol and Rebekah have escaped and are on their way. This is followed by a dozen exclamation marks." He says dryly and hands the phone to her when Elena pulls over. She takes it and quickly calls Caroline, looking worriedly at Elijah as it rings.

"The linking spell ends tonight. If they kill him tomorrow then all our problems are solved," she says with relief and turns away when Caroline answers and asks breathlessly what's happened. Elijah stares at her for a moment, going over what she had said and looks aside, a calm face hiding an inner conflict.
They reach Monterey with the sun setting behind the mountains they have just driven out of. For hours they have seen nothing but nature so when the low slung houses come into view they sigh with relief.

"Civilisation," Elena breathes and Elijah smiles at her. Their mood has lightened since that morning and even as they drive through the pretty town the dream is already fading for Elena. Now her thoughts are hooked onto the night they had shared together. It had been a sexless event but she will always count it as one of the most erotic nights of her life. For all Elijah's calm and collected demeanour he's incredibly passionate.

They drive down the Main Road and reach the boundary in less then five minutes. Monterey is picturesque but tiny. At the western end of the road a Victorian style Inn called the Arbogast welcomes visitors and they check in. They are shown three guest rooms and Elijah, amused, opts for the blood red 'Bram Stoker Suit.'

"I hope you'll be comfortable." The landlady who has shown them around says with a zealous smile that doesn't quite reach her eyes. She closes the door and Elijah shakes his head in bemusement. Elena cocks her head at him.

"What?"

"Didn't you see how scandalised she was?" He walks up to her and twirls her around suddenly before reaching for his bag. "She thinks I'm too old for you."

"Well she's got a point; you were born in the tenth century or something." She smiles sarcastically.

"But I look like I'm in my thirties. I'm at least fifteen years older then you, by appearances. If I remain human I will age."

Elena shrugs. "So will I. It doesn't bother me, I happen to like older men. Much, much older…” She kisses him and he wraps his arms around her. Like the kisses they had shared last night this is a slow burn that promises to boil if they're not careful. They move back until they hit the end of the bed and break apart. Elena moans when he kisses a trail down her throat, one hand buried in her long hair. He picks her up and stares playfully into her eyes.

"Shall we scandalise her even more?"

Elena grins as they fall onto the bed and Elijah pins her beneath him. She lifts a hand to rub her fingers against the stubble he hasn't had the chance to shave off.

"You'll give me a rash soon."

His lips purse in bemusement. "I thought you liked it?"

"I do…” she trails off, looking thoughtful. "Strange to think this all started with you knocking on my door asking for my blood…”

His lips thin a little. "Something I still regret. I needed to know what Klaus was planning and so I needed his trust but in hindsight…it says something about my character."

"And what's that?" She trails her fingers over his face gently.
"Even though I am the older brother I was content to follow his lead. I acted as his consigliere and I did it for hundreds of years. It seems it's a comfortable position for me to fall into. I thought he was special, that he had a birthright. At first I was all for him breaking the curse and being a hybrid. I hoped that we could change the world. But his desire to build an army overshadowed any aspirations I held. He became fanatical and ultimately it drove us apart."

She looks up at him with a small frown. "I can't see you taking orders from anyone."

"Well for the last five hundred years I've pretty much run things my way. But I don't have a problem with authority, if the power is in the right hands."

"Good to know." She says with a coy smile and threads her fingers through his hair and pulls him down for a kiss. As she does her cell phone buzzes in her pocket and she pulls away to answer it. Elijah rolls off her with a frustrated groan and sits up. He watches her as she stands and talks, the joy on her face fading into something serious.

"OK, we'll meet you outside." She hangs up and looks at Elijah. "That was Tyler. He said that they're moving up the execution."

Elijah curses and gets to his feet. The ease of the past half hour is obliterated and with a deep sense of anxiety they make their way out of Monterey, heading east toward the old reservation.

They walk towards a sagging chain link fence, where two men stand. Tyler stands with his hands in his pockets and looks at them approaching with a surly disposition. The older man regards them with a calm scrutiny.

Elena comes to a stop beside Elijah and smiles awkwardly. "Hi Mr Forbes." Caroline had told her that her father was also part of the plan to execute Klaus.

Bill smiles affably. "Hello Elena." His eyes switch to Elijah. "I take it you're the Original?" No smiles for him. Elijah nods and steps forward.

"My name is Elijah and yes, I was. As you've no doubt been informed I'm human now, as are my siblings. I've come here to take Klaus home." His voice is pleasant but there's a dangerous edge to it. Even human he can muster a chilly menace when he needs to.

Tyler shakes his head. "That's not gonna happen. Klaus was undefeatable before but now we have a chance to stop him."

"Stop him from doing what exactly? He can no longer create hybrids or vampires. His werewolf gene is once again dormant, correct?"

Tyler nods, thrown at the brusque tone. Bill shakes his head and eyes Elijah with a flinty gaze.

"This isn't about what he might do, not anymore. This is about justice. Your brother has murdered countless werewolves and would have done so until all of them had been turned into hybrids. The people back there want revenge."

"I see and what concern is this of yours Mr Forbes?" Elijah says with a sharp smile.

Bill matches his smile with one of his own. "Just trying to help. Can you resent them their right here? I know he's your brother but he's left a wake of bloodshed stretching back a millennium."

"As have I..." The dangerous light in Elijah's eye dims and he tilts his head thoughtfully. "I do not
resent why they want to kill Klaus, I understand it more then anyone. I worked for hundreds of years to take down my brother before he could accomplish his plans. That, obviously, failed."

"Now we have that chance." Bill moves towards the fence and they follow. He looks at Elijah carefully. "I've heard of you, like all Originals your reputation precedes you. They say that you're a noble man."

"I try to be." Elijah says flatly and then cocks his head with a small smile. "If you know that you should be aware that I like to make deals."

Tyler shakes his head. "There's nothing we have to give you."

"You have time. All I ask is that you spare him until tomorrow. After that I will make no move to stop you."

Elena moves forward as they mull this over. "Look, everyone here wants him dead; all we need is some time." She explains about the link and how it will fade in only a few hours.

Bill looks at Tyler. "It's up to you."

Tyler looks at them and then back towards the reservation. Finally he nods. "Fine but I'll have to talk with the others."

He shows them through the fence and into the compound. A few people mill around, looking at them but on the whole they are ignored. They stop at a shed and Tyler turns to them suddenly.

"Bill I need to speak to them alone."

Mr Forbes argues but relents when he sees how stubborn Tyler is. He walks away, throwing suspicious glances over his shoulder. Tyler turns back to Elijah.

"Do you really want to kill him? Is that why you came all this way?"

"Yes." Elena answers.

"No." Elijah says softly and she turns to him, mouth open.

"It's not?"

He moves to her side and regards her intensely. "I've wanted to kill him for so long and I still do. But I've been thinking that this can go a different way..." He looks at the shed, his gaze troubled.

Elena takes his arm and stares at him hard. "He killed Jenna and countless other people. He should be punished for that."

"I know. Being human does not take his crimes away or mine, I'm not disputing that. I just want to take him home and we will deal with him there."

"You're basically giving him a free pass." Elena looks away angrily. Elijah opens his mouth to argue but Tyler speaks up first.

"The man in there killed me and basically enslaved my will. I agree with Elena...but I also think this is wrong."

Elena stares at Tyler with surprise. "You do? After everything he's done?"
"It doesn't feel right. If we were normal we could just hand him over to the police but it's not. We're not. There's no law, there's no police to help people like us and that's why we can get away with murder. It's not right and it will never end unless we do something."

Elijah stiffens slightly and nods. "It's not right. This is why I'm begging you to let me take him. There is no law because we have not set one up but we can, with your help."

Tyler and Elena blink at him, as if he spoke in a different language. Elena's anger abates and she starts to smile. "You want to set up the council that never worked?"

"I want to try. We will hand him over to the servants of nature and we will work in collaboration to make sure this doesn't happen again."

"And if that doesn't work?" Bill asks quietly from behind them.

Elijah turns and shrugs. "Then I leave his fate in the hands of these people." He stares at Bill sincerely. "Do you agree?"

"It sounds like a pipe dream but you're right. I've been hunting down vampires with little to no assistance but I'm just one man. If there was some sort of framework in place, a governance…it would be a start."

Elijah looks between them with a suppressed satisfaction. "It's a deal."

There's a bang from the shed and Klaus' muffled voice drifts out. "If you're quite finished? Dear god I've never heard so much self righteous twaddle."

Elijah's mouth thins and walks to the door and Tyler opens it. They step in to find Klaus standing in chains.

He grins at Elijah. "I thought about leaving it for a few minutes in case you wanted to sing kumbaya. Saying that I have never been more thankful to see your face. Please get me out of this mad house?"

Elijah comes to stand before Klaus, his eyes intense. "You heard what I said? Then you know what I plan to do?"

Klaus waves a hand and his chains clink. "Yes something ridiculous about witches." He leans forward and whispers. "I get it; you're just playing along with these insane people." He winks.

Elijah continues to stare at Klaus, expression unreadable. "Do not play with me. I will leave you here to die if you do."

The smile falls off Klaus' face. "I'm not playing. I have a jumbled head full of memories. I know I was a vampire and I know I must have done something terrible but that doesn't feel like me any longer. All these accusations belong to a different man. Do you understand?"

Elijah shakes his head slowly. "The amnesia will pass and you will see that your crimes are not washed clean. We have both committed atrocities…"

"Because we were vampires, we were monsters." Klaus says reasonably.

Elijah regards him sadly. "That's no excuse. We had a choice to show mercy and we didn't…"

Klaus exhales through his nose heavily. "All this moralising is wearing thin Elijah. I want to go
home."

"And the tree?"

Klaus blinks, his mouth falling open in realisation. "The tree…"

Elijah is about to comment when Tyler comes forward. "I've spoken with the others. They agree but on one condition. A werewolf has to be present at this trail or whatever it is. If she doesn't agree with the sentencing then we kill him."

"Done." Elijah says bluntly.

Tyler stares at Klaus seriously. "I'm not doing this because I feel sorry for you. I'm doing this because I never want to sink to your level." He unlocks the cuffs from him and Klaus moves forward, rubbing his wrists. He pauses when he sees Elena framed in the doorway.

"Tatia?"

Elena says nothing but stands aside as they exit, Klaus emerging last. She hangs back, waiting for Elijah. As she does somebody rushes at her and she sprawls into the dust. Elijah, Klaus, Bill and Tyler whip around to find Kol and Rebekah behind them. Kol steps forward and smartly holds a gun up to Bill's head.

"Kol!" Elijah shouts, helping Elena to stand. Kol smiles in greeting. There's a crazed light in his eye and even Rebekah stands apart from him.

"Hello brother. Thought I'd tag along and help rescue poor Klaus here. But you seem to have succeeded without my help. Well done you." He looks at Tyler who is growling quietly. "I know you're faster and stronger and I'm just a mere human. But you can't move faster then a bullet. I just want to know one thing: where is the tree?"

"There is no tree." Bill says. Kol narrows his eyes and suddenly smacks the barrel of the gun again his head. Bill falls to the ground, groaning feebly.

"Anymore nonsense from you and I'll put a bullet in your spine."

"Stop it!" Elena screams.

Kol looks up at her and grins. "I will once they've told me where the tree is. You have my word. Otherwise…" he flicks the safety off and everyone stiffens.

"It's in the woods back there. I'll take you to it but you have to let him go." Tyler says angrily.

"Done," Kol says with a smile and stands back. He walks past Bill and Elena shots forward and drops to her knees beside him. Kol moves to Tyler and waves the gun. "Lead the way then."

Throwing him a dark glance Tyler moves towards the wood at the back of the reservation. Elijah grabs Kol and spins him around.

"Are you an idiot? He's probably leading you into a trap!"

"It's worth the risk. I can't – I won't – stay like this. It's driving me mad." He pulls away from Elijah, his eyes shining strangely and moves forward, pointing the gun around aimlessly. Elijah looks after him in deep worry. His little brother is on a tripwire, anything could set him off. He had been so preoccupied with Klaus that he never stopped to consider where the real threat was. He
walks back to Rebekah who stares with a heavy frown.

"I tried, I swear but he was out of control. We had to convince these baby vampires to get us through airport security. We have no viable passports and they had to compel them to let us through."

"What about Damon and Stefan?" Elena asks, catching up with a wounded but walking Bill. She had been expecting them to be dogging her heels by now.

Rebekah purses her lips but continues. "They tried to kill us with this blasted link still in affect so Kol shot them. Oh don't worry," Rebekah adds with a sweet smile, "they'll heal eventually."

They move on, the ground gradually ascending as they climb higher. The last dregs of dusk gild the tree tops but stars are already appearing in the purple east. Elijah walks beside Klaus who has been very quiet.

"I know what you plan to do with the tree."

Klaus looks up with a smile. "Do you? You know I had completely forgotten about the bloody thing until you mentioned it? Thank you Elijah, always there with a timely comment."

Elijah's mouth purses and he grabs his brother's arm. "You said that mother is conniving and she is. I don't trust her. What if destroying the tree doesn't break the spell? What if it just kills us?"

Klaus shrugs. "I agree with Kol. We're human, either we'll be killed attempting this or we'll die from old age or sickness. Either way we'll all meet an end. I don't want to be mortal Elijah. I worked for so long to break the curse and I finally succeeded and now it's all been for naught. I can't let this be my fate."

"Nothing is truly immortal Klaus, you know that. Is being human really that awful?"

Klaus looks at Elijah thoughtfully before turning his gaze to Elena. "Clearly it's not for you. But you're the only people I care about and one day you'll die and I won't allow it. We were created for more."

"All things die. We've both lived long enough to know and accept it. But..." Elijah trails off and looks at Klaus carefully before continuing. "The world will be safer if you remain like this Klaus."

"What are you talking about?"

Elijah looks at Elena for support and she nods after a pause. "I have seen a future in mother's dreamscape and it is awful. Even you shudder at it. Either by accident or purposefully you create it."

Klaus stops and looks at Elijah with a scowl. "Create what?"

Elijah explains about the suppressing of magic and the complete destruction of Mystic Falls and Klaus listens. At first he takes the news derisively but the more he hears the more his disbelief turns into alarm.

"The total obliteration of magic? I've gathered enough knowledge over the years to know the loss of balance would have unbelievable consequences. You labelled me as a megalomaniac once but intentionally tearing the fabric of reality is not something I desire."

Elena stares at him and realises with a jab that she believes him. "I don't think you intended for it to
happen but it did. It still might."

Klaus looks between them and throws up his hands. "Stay away from Bonnie Bennett, got it." They hurry to catch up and climb hard to crest the hill.

Tyler turns to them, his face like thunder. "Here's your damn tree." He moves aside and points. Everyone freezes, eyes growing wide. Once it would have been a huge oak, with a canopy stretching out in all directions but now all that remains it a massive stump, large enough for a man to lie across.

"Where is it?" Kol demands, turning on Tyler.

He shrugs. "Don't know, don't care."

"Well you should bloody care!" Kol rages and waves the gun around wildly. Klaus steps forward, palms up.

"Come on Kol, keep it together. The tree is not completely gone. Keep calm and look for anything unusual."

Kol, Klaus and Rebekah inspect the tree stump as the last of the light fades away. They stand in twilight now. Elena moves closer to look, her dream of the massive tree piquing her curiosity. In the dream the tree had been scored with runes which she knows to be their names. She looks up and moves to Tyler and speaks quietly.

"What happened to the rest of the tree?"

He shrugs. "Probably got chopped down for fire wood. But they didn't let all of it go to waste." He says conspiringly and Elena opens her mouth to ask what he means when Rebekah suddenly speaks up.

"I think I've found something!" She points at the base of the stump and they crowd around to look. A series of runes are scored into the bark, almost hidden by high grass and vervain. Rebekah sniffs. "Typical."

Elijah steps forward. "Don't do this. It might not even work or you could be condemning us all to death."

"The link," says Rebekah in worry. Kol hums in thought and moves towards his sister and pinches her arm. "Ow! You bastard!" She glares at Kol, rubbing her arm.

"Did anyone else feel that? Because I didn't. The link has faded with the sunset. It's gone so you can stop your worrying Elijah." Kol lowers his gun and takes out a pocket knife. "So scoring out our names breaks the spell?"

"Only one way to find out." Klaus plucks the knife from his hand and cuts a bold line through his name. With a zeal Kol follows suit. Everyone remains still, waiting for something to happen. But it doesn't. A frown line appears on Kol's brow and he looks down at the tree trunk in accusation.

"Why hasn't it worked? Do you feel any different?" Rebekah asks her brothers and they shake their heads. As they do a rustling from behind catches Elijah's attention and he turns to see figures prowling around the trees below.

Kol suddenly looks up, his face bright with a realisation. "Of course... removing our names just breaks the binding agent. It doesn't break the curse. I need a blood sacrifice. How convenient that
you are here." He suddenly turns on Elena who stands before the tree stump and shoots her in the stomach.

"NO!" Elijah roars.

Elena stumbles backwards, a bloom of blood spreading over her abdomen. She collapses against the tree stump; fingers pressed again the bullet wound and blood spills over her hands. She watches with a dazed disgust as the tree unnaturally soaks up her blood like a sponge. Kol and Klaus collapse to the floor and being to writhe and Elijah drops down beside her.

"Elijah…?"

"It's OK, it's OK…" He pulls off his coat and presses it against the wound but her eyes roll up and her face begins to whiten. He looks around desperately for help and catches Klaus' gaze. His eyes are black and he bares his fangs. He and Kol are again vampires.

"Heal her." Klaus gasps before curling himself into a pained ball. The figures that Elijah had seen in the trees emerge, all carrying stakes, weapons that can kill an Original. Kol stands up shakily and stares at them before charging with a snarl, his fangs barred. Klaus gets to his feet and races after him, shouting out his and Rebekah's name.

Elijah looks back at Elena, who by some miracle is still breathing, and with a searing heart reaches for the knife that Klaus dropped and cuts his name away from the bloodstained bark. The change happens immediately and he falls to the ground with a yell of pain. His body shudders in agony and then stills completely. He stops breathing and his heart ceases to beat before his body gives another lurch and he groans as he transforms back into a vampire.

Elijah leans up weakly and with an effort bites into his wrist and places it over Elena's mouth. Someone is screaming and a fire crackles but all these things are distant and unimportant. He watches in desperation as she draws in ragged, shallow breaths. His strength returning he pulls Elena into his arms and stands. The trees below are aflame and Rebekah is wailing in grief, Klaus shielding her from approaching assailants. Kol is dead, burning into ash. A numb, diluted pain spreads through his being, like blood in water. An acrid smoke begins to spread and her breathing becomes even more laboured. Elijah turns, looking down at Elena's face and then freezes when someone comes at him.

It's Bill. He stares at Elijah fiercely, a stake in his raised hand. Elijah glares at him, his eyes black and blood around his mouth. More trees catch fire and the people that had gathered to attack them begin to retreat from the spreading flames.

"If you're going to stake me do it. If not get out of my way or I'll kill you where you stand."

Bill lowers the stake and Tyler appears suddenly at his shoulder, frantic. "We have to go or we'll die in here! Come on!" He drags at the older man and they run.

Elijah looks around for his siblings. Klaus and Rebekah are ringed in by fire and Klaus covers her body protectively. The flames rise and fall but he sees no more. Holding Elena close he races through the woods and past the reservation until he gets to the western end of Main Street and the Arbogast Inn. He makes it to their room unnoticed and carefully lays Elena down on the bed.

She breathes shallowly and her sweater is soaked with blood but she's alive. He gingerly rips the top off her and she wakes and stares at him dazedly.

"Elijah?"
"Yes, yes." He kneels beside her, her ruined sweater in his hands before he throws it away to cup her face in anxiety. "Are you OK?" Smears of blood appear on her unnaturally pale face and he takes his hands away.

She nods, placing her fingers against her stomach which is now slick with her own blood. She looks up, her eyes filling with panicked tears. "Someone shot me?"

He nods, his eyes feverishly bright. "I healed you. I had to, you would have died otherwise." He brushes her messy hair back and plants small, desperate kisses over her face before pulling her into his arms. She begins to shake and moan and he pulls back to stare at her. There's a rising hysteria in her eyes. Over the last few years she's gone through one trauma after another and a spike of dread stabs through him. How much can one person take before they crack?

She looks down at the blood covering her skin and gets unsteadily to her feet. He helps her to the shower, removing items of clothing she's too weak to remove herself. She stands under the water, watching her blood drain away and then looks back at him with a thousand yard stare. Elena holds out a shaking hand and he pulls off the bloody clothes he wears and joins her, holding her until the water runs cold. Half naked and shaking they get into bed and fall into an exhausted sleep.
Chapter 20

The fire rages through the night and the wail of sirens and beat of helicopters does little to disturb her sleep. She rests profoundly but he can not. He stands by the window and watches the trees burn in the distance until the sun rises. Glimmers of light filter through the lace covering the window and his skin begins to singe. Standing there until he can't take it anymore he walks back to the bed. She lies curled up tight and her hair is a messy fan around the pillow.

Mortality had given him hope that even if they spent the remainder of their lives apart he would not have to spend an eternity without her. Keeping his love to himself had been a precaution against that pain, one that is unavoidable now. One day she will die, god willing many years from now, but he will not. Deep down he never expected his mortality to last and suspects neither did she.

_Maybe that's one of the reasons why she wants to wait_, he thinks sadly, _she suspected this outcome and wants to avoid it. I can not blame her_. Rousing from this inner monologue he peers once more through the window and is about to move to Elena's side when something catches his attention.

She bumps through the crowd that has formed along the barrier cutting off the rest of the town from the forest. Her hair is in disarray and her clothes scorched and dirty. She stares around with wide, distraught eyes but it is unmistakably Rebekah. Elijah moves away from the window at once and goes to Elena, saying her name softly but she sleeps on. Not wanting to rouse her Elijah quickly and gently removes the chain from around her neck and slips on his old daywalking ring.

"I'll be back shortly." He kisses her temple, smelling the blood that covered her from last night and straightens sharply. His hunger had been a quiet gnaw but now the need to feed is becoming incessant. He leaves the room, closing the door softly and Elena mumbles something in her sleep and turns over.

Monterey is in a state of pandemonium and it seems the entire town is out on the street to look and gossip. As he passes through them he hears numerous theories about how the fire started but none come close. With a racing heart he reaches his sister who has her back to him and touches her shoulder lightly.

"Rebekah…?"

She jumps and turns. At the sight of Elijah her wild looking eyes grow wide and fresh tears run down her ash streaked face. "Elijah!" She gasps wetly and then flings herself forward, holding him tightly. "I – I thought you had died!" Her voice is rough and she coughs with a grimace.

He hugs her, smelling smoke on her clothes and hair. She also smells of something else. He leans back and stares at her gently. "You're still human?"

For the first time an anger cuts through her confusion and grief. "I never got a chance to remove my name and now the bloody tree stump is ash and cinders."

He tilts his head in sympathy before looking at her fixedly. "Rebekah…where is Niklaus?"

There is a vulnerability that he's only seen a handful of times shinning in her eyes. "He saved me from the fire but I inhaled smoke and passed out. I – I woke up over there… I looked for both of you, I went back in to search but those people dragged me out… I haven't seen Klaus since…." she looks at Elijah and shakes her head slowly. "I can't lose him
as well. Not after Kol."

Elijah brushes back her hair, tidying her up like when she was a child, and reaches down for her hand. "I'm sure he is fine. Unlike you he managed to score his name out."

"And you?"

"I am a vampire again." He looks over her shoulder as a helicopter transporting a water tanker swoops over head. They watch as a waterfall is released from the sky over the forest and another bout of smoke rises. He turns back to look at her, watching tears spill down her face and feels an intense swoop of guilt. He abandoned her and she doesn't even realise it.

The hand in his tightens and she turns from the forest. "We have to find Klaus. He might have been staked for all we know…" She inhales and coughs again but she composes herself. "Finn will tell us where he is." She says with her old gumption and they hurry back to the Inn.

An urgent knock at the door jolts her up from sleep. Elena groggily stares around, for moment unsure where she is but then everything falls into place. Being shot, the trees burning and Elijah holding her flash into her mind. Her breathing rate begins to increase and her heart hammers but she tells herself to keep calm and focus on what is around her.

She sits up, looking at the empty room. Elijah is gone. Wrapping a sheet around her as another knock sounds at the door she stands on shaking feet. She has a distinct memory of shaking throughout the night, so much so that she wondered if she would come apart. So the feel of his arms around her had been a blessing. She glances at the bathroom but its empty, the door wide open. Maybe he just stepped out to see the wood. As she grasps the door handle she realises that she's no longer wearing the chain around her neck but that thought dies when she sees who is standing on the threshold.

"Klaus?" She steps back, mouth parting to shout when he steps forward and stares directly into her eyes.

"Be calm. Be still. Now listen to what I say. You will do everything I tell you and you will not run from me." His compulsion takes effect immediately and any fears she has fades away. She stares dazedly into his eyes and Klaus smiles. "Good girl. Now Elena I'd like you to get dressed as quick as you can. We have to leave this place as soon as possible."

She turns and lets the sheet fall to her feet and walks into the bathroom. He stares at her in consideration before looking away. Once she is dressed he comes forward to take her bag and slings it over his shoulder. Her head feeling like it's filled with cotton that dulls her senses she manages to frown at him.

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because I need you. You can't make babies if you're shackled up with my brother, now can you?" He ushers her from the room and quickly down the stairs. The Inn is empty, everyone gawping outside. "And I can't go home thanks to a family that wants me dead. No, with your help I'll create a new family. Shall we?" He shows her to a waiting car and Elena stops, shaking her head slowly. Even that costs an effort.

"You can't do this."

"But I can and I will. Like I told Elijah yesterday: I have spent far too long on this plan to see it fall through now. Once I've triggered my werewolf gene its business as usual. Get in the car Elena."
Unable to resist his compulsion she gets in and he drives away. She looks at the smoky town growing smaller in the rear-view mirror and feels something crack inside her, sending out hairline fissures that will shatter with the right pressure. *This has to stop*, she thinks before her mind is overcome with a swirling numbness that follows the sound of his voice.

As soon as he approaches the room he knows something is off. The door stands wide open and the room beyond stands empty. The bed sheet is pooled on the ground and he picks it up and twists it in his hands. Her cell phone rests on the bedside table.

"Is she gone?" Rebekah asks unconcerned and he rounds on her in suspicion.

"Is this a trick? Did Klaus plant you outside to lure me out of this room?" He moves forward until they are inches apart. She might be human but she stands her ground with an unflinching stare.

"I've been telling you the truth."

"Then where is she?"

"Who cares? My god, look at yourself! Kol is dead and all you're concerned about is her. It's pathetic." She turns away in disgust, coughing heavily.

Elijah ignores her and walks into the bathroom. The shower is as they left it, splashes of blood drying on the tiles. He turns and freezes when he sees the mirror. Elena has managed to write the word *Klaus* in soap on it. He feels a heady mix of dread and pride at her resourcefulness.

"Klaus has taken her. Look for yourself." He quickly gathers his things, a cell phone in his hand. Rebekah blinks in surprise and looks at the mirror. When she comes out of the bathroom her face is long.

"He left me…?"

"If it hasn't become apparent yet this family is full of the most untrustworthy people imaginable. And that includes me." He leaves the room and dials the number, praying that Finn is savvy enough to answer a phone. Finally someone does answer but it is not his brother.

"Hi, this is Abby. He's asked me to speak. Phones still freak him out…"

"I need my brother to locate Klaus. He has Elena." He hears Abby relaying this information to Finn who then takes the phone to speak in person.

"Are you vampires again?"

"Yes but Rebekah is still human."

"And Kol?"

There is a heavy silence before he answers. "He didn't make it." A pained sigh punctuates over the phone line and Finn does not respond again.

"Elijah? We'll do a locating spell and get back to you. Hold tight." Abby hangs up and Elijah is left to wonder what state Finn is now in. He and Rebekah get into his Lincoln and pull away from the Inn. The road leading west in blocked so Klaus only has one road out. Elijah drives back into the mountains.
They have driven through the valley for an hour, retracing the path she and Elijah had taken. At first Klaus talked to her jovially but Elena remained silent, only answering questions when he compels her to. Finally growing tired of her retentiveness he too falls quiet. It's only when they reach a fork in the road that Elena speaks up.

"You're going in a different direction?"

"She speaks," Klaus smiles at her. "Yes, I am. I'm not returning to Mystic Falls, as I told you before, so we have to find another place to live. There's a small airport along this route. We'll fly to a bigger airport and then bon voyage."

"I'm not living with you." She says flatly and Klaus sighs.

"Poor choice of words. I have no desire to stay with you either but for the mean time this is the plan. Once the dust settles we can part ways and you can go on living your little life."

He drives upwards, the trees thinning, and Elena can just make out a landing strip in the distance. A shudder of panic rings through her. Her senses have been dull since awakening and she has welcomed it for the most part. Being shot has affected her more severely then she imagined. Every time she has been able to pick herself up, it may take time but she does it. Maybe this is just the final straw.

"They'll come after me," she says as they come to stop and she eyes a small plane in the distance wearily. Klaus turns the ignition off and turns to her.

"We both know it would be safer for everyone if they keep clear. Do you want more people to die?"

"Of course not." She turns away in disgust but guilt eats at her. The people she loves have and will lay down their lives for her and this is no different…Except it is. Klaus sees her as nothing more then a blood bag and breeding mare but he needs her alive. Her life is no longer in jeopardy but her freedom is.

Klaus compels her to get out of the car and follow him into a low slung building. He tells her to sit at a table while he compels a pilot to fly them to the nearest national airport. Klaus joins her at the table and sets out a bowl, milk and a tiny box of cereal. Breakfast.

"Eat. We'll be taking off in ten minutes and you might not get another chance. Need you in tip top condition my girl."

Reluctantly she upends the cereal into the bowl and pours the milk. It tastes like cardboard but she is hungry. And so it happens is Klaus. He eyes a man going into the gents and prepares to rise but Elena grabs his wrist. He stares down at her with a frown.

"Don't."

He smirks. "You can feed but I can't? I'm ravenous." He tries to move but she tightens her grip.

"But you'll kill him?"

"It's likely, yes." He shrugs.

"If we're going to do this, if there's no chance of my freedom, then we have to come to an arrangement." She stares at him intensely and he sits.
"And what arrangement is that sweetheart?"

"As long as I'm here you feed from me and no one else." It's an effort to say it but it must be done. Klaus is a vampire with a dormant werewolf gene. He has to kill to trigger it and become a hybrid. He can not kill her. As long as he remains a vampire she has a chance of beating him. Letting him feed from her is a small price to pay, a repugnant as it is.

Klaus smiles in bemusement. "You are a little Mother Teresa aren't you?" He leans forward and suddenly offers his hand. "Say what you will but me and Elijah do have one thing in common: we like to make deals."

Elena eyes his hand warily. "And do you live up to them?"

"As much as he does. I know you think I'm some brute but I do value decorum. As long as you are in my possession I will only drink from you and abstain from killing others. But after we reach Europe its open season." He shakes her hand which she withdraws quickly.

Klaus stands as the light aeroplane in the distance thunders into life. Elena looks at the spinning propellers and is unable to stand. Elijah should have noticed that she's gone and likely seen her message on the mirror. Right now he's on his way. But now she is alone and about to fly to god knows where. The hope of his appearance and her rescue gives way to a boiling rage, not at him but at this turn of events.

She is soul tired of being in peril, of the constant threat that hangs over her life and others. There is a helplessness that she has tried to rise above but now she can not. Since her parents death she has been witness and subjected to horror and death and you can only withstand that kind of strain for so long before snapping. She felt it last night, the sensation of her mind teetering over the edge but now that subjection triggers the most intense frustration she has ever felt. She does not feel self pity or even fear, she is blinded by anger and the compulsive need for it to stop. She has had enough and one way or another she will end it.

As Klaus steps out, the wind making his hair and jacket fly, Elena lifts the spoon she has eaten with off the table and slips it into her pants before standing. The feel of the steel against her skin makes her walk a little straighter and she gives him one flat eyed stare before climbing up into the plane. By the end of the flight one of them will be dead.

The driver's side window fogs up slowly and Elijah watches an invisible finger write a destination onto the glass:

King County Airport, Route 654.

"Klaus is trying to escape by plane." Elijah puts his foot to the gas and trees whip passed them. He spares his sister a glance when she does not respond and then does a double take. Since finding her she has been coughing and sporting a headache but brushed his concerns away irritably and remained silent, her breathing wheezy. He knows that she is human and frail but the thought that she might be in serious trouble never really crossed his mind, not when he is so focused on Elena.

Her lips are blue and she does not wake when he calls her name. He stops the car with a screech and grips Rebekah by the shoulders and shakes her. She wakes with a groan and inhales a breath only to start choking. She grips at her throat, wide panicked eyes staring at him. Elijah bites into his wrist and offers his blood to heal her. She takes his arm hastily and tries to drink but finds it impossible to swallow.
"C – Can't...breathe!" She bats his hand away and coughs and wheezes even more. Elijah stares at her in horror and then back at the road. If he waits Klaus and Elena will be gone but if he continues on Rebekah will surely die. He stares in conflicted torment at the waiting road and his sister takes note. Even through the frenzied fear for her life she manages to lift a hand and slap him with all the strength she can muster. Elijah turns on her in shock but the betrayal is clear in her swimming eyes. He grinds his teeth and looks away. "I know Klaus won't kill her but I can't just leave her at his mercy."

She jabs at her chest and simply mouths *family*. And there it is. The value of family has always been the touchstone of his and Elena's connection, both going to equal lengths to protect them but she is far nobler then he. She would not abandon Jeremy for his sake, not if his life were at risk and Elijah would never expect her to. For as long as he can remember he has strived to attain that level of honour that he sees so clearly in her but falling short of the mark. For what sort of man would he be to knowingly let someone he claims to love die? Kol is gone but he will not forsake Rebekah. With a heavy heart he turns the car around and drives as quick as he can towards Monterey and the medical centre, praying that Elena will fight her way out. That is what he has faith in, her conquering spirit and he has to believe it still survives. She has made it clear to him that people underestimate her willpower and he will not start doubting now. His mother said that he will need to make a choice and he had thought it meant sacrificing his mortality but maybe it is this. He will see Elena again and maybe he will be someone truly worthy of her love.

The flight is a short one, only taking an hour to reach the nearest international airport. From there Klaus plans to travel to England and store her away somewhere. The wheels bump along tarmac and Elena grips the leather seat in her hands, the spoon very warm against her hip. Klaus gets up and, ignoring the seatbelt sign, gets on his knees before her.

"I'm thirsty love and you did promise." His lips twitch. Elena spares him a withering glare before slipping forward and pushing her hair away from her neck. He leans forward but stops inches from her.

"Don't look so glum. I'm not going to lock you up in an ivory tower. Once I have things secured you can live as you wish. The top schools and jobs will be available to you. You will want for nothing and nor will your children." She pictures her child and Klaus sitting in a murky room and looks thoughtfully at the vampire before her. "You know I might have had a son in the future? He would have been called Grayson, after my father."

He grins. "Well it's good to hear that you can conceive. Maybe one day he'll be a reality."

"No, he won't. Elijah would have been the father," Elena says flatly. Klaus says nothing but the smile on his face fades slightly. "In that future we're both dead and you took care of our son."

"Me?" He says in disbelief.

"You told him that if you had the chance to go back and change things you would do it in a heartbeat." She looks at him sadly, her fingers pulling at the spoon in her pocket. "I'll never see or hold him and I thought it was for the best. I had to let him go for the greater good. But now I wish that I could go back and change it to."

He stares into her eyes and she sees a gleam of sympathy there before she drives the handle of the
spoon into his heart. The blunt head of the spoon cuts open her palm but she hardly feels it. He screams and falls back, face twisting in pain and fury. For a moment she thinks he's going to lunge at her but his face begins to grow ashen and he collapses onto the floor. She stares down at him with a vicious triumph before running for the hatch.

He won't stay dead for long.
Rebekah breathes in the oxygen as deep as she can before taking the mask away. They're seated in a small cubical, a curtain giving them privacy. Rebekah had been seen straight away and treated and her condition seems to be improving. If it had been any later she would have died from asphyxiation.

"I can see you're itching to go after her and frankly it's making me sick." There is nothing derisive in her words, she's literally disgusted.

"Do you hate her that much?"

"She pretended to be my friend and then stabbed me in the back. What do you think?" Elijah gets to his feet, saying nothing. Rebekah replaces the oxygen mask and narrows her eyes at him. "But she's not the issue here, you are. You considered letting me die, your own flesh and blood. I thought you were in that bloody forest and I searched through it, breathing in that foul stuff. What a fool I must seem…for all your talk of loyalty you left us there to die. Didn't you?"

"Rebekah…" He says softly, voiced laced with pain.

"Do you deny it?" She asks and for all her anger a flare of utter betrayal is in her eyes. "Did you leave us there to save her?" His heavy silence is all the answer she needs. Rebekah nods, biting the inside her lip and turns on her side, her back to him. "Goodbye Elijah."

He stares sorrowfully at her back, torn on what to say or do. He had left them there to burn and he can not defend his decision. He will save Elena a thousand times over. Giving his sister one last regretful gaze he leaves and quickly hurries to the car. Klaus could be anywhere by now but he has faith in her.

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The plane has landed near to Waynesboro and she races across the tarmac and into the terminal. The spoon has sliced her palm open and blood splashes onto the floor. Like a bread crumb trail for him to follow…

She hurries towards an exit and out along a taxi rank before doubling back, wrapping her sweater around her injured hand. The blood should give her a head start if he does take the bait. She heads quickly towards a toilet and runs a jet of water over her hand, hissing at the flare of pain. Looking up at her reflection in the mirror she stills. Someone is writing in the condensation upon the glass:

*We know where you are. Stay put. We’ll be there shortly.*

_Finn._

Her heart soars and she looks at the door to the toilet expectantly, wondering how far away they are. Of course Finn has been monitoring their movements from the beginning. But how will they make it from Mystic Falls to here in time?

Elena creeps to the door and opens it a fraction. She is not sure how long Klaus will remain down but she prays it's long enough. Even as she thinks this she spots a roving blonde head and jerks away from the door. Steeling herself she looks again and watches with relief as Klaus follows the bloody trail and hurries out of the terminal. But her relief is short lived as she watches him ask one of the cab drivers something and the man points back the way he had come.
"Shit…" Elena looks around the cubicles but there are no makeshift weapons here. She backs away from the door when Klaus' head swings in her direction. Her options are to run from the bathroom and be caught in seconds or trust Finn on his word. Praying that Finn is as honourable as his brother she ducks into a cubicle and locks the door and stands on the seat, her arms braced on either wall. A sliver of the room beyond can be seen though the door hinge and she stares through it.

The door squeaks open and she stops breathing. There is a sigh which is followed by a light chuckle.

"I do admire that pluck, you know. All Petrova's have it, that fire. That's what drew us to her, to Tatia and I think that magic still lives on. You stabbed me with a bloody spoon. That's too ridiculous for me to stay angry about. In fact you deserve praise." He begins to clap and the noise makes her jump. He walks near to her cubicle, still clapping. "Good show my girl but the day is growing long and we have places to be."

There's a polite knock at her door and she sees his shoes below. He is mocking her and it sends a flick of fury through her fear. He will knock until he breaks the door down, until she's cowering from him. Either way she will leave this place in his custody. If that is to be her lot then she will not do it his way. Not if she has breath left. So inhaling deeply and squaring her shoulders she steps down from the seat and slips the lock back and opens the door.

"Fuck you, always and forever."

The triumphant smile on his face slips and he opens his mouth to comment but he is never given the chance. At that moment someone appears at his shoulder and Elena almost screams with joy. It's Bonnie.

"Couldn't have said it better myself." She slips a silver chain over his head before he has time to react and says a spell in a deep, commanding tone. His eyes roll back and he collapses into a heap on the floor. Elena recognises the pendant as one she used to wear, which has now bound Klaus.

"Bonnie!" She flings herself into her friend's arms and is wrapped in a fierce hug. "You're awake!" She pulls back, elated.

Bonnie nods, grinning. "I woke up last night. I've been travelling to catch up ever since." She looks down at Klaus and the smile drops. "We've finally got him."

"Good job," Finn says, coming into the room. He inclines his head to Elena and she smiles.

"Thank you. How did you get here in time? Did you drive?"

Finn's lips quirk. "The servants of nature can travel by other means." He bends down and drags Klaus into the centre of the room. "Stand back."

She and Bonnie move to the door as he says something under his breath and in a blink he and Klaus are gone.

"Woah…"

"Tell me about it."

Elena turns to Bonnie, eyes wide. "Is Elijah OK?" She hasn't seen him since last night when she fell asleep in his arms. Anything could have happened.
"He's fine. Last I checked he was driving to get here. He should reach Mystic Falls in a few days or you can wait to meet him?"

"I want to wait." A thrill of anticipation and uncertainty sweeps through her. She has no idea if giving up his mortality to save her has changed things. He may want nothing to do with her now. He did tell her that he avoids relationships with mortals and was prepared to say nothing of his feelings…

Elena pushes away these depressing thoughts and links her arm through Bonnie's. They exit the toilet and walk slowly through the terminal. She wonders about Klaus finally being captured and what may happen to him. She thinks back to Elijah's dream of a supernatural government and imagines Klaus on trial. It's ludicrous but how can they go on like this? Tyler is right, there needs to be a law in place or they'll literally get away with murder. They sit in the arrivals area. Elena has been running on a surge of adrenaline but now it leaves her shaking and weak. She asks what they plan to do with Klaus.

Bonnie takes her hand and speaks low. "For now we are keeping him locked up. He's a vampire so he can be killed, there are white oak stakes out there…but we can't."

"Why not?"

"When Kol died something strange happened. All the vampires that shared his bloodline dropped dead."

"What?" Elena stares at Bonnie in disbelief.

"Any vampires he created who then went on to create their own have died. And people have noticed. I've even seen reports of it on the news, they think someone sort of plague have struck some people down. It's crazy. Esther is trying to cover it up…"

They sit, mulling this over and then the full ramifications hit home. "Oh my god. Esther planned to kill all her children before we talked her out of it. She must have known she would be committing genocide."

Bonnie stares at her in conflict. "I think that was her ultimate plan. She spent a thousand years on the other side, unable to move on. Whenever someone died as a result of her mistake she felt their torment. She came back to put an end to it. She thought was serving the greater good by ridding the world of them."

"I understand why but I don't trust her."

Bonnie smiles strangely. "I know. She doesn't have much time left. Once we deal with Klaus she'll die."

They fall silent and watch arrivals checking in, greeting their friends and families. Bonnie stares at Elena anxiously.

"Are you OK?"

Elena nods and then shakes her head. "I can't take much more of this…" she stares through the window and watches a plane touch down. "I want to leave, just get on one of those things and fly away."

Bonnie nods in understanding and sits back with a sigh. "I could do that; just go on vacation for as long as it takes."
"Then why don't we? Once we graduate we could take a gap year." She sits up eagerly.

"Go see the world…?" Bonnie looks into the middle distance wistfully and then turns a determined gaze on Elena. "I'm up for it. Let's do it."

"Yeah? Me, you and Caroline, if she agrees."

"Please, she's been planning a trip through Europe since we were thirteen."

They smile and sit back, content in this pocket of peace and thoughts of far off places.

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The night deepens but still he has not arrived. Elena waits impatiently outside the motel room where Bonnie is talking on the phone to Caroline. Leaving her friend to explain their triumphant success Elena walks down a flight of steps and paces around the parking lot. A swimming pool shimmers in the dark, sending up ripples of light.

Before she had been nervous about what Elijah may feel for her, now that feeling has only intensified. Today has ended the best way she could have hoped but she prepares herself for disappointment. Gazing transfixed at the rippling water she does not hear the car approaching until the headlights beam over her and then die. She watches, her breath trapped in her throat as he gets out and stares at her. He is attired as he has been for the past week but his skin appears paler and his eyes flash in the dark. Or maybe it's just her imagination. He stands away from the car and then with a sudden blurring movement stands inches from her.

"Elena? Are you OK?" He gazes at her intensely, his eyes roving over her face. She has felt an intense magnetic pull between them but it has never been as strong as in this moment. The need to touch is almost as strong as the need to resist.

"I'm alive…how are you?"

"Dead," he quips but if he is aiming for humour he misses his mark. Elena's face crumples and he suddenly closes the distance between them and wraps his arms around her. She pulls her head back to speak but his lips claim hers and he kisses her fiercely. Her mouth parts under his and she moans when she feels a wall at her back. She hadn't even felt them move. Elijah breaks away from her and she pants for air.

"I wasn't sure if that would happen again," she says with a shaking laugh.

"Why?"

Her smile falls. "You know why."

He stares into her eyes deeply before nodding and stepping back. "I'm sorry. I'm just relieved that you're safe." There's a formality to his words that Elena does not like. She reaches forward to touch his face.

"You don't need to apologise. The only reason I'm even standing here is because of you. You saved my life at the cost of your own."

His lips quirk at her sombre tone and he takes her hand in his. "Not such a cost. I think we both knew deep down that it wouldn't last. I've had a thousand years to come to terms with what I am and that doesn't just disappear overnight. I'm just thankful I got to spend the little time I had as a human with you."
She stares down at their clasped hands. "Me to…" She looks up and catches a flare of torment in his eyes and she tilts her head. "What's wrong?"

"Kol is dead and Rebekah will never speak to me again and it's my fault." He stares down into the water below with a self-loathing that he has been harbouring for hours.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean I'm a hypocrite. I talk about the value of my family and how important they are to me but when the time came I left them to die." His voice is gruff and he keeps his eyes fixed on the water below.

Elena shakes her head and makes him sit down in the edge of a deck chair while she takes one opposite. "That's not true. You could have died if you stayed."

"No, Elena, I would not have. I am impervious to fire and the werewolves were retreating. I could have saved them but I chose not to." He looks back at her, his face drawn and angry. "Rebekah is still human but that didn't stop her from heading back into the forest to look for me. She almost died and I would have ignored it for your sake."

The elation at their meeting drips away as she listens and the doubts she had before return in full force. "You regret saving me."

He stares at her suddenly. "I will never regret that." He leans forward and kisses her forehead, one hand sliding through her hair to cup the back of her head. "My feelings for you have not changed."

"Maybe…You've always made it clear that your family comes before anything and the choice you made will eat you up inside. If I was in your position and I left Jeremy…" she gazes at him in sympathy and understanding. "I don't hold it against you."

Elijah stares at her lightly, his abhorrence passing. "I think you underestimate how important you are…But I do not deserve your sympathy. You've called me a noble man in the past and it is something I have strived to be. But truthfully I'll never attain it. I think I am more upset that I failed my own test of honour then the fact Kol is dead. For most of my life I have never had a family as you think of one, never loved anyone as I do you. I had this idea of what my family could be but in reality it was a failure, a simulacrum of what we once were. We could never be like that again…I knew that. What I truly held onto was my own inflated sense of worth. That's what I've lost."

Elena stares at him sorrowfully. "Elijah you can't really believe that?"

He nods with a small smile. "I do. I'm telling you the truth and I do not want your pity. It served me well, those ideals, even if it was in pretence. It kept me in control and gained others respect. But I do not want you to labour under false pretences. I am a vampire and I will always fall short of the grace you seem to have in abundance."

Elena has listened to him in silence, her sorrow turning to something firmer. "I've never thought you were perfect and I seem to recall you telling me that I was no paragon. Right now you're hurting and that pain is turning inwards. I understand and I've lived through it. You might think I'm delusional but I do believe you're a good man, vampire or not. Those values that you have are not an act; no more then they are for me. They're concepts, not set in stone and anyone can fall short. You screw up and disappoint yourself? Get over it and try harder. You're feeling let down and pissed off and that's OK."

If she had said this to anyone else she would have offended them but not Elijah. A smile curls over
his mouth and he regards her softly. "Out of the mouth of babes..." He sighs and leans back, moving to sit with his legs crossed. He stares at her for a long time before laughing darkly. "I hate brooding, it's such a cliché, and now it seems I can do nothing but. How embarrassing..."

Elena manages a smile and comes to kneel on his chair, hands resting on his knees. "Brood all you like. Just know that my feelings haven't changed either. I love you." It is the first time she has spoken the words aloud and he gazes at her deeply, well aware of the significance of the admittance. Before there had been a part of her that held back but no longer.

She blinks, tiredly and he leans forward and runs a finger down her nose. "There is one advantage of being a vampire again. We can share dreams..."

"I know. In one of the futures we do it. I think that's how you helped me write my book." Her story is now sounding even more probable.

Elijah smiles suggestively. "And when would you like to get started?"

"Not yet. I told you that I want to travel and go to college. In fact, once I've graduated, I'm going on a long vacation." It feels good to say it aloud and a sparkle of exhilaration ignites in her stomach. After the stress of the last few hours it's a relief she can get excited for something.

"You are?"

She nods and tells him about the trip she, Bonnie and Caroline plan after they graduate. For the first time since he arrived a truly happy smile lights up his face.

"That's good to hear. Well let me know when you leave, I have a number of estates you could all stay at."

"I wouldn't be adverse to you popping up now and then." She leans forward, her hair falling around him as she grazes her lips against his. Elijah grips her hips and she straddles him, her arms twisting around his shoulders and kisses him passionately.
The council takes place in the Mikaelson Mansion and people take their seats around a shining mahogany table. At the sight of Elena the Salvatores crowd around her, offering equal parts scorn at eloping and relief at her safety. She reassures a particularly worried Stefan that she is fine and joins Elijah at the table. They regard her openly affectionate behaviour towards the Original with a stunned silence. Elena feels a stab of relief to see Tyler and Bill Forbes there, sitting between Caroline. The majority of the Founder's Council are also in attendance.

"Thank you for agreeing to come."

Esther sits at the head of the table and surveys everyone around it calmly. She is pale and dark circles ring her eyes. Bonnie had awoken vigorous with life but Esther seems to be withering away before their eyes. There is an air of grief around the woman. She retains an unruffled exterior but pain shines through sharply, like light spilling through cracks.

"You're welcome," Damon says with a smirk. "Now will someone explain what's going on?" He asks, looking at the faces around the table. Elijah is the one to speak up.

"For some time I have harboured a desire to set up a committee, similar to the one that you have in this town." He looks at the older generation before continuing. "What I propose is a little different. I want an agreement between supernatural species and humans. We will sign a treaty to work together to ensure all our safety, as well as our ongoing good faith and anonymity."

"It will never work." Rebekah scoffs and shakes her head. She had to be persuaded to attend by Finn, as she is still not talking to Elijah.

"But it must," says Esther quietly and they turn to look at her. "Magic is the reason that half of you sit at this table. My mistake lead to the creation of vampires and that act had enormous repercussions that have spread throughout the years. Witches pose as much of a threat as vampires, more even because we wield unimaginable power and, for a number of reasons, we can be swayed. We hold the balance of nature in our hands and it is imperative that we do not overstep it. The servants of nature need to begin and maintain commune."

Elena frowns at her. "You're talking about setting up some sort of government for witches? Separate from what Elijah is talking about?"

Esther nods. "Yes but we will work in partnership. Please be aware that all this is conjecture at this point. Bonnie, Abby and Finn will have to get enough witches to agree and form a coven like none other…"

There is muttering from around the table as they discuss this and Elena turns to Elijah. "If this really works it could change the world."

"I know…" Since his loss of self worth he seems to have taken her words to heart and now works to make his ideas a reality with a limitless drive. Everyone looks up when Tyler stands and clears his throat.

"A council sounds like a good idea but what about hybrids? Are we going to be hunted down for something we didn't want? We have as much right to live as you do and I don't give rat's ass about balance."

Esher manages a smile. "All supernatural beings will be welcome, if they agree to uphold the
terms. The compulsion that Klaus held over you is now gone. You are free, as are your kin. You have an advantage over vampires in that you can control the need to feed, thanks to your werewolf side. There is a balance in you…” She turns to Damon and Stefan. "Vampires are averse to the sun but witches can make rings for them. Before these rings were handed over but now a price will be asked."

"What price?" Stefan asks with a frown.

"If a vampire wishes to have a ring then they must face the consequences of their actions. The ring will record a vampire's misdeeds and they will be punished for it."

"And how do you measure a 'misdeed'?" Damon asks dryly and Esther turns a sharp smile on him.

"A vampire craves blood and will hunt and kill to acquire it. This is almost unavoidable for a young vampire but with perseverance they can control that hunger. If this proves to be unattainable and they continue to kill indiscriminately -"

"Become a ripper you mean?" Stefan asks flatly and Elena stiffens.

"Yes. I am aware of your past and your ongoing struggle. But if you had worn a ring I propose then the council would take action. They would stake you." She clarifies simply and Stefan nods, looking down at his ring.

"What will witches get out of it?" Elena asks. As much as they proclaim to be balanced and serve nature freely there must be something more in it for them.

"Blood, for one." answers Esther. "Vampires, for all the torment and pain of their condition do have that miraculous property within them. We ask that they offer some in exchange for assistance."

Meredith Fell, who Elena has learned is a doctor, listens to this with a hungry, albeit sceptical, expression. "And vampires will just do this willingly?"

"I've been doing it for years," Elijah answers. "But we are also in the process of negotiating a salary. So there is that incentive." Elijah smiles at the doctor and she looks away, troubled.

"The rings, the blood…Will this be forced on us?" Caroline asks worriedly.

"No," says Elijah, "only those who agree to this treaty. You'll be fully briefed on what will happen if you do agree. Those who already have a ring…” he shrugs, "it's up to you."

Again the table falls silent to think this over. A door at the back of the room opens and Finn and Bonnie enter with Klaus between them. The muttering stops and every pair of eyes watches them approach until they stop at Esther's side.

Klaus smiles at his mother. "Nice to see you up and about mum. I would have sent flowers but I was a bit busy."

Esther ignores him and turns back to the table. "The second piece of business concerns my son here. You are aware that I turned my children human but even that failed for the most part." She eyes a sullen Rebekah before continuing. "We can not kill Klaus, not without killing all those who carry his blood."

Elena sits upright with a frown. "But that was your original intention."
"It was. I was not completely forthcoming with you. I apologise for that."

"What a surprise," Klaus says and looks at Elijah who averts his gaze.

"I thought I had created monsters and wanted to correct my mistake but that was easier said then done…” she falls silent for a moment, looking pained. "I took their life away from them and I decided to give them another chance to live. My original plan succeeds in one area: Kol's death and the rest of his bloodline." A massive amount of pain wells up in her eyes and like Elijah she turns her face away.

Tyler sits up with a jerk. "Bloodline?"

"It was my intention to bring about the death of all vampires. Why would I kill five of you but leave thousands of vampires to walk the earth and create more?"

Carol Lockwood blinks at the ramifications. "The vampires that Kol sired who went on to create more are now dead?"

"Yes, hundreds upon hundreds. It has taken most of my strength to hide this from unwanted eyes..."

"Holy crap," Caroline whispers in shock. She looks at the Originals sharply. "Whose bloodline am I from?"

"Mine," Elijah answers softly, mind stretching back centuries, "I sired Rosemarie." The Salvatores look at him in a new light and Damon clears his throat and shifts in his seat. Probably thinking of his numerous attempts to kill Elijah…

Elena stares at Esther. "You can't kill Klaus because killing him would kill others. Tyler was sired by him…” She looks at the stunned looking hybrid.

Esther nods. "I only have a short time left here so excuse me if this comes across as blunt. Klaus," she turns and looks him square in the eye. "I do love you and I have always loved you but the threat you pose it too great."

Klaus tilts his head warily. "I'm no longer a hybrid, so I can't create them. Elijah informed me of the apocalyptic future that I help to manifest. I have no wish to upset the balance. I'll leave this place and never come back if that's what you want?"

Elijah narrows his eyes at him. "You only have to kill to trigger your werewolf gene. You will become a hybrid sooner or later."

Esther nods in agreement. "Can you deny that you would create more hybrids? That you will kill the only werewolves that remain, turning them against their will until there is none left, skewing the balance of nature in the process? That you will make Elena conceive by any means necessary to continue the Petrova bloodline?"

Elijah stiffens and Elena feels his fingers brushing her knee. She takes his hand.

"Would it make any difference if I say I won't? No? Thought not. This council is a joke." Klaus drags his tongue over his teeth and rolls his eyes upwards in thought before fixing Elena with a stare. "You know all your worries could be avoided if you just take one thing out of this equation: Elena Gilbert. You don't even have to kill her; just turn her into a vampire. I'm sure Elijah would love that."
"If that happens you won't be able to create your precious hybrids." Stefan says with a dangerous smile.

Klaus matches it with one of his own. "It's either her or me." He turns to Esther. "You'll choose her over your own flesh and blood?" For all his flippancy there is hurt in his eyes.

"Do not think I do this lightly Niklaus but my wants and needs do not matter. The greater good must be served. That future can not happen and we must take every precaution to ensure that. Do you all agree?" She looks around the room and everyone but Rebekah raises their hands.

"I will not be part of this. I will not condemn my brother for something he has not done." She looks at Klaus, her gaze hard. "Do not think I have forgiven you. Like Elijah you didn't care if I lived or died, not when I'm a pathetic human. What use am I to you now?" She gets to her feet and stares at each of those gathered with disgust. "You should all be ashamed, especially you," she glares at her mother, "we're your family and you plotted to kill us. We loved you."

Esther stares at her only daughter with teary eyes. "It was a grave mistake."

"But it was your intent none the less. I wash my hands of all of you." She walks to the door, flings them open and strides out. The Mikaelson's who remain watch her leave with tormented expressions.

"This is not an easy decision but it must be done. You can not be allowed to jeopardise the balance." Esther looks up at Klaus, her voice low but firm.

Klaus sighs in disgust and looks at Bonnie. "Just stake me already so I don't have to hear her pontificating."

Bonnie smirks at him. "I wish."

"I think it fitting that you lie in a box for the rest of eternity with a dagger in your heart." Finn says and pushes him back towards the door. Elena and Elijah watch Bonnie go with matching worried expressions. She had requested that she be the one to dagger him but to do it alone. Every precaution has been taken but they are concerned for her.

"Do you think it will work?"

"I hope she doesn't have to find out…" He stares at the closed door, a frown line between his brows.

Bonnie closes the door and seals it with a spell. The windows are similarly locked. She turns to find him grinning at her, his hands behind his back. The chain around his neck keeps him from escaping but she still has to be careful. An open casket stands waiting, a pentagram etched onto the floor below. He stops but does not enter.

"Us in the same room, is it worth the risk?"

"There is no risk." Finn waits outside, ready to rush in if she gives the signal but hopefully she will not have to. Bonnie comes forward and pushes him into the centre of the pentagram. Once there he does not move.

He tilts his head. "But there was? I do something to upset the balance?" He seems genuinely curious and not at all distressed that he's about to be daggered. Bonnie decides to humour him. For all her mistrust she does feel a morbid kinship. In one future they would have destroyed the world
"In another timeline you would have become a hybrid again and I tried to suppress your werewolf side." She explains how he switched his blood for her own. "Beforehand you had bitten me and that's how you got my blood. I think you knew what I planned to do..." She will bet anything that he knew about the Elixir and destroyed it in that timeline. Now she is fortunate...

"But I only wanted to stop you from channelling. I'm guessing something on your end went wrong?"

Bonnie says nothing for a long time, going around the pentagram to look for gaps. Her voice is low when she speaks. "I was only meant to suppress your werewolf side but I thought why stop there? I channelled your mother and through her all witches. I wanted to suppress all the hybrids that you had created. The power..." she falls silent, shaking at the memory. She had not felt it but the image of her in a state of ecstasy was not something she will ever forget. "I realised that I had blocked channelling and tried to stop but I couldn't. I contained it long enough for some people to escape and then...the magic imploded."

"And destroyed Mystic Falls. You played god and condemned the world to a slow end," Klaus says when she comes to stand before him. He looks at her in an almost sensual way. "I feel, in light of this, that we've grown intimate. Come on love, think of what we could accomplish if we combine our strengths."

"You're insane," Bonnie scoffs and takes a small bottle and dagger from a shelf. Klaus watches her fiercely, all traces of humour gone as she covers the blade in ash. She comes back to him, dagger in her hand and gestures at the coffin. "You can get in yourself or I can make you."

"I'd like to see you try..." Even now, with his fate almost decided, he remains arrogant.

She steps into the pentagram, her eyes fixed to his. This is it. Death is in the room, hovering by their shoulders. While in her coma this outcome had always been there, haunting her dreams. It is inevitable but she also knows that she will escape her death. She knows what will happen next, has been prepared for it but now that the time has come she feels a shudder of fear. But she does not let him see it. She stops close to him, dagger clutched in her hand and waits for him to strike. It is the only way to stop him.

"I'm sorry love but I can't let a thousand years of work be foiled by you." He strikes forward and Bonnie lunges but he pivots her around, grabbing her arm and with a hard thrust stabs her with the dagger. Bonnie falls into his arms and he scoops her up before laying her down into the coffin gently.

"Y - you stabbed me...?" Surprise courses through her, more then pain. In all her dreams he bites and drains her. But the future is not set in stone, she knows that.

"I'll stay until you're gone," he offers gently.

"You'll become a hybrid," she chokes out, unable to look away from the bloody dagger he holds.

"I'm sorry it had to end like this but it always seems to come down to the two of us, doesn't it?" His tone is tender and Bonnie reaches for him but her hand falls back. Her eyelids begin to grow heavy and her vision fades. The light sinks, growing ever dimmer and her last thought is that he's closing the lid on her.

As her heart ceases to beat he closes the coffin and then immediately slumps over it as his
werewolf gene triggers into life. Grinning through the pain he stands and makes his way to the door. At the edge of the salt line he toes it and feels a slight resistance. He tries again and his foot slides through.

"Thank you Bonnie…"

His body changing at a miniscule level he walks to the door and twists the handle. As he does he feels something invisible hook into his head and tug him back. Wincing he looks down and sees that he's still wearing his mother's old necklace, the one that had kept him bound and unable to move a few feet from his captors. He rips it over his head and a lighting bolt of agony shoots through his brain and his knees buckle. Holding onto the door for support he stares in confusion, wondering what is happening to him when a creaking noise cuts through the silence. Klaus turns and his jaw drops. Bonnie stands there, her clothes drenched in blood and the coffin is wide open. Her blood is still fresh, he can smell it but it is not the sharp smell that his werewolf heritage gives him.

For some reason he is lowly changing back into a vampire.

"What – what have you done?" He stumbles weakly towards her, lifting the dagger but his strength diminishes with every second. Bonnie grabs him and drags him back to the coffin. He tries to flight her off but he is as weak as a kitten.

"You forgot about the Elixir. I died but not long enough for the transformation to be completed. Right now I'm draining your life force to supplement my own. Killing me sealed your fate. Balance…" She whispers, mocking his accent.

It's true. Every second he grows weaker she becomes stronger. Bumping into the coffin, he looks up at her in bewilderment, his heart beating feebly. "Pl – please…please."

Bonnie stares into his eyes and is moved despite herself. "I'm sorry but you bought this on yourself."

She slips the dagger from his weak grip, coats it in ash and plunges it into his heart. Klaus falls back and Bonnie goes with him, helping him into the coffin. She watches him grow ashen and lifeless. In his hand is the pendant, binding him to the coffin, so even if he should wake he will not be able to escape.

Bonnie shakes as she lowers the lid, a rush of his strange life running through her. After every large spell she would feel at the point of death, now she vibrates with energy. Magic demands a balance: his life for hers but what existence is she taking? With a certainty that borders on premonition she knows that she will live a very, very long life.

"Bonnie?"

Someone moves behind her and she turns. Esther staggers into the room and falls to her knees. Bonnie darts forward and helps her to sit upright. Esther's nose is bleeding and she shakes with every laboured breath. For all the women's duplicity to see her in such a state sends an arrow of distress through Bonnie. They had seen and experienced much in the dreamscape.

"I did it, he's gone."

"I knew you could. You are a wonderful witch..." Her voice is weak but the pride rings clear.

"Is this it?" She sadly asks and Esther nods. She does not appear scared but looks on with a palpable relief. Someone appears at the door and Bonnie looks up to see Elena, Elijah, Abby and
Finn.

"This is the time. Bonnie you will have a lot of work to do and we have both seen what you can accomplish. I pray that it will work." She looks at her remaining children and smiles. "I hope you can forgive me...one day." The hand in Bonnie's grows weak and falls to the ground. Esther closes her eyes and does not open them again.

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Time passes, the spring giving way to summer.

Elena graduates from school and spends time repairing the relationship with her brother. Telling him the truth about compelling him to leave had driven Jeremy away and for months he would not speak to her. It is only now that he seems to have forgiven her but that abuse of his will is not something that disappears even with forgiveness. But at least they talk.

The same can not be said for Elijah and Rebekah. Scorned at what has transpired she has not returned and cut all her ties. The sibling that he still has a relationship with is Finn, but he is hardly around anymore, focusing his energy on forming an alliance with other witches. Damon and Stefan left months ago but she still gets postcards from them from time to time. It gladdens her greatly that they have mended their bond, something that would have been impossible if she had chosen either one of them. Thinking of it now seems like it happened in another life, to another girl. Those old loves are gone, the threats captured and she has never felt so liberated and she is not alone. Klaus safely contained Elijah turns his vast recourses and time to a venture he has always dreamed of. But it keeps him away from Mystic Falls, from Elena...

One warm summer's day Elena packs the last of her possessions that she needs into a suitcase and carries it down the stairs. She locks the door and stands out on the sunny porch. The vacation she has desired is finally a reality and she lifts her face up to the sun, eyes closed as she is bathed with warmth. The last few years have been hectic but she feels that she can truly relax now, stop worrying about what terrible thing may await her around the corner. That is no way to lead a life and she does not intend to. She opens her eyes and blinks away sun spots to see a familiar shape at the bottom of the garden path.

"You looked so peaceful I didn't want to interrupt." Elijah stops at the bottom her porch and smiles lightly up at her. Gone are the jeans and plaid shirts but so are the ties and sever black suits. The arms are rolled up on his blue shirt and his hair looks windblown. He looks faultless, as always but truly at ease with himself. It no longer looks like he's wearing his clothes like a suit of armour.

"You have my permission to interrupt." She toes the top step and leans her body close to him. "I've missed you."

"As I've missed you. Although, it looks like you're planning an elopement." He eyes the suitcases and then looks back at her with a smirk.

"You know I'm leaving today."

"Yes, first stop London where you will meet up with the Bennett's and Finn...I was going to surprise you there but I couldn't stay away." He twines a strand of her hair around his fingers, the air around them crackling with tension, when a car pulls up and Caroline honks her horn.

"Come on Elena! I wait for no man or vampire."

Elijah stares at her and she knows that he will hold onto this desire until he sees her again. Elena grabs his loose tie and tugs him forward and their lips press together. She kisses him goodbye until
he begins to growl into her mouth, his hands pulling at her clothes and she breaks away.

"Hold onto that until we meet again." She grazes her lips against his and then steps back for her bags. Any longer and she will not be responsible for her actions. He carries her luggage for her, a gleam in his eye that promises that when they do meet again she will never forget it.
The Château overlooks the Bay of Biscay and a private beach is only a ten minute walk away. When Elijah had invited them to stay at a few of his "estates" none of them had been fully prepared for what awaited them. "It's a palace...another one." Caroline whispers in awe, staring up at the turrets and the many shining windows. The Château had been built in the 17th century and it gives Elena a great thrill to realise that he would have walked down these same corridors then. She had even spotted a few portraits of him throughout the estates, stretching back from the 14th century, documenting his long journey though the past millennium. His appearance would change slightly to avoid suspicion but it was unmistakably Elijah. It makes her feel very young, her eighteen years on this earth a drop in the ocean compared to him.

It was seeing these immense properties that he has scattered across the globe that really drove home just how incredibly wealthy and well travelled he is. The thought of him or any of his family staying in a tiny town like Mystic Falls is completely ridiculous. This is where he belongs. Elena is just content to see these places and not trouble herself with questions of where she belongs. This summer Elena and her friends will enjoy this luxury because they have deserved it.

A warm summer breeze blows off the ocean, making the candles flicker and a low folksy tune issues from an old radio. Elena, sitting comfortably with a glass of wine, says goodnight to her friends who head up to bed. They had spent much of the day sight seeing and even Caroline is exhausted. Bonnie, who has trouble sleeping, is almost asleep on her feet. It's a good tired, the sort that comes from a day well spent. Tomorrow they will pack up and head for Venice, where a container of fresh blood will be waiting for Caroline.

Maybe I will see him there…?

The thought has plagued her from time to time when she finds herself alone, especially at night. She misses him. He had promised to meet up with them when he has some free time but so far he has been absent. Not that she begrudges it, since proposing the treaty Elijah has been searching the world for like minded vampires and he has confided in a few letters that it seems to be going as well as can be expected. Finn and Abby have been likewise travelling and plan to broaden their search if they get enough witches to agree to form a united coven. Elena and Caroline had met up with Bonnie in London who had been enthusiastic if tired.

Elena places her glass on the table and reaches for a pad and pen, quietly jotting down ideas when something crunches on the gravel behind her.

"Bonsoir, mademoiselle."

His accent is so impeccable that she doesn't realise who it is until she turns around. She jumps to her feet with a laugh and Elijah pulls her into his arms. He lowers his face into her hair and inhales deeply and then pulls back to gaze at her adoringly.

"Bonjour, monsieur," Elena says with a joyful gleam in her eye. She runs her hands through his hair and pulls him down to her lips. Her mouth parts under his and he tastes wine and sugar on her tongue. They kiss as the sun fades below the horizon, only breaking apart when she feels the lip of
the table at her thigh. Elena pulls herself up to sit on the table and he slips between her open legs, placing an arm either side of her.

"I've missed you…" He kisses a line from her jaw down her neck and Elena's head falls back, offering her throat to him. He has never bitten her and she doesn't think he would even if she offered. Right now she feels like she is up for anything. He once confided that he is no monk; well she is no nun. Tired of waiting she wants to prove that right now.

"We should go upstairs. Unless you're an exhibitionist?"

He pulls back from kissing her chest and shrugs. "There was a phase…" he lifts her up and Elena wraps her legs around him. With a speed that can not be processed he moves from the terrace to her bedroom, which is thankfully in a separate wing from her friends. He kicks the door closed behind them and gathers her into his arms where they kiss with a furious intensity, a passion that builds and builds. He kisses her throat and she can feel his teeth against her skin. She moans with a thrill.

"Elijah…"

"You're certain?" He looks with trepidation into her eyes, meeting a gaze hot with lust and certainty.

"Yes. Right now I am. I am." Hearing those breathless words coming out of her mouth sends an intense shiver through her. She has said those words before, in an intimate moment that never was.

He blinks at the spooked look on her face. "What is it?"

"Nothing," she shakes her head with a smile, "just déjà vu." She leans up to brush her lips against his and he moves them forward until her back touches solid wood. She gazes up at him coyly. "This time you can undress me."

He offers her a crooked smile. Braced against a pillar of a four-poster bed he reaches down and hitches up her dress. She lifts her arms and he pulls the dress up and away. His hands glide up her waist and around her back where he deftly unclasps her bra and she lets it fall to the ground. As soon as she is bare he lifts her and deposits her onto the edge of the bed. She plucks at the shirt he still wears and undoes the buttons quickly. She had imagined the first time being a slow affair, letting the tension build and savouring it. But the wait has proved too long, even for patient Elijah and she just wants to feel him within her.

With a speed too quick for the human eye to follow he undresses and leans over her. Elena lies flat, breathing heavily and watches him reach under her hips and pull her underwear down her legs. Naked and needy she spreads her legs and pulls him down to her open mouth. They kiss long and deep as she lets her hands roam over his firm chest and further down to the hard length that presses against her thigh. After a moments hesitation she grasps him in hand and he stiffens, pulling away from her mouth.

"How long can you last?" Vampires have more stamina then humans and he's an Original. Who knows what he's capable of?

His lips quirk but his voice hitches. "For a substantial time…and also for as long as you need."

She leans up on an elbow, stroking him faster and he grunts, the hand taking his weight fistig the sheet below. Elena stops and pushes a hand against his chest, directing him to lie back in the bed. Once resting against the many pillows she kneels between his legs and carries on her administrations, adding her mouth and tongue to pleasure him. Elijah threads his fingers through
her hair, watching her head bob up and down until he groans out her name.

Elena looks up at him, her eyes dark and hot and moves up to straddle him. He grips her hips as she hovers over him. She leans down and kisses him softly and then touches her forehead to his as she lowers herself down around him. Eyes never breaking contact he pushes into her gently, watching her face for any signs of pain but she smiles at him. She's wet and he slides in as deep as he can. She sits up and rocks back, rolling her hips and he lets her set up a rhythm she's comfortable with before thrusting up to meet her. He cups her breast while the other holds her hip, trying not to grip her too tight and she lowers to kiss him again. She gasps into his mouth when his fingers find the sensitive hood between her legs and begins to rub. With a throaty groan Elena arches back, her hair brushing against his knees and rides him with abandon.

"Tell me when you're close," he breathes, sitting up and Elena wraps her arms around his neck, burying her hands in his hair. He kisses and nips at her throat, groaning and whispering her name as she grinds down on him. Suddenly she finds herself on her back and Elijah leans over her. She brings her legs back and he hooks one of them over his arm and pushes into her slowly at first, driving her crazy. She clenches around his cock while the other holds her hip, trying not to grip her too tight and she lowers to kiss him again. She gasps into his mouth when his fingers find the sensitive hood between her legs and begins to rub. With a throaty groan Elena arches back, her hair brushing against his knees and rides him with abandon.

"Think you can do it again?"

"We'll see..." He wraps his arms around her chest, grasping her hands in his so she can't take matters into her own hands and begins pounding into her, making the bed shake. The change of position, like last time, is an immediate improvement. It feels like he moulded just for her, knows the right place and within seconds she is gasping as the peak of her orgasm rises like waves. She grounds the back of her head into his shoulder and screams out his name repeatedly like a mantra as she climaxes, milking the length of him. The orgasm is so intense and all consuming that she barely feels the graze of his teeth against her shoulder as he comes deep inside her, breathing out words in a dead language.

He thrusts lazily into her sated body before pulling out and feeling that he's still hard she rubs back against him. The arms around her tighten and feeling his lips against her throat she turns to her head to look at him. His eyes glisten darkly, completely black and there's a flash of sharp teeth before he regains control. She has a faint memory of seeing that face as she lay dying but then it had been a matter of necessity now it is a loss of control. A part of her feels a deep seeded satisfaction that his composure shatters and comes apart at this act, it makes him strangely vulnerable. She rolls over and places a hand against the side of his face and kisses him softly.

"I'm sorry you had to see that."

"Why? I know what you are, what you look like and it doesn't faze me. Does it always happen when you do this?"

"Sometimes..." he trails his hand down her chest, brushing his fingertips around her areola. A flame of arousal flares up but she blinks tiredly at the clothe canopy above, trying to keep her eyes open. Elijah smiles and turns her face back to him. "Go to sleep, I have something I want to show you."

*His dreams.* A spike of excitement shoots through her and she squirms in his arms. "I'll never sleep now."
Still smiling he nuzzles against her cheek and she closes her eyes, trying to deepen her breathing. For all her protesting she is asleep within a matter of moments.

Music, laughter and the clatter of feet on wood is the first thing that she becomes aware of. Every sound is distinct, from the pluck of strings to the beat of someone's heart and the more she concentrates the clearer and more magnified the sounds become. Threatening to overwhelm she is brought back to herself when a voice whispers into her ear.

"The year is 1814. Mad King George is on the throne but his son acts as Prince Regent. Napoleon has been exiled to Elba…and Austen published *Pride and Prejudice* last year."

The sound of his voice draws her mind away from the mummeration of sound around her and she turns to Elijah in wonder. She could count every eyelash, every strand of hair and drown in the warmth of his dark eyes. Just as her hearing seems to be magnified so does her vision.

"This is amazing. The sounds, the smells…" A jug of lemonade and a pot of tea stand on a trestle table where thinly sliced pieces of bread are neatly laid out on platters. The aroma of candle wax and lemonade is intoxicating. She turns back to Elijah who stands surveying her calmly, out of place in his very modern suit and haircut.

"This is my dream, my *memory* and you are reliving the world as I saw, heard and smelt it."

"As a vampire?" She looks around at the simple supper room they stand in, at the flicker of flames on the wick. She can almost hear the crackle and feel the heat of those diminutive fires from across the room. She feels like a hyperactive child, attention drawn from one shiny thing to another. "I know that your senses are heightened but I never guessed it was like this. It's unbelievable."

"Come on, dance is this way." Elijah takes her by the hand and leads her from the room to a corridor. Portraits line the walls and Elena has to employ all her self restraint not to stand there and stare at every brush stroke of colour. The detail is astounding.

"Are you sure this is a dream? Because mine never look as solid as this."

"This is all from my recollection. I'm quite…attentive to detail, even for someone like me."

"Understatement. Wow…"

They head closer to the music and suddenly Elena finds herself standing amongst dancing people. Couples twirl around each other and break apart, forming into lines of opposite gender. Voluminous dresses swish against the floor and numerous fans flick in the humid air. A small band plays the corner, like at the ball she had attended but these people are far more skilled and the dancers move to the music with an easy confidence. One of the guests seems to draw much attention and Elena sees with a shock that it's Rebekah, looking beautiful in a pale ivory dress. Men crowd around her and she hides a coy smile behind a fan. Beside her is a bored looking Elijah, dressed like Mr Darcy.

"Elijah, this is so weird. I can't believe I'm actually standing here watching this…" she looks on with an obvious pleasure and he smiles. She turns to him and gazes up into his eyes. "Thank you. I could do this every night."

His smiles suggestively and pulls her closer. "I would be very willing. There are many more eras to choose from."

She looks around the room again, feeling not a little greedy at the prospect that she now has the
opportunity to experience the last millennium. As this excitement passes through her a thought is
birthed, growing powerful and grasping. She looks back at him, her smile cautious.

"There is something I'd like to see. Someone…"

His eyes, once warm and open, grow guarded. "Tatia?"

"If it's too strange then it's OK. I - "

He places a finger to her lips and the room around them begins to fade, the music growing hushed
and echoing. Elena blinks and then finds herself standing on the edge of a meadow. High grasses
sway in the breeze and a few clouds drift across a blue sky. Strangely the scenery is subdued in
comparison to the dancing rooms back in London. The green of the grass should be vibrant and the
blue of the sky rich and deep but it is normal.

"I only have a few complete memories of this time and this is one of the most vivid." Elijah speaks
beside her and she looks up at him enquiringly.

"This is when you were human?"

"The first time," he responds with a slight smirk but then grows alert when the pounding of hooves
fills their ears. Wild horses crest a hill and come galloping into the meadow. Elena gasps and steps
back as they charge past. She can't be harmed but the raw power of the herd can be felt even in a
dream. Delighted at the sight but also a little confused she opens her mouth to ask Elijah about
them when something catches her eye.

Someone is riding one of the horses. Long dark hair streams out from behind her and even from
this distance Elena can see the exhilarated grin on her face. Tatia is riding a horse bare back and
loving every second of it.

"Oh she'll get in trouble now…" a voice, clearly Rebekah's, says from behind them and Elena turns
to her. She is accompanied by a small brown haired boy who looks about three. At the sight of him
Elena feels her stomach turn over. For a second she thought it was Grayson but on closer inspection
this boy is different. But they could be brothers. Elena eyes Elijah sharply but he looks ahead
impassively.

Rebekah is younger, appearing to be sixteen or so. She watches Tatia nervously as the horses turn
and run back. Tatia straightens when she catches sight of the blonde girl and boy and begins to
wave enthusiastically. The boy waves back, very over excited.

"Bekka! Look I've done it!"

"Get off that thing you crazy idiot! You'll break your neck!" Even as she shouts this there is a
keyed up smile wobbling on her lips. She's clearly impressed. As is Elena, who would have to be
very drunk to even consider doing such a stunt. Tatia attempts to slow the horse down, which
seems to be working as best it can with a wild animal, when someone walks past Elena and into the
field. Her eyes widen.

"It's you! Look at your hair…" The human Elijah with shoulder length hair approaches the now
stopped horse slowly. The horse stamps at the grass threateningly and he stops before lunging
forward. He wraps an arm around Tatia's waist and drags her off the horse. Now without a rider the
beast dashes away. Elena moves closer, getting a better look at her copy. Identical except she's
possibly a little older. But there is a fiery, mischievous air around her that makes her look younger.
Finally seeing her in the flesh is bizarre as it was to see Katherine but this is different. She had
expected to witness something otherworldly but for all her spirit there's nothing odd about Tatia, nothing that marks her strange legacy. She's just a bored, reckless teenager.

"Why did you do that? It took me days to tame it." Tatia shouts, pushing him away.

"Tame it? It was just waiting to come across a nice ravine or river to buck you into." He does not shout, his voice is low but it is laced with disappointment. The fire in Tatia's gaze fades. Elijah shakes his head and sighs. "If you're so determined on getting yourself killed by pulling these reckless stunts and won't listen to reason then by all means do so," he leans close, eyes becoming hard, "just don't involve my son or my sister."

Tatia manages a smile but she looks humbled. "You fear that I am a bad influence?"

"I fear that one day I won't be there to drag you from danger. You're only human Tatia…" He stares at her softly and seeing the sad gleam of her eyes bends down and kisses her forehead once. Elijah picks his son up and carries him away, ushering Rebekah to follow. Once they have disappeared into the trees Tatia stares in contemplation before she fades from sight. Standing in the empty meadow again Elena turns to Elijah.

"She was wild."

"At first. Soon after this she was married and had a child. Her husband died some years after that…"

Elena looks back through the trees, trying to catch some glimmers of them but the wood is empty. She regards Elijah softly, head tilted to the side.

"Your son, what was his name?"

"Ivan…" he speaks softly and Elena thinks that is all he will divulge when he speaks again, his eyes fixed ahead. "When we were turned into vampires half the village was killed. Mostly by Mikael but we all played a part. I managed to spare my son that…Tatia left with her daughter and Ayanna the witch. My son went with them."

"So he lived?"

"To an old age. He had a family and to this day I can still trace their ancestry back to me." He smiles softly, a nostalgia shining in his brown eyes. But when he looks at Elena his gaze is heavy with sadness. "There are advantages to being a vampire but I was a father and I never got to watch him grow up, not as I should have."

Elena moves into his arms, holding him close. She brushes her cheek against his. "I'm sorry; I shouldn't have asked to see her."

He pulls back to look at her. "No, I wanted you to see. I've never told anyone about him but I know you understand. If things had been different we might have got to raise a child, even if it wouldn't last…"

A dull but powerful ache of sorrow flares up and Elena has to fight down the need to cry. His son had been a reality; hers was now just a figment, a ghost of a future lost. But the pain feels real. For a moment her life stretches out before her, one forever entwined with Elijah and it is happy but childless. Once she had rashly denied the possibility of being a mother and if things had been different that promise would have only hardened. But she will never forget that lonely little boy, not even if she wanted to. Now she can only lament at the loss and suppress the desire to correct it.
Elijah sees the flare of sadness in her eyes and holds her tightly. They wake in the same embrace, his arms wrapped around her and she inhales deeply. The sorrow that she feels is bewildering, one at the strength of it and two at the timing. She can not be sad over things she can't change, especially now that she is on the path to a bright, hopefully happy, future with the man beside her. She shakes her head and smiles.

"This was meant to be a fun night…"

"You're not satisfied?"

She shrugs with a mewing sound and suddenly finds herself flat on her back, pinned beneath Elijah. He has a lusty gaze, one that promises satisfaction. But beyond that there is a great warmth of tenderness, a feeling that has always been there but now unrestrained and she returns it in equal strength.

**note:** this developed into something sadder then I intended but I think the loss is something that they both feel and share. But I don't think either are ones to wallow :)

I was going to write about Bonnie, about why she has trouble sleeping but I think I'll save it. If not in the final chapter then in another fic. Lets just say Klaus is not completely gone. Her nights are his... ;)

*Epilogue next...*
Epilogue: Fifteen Years Later

The Birthday

The soggy smell of wet cherry blossom hangs in the air. Spring is finally here; bringing pewter grey rain clouds and high winds. Daffodils flutter below the tree and as Elena watches a balloon comes loose from a chair and floats up to get stuck in one of the branches.

His birthday proves a contented affair, despite the English weather. As tradition Elijah celebrates his birthday every hundred years. He can not pinpoint his exact day of birth but he knows he was born in the spring, in the month of April. After weeks of cajoling Elijah to agree Elena planned a lavish celebration and sent out invites to their friends and family. The gathering is a success, with members from the Council and the Coven in attendance. For years there has been a peace but bringing werewolves, vampires, witches and hybrids together is always a taut event.

Sighing she places a chair under the tree and climbs up to retrieve the balloon. Stretching to reach the ribbon she feels something brush against her leg and looks down at Elijah. One hand glides up the back of her calf while the other grips her hip firmly.

"Thanks."

"Can't have you falling head over heels in front of our esteemed guests."

"Are you calling me clumsy?" She smiles up at the balloon, standing on her tiptoes. The end of the ribbon tickles her fingertips but it's still annoyingly out of reach.

"Of course not, you're grace personified."

"Ha!" She wraps the end of the ribbon around her fingers and pulls the balloon down. As she does a cascade of blossoms and rain drops fall. Balloon now in hand she turns on the chair, gazing down at him and as he plucks pink petals out of her hair. She had made it clear that she had wanted to wait before fully giving her heart away but somehow he took it without her noticing. There is not a piece of it left to hold back, he has taken it all. She slides her hands around his shoulders and he wraps his arms around her waist.

"Thank you for doing this."

"You're welcome. It's not every day a girl gets to celebrate someone's 1100 birthday, especially when you celebrate them every hundred years..." she trails off and the easy comfort that had been there previously dims. His immortality is something that they discuss infrequently but it is always there, an invisible thing between them. She had accepted that death would one day separate them but as the years stretched and her love grew that acceptance became weaker. She does not want to part from him and the answer to that problem has been clear from the start.

Elijah smiles softly at her. "I'll celebrate it every year if you'd like or would that take the shine off?"

"It was hard enough getting something for you, let alone every year! You're a very hard man to buy for." She brushes her lips against the corner of his mouth, conscious of the fact that a few of their guests are watching them. Finn's and Abby's children giggle behind their hands.

Elijah looks back at his brother and a slow, wicked grin spreads over his face. Finn had been convinced by his wife to fly in an aeroplane for the first time but he had to be sedated on the way
after threatening to transport the whole "beastly contraption" with magic to London. The xanax has not worn off yet and he regards everything with a mellow, dazed smile. Elijah has responded with a level of schadenfreude that only siblings can truly achieve and Rebekah teases her older brother with equal gusto. After years of stubborn silence she had contacted Elena unexpectedly to share the news that she was married and expecting her first child. Elena cannot say that she knows the woman well but she has never seen her so happy. Now she sits, contently rubbing a hand over her belly while her husband – a doctor - fetches a juice for her.

Elijah squints up at her playfully. "Hmm I have been wondering what you've got me."

"I'd save you the suspense now but I don't want to scandalise the children." She lets her weight fall against him and he pulls her off the chair, her feet dangling. Elijah smirks and lowers his lips to hers and kisses her hard and fast. Her breasts heave against his chest as she laughs into his mouth.

"Eww!" Their nieces and nephews shout and scream before running away. They sit and Elena watches them play wistfully and unbidden she pictures a lonely boy before a piano. What she wouldn't give to see him play now. Elijah turns to her and takes her hand, displaying that uncanny ability to read her without words. She shakes her head with a smile and kisses him softly. The balloon she had retrieved slips from her loose grip and she breaks away to watch it float up into the air before being carried away by the wind.

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The Summoning

There is no limit to what magic can do. It's just a matter of finding the right words to form and shape it, the right person to cast it…Magic can heal and magic can kill. It can revive those dead and gone but at a price. Nature demands balance, you can not take something without giving back. There are laws.

Time has laws. The past is obdurate, it does not like to be meddled with and as a rule witches leave the past as it is. The future on the other hand is insubstantial, changing every second, sprouting off in a thousand, million threads. The future is easy to manipulate and if you are lucky enough you can weave those threads into whatever you desire. Magic can restore and the future can be shaped. But how can you bring to life a ghost from a future lost? For the last decade that is what she has been yearning to know and tonight she may finally get her answer.

"I can't guarantee that this will work," Bonnie says and the candles around the pentagram flicker into life. "No one has ever attempted this before."

"We know and we're prepared for that," Elena says, looking at Elijah who nods stiffly. They have talked about the possibility of seeing Grayson for years but it is only recently that Elena has approached the possibility with a drive that borders on obsession. Where this drive comes from she will not disclose but he has his suspicions. Elena is now thirty three, almost the same age as her mother when she died. That has to be an underlining reason but it is one she will not voice.

"Then you know the risks. You can't touch him if he materialises. He's from a different timeline, a different reality. He doesn't really belong here and any attempt to cross him over could be dangerous."

"Because he doesn't really exist," Elijah says quietly and Elena gives him a sharp look.

"Not here but he does somewhere, some when. I'm not doing this out of a sense of sentimentality, I didn't give birth to him or get to raise him...but he's still my son. If that timeline is still existing, in whatever state, I need to know if he's okay, if he's safe." She looks back at the salt circle with a
hard gaze. "I know nature could be unbalanced by him crossing over, I understand but I need to put these doubts to rest."

Bonnie opens her spell book and sighs, "He might not even be able to talk or see us, he might not be aware."

Elena and Elijah nod and watch expectantly as Bonnie begins to chant, eyes squeezed shut. The candles suddenly flame upwards, roaring with heat and the centre of the circle begins to shimmer, like a heat mirage. A shape begins to emerge slowly and a strange echoing noise fills their ears. The shape becomes more solid and the hollow noise becomes louder, as if many people are whispering in a large, echoing room.

"Who...who...who are...you?" His voice drifts up, small but distinguishable from the others. He stares at Bonnie, back to his parents. "Do you want to see...see my uncle?"

Bonnie smiles, shocked to her core that it has worked but giddily pleased. "Actually I want talk to you. Turn around."

As he does, becoming more solid and there every second, Elena stumbles and Elijah grips her arm. She smiles up at him, about to tell him she is fine when her nose begins to bleed. Alarmed Elijah looks up at Bonnie whose smile falls.

"What's happening?"

"I – I feel strange. Oh!" With a surprised gasp her eyes roll up and she collapses into his arms.

"Mom...? Mom!"

Elijah looks up at Grayson just in time to see the shocked little boy disappear. Before he does their eyes lock and Grayson stares at Elijah in bewildered recognition. With a sound like air being sucked into a vacuum the many voices cease and the candles lower. Cradling Elena in his arms Elijah frantically listens for signs of life and can just barely detect her heart beating. He bites into his wrist and presses it to her mouth, forcing the blood down her throat. Elena chokes and a wave of relief washes over him.

"Elena? Are you okay?" His voice shakes and she looks up at him blearily. But her confusion fades as her eyes snap to the empty circle.

"He's gone?"

Elijah nods, keeping rigid control on his wild emotions. He looks at Bonnie who kneels shakily at their side. "What happened?"

"I – I think something was trying to make him real, make him alive. Nature saw him as something that didn't belong so tried to fix it..." she trails off, gazing thoughtfully before looking at Elena who sits up against Elijah's chest. "If he had been here any longer you would have died."

"Why me?" Elena asks, wiping the blood from her mouth and nose.

"Elijah is already dead and I'm not his mother...I guess you were the most compatible because of the blood connection."

"Nature would have used my life in exchange for his?" Elena stares with a hungry intensity at the spot where Grayson had been. "So it's possible? He could really be here?" The arms around her spasm and grow tight.
"The cost is too high."

Elena looks up at him and turns. The anger in her eyes turns into something softer. "Not such a cost you told me once."

"Your life means more then mine."

"And his means more then mine," she calmly whispers, willing him to understand. "I have your blood in my system, I won't die permanently. We both knew this day could come and I've been prepared for it. I accept it."

"You told me that you didn't want to be a vampire," he speaks roughly, jaw clenching.

"When I was a teenager. A lot has changed since then, I've gone out in the world, I've lived and I'll continue to. If anyone has shown me that you can live a worthwhile, good existence it's you. I'm prepared to do this if it means he gets to live."

"You'll become like me…do you want to raise a child like that? I thought I could do it, that I could still be a father to Ivan but I caused him nothing but pain. He was better off without me." Torment dances in his eyes and she cups his face.

"That was years ago Elijah, you're different, more in control. You're a better man, a better vampire. If I can make any sense of where he comes from, if it even exists for him, our son might be living with a hybrid, with Klaus. You're telling me we should ignore that because we're vampires?"

"You're not one yet," he growls out and pulls her up to her feet. Elena clutches at his coat, hands balled into fists.

"If there is a way to do this I won't let anyone stop me. He belongs with us."

A strange smile quirks his lips, "I don't get a say?"

"You don't want to do this, you've made it clear."

He grabs her hands in his and stares at her intensely. "No, I would give anything to have him with us but not in the way you're talking about. Vampires raising a child? How cruel do you think I am?"

Elena blinks as if struck. She looks down at her feet, shaking her head. "What else can I do?"

"Let him go."

"No."

Bonnie moves away from them, not wanting to intrude on a painful and intimate moment. The truth of the matter is even if Elijah agreed she couldn't bring the boy back into their world, not if it meant turning Elena into a vampire. It goes against the rules of the Coven, rules that she must uphold absolutely as the High Priestess.

"Aw, don't be such a stick in the mud," whispers a voice in her head and she tries her best to ignore him. But he can be annoyingly persistent.

"Shut up Klaus, this doesn't concern you."

"Excuse you but that little kid happens to be family. So it does concern me. I've been stuck in your head long enough to know the rules as well as you do. If a person consents to being a vampire
there's nothing you can do about it."

Since draining his life force and containing his body Klaus has not left her in peace. He took up residence in her subconscious at first, invading her dreams, trying to scare her into releasing him. But as the years drew on they struck up a strained sort of companionship. Visiting her dreams is the only way he gets to live and communicate. She learned years ago to accept it but only a handful of people know. If her brothers or sisters knew in the Coven she would have her titled revoked before she could blink. As long as she siphons off his everlasting energy she lives but he never leaves her consciousness, an unforeseen side effect of the elixir. Now she listens to his advice grudgingly.

"Crossing him over could skew the balance of nature. Who knows what the side effects will be?"

"By that reasoning you shouldn't have attempted the ritual in the first place. Come on, live a little love."

She stares at Elena and Elijah, watching Elena trying her utmost to convince him. She seems to be winning because he looks at the circle of salt wistfully.

"Fine."

"That's my girl."

She walks back to her friends and stares at Elena firmly. "If you want to do this say so now, you might not get another chance."

Elena looks up at Elijah, begging without words and he sighs, relenting. "If this is what you want then I won't stop you. He should be saved."

"Thank you," she breathes and clutches his hand. She watches, heart racing and blood thundering in her ears as Bonnie performs the spell again and prepares herself for what comes next.

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**The Piano**

Morning light shines through the lace curtain. In the sunbeam she can see miniscule specs of dust. There must be thousands of them and if she was so inclined she could lie there and count them all. Instead she focuses on the lace covering the window, following the intricate pattern. From a distance she can see the warp and weave that someone sewed, accomplished by a human hand. She could probably create wondrous things if she wants, she realises with a thrill.

She focuses on details, smaller and more complex the better. Anything is preferable then facing the incessant hunger. It has been over a month since she turned and as Caroline told her each day is hard but not as hard as the day before. It had been thirst that awoke her and she turns to see a blood bag next to a glass. Elijah is not here but his old ring lies against her chest, protecting her from the sun. In its place he now wears a simple gold band.

She reaches for the blood and glass and measures out an amount to drink. *Pace and control,* Elijah's voice whispers into her head, *do not let the hunger govern you.* In the end it had been her choice. Not by accident or through malicious means. She had thought about it for years and over time became almost certain of her decision. Indecisiveness is a flaw in her character, one that she battles with but she would make the same choice a thousand times over. Of course there is a searing kernel of fear within her, fear of what she may do but she has surrounded herself with the best people, the very best and she will not succumb to malevolence.
A sweet sound reaches her ears and she sits up. Since transforming she has had to cope with not just the bloodlust but also the sensory change of the world around her. In dreams she had seen how vampires' experience their surroundings but she realises that it had been a pale imitation of the real thing. The world is utterly overwhelming. But the sound calls to her, a siren drawing her up from bed. She walks from the room slowly, fingers trailing over tiny bumps in the walls and then with a burst of speed she reaches the hallway.

*I've been here before,* she thinks as she comes to stand between cream walls, sunlight streaming in. Before she had thought it looked sterile but now it is welcoming and warm. These moments of *déjà* vu, of frequently seeing things that should not exist, bemuse her. She had tried to change this thing from happening but fate is seems had other plans. Smiling she opens the door and peeks through. They sit side by side before the piano and Elijah encourages him quietly. He has proved a wonderful teacher. Grayson begins to play with confidence, wanting to impress. When he finishes with a flourish, beaming, this time he turns to his father who claps proudly.

Time is obdurate and time is flexible and people attempt to manipulate the two. Some succeed but they meddle in things beyond them. Time has a resonance, a familiar beat and no matter what you do it does not truly fade. Everything happens just as it should, if not always in the way you expect.

~ The End ~

**note: *phew***

This final chapter proved to be more difficult then I imagined. You start out with one ending in mind but come to another. I rewrote this a dozen times. Originally I thought it was too "nice and neat" but then I made it too depressing, because I love angst. So I hopefully this is a happy medium. I imagine that Grayson, not being from their world/timeline gradually feels overtime that he doesn't belong and that his existence is...fragile. I was going to explore that but I felt I should leave it here before I lost my mind trying to finish lol.

I liked playing with the idea of freewill and predestination. Elena shapes her future but there are some things that just do not go away. It's in those moments of *déjà* vu that she sees this. I intended for her to change at the end but I wanted it to be her choice and not by accident. I just had to do it in a way that would be in character, which I hope I've achieved. Doing it to save a loved one seemed right to me...They really are "Always and Forever" now ;)

This is the end of this story but if the mood strikes I might dip back into it again. Either way I do have other Elena/Elijah plot bunnies that I'll write down soon.

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