Answering The Prayers Of Vampires
by LilGray1326

Summary

Some 455,000 years ago, the first Human did a spell that created the first Vampires. 1,234 years ago a Witch placed a spell on them that turned them Human in the hopes of teaching them the meanings of love, loyalty, and honor. This is the story of what they became and how they’ll learn the lessons they need to learn and become a true family.

Notes

Author’s notes: First please know that this story is completely written so all I need to do is have my Beta look everything over and then I can post. It is about 20 chapters long and came in at just over 106,000 words.

The story begins during Season Two, Episode Twenty-Two ‘As I Lay Dying’, and it’s mostly AU after the first few paragraphs though I take things from Season Three and twist them to suit my purposes. Some of the dialogue in the beginning (approximately the first 24 lines of dialogue) of the story is directly quoted from the show. Also, I bend the Vampire mythos a bit in this story though the Originals are still the Originals. Also, every creature, even the Originals (and Klaus), can be killed by ripping his or her heart out.

In my story, the 100 dead Witches are actually a few hundred (as in at least 316) dead Witches and they never abandoned Bonnie as Sheriff Forbes never accidently shot and killed Jeremy (though she almost did but Damon prevented tragedy despite being so sick), so
Bonnie didn’t need to bring him back from the dead. Therefore, Jeremy also doesn’t see ghosts either.

Oh and Damon didn’t let/cause Emily to die at the location the few hundred dead Witches died. She told him about their deaths and where it happened but he had nothing to do with her actual death and would have prevented it if he could have.

Furthermore, for those of you who are touchy about major character death, there is non-permanent major character death in the very beginning… all you Damon fans don’t be scared off by the first chapter… it totally doesn’t mean what you think it means since the whole story is told in his perspective.

I’m aware that certain characters are Out Of Character (OOC), and I’m okay with that, so I hope you are too.

I’ve only seen through half of the fourth season so not much from beyond Season Three is used in my story, and only a few things I read on the internet that I know were introduced later are used.

Fair warning, there are some Original Characters (OC) in this story… sort of, you’ll understand after the second chapter.

This story is more action adventure than romance but the end game relationships in the story are as follows: Delena, Steroline, Beremy, Kalijah, Rebekah/Ric, Lexi/Matt, and Tyler, Kol, and Finn with OC’s because I ran out of female characters to pair them with.

There will be deep friendships between Damon and Bonnie; Damon and Elijah; Damon and Caroline; Damon and Tyler; Damon and Matt eventually; Elijah, Kol, Finn, and Rebekah with everyone; Bonnie with all the aforementioned characters; and all the canon friendships.

Special thanks to Lauren for Beta-ing this for me. All remaining mistakes belong to me.

Disclaimer: I do not own The Vampire Diaries or any of its characters or locations. They belong to the CW, Kevin Williamson, and Julie Plec, et al. I’m making no money from this story, which I wrote just for fun, and I intend no copyright infringement.
I wake in my bed at the boarding house. How did I get here? The last thing I remember is knocking Jeremy to the ground as Liz shot at us in the Grill. I look down at my chest and see three bloody holes in my shirt. Guess I didn’t dream taking those three bullets that probably would have killed Jeremy. I’m clueless about how I got back here though. A moment goes by and then I see my answer come out of my bathroom. “Elena?”
Her lip trembles and her eyes are watery with unshed tears as she says, “It’s okay, Damon. I’m right here,” and after walking to the bed she leans over me and wipes my sweaty face with a towel.

Of course she is, because being the stubborn, pig headed girl that she is she’s always putting herself at risk to help others. I frown and pain stabs through my chest making speaking more difficult but I manage to tell her, “Elena, get out of here. I could hurt you.”

My stubborn Elena frowns back at me and as her brows furrow she looks me right in the eyes and says, “No. You won’t.” She pauses and wipes my face with the towel again before telling me, “I’m here until the very end. I’m not leaving you.”

Does she not remember just how close Rose came to hurting her on multiple occasions as she died from her Werewolf bite? Truth is there have been times in the last 48-hours that I haven’t been entirely sure what was real and what was just in my head and she wants to stay by my side where if I guess wrong I could possibly hurt her, or god forbid worse. I mean it’s really not a stretch that I could easily kill her, but I could also force my blood on her and then kill her all without even realizing that it’s actually happening. I try to sit up and argue back just as firmly, “Get out of here,” I intended to tell her everything I just thought of but then pain rips through my body like little stabbing and burning knives being simultaneously shoved all over my chest, arms, and legs. I scream before coughing up blood, and I lose my train of thought.

As she climbs up onto the bed and sort of cradles me in her arms she helps wipe away the blood I just coughed up with the towel. I want to keep arguing with her to leave since it really is dangerous for her to be here with me, and I’d never forgive myself if she got hurt because of me. However, when she leans back against my pillows with me in her arms and my head cradled against her chest saying, “Hey… hey… hey… hey. Hang on. Shh. It’s okay. It’s okay. It’s okay,” I lose the will to spend my last few minutes telling the woman I love to leave.

Truth is I don’t want to die alone. Oh I deserve to do just that, but once again I decide to be selfish though I do offer up a small prayer, ‘Please God if you listen to the prayers of Vampires and might consider answering one please don’t allow my being selfish right now to turn disastrous. Please keep Elena safe even as she stays with me through my last moments.’

After I think my plea for ‘Lena’s safety I really mull over her words and really it’s so far from okay it’s not even funny so I tell her, “It’s not okay. It’s not okay. All those years, I blamed Stefan.” More pain slams into my body causing me to cringe and shudder before I finish my thought, “No one forced me to love her.” I swallow hard and tell her, “It was my own choice.”

Her hold on me tightens and she has tears in her voice as she whispers, “Shh.”

I shift on the bed slightly as more little stabbing knives rip through my chest. My head is pounding but I plow ahead with my train of thought as though she hasn’t spoken, “I made the wrong choice.” Another hard swallow and I manage to say, “You tell Stefan I’m sorry. Okay?”

I crack my eyes open and tilt my face up in her direction in time to see the tears spill over her cheeks as she tells me, “I will.”

I close my eyes again and then sigh as she puts her head against mine and we just lay in companionable silence as I focus on her lying beside me with her hair tickling my cheek. Unfortunately, ignoring the pain radiating through my body with every breath I take is impossible as my focus keeps leaving Elena holding me in her arms and lands on the fire burning within my veins as the Werewolf venom feels as though it’s battery acid slowly eating away at my nerve endings.

I don’t know how long we’ve been just laying here but through my pain it occurs to me that, “This is
even more pitiful than I thought.”

She lifts her head and looks at me with her pinched and tear-streaked face as she tells me, “There’s still hope.”

She’s got restless fingers that keep clenching and unclenching as she holds onto me, and she’s clenching her jaw tightly, so I know she’s lying through her teeth, so I forgive myself for not having any hope left either as I sort of ignore the sentiment and say, “I’ve made a lot of choices that have gotten me here.” I swallow hard again and tell her, “I deserve this… I deserve to die.”

She shakes her head against mine as her arms tighten around me moments before she says, “No. You don’t.”

She’s so stubborn, but then again so am I. I’ve probably killed more people than her and all of her friends have met in their entire lives combined and she thinks I don’t deserve to die as painful a death as possible? Very few of those deaths I caused were particularly quick and none of them except the few snapped necks were painless so I tell her, “I do, Elena.” Then it occurs to me that every choice I made led me here so I continue, “It’s okay because if I’d chosen differently, I wouldn’t have met you.” I close my eyes and clench my jaw through a particularly strong stab of pain groaning ever so slightly then tell her, “I’m so sorry, done so many things to hurt you.”

“It’s okay. I forgive you.” Are her words only because I’m dying? You know what? Not only do I not care but there is no way I’ll ever know if my impending death is the only reason she said it. Either way her words cause a weight I hadn’t truly realized was there to lift off my chest, but I need to tell her how I feel so I say, “I know you love Stefan… and it will always be Stefan.”

Even just saying the words causes a stabbing pain to bloom in my heart that matches the pain already so rampant throughout my body, but I was right when I told her that I don’t deserve her. I was just as right when I finished that statement up with the fact that Stefan does deserve her. I pause as she takes my hand and lays next to me putting her head on my chest and I bask in her closeness as much as the situation and the pain raging inside my body will allow before I finish the thought, “But I love you.” I pause then tell her, “You should know that.”

Lord knows I tried like hell not to fall in love with her, but how could I not. She’s the only person who ever told me they were sorry that I had lost Katherine too. And it was obvious she meant every word. The truth was plain as day in her eyes as she spoke the words. Who does that except a woman who wholly deserves to be loved by everyone who meets her.

I open my eyes in time to see her tears speed up as she sniffles and tells me, “I do.”

I wish we had met while I was still Human. I might have actually won the girl if that had happened. I smile wistfully at what might have been if things had been very different and tell her, “You should have met me in 1864. You would have liked me.”

She raises her head and looks me in the eyes as she tells me, “I like you now... just the way you are.”

Does she really like me just how I am now? I mean really? I killed Vicki and worse yet I turned her into a monster. I forced my blood on Elena before the sacrifice and only her father’s sacrifice saved me from destroying Elena’s life just as Stefan did mine. I killed Jeremy and got very lucky that he was wearing Jonathan Gilbert’s Immortality Ring. I’ve done so much to hurt her that I’m inclined to think those particular words are really just because I’m dying. I’m so very tired, so I close my eyes then a moment later her soft lips brush mine and I reconsider. Would she really kiss me even if I was dying if she didn’t truly like me how I am? Part of me wonders if this is a hallucination but I tell her, “Thank you,” anyway.
She whispers back, “You’re welcome.”

We lay there for a while longer and my strength is slowly seeping out of me minute by minute. My time here is growing much shorter with every passing second. There are three more wrongs I have to right though, and I know out of anyone in my life Elena will deliver my messages so I tell her, “Tell Jer I said I’m sorry about Vicki. I was wrong to do that to her. Tell him I’m also sorry I killed him. And tell—tell Caroline…”

I pause trying to gather my strength to say the words I need to say, “Tell her I’m sorry… for how I treated her when I got here… I was… wrong… And… I would do it again.”

She seems to misunderstand as she cups my sweaty cheek and asks, “You’d hurt her again?”

No that’s not what I meant at all. Obviously something got lost in translation so I frown and shake my head slightly hoping she can hear me as I whisper, “No… I’d let Lockwood bite me again… if it meant protecting her and Matt.”

I think I hear a gasp come from the doorway, but I’m not sure, so I finish the thought, “Somewhere along the way Vampire Barbie grew on me… And without realizing it she became family… like you, Jeremy, and Stefan… the little sister I never had… never even knew I wanted. Tell her… Tell her she’s worth it… and… I’d do it again to protect her.”

The bed on the opposite side of where Elena is lying dips and then a gentle hand brushes my dark sweaty hair out of my eyes, and touches my clammy cheek. I turn to look at the person and my blurry eyes struggle to focus on Caroline’s face. At least I think it’s her so I ask, “Caroline?”

Her hands tremble as she tries to smile through her tears and cups my cheek while she says, “I’m here, Brother, and I forgive you.”

I smile just barely and whisper “Thank you,” as the pain slowly fades and then I’m standing beside the bed watching as my body begins to turn grey and desiccate. I’ve been in pain for days now so the sudden lack of pain is at once welcome and alarming.

Caroline doesn’t seem able to stop the tears from pouring out of her eyes and obviously neither can Elena. Elena’s practically laying on top of me as she sobs and begs, “Please don’t be dead, don’t leave me, you can’t leave me, please, come back.” My heart breaks because I know it’s too late, I’m gone, even if I do still seem to be here.

They sit there, Elena sobbing into my chest and Caroline holding my lifeless hand and bawling for who knows how long before Katherine appears in the room and asks, “What’s going on?”

I scowl at her ruining the moment as Caroline looks up with a slightly slack and vacant look that quickly shifts to a dazed look, as she’s obviously startled that anyone managed to approach without her realizing it. Ordinarily I’d be upset that she let someone sneak up on her or Elena for that matter but I’m fairly certain Katherine won’t try to harm them, well not physically anyway.

As Caroline’s tears pick up speed, the first woman I loved stares at the last woman I loved and smirks. Caroline’s brow furrows and she crosses her arms at the same time her mouth turns down as she half-heartedly asks, “Katherine? What are you doing here?”

She smiles with loose shoulders and limp arms and takes a long moment to just stare at Caroline and Elena before she lifts her hand and jiggles a bottle of, is that blood? Turns out it’s better than that and a day late and dollar short, “I brought the cure.”

Caroline and Elena both gasp and look at her with red eyes as they both clearly wish she had gotten
here a few minutes sooner as Caroline tells the older woman, “You’re too late Katherine, he’s, he’s gone.”

“No… no.” She takes several steps forward and I see something I can’t name flash in her eyes when she realizes it’s true. I’m surprised when a moment later her eyes narrow and her face becomes pinched. Her shoulders drop as she almost slouches before she seems to realize she’s telegraphing her feelings and she quickly allows her cold disinterested mask to fall back into place.

She places the bottle on the bed and says, “If you’re going to continue playing with Wolves then you might want to freeze that in case someone else needs it.” The unspoken ‘Not that I care either way’ is so blaringly obvious it’s almost comical.

Elena looks up at her as she almost protectively shields my body and asks, “Where’s Stefan?”

Katherine smirks and sweeps her dark curly hair over her shoulder the way she always does when she’s getting ready to deliver a verbal blow, so I tense just before she tells them, “He traded himself for the cure. He gave up everything, including you Elena, to save his brother.”

All three of us gasp and Caroline lets out a heavy breath before she asks, “What exactly does that mean?”

My sire smiles and it’s definitely not a nice or even remotely reassuring smile, “It means he sold himself into slavery to Klaus for the next ten years. I’m sure Caroline here will see him again in a few decades, but Elena, you’ll probably be long gone and buried before he comes back to himself.”

Dammit, I bare my teeth and clench my fists at the thought of Stefan doing such a stupid thing to save me, the brother that has done nothing but torment him for a century and a half. On the other hand, my stomach flutters and despite being wherever I am my heart is banging hard against my chest at the realization that he obviously loves me enough to give up everything, even Elena, to try to save me. Either way the damn cure didn’t get here in time, so Stefan sold his soul to the devil and is likely well on his way to being a Ripper once more and all for nothing.

Before Caroline and Elena can blink, Katherine’s gone and they’re left to cry their tears in peace.

As I watch them crying for Stefan and me, I notice everything slowly fading to nothing. Am I going to get to see Hell up close and personal now? Lord knows I deserve it after all the pain and death I’ve caused in my century and a half as a Vampire.

I say another quick prayer ‘Please God, let those I’m leaving behind, namely my love, my sister, and my brothers, Jer and Stefan, be okay. Let them survive and find happiness and peace.’ Then I know nothing.
Death Is Only The Beginning

Chapter Notes

Special thanks to Lauren for Beta-ing this for me. All Remaining mistakes belong to me.

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Chapter 002

Death is Only the Beginning

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Saturday, May 29, 2010; around 8:00 p.m.

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I’m floating in a sea of nothing then I begin to hear voices, and I at once know they’re voices from my past.

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A woman’s voice says, “Congratulations, Hector, it’s a boy.” She’s speaking of me, I’m sure of it, but who is Hector? My father’s name was Giuseppe, not Hector.

“A boy?” The voice I vaguely recognize as Hector’s asks.

I can hear the smile in her voice as a baby, me I guess, lets out a loud wail, “Yes, an apparently healthy baby boy.”

“My boy,” the voice I now recognize as belonging to my father, Lord Hector, whispers clearly delighted by the prospect of a son. I pause and wonder that he actually seems happy about me. I don’t remember him ever being happy with me.

The woman asks, “Have you decided on his name?”

Now I can almost see him in my mind’s eye standing there with his broad chest puffed out and the high chin and the gleam in his eyes I only rarely saw thrown in my direction as he lets out a booming laugh and says, “Yes, his name is Drago, after his fire breathing ancestors.”

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Slowly images begin to accompany the voices, and I’m standing in a ballroom surrounded by at least 50 dancing couples and probably twice as many people gawking on the sidelines. I’m not much into dancing right now, so I’m one of the ones standing a few feet from the dancers. I look at Stefan with his long shoulder length brown hair and soulful green eyes as he smiles.

Elijah, whose long dark hair is pulled back with a crimson ribbon as he stands to Stefan’s left smiles a smile that makes his chestnut colored eyes twinkle with joy as he says, “Brother, allow me to
reintroduce my sister, the lovely Lady Briseis.”

I turn and smile at the brunette woman as I take her gloved hand and kiss it. I gasp as my eyes meet hers and then catch myself staring as I hold her hand and just barely manage to get the words, “It’s a pleasure Milady,” to come out of my mouth.

I’ve never seen a more beautiful woman and my pants begin to tighten as the knowledge that I’ll never want anyone other than her ever again settles firmly in my mind. I try not to telegraph any of that though lest her brother kill me for thinking impure thoughts about his baby sister. Being his best friend and older big brother type will allow me to get away with a lot others can’t but wanting to throw his sister on a bed and spend hours enjoying every inch of her is the quickest way to get myself killed.

I do find myself wondering though because she looks like Elena but I’m certain that it’s Briseis not Elena as her eyes crinkle and a broad smile breaks out on her face and she responds, “The pleasure is all mine, good to meet you again Lord Drago.”

I smile back and bite my tongue to keep from insisting that the pleasure is really all mine but that I would love to make it hers, if only she would allow me.

Elijah shifts slightly and with much effort, I pull my eyes from hers as he laughs and then thankfully gets distracted by a young lady who obviously wishes to dance with him.

‘Thank you, Goddess,’ I offer up as he smiles at us before following after the fair maiden who caught his fancy.

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I’m standing in another crowded ballroom with Stefan, no my mind tells me, his name is Dante, and Elijah, no that’s not right, he’s Balthazaar. Briseis, who at this point is my wife so I can have as many impure thoughts about her as I like, is on my arm and the four of us are once again avoiding having to dance though I have promised at least a few to Briseis. Dante smiles again and asks me just slightly louder than necessary, “Have you met Miss Lilith yet?”

I turn and see a woman who looks remarkably like my wife. The resemblance is because some of Briseis’ blood was used when they created this woman who is the first of her kind, a Human. As she reaches us, she smiles and extends her hand to me and says, “Lord Drago, I don’t believe we’ve met yet, it’s a pleasure. I am the Lady Lilith.”

My stomach immediately plummets and a sense of doom settles over me and I’m not sure why, but my instincts rarely lead me astray, still I smile and tell her, “The pleasure is all mine I am sure.”

She smiles and laughs at that as she turns and gives a wink and a coy smile in Balthazaar’s direction as he gazes softly at her.

Damn, Balthazaar is clearly smitten and not feeling the sense of doom that is blossoming in my chest the longer Miss Lilith is in my presence.

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Katherine, no some part of me knows it’s Lilith, happily says, “Drink my darlings and we’ll never be
alone again.” I’m sitting at a round table with Briseis, Dante, Balthazaar, and Lilith, as well as Caroline? And then my mind supplies, ‘No, she’s not Caroline, she’s Asya.’

I smile as Lilith encourages us to drink from the goblets she’s handed us and then once we drink the disgusting drink her Witch, my great-great granddaughter, Fontina, whispers some words and I find I can’t move. I watch in horror as Lilith walks to each of us and snaps our necks. That sense of doom I felt the first time I met Lilith seems to have been a foreshadowing of this moment.

My eyes shoot to Briseis’ chocolate brown eyes as she sits unmoving across from me and her face turns ashen as she blinks rapidly and watches our friend kill our loved ones and then each of us.

When I come to all of us, including Lilith, are all lying on the floor in crumpled piles. Colors seem brighter, and I seem to be able to see finer details than before.

Every noise, even the rustle of fabric as Lilith and Balthazaar’s oldest daughter walks to me when she realizes I’m awake, is infinitely louder than it was before. I freeze when I see the dagger in her hand, but then she does the damnedest thing and slashes her wrist.

I’m on her before I can even realize what I’m doing, and I’m drinking from her wrist as she pulls me into her body and strokes my hair gently as she tells me, “Everything will be fine Drago, you’ll see. It’ll take a while but it’ll all work out as it’s meant to, as it should.”

Lilith and Balthazaar’s other daughters are doing the same to the others and my heart breaks as they become our first victims.

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Another flash and I’m seeing a new scene, the six of us are once again frozen as we’re literally forced to drink from a goblet. When my descendant and dear and trusted friend, Tianna, reaches me, she strokes my cheek and says, “Brother, I wish I didn’t need to include you and Briseis, but the others need to learn what love, loyalty, and honor are and your nature and how you came to be Vampires requires I spell all six of you.”

She leans down to my ear and tells me, “Fear not my dear friend, to break the spell simply give your life for someone you truly and selflessly love. A willing sacrifice to save a life you truly care about.”

I understand as she sets about casting her spell. The others know nothing of love, oh they say ‘I love you’ left and right but they don’t truly understand what they’re saying. Furthermore, their constant murderous rage that they share with the world through repeated, frequent, and often uncalled for violence shows they have very little honor or consideration for anyone other than themselves.

If she thinks this will help, I won’t fight it. I just send up a little prayer to whomever might listen to and answer the prayers of Vampires, ‘Please let us all survive this long needed lesson.’

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Other memories from the lives I spent as a Human after Tianna placed her spell flash through my mind quickly, and rather suddenly, I remember everything and then I’m gasping for breath as Briseis and Asya hover over me crying and running their hands over my face and arms. Then I realize they’re not truly Briseis and Asya as they have yet to break the spell so they are simply Elena and Caroline.

I feel like a drowning man as I involuntarily gasp for breath I haven’t needed in a very long time. It takes me a minute or two to get my bearings and regulate my breathing. It takes a minute longer for
full feeling to return to my body but once it does I quickly gather up both girls in my arms and pet their hair as they gasp and tremble while they cry because I’m not truly dead.

I replay all the memories that are still settling in my mind as I mindlessly coo to my love and my sister telling them, “I’m okay. Everything is fine, I’m okay.”

About ten minutes later Caroline seems to calm enough to break away first, “Damon, what, you were dead, you were all grey and veiny and desiccated and now, you’re, you’re not. What’s going on?”

I pause and consider what to say. I know instinctively that the nature of the spell placed on all of us won’t allow them to believe me if I tell them there is a spell on them, but they might believe there was a spell on me, so I tell them, “A very long time ago a Witch placed a spell on me. It was meant to teach me the true meanings of love, loyalty, and honor. The only way to break the spell was to willingly sacrifice my life for the life of someone else, someone I truly and selflessly love. Apparently it didn’t need to be romantic love, and brotherly love was enough.”

They’re both looking at me with wide eyes so I smile my trademark smirk that is still the same as it has been for most of my 490,454 years and wait to hear what they think.

Surprisingly they both just sit there a moment, and despite their still watery eyes their shoulders loosen and they begin gently and slowly nodding and equally slow smiles break out across their faces. Clearly, some part of them understands even if the memories are not theirs for the remembering just yet.

We’ve had an audience since about the time I began gasping for air so I smile and say slightly louder, “Judgey and Little Gilbert, you don’t need to keep standing out in the hallway you can come in if you want.” I try to smile reassuringly as Bonnie and Jeremy enter.

I shake my head almost in denial when Jeremy says, “Katherine was here and she said you were dead so I called Bonnie and told her she should get here as fast as she could, but you’re definitely not dead.”

I laugh despite the seriousness of the situation I was recently in, “I was but now I’m not, not any more than I was yesterday at least.”

Bonnie’s brows draw closer together as her face tightens and she interrupts, “So if a spell was placed on you who did it and when?”

I smile again as she really does remind me of Tianna although once she grew up Tianna wasn’t nearly as judgmental as Bonnie currently tends to be. Then again, I can admit, even if only to myself, that I haven’t really given her any reason not to condemn me. Still I respect her, so I tell her the truth, “Your ancestor, Tianna, did the spell a little under 1,235 years ago.”

Still her brows grow impossibly closer together and she purses her lips. The look seems to somehow deepen even more as she asks, “So you’re, what, as old as the Originals?”

I smirk again, “Oh no, I’m much older and one of the Pervonachalnyue, which loosely translates to ‘The First Ones.’”

Elena puts her hand on my face and turns me to look at her as her brows furrow and she asks, “Exactly how old is much older?”

I sigh then kiss her lips with the barest of touches as I try to mesh the different methods of time keeping through the years then say, “Well I was already over 35,450 years old when I was turned Vampire and that was, hmm, maybe about 455,000 years ago give or take.”

Bonnie scoffs obviously thinking she senses a lie that really doesn’t exist; “Now I know you’re full
of shit, how could you possibly be thousands of years old before becoming a Vampire? Plus, Humans didn’t even exist 500,000 years ago.”

I sort of half smile half frown as I tell her, “I know, I never said I was Human, well not until the second spell was cast anyway. I was a Fire Demon.” I focus and then turn my skin the reddish orange color it was for the first 35,450 some odd years of my life. Then when I feel my third eye appear in my forehead I ask, “See?”

As I hold out my arm to give them more skin to see I smile and breathe out a few little puffs of flame, which causes their jaws to all drop before Elena says, “That’s not possible, how…”

I chuckle at their widening eyes and slack mouths as they grow impossibly still except Jeremy who smiles wide and sort of bounces on the balls of his feet at receiving new Supernatural information and a moment later says in a hushed whisper, “So cool.”

Bonnie just stares at me while I will my skin to look Human once more and my third eye becomes hidden again. I can see her wheels turning, and I know what she wants to do. I’ve actually seen the spell I think she’s considering using done before so I tell her, “Do it, if it’ll make you believe me then do it. There are candles in the bathroom.”

Jeremy goes to get them without waiting to be asked and then looks at her with a question written all over his face when he returns, so she tells him, “One in each corner of the room and Damon you need to hold the fifth one.”

I nod as Jeremy hands me the candle, and I catch her eyes briefly before telling her, “Bonnie I have to warn you if you’re going to do what I think you’re going to do it will hurt, a lot, and you will know everything, including things you might not want to know.”

She rolls her eyes at me but nods once, so I know she understands I’m not lying. Suddenly the candles ignite and she begins chanting. I look at Jeremy and tell him, “Get ready to catch her.”

He nods and moves closer to her and after three minutes of chanting that grows louder and firmer with every passing second the room goes completely dark despite the lights being turned on as Bonnie drops, and she begins to convulse. Jeremy shouts her name and catches her just a moment before her head would have hit the floor as a windstorm breaks out in my bedroom.

Her hair and several book covers in the room are all flapping in the wind. Despite her convulsions, Jer manages to lower them both to the ground and sit with her in his lap as I place the no longer lit candle onto the bedside table. A moment later, I latch onto Caroline and Elena’s arms when they move to go to her and tell them, “Stay where you are. I’m not sure what either of you touching her right now will do.”

I pause then tell them, “Actually, I’m pretty sure nothing good would happen if any of the three of us touch her before she wakes up.”

Surprisingly despite their usual inclination to argue with me they both seem to take me at my word so they stay put. A minute later, they both lean into me, and I wrap my arms around them realizing that they’re still shaken up from my death. None of us speak and about a half hour later, though I know it’s actually 27 minutes later, Bonnie stops convulsing, the wind stops as the lights come back on.

I kiss Elena’s forehead and then Caroline’s before I reluctantly let go of them and climb off the bed to stand over Jeremy and Bonnie as she finally lays seemingly at peace in his arms. “Little Gilbert, Caroline, Elena, and I can’t touch her until she wakes, so do you think you can pick her up and carry her into one of the spare rooms?”
His brow is wrinkled and he’s biting his lip as he holds Bonnie and has tears in his eyes so when he looks up at me I tell him, “I’ve witnessed this spell before, so I promise you, she’ll be fine. But she’s going to sleep for a long time, and I’m sure you’d both be much more comfortable in a bed than here on my bedroom floor.”

He nods and after wiping at his eyes with the hem of his t-shirt he moves around a bit, before he manages to stand and then pick her up. I grab his bag off the floor and walk him out of the room and into the one across the hall where he lays her down and then walks to the other side of the bed before he sits beside her.

I place his bag beside the bed and as I go to leave them in peace I turn back and tell him, “Holler if either of you needs anything.”

He nods as he lays down beside her and grabs her hand immediately joining her in slumber, so I leave them to my memories, which past experience tells me are currently playing across the backs of their eyelids as they rest.
Make Your Own Conclusions

Chapter Notes

Hello, Happy New Year. I meant to post Chapter Three when I got up today but I totally forgot so everyone say thank you to my awesome Beta Lauren for reminding me a few minutes ago. You Rock Lauren! Thank you for all you have done for me. I look forward to all that we can accomplish together in the future.

As I believe I said in the last post this story is completely written so it's just a matter of Lauren and I going over the chapters and sprucing them up for you all so here is chapter 003 for your reading enjoyment.

I hope to post a new chapter every weekend until the whole story is posted so I'll see you all next weekend.

Oh and by the way, thank you to Lauren for Beta-ing this chapter. All remaining mistakes belong to me.

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Chapter 003

Make Your Own Conclusions

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Sunday, May 30, 2010; around 1 a.m.

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Jeremy lay down in my spare room beside Bonnie around nine. I check on them both periodically except for the two hours when I ask Elena and Caroline to watch over them so I can go to Elena’s house and tell Ric what’s going on without anyone else overhearing. Since no one else is there, I tell him the complete truth instead of the half-truth I told everyone else earlier in the night.

When I return to the boarding house at around one in the morning Elena gives me a hug as I enter the living room and then immediately excuses herself to Stefan’s room to go to sleep. A few minutes later Caroline goes upstairs and lays down in the room across the hall from my brother’s room despite all of Zach’s stuff still being in there. It’s the only other vacant room with a made bed so I’m sure that’s why she uses that room instead of one of the other four empty rooms on that floor of the house.

About half an hour later, just after I hear Caroline’s breathing even out as she finally falls fast asleep, there is a hesitant knock on my front door. Even from my spot in the doorway of Bonnie and Jeremy’s room, the scent of the shampoo and body wash that I know Liz uses reaches my nose. Since she’s the only person I know in this town who uses the rare high-end bathing products, I cautiously head down to answer the door. I’m acutely aware that the last time she showed up here she was planning to kill me so I offer up a small prayer, ‘Please, Goddess, let her be here for more
peaceful reasons this time.’

She knocks again a moment before I open the door. I smile and after looking past her and seeing as well as hearing that she’s alone I tell her, “Liz, I trust you mean no one in this house any harm this time around.”

She flushes at that and nods, “You, you haven’t acted how I was taught your kind acts, so I have some questions.”

I nod and step aside, “Then please come in, but try to keep your voice low since I have a full house tonight and I’d prefer not to wake them.”

As she enters and then follows me into the living room she raises an eyebrow and asks, “Oh, who’s here?”

I smile as I walk to the alcohol cart and pour two glasses of the finest Bourbon I own and tell her, “Elena, Caroline, Bonnie, and Jeremy are all sleeping over tonight.”

She nods and says, “Oh, I knew Caroline was staying with Elena and Bonnie. I just assumed they’d be at the Gilbert house.”

I nod and tell her, “Yeah, I was sick from a Werewolf bite so they were here watching over me, but I was cured so I’m better now though I thought it was too late for them to be driving across town so they crashed here. I hope you don’t mind.”

She shakes her head no but says nothing as I hand her the drink I poured for her. Then a moment later, all of my words seem to register and she says, “Werewolves are real too?”

I chuckle and tell her, “Yes, though they’re pretty rare in this day and age since Vampires spent a few millennia killing as many as possible.”

She takes a good size sip of her drink then swallows hard as she frowns and asks, “Did you kill the one who bit you or do I need to worry about a Werewolf on the loose too?”

I smile slightly and tell her, “No I didn’t kill him as he’s actually a friend of mine and his biting me was an honest accident. They’re as a rule only dangerous on the full moon and this one usually locks himself up to prevent himself from harming anyone. Things happened the other night that kept him from being able to secure himself but I’m confident it won’t be an issue again as the situation was a once in a lifetime type of thing. Also so far as I know he’s the only Wolf currently calling Mystic Falls home so other than the occasional Wolf passing through on their way elsewhere the town should be safe from Wolves.”

She nods and we lapse into silence. She’s fidgeting though and shifting back and forth on her feet as she studiously looks everywhere but at me so she’s making me leery, therefore, I remain standing but motion for her to take a seat as I take a sip from my own glass. As she sits down, I ask her, “So you have questions?”

She takes a big swallow of her drink and then nods and says, “Yes, I, well all of the members of the council, were taught that Vampires are monsters with no emotions, but earlier my aim was off and you took three bullets protecting Jeremy as you pushed him out of the way. I know, as you obviously did, that I would have killed him, and you protected him. Then you didn’t attack me, you just asked Jeremy if he was okay, then he helped you get up, and I was so stunned that I let you both walk out of the bar. None of the journals account for a Vampire willingly taking wooden bullets to protect a Human.”
I frown and tell her, “First of all, I protected Jeremy because he’s like another little brother to me. Secondly, I didn’t attack you because despite what you might think of me I consider you my friend. Friends don’t generally attack or try to kill their friends. That said, thirdly, take everything you read in the council’s journals with a grain of salt. Just as history is written by the victors those journals were written by people who considered my kind to be their enemy, so they had their assumptions and biases about us but no way to double check their facts and honestly most of them wouldn’t have bothered checking because their hatred ran so deep.”

I pause to take a sip of my drink and then admit, “Conversely we viewed them as enemies too so we weren’t too apt to share the finer details of our existences with these people either.”

I take another sip then tell her, “The most important thing I’m going to tell you is that just as not all Humans are good and pure, neither are all Vampires evil. Don’t get me wrong, honestly most of us at some point do something that could be categorized as evil, but, well, Vampires have a Humanity switch that we can turn on and off. When we first finish the transition the hunger is very strong and often that can lead to tragedy, which leads to guilt, which leads to the Vampire flipping the switch, which leads to not caring and therefore to evil acts.”

I pause again and look at her hard. She’s making eye contact and seems to be listening so I take a calculated risk by telling her, “I’ll be honest I’ve killed a lot of people in my life time. Some I didn’t mean to kill, and for the record that number is actually pretty high and mostly from my first few decades while my control was still shaky.”

Her eyes widen and she seems slightly impressed that I admitted that so I continue to keep my story as honest and frank as I can, “The other thing to know is that Vampires feel everything more strongly, every emotion is magnified by the process that makes us a Vampire. So I was a good and decent man when I transitioned. Fundamentally I was a good and decent man as a Vampire too so the guilt I felt every time I accidentally killed someone led me to flip my switch.”

I take another sip and then close my eyes briefly as I remember and tell Liz, “My wife is the only reason I turned it back on. I missed my love for her, so at her urging I turned the switch back on, and then I almost turned it back off immediately as the guilt came crashing down on me. She implored me to work through the guilt and I wanted to love her badly enough that I allowed myself to suffer the almost debilitating guilt.”

I pause and she narrows her eyes before she asks, “So you could turn the switch off right now and kill everyone in the house?”

I shake my head, “No once a Vampire reaches somewhere between 200 and 300 years old the switch breaks. Now usually it turns itself back on first and that was true for me. I wouldn’t be able to turn the switch off no matter how badly I might want to, but truthfully I prefer to try to honor my victims by forcing myself to feel the guilt associated with the pain and death I’ve caused. If I’m badass enough to kill someone I should be badass enough to deal with the emotional consequences of that action.”

Her eyes widen slightly but she’s nodding so I continue, “Though I’d like to point out one thing I’ve found the council seems to completely disregard, even though I could kill everyone in the house so could you. You have a gun, you could kill them all in their sleep and they’d never see it coming.”

At her narrowed eyes and shake of her head I smile slightly and tell her, “Now we both know that that idea is abhorrent to you and you would sooner kill yourself than harm an innocent. Truth of the matter is I feel the same way. These days I only harm those who are a threat to me and mine and for the record everyone asleep upstairs is mine by my way of thinking as are Stefan, Alaric, Tyler, and Matt. I almost died protecting several them from our Werewolf friend the other day, and I would do
it again even if it meant certain death because they’re my family and that’s what you do for family.”

I pause and shudder at the realization of just how close to tragedy we all truly came then I shake my head to clear the thought and tell her, “I mentioned that we feel everything stronger and you should note that that includes the positive emotions, which is why the Vamps who willingly turn their switches back on do it. When the switch is off there’s no emotion at all, and between you and me that’s really not living, it’s just existing if you don’t have emotions to color everything.”

She’s nodding again as I pause and then clarify, “Now don’t get me wrong there are definitely Vamps out there who are exactly as the Founder’s Council believes all Vampires to be. They have no Humanity and they kill for fun. Some of them are even unfortunate enough to have their switches break in the off position. So I’m definitely not saying all Vampires are good, but just as Hitler, who was very Human by the way, is not a proper representation of every Human to ever exist the Vampires with their switches off also aren’t a good representation of the species as a whole.”

I move to sit across from her and smile slightly as I tell her, “It’s been my experience that no one species has the market cornered on good or evil. There are members of each species at both extreme ends of the spectrum and then the rest of the species falls somewhere in between.”

Her shoulders have been slowly relaxing as I speak so after taking a sip of my drink I tell her, “Stefan is one of the good ones and he drinks from animals because he has control issues and therefore decided the best bet was abstinence. That abstinence weakens him physically, but he finds it easier to accept what he is if he eats thumper despite his diet making him weaker. That’s the price he’s willing to pay to ensure he doesn’t kill innocents.”

She’s nodding again or still nodding so I tell her, “Now I drink blood from blood bags, no one gets hurt that way either. I actually know a lot of Vampires who use blood bags as they prefer not to risk losing control. Now I know the council would say that that blood could go towards saving Human lives, and I would counter that statement by saying it already is saving Human lives.”

She nods apparently agreeing with me so I say, “There are so many factors that go into how well someone can control their hunger and bloodlust. Not feeding regularly is a huge factor. The last Humans I killed were, I will admit, here in Mystic Falls because I had been locked up and starved for a week. I deeply regret those deaths including Vicki Donovan’s but if you don’t feed regularly for whatever reason the hunger will take over and you’ll lose control.”

Her eyes widen and she asks, “You’re the one who killed Vicki? Who starved you?”

I frown and cautiously tell her, “Yes, I killed her, which for the record I deeply regret. And as for who starved me, that would be Zach mostly because he feared me and what I might do if he let me stay free. Sadly, I wound up killing him that day too, which I also regret since he was family.”

She gasps at the news that Zach is dead, but she seems to be taking the news about both Vicki and Zach well all things considered, so I continue my lesson, “Another factor is our emotions, if we turn the switch off obviously we’re more likely to kill but heightened emotions can wear on one’s control just as much. Anger is probably the most obvious trigger in terms of heightened emotions feeding the bloodlust.”

I pause and at the risk of freaking her out a bit I tell her, “Then there’s the Human’s emotions. Not to freak you out or anything but just sitting here right now I can hear your heart beating and your blood pumping through your veins. I can hear your breathing accelerate and your heart rate pick up speed, which both just happened as your level of fear spiked. Your emotions have physical manifestations and I can hear or otherwise sense all of them.”
She’s stiff and clearly considering bolting so I tell her, “If you act like prey then my instincts are more likely to view you as prey. Now don’t get me wrong I’m not blaming Humans you’re just as much a slave to your emotions as Vampires are. Your instincts take over and tell you I’m dangerous to you, and if I weren’t completely in control I could undoubtedly pose a threat to Humans.”

She relaxes ever so slightly and rolls her almost empty glass around in her hands so I smile and say, “The good news is the older a Vampire gets the more in control they are. If they’re one of the good ones who has their switch firmly on and tries their best not to harm innocents, then with every year that goes by the fight gets slightly easier.”

I pause and consider how much of my story to tell her then decide I’ll save most of it for another time, “Now I’m not going to bore you with my history tonight though, since I do consider you my friend, I might be persuaded to share some of my long history with you at some point in the future. That said, know that I’m pretty much the oldest thing in Mystic Falls right now. I’m even older than all of the trees here and some of the water features in the area hadn’t formed yet when I was already considered ancient so my control is as close to a sure thing as that sort of thing can get.”

Her frown deepens and her stiff posture returns full force but she doesn’t say anything so I tell her, “Liz, whatever just popped into your head, I can’t address it, if you don’t tell me what it is.”

Her brows draw together and I notice her hands trembling ever so slightly as she raises her glass to take a sip and then after she swallows she asks, “If age is a big factor in a Vampire’s control am I safe with Caroline living in my house?”

I sigh but smile slightly as I tell her, “Liz, your daughter has been a Vampire for months now and she hasn’t harmed a hair on your head. In fact, she only killed one innocent when she first woke Vampire and that’s because we didn’t know she was transitioning so we weren’t there when she woke with the hunger and didn’t even know she needed to be taught control. As soon as we discovered she had transitioned, Stefan approached her, and he offered to teach her how not to be a monster. She latched onto the idea immediately, and she hasn’t harmed anyone other than those trying to harm people she cares about since.”

I chuckle then explain the laugh when she looks at me with a question written all over her face, “She tried the animal diet for a while but she had issues with killing the cute little furry things Stefan was trying to get her to eat. Now she does blood bags and another little known fact about Vampires the age of the Vampire whose blood causes a Human to go into transition affects the new Vampire’s level of control. I’m the Vampire whose blood was in Caroline’s system when she was murdered so her control is better than it would have been if I had only been a few decades old. Katherine who turned Stefan and me was over 390 years old when she fed us her blood so our control was better than it would have been if she had only been 170. And before you ask, I firmly believe Stefan’s control issues would have been even worse than they are if she had been younger.”

I smile gently and after taking another sip I tell her, “Your daughter is actually handling the changes within herself better than most. She’s strong physically because of her sire’s age but in terms of will power, well I’ve only met a few creatures in all my years who had greater will power to do good than your daughter. She was horrified when she killed her only victim and Stefan actually found her in the bathroom bawling because she didn’t want to be a monster. You should be proud of her and yourself. You and her dad raised a wonderful young woman who got dealt a horrible hand and yet has taken the cards dealt to her and turned them into a winning hand.”

I frown then cautiously admit, “I can admit that at first, when she was Human, Care was a little much for me but she grew on me and I proudly call her Sister at this point. You don’t have to worry that your baby is off in the middle of the night killing innocent people. She’s not and just as killing
everyone in this house is abhorrent to you and me both that sort of thing is just as abhorrent to Caroline. She understands what’s at stake, and she fights to keep control at every moment mostly because you raised a loving and caring woman who genuinely cares when others are hurt or in pain.”

I pause to let that sink in and a moment later Liz looks at me with tears in her eyes and asks, “She was murdered?”

I nod and explain what I can without putting Liz in a position to get herself killed trying to avenge her daughter, “She was. I gave Caroline my blood after the car accident her, Matt and Tyler were in. I overheard as the doctors told you she only had a 20% chance of surviving, so her friends and I decided the best bet was to feed her some of my blood and ensure she’d survive.”

I frown and sigh, “Sadly, I made a bad call though when I left her unprotected in the hospital. Honestly, I figured it was a hospital so she’d be safe. What I didn’t factor in was that a Vampire who has been hunted for over 500 years would know she had my blood in her system and kill her in an effort to give the one hunting her what he wanted.”

My frown deepens as I lean my elbows on my knees before I take another sip and then tell her, “That came to a head a few days ago and I rescued Care and Tyler, unfortunately it put Tyler’s friend and Jenna Sommers in harm’s way and they were both killed in Care and Tyler’s places.”

She asks the obvious question as her nostrils flare and she flexes her fingers, “Who?”

I sigh and cautiously tell her, “A very old Vampire named Klaus, who now has my brother.”

Her teeth are bared and her shoulders are tense again. She looks ready to go hunting Klaus so I tell her, “I need you to stand down Liz or your daughter will end up having to bury you much sooner than she should have to. One he’s not a regular Vampire so he has much fewer weaknesses. Two he’s much too old for a Human to stand any chance against him, especially since at this point, the only way to kill him is by tearing out his heart. Stakes won’t do anything but hurt and piss him off further. The good news is I’m older than Klaus by thousands of years so I can and will end him and rid the world of his brand of crazy. But I need you to trust me on this at least; I will not rest until he’s dead, especially since he has Stefan.”

She reluctantly nods but tells me, “I’ll trust you on this for now, but if you need anything to help, even if it’s only information, please don’t hesitate to call me.”

I nod back, “I may very well take you up on that as I’m going to need to track them and I’m guessing there’s going to be a trail of bodies left in Klaus’ wake so you might be the only one who can help me do that.”

She nods again and then yawns so I smile and tell her, “You’re tired Liz and it’s been a long day for all of us. Unless you have any other questions you absolutely need answered tonight I suggest you go home and get some sleep. My door is always open to you provided you come with peaceful intentions.”

She nods and then blushes and stammers out, “I’m really sorry about that, I—”

I interrupt, “It’s okay Liz, you were taught we’re all monsters and no one had ever shown you any evidence that that fact was wrong. You and John Gilbert were both good people who finally decided to get all the facts and make your own conclusions instead of taking someone else’s word for it that we’re all unredeemable.”

She catches my use of the past tense and asks, “He was? Is he…?”
“Klaus needed to complete a sacrifice and his chosen targets, for reasons I’ll explain some other time, were Elena, Jenna, and a Werewolf named Jules. Technically, the sacrifice was successful and all three of them died. John brought his daughter back to life, but it sadly cost him his own life. He knew that was the price he’d have to pay when he revived Elena, but he did it anyway and left her in the care of me and my brother despite having been taught that all Vampires are evil.”

I smile despite the sad subject matter and tell her, “He did what you’re doing now. He evaluated what he was seeing in Stefan and me, and he realized that not only do we not go around killing people but the three of us all had several things in common. One we all love Elena and are willing to sacrifice ourselves to protect her. Two, we want the same thing… for Elena to live a long, happy, healthy, and safe life.”

Now I frown and say, “I regret that we weren’t able to save him as I think he and Elena would have been close once he took his head out of his ass when it came to Vampires. He also probably would have been helpful in helping Elena deal with all the grief that’s plagued her life in recent times.”

She’s nodding again as I take a quick sip of Bourbon and then tell her, “I mean she has, me, Stefan, Jeremy, Caroline, Bonnie, Matt, and Tyler. She has Alaric too who is obviously going for sainthood since he’s not only taking her and Jeremy in but he regularly puts up with my bullshit and often manages to tone my shit down a bit. However, none of us can replace John, Grayson, Miranda, or Jenna and I wish she at least still had her father in her life. I wish Jeremy had him too actually. Anyway, now you’re evaluating things and coming to your own conclusions.”

She nods and yawns again so I laugh and tell her, “I’m serious Liz, go home and sleep. I know you’re conflicted about me, but I want you to know that I consider you my friend. The first friend I had had in a really long time, and I regretted that I couldn’t tell you the truth, but I didn’t think you’d be willing to give me an honest chance. I apologize for not giving you enough credit, but in my defense Vampire haters usually can’t see beyond their own bias and rarely change their minds. Not always mind you since as I said blanket statements about entire groups of people are rarely always correct, but anyways, I’ll be here to answer any other questions you think of some other time.”

I pause then tell her, “And just as you offered to help me find Klaus let me extend the same offer. If you think you have Vampires or other Supes hunting in our town let me know and I’ll help in whatever way I can as I’m genetically programed to hunt, so I might be able to sniff them out more easily than the council members can. Plus, I’m stronger and faster than any Supe who might show up, and I have contacts that would sooner kill you guys than talk to you but they’ll give me information with little argument.”

I pause then decide to be a little more honest so I add, “Also I plan to make it known to the Supernatural world at large that Mystic Falls is off limits when it comes to killing and I fully plan to enforce that so hopefully that will help lessen the number of wild animal attacks.”

She nods and as she stands and hands me her empty glass she says, “I’ll let you know the next time we have evidence of Vamps being in town, or well other Vamps being in town.”

I smile as I stand and then remember something so I say, “Great. Oh and while I remember I’d like to continue supplying the council with Vervain. As much as being able to compel the majority of the council would make my life easier ultimately you’re all safer on it so when the new crop fully matures I’ll drop some off with you to distribute however you see fit.”

She smiles as her eyes pop open wide, “Thank you, Damon.”

I can tell that my offer to continue supplying Vervain has actually had an unintended consequence and helped to strengthen her inclination to trust me despite what I am, so I smile and escort her to the
door. “You’re welcome. Oh and not to interfere in your duties as a mother but if you could let Caroline spend as much time as possible with us that would be great. Truth is they’re all much safer the closer they are to me and I find myself rather paranoid anytime they’re out and about while Klaus is still on the loose, though I’m fairly certain he’s going to be leaving town soon if he hasn’t already. Still, if you could allow sleepovers and such as frequently as possible, I’d sleep better at night, and we might be able to kill him sooner rather than later if we’re not having to concern ourselves with curfews as often as we normally would.”

She laughs and tells me with a smile, “I’ll see what I can do, but the odds are in your favor since school is out now, so if I were you I’d try to kill him before September when I will get stricter about curfews and sleepovers on school nights.”

I laugh back, “Duly noted Liz and for the record I’m hoping it won’t take that long but realistically it might take longer. If you, in your sheriff duties, hear any talk of piles of bodies appearing in any kind of pattern or line let me know. I hope to get ahead of the piles and prevent Humans from ever knowing what’s happening, but I know I’m going to need a few piles first to figure out where he’s headed.”

She nods and says, “I’ll let you know what I hear. Thank you, Damon, for not chasing me off tonight. I feel better having some much needed answers, and I think I will take you up on your offer for more answers if I think of anything else I don’t understand.”

I smile and offer, “Good, and at some point if you want to hear my history, let me know, and I’ll tell you what I can.”

She surprisingly sticks her hand out so I shake it and then watch as she walks to her cruiser and gets in before driving off.
I spend a good chunk of the rest of the night standing in the doorway to Bonnie and Jeremy’s room watching over them. They both moan in pain a number of times but I know from the previous times I saw this spell used that there is nothing I can do to help alleviate the pain.

Their eyes are constantly moving behind their eyelids, so I know images are flashing through both of their heads very quickly, but I also know that given a little time to process everything when they wake for the most part they’ll remember and understand everything that they’re seeing and hearing now.

I go to sleep around four and sleep in for once though I still wake before Elena and Caroline. As I’m cooking their breakfast and chatting with them about random rather unimportant stuff the doorbell rings and Care gets up saying, “That should be Ty.”

As soon as Tyler enters the room, I reduce the heat on the stove-top so I don’t burn my omelet, wipe my hands on a towel, and walk to the younger man who’s shifting his weight back and forth on his feet and looking everywhere but at me. This is the first time we’ve actually seen each other since I died.

I smile what I hope is a reassuring and friendly smile and tell him, “I just want you to know that I know you didn’t mean to bite me or Care. I don’t blame you or hold you responsible. Klaus kidnapped you, and if he hadn’t you would have been locked up tight and none of us, you included, would have been in any danger.”

I smile wider and tell him, “We have some of Klaus’s blood in the freezer downstairs, so we have at least a couple doses of the cure since for whatever reason Klaus filled the whole bottle to the rim, so no hard feelings. I don’t want you to worry about putting us at risk because we have a few bites worth of the cure as backup if something goes terribly wrong again. Okay?”

Tyler looks shocked, but then says, “Yeah, thanks. I… I hated that I put you at risk, but I see what you mean about that situation not being my fault so thank you. While I’m at it, thanks for stepping between me and Care too. I don’t know what I would have done if I had killed her.”

He pauses then adds, “I think I might ask Bonnie later if there is any Witchy way to stretch that cure.”

I smile as I say, “I actually have an idea about that but Briseis has to break her spell and get her powers back. So long as we have some of Klaus’s blood when that happens she’ll be able to become the permanent cure.” I make a little oops face when I realize I may have said more than I
should have and definitely more than anyone else in the room knew before I spoke.

Tyler looks shocked but happy to hear there’s hope as he asks, “Uh Briseis is who? And how will she be a cure?”

I cross my fingers that the spell on them will keep Care and ‘Lena from figuring out who they are as I tell them all, “Briseis, was my wife and she was born a Demon like me. Only she and her brother Balthazaar are a very rare kind of Demon called Elementals. They’re actually part Fire, Earth, Water, Air, and Spirit Demon. They’re all five subspecies in equal parts.”

I smile and continue the story, “The men with that distinction have very powerful Magick. In fact, when some of the members of the species slept with Humans, well that’s essentially who Witches are descended from, but the women Elementals are even more powerful than the men. They’re what’re generally called Mimics. If they touch someone they gain all their knowledge, memories, know-how, abilities, strengths, powers, pretty much everything including Supernatural powers, senses, strengths, and speed. Their bodies essentially make a permanent copy that they get to keep for all time. After a while that power accumulates and as I’m sure you can imagine the women by the time they reach even just a few centuries old are incredibly powerful.”

I frown at the memories of entire families being wiped out as I tell them, “The species is pretty rare though, especially since the women were hunted and slaughtered by the other sub-species of Demons due to how powerful they could become.”

I walk back over to the fry pan and go back to adding the ingredients I want in my omelet as I say, “Anyway, despite what Klaus thinks, he’s not actually the first Hybrid. Though the two I know of that came before him never had curses placed on them so they could both shift at will and create progeny. They and their progeny were hunted and slaughtered several millennia ago by hate mongering Humans whom another Vampire named Lilith encouraged long before Klaus’s parents were even born.”

I smile, “Now touching Klaus or his blood might not be necessary as Briseis has touched both previous Hybrids in the past but if she were to touch Klaus or even just some of his blood, she could at will turn her blood to mimic his and would therefore be the same cure his real blood is.”

Everyone’s jaws drop open at that so I know they understand what I’m implying but I tell them, “Anyhow, I’ve seen a Mimic successfully cure three different Werewolf and two Hybrid bites on different occasions.”

As I turn to the counter to pick up a handful of chopped black olives I say, “Still Briseis was the strongest Mimic I’d ever heard tale of. Once she returns she’ll be a millennium stronger at that, so just try to keep the biting to a minimum, so that when she does return to herself she’ll be able to drink his blood and definitively make us all safe eternally.”

He nods so I add, “Also, I’m pretty sure she’ll be willing though maybe I shouldn’t bring it up yet until I can run the idea by her first, but I know how much you hate shifting. Did Care mention that Klaus plans to build a Hybrid army?”

When Tyler nods, I continue, “Right I’m pretty sure it’s not going to work mostly because a dream I had makes me think he needs to feed them the Doppelgänger’s blood instead of Human blood to finish the transformation, which is why I fully plan to keep ‘Lena being alive a secret.”

As I add spinach to my omelet I tell them all, “Now since Briseis touched a previous Hybrid it might work without Elena’s blood but if ‘Lena stores some blood then no matter when Briseis comes back if it’s next year or 100 years from now she’ll be able to touch/drink Elena’s blood and definitely have
the abilities necessary. If it happens while you’re still alive then she could theoretically turn you into a Hybrid using Klaus and Elena’s blood within her own, and then my friend you would no longer be a Servant to the Moon.”

Everyone’s jaws are on the ground, but it’s Elena who speaks up, “Damon as soon as we finish breakfast I want to store some blood away just in case since I’m such a trouble magnet.”

She pauses as though she’s thinking about it then adds, “And I want to give fresh amounts periodically so it’ll last as long as possible in case Briseis doesn’t get back before I’m dead.”

I nod glad that she suggested it since in order for Briseis to return Elena’s blood will change back into Briseis’ blood, so the only way for the idea to work is for Elena to store blood away for after the change happens. The idea of her dying though makes me sick to my stomach and my jaw is ticking at the thought.

I recover a moment later and turn back to Tyler, “Good, so see hope is not lost and someday hopefully you’ll have control over your beast and helping you isn’t and will continue not to be an automatic death sentence if you bite one of us. Incidentally, I’m now immune to your venom at this point due to my becoming a Vampire through a spell instead of through siring. Oh and if you’re wondering the same is true of all of the Originals. Anyway the only ones you really need to be mindful of your teeth around are Caroline, Stefan, and if she shows up, Katherine.”

Tyler looks like he’s high but he nods and says, “Thank you for letting me know there’s hope. You didn’t have to do that especially after what I put you all through. I know Care and ‘Lena both honestly thought they lost you. While it might not have been my fault exactly, it was still the venom from my mouth that killed you. And while I’m at it thanks for not trying to make me dead back.”

I chuckle and nod as I flip the back half of the egg onto the front half and smile a genuine smile at Tyler before I say, “No problem, truth is you’re kind of growing on me, Wolf-boy, and I know you’ve helped Care deal with her issues just as much as she’s helped you. Therefore, since my sister thinks of you as family I’m kind of stuck with you. But like I said you are growing on me, like a tumor, but I’m getting used to having you around, and I know our family wouldn’t be quite the same without you in it, Brother.”

He smiles at that and says, “You’re kind of growing on me too man, though you are definitely an acquired taste.”

I laugh and nod as I plate up my own omelet, which is a little more well-done than I would have liked since I was distracted by our conversation, but oh well.

As I put my plate on the counter, I ask him, “You hungry? I can make you an omelet too.”

He smiles but shakes his head no and says, “Thanks but I ate before I came over.”

I just nod and sit down to eat my breakfast. Once we’ve all eaten, Elena and Caroline clean up my mess and then I take a quick turn as Elena’s phlebotomist before I leave the three teens in the living room to converse among themselves and head back up to stand guard over Bonnie and Jeremy.

Is Bonnie surprised that I told her the truth? Oh not the whole truth but she should also know that I couldn’t, not with Elena and Caroline within hearing distance.

Is she surprised that I, as Drago, swore to protect her ancestors and all of their descendants who are actually mine and Briseis’ descendants through our oldest child, a daughter named Hali? Balthazaar and Lilith’s descendants came into the line a little farther down through the years too, well about
35,000 years after Hali gave birth to her first child or thereabouts so about 10 or 11 generations later.

Anyway, Balthazaar and Lilith thought being their ancestors gave them the right to kill them when they displeased them so I promised to protect Bonnie’s line and I kept my word. I even protected Emily and her descendants despite not remembering my original pledge.

Well at least I did until Bonnie, then I tried to kill her after I thought she had destroyed the only way to save Katherine. After I bit her, I deeply regretted it as though some part of me knew we were family and that I had just broken my twice given word, which prior to that I had always kept if I was able.

I actually almost killed Dante, Asya, Lilith, and Balthazaar in the past. They had no respect for my vow of protection or my sense of family and I literally held their hearts in my hand and promised to end them if they didn’t stop toying with or otherwise trying to hurt Briseis’ and my descendants.

That is in part why Tianna spelled us I think. I’m sure she didn’t think of it as a curse. It was merely a spell to try to teach them some lessons they desperately needed to learn and in most cases still do. Briseis and I were the only ones with any real honor back then, though I can admit there was still room for improvement as evidenced by my attacking Bonnie.

Are Bonnie and Jeremy seeing all of our hidden memories as well as all the memories of our current lives or are they just seeing my memories? The last Witch who completed the memory spell, another ancestor of Bonnie’s, remembered the memories of all six of us despite only one of us being part of the actual spell. Since that’s pretty much how it played out this time too I’m guessing Bonnie and Jeremy are getting everything from all six of us.

My eyes cut towards Bonnie laying in the bed as I pace a little just inside the door of the room. I wonder if Bonnie is going to see all the bad things, in some cases really, really bad things, I did before Damon’s switch broke in the on position and further condemn and hate me. She’s prone to passing judgment and I find I want her to realize that my bad behavior now weighs heavily on me, and in most cases, I regret the pain and death I’ve caused.

On the other hand, I wonder what she’ll think of Stefan if she’s getting his memories too. Stefan though plagued by guilt is not the saint he portrays himself as, and I know Klaus knows that and is planning to turn Stefan back into the monster he’s fought so hard to bury.

I still believe Stefan needs to find moderation not abstinence otherwise, he’ll fall off the wagon every couple of decades and a ton of lives will be lost. Sadly, I’ve seen it happen often enough. Will Bonnie recognize that eating bunnies and squirrels really isn’t the answer or will she believe, as Stefan does, that he can’t possibly learn to control himself?

I mean he’s one of the strongest people I know, and his willpower is strong too since he surrounds himself with Humans day in and day out and then denies himself what his body needs and craves. It’s no wonder he breaks down and kills every few decades, but still I don’t think I’d last even that long if it were me.

Close to midnight the night after I died, I hear Tyler sneak back into the house. When he left to go home he told us, “I’m going to say goodnight to my mom, then sneak out, and come back over once my mom goes to sleep.”

I nodded and told him “That’s fine, just come on in when you get back.”

He smiled and nodded as he left the same time Care and ‘Lena left to go grocery shopping at the 24-hour Walmart, so I’m not surprised when a moment later he walks up the stairs and joins me in the
doorway.

He looks at me and after a minute of looking back and forth between me and the pair on the bed he asks, “Any change?”

I shake my head, “No but they should wake any minute now as we’re quickly approaching the 27-hour mark from when Jeremy lay down, which is when the spell should finish itself.”

We watch Bonnie and Jeremy sleep for maybe ten more minutes before Bonnie’s heart-rate picks up and we see her eyelids flutter a moment before her eyes finally open. She turns her head away from the doorway seemingly not realizing we’re here and looks at Jeremy lying beside her in bed fast asleep.

She raises the hand not holding his to rub at her eyes and Jeremy’s eyes pop open at the movement. He smiles as he turns his face to look at her, then his eyes widen, and he asks, “Are you okay? I think we’ve been asleep a long time.”

They’ve been asleep for exactly 27 hours, but how does he know that since neither of them has woken even once during that time? She nods, “I’m fine,” his brows draw closer together and his lips thin out as he looks at her, so I’m not surprised when she moves to reassure him, “I mean it. I’m fine. I just got bombarded by six or twelve different sets of memories but I’m fine.”

He looks to the door and she follows his gaze to find Ty and me leaning against opposite sides of the door jam.

I’m mostly relaxed as I look at them though I’m sure concern flashes in my eyes for a moment before I slip my usual disinterested mask back on, “Hey there Judgey, how do you feel?”

She frowns but before I can tell her I was just kidding about calling her Judgey she surprises me by saying, “Damon, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t have judged y——”

Her look is heavy as her eyes hold the knowledge that she didn’t have all the facts when she judged me, and that I’m a different man than I was even from as recently as when I came back to Mystic Falls. So I interrupt her, “Don’t worry about it, you weren’t completely wrong about who I was at the time and I did try to kill you. I’m sorry for that, I never should have——”

She interrupts me back, “You didn’t break your word, it’s Tianna’s fault that you didn’t remember your vow or that we’re family.”

I sigh and my shoulders slump just a tad before I catch the movement and straighten up again, “But I made the same vow to Emily and I definitely remembered that one when I bit you.”

She rolls to her side so she can look at me without turning her head and tells me, “I know, but I forgive you, and I kind of understand where you were coming from now that I have most of your memories. You honestly thought I had just destroyed the only way to rescue the woman you loved from starving for all of eternity. We should all love so deeply.”

I frown then rather suddenly smile ever so slightly, “That’s still no excuse as far as I’m concerned but thank you for forgiving me. Know this however, I remember both of my vows now, and I will not break either one again. Furthermore, I now remember that you are descended from my oldest child, so I will protect you and yours from this moment forward.”

Despite how long she’s spent hating me I can tell she believes me as her body’s tension seems to evaporate into thin air and her eyes brighten. I truly want to be a better man, and I used to be very trust worthy and wish to return to that behavior now that I’m myself again. She must be able to see
all of that in my eyes or something since she tells me, “I know, thank you.”

I nod and then Ty and I enter the room. He sits at the end of the bed but I stay standing a few feet away as she says, “Hey can I call you ‘Gramps’ since technically you’re my great-great-a-thousand-times-removed grandfather.”

I laugh and tell her, “It might be suspicious in public, but in private you can call me whatever you like, though don’t be surprised if I start calling you something like ‘Childe’ in response.”

She laughs back and says, “I’ll have to think about whether I can live with that or not.”

I nod and laugh back then after a few seconds, I calm down and tell them, “Caroline and Elena went to the 24-hour Walmart to pick up groceries since I was running low on Human food. If you have any questions you want to ask now’s the time as I’m sure you realize they can’t know what we know until they break their own spells.”

She nods as Jeremy sits up and kind of sputters as he and Ty both ask, “Wait Caroline and Elena have the same spell on them that you did?”

I smile reassuringly and nod, “Yes and Katherine, Elijah and Stefan also have the spell on them.”

Ty’s eyes are wide as he sort of shakes his head in wonder but Jeremy practically bounces despite sitting in bed as he shouts, “Holy Shit! So you’re like all way older than even they know?”

I chuckle as a wide smile slowly grows on my face at Jer’s obvious happiness at this news, “I’m the oldest at a little under 490,455 years old, followed closely by Stefan, whose name was Dante back then, and Elijah, or Balthazaar, who are just over 100 and 255 years younger than me, respectively. Elena whose name was Briseis is just a few months over 135 years younger than me and Elijah, or Lilith is the first Human so she’s about 35,250 years younger than me and then Caroline, or Anastasiya, though we usually called her Asya, is just under 100 years younger than Lilith though her maturity has always made her seem much older than Lilith even when Asya was a child.”

Bonnie laughs and turns to look at Jer as she tells him and Ty, “He’s not kidding. Lilith is a billion times worse than Katherine while Asya in comparison despite her many flaws makes my grams look like an immature, entitled, and spoiled brat and we all know Grams was pretty much the exact opposite of that.”

We all laugh at that and I nod seriously as I agree, “You’re right about that. Katherine is nowhere near as bad as Lilith used to be though, and I’m hoping once the spell is broken that will still be true.”

Bonnie smiles reassuringly before telling me, “It will be though she’ll be better than she currently is too.”

I nod once, “From your mouth to the Goddess’ ear. So any other questions?”

Jeremy sputters and then says, “Hey how do I know... Bonnie did I somehow see everything you saw?”

I smile as I realize I was right, so I tell them, “I expected as much when you passed out moments after you both lay down holding hands. I imagine the delayed memory is a result of you having had to see it through Bonnie.”

His eyes are wide but they are still sparkling and he’s bouncing so much I’m afraid he’ll vibrate right
off the bed so I tell them all, “You’ll both need to stick close to the rest of us for a few days as you might have bouts of... well you’ll probably get lost in memories and that could put you at risk, especially if you’re driving or if there’s some other kind of danger. Klaus has me worried.”

Bonnie frowns and grabs my hand, “He should but I think he daggered Elijah, so we need to help him first then he can help us get Stefan back.”

I can’t say I’m surprised that Klaus betrayed Elijah. Everything I’ve learned about Klaus both from personal experience as well as massive amounts of research before the sacrifice played out says he’s incredibly untrustworthy and an all-around asshole to almost everyone. I sit on the edge of the bed when Bonnie tugs on my hand a bit and then ask, “Any idea where to look for Elijah?”

She pauses as though she’s sifting through memories and she probably is. Then she says, “I think he shipped him to Chicago this morning and if we get there before Klaus we should be able to undagger him and get back here before Klaus and Stefan even think to head to Chicago.”

I don’t question how she knows these things as I ask her, “Okay, do we have a few days or do I need to run up there now and do it.”

She frowns and then tells me, “I honestly think we have three or four months before they’ll head up there and it might take that long to figure out where he’s stashed the coffins.”

I nod then sit up straighter as her words sink in and I ask, “Wait, coffins, plural?”

She nods back slowly and tells me, “Yeah all the other Originals, I’m not sure what to do about them. On the one hand I think they need to have their hearts ripped out before they do any damage to anyone, but I’m not sure how well that would help us to getting Elijah on our side. I mean if he was willing to betray us once to save them, our killing them might destroy his willingness to help us even if he is Balthazaar.”

I think for a moment and wonder if the spell Tianna used on my family to freeze us so she could do the other spell would work and if so would it be included in the tomes housed in the cave she and her ancestors as well as her descendants, including Emily, inherited from Hali. They all took me there fairly often through the years, even Emily took me a few times when I was Human, so I know exactly where it is and how to access it. I sit up straight when it occurs to me that Bonnie probably doesn’t even know about the cave or she would have mentioned all the books before. Then again, we weren’t exactly each other’s confidants so maybe she does know. Regardless I ask her, “I have an idea, Bonnie, did your grandmother get a chance to show you the cave where your ancestors’ Grimoires are hidden?”

She shakes her head no, so I continue, “It’s your birthright, so I’ll bring you there tomorrow.”

She nods with wide eyes, so I tell her, “Anyway, when Tianna placed the spell on us, she held us immobile for a good long while as she prepared and then forced us to drink her potion. If the spell to immobilize a Vampire is in one of the books we could theoretically undagger them all and give them a choice, help us or at least follow our rules and live or we’ll kill them then and there.”

She nods and pauses obviously thinking things over for a minute and then Tyler asks me, “Care said Elijah is supposedly really into keeping his word right? Any idea if any of the others are as into keeping their word as Elijah is?”

Before I can really ponder the question Jer shifts on the bed beside Bonnie and then somehow he seems to vibrate even more as he asks, “What if we do what you said with just Elijah and give him the details we can share and then ask him what he wants us to do with his family. If he’s on our side
when we talk to the other Originals it might help sway them to our side and also help keep them loyal to us or Elijah at least, especially if Klaus daggered all of them.”

Bonnie smiles and says, “Yeah I can’t imagine they’ll be too pleased with him when they come to.”

Ty agrees, “I bet they’ll be pretty pissed off and gunning for Klaus too.”

My eyes narrow and my brow furrows before I sigh and say, “That’s true, but we have to remember he’s their brother. Brothers forgive or at least overlook a lot of shit just because it’s their brother that did it.”

My frown deepens as the memory of Stefan biting Damon’s first victim and practically throwing her at me while I was in transition enters my mind.

Bonnie is apparently remembering the same thing as she says, “You mean like you not killing Stefan when he forced you to complete the transition against your will?”

Despite my time as Damon being infinitely shorter than my time as Drago, the pain from my life as Damon is still very real even though my lives and memories have merged. The merging didn’t take away any of the pain from previous betrayals. After a moment, I refocus on the present and with a grim expression on my face say, “Exactly like that.”

Jeremy and Ty both frown and with wide sad eyes ask, “He forced you?”

I nod, “Neither of us planned to complete the transition, but he found himself in the same room as an open wound and he fed and then tried to convince me to do the same. I still didn’t want to finish it, so he bit a girl and pretty much shoved her at me, and my instinct to survive took over. That’s why I’ve been spending the last 150 years tormenting him. That night I literally promised him an eternity of misery for forcing me to complete the transition.”

Their frowns deepen and they both whisper, “God that sucks.”

I nod back, and we all just sit for a few minutes. Jeremy’s vibrating seems to have stopped for the moment. Then Jeremy brings the focus back to the Originals as his excitement returns and he once again practically vibrates off the bed as he talks with growing speed and asks, “Well you could take the Originals right? You’ve said before that being older translates to being faster and stronger than anyone who’s younger than you, right? And if Bonnie can over power them then they might just fear us enough to stay in line.”

I smile a rare genuine smile as I nod at Jeremy, “You might be right about that, Little Gilbert.”

We all sit in silence for another minute then I clear my throat, “Look, I know Caroline and Elena know this but I just want us all to be on the same page. Despite how I might have acted before I uh I consider you all family and I protect my family, so I just want you to know that. I know all three of you have lost loved ones and I’m sorry for your losses, but you need to know that you’re not alone, we’re kind of forming our own little ragtag family.”

Bonnie smiles and leans up to hug me, “We know but thank you for saying it. I think I might actually like the real you, go figure.”

I hold on for a second then pull away before turning to look at Ty and Jeremy and putting my hands up defensively which causes Jeremy to laugh and assure me, “Don’t worry man I’m not going to try to hug you, I know better.”

Ty smiles and nods as my eyes sparkle with mirth and I laugh before telling them, “Good, just so
we’re clear.”

A moment later, I smile and cock my head to the side as Ric finally gets out of his car that he’s been sitting in for ten minutes. Despite the very late hour, he spent the time speaking on the phone with his landlord who was calling to find out who the person staying in Ric’s apartment was. Ric told him it was a friend who was in town for a few weeks but who should be leaving any day now. The landlord has nothing to suggest there is any damage done to the apartment, but once Ric promised that he’d pay for any damage his friend might have caused the landlord seemed satisfied and ended the call.

A moment later, we all hear a knock and then Ric loudly says, “Hello, anyone home?”

I stand and walk to the door of the room before shouting, “Upstairs Ric.” A minute later, we hear his footsteps on the stairs, and then I’m shaking hands with him as he looks at the three teens sitting on the bed over my shoulder.

“Tyler glad to see you’re okay after everything that happened with Klaus. Bonnie, Jer, glad to see you’re finally awake. You guys okay?”

She gives me a questioning look before she smiles and nods so I tell them, “I went to the Gilbert house last night while Caroline and Elena stayed here to keep an eye on both of you and told Ric everything so while he doesn’t have any of my memories like you two he’s been told the basics like Ty. Feel free to talk amongst yourselves whenever so long as Caroline, Elena, Stefan, Katherine, and Elijah can’t hear you. I think for now the two you need to focus on are Caroline and Elena.”

They all nod, but then Bonnie frowns and says, “I hate keeping secrets.”

I frown back and tell her, “I know, Bonnie, but look at it this way; we don’t know what damage we could do by telling them any of this. It’s too risky, and I firmly believe they’ll forgive all of us for keeping this secret once their spells have been broken.”

She plays with the blanket in her hands as she looks down and slowly nods again, “I know. I just really hate keeping secrets, especially from Caroline and Elena. I couldn’t even keep being a Witch from the two of them despite Grams’ warnings.”

I walk to her and then squat beside the bed so I’m eye level with her and gently tilt her face up with my finger so I can look in her eyes, “I know, Childe. Your loyalty and moral compass are, amazingly enough, two of the things I admire most about you. You’re a good friend Bonnie. Try to look at it more as you’re protecting them and less as you’re keeping secrets from them because let’s face it the only reason any of us would keep a secret is to protect someone we care about and this time is no different.”

She chuckles when I call her ‘Childe’ and then smiles at my words, so I smile back and tell her, “Honestly I think now that one of us broke the spell it’s probably more likely that others will follow suit quicker. Not to mention I think Elena and Caroline are the most likely of the other five to give up their lives for their loved ones so hopefully it won’t be too long now.”

She nods as much as my hand on her chin will allow and tells me, “I hope so, Gramps.”

I laugh back and then let go of her face and pat her hand before giving it a gentle squeeze as I stand back up and say, “I can hear Caroline and Elena driving towards us. They’ll be here in five or so minutes so we need to stop this discussion for now.”

Ric’s eyes pop open just as wide as everyone else’s do at that news, but he’s the one who gathers his
wits first to ask, “Wait they’re five minutes away by car and you can already hear them?”

I chuckle and tell them all, “I’ve been listening to them the whole time they’ve been gone. They’ve mostly been switching back and forth between gushing about how happy they are I didn’t die for good and worrying that I might be dead when they return. They’ve mentioned not wanting to wake up if my being alive again is a dream a dozen or so times.”

I pause then frown slightly as I tell them, “I’ve been trying to zone them out, so I’m not eavesdropping on their private thoughts about me. However, I seem to zero in on Elena’s voice automatically if I don’t actively work at ignoring it and since my range has dramatically improved over night I’m finding it harder to focus on zoning everyone out. Though I have to admit their obvious worry has left me feeling loved.”

All four of them stare at me with wide eyes and slack jaws before Ric asks me, “How?”

I shrug and look at each of them as I say, “If I were standing in the geographic center of Mystic Falls I’d be able to hear just about everyone in Mystic Falls and probably eighteen to twenty-two miles outside of it too. Since we’re on the far side of town, I can hear all of Mystic Falls and about twelve miles in the opposite direction and about twenty-four to twenty-eight miles in this direction going out towards the Walmart.

“I mean I already knew how to focus on specific voices and zone everyone else out, but my range improving so drastically and so quickly is making it harder to get it completely back under control. Fortunately, it only took an hour or two for me to really remember how, but as I said it’s taking more work than I recall since not only can I hear father away but everything seems infinitely louder too. I’m hoping it’ll return to being second nature within a few days and then it won’t take so much effort and concentration to zone everything out.”

They’re nodding so I smile and add, “I’m faster now too, and my sense of smell is drastically improved. Last night I could smell someone’s shampoo and body wash well enough to identify the user as their car pulled up to the house while I stood in the doorway to this room.”

Their eyes widen even further at that news so I continue, “I’ve found I can also see things from much farther away not to mention see more detail closer up, and my night vision is vastly improved, none of which I thought was really possible but it apparently is.”

At their shocked faces I keep going, “I mean think about it, by way of modern time keeping I’m a little over 9,545 years shy of 500,000-years-old give or take a century. Think about how strong and fast Elijah is and he’s only just over 1,000 right now. If you multiply his power and abilities by 500,000 you might get some idea of where I’m at right now. Plus, it’s as though all of my powers and abilities not only returned to where they were when Tianna placed the spell making me a Human but they’ve also improved drastically since I’m now 1,234 years older than I was, which in terms of age and power acquisition is a long ass time.”

All four of them look at each other in awe and say, “Wow,” at the same time with wide eyes.

Bonnie seems to get over her awe first as she refocuses on my face and brings the conversation back to the cave her ancestors used to hide their books, “The cave where the Grimoires are, how easy is it to get to it?”

I stop and think for a moment, “Well it’s by the falls, and it shouldn’t be too hard to get to. I was always able to enter the cave but my Vampire family, with the exception of Briseis, wasn’t able to get past a certain point. If I recall correctly Emily strengthened the Vampire free zone and I know she talked about possibly moving it closer to the entrance and farther away from the actual cavern,
but if she actually did move the barrier, it didn’t happen until after I transitioned. Anyhow, we’ll need to bring Ric, Elena, Little Gilbert, and Tyler to help you carry anything you might want to take home with you. I mean Caroline and I can carry shit once you hand it over but well I’m sure you get the idea.”

She nods so I continue, “First you’ve both been asleep for 27 hours so you need to eat, and Caroline and ‘Lena are pulling into the drive now with groceries, so I’ll cook and then tomorrow morning we can go since it’s already after midnight and only Care, Ty, and I can see so well in the dark.”

They all nod, and I nod back then say, “I’m going to go help bring everything in from the car, come down when you’re ready.”
Elena keeps staring at me as if she can’t seem to take her eyes off me. She was very clear that she didn’t want to leave me when I suggested she and Caroline go shopping, so I could feed Bonnie and Jeremy when they woke up.

I frowned and told her, “Nothing bad is going to happen ‘Lena while you’re gone.”

She frowned back and told me, “You don’t know that. What if Klaus shows up?”

I sighed and said, “I’m perfectly capable of handling him now that I’m myself once again, and it’d be better that he shows up when none of you are around to get hurt.”

I paused then Caroline told her, “Seriously ‘Lena, I promise he’ll be fine for the hour it will take the two of us to buy groceries.”

Tyler seemed to sense that no one was winning this argument so he added, “‘Lena, would it help if I come back once my mom goes to sleep? Then he won’t be alone, and we can call you guys if anything happens.”

She paused to consider his words then said, “You promise to come right back?”

He nodded and told her, “I promise, ‘Lena. As soon as my mom is out for the night I’ll come back.”

She nodded and smiled as she said, “Okay then.” Never mind the irony of Tyler being here to protect me when his venom is what killed me the first time but the promise worked so whatever.

She admitted to Caroline in the store that, “I feel as though if I’m not looking at him I’ll wake up or he’ll drop dead. His dying was way too close for my comfort,” which is probably true for everyone but especially for Elena. I mean I actually died again and not undead dead, but dead-dead. It’s only sheer luck that I had that spell placed on me and that dying was the way to break it.

I know Elena knows I know things I’m not telling her and Caroline. I tried to keep the trailing off mid-sentence and furtive glances between each of us in the know to a minimum but they still happened enough to tip Elena, and probably Caroline, off that there are things she doesn’t know.

Therefore, I’m not surprised when after our very later dinner, she follows me into the living room, and as I pour myself a glass of Bourbon she asks, “So what aren’t you telling me and the rest of us?”

As I pour Ric a glass I sigh, I hate keeping secrets probably just as much as Bonnie does still I can’t tell these secrets yet, so I turn to face her fully and tell her what I can, “Honestly, there’s a lot I’m not
telling you ’Lena, but I can’t tell any of it to any of you. If I do, it would put you at risk and I’m not talking as if it might put you at risk. The simple act of speaking the words could possibly have catastrophic consequences, such as some of you dying. It has to do with the spell. I promise eventually you’ll all know everything but as badly as I hate keeping secrets right now it’s our only option.”

She stares into my eyes the entire time I’m talking, and I know she can see the pure honesty shining in my eyes as well as the glint in them reflecting the sharp pain in my chest over having to keep a secret, so I’m pleased when she nods and says, “Okay, I trust you.”

Apparently, she really does know I’d never lead her astray, and I’d die before I let anything happen to her or Caroline for that matter or really any of them at this point, even Bonnie and Tyler, who strangely are now my two number one fans. I smile a rare smile and tell her, “Thank you Elena, you have no idea what that means to me.”

I know Bonnie told Elena the same thing I just did about our secrets. Fortunately for us, Elena seems to believe her too. She knows her best friend would never keep a secret if it wasn’t a life or death situation, I mean her grams told her not to tell anyone she was a Witch and she immediately told Elena anyway.

Elena nods and smiles back as everyone else files into the living room. I hand Ric his glass before he goes and sits down. Ty sits down on the couch to my left as Care joins him. Jeremy has his laptop out and after placing his backpack at his feet, he sits on the couch to my right as he sets the computer on his lap. Once settled he turns to look at Bonnie who’s still standing and says, “I’m not having any luck searching the internet for the warehouse I drew. Plus, other than knowing the one of the singer is probably from the 1920’s based on the clothes she’s wearing I’m clueless about where or when the other drawings are from so can you show him the sketches I made maybe he’ll know what, where, and when they all are.”

She nods and flips open the sketchbook she’s carrying to the correct page and walks over to hand it to me. As she walks back to the couch Jer is sitting on and sits beside him I look down at the first page and despite the subject matter I smile. Jeremy really has grown as an artist since I first met him so I tell him, “Little Gilbert, I’m impressed, your renderings keep getting better and better.”

He smiles a shy smile and says, “Thanks man, I think the advice you gave me a few months ago really helped me with my perspective issues.”

I nod, as his perspective is now flawless as evidenced by the stunning use of foreshortening on the shelves holding bottles in this drawing. I take a sip of my drink and then I cautiously say, “This first one is a secret closet in the apartment that Stefan kept in Chicago during the 1920’s. He still owns the whole building and I know he’s continued to pay his taxes and whatnot.”

Care, Ty, and Ric watched as Jer drew all of his sketches tonight so I know they already know what I’m looking at. However, at that time Elena was ‘helping’ me cook by stirring everything after I cut it and added it to the bowl before I threw it all in a pot and then took over stirring since I know the Gilbert’s propensity for burning things. Therefore, I’m not surprised when a moment later she walks closer to me to look at the picture. I pray Elena just takes me at my word but of course, after looking at it for a long minute she asks one of the questions I don’t want to have to answer, “How did you get that from a list of names on a wall and some bottles on some shelves.”

I frown and my hand tightens on the book. Damn Saint Stefan and his inability to tell his girl the truth about himself. Now I’m stuck delivering his bad news. I lift the glass and take a sip just to give myself another moment before I shatter Elena’s perception of the man she loves.
When I can’t put it off any longer, I try to answer without actually answering, “Most Vampires have eidetic memory, and I’m no exception, so I recognize the names as the same ones on the wall in Stefan’s hidden closet in the Chicago apartment.”

She frowns back at me as I tense waiting for the question I’ve known was coming since I first laid eyes on this drawing. She stares at me for a minute and then a moment later she asks, “Oh so what do the names mean?”

I sigh again, and I tighten my grips on my glass and the book enough that my knuckles are paper white. I consciously will my hands and the rest of my body to relax with moderate success before I reluctantly tell her, “They’re, well, they’re his victims’ names. He always asked their names so he could put them on his walls.”

When she opens her mouth to ask another question I bite the proverbial bullet and just tell her, “He’s actually got a number of walls like this throughout the country. But like I said I recognize these names as being from the Chicago apartment.”

I see her mouth open and pray she doesn’t ask how many walls he has. She pauses and I know that’s exactly what she was going to ask, but miracle of miracles she seems to realize she doesn’t actually want to know so instead she says, “That’s a lot of names.”

I put down the book and after finishing my drink I pour myself another generous glass of Bourbon before taking a big swallow then I look at her. My chest tightens uncomfortably and with pain-filled eyes I tell her, “Honestly Elena I know you love him, but he hasn’t told you even the tip of the iceberg about who he is when he’s on Human blood. He’s not the Stefan you know and love, in fact, he’s not even the Vampire who attacked that Amber girl. That incident was actually rather tame for Stefan all things considered especially since she survived. I actually think you both might be two of the few, if not the only, Humans to have been fed on by Stefan and still survive. Anyways, Vampires have a name for other Vampires like him, they call them Rippers.”

Her mouth opens again so I cut her off before she can speak, “Before you ask, it’s because they’re addicted to Human blood and lack control so much and gain such great entertainment from the hunting and terrorizing of Humans that in the end they literally rip their victims apart. Stefan usually feels remorse or something afterward and puts them back together, but he rips them apart all the same.”

She gasps and I realize a moment later that she’s not the only one who did so. She obviously isn’t grasping what I’m trying to tell her though as she asks, “What do you mean by rips them apart?”

I sigh and frown as my hand tightens again on my glass of Bourbon and I begin pacing in front of the unlit fireplace, “It’s exactly what it sounds like Elena, he bites so hard he rips them limb from limb and usually decapitates them too. It’s very brutal and very messy. He didn’t used to be that way and I don’t understand how that’s…”

She stands up straighter and asks, “How that’s what?”

I answer without thinking, “How it’s supposed to teach the lesson,” I realize a moment too late that we’re heading towards information I can’t share with her so I snap out of my thoughts and continue, “never mind the point is he’s a Ripper and Klaus knows this, and I’m sure that’s his purpose in taking Stefan. Even among Rippers, Stefan is beyond legendary. Klaus in all likelihood wants to make him that Ripper once more.”

Bonny places her hand on Jer’s knee but looks at me as she asks, “Uh out of curiosity, how does Klaus know about Stefan?”
I pause my pacing with the glass half raised to my lips and stare into the glass for a minute before taking a long sip and then stopping in front of the alcohol cart and placing the glass back on the table, “Well most Vampires know about Stefan by reputation at least, as I said he’s beyond legendary. He’s actually almost a cautionary tale for baby Vamps that their sires tell them to warn them to keep control or they’ll end up like the ‘Ripper of Monterey’. Of course the sadistic ones want to be just like him but usually the tale is told in hushed whispers as a ‘behave or else’ kind of tale. Anyhow, despite his notoriety most probably don’t know his real name. As I mentioned he’s mostly and most notably known as the ‘Ripper of Monterey’ since he pretty much wiped out a whole rather large immigrant population there back in 1917.”

I pause to add more liquor into my not quite empty glass and then take another long sip before telling them, ‘However, Stefan actually told Klaus who he was. I was in Chicago in the 1920’s too. Although Stefan and I were avoiding speaking to each other, as much as possible I kept an eye on him. Klaus was there and I knew his name was Klaus, I just didn’t realize he was ‘the’ Klaus. Therefore, I didn’t put two and two together until Klaus was here in his real body, and I saw him and knew that it was him back in Chicago.

“He and his sister, Rebekah, hung out at the same club as Stefan and they were fast friends, and no I’m not telling you about the sorts of things they got up to together. Just know that Stefan’s switch was firmly off, and therefore Klaus appreciated Stefan’s boundless imagination as well as his propensity for truly sadistic and unlimited cruelty. Needless to say they were as thick as thieves.”

I take another long pull of my drink then continue, “Stefan doesn’t seem to remember Klaus so I have to assume Klaus compelled Stefan to forget him for whatever reason, but I also have to assume that eventually Klaus will reveal the truth to Stefan and hope to rekindle their friendship.”

I pick up the sketchpad from where I’d placed it on the table and flip to the next picture hoping it’s something innocuous and then breathe a sigh of relief when I see what it is, “Okay this is Gloria’s Club where they hung out.” I turn the page towards all of them and look Jeremy in the eye, “This is Gloria singing in her club on the night that Stefan and Klaus introduced themselves to each other.”

I point to a light haired woman in the drawing and tell them, “This woman right here is Klaus’ sister Rebekah. Stefan was being loud and she literally told him to ‘stuff a sock in it’ so Gloria didn’t have to compete with him while she was singing. He reluctantly obeyed after trying to learn her name and a few minutes later he and Klaus met at the bar and introduced themselves. They hit it off almost immediately despite Rebekah making Stefan work for her name. Anyway, you, Little Gilbert, need to apply to art school when the time comes because this could be a fucking photograph it’s that accurate.”

Jeremy blushes a little but nods as I flip to the next page before whispering, “Fucking A,” it just had to be a drawing of one of Stefan’s crueler moments back then. I sigh dejectedly knowing there’s no way around explaining the picture so I drink some more liquid courage then say, “This was one of the regulars’ husbands. His name was Liam Grant and I unfortunately was a few tables away when this happened, listening as Stefan tortured him.”

I pause silently cursing Klaus for making me have to reveal my brother’s true nature when on Human blood then tell them, “As you might have figured out from the dark liquid in the glass and the fact that this is a Vampire story, it’s not red wine it’s actually full of blood, specifically his wife’s blood. Before you ask, no, Liam wasn’t a Vampire. And yes Stefan forced him to drink his wife’s blood just for shits and giggles.”

Elena lets out a shaky breath before asking, “Oh my god, he did what? Why on earth would he do that?”
I turn my broody eyes on her and say, “Because he thought it’d be fun or funny, who the hell knows. Klaus thought it was hysterical. His sister, however, didn’t seem as impressed though.”

She seems startled that I answered so I assume she didn’t mean to ask the questions aloud. I decide to just flip to the next page and sigh in relief as I hold up the full color picture and say, “This is downtown in the old warehouse district. Unfortunately, I don’t know how that relates to Stefan or Klaus though.”

Bonnie nods and says, “I think it’s where the coffins are, flip to the next page.”

I do as I’m told and smile at the full color drawing before telling her, “Looks like the dilapidated modern version of the previous drawing. Out of curiosity whose memories is this building from?”

Bonnie and Jeremy both nod deeply as Bonnie says, “The spell gave me all of the memories of you, Stefan, and each of your first family’s members as well as select memories from Klaus. I think it’s because there’s a line in the chanting of the spell that basically asks for any knowledge the Witch needs to have. Anyhow we think the building is near Eastern Street but we’re not sure.”

I nod as I fluently speak the language the spell was in so I knew the particulars of what it asked for. I put the book on the alcohol cart and close my eyes just standing there for a few minutes going over the layout of that section of Chicago. I barely notice my fingers hanging by my sides moving as if I’m giving directions. A minute later my eyes pop open and I tell Jeremy, “I know the city changed a bunch of street names down there back in the 1970’s so look up Potomac Avenue and see if it’s still close to Eastern Street.”

Jeremy types into his laptop and clicks the mouse pad a few times before typing again and then he says, “It’s one street over. Atlantic is between the two.”

I smile as I realize where the building is located and ask “Okay and does 9th street still end at Atlantic?”

Jeremy clicks and types for a minute then looks up with a smile on his face, “How did you do that?”

I smile a sheepish smile and tell them, “Um I used to hunt the workers down there.”

More confidently I continue, “I vaguely remember the molding on this building, it was unique to it alone, so I think it’s on the corner of Atlantic and 9th street. Can you pull up any pictures to see if the building is still there?”

Jeremy nods as he says, “Hold on a sec, now that I know the streets it’s on let me see if I can figure out what the address would be and then I’ll…” He types and clicks for a few minutes then as he once again almost vibrates out of his skin he says loudly, “Jackpot!” and he turns his computer to face the room. I walk over to get a better look and there is a photograph of the dilapidated building in the second drawing.

I smile at Jeremy and nod my head with a proud smile on my face. Jeremy and Bonnie have really stepped up and done most of the work on this caper. My smile deepens when I notice them sitting up a little straighter with slightly puffed out chests obviously realizing that I’m proud of them, not myself.

I take another sip and say, “Okay tomorrow we go down to the falls and go spelunking for Grimoires, and then once Bonnie’s had a chance to try to find the spell we need and maybe read a bit to see if anything else will help us, then we can drive up to Chicago in two vehicles. I figure my Camaro and, if he’s available for a road trip, Ric’s SUV. I’m not sure what we’ll do if more than
Elijah wants to come back with us but I figure worst case scenario I rent a car for the ride back if necessary and Bonnie or Tyler can drive the rental since you’re both 18. Hell even Jer, Elena, or Care could drive if everyone’s okay with me compelling any cops who might stop us especially if we enter a state where Jer’s Virginia’s learners permit isn’t honored.”

Everyone nods to show they’re okay with either scenario, and I smile at the sparkle in Jer’s eyes and the wide smile on his face at the idea of his driving a rental. Elena is smiling too, but she clears her throat and asks, “So we’re all going?”

I frown and give her a piercing look but say, “As if you’d let me leave you behind.” She nods to show I’m right, and I smile a sad smile and nod once before I continue, “Besides, I think we’re all safest when we’re together. Right now, Bonnie and I are the strongest and sadly, both of us need to be there, so we’d be leaving everyone else completely unprotected.”

I look at Caroline and tell her gently, “No offense Vampire Barbie, but if Klaus and Stefan came back while we’re gone, well you’re still a baby and Klaus is over 1,000 years old. I was no match for him when I was 170 so you’d be dead before I ever knew there was an issue.”

She smiles and says, “No offense taken, Brother.”

I smile a secret smile at her pleased that she would publicly call me ‘Brother’ and then I look away and say, “And Ty I’m hoping you can come too since Klaus is looking for Werewolves to turn and like I said earlier I don’t think his attempts at siring Hybrids is going to end well for the Wolves involved. Therefore, I would just as soon not have you here too, if he comes back. All it would take to kill you is a little bit of his blood. While we could feed you ‘Lena’s blood and possibly save you if we know about it, if we’re in Chicago and you’re here when it happens well we probably wouldn’t get back in time to save you. So I’m really hoping you can come too.”

Tyler looks touched that I care, but I was serious this morning, our family wouldn’t be the same without him. Anyway, he nods to show he understands so I turn and address Ric, “So, Ric, I hope you don’t mind, but I’d prefer Jer and Elena stay here tonight and the rest of you are welcome to stay too.”

I smile and say, “Care I can call your mom and tell her that Elena needs you here for moral support if you need me to. I think she’s calmed down enough about my being a Vampire after the conversation I had with her last night after you were all asleep.”

She looks confused so I explain, “After I got back from the Gilbert’s house and you and Elena went to bed she showed up and asked a lot of questions. I explained about switches mostly and how Elena made my switch turn back on and then broke it in the on position. I also told her the saintlier parts of Stefan’s story and that you only killed one innocent right when you turned before Stefan found you and taught you how to control the bloodlust.

Her trust of me, and probably you, is tenuous at best, but I think it’s ultimately salvageable in the long run. Anyway I’m pretty sure she’d let you stay here since she mentioned being laxer about your curfew and weekday sleepovers during the summer. Bonnie I don’t know how your father would feel, but if you want you’re free to stay too.”

Caroline smiles and says, “I already told her I was staying over with Elena and hinted that there might be boy issues that need a good crying over.”

I smile and ask, “Excellent, Bonnie?”

“My dad’s out of town all week, which is why he didn’t come looking for me yesterday while I was
passed out. Anyway I texted him earlier and I told him the same thing Care told her mom though I figure the sheriff and my dad both probably expect us to be at the Gilbert’s with Ric as the chaperone."

Ric sits forward in his chair and places his elbows on his knees as he speaks up, “I agree that’s probably what they expect, so if no one minds and you, Damon, don’t mind me liberating some more of your Bourbon then I’ll stay too. I brought a bag. It’s in my car.”

I nod with a genuine smile on my face that I realize I usually reserve for Elena and say, “Mi casa es su casa. That goes for you too Ty.”

He smiles and says, “I can stay for a few hours but I need to at least appear to wake up in my bed at home since my mom currently thinks I’m fast asleep in my bedroom.”

I laugh and tell him, “Right can’t have Carol’s son hanging out with Vampires. What would the council say?” I pause and collect myself then say, “Sorry, I know it’s not really funny but I just find it very ironic that one member of the Founder’s Council, me, is a Vampire, while another member has a Vampire for a daughter and the head of the council’s son is a Werewolf. Anyway, Ty, stay as long as you like and feel free to come back tomorrow morning and go to the cave with us if you can swing it.”

He nods as Caroline smiles and then stands before saying, “Elena, Bonnie, I think we should go have a sleepover in Stefan’s room, what do ya say?”

As we all look at Caroline’s expectant face, Elena laughs and says, “You just want to snoop.”

Caroline and I both laugh when she says, “Well, duh!”

I throw out there with a mischievous smile and a glint to my eyes, “I’m sure my brother would have no problem offering up his room for your sleepover needs.”

Elena laughs again as she catches me winking in Care’s direction, which causes the blonde to beam and run out to her car to get her overnight bag, which she picked up while out shopping for groceries earlier.

Elena walks back over to me and asks, “You sure you don’t mind all of us crashing here?”

I smile and wrap my arms around her for a hug that I really need. The thought of Elijah staked and Stefan off doing god knows what makes me nauseous, which I’ve only felt as a Vampire a handful of times in my long life. I push thoughts of my two brother’s suffering somewhere out there alone right now out of my mind and tell her, “I’m sure. I kind of like knowing most of my family is all in one place and safe for the time being.”

She seems to know exactly where my thoughts are, well the Stefan parts anyhow, as she tightens her hold on me and she whispers, “We’ll get him back Damon. I know what you’re like when you have a mission, so I’m sure we’ll get him back, and we’ll save him, even from himself if we have to.”

I hope so. I hug her back tighter for a moment and then kiss the top of her head before stepping back when Caroline says, “So girls are we ready?”

Elena laughs and follows her up the stairs with Bonnie right behind them.
I turn back towards the three other men in the room and look at Jeremy and Tyler as I tell them, “Feel free to stay down here with the quote unquote ‘adults’ if you want, neither of you will bother me and I’m sure Ric doesn’t mind your company either.”

Ric nods the same time that Jeremy and Ty do but Ric throws in, “I’m only an adult when absolutely necessary, which is usually when in the company of other adults, and you my friend, despite your many advanced years, rarely qualify as an adult by any standard.”

We all laugh at that and I tell him, “That’s actually pretty accurate.”

I walk over to Jeremy and he smiles as he takes his sketchbook back when I hand it to him. When he grabs it, I hold onto it until he looks me in the eye. When eye contact is made I say, “I meant what I said Jeremy, you’ve got talent in spades, so at the risk of making Ric a liar and sounding all grownup and responsible, keep your grades up and you’ll get into any art school you want. I might even be able to help you pay for school and all of your supplies if you don’t get the free ride I’m pretty sure every school you apply to will offer you.”

I know from several conversations I’ve had with Jer that he’s wanted to go to art school since he was pretty little, so though his eyes are wide and suspiciously shiny at my offer, he smiles and tells me, “Thanks man, I’m going to hold you to that.”

I smile and finally let go of the book, “I hope you do,” and I really mean that. Kid is crazy talented.

“Ty Jer tells me you’re pretty talented too so that offer applies to you too.” Since they’re quickly becoming younger brothers to me if they need help funding their time at the art schools of their choice I’ll happily provide whatever funds they need. I won’t just help with tuition and housing either, I did art school a long time ago, so I know supplies are expensive, and I’m sure that’s even truer in this day and age.

Ty nods and says, “Thanks man I’ll keep that in mind, though my inheritance from my dad should cover whatever school I choose.”

I smile and tell him, “Good, but if you find you do need help don’t hesitate to let me know. I meant what I said earlier about us being family and family helps with shit like that.” He nods again so once I’m satisfied that Jeremy and Ty both truly understand that I’ll help if they get into art school I walk back over to Ric on my way to the alcohol stand and grab his glass before pouring us some more Bourbon then I pour another two glasses. Carefully holding two glasses in the same hand, I pick up Ric’s and walk it over to him who nods and smiles in appreciation as he leans back and slouches in one of the wingback chairs. Then I walk over to Ty and hand him a glass and then I go back over to
Jeremy and hand him the other glass. His eyes go wide again so I say, “I won’t tell if you won’t, and as long as Ty only has one and you don’t try to drive anywhere if you have more than one I think our secret will be safe.”

He nods and after grabbing the glass, he takes a sip closing his eyes while he enjoys the burn as it slides down his throat. He surprises me with his knowledge of Bourbon a moment later when he says, “You gave us the good stuff, awesome. Thanks. I won’t try to drive anywhere. I promise.”

I chuckle as I walk back to the cart to grab my glass and ask, “How do you, at 15, know the difference between cheap Bourbon and the quote, ‘good stuff’, by taste alone?”

He smiles and shrugs. I figure he’s not going to answer but then he does a moment later, “My dad, he liked his liquor. Don’t get me wrong he wasn’t a drunk, far from it really, but he appreciated what he called ‘fine liquor.’”

He pauses with a small smile on his face then continues, “Anyway he believed that I would only rebel and do the clandestine underage drinking thing more than once or twice if he and my mom acted as though drinking was this big thing. So when I was little and we were home, if Dad was drinking he’d let me have sips. Then when I reached about 12 years old, he’d pour me a little, and I mean a little, it really wasn’t much at all, but he let me have my own glass. He even bought some cheap stuff just before he died to let me taste the difference.”

As I sit down, I smile and tell him, “I actually agree with his opinion. Most kids only abuse alcohol because they’re taught it’s something they shouldn’t do, and as teens, all they want to do are the things that they’ve been told are forbidden. When really if the adults taught the kids to respect alcohol and its power and drink in moderation from a young age like your dad apparently did then the chances of them abusing it would be slimmer. I mean I’m sure there are some people who are going to abuse it either way but the average kid who’s given a sip or two when their parent is having a glass is less likely to look at it as though it’s this big thing.”

Jeremy nods and says, “That’s pretty much what my dad thought.”

Ty nods and says, “My dad was the same way.”

I nod back and wistfully tell Jer, “I know the Gilbert’s historically hated Vampires, but I kind of wish I’d had an opportunity to know your dad. He sounds like a really decent man and a good dad by all accounts.”

Jeremy laughs, “He really was, but according to Uncle John my dad was the most gung-ho of the members of the Founding Families about ridding the world of Vampires, so it’s probably best that you didn’t meet him otherwise he probably would have tried to kill you as often as John did, if not more. While I know in the end, John seemed to realize that not all Vampires are monsters I really don’t think my dad would have been as willing to accept that despite Elena and me knowing for a fact that it’s true.”

He pauses to take a sip then tells us, “I mean I know between you, Stefan, and Anna you’ve each killed more people than me and Ty have probably ever met in our entire lives combined, but Humans kill people too so it’s not just Vampires that are monsters. You guys at least have the excuse that you feel everything stronger than we do so a lot of you turn your switches off. Human monsters just don’t give a fuck and there’s no underlying reason for it. Plus, although Vampires like you can turn your switch back on, I think the Human monsters can’t turn their feelings on at all since they’re pretty much born that way, not that any of them would want to anyway.” He pauses to breathe and then adds, “Uh sorry, I’ll get off my soapbox now.”
I laugh, as does Ric before I tell them, “Little known fact about Vampires, around 200 to 300 years old our switches tend to turn themselves back on without our say so and then have this nasty habit of breaking in the on position. Then we’re stuck with the guilt of all the horrible shit we did while the switch was off. Personally, I’d go through phases. Sometimes I’d want to feel it all even the guilt and other times it’d be too overwhelming, so I actually turned it on and off a dozen times at least in Damon’s 150 years as a Vampire.”

I sit back in my chair and take a sip then tell them, “Then again as Drago, I pretty much refused to turn it off after the first time. I still did monstrous things, mostly in the first few centuries, because let’s face it the bloodlust can overwhelm the most righteous person if the circumstances are just right and back then my control was less than what Caroline’s is now, way less actually.”

I smile slightly, “Anyway, I felt, and actually now that I’m myself again I still feel, that not allowing myself to feel the guilt, sparing me that pain, is actually dishonorable. If I’m man enough to take a life, I should be man enough to live with the damn guilt that comes with my actions. I really tried to make every life I took count for something by allowing it to teach me something about myself or life in general. Now I try to be a decent person almost in honor of my victims because otherwise it was all for nothing and that’s really sad and depressing.”

Ric and Ty nod as Jeremy bobs his head up and down and opens his sketchbook before taking a box of colored Conté crayons out of his backpack that’s sitting by his feet. He closes his laptop, places it on the couch beside him, and then crosses his right ankle so it’s lying across his left knee before he lays the book on his leg as he takes out a sanguine colored Conté crayon and begins sketching. He’s looking at me often enough that I know he’s drawing me as I drink my Bourbon.

I studiously ignore the fact I’m being watched and studied and smile as Ric leans forward in his seat and asks, “So 490,450 years old huh?”

I chuckle as I look over at him and smile wider as I reply, “More or less, yeah. Time was kept a little differently during various parts of history. There were 13 months instead of 12 in a year for the entirety of my time before I became a Vampire and then the first 12-month calendar didn’t happen until about 6,000 years ago and then after that it switched back and forth off and on until we finally settled on a 12-month calendar the last time. The 13-month calendar is 1 day, 5 hours, 49 minutes, and 12 seconds less than the current calendar so that makes meshing older dates with the modern time keeping more difficult.”

I pause to take a sip then sit forward with my elbows on my knees as I continue explaining, “Then as the years go by they kind of blur together even with eidetic memory so keeping track of that many years with any real accuracy is pretty difficult. That said, give or take I was a handful of modern years over 35,450 years old when I was turned Vampire and give or take a millennium that was about 455,000 years ago.”

Ric’s eyes are wide but he and Ty are nodding as Jeremy asks what others might consider a stupid question, but I’m happy to realize that he knows Ric, Ty, and me well enough to know that even if it is a stupid question we’ll humor him and not laugh at him for asking a silly question. That said it’s really not a stupid question that he asks, “When did the final shift from 13 months to 12 happen?”

I smile wider quite pleased he asked and say, “Julius Caesar was the last to make major changes to the calendar. The calendar we use now is actually called the Gregorian Calendar but it’s basically the Julian Calendar with something like a .002% change in the length of the year making the Julian year of 365 days and 6 hours turn into 365 days, 5 hours, 49 minutes, and 12 seconds. Anyway the Julian Calendar was named after Caesar.”

Jeremy smiles and says with bright eyes and slightly louder than necessary, “That’s kind of cool.”
I shrug, “Honestly the 28 day, 13-month calendar made more sense since it was a lunar calendar and all these 30, 31, 28, and 29 day long months were pretty confusing at first. I mean I know the length of a year is based on the length of time it takes the earth to make a single revolution around the sun, a solar calendar if you will, but think about it, the Julian and Gregorian Calendars work so poorly that every four years we have to add a day to the calendar. The Gregorian Calendar gets even more confusing as years that are exactly divisible by 100 aren’t leap years, except when they’re divisible by 400.”

I look around the room at each of their faces and everyone seems to understand the confusing facts about our current calendar, so I continue, “The 13-month calendar on the other hand was lunar and based on the moon revolving around the earth and therefore didn’t require any days past the 28 in every month.

“Then again, I knew the minute I met Caesar he was a narcissistic ass who apparently couldn’t tell time to save his life.”

My companions all laugh and take sips then all of them almost choke on their sips as what I actually said dawns on them and they all ask, “Wait, you knew Julius Caesar?”

I frown into my drink, “Well I wasn’t friends with the man since as I said I thought he was a pompous ass, but yeah I was in the Senate with him and usually disagreed with whatever he said on principle alone. Man was pretty much a military genius, but he let it go to his head and then he began believing his own hype.”

I smirk into my glass remembering all the times we butted heads before taking a sip and then tell them, “You should have seen his face when I walked into the room the day after his assassins tried to kill me. They slit my throat and stabbed me about 20 times. I let one run back covered in blood and compelled to tell him they were successful. The other two I fed on to heal myself. Needless to say, it wasn’t long before I helped organize his assassination.” I pause, then smirk as I lower my voice and tell them, “I may or may not have even compelled Brutus to betray him.”

Ric sits up straight at that and laughs before asking, “For real?”

I smile at the memory of the look of betrayal on Caesar’s face and say, “Oh yeah he was, as I said, a total asshole and making trouble for a lot of people all to make himself more important. I mean the man had the gall to proclaim himself ‘dictator in perpetuity’. Only an idiot does that as it’s pretty much the quickest way to get yourself killed or to start a war at the least. It turns out he wound up doing both with that proclamation and ultimately killed the Roman Republic.”

Jeremy breathes out a “Wow,” and takes another sip before putting his glass down on the table beside the couch.

He pulls up a blank page and writes something on it. He passes the sketchbook to me and I smile as I read what he wrote, “Can we talk about Briseis, Asya, Balthazaar, Dante, and Lilith if we don’t say anything to give away that they’re who they are?”

Jeremy has a thirst for knowledge that I think will serve him and this family rather well in life. So I look him in the eyes a moment later and with my usual smirk in place and my eyebrow raised I say, “Sure, Little Gilbert, if you stick to the rule I’ve got no problem talking about that,” and really I don’t.

As Jeremy nods to show he understands, I stand up and walk over to Ric showing him what Jer wrote. When he nods I show it to Ty and then I tear off the page, take the lighter off the mantle, and light the page before placing it in the fireplace. I watch it turn completely to ash before I turn back to
face my companions and ask, “So what do you want to know?”

He thinks about it for a second as I hand him back the sketchbook and he reopens it to the drawing I can now see is definitely of me drinking my Bourbon. Then he tells all three of us, “Well I got a lot of Bonnie’s memories of your memories but it’s not all filled in yet for either of us.”

I nod and after refilling mine and Ric’s glasses, I sit back down and tell the boy, “With the amount of memories and the sheer number of years of each person’s lives that she remembered it’ll take a while to get them all sorted out inside both of your heads. Your brain might actually take slightly longer simply because you’re Human as opposed to Bonnie being a Witch, and you saw it all through her mind, which I’m sure acted as a sort of filter.”

I smile as I tell him, “The memories are all already there though, so it’s just a matter of your brains’ processing them and then giving you free access to them. Talking about this might actually help gel them in your head, so ask away, Gilbert.”

He stops drawing and stares at the marks on the page before saying, “Okay so, you said you’re the oldest and,” he pauses and I know he almost said ‘Stefan’. A moment later he continues cautiously as he obviously realizes this is going to be harder than he thought, “Dante is 100 years younger than you, so how did you two know each other?”

I nod showing I understand the challenge this conversation is going to present with Caroline being upstairs and her being perfectly capable of hearing everything we’re talking about. I can actually hear her telling Elena and Bonnie what we’re saying and that she thinks Jeremy wrote something down so with our additional audience in mind I say, “Caroline, why don’t you all come down here and save yourself the hassle of having to repeat everything I say.”

I chuckle when she tells the girls, “Oops, busted. Be right down Damon.”

I wait and a minute later Caroline, Elena and Bonnie come back down the stairs and join us. I smile at their sheepish smiles then I carefully start my story as I decide a little background information is needed. I begin by telling them, “First, Demons live long lives, as evidenced by the fact I’ve been told I look anywhere between 21 and 30 Human years old and yet I was already more than 35,450 years old when we were turned and I stopped aging. I guess after we reach maturity we age a little less than a Human year every thousand years or there abouts though the aging does slow progressively as we get older otherwise the oldest would be shrunken little old people and they really weren’t. The average lifespan was about 200,000 to 250,000 with only eight or nine dozen in each generation reaching 300,000. Although, if a woman suffered from birthing complications then they might die when they were much younger than 250,000 years old.”

I smile and take a sip before telling them, “I was fairly young all things considered. Now the species as a whole is fertile for most of their lives starting in our mid-50’s, which is pretty much the equivalent of being in your early teens in Human terms and I’ve known a few female Demons who gave birth after their 185,000th year.”

I smile and look at Bonnie as I say, “Not to jump ahead in the story but Briseis and I named our first child, your ancestor, Hali. She had hundreds of children and last gave birth when she was 194,401 years old. Incidentally, she also lived past 300,000 and was about 309,000 when she finally died. A good chunk of my descendants come from her line, though our other children were very fertile as well and only a handful had birthing issues, though thankfully none of them died because of those issues.”

I pause then add, “Unlike the women the men are pretty much fertile until their deaths, much like Human men.”
I settle more firmly in my seat as I lean back and take another sip then continue, “So anyway, despite there being 104 years between us, Dante and I were Brothers, well, Half-Brothers. My mother died when I was 73 giving birth to my youngest Full-Blooded sister. Then about a year later my father, Lord Hector, remarried.”

I stare at the fireplace as I remember the pain of that loss and tell my new family, “I can admit I was angry at first, but the woman, Helena, treated me and my siblings as if we were her own. She was a lovely woman, and once I got to know her she filled most of the hole left behind when my mother died.”

I pause to take a sip and use the extra time to prepare myself for sharing her sad story then I say, “Unfortunately, she had eight stillborns before Dante was born 31 years later and then she never really recovered from his birth and died within three years. Although I was 107 when she died and didn’t really need a mother figure at that point, I was still devastated having lost another mother, and as I said, she and I were close.”

Everyone has sad looks on their faces and the girls all appear to have tears in their eyes so I move the story along, “Our father remarried less than a month later and most people knew he had not only been sleeping with her since before Dante was conceived but had fathered several children with her already. He apparently had planned to leave Helena since she was unable to give him live children.”

Now the girls look pissed off so I tell them, “Most men wanted big families full of as many children as possible, the bigger the better, as the more fertile you were the more virile and manly, for lack of a better word, you seemed. My father was no different so he placed more value on Helena’s breeding abilities, or lack thereof, without taking into account the wonderful woman she was.”

I pause feeling the anger I felt all those years ago at my father’s betrayal. So as Jer uses his thumb to smudge one of his lines the pause in my story allows him to ask, “That sucks, was the third wife at least nice?”

As everyone else nods at his question I stand and walk over to pour myself more Bourbon, as this conversation definitely calls for more booze, and laugh a humorless laugh, “Hell no, she was worse than Lilith and Katherine combined. In fact, she was a total bitch who unfortunately taught her bitchiness and sense of entitlement to her 12 sons and 14 daughters she had with my father. My 8 Full-Blooded siblings, Dante, and myself were treated like second rate citizens by Sinclética and our father.”

I frown as I tell them, “As a matter of fact, she was actually trying to convince Father to write us all out of his will and give our rightful and rather sizable inheritances to her children only. Unfortunately for her, he had a bit too much to drink one night, and he slipped in the bath and drowned before she was successful. She didn’t find him until the next day because she was too busy fucking the help.”

I pause and feel the anger I felt all those years ago when I discovered she was bedding two servants when Father was drowning bloom in my chest once more as though it had all just happened. A moment later, I laugh as I remember her face several days after he died when she received news of the state of his will and tell my companions, “Best part about the whole thing was that she got the shock of her life when she discovered he hadn’t left anything to her or her children.”

I take a sip then finish the thought, “They were paupers overnight and since none of them were even remotely nice to anyone no one offered to help them. I think she wound up selling most of her underage children as slaves and abandoned the older ones completely before she then found herself another wealthy man who was kind enough to beat her to death when he discovered she was once
again sleeping with the help.”

I refill my still mostly full glass and then go sit back down before taking another sip and continuing my story, “I, as the oldest son, inherited most of my father’s assets and it was my responsibility to look out for my younger siblings. Now back then most other men probably would have done what my father and Sincletica did and treated Dante as a second rate citizen since he wasn’t my Full-Blooded brother but we clicked from the first moment Helena let me hold him. In fact, I was the only one who could calm his crying when he was a baby, and honestly, once he got old enough to talk and think for himself we were actually closer than I was with my other siblings.”

I smile at the memory of my younger siblings and their love of Dante and tell my new family, “Fortunately for Dante, all of our other siblings felt the same way I did, so none of them made much fuss over my giving him the same percentage of our father’s wealth as the rest of them.”

My smile widens as I tell them, “Now of course you need to realize that by the time my father died, I was already more than a decade past 500 years old and Dante was only 104 years younger. Anyway, we were two peas in a pod. It was only about three years after our father’s death when I met Briseis, through our best friend, and she quickly became our shadow.”

I frown slightly as I tell them all, “I think at first Dante fancied her but he quickly lost interest, which was lucky for me because once I looked into her chocolate brown eyes I knew I’d never want another woman. So much so that I actually stopped fucking around long before her father allowed me to court her. I dare say the lack of women in my bed was probably a big reason he let me court her.”

I pause remembering my abrupt change in behavior and grin as I recall my wedding night, “Courting could take centuries back then, so we married a few years after I turned 700. Dante was my best man, and I’m pretty sure he and her brother bedded the entirety of her side of the wedding party on our wedding night. Don’t get me wrong her maidens were beautiful, but I thought sleeping with 10 women all at once was a little much even if there were two of them.”

Ric laughs as he gets up to refill his glass, “So you were the devoted one and Dante was the hound dog?”

I chuckle and tell him, “Well I suppose I never really thought of it that way but yes. That is until he met Asya. Briseis was friends with Asya’s mother and was actually present when Asya was born. We were all about 35,000 years old give or take a few centuries when she was born and she was barely 100 when we were turned. Fortunately for Dante he already knew by then that she was his intended Mate.”

Jeremy interrupts as he remembers Elijah, “So where does, uh Balthazaar was it? Where does he fall into all of this?”

I smile softly and say, “He was best friends with Dante and me and actually how I re-met Briseis since she was his younger sister, and yes he’s the brother who helped Dante bed her maidens. Anyhow, she and her mother had been living with a sick aunt taking care of her for most of Briseis’ childhood.”

I extend my legs out in front of me and cross them before taking another sip and telling them, “You need to know that Demons have three age groups for children, from age 0 to 26 they are completely dependent children. Ages 27 to 53 are pretty much the equivalent of preteens and then 54 to 81 are teenagers. Once they reach 82 they’re mostly considered mature and are legally treated as adults though unofficially that can vary slightly depending on the actual maturity level of the Demon in question much like in today’s day and age.”
I pause to take a sip and remember before telling them, “So she was maybe 30 years into adulthood when she moved back to be closer to Balthazaar. He reintroduced us and I don’t know if she knew right away but I definitely knew there’d never be another for me.”

I stop and chuckle before confiding, “Honestly I think Balthazaar was the other reason their father let me court her because Balthazaar kept bitching about how I was a drag now that I only had eyes for the ‘lovely Briseis’. Really, to hear him and Dante tell it I was a complete bore and no fun anymore, and that suited their father just fine.”

The girls all smile dreamy smiles and sigh in unison so I chuckle again and tell them, “Anyway, it was just the four of us against the world until we met the first of a new species, the newly Human Lilith who had her eyes set on Dante and Balthazaar. Balthazaar was in love with her but Dante thought she was too high maintenance… Since she was the first of her kind, she felt entitled, and everyone spoiled her since they thought the birth of a new species was so fabulous. Think Katherine only a billion times worse.”

I frown as I tell them, “She finally got fed up trying to play them off each other and settled on wrapping Balthazaar around her little finger. Honestly, I hated her for the longest time, but she mostly made him happy. Eventually we became friends if you could call it that.”

I smile and tell them, “Then Asya, our little Air Demon, was born and Dante fell head over heels. Her father wasn’t too sure since Dante had a 35,000 years long history of bed hopping and womanizing, but by the time she turned 90, her father knew Dante would stay true to her, so he gave his blessing, and they were married. Less than ten years later Lilith tricked us into drinking the spelled blood and turned us into Vampires, the first by all accounts.”

I finish my Bourbon and get up to get myself some more then say, “I mean I was about 35,455 years old and I had never heard of such a thing. I looked through all of our fathers’, grandfathers’, and great grandfathers’ journals. I actually read more than 850,000 years’ worth of journals trying to discover if there had ever been anyone like us before. Needless to say, I never found any evidence to support the idea that there had been any Vampires before us.”

I pause considering and then tell them, “I’m guessing the spell the Witch used to make the Originals was probably the same or derived from the one Lilith and her Witch, Fontina, wrote and used. Actually, Witch isn’t the right word since she was my great-great granddaughter and a Demon, so Spell Caster maybe, anyhow Fontina cast the spell that made us Vampires.”

They all look a little shell-shocked and perhaps surprised that the spell caster who helped Lilith trick us into becoming Vampires was my descendant. I sigh and tell them, “Anyway, I know maybe 200,000 to 170,000 years ago a few other families, I think it came to six in total, found and used the spell in an effort to try to stop certain members of my family from destroying their villages. They figured if they were like us they’d have enough power to stop us. What they didn’t count on was that our ages alone made us significantly stronger than they were. Lilith searched for and locked down all the copies of the spell to keep the power from being given to everyone. Then she also got the Humans all fired up about the new Vampires and pretty much accused them of being the ones slaughtering whole communities. She even compelled a good chunk of the Humans to hunt down the newly spelled Vampires. Sadly, or maybe fortunately, they didn’t last longer than a few years each. Perhaps a few made it to a couple of decades old before they were slaughtered.”

I pause again then tell them seriously, “Though I’m actually surprised that no one else managed to use it before that since Lilith talked about her prowess with magic, to whomever would listen, despite it actually being Fontina who had the power. Fortunately, most were too scared of both women to try to steal her Grimoire and any who did try met long painful deaths at Lilith’s hand.”
I sigh unnecessarily and with a lowered voice tell them, “Though that doesn’t mean Lilith herself didn’t have her personal Spell Casters use the spell to create more. In fact, over the first 150,000 years or so after we turned she created seven more Vampires using the spell and we were known as the Pervonachalnyue, which as I told you yesterday translates to ‘The First Ones’.”

Jeremy and Caroline smile and say in unison, “Wow, okay, so 13 First Ones, are the other seven still around?”

I laugh at them and the faces everyone makes at them using the exact same words as each other, but then I frown as my Human memories give me insight into the actions of the younger Pervonachalnyue after we were spelled.

They felt the only ones strong enough to control them were gone forever and they took great fun in killing our Human incarnations multiple times through the centuries so I tell my new family, “Oh yes. They had great fun at our expense after the spell was cast, and make no mistake they will pay dearly for the continued slights they perpetrated against me and mine. They thought they were free of the only ones strong enough to best them, and now the oldest and arguably strongest is himself again, so I’m sure once we settle things with Klaus that I’ll find time to pay them a visit, especially once my full family is around me.”

That apparently brings Jeremy and the others up short, so he pauses his drawing and as they all look at me curiously he asks, “Full Family?”

“Oh yes, Briseis, Asya, Dante, Balthazaar, Lilith, You, Ric, Bonnie, Tyler, well all of you, and maybe even Matt. You’re my family just as much as they are and whether the Humans decide to remain Human or become Vampires you’ll always be my family.”

Ric and Jer both ask at the same time, “You’d actually turn us?”

I’m honestly startled by the question, so it takes me a second to answer but then I tell them, “Duh! I’d turn any and all of you if you wanted, though make no mistake I learned my lesson from the shit ton of guilt I felt when I tried to force ‘Lena to transition if she died during the sacrifice. I was very relieved when Bonnie and John said they had found that spell and even more so once we knew it had worked since I really couldn’t stand the thought of ‘Lena hating me for the rest of eternity. Bonnie and John really saved me from making a real mess of things and prevented me from totally destroying my friendship with ‘Lena.”

I look at Bonnie and tell her honestly, “Thank you for that by the way.”

She nods so I continue, “Anyway, I won’t force anyone to transition, and I will do my best to make sure everyone is fully informed before any final decisions are made.”

Smiling I tell them, “Things would be different for you guys though because you’d be one-step down from me and the others, genetically I mean, since we’d all be pretty much equals, strength and speed aside. But you’d have it easier than the Vampires the Originals and their spawn have turned because we have more power simply because of our ages.

“The older your sire when they make you the stronger and more powerful the baby Vampire will be and their control is generally much stronger from the start. So Vampires I made when I was 200,000 years old were immediately stronger, faster, and more in control than the ones I made when I was 100,000 years old. Even just me being 170 affected Caroline’s control and Katherine’s being 390 when Stefan and Damon were turned affected our control, or mine at least. I’m not sure why Stefan seems to lack so much control, but I’m pretty sure he’d be even worse if Katherine had been younger when we transitioned.”
I stop to take a sip of liquor, and then I tell them all, “Anyway keep it in the back of your heads as a possibility, and if you want to talk about it let me know. I’ll answer any questions you have because while I know you guys know more than most about Vampires in general you don’t know what it’s like to be a Pervonachalnyue or one of their descendants.”

They all nod and promise they’ll keep it in the backs of their heads, then Jer asks, “What about Bonnie can she be turned?” He pauses and looks at her as he continues, “Not that I think she’d want it per say but, well…”

I smile, “She can be turned and if several of my descendants are any indication she wouldn’t lose her Witchy powers either.”

I turn to look at her and tell her, “Bonnie, I actually want to try to get in touch with three of them. I was very close to them before Tianna placed her spell so I miss them, but more importantly I want to see if they feel up to teaching you further. You have power in spades, but I regret that your grandmother died when she did because now you only have us to help guide you, and while I know more than most about Magick, your ancestors would be able to help and teach you best.”

She nods so I continue, “I’ll let you know when I track them down and find out whether they’re able to come teach you, but in the meantime know that turning you is a possibility. In fact, if you want the details of what your undead ancestors are like as Vampires and how that differs from how they were as live Witches come talk to me later and I’ll try my best to give you all the answers you want. Either way you all would have it much easier than Damon, Stefan, and Caroline had it.”

They all nod and Bonnie promises, “I’ll find a time to bring it up at some point.”

I just nod and we all sit quietly as Jeremy continues to draw, the girls talk quietly among themselves about my story and Ric, Tyler and I just contemplate everything that’s happened. I’m not sure when it happened but at some point Jeremy and the girls fell asleep so around four thirty I wake them up and tell them to head upstairs to their rooms.

Ty sits up as the others head upstairs and says, “I should probably go sneak back into my bedroom before my mom realizes I’m gone. What time are you guys planning to get up so I can try to get here before you leave for the cave?”

He only had the one glass of Bourbon and he finished that over an hour ago so I know he’s fine to drive home. At his question though, I pause and think for a minute and then tell him, “Give me your phone.” He takes it out of his pocket and hands it to me so as I punch my number into a new contact entry I tell him, “I’ll need at least four or five hours sleep since I didn’t get much last night either. I don’t know how late everyone else will sleep though since it’s already almost five but if you get here and we’re already gone give me a call and I’ll walk you through the directions to find the cave.”

When I finish entering my info I push the button to call my own phone and take mine out of my pocket to save his number so I’ll have it if I ever need it. He nods as I hand him his phone back and says, “Okay, thanks man. And thanks for everything else, I really don’t have words to express how grateful I am that you protected Care and Matt from me. Or that you didn’t end up dying from my bite. And once again thanks for not trying to make me dead back.”

I laugh and tell him honestly, “I meant what I said too Ty. You’re part of this family, and I was just looking out for all of you. I would step between you and Care again even if I knew it would kill me for good because that’s what you do for the people you love, and in case I haven’t been perfectly clear you are definitely on that pretty short list.”

He nods and surprises me by shaking my hand and saying, “Ditto Man.” Then he leaves to try to
convince his mom that he was in his bed all night long.

Ric and I spend another half hour drinking and talking about random shit that has nothing to do with our recent dramas or my previous lives before we both follow the others up the stairs and after I make up a bed for Ric, we head to bed.
The sound of heartbeats, two quick ones and one slower one, wake me as they sneak into my room. I’m sure they’re up to no good and since I’m buck naked under the covers I crack my eyes open to see if I can figure out what they plan to do. As much as I would love Elena to get the full view I really do think of Caroline and Bonnie as though they’re my younger sisters so when my vision focuses on them in the dim light I say, “Whatever you three are planning know that I’m naked under this blanket.”

I chuckle and open my eyes fully as their faces drop and Bonnie and Caroline simultaneously make ‘eew’ faces just as Elena gets a thoughtful look on her face that I can’t quite place. Her shoulders slump and she gives a heavy sigh as I warned them, almost as if she’s disappointed that she doesn’t get a free show. Still all three climb up onto the bed careful not to pull the covers off me. “So what’s up ladies, to what do I owe the pleasure of your company this fine morning?”

Bonnie smiles and says, “Well since we went to bed before you guys and therefore fell asleep earlier we all woke up before the drunks and we’re bored.” Elena and Care giggle and nod.

I fluff my pillow and lean back against my headboard as I ask, “So you were going to take your boredom out on little ole me while I was blissfully unaware of the danger I was in?”

They all three nod deeply then Care leans over and kisses my cheek, “Forgive us?”

“Hmm,” I pause as if I’m really thinking about it and then smile and tell them, “Well since I woke before you could do any real damage I suppose I’ll let it slide this one time. But be forewarned I usually sleep in the buff, in fact I can’t remember the last time in my looong life that I wore clothes to bed, so you might want to stick to jumping on Jer and Ric’s beds. Although, then again, no guarantee that Ric doesn’t sleep just as nude as I do.” I laugh hard as they all make overstated ‘eew’ faces again.

I nod and tell them, “Guess you’ll need to pick on Jeremy then.”

They giggle and Bonnie says, “We’ll do our worst.”

At the same time Care and Elena say, “Will do.” Goddess I’ve missed having a family, a real family.

We sit there for a minute before Care asks, “I wonder what kind of print Jer has on his boxers?”

Everyone turns to look at Bonnie who blushes and says, “Don’t look at me. I wouldn’t know.”

I laugh as Care asks, “You sure about that?”
Bonnie nods deeply and says, “I’m absolutely positive I have no idea what Jer’s underwear looks like. Every time we sleep in a bed together other than maybe a little kissing that and sleeping are all we do. And the few times he hasn’t been wearing street clothes he had sleep pants on.”

I’m still laughing but not at Bonnie’s answer as I’m sure she’s being completely honest, but Elena has been keeping her hands over her ears for most of the conversation. Could she possibly be any cuter?

Finally, fate saves Bonnie and Elena from any more mortal embarrassment when Bonnie’s and then Elena’s stomachs make their hunger known by growling loudly. I laugh again and tell them amidst giggles from Care, “Okay ladies, let me shower and put some clothes on and I’ll go make you all some breakfast lest we be attacked by those hungry beasts I just heard growling.” Fortunately, they think that’s hysterical and quickly depart my room to go change out of their bedclothes.

Five minutes later, I’m walking down the stairs, thank you very much Vamp speed, with my shirt over my shoulder and my hair slightly damp. I put the shirt on but don’t button it. Just as I go to enter the kitchen and get to work on making pancakes the doorbell rings so I head over to open it for Tyler whose shampoo and wet dog scent I could probably smell from pretty much anywhere in the house as he stands at the door.

As I open the door I smile at him and tell him, “Good morning Ty, for the record you don’t have to knock or ring the bell, just come on in, lord knows everyone else in this family does and honestly I don’t really mind. Now, if Liz started coming in without knocking, it’d be another story, but you guys are welcome anytime, that’s why I don’t lock the door.”

He nods and says, “Okay, thanks.”

I smile and lead him towards the kitchen as I tell him, “Everyone’s still waking up so come keep me company while I cook. How are you here so early anyhow?”

He nods and follows me into the kitchen and tells me, “Before she went to sleep Care texted me and promised to call me when her and the girls woke up so I’d be able to get here before you all leave.”

I smile as I begin taking things out of the fridge and start cooking, surprisingly Ty offers to watch and flip the bacon and sausage. I keep an eye on him but am happily surprised to see that he seems to have better kitchen skills than the rest of our family so he cooks the meat perfectly.

We just shoot the shit talking about random things, mostly the shit his mom is making him do for her this summer until everyone finally joins us. As I start handing out full plates, they all kind of stop and look at me with this weird expression on their faces. “What? Did I get your preferences wrong?”

They look at each other for a minute and then at their plates before Bonnie says, “My own father forgets how I take my coffee, despite the fact I’ve been drinking it since I was 12, and that I can’t stand blueberries in my pancakes and prefer sausage to bacon. Yet…” she pauses to take a sip of the coffee I just handed her then nods and continues, “you, whom I’ve barely known a year and rarely drink coffee or eat breakfast around, made my coffee perfectly and gave me chocolate chips instead of the blueberries that everyone else seems to have and sausage not bacon despite the others having both. And I think I spy strawberries in with Care and Ty’s blueberries, and chocolate chips in with Jer and Elena’s blueberries, which I know for a fact are their favorite ways to eat pancakes.”

I honestly don’t know what to say, so I just sort of nod. She steps around the counter with her plate and cup still in her hands and leans up to kiss me on the cheek, “Thank you, Brother.”
I smile and tell her, “You’re welcome, Sister.”

She smiles and goes back to her seat before chowing down and making noises that clearly let me know I didn’t fuck up the pancakes.

Caroline, Tyler, Jeremy and Elena all smile and say “Thank you,” too as Ric, who like me didn’t get even four hours of sleep, comes into the kitchen with his eyes barely open.

I hand him his cup of coffee, a plate of plain pancakes, and the saucer of cherry sauce and he takes a big sip of his coffee before opening his eyes wide and saying, “Have I ever actually told you how I take my coffee, because I don’t remember mentioning it and yet every time you make it it’s perfect.”

I blush a little at all the compliments I seem to be getting this morning. They’re all looking at me expectantly so I ask, “What? I pay attention, that’s all. It’s totally a predator thing.”

They all look at me as though they know just how full of shit I am, but they let it pass for which I am grateful.

I quickly set about making some pancakes for myself then as we all eat I ask, “So who all is coming to the cave with Bonnie and me?”

All the teens say “Me,” so as Elena watches me I begin to finally button my shirt, and I turn to Ric and raise my brow.

He raises his brow back at me and after swallowing his bite of cherry sauce dipped pancake says, “Bonnie assures me that Klaus has left my apartment so I need to go check things out. I’m planning, if it’s not wrecked, to meet with my landlord about ending my lease tomorrow since it’s a new month, so I can move in with Elena and Jeremy as they asked me to the other day. So I’ve got a bunch of stuff to do later today like packing up the stuff I’ve unpacked. Though honestly I still have a ton of unopened boxes so mostly it’s clothes and weapons I need to pack. Anyhow, if you think I can be back to town by six so I can meet with my landlord at seven thirty after I’ve cleaned up whatever mess Klaus left behind and packed my shit then I’m happy to help.”

I nod and tell him, “If you don’t mind I’ll come with you to your apartment just to make sure he really left, and if you want I’ll help you carry the boxes to your SUV and then into the Gilbert house since tomorrow’s the first so you’re cutting it kind of short.”

Ric nods and says, “Thank you, Brother.”

I smile and nod back before saying, “Anyways, I don’t think our trip to the cave will take too long since it’s not even ten yet, which by the way why are all the Humans up so damn early when none of us got to bed before four thirty?”

They all shrug so I shrug back.

Elena asks as she takes her last bite of pancake, “So you mentioned Briseis yesterday morning and last night, she’s your wife, right? And you mentioned her breaking her spell, so Care and I were talking this morning, and Care thinks that means everyone in your family that you told us about last night has the spell on them. So where are they now?”

I look at Care with a question written all over my face. She smiles and says, “Not just a pretty face, Brother, I actually have a working brain. All those looks and sentences trailing off mid-way led me to believe that there are others who have been spelled and that you aren’t telling anyone other than Bonnie and Jeremy who they are. I also know that the only reason you even told them is because they now have all of your memories.”
She frowns and tells me, “I have no clue who the rest of your family is but some of them must be nearby because otherwise you and Jeremy wouldn’t have had to write down whatever you didn’t want said out loud last night. I figure you wrote it down because you knew I could hear you. I can’t figure out who they are though and it’s driving me nuts.”

I laugh and realize that Tianna’s spell is keeping Care and Elena in the dark about who they really are, so I tell her, “I never thought your brain was anything other than a highly efficient machine that puts most others’ brains to shame. So yes, there are others but I can’t tell you anything else like who they are or even where they are. I wish I could as I hate keeping secrets from all of you but it’s too dangerous to the other half of my family to let anyone know right now.”

They all nod and seem to take me at my word, so as everyone else continues eating Bonnie asks, “So I know Tianna was your descendant and my ancestor but you were friends right?”

I nod after I take a bite, chew, then swallow before telling her, “Best friends really. Despite my actually being her ancestor she was like my sister and I think she truly saw me as her brother.”

Ty takes a sip of his coffee then asks, “And she still spelled you?”

I frown and tell them, “She said that our nature and how we came to be Vampires required that she spell all of us.”

Jer frowns and says, “That sucks, are you pissed now that you have your memories and powers back?”

I smile and shake my head no then tell them all, “The short answer is no. I’m not angry, not even a little. The long answer is that she was right that the others needed to learn the true meanings of love, loyalty, and honor. Briseis and I were basically collateral damage, and since in the long run, I think I still learned how to love better and be more loyal and honorable than I was I can’t bring myself to be angry. All Tianna ever wanted for all of us but especially Briseis and me was whatever was the best for us. I truly believe in the long run all six of us, including myself, will have learned important lessons and ultimately come out the other side better people than we were when we were spelled.”

I pause to take another bite and after I chew and swallow I continue, “I’ve been friends with pretty much all of my descendants, your ancestors Bonnie, from my daughter to her great granddaughter Fontina, right up until Tianna spelled us, and then Emily and a few others while I was spelled. Other than Tianna and probably Emily and you, Bonnie, the others wouldn’t have had the guts to spell us as Tianna did. All of your ancestors after we transitioned knew my family was out of control, and while I know they did their best to help me minimize the damage wherever we went it wasn’t enough to prevent major loss of life pretty much everywhere we went.

I pause and try to figure out the best way to explain just how extraordinary what she did was. When I think I know how I tell them, “However Tianna took one look at the mess we were and she set about writing that spell, which I’m pretty sure took her well over a decade, maybe almost two decades, to perfect before she decided it was ready to be tried out on us.”

I smile slightly and tell them, “You have to understand she was beyond brave because if she had messed up and it hadn’t of worked I probably wouldn’t have been able to protect her from all of the others all at the same time. Balthazaar and Lilith would have completely ignored that she was also of their line and she likely would have met a very messy and very painful death. Then if you take into consideration that she and I pretty much viewed each other as siblings, and she willingly gave up spending the rest of her life with me to try to help better my family, well, she was beyond brave and selfless.”
Everyone seems to understand so I continue, “She essentially sacrificed her happiness to save the rest of my family. If that’s not what love is about then I don’t know what is, but the furthest thing I am is angry with her. I’m awed by her courage and faith, blessed for having had her love, proud of her for being brave and doing something when no one else could or would, and about another thousand other equally positive emotions, but anger hasn’t found its way onto that list.”

I take another bite then smile again as I tell them, “I know she did what she felt was best for me, my family, and the rest of the world. You need to understand she didn’t just save my family she saved everyone who lived in this area at that time, whole families survived because she spelled us since the other members of my family were at the time trying to drown their guilt over previous evil acts with more innocent blood. I think they were essentially trying to force their switches back off by being so evil the switches would have no choice but to turn themselves off. That or they were trying to prove to themselves that they really didn’t care.”

I pause for a second then tell them, “Either way, she pretty much saved everyone by spelling us and sacrificing her happiness and even her safety. The younger Pervonachalnyue attacked her and her children and theirs many times after we were spelled figuring her protector was now Human and weak. Fortunately, she was one of the strongest Witches I’ve ever met, easily in the top three so she pretty much did what you did to me and fried their brains every time they came at her until they finally realized she didn’t need my protection. But her family likely lived in fear for centuries at least until after her great grandchildren died. During those two or so centuries those with the most power in the family had to be everywhere the younger and less powerful were to make sure they stayed safe until the younger Pervonachalnyue gave up trying to end her and her line.

I frown then tell them grimly, “And honestly I’m pretty sure the 316 dead Witches, whose power you now, have died because the younger Pervonachalnyue compelled the Humans in this area to hunt the Witches and murder them all as a sort of payback for not having been able to end Tianna and her descendants on their own. She risked the future of her familial line for me and my family, she put her bloodline’s survival in danger to ensure we would be worthy of the gift of immortality that Lilith stole for us.”

My frown leaves my face and I smile genuinely, “Anyway, anger doesn’t even get an honorable mention as it is the exact opposite of everything I feel towards her. She was my best friend, the closest thing I had had to a sister in several hundred thousand years and she risked everything for me. I’d be a real asshole if I didn’t accept and acknowledge the sacrifice and courage it took to do all of that. I would never repay her kindness and sacrifice by directing anger towards her.”

I stop talking and begin eating my now cold breakfast as everyone just sort of sits in stunned silence. Bonnie is the first to break out of the awe enough to say, “Wow, she sounds pretty badass and I kind of wish I could have met her.”

I smile after taking my last bite and place my fork on the table as I tell her, “You and her would have been thick as thieves. You actually remind me of her, a lot, and except for your larger tendency to judge first and ask questions later you’re just like her. And before you get mad at me for saying that, she was actually pretty judgmental in her younger years too and she, like you will, grew out of it and became more understanding and more judicious with her anger and scorn.”

I stop and consider if I should say this but then decide it will probably be more helpful than harmful so I tell her, “One thing to remember Bonnie is words and emotions have power. What kind of power do you want fueling everything you do, happy, loving, loyal, honorable, and all around healthy emotions or do you want hatred, anger, fear, and judgment to flavor everything you do?”

I lean forward in my seat as I play with my fork and tell her, “Tianna said her mother posed that very
question to her when she was a few years younger than you are now, so I hope you do what she did with the words and really contemplate the kind of Witch and person you wish to be. You have power in spades, and you could pretty much do anything you want with it, and while I know you wouldn’t intentionally do anything evil I want you to consider that the ones who hunted Witches thought they were doing the right thing as they had judged the Witches and found them quote unquote ‘evil’. Their anger, fear and hatred led to the deaths of hundreds of innocent people, men, women, and children who would never harm another all because the Humans thought they had the right to pass judgment on someone else.”

I sort of half frown and half smile as I tell her, “I believe in the Goddess and I don’t really care what other people believe one way or the other as I know it’s a personal thing and very individualized. However, I’ve read enough holy books from other religions to know that even they believe only God or whomever their higher power is has the right or privilege to judge anyone else.”

I smile to soften the blow of my words as I tell her, “Remember that the next time you decide to jump to conclusions and pass judgment. If you change that one thing about yourself, well, in my opinion, you’ll be an even better person than Tianna was. You’ll definitely be a better Witch that’s for sure. And as I think I’ve explained, it doesn’t get much more loyal, honorable, or willing to sacrifice for the good of others than Tianna.”

When I finish my statement that became much deeper and more serious than I had intended I notice that Bonnie has tears in her eyes. She sniffles and then asks me, “You obviously hold Tianna in very high regard, yet you honestly believe I could be even better than her both as a person in general and as a Witch?”

I smile and nod before telling her, “Without a doubt, you have it inside you. You just need to feed it and starve the inclination to try to pass judgment. God or whomever will take care of that when the other person dies, and honestly, I pretty much believe Karma will get them even before the Goddess does. I know your grams had only just begun teaching you when she died helping Stefan and me but did she have a chance to teach you ‘The Law of Threes’?”

She shakes her head no so I continue, “‘The Law of Threes’ basically says that everything you put out into the world will come back to you three fold. So every bad thing you do will come back and bite you on the ass three times worse than whatever you did. Conversely, if you put out positive energy and do good deeds then that will come back to you times three.”

I pause to take a sip of my mostly cold coffee then tell her, “Most Witches also live by the Creed, ‘An harm it none, do what ye will.’ And that means exactly what it sounds like. If it doesn’t hurt anyone feel free to do it. If it does hurt someone, you’ll get that energy back three fold. Now remember that everyone does so called bad things from time to time, that’s the nature of life, so you need to weigh the pros and cons of everything you do. Is this action and its consequence worth the backlash you’re going to feel.”

I smile again and tell her honestly, “Anyways, I fully believe you have it inside of you to be an amazing woman and Witch just as Tianna was. Incidentally, Emily was like the two of you too though she didn’t have anywhere near as much power as you and Tianna.

I get up and hand my plate and silverware to Elena who has been washing everyone’s dishes for most of my conversation with Bonnie. When I turn back around, I’m surprised to find my arms full of crying Witch as she says, “Thank you. I’ll do what you said and feed the good stuff and starve the bad judgmental stuff.”

I hug her back and kiss the top of her head as I tell her, “You’re already well on your way I just thought hearing the words as Tianna did might help you as much as it helped her. She said pretty
often that that conversation with her mother pretty much changed her life for the better. I only hope my words have the same kind of effect on you, Sister.”

She nods and then steps away to wipe at her eyes as everyone heads out of the kitchen to get ready to leave. We’re out the door by ten thirty.
Never So Grateful

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Chapter 008

Never So Grateful

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Monday, May 31, 2010; around 10:30 a.m.

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Tyler drives Caroline, Bonnie, and Jer in his SUV and Elena and I go with Ric in his SUV since I’m not sure how well my Camaro’s paint job would handle the probably little used access road that leads to the mouth of the cave system. That’s if it’s even still there. We might have to hike a ways to get anywhere near it since most Humans, and really besides a Witch anyone who hasn’t seen the caves before, would be deflected to avoid them by copious amounts of spells set on the place.

I was right. We have to hike, and when we arrive, I’m pleased to find the spells are still holding as evidenced by Bonnie’s whispered, “Holy shit, how long ago were those spells cast.”

I shrug and tell her, “There were a lot of them, actually probably most of them, already in place when Tianna cast her own back about 1,250 years ago, though for all I know her descendants have kept them strong. I know Emily came out here pretty often, well when Katherine would let her slip away anyhow. That’s actually how Damon knew about this place. Emily brought me here a few times before I transitioned.”

Bonnie nods and places her hand on the rock beside the entrance and says, “There’s layer upon layer of spells protecting this cave. I think you’re right, it does feel like her spells weren’t the first. I think generations of her ancestors came here and placed spells on it too. I’d say the descendants backed her spells up fairly regularly too but hers and the older ones are still probably just as strong as the first time they were placed. Give me a minute then we can go in.”

She whispers some words and I physically feel the spells relax, for lack of a better word. They’re still there and will definitely keep others away but the others in our group all gasp when the opening of the cave materializes before their eyes as if by Magick.

Caroline pats Bonnie’s shoulder and says, “That’s pretty cool Bon.”

Everybody including me nods in agreement. Bonnie goes to enter, but I put my arm out in front of her, “Please don’t take this the wrong way, but I’ll feel better if I go first in case any of the descendants after Tianna placed booby traps on the place. I don’t remember any from when Emily brought me here but better safe than sorry, and I’m more likely to survive if I set one off than any of you.”

Bonnie nods and says, “You’re probably right but be careful okay?”

I smile, “Why Sabrina, I’d almost think you care.”

I meant it as a joke, as I know damn well she cares, but she frowns and places her hand on my arm as she looks me square in the eyes and says, “That’s because I do, Drago.”
I inhale sharply at the use of my given name and just nod before telling her, “Then I’ll be careful.”

She nods back and I lead our merry band into the cave but not before Jeremy hands me a little battery powered lantern that he obviously hopes will light up the whole cavern when we get to it. I’m not sure it’ll be strong enough, so I narrow my eyes and raise my eyebrow at him, and he smiles and tells me, “I know you, Care, and maybe Ty don’t need it to see but us Humans, yeah we kind of need the light.”

I laugh and take the lamp and slowly we make our way through the curving, winding tunnel, deeper and deeper into the ground. Finally, I stop where I know the spell keeping Vampires out was strengthened by Emily and tell the Humans, “This is as far as Care and I can go. I doubt there are any booby traps beyond this point since there weren’t any leading down here, and does that seem odd to anyone else?”

Bonnie laughs, “Oh there are plenty of Magickal booby traps but the Magick judged us and found us worthy so it let us pass freely. In fact, I’m pretty sure you can go beyond this point though I’m not sure about Care since one of my ancestors would have needed her down here to make an exemption.” She waves her hand in front of where I’m standing and then says, “Here Care try to wave your hand here.”

Caroline tries but an invisible wall blocks the downward trajectory of her hand. Then Bonnie says, “Drago you try.”

I frown but wave my hand and sure enough, it goes up and down unhindered. I stick my foot out and try to take a step and succeed, so I take a few more and Caroline pouts, “No fair.”

Bonnie smiles and says, “Bite your finger and draw blood.”

Caroline looks at her for a minute and then does as she’s told. Bonnie whispers some words and then has Care wipe her blood all along the barrier top, bottom, and both sides. Then Bonnie whispers a few more words in a rare Demon language I haven’t heard in over two millennia, and then she smiles as we all feel the air shift. “You should be good now, Care.”

I send up a prayer softly in Tianna’s native tongue, “Please Goddess, make sure her trust in us is not unfounded.”

As Bonnie turns to me and sees my slightly worried look she says, “Don’t look at me like that, Brother. Only you and Caroline can get past the barrier, and that’s as it should be for now. But don’t worry. If there are any other Vampires in the future that we need to give access to I can do the same thing I just did and grant them access too. I can revoke the access at any time, and if they go evil without my knowledge, the Magick will have already judged them and stopped them long before they make it to this point. Trust me.”

I smile, “I do trust you, Bonnie. I’m just worried about what the other members of my family will be like when they arrive.”

Obviously discerning my meaning, she smiles and pats my arm as she says in Tianna’s native tongue, “I think they’ll all be found worthy once the spell has been broken on each of them. But for now Caroline is already trust worthy, but the spell down here is worded such that if she reverts to being, not evil, but the way she was before, untrustworthy if you will, then it’ll stop her just like it did before I let her past.”

I smile and nod before telling her in English, “Good, and for the record I hadn’t realized how much I missed that language. How on earth do you know it?”
Bonnie smiles and wearing a coy smile says, “Magick.”

I laugh as just then Elena asks, “What language is that?”

I smile and tell her, “It’s a later version of Proto-Norse and dates back to the eighth century CE just before it became Old Norse.”

I pause then tell her, “Well I say just before, but really it was a century or two later before Old Norse fully developed.”

Elena smiles and says, “Wow that’s pretty cool. I think I might need to pick your brain about all the history you’ve seen since you’ve already told me a bunch about the 1860s, but now that I know you’re older than Humans, well I kind of want to know everything you know.”

I chuckle, as that is very typical of Elena and Briseis both, “Eventually, ‘Lena, you’ll know everything you want to know and so much more.”

She smiles and takes my hand as we follow the others down into the cavern. We almost bump into everyone as they stand there in awe of the sight. The space is the length of more than a football field and is four stories high with shelves from floor to ceiling and every bit of shelf space is taken up by a book or artifact, which all become visible when Bonnie whispers a few words and the torches stationed around the room ignite.

Bonnie turns to look at me clearly surprised, “Um, how did Tianna make so many books?”

I chuckle as I lay eyes on the many hundreds of thousands of books and several thousand artifacts and statues for the first time in almost 150 years, “She didn’t, she made maybe 14 full books before I was spelled. The rest are from my ancestors and most of my descendants, but especially those in Tianna’s line. Some of these date back more than a million years. All the journals of mine and the others’ ancestors that I told you guys about reading after we became Vampires are down here. They should be over there,” and I point in the direction of the shelves I placed them on so many years ago then I continue the thought, “and I know Emily has a bunch of books down here.”

I sort of half smile and half frown as I tell her, “Every Bennett Witch I’ve known and those who came before the Bennett name was attached to your line made two sets of books each identical to the other. One set was kept here and the other was kept in their homes. I always figured your grams knew about this room and would have told you, which is why I never mentioned it before yesterday when it dawned on me that you didn’t have any knowledge of this place.”

Jeremy turns to look at me and asks the obvious question, “Why two sets?”

I frown while my chest tightens painfully as I remember Tianna’s response to my asking the same question, “When I asked Tianna she said accusations, hatred, fear, and Trials would come and most of the books outside this room would be burned beneath the pyres our descendants would perish on. I promised to keep as many of them alive as I could.”

I sigh as I remember the look on her face when I made that promise and tell them, “I think she had already decided it was time to place the spell on us though, so she knew I wouldn’t be able to keep my vow no matter how much I wanted and intended to. I did manage to save a few through the years though unfortunately Emily ultimately wasn’t one of them. She died a few months after I completed the transition at the hands of the Founding Families. I always regretted that I couldn’t save her too.”

Bonnie smiles and takes my free hand, “You saved her children though right?”
I nod and tell her, “And her sister, Amelia, who was the woman your great grandmother was named after, and her three small ones. Their descendants are in Baton Rouge now a days.”

She squeezes my hand slightly as she smiles wider and asks, “Do you mean Lucy and her family?”

I smile back and shrug, “Yes, I didn’t realize who she was until I followed you both outside and heard her tell you she’s your cousin. I was honestly a little surprised I didn’t notice the resemblance to Amelia, because she looks just like her.”

Bonnie’s eyes are big as she says, “Wow.” She pauses then asks, “Okay so two sets of books, one that Tianna knew would be used as kindling to burn your descendants and the other stored here for… safe keeping?”

I smile, “Stored here for and I quote, ‘the Bennett Witch who will restore our families’ mutual love, cooperation, and loyalty to each other and ultimately and permanently unite the families back into one.’ Before you ask she actually used the name ‘Bennett’ when she told me that, of course after the spell was placed I forgot everything so I’m not really sure how it is that I knew to protect Emily, Amelia and their descendants.”

Bonnie’s eyes wander the room as she thinks for a moment and then she says, “She didn’t take away your subconscious memory only what you consciously remembered so you would have instinctively known that you should protect them. And I think she did it that way because she knew if she didn’t her part of your family would perish and you would never forgive yourself once the spell was lifted. And I agree with her assessment, you would have blamed yourself for having needed to be taught a lesson and it would have eaten you alive for the rest of eternity.”

She pauses and closes her eyes briefly before she continues, “I can feel the love in the spell that lets you pass through the barrier, she loved you like a brother and knew you returned the feelings. She knew as I do that you wouldn’t have been whole if you hadn’t been able to save at least some of us. Oh and by the way, as a descendant of Emily and therefore Tianna, for all of us, thank you, I wouldn’t be here without you.”

I turn my back and discreetly wipe my eyes to hide the tears that I can’t keep from escaping. I miss my friends and the honest gratitude in Bonnie’s voice as she thanks me lets me know that whatever issues we’ve had in the past all has been forgiven and she truly appreciates the effort I put in to keep her line alive. I also realize that now I have a new sister, who while she definitely won’t replace Tianna, Emily, or any of the others before them will definitely have her own place in my heart and my life, hell she already does if I’m completely honest with myself.

I obviously don’t fool her as she retakes my hand squeezing it softly before moving away to check out the shelves of books.

Maybe five minutes later Jeremy breaks the easy silence that follows when he says, “Hey, Damon, this has your name on it.”

He hands me an envelope with my name written on it in handwriting I recognize as belonging to Emily. I take the letter and go sit in one of the many chairs stationed at one of several tables. I take a deep breath and center myself before I carefully open the letter that is probably about 150 years old since Emily was killed a few months after Damon became a Vampire.

I slide my finger under the flap of the envelope lifting the wax seal and somehow managing to keep it in tact. I take out the page, which turns out to be from my Father, Giuseppe’s, personal stationary set.
“Dearest Damon,

If you’re reading this that means you finally broke the spell my ancestor placed on you. Welcome back, Brother.

I’m writing this because I want to apologize, and I know that while you only have Damon’s memories you won’t understand or even be willing to listen.

I know when you finished the transition and I finally mentioned the tomb beneath the church that you were very angry with me for not telling you sooner. Since I know the barrier will keep you out of this space until you have Drago’s memories and have returned to yourself I will tell you that I know Katherine is not beneath the church.

I did not want you to choose immortality based on a lie. She made a deal with George Lockwood and he helped her sneak out of the church before it was burned. I know how you feel about her as Damon and I wished I could tell you the whole truth, but I know there is a very powerful Vampire hunting Katherine, which is why she wishes everyone to believe she is dead.

Until you are Drago once more, you will be no match for this Vampire, so to protect you I have decided to keep the fact that Katherine is not trapped in the tomb to myself.

You are the brother I always wished for and I know that you will stop at nothing to free her so I know eventually you will know the truth. I only hope that you will one day understand that I kept this from you to protect you.

Our descendants, Shelia and Bonnie, will eventually open the tomb for you and you will discover that Katherine is not trapped inside. The spells our descendants will cast that night will cost Shelia her life and your relationship with Bonnie will be strained for some time. However, I am hopeful that if you are reading this now that she has done the memory spell I made my children all promise to copy into each of their Grimoires. They also promised to have their children and their children all write it in their books so that one day Bonnie will have that knowledge and be able to discover the truth of her family and her connection to you.

She is the one foretold to you by Tianna. She will reunite the families and help you restore those you love into the loving and caring individuals they were before Fontina cast the spell making you all immortal.

She will also serve as the glue that will hold your family, which will dramatically increase in size, together, and when the time comes you all will be stronger and happier than ever.

I want you to know I love you like a brother and wish only for your happiness and continued wellbeing. Have hope Brother it is all coming together as it is intended to, and soon you will have all of your prayers answered.

I miss you and hope you find the peace you so rightfully deserve sooner rather than later.

Blessed be.

With love,

Emily.”

I wipe more tears away when I finish reading. I figured Emily kept the truth about Katherine from me to protect me but I appreciate that she left this letter for me to explain in her own words. I softly say, “Thank you, Sister, for everything you ever did for me. I hope you are also at peace.”
I sit quietly just feeling the love that is so obvious in her every word before Bonnie walks up to me and asks, “If it’s none of my business tell me so, but who’s the letter from?”

I smile and tell her, “Emily wrote it to explain why she didn’t tell me Katherine wasn’t trapped. You might be interested in her words though.”

I hand the letter to her and watch her face as she reads. I grab her free hand and hold it when a tear slips down her cheek, “She knew Grams would die helping you and Stefan escape the tomb.”

I just nod. When she finishes reading she hands the letter back to me and says, “Thank you for letting me read that. I hope I manage to live up to her great expectations of me.”

I smile and tell her, “Oh I have no doubt that you will do everything she wrote and so much more for our family.”

She smiles and leans down to kiss my cheek, “As you said yesterday, ‘From your mouth to the Goddess’ ear’.”

I smile at her and nod as she returns to exploring the cave. I just sit and watch the newest members of my family and some older members who don’t remember yet as they explore the cave I first brought Hali to when she was but a child. She always loved this cave and I wasn’t shocked when she set up the spells to protect it and began keeping her Magickal items and Grimoires in here. I also wasn’t shocked when her descendants followed in her footsteps and continued using and protecting the cave.

I’m brought out of my thoughts by Jeremy asking, “Hey Bonnie, how are these all in such good shape, I mean it’s pretty damp out in the tunnel, but in here it’s like a climate controlled storage space. Damon said some of these things are over a million years old yet there isn’t a hint of mold, decay, or aging on any of these books or the statues and other things.”

Bonnie smiles and winks at him as she says, “Magick.”

Jeremy chuckles and tells her, “That’s pretty cool. So what are you going to do with all these books? You obviously don’t have room for all of them at your dad’s house, since this room is way more than ten times as big and twice as high as his house. Plus, you had to take over the spare room in his house and add wall to wall bookcases to hold all the ones Luka’s dad collected and you still have piles of them on the floors of your room and the spare room that didn’t fit on the shelves.”

Bonnie nods and turns to me, “Caroline says back at the boarding house there’s a whole other floor of empty rooms both in and beneath the basement everyone knows about. Do you think all of this would fit? And if so, would you be willing to let me move all of these there? It will save us a trip anytime we need info out of them especially since we might need multiple books all in the same day and not know it until we’ve read the first set.”

My jaw is practically hanging open, and my eyes could pop out of their sockets they’re open so wide. I try to talk and sputter and stutter for a minute and then finally collect myself enough to say, “You—you would trust them in my house where I could access them anytime?”

Bonnie smiles sadly but confidently tells me, “Yes Brother, I would, of course I would have to set up the same barrier at the entrance to the sub-basement to keep others out for the time being but you and Care would have free reign down there provided you don’t turn all evil on us.”

She winks so I know she’s kidding about me turning evil, then she continues, “Honestly, there isn’t anyone else I’d trust more to keep them safe. Before you say it, I can place a spell on the whole
house to prevent it from burning or flooding, and this book here has the spell used in here to keep the books and artifacts from decaying or aging so I can place that at the boarding house too.”

She pauses then seems to remember something and says, “Oh and Tianna told me in a dream last night which book to look for to make a barrier that will keep out all Supernaturals that should be kept out and we, that is our little family, will be the ones to decide who can enter. You and Care will be exempt just as you are here, and we can add exceptions as necessary and if I understood her correctly we’ll be able to temporarily invite folks in, and if they are judged worthy they can enter, but they’ll be judged each time, so if their loyalties shift they won’t be able to get in.”

I smile, “Thank you for your trust Bonnie, be sure and look for that book first because I’m really worried about Klaus and even Stefan if he’s gone Ripper again entering and harming those I care about, which for the record most of them are in here right now and, all due respect, kind of fragile at the moment.”

They all smile at me, so I know they understand my worries. I take a breath and then I continue, “But to answer your questions, there are four wings in the house that sort of form the arms of an ‘X’ off the center of the house, however, the basement and sub-basement are rectangles and cover from the farthest corners of the yard to include the whole yard. Honestly, they’re both gigantic and the yard, gardens, driveway, and even some of the forest behind the house cover the underground rooms in addition to what’s beneath the actual house. Everything here should fit in the sub-basement with a bit of room to spare, and you are more than welcome to use the space anyway you see fit.”

Bonnie nods and smiles before she marches up to a wall and grabs a book off the top shelf, and then she walks up a staircase and down the corridor to another shelf and grabs another book. When she has both books in hand, she turns to Jeremy and says, “I need the bag.”

Jer takes off his backpack as Bonnie returns to the bottom floor and then moves some things around on the floor before revealing the pentagram I helped Hali carve into the stone floor when she was still in her 60’s. As Jer hands things to Bonnie and sets up I ask, “So obviously you’re going to do a spell but what will it do?”

She smiles and says, “The first spell will move everything including this pentagram and the tables and chairs to your subbasement and then when we get back home I’ll do the spells to protect against fire, water, mold, decay, and Supernaturals.”

She smiles and says, “I also have a spell that will make anyone we choose able to fluently read, speak, and understand all the different languages in the books to make research much easier. That’s actually how I was able to speak Proto-Norse earlier. You whispered a prayer in it so I suddenly knew it as though I had been speaking it my whole life. I found the spell in one of the Grimoires Dr. Martin collected so now I’m fluent in every language I encounter in some form be it written or spoken.

Anyhow, just to warn all of you, I’ll need blood from each of you for the anti-Supernatural spell so that you’ll all be able to invite people in provided the Magick agrees they’re safe. Although only Damon and I will be able to invite people in on a more permanent basis since I’m the Witch and he’s the oldest of the descendants of the one who built the house.”

I smile and tell her, “Uh Bonnie, I am the one who built the house.”

She pauses moving things into place and looks up at me with wide eyes before she smiles and says, “Oh um, okay that’s even better.”

Elena chooses that moment to ask, “Damon do you want to me sign the house back to you since my
being the owner doesn’t serve the original purpose anymore anyway?”

I pause, on the one hand I kind of like the fact that it’s really her house, but if Bonnie thinks it’s better defensively, “Bonnie, defensively would it make a difference?”

As she kneels on the floor, she pauses, opens the book she placed on the book-stand resting on the floor earlier, flips to a page, and then reads for a minute before she looks up and says, “Whoa, this spell is actually better than the one I thought Tianna meant. This spell will actually keep out all those who mean any in our family harm and the spell will be sealed by blood, specifically your blood, Drago. It has to be freely given and it won’t be breakable unless you again freely give your blood to break the spell and even then you’d need me or one of my descendants specifically to do the breaking. Though there will be a loophole that only you will know in the event that I permanently die and my direct line ceases to continue.”

I nod to show I understand her use of the words ‘permanently dead’, and it gives me hope that she’s at least considering the possibility of transitioning and becoming a permanent part of my family. I offered to Tianna too, but she said it would be generations before one of her line would again accept my offer to join my immortal family.

I say a quick prayer, “Please let Emily’s letter mean what I think it means, and it’ll be Bonnie who says yes and not one of her descendants.”

A warmth spreads through my body when I whisper the last word of my prayer, so I know it was heard then I turn back to Elena who has patiently been waiting for my response and tell her, “Since it doesn’t matter safety wise I kind of like the fact that it belongs to you. It seems right that it be yours now since you’re part of Stefan’s and my family. We wouldn’t have given it to you in the first place if we didn’t feel that way since we could have just as easily bought a new house closer to town and put that in your name. No, Stefan and I both agreed it should be yours, so unless you want to change that it will remain yours.”

She wipes a tear from her eye and then walks over to me giving me a hug and whispering, “Thank you,” in my ear.

I hold on for a minute longer taking the time to breathe in her scent that even millennia later still smells like blooming jasmine and the faintest hints of peeled oranges and fresh mint, and then I step back and smile at her telling her, “You’re welcome.”

Bonnie is still kneeling on the ground and now looking at us as if she’s waiting for our moment to be done so I walk over to her and ask, “What do you need from me for this spell, anything?”

She nods, “Your blood since it was you who built the house.” She pauses then asks, “Out of curiosity did you literally build the house or just pay people to build it for you.”

I smirk, “Does it matter?”

She nods but says, “Only because I’m curious.”

I laugh and tell her, “Yes I, and a bunch of towns people, personally built the house. I was hiding out from Stefan for a few years and he was far enough away that I felt comfortable returning home for a bit. Our original house was burned to the ground during the search for Stefan. Eventually I allowed my half-brother’s son and his family to live in the boarding house and he and his descendants did so until Zach died a few months ago.”

Elena turns away from the statue she was looking at and asks, “Wait, what search? When was
Stefan missing?"

I sigh unnecessarily and after looking at each member of my family to try to ascertain how they’ll take this story I decide they’ll handle it fairly well for the most part and tell her, “Um you do know how we became Vampires? He did at least tell you that, right?”

She nods though most everyone else shakes their heads no, so she says, “Yes you both shared blood with Katherine and when she and the tomb Vampires were taken you both tried to rescue her and were…”

She seems hesitant to complete the thought so I finish for her, “Shot, we were both shot and killed, as it turns out it was our father who did the shooting. After we woke in transition both of us decided not to finish the transition.”

I shift my weight from foot to foot and tell them, “Stefan went to talk to our father, maybe to say goodbye. I’ve never been entirely sure what he hoped to accomplish by going to see him. Then again, after my mother died, my father and I were never close, and he actually seemed to hate me more and more as I grew older, and when it came to me he had a tendency to talk with his fists more than his mouth, so I personally had no desire to see him ever again. Stefan did though so he went to see him.”

I look at Elena and say, “Anyway, as I understand it, Father attacked Stefan, and Stefan defended himself by pushing Father away. Unfortunately, when he fell his stake landed in his gut. Stefan ran to him to help and then noticed the blood.”

Her eyes are wide and have unshed tears in them but I continue undaunted, “I honestly believe he tried to resist, but he’d been denying the hunger all day since as I said he had planned to die rather than complete the transition. Anyway, long story short his hunger got the best of him and he fed from and killed our father.”

I sigh and shift my weight again, “I didn’t know any of this was happening until later when Stefan came back to the quarry where we had been hiding with Emily’s help. He told me how amazing he felt and how wonderful it was.”

I close my eyes as the memories of that night play out behind my closed eyelids, “Honestly, I didn’t care since the only woman I thought I had loved was as far as I knew burned alive. I had actually woken soon enough to watch the church burn to the ground, and Emily didn’t tell me about the tomb until after I had finished the transition saying she didn’t want to influence my decision.”

I sigh and then admit, “At the time, I hated her for that, but over time, I grew to understand that she had been right to do so. Though, I can admit that that realization and understanding only fully set in recently. I figured and now I know for sure from her letter, that her real motive was that she already knew Katherine wasn’t inside and that I had been played, and therefore she didn’t want me to choose immortality based on a lie. She was another Sister looking out for me the best she could.

“Anyways back to Stefan. He left witnesses, servants who told the Founder’s Council that it had been Stefan who killed our father. To make a long story short he was seen returning to the house often enough over the next few days that they burnt it to the ground with the hope that he was inside.”

I stuff my hands in my pockets as I say, “Fortunately for me, I had already removed most of my mother’s things shortly after her death and had hidden them away in a secret location as our father hated reminders of Mother. There wasn’t really much that I wanted that burned, plus by the time they burnt it to the ground I had already gone back and collected my personal belongings that I
wanted to take with me.”

I open my eyes trying to let go of the memories and shrug, “The house burnt to the ground and obviously Stefan wasn’t inside. He didn’t feel the same apathy I did about the house though, so he went on a rampage and killed most of the Founding Families, well the adults anyhow. Mostly he left the children be.”

I sigh deeply then tell them, “I probably shouldn’t be the one to tell you and Jeremy this but I’d rather you hear it from one of us than find out some other way, so I’m just going to say it. Stefan killed Jonathan Gilbert. He was wearing the ring Jer now wears so it didn’t stick, but Stefan didn’t know about the ring and believed for decades that he had killed all of the members of the Council.”

Elena is nodding and I realize that she at least knew that part of the story, still I continue, “Jonathan made sure the children never forgot what and, more importantly, who, had killed their parents and he rebuilt the council. By the time Stefan found out, Jonathan had been truly dead for a little more than a decade. Nevertheless, the children remembered because they recognized Stefan when he came back to figuratively piss on Jonathan’s grave and they ran him out of town.”

I sigh and tell them all, “For whatever reason, they apparently didn’t pass that knowledge down through the generations since Stefan returned a generation later and no one recognized him despite him using his real name. And no one, Jonathan Gilbert included, seemed to know I had turned, so they never seemed to recognize me and honestly, until recently, well the 1990’s really, I’d never killed anyone inside Mystic Falls.”

I pause then add, “Well that is, except for the girl Stefan forced on me to complete the transition. I tried to stop in time but I had been fighting the hunger all day and half the night so it got the best of me. I tried to use her death as a lesson and from then on tried to keep myself satiated as much as possible so I’d be able to stop before I killed my meals if I wanted to. I’m actually not sure why Stefan has such a hard time with it since I actually, all things considered, took to this life fairly easily.”

Frowning I tell them, “Don’t get me wrong, as Damon I was a bad man at times, okay actually most of the time. I killed way more than my fair share of innocent people while my switch was off. However, I didn’t enjoy the kill anywhere near as much as Stefan apparently does when he’s on Human blood, and unlike Stefan I wasn’t sadistic and therefore never tortured my victims.”

I smile and look at Elena as I tell them, “Now it doesn’t matter since Elena effectively broke my switch in the on position anyway, and now that the spell has been lifted, well as I told some of you last night, once you reach somewhere between 200 and 300 years old the switch has this nasty habit of breaking.

“Elena just sped the process up for me and fortunately, it was on when it broke. I know it usually turns itself back on before it breaks for good, but I’ve also known a few handfuls of Vampires through the years, including the seven younger Pervonachalnyue, whose switches broke while off and they never regained their Humanity. So thank you for turning it back on and helping to break it.”

I pause then I say, “I hadn’t realized how much I missed the good emotions while the switch was off. Though don’t get me wrong the bad emotions suck, and since I’m a Vampire, I feel everything stronger. However, now that I have family again I’m finding that the love I feel for all of you far outweighs the shitty feelings associated with the so-called bad feelings.”

Frowning again I say, “Though guilt is definitely still a bitch, which by the way I know I already apologized Jer but I’m really sorry about killing you.”
Jeremy looks up from the herbs he and Bonnie are mixing and nods but hesitantly asks, “Can I ask what made you do it?”

I really don’t want to bare my soul like this even to my family but I know he and the rest of them deserve to know the truth so I suck it up and tell him. “Earlier that night Katherine had been by to see me and tried to get me into bed. Before I agreed to sleep with her I asked her if she loved me promising to forget the last 150 years and her deceit if she answered right, but she just laughed and told me that she loved Stefan and it was and always would be Stefan.”

Elena gasps and bursts into tears. I speed over to her and take her into my arms, “It’s okay you had no way of knowing, and I don’t blame you. I really set myself up for what you said and I think a tiny part of me knew it, but I couldn’t stop. It was like a train wreck.”

She holds on tight and nods against my chest as I hold her while she cries. I look up and see nothing but curious faces so I finish the story. “I told Elena I had feelings for her and that we had something. I went on to tell her that she was lying to me, Stefan, and most importantly to herself if she denied it. She took my face in her hands and looked me right in the eye and told me that she cares for me but that she loves Stefan and it will always be Stefan.”

I pause as remembered pain blooms in my chest then tell them, “Since the woman I had pined away for during the last 150 years had not an hour before said the same words the new woman I loved just said I snapped.”

I pause and make a snap decision to be brutally honest so I say, “I wanted in that moment to hurt Elena as much as I was hurting and I think I did.”

I look Jer in the eyes and nod ever so slightly as I tell him, “The minute I did it I realized my mistake and understood exactly the kind of monster I had become in that moment. I knew I was far worse than Katherine ever was, and I have never been as grateful as I was when Stefan came home and told me you had been wearing Jonathan Gilbert’s ring.”

Frowning again I continue, “I actually broke down and cried right in front of Stefan, which as I’m sure you realize is not something I would ever willingly do. I’d never open myself up like that in front of him, but I was so relieved that I hadn’t permanently killed you. I knew your death would have destroyed Elena, and I can admit I had already grown fond of you from our little bonding moments every now and then.”

I pause and take a moment to breathe then tell him, “So basically, I didn’t want to kill you, but I snapped and tried unsuccessfully to turn the switch back off. I just didn’t want to care anymore, obviously that didn’t work out so well and the pain actually got worse. Anyway, you just happened to be the person in the wrong place at exactly the wrong time. I really can’t tell you how sorry I am to both of you for the pain I caused you with my reckless actions.”

Jer smiles reassuringly and nods as he says, “I forgave you almost as soon as you did it, though I do appreciate you being up front just now and as you said laying yourself open like that in front of us. Did you at least learn from it?”

I chuckle a humorless laugh, “Oh yeah, I learned to calm the fuck down before I go making declarations I know aren’t going to be returned. And I can honestly say now that the spell has been lifted I feel like an even mix of the good parts of Drago and Damon with minimal amounts of the bad parts of both, so I don’t think I’ll ever be as impulsively reckless again as I was that night. Now I also know the switch is permanently on and honestly, I wouldn’t want it to be off ever again anyway.”
I smile, “Anyhow, as Drago, I was fairly level headed and thought everything through looking at all the angles before taking action. I feel like that part remains intact now and only my severe dislike for all things fun has really changed.”

At their doubtful looks, I laugh and tell them, “No seriously I learned as Damon to find fun in the little moments and enjoy them while they’re here. While I can admit, I had fun as Drago, over the years I kind of lost the ability to truly appreciate the good things mostly because I think my family, at the time, was so busy terrorizing others and trying to drown their own guilt in blood. I was constantly trying to clean up their messes and stopped finding joy in the little moments.”

I shrug a little and tell them, “Now I feel like even if shit comes, and it has already with this Stefan and Klaus bullshit, I feel like I can still find the good mixed in with the bad. For the record most of that good stuff is directly linked to all of you, so thank you for that.”

I look Jer straight in the eyes and tell him, “I feel like I needed to kill you to realize just how fucked up I had become, but I think Tianna, Emily, and the rest of our line, since it was Emily who made your ring, ultimately saved me from making the worst mistake I could have ever made. Or that’s not right, I made the mistake, but they allowed me to learn from it without irrevocably destroying the family I was unknowingly building for myself.”

Suddenly a wind blows through the room and the voice of Tianna echoes through the space, “You’re welcome. Be at peace, Brother.”

Then Hali’s voice says, “Be at peace Father,” followed by thousands of voices echoing their words on the wind only instead of calling me ‘Brother’ or ‘Father’ some of them call me ‘Honored Ancestor’. Emily’s voice is the last voice to echo the words and she like Tianna calls me ‘Brother’.

I drop to my knees and hang my head as I quietly say, “Thank you.”

It’s Elena who also dropped to her knees with me and has her arms wrapped around me who asks, “Was it just me or did you all hear that?”

Bonnie and the rest of them nod as she tells Elena, “I think that was Tianna, if I’m not mistaken and the rest of my ancestors, his descendants.”

I nod and tell them, “It was. The first voice was Tianna’s, then my daughter Hali’s followed by all of your ancestors that I’ve been blessed to know and love through the years and the last was Emily’s. I miss Hali, Tianna, and Emily, well, all of them really, but I was especially close to Hali, Tianna, and Emily, and just hearing their voices, however fleetingly, brings me a sense of peace I haven’t felt in a millennium, longer really.”

Bonnie smiles despite her tears that began falling during my sad tale of woe and tells me, “You deserve it, Brother. You obviously learned the lessons you were meant to learn from the spell, so I think you’re going to be okay from now on.”

I smile and help Elena off the floor, but she continues to hold on to me, so I give in and hold on to her too as Bonnie resumes getting ready to apparently transport everything from this space to the cavernous space I built below the boarding house.

I never knew why I built a sub-basement. They were standard when I was a Demon but few that size have ever existed especially in these parts. The last one I personally knew of being built was built over 500 years ago and it was in Europe. Anyhow my subconscious must have known we’d need it when the spell was lifted. Either way I’m grateful once again.
Bonnie waves me over and hands Jeremy a goblet to hold onto and then grabs my hand and holds it over the goblet before slicing my palm with the dagger Lilith and Balthazaar’s daughter used to feed me my first meal as a Vampire and that I made sure was passed down through the generations from oldest daughter to oldest daughter. I squeeze and release my hand over and over allowing the blood to flow more freely as I force the wound to stay open as long as possible through my control over my body, which is suddenly stronger than what it was a thousand years ago and not as weak as it was three days ago.

When Bonnie nods I allow the wound to heal, and then she lets go of my hand. I know to stay in the circle though, so I remain where she placed me. I watch and listen as she erects the circle and then after mixing some herbs into my blood she drinks it and recites words Emily once read to me telling me it would be an important spell someday in my future, and as usual, she was right.

The candles ignite and then burn hotter and the wind is back before all of the lights including the flashlights and the lantern go out. I hear several gasps and I can sense Elena’s fear as her heart rate picks up speed and her breathing comes in short bursts so I tell her as confidently as I can, “I’m right here ‘Lena, no one will hurt you while I’m near I swear it to you, to all of you, you are all safe with me.” As I utter the last word so does Bonnie and suddenly the lights turn back on though the candles and torches remain out.

As the wind dies down I whisper, “So mote it be.”

Which causes Bonnie to smile and say, “So mote it be,” and then she adds, “Blessed Be.”

I kiss her cheek and reply, “And you as well.”

Then I hear everyone else gasp, so I look away from Bonnie to find that all of the shelves, tables, and artifacts as well as the books on the shelves are now all gone and the cave is once more just a cave. Bonnie smiles and tells me, “I’ll keep the Magick up protecting this place so if we ever need it either to store things or hide in we’ll have it.”

I nod, “That’s a good idea.”

She smiles and nods as she starts cleaning up the items she and Jeremy brought with them, which along with the knife she used to cut me are the only items that didn’t move as a result of the spell. Jeremy asks a moment later, “Do we need to head over to your house later with Ric or Ty’s SUV and grab the other Grimoires and things your grams left you?”

Bonnie shakes her head and tells us all, “They’re already at the boarding house as well as some other items all of our ancestors have hidden through the years. The spell didn’t so much as move the items in this space to the boarding house as it moved all Magickal, historical, or sentimental items intended for me and our family into the subbasement. Well mostly the Magickal and historical items are in the basement including all of the Founders’ journals, which the other founding families will figure have been somehow misplaced since they were all kept under lock and key. They’ll probably never figure out how someone broke in and stole them without breaking the locks or there being any other evidence of a break in. Furthermore, since they all know Vampires require an invitation and only Care’s mom knows about Damon none of them will think a Vampire had anything to do with the disappearances. I’m also pretty sure they won’t mention the disappearances to the other families for years to come so they won’t realize that all of the Founders’ journals are now ‘missing’ or that their disappearances are related.”

She smiles then says, “Anyhow, in addition to the journals I think Damon’s going to find several things in his room, that he hid away through the years or that were believed lost, have been returned to him.”
She shrugs then adds, “When Stefan gets back he will too, Emily did a similar spell to remove those items from the burning house that the two of you would later want or need but it’s dependent on your spell being broken. And items that were wrongly sold or given away through the years have been returned to you as well, not just from your life as Damon but your lives as Drago, Draco and all the Human lives you lived before being born Damon Salvatore. As you now have all of those memories you will again have everything that is rightfully yours.”

I smile but then my jaw drops as Elena asks, “Will the same happen when Stefan lifts his spell?”

I turn to look at her, and she places her hands on her hips as her eyebrow shoots up, but she smiles when she says, “Don’t look so surprised Damon. It only makes sense if he was spelled too and maybe Katherine since you brought her up at breakfast yesterday and asked Tyler to try to avoid biting her. Her being one of the spelled ones is the only reason I can think of that you would want to prevent her death. So yeah, since last night when you were distracted you wondered how Stefan’s lack of control teaches the lesson I figure Stefan and Katherine are two of your original family members.”

I glance at Bonnie who nods, so I tell Elena, “There were six of us total, the ones I told you about last night, who were spelled. I can’t tell you who some of them are only who they were, but yes Stefan is one of them as well as Katherine and Elijah. However, it is imperative that none of you tell any of them anything about the spells on them as it might impede each of their ability to break them.”

Bonnie nods and speaks up and only lies a little, “He’s right, we can’t emphasize enough how disastrous it could be if they find out before their spell is broken. Since right now none of the ones we need to worry about are around it should be good but when they return mums the word. In fact, we should only probably talk about any of it with the people in this room until further notice and the Humans and Witch should be super aware of the hearing range of Supernaturals whenever we decide to talk about this stuff.”

She pauses then smiles and says, “I think we’ll be safe at the boarding house as I plan to put up a number of spells one of which will keep what we say in the house inside and make it only hearable by those whom we want to hear it, that is if that’s okay with you Drago.”

I smile and tell her, “That’s more than okay Bonnie. I can’t thank you enough for all the things you have done and plan to do for our family. We would not be nearly as safe as we are if it weren’t for you.”

Everyone else nods deeply and a tear slips out of Bonnie’s eye, “No problem, that’s what you do for the people you love, your family.”

Elena steps towards her and hugs her as Jeremy and Caroline join her in hugging Bonnie. I’m not really comfortable with a group hug so I grab Bonnie’s hand off Elena’s back and hold it tight. I notice Ric has his hand on Jer’s back and Ty has his resting on Caroline’s back and I smile to myself.

My family’s not yet completely whole but it’s well on its way to getting there, now we just have to rescue Elijah and Stefan and hope that everyone who needs to figure out the true meanings of love, loyalty, and honor do it sooner rather than later.
Friday, June 04, 2010; early afternoon

So after we left the cave, we headed back to the boarding house and after checking that everything really had arrived from the cave and elsewhere, Bonnie went about placing all the other spells we need.

As she said in the cave, she knew a spell to allow any in our family to read, write, speak, and understand fluently all of the different languages found in the journals and Grimoires, which she assured me she can easily do on other people as the various members of our family return to us. Then she did the spell to keep those who mean us harm out, which turned out to be better than the spell that would have just kept the Supernatural out since this spell will keep the Founder’s Council out too if they try to take me down again. She followed that up with spells to protect against fire and water, ones to protect against mold, decay, and aging in general, and one to keep our secrets secret from those who shouldn’t know them.

I smiled at her when she showed me that last spell understanding that it will keep our enemies from eavesdropping but also keep Elena and Caroline in the dark about their own spells and their roles in my life as Drago. The same will be true for the rest of our family when they finally return.

We are now working on getting the first one back. We are about an hour outside of Chicago and although I wanted to try to make it in a single day Ric suggested the Humans would do better sleeping in beds at a hotel. So we’re doing the drive in about a day and a half since Ric and Bonnie convinced me to make many stops along the way so we could take pictures, mostly for her dad, Mr. Hopkins, who believes Ric had a family matter to attend to in Chicago. Mr. Hopkins thinks that instead of leaving Jer and Elena alone at home so soon after their most recent loss, Ric decided to take them with him and turn it into an educational experience.

Since today is June 4th and as of May 28th school is officially out for the summer Ric then sweet talked Bonnie’s dad and Liz into letting Bonnie and Caroline go on the trip too. The only one whom we invited that we thought couldn’t come was Tyler, but instead of leaving Wednesday morning like we originally wanted to we delayed the trip a day so he could attend some dinner with his mom Wednesday night.

I explained to Carol, “Carol, Tyler’s had a lot of loss and upset in his life recently and since Ric and I will be in attendance to chaperone wouldn’t it be nice to just let Tyler be a teenager on vacation with his friends especially since Ric plans to make it an educational vacation.”

Ric even supplied me with an itinerary and I sweetened the pot by telling her, “I have a degree in art history, so between me and Ric we can easily teach Tyler more about history and art in a week of museum trips than most other people could.”
She told me, “He can’t miss the dinner.”

I called her bluff and asked, “Well then how about we wait to leave until Thursday so he can go to your dinner and still come to Chicago with us?”

Finally, she relented after telling me, “Fine, but if anything happens to my baby boy I’ll hold you personally responsible.”

So anyway, Ric explained to all of us, “We need to make it look real,” so we’ve been stopping along the way. Bonnie and I are sure that Klaus and Stefan are in North Carolina right now, so we plan to stay in Chicago for a few days maybe up to a week and go to all the museums.

The teens all groaned at that news but I told them “It’ll be fun since we have a talented and personable history teacher and someone who was actually there during the history to narrate and point out all the historical inaccuracies.” I also added that, “If our real reason for the trip is successful we’ll hopefully have two individuals who lived through so much history to give you firsthand accounts.”

I have to say I’m a little nervous about undaggering the Originals. We decided to go with Jer’s idea and do Elijah first and then once we’ve won him over, ask him what he thinks the best bet with his siblings will be.

When we arrive in Chicago, we head to the nicest hotel in the city, which has a condo on the top of it that just happens to be conveniently owned by me.

Bonnie smiles as the porter rolls the bag cart to the elevator across from the one we just got out of at my urging. The second elevator only accesses the floors of my condo. The porter turns back to look at me and tells me, “Sir, I’ll take the bags up one floor and meet you up there.”

After I nod at him, Bonnie asks me, “So, do you own just the condo or the whole…”

I laugh, “I actually own the whole building and the hotel. I own many actual houses but I especially own many hotels around the world, actually, well I own a lot of buildings and businesses in general but definitely a lot of Hotels most of which have a condo inside them somewhere. I’m sure Elijah is the same way; we probably have holdings in mostly the same cities and regions. I also know Katherine owns a bunch of bed and breakfasts around the world.”

She turns to look at me as I lead her and the others into the foyer then she and Tyler ask at the same time, “How do you know that if you’ve only known she wasn’t trapped for a few months.”

I smile that smirk of mine that usually means I’m up to no good and tell them, “Pearl and Anna actually had a friend of theirs investigate Katherine. When Pearl died, Anna showed up the next day to tell me Pearl was dead and that she had several boxes she asked be delivered to me in the event of her final death. Upon Anna’s death, I actually inherited everything they owned, but there were things Pearl wanted me to have even if Anna was alive.”

I pause considering the past then tell them, “I have to say I don’t really regret much in terms of things Damon wasn’t able to do, but not being able to save Pearl and Anna are definitely towards the top of the short list. They were good to me back in 1864 and except for reminding me that she was my elder and to be respected, they were continuing that theme once Pearl was released from the tomb. She even apologized for not controlling the tomb Vamps well enough to protect Stefan. For the record, apologizing wasn’t really something she generally did, so it was a big deal that she admitted to that failure on her part. Then as I said they both left me everything they had accumulated in their long lives when they died.”
Bonnie and Tyler double team me again and interrupt to ask, “Didn’t the founding families steal everything the tomb Vampires owned.”

I smile realizing Care has obviously filled Tyler in on every last detail, which is a good thing, so I laugh and say, “Nope, they only took the local properties and holdings. They had no way of knowing what the Vampires had outside Mystic Falls and since Pearl and Anna were both centuries older than Katherine, Anna knew everything she needed to know to maintain and grow everything all the tomb Vampires had. She did so figuring they’d get out eventually. I think Emily even helped by removing all the records of the holdings outside Mystic Falls and most of the more priceless valuables from their homes so the Founders wouldn’t know about or have access to them.”

I smile that smirk again and tell them, “Anna and Emily actually did phenomenal jobs of it too as most of the tomb Vamps’ net worths when they died on Founder’s Day were higher than those of the wealthiest Humans. Now that they’re all gone, it’s all Damon Salvatore’s as Anna for whatever reason named me everyone’s beneficiary so she literally left it all to me. I’m in the process of moving most of it around so it’s not so obvious what happened to keep anyone from asking why I just inherited huge fortunes and estates worth hundreds of billions of dollars each from 27 different people, who all happened to die within a few weeks of each other.”

Everyone’s eyes are wide at the mention of hundreds of billions of dollars so I smile then get back to answering their questions. “Anyway, back to the boxes Pearl left, among the many boxes Anna delivered were several with info she thought I might need and lists of the people Pearl and Anna protected through the years and a request that I continue to look after them, which I am doing if you’re wondering. Some of the other boxes had everything Katherine likely doesn’t want anyone to know, all her aliases, all her holdings, lists of all her friends and more importantly lists of anyone whom she feels owes her. I pretty much know everything she did while I thought she was in the tomb.

I pause then tell them, “Anna also at her mother’s request introduced me to several individuals of use including her investigator, Hanz Klein, who is about four centuries older than Elijah. Apparently, Pearl thought highly of me and spoke fondly of me even giving me most of the credit for getting her out of the tomb, so he has decided to honor her wish that he help me in any way he can until his final day. I have him currently looking into Klaus as cautiously as possible.”

I pause and then at all the worried looks being thrown my way I tell them, “Don’t worry I made sure Hanz knows Klaus is an Original and a Hybrid at that and that if he gets caught he might end up begging for a quick death. I also made sure he knows that I don’t want him to martyr himself and that if he feels it’s getting too dangerous I won’t hold it against him if he discontinues his research. Last thing I want is to get Pearl’s friend dead just for helping us.”

Bonnie throws a questioning frown at me so I tell her, “Oh don’t look at me like that Judgey, I’m not so willing to allow collateral damage as I once was. And for the record that change of heart is just about equal parts my new family’s influence and my breaking the spell. Besides I actually knew him before the spell was cast as Asya is the one who turned him, and she will never let me hear the end of it if I get him killed. The good news is Asya was about 453,500 years old when she turned him so he’s significantly stronger than Elijah and Klaus are combined so he stands a good chance of surviving. I called and told him I’m back, so now he’s helping me because of who I am and not so much because of Pearl.”

I smile as Bonnie nods. I know she thinks my changed perspective has more to do with Elena than the rest of them and while that was true in the beginning I hope they all know that they’ve all had a positive effect on me.
I really don’t plan to get anyone other than Klaus and then the younger Pervonachalnyue killed if I can help it, so I’m serious about having warned Hanz. Besides, he’s a good guy and now that my switch is broken in the on position, I’d feel like shit if I inadvertently got him killed.

Bonnie’s distracted from our conversation by the view as they all shuffle out of the foyer behind me into what is one of my nicer living spaces on this side of the Atlantic. She obviously agrees as she breathes out, “Wow Drago, just wow.”

She laughs as do I, as everyone else nods deeply as they look around. I smile and say, “Follow me.”

They follow me up the first flight of stairs and through the upstairs living room to a long hallway with doors on one side and one at the end of the hall. The porter is waiting just outside of the elevator with our bags. I open the first door and say, “There are three floors and they all have bedrooms. Since the Hotel, takes up half of the entire city block and the condo takes up the entire length and width of the hotel there are a total of 29 bedrooms, including my master bedroom, in the whole condo. Vampire Barbie this is your room.”

She kisses my cheek as she passes by me and then most of us quickly cover our ears when Caroline squeals to high heaven. They all stick their heads inside the door and smile at the room that looks like it belongs to a princess complete with canopy bed that has light pink gossamer curtains surrounding the bed, though there is no roof on the canopy. There is also a huge balcony through the French doors, which adds to the decadence of the room.

Care spins and runs to hug me then runs back into the room, and after kicking off her shoes, she jumps on the bed a couple of times before landing on her back and saying breathlessly, “That’s kind of trippy with the view and the bouncing. I felt like I was flying for a sec.”

I laugh at that, and I take her bag from the porter and place it on a bag stand over by the door that leads to a bathroom that rivals mine back at home. Bonnie giggles and asks, “Brother, who does all your bathrooms?”

My eyes crinkle as I laugh heartily at that and only say, “I know a guy.”

I then lead them to the next door and say, “Little Gilbert, this one’s yours or yours and Bonnie’s depending, which ever, doesn’t really matter to me.”

She looks at Ric who shrugs and says, “I know for a fact that Jenna knew Stefan and Damon spent hours and sometimes whole nights in Elena’s room. I also know that she knew Stefan wasn’t staying on top of the covers fully dressed unlike Damon, so who am I to start acting all parental. Provided no one ends up pregnant I really don’t think I get a say.”

I chuckle as Elena turns bright red at Ric’s apparent knowledge of her personal life before Bonnie smiles and kisses Ric’s cheek and then has a silent conversation with Jer. Finally, she smiles as he nods before grabbing her bag from the porter and following Jer into the powder blue room that has a huge sleigh bed in the middle of it that is made of cherry wood. This room has a balcony too. She walks over to the window and looks out, and since it’s a clear day, she can see for miles. It’s a beautiful view so I’m not surprised when she runs back and kisses my cheek and whispers, “Thank you, Brother.”

I smile and nod before leading Tyler, Elena, and Ric down the hall. I skip two doors and then open the second to last door before the room at the end of the hall. “This one is Wolf-boy’s room.” He grabs his bag from the porter and walks into the room that looks a lot like my room in Mystic Falls only with a balcony all along one wall. He stops and says, “Nice, thanks man.”
After he places his bag on the bag stand I lead Elena and Ric to stop at the last door before the perpendicular one and say, “This is your room Elena,” as I open the door.

It’s got a canopy bed with white and pale yellow curtains and roof and the room again has a balcony.

She smiles and kisses my cheek as she takes her bag from the porter and sets it on the bag rack inside the door of the walk-in closet.

She then turns and follows us to the perpendicular door at the end of the hallway and I say, “Ric you get the grown up room, well one of them.”

Bonnie sneaks out of her and Jer’s room and follows to see what kind of digs Ric got. Her unspoken ‘Holy shit’ is written all over her face. It is a pretty nice room as it’s a corner suite so two of the walls are floor to ceiling windows with a wraparound balcony. I smile and tell them all, “Fair warning I’m the only one with a private balcony, so you all get to share, so just be aware of the communal status.”

They all nod so I leave Ric to inspect the huge California King four poster bed done in dark purple and lead Bonnie, Jer, Ty, Elena, and Care back down the hall.

I stop and open the two rooms we skipped when asked about them. I point to them and say, “These two and two more upstairs are for Elijah and his siblings if they need a place to stay that Klaus won’t know about. I’m not actually listed as the owner of most of my property so like Elijah I should be slightly harder to track than Katherine and Klaus are proving to be.

Bonnie asks what everyone’s wondering. “So who’s listed as the owner of your stuff if not you, and wouldn’t it just be an alias like you said Katherine has?”

I shift my weight a bit before I say, “Katherine and Klaus use aliases that they just randomly come up with. The names come out of thin air and there is little to no back-story or paper trail so all one has to do is look for people who didn’t exist before a certain time. I mean look at Elena, Stefan easily figured out she was adopted because there was no record of a hospital stay or her mom having been pregnant. My aliases on the other hand have actual filed birth records, recorded hospital stays for their births, recorded doctor’s visits, school records when needed, and families and descendants who remember them. The original ones all died as teens or young adults and I compelled everyone to forget they died and think I’m their loved one or a descendant like them.”

Bonnie is frowning so I turn to look her in the eye and tell her, “Now before you go getting all Judgey, Judgey I make sure the families are considerably better off compared to how they used to be and I make sure all of their descendants are well taken care of through the years. I treat them all kindly and act as if I love them the few times I see them. I send them postcards and video when I travel and write them letters so they don’t worry.

“At this point most of them even know my secret like Zach did and they keep it and protect me. Every generation I compel a doctor to make a birth certificate and forge doctor and hospital records for the alias I’ll use in the next generation with the current alias I’m using listed as the father. The grown children back up the birth records and claim me to be their cousin through the last alias I used in their family so I get to keep my wealth hidden with them and they get to keep reaping the benefits of having an immortal benefactor.”

I pause and at the deepening frown on Bonnie’s face, I continue explaining, “I didn’t cause the deaths of my original aliases they happened on their own and their families all know that as well as the fact that I didn’t have to take care of their families. I only took advantage of our similar
appearances after the fact and all of my deceased aliases are buried in crypts with my actual
descendants so I can be sure they’re being properly cared for. Of course while the spell was in place
I didn’t actually know they were my descendants but still they are and the graves are treated with
respect and well cared for.”

Bonnie clearly isn’t completely convinced as she asks, “You didn’t cause any of the deaths?”

I sigh as I see her prepare for the worst, “Only one and only because my nature spooked the horse he
was riding and he fell off and broke his neck. I actually didn’t look that much like him, but I turned
him into an alias, so I could make sure his family who had lost their father the year before was well
provided for. The father had left them practically bankrupt, so I fixed all of his financial issues, and
the family is currently part of the one percent the Politicians are so quick to complain about these
days. And for the record I actually felt bad about his death especially since that hadn’t been my
intention.”

She obviously feels bad for assuming the worst but still asks, though more gently, “What was your
intention?”

I sigh and tell her the sad story, “I was staying with them as a guest and his little sister was playing
with a ball while he ran the horse back and forth across the yard. She reminded me of a childhood
friend who died young from influenza so when she ran too close to his horse I moved her out of the
way before she could get hurt.”

Frowning I continue the story, “The irony that by trying to save the sister I actually wound up killing
the brother wasn’t lost on me, and I immediately set about covering up his death and setting things as
right as I could manage. For the record I regret that death too.”

She smiles and tells me, “I’m sorry I shouldn’t have—”

“It’s okay Bonnie truth is I was a bad man for a long time. That was one of the few times Damon
had his switch turned on back then and that death actually precipitated me turning it off for a couple
of decades, well actually until I met Elena.”

I barely pause as I say, “First time I laid eyes on her… I of course first thought she was Katherine,
but then once I heard the different cadence to her speech and truly realized she was a live girl, well
my switch got a mind of its own and began the longer than anticipated process of turning itself back
on.”

Now I do pause and then cautiously continue, “And in the interest of full disclosure I watched you
Elena, for just as long as Stefan did, though not to make sure you weren’t Katherine. I already knew
you were nothing like the bitch and that was even before I realized just how big a selfish and cruel
bitch she is.”

She smiles so I keep going, “Mostly I wanted the sweet girl whom I briefly spoke with to get
everything she ever wanted, so I kept an eye on you to make sure you were safe, and for the record, I
was seconds behind Stefan when he pulled you out of the water. I actually dove in and pulled your
mom out while Stefan went back and got your dad. I stayed just long enough to know you were
going to make it then I hightailed it out of there since I hadn’t planned on letting Stefan know I was
in town. But I knew trying to save your family was more important than keeping a low profile.”

I’m looking at Elena who has tears running down her cheeks. She’s looking deeply into my eyes
and she seems to find what she’s looking for as she steps into my arms and sobs out “Thank you for
trying.”
I hold her while she cries and pet her hair. When she calms down she looks up at me with still watery eyes and asks the question I was pretty sure was going to come when I started this line of conversation, “When did we meet? I’m sure I would have remembered.”

I sigh again and drop my arms preparing for her to be angry with me. “I met you moments before your parents picked you up. We had a conversation during which we discussed what you wanted in life. I told you that you want what everyone wants, a love that consumes you. I told you that you want passion, an adventure, and even a little danger. Then I wished for you to get everything you were looking for, and then I compelled you to forget me.”

She doesn’t seem angry but still I tell her, “In my defense, I didn’t really know you then, not beyond what I could see of you looking into your eyes, and I really didn’t want Stefan to know I was in town. If I had known then, that five minutes later I’d be blowing my cover to help him try to rescue your family from the lake I wouldn’t have bothered compelling you.”

She grabs my hands and asks, “Is that the only time you compelled me?”

Shit! I probably should have seen that coming. I shake my head. “No I compelled you one more time.”

She gasps but doesn’t let go of my hands as she asks, “When?”

I hang my head in shame. I wait for her eyes to flash and narrow and her nostrils to flare in response to the first compulsion but they never do. Still she’ll definitely be angry about the second compulsion even if she doesn’t seem mad about the first one. She uses our entwined fingers to tilt my chin up so I’m looking in her eyes.

I barely notice that everyone else is kind of debating sneaking into their rooms so we can have what should obviously be a private conversation in private but neither one of us pays our audience much attention as I say, “After we got you back from Rose and Trevor. I found your necklace in the abandoned house so I showed up in your room to return it to you.”

She tilts her head to the side and narrows her eyes as she asks, “Why would you compel me to forget that?”

I uncharacteristically slouch and then proceed to bare my soul again in front of my family. “I told you I had to say it just once, you tried to stop me, but I told you I love you and then told you that because I love you I can’t be selfish with you. And because of that I had to let you go because while I don’t deserve you my brother does. Then I compelled you to forget the whole conversation and left before you snapped out of it.”

Bonnie tilts her head to the side and purses her lips before she says, “I have that memory Damon, that’s not all you did.”

Elena stiffens but I stand up straight since that really is all I did and I tell her, “I swear that’s all I did.”

Bonnie frowns and seems to really examine the memory for a moment then she tells me, “I don’t think you meant to do it if it’s any consolation, but you believed so strongly at the time that she should always choose Stefan that I think you inadvertently compelled her to choose him over you. I think that’s why she’s so conflicted. Her heart wants to choose you, but her mind won’t let her because you accidentally compelled her to choose your brother over you.”

My eyes widen and I get the chills while a tingling sensation spreads through my chest just before I
say. “Fuck, did I? God Elena I didn’t mean to fuck with your head or your heart I just needed to say the words and for you to hear them just once, but I didn’t want to hurt you by doing it, so I tried to take the memory away. I’m, I’m so sorry I never meant—”

She places her finger over my lips and whispers “I believe you. I know you would never intentionally fuck with my head as you so elegantly put it. Is there a way to undo it?”

I think hard, lost in thought for a moment and then I say, “Usually if you want to undo a compulsion you need to basically put an escape clause in it when you place it and say ’do this or forget that until…’ which I didn’t do. However, Tianna removed a compulsion without an escape clause once. Someone compelled someone to do something I thought was beyond wrong and immoral so I asked Tianna to consult her tomes. She reworked three spells into one and gave them back their memories.”

I frown at the memory, “Of course then we had to leave, but I felt that was better than letting the man believe his wife had willingly been unfaithful, so he and everyone else knew that one of my Vampire descendants had actually forced himself on the woman. I killed him for that and then we left that area for a few decades. Anyway, I know Tianna wrote it in one of her books so maybe when we get back Bonnie can look for it and then try to undo what I accidentally did. I really am sorry. Damn I keep apologizing for shit. That seems to be all I do lately.”

My heartbeat begins to race, well as much as a Vampire’s heart can race, when Elena quickly whispers, “It’s alright. I forgive you. It takes a lot of love to let go of the one you love because you believe someone else is better for them.” She looks deep into my eyes as she continues, “Do I wish you had let me keep the memory and make my own choice? Yes, but you’re a work in progress, Damon, and I remember where you were on your road to feeling again when that took place, so I know you thought you were doing the right thing.”

She pauses then grips my hands tighter and tells me, “I do, however, need you to promise not to compel me again. If you do that and really mean it, and I’ll be able to tell, then I’ll forgive you right now and say a little prayer that Bonnie can fix it.”

I let go of her hands and her face and shoulders drop until I cup her face in my hands and looking her right in the eyes vow, “I swear to you Elena, I won’t compel you or any other member of our family without their prior consent ever again.”

She smiles and I let go of her face and stuff my hands in my pockets as I tell her, “Besides, now that the spell is broken I’m back to believing that less is more when it comes to deciding whether to compel someone or not.”

She nods with her smile firmly in place as do the rest of them as she tells me, “I’m going to hold you to that Damon.”

I nod back and whisper, “I know. I wouldn’t want it any other way.”

When we look to be done with our not so private moment Bonnie interrupts as softly as possible probably so as not to jar us out of our little bubble, “I saw the spell the other night as we were looking for the others for the boarding house. Since the book also houses the spell used to freeze Drago and his family I actually have the book here in Chicago.”

She pauses briefly and then smiles before saying, “I think I have all but one of the things I’d need. When we go to the Witchy store later today to get what I need for the spell for the Originals then I can pick up the herb I need for this spell and we can do it tonight if you guys want. Though I have to warn you I’ll need blood from both of you and it has to be freely given.”
We both smile and Elena nods as I say, “That won’t be a problem,” which honestly I’m sure she never doubted but she obviously wanted to give us full disclosure.

Jer breaks the following silence next and asks, “So have you compelled any of the rest of us?”

I nod and say, “I compelled Caroline a bunch of times, but she remembers all of those now that she’s a Vampire. I’ve apologized though if you need to hear it again, Sister, I will tell you I’m sorry as often as you need me to.”

She smiles and says, “I’m good, Brother, since one of the last things you wanted to do before you died was apologize to me as if you needed to right the wrong you had committed before it was too late I believe you’re truly sorry. When you whispered that you were wrong to do it and that you’d take a bite from Ty again if it meant protecting me, well it helped me get past it, but thank you for offering.”

I nod and then continue, “I compelled you Jeremy the one time that you know about from reading Elena’s diary.”

Bonnie interrupts, “You might get those memories back through Damon’s memories, but I could reverse that too if you want, but everyone who saw you after Vicki’s death, before Damon compelled you to forget, agrees you were pretty wrecked and that it was gruesome, and they wish they didn’t remember, so be careful what you wish for.”

I’m surprised but not when Jer looks at me and asks, “What’s your opinion, Brother? You know what the compulsion was, and you and Elena know what I forgot. Do you still believe I’m better off not remembering?”

I pause and give the question the consideration it deserves then I say, “First I wasn’t present for the worst parts you personally saw. Therefore, those memories won’t be returned through my memories but possibly through Stefan’s memories since he’s the one who saw her attack you and staked her in your defense. That said, honestly I was horrible to Vicki too and I turned her into a monster and that you will get from my memories. While I didn’t intend to turn her into a monster, the last time you saw the first girl you loved she was staked by my brother as she tried to tear out your and your sister’s throats. I did that. I made her into that.”

I see Tyler’s eyes widen in surprise and realize a moment too late that he might not know about what I did to Vicki. I already said it though so there’s no going back so I soldier on despite the anger Tyler might feel towards me. “I understand that you wish I hadn’t removed the memory, and I totally understand about the hole you mentioned the other day still being there but all I can ask you is this, ‘Do you really want your last memory of the girl you loved to be of what I turned her into? Or do you want to remember the last time you saw her before I killed her?’”

I pause and as he obviously considers my question, I tell him, “I’ll support your decision whatever you decide but maybe you should think about it for a few days. Bonnie is this spell something that you can do for Elena now and then do later for Jer if he decides he wants the memory back?”

She nods and tells us, “Yeah it’s actually probably best to wait until after we deal with the Originals before I go trying to fix Jer’s memory though I firmly believe the sooner we fix Elena’s the better, so I’m going to push to do that tonight after we’ve eaten dinner.”

I nod and smile sadly, “Okay so Jer, think about it and if you want to talk about it and have me tell you everything that I’ve been told happened like I just did with Elena let me know and I’ll answer all your questions so you can make a fully informed decision.”
Jer smiles and tells me, “Okay, I’ll probably take you up on that later, Brother.”

I nod and smile slightly, “Whenever, my door is always open to you, to all of you for whatever you might need and Tyler, obviously you didn’t know the finer details of Vicki’s death, so if you want to know what happened in more detail find me later and I’ll fill you in, okay?”

Ty nods deeply and thankfully and, honestly, surprisingly, he seems more curious than angry as he says, “I’ll definitely be taking you up on that later.”

I nod back and after everyone else nods at my offer they thank me before I frown and say, “I also compelled you, Ric, shortly after you got to town, you kept acting shifty around me, so I asked who you were, why you were here, that sort of thing and then compelled you to forget the whole conversation.”

Surprisingly Ric smiles, “I know, Brother, I was holding a Vervain branch in my hand at the time.”

I unexpectedly laugh at that, “Of course you were…” I pause and really think about what he said for a minute then tell him, “I suppose I should have known that since your answers turned out to be lies, still all the same I’m sorry.”

Ric smiles and shrugs, “I forgave you for most of the shit you did to me the first time you saved my life. Forgiving you for turning my wife into a monster took a little longer but now pretty much all is forgiven since I now know she actually begged you to turn her. I know how persistent she could be when she wanted something so, yeah I’ve pretty much forgiven you for everything you’ve done ‘to’ me at this point.”

I nod and then say, “For the record Ric I’m sorry I killed you too, twice no less. I don’t think I actually apologized so just know I’m sorry for that too.”

He nods back and tells me, “I must have brain damage from my two deaths because strangely I forgave you, Brother, for that fairly easily all things considered.”

I laugh and say, “Well thank you then.” I turn and look at everyone else and tell them, “I haven’t done any other compelling to anyone in this hallway.”

Bonnie smiles and tells me, “I think I speak for everyone when I say, thank you for telling us the truth even though we all know you thought we’d be angry and never forgive you. You’re a brave and good man Damon Salvatore.”

I laugh and tell her, “I don’t know about that Sabrina, but I thought the least I owe all of you is my honesty.”

They all nod and the girls all give me hugs and kisses on the cheeks while Jer, Ty, and Ric pat me on the back. Then Caroline brings the mood back up to where it was by asking, “So can we see your room?”

I quickly show them around telling them, “This is the kitchen,” then I show them down the hall and lead them into my office and then the ‘man cave’ off under the stairs. I quickly show them the seven
bedrooms on that side of the first floor then as we head back into the living room I turn to everyone and extend my arm in the opposite direction of the stairs before leading them into a short hallway.

At the end of the hall, I open the door and we all shuffle inside. Three walls are floor to ceiling windows with a balcony that extends from all three walls, so I chuckle at their wide eyes and hanging jaws. There’s a huge lowered sitting area off to the left and my bed is to the right against the wall the door is in. My bed is pretty similar to the one I have in Mystic Falls only this one is slightly bigger and higher off the ground. The ceiling is high and there is no second story above this room, though the third floor does have a few rooms above this one.

Caroline and Bonnie open one of the doors to the balcony and step out into the afternoon sunshine. My view is, in my opinion, even more amazing than all of their views because you can see the lake in the distance from my balcony. There is a high wall out on the balcony with a door in it, which separates my portion of the balcony from the one that goes out from the main living room.

I set my bag down on one of the bag stands resting just inside the huge walk-in closet set into the wall the bedroom door is in, and then I turn and ask them all, “So Sabrina needs to go to the Witchy store. I’d prefer we stick together but anyone who wants to stay behind should be fairly safe inside the apartment. Although I’ll get really mad and extra bossy if anyone who does stay leaves the safety of the apartment without the rest of us for back up. We’re essentially in enemy territory so we have to play it smart and safe whenever possible.”

We all look at each other and then everyone agrees we’ll all go to the store. We go to our rooms to freshen up after the long drive, and then we meet in the foyer and head out into the city to buy Bonnie’s supplies.
Saving My Life Was Your ‘Fault’

Chapter 010

Saving My Life Was Your ‘Fault’

Friday, June 04, 2010; mid-afternoon

We go to the Witchy store and Bonnie easily finds everything she needs and a couple of things she thinks she might need in the future. As the shopkeeper rings up her purchases, I gently push her aside and open my wallet to take out my credit card, which prompts Bonnie to say, “Damon, you don’t have to pay for my purchases. I’ve got enough to cover all this.”

I shake my head and point out, “Hey I tore into your throat and tried to kill you, for doing the right thing no less, so the least I can do is pay for the Witchy supplies you wouldn’t even be buying if it wasn’t for my brothers and me.”

Despite my reminding her that I tried to kill her she giggles and says, “Okay, Gramps,” before she kisses my cheek and moves out of the way so I can pay with my black Amex card. I chuckle as I see several sets of eyes go wide when my family sees it. I mean I’ve been pretty up front that I’m beyond wealthy. I’d be an idiot if I were poor after 170 years never mind 490,454 years. Plus, they’ve now seen two of my homes. Not to mention my talk earlier of owning many houses, hotels, and other businesses the world over but clearly they’ve never actually seen a black card before.

I hear Elena whisper to Care, “Is that a Black Amex card?”

When Care nods Elena confides, “I only know they exist because my dad’s college buddy bragged about giving his wife one when they came over for dinner back when I was 13 or 14.”

I smile because honestly, I don’t really think about my money at this point in my life. I pay other people to manage it and maintain my aliases and all the paper trails. Those people are themselves Vampires and descendants of mine, so they’re discreet, and they know not to fuck with me or what’s mine.

Somehow, Drago and Damon use the same financial managers and the most involved I’ve been in recent years is this year when I had to deal with everything I inherited from the tomb Vamps as well as Pearl and Anna.

I actually called my money-men the other day to check on Drago’s assets and was very pleased to find that not only have my assets and aliases been maintained but also my wealth has been properly managed and has grown considerably through the years, even more than I would have expected.

Anyway, I pay the shopkeeper, and as we exit the store carrying several bags between Elena and Bonnie, I ask, “So what are we in the mood to eat for dinner? There’s a grocery store a couple of blocks from the condo. I can make just about anything thanks to my time at culinary school back in the ‘80’s, the 1980’s in case you’re wondering. So anyway any requests?”
Jer barely has to think about his answer before he asks, “Can you do manicotti? Uncle John used to make it and I haven’t had it in forever.”

Then as if he remembers that John is a sore topic for Elena he cringes and apologizes, “Sorry ‘Lena, we can have something else!”

She grabs his arm and as they walk arm in arm she smiles, and she tells us all, “It’s okay, I’ve pretty much made peace with John. He finally stepped up and acted like my father and did what was best for me despite it literally killing him. He left me in the care of two Vampire Brothers he repeatedly tried to kill because he finally realized that they would love me beyond my own death and that they would both do everything in their power to postpone my death for as long as possible. He did all of that despite being raised to hate and despise all things Vampire.”

She smiles sadly as she continues, “He finally stopped being the uncle I loathed and only put up with for my dad and brother’s benefits and truly became my dad. I actually kind of miss him now and wish I had longer to get to know him without him wearing his hate goggles every time Damon and Stefan came up in conversation. So while I’m skeptical that Damon can make some manicotti as good as John did I’m down with him trying if everyone else is okay with that.”

I chuckle at her challenge and tell her, “Challenge accepted, ‘Lena.”

Everyone agrees that manicotti is good so we head to the store to pick up what I need. While we are there Care asks, “Oh can we have some lima beans with the pasta? I haven’t had any in forever and I’m kind of in the mood for them.”

I’m a little surprised that a teenager likes lima beans but I smile and tell her, “Sure,” then I chuckle as Bonnie makes a face and pretends to gag so I ask, “Bonnie do you or the others have any requests?”

Bonnie smiles and tells me, “Broccoli would be awesome.’

I nod and add the broccoli to the cart then everyone else has a grand ole time listing off all the vegetables they like and making dirty faces whenever someone mentions one they can’t stand. Finally, I put the vegetables to a family vote and Bonnie and her broccoli and, amazingly, Care and her lima beans win hands down. However, instead of putting everything else back I smile and say, “We’re here at least three more nights to make the educational part of our trip more believable so we’ll have the rest then.”

All in all, I had a blast this afternoon and I think everyone else did too. I notice everyone trying not to eavesdrop as Bonnie pulls me aside when we get back to the apartment.

We go into the hallway and she looks as though she could easily vibrate out of her skin she’s so excited as she quietly says, “I think Elijah already broke his spell.”


She explains what she knows and then finally we come back from the hallway and ‘Lena asks, “Everything alright?”

I nod and tell them, “Bonnie had a vision in the Witchy store that makes her think Elijah already broke his part of the spell. She actually thinks he died protecting Katherine from some of Klaus’s goons just before she came to Mystic Falls the first time, a year or two before I guess.”

I look to Bonnie for confirmation and when she nods I continue, “I need everyone to pray to whatever higher power they believe in that her vision is accurate because that will save us a shit load of trouble trying to convince Elijah to fight with us against Klaus.”
‘Lena decides to play devil’s advocate as she asks, “Uh if he already remembers then why did he betray us for Klaus? And didn’t you tell us on the ride here that the only way to kill you guys is tearing out your heart, so how did the dagger work if he’s already Balthazaar again? Not to mention he wasn’t as strong as Damon is now so wouldn’t he have been stronger if he remembered?”

I know Bonnie has thoughts on all of that so I nod to her and she answers, “I have a couple of theories about all of that. I think he thought he was going to help break uh Damon’s or maybe Stefan’s spell. And despite everything he still remembers Klaus as his brother for over 1,000 years. That’s a long time. I mean think about it, ‘Lena and Jer, you’ve only known each other for less than 16 years and yet you would die for each other. Technically your cousins not blood related siblings though I’m fully aware that you couldn’t be any closer to Brother and Sister despite who your respective biological parents were. But just imagine believing for 1,000 years that you were siblings. Think of how much stronger your bond would be.”

I take over, “And technically he and Klaus are brothers just as Stefan and I are since Elijah was born Human in that life. So in his heart he probably felt torn between his loyalty for Dante and me and his loyalty, not so much for Klaus, as I truly believe he wanted him dead, but for his other brothers and his sister. Once he knew they weren’t lost at sea forever he probably figured he was their only shot at freeing them.”

I pause as I take out the mixing bowl and my pasta maker and then tell them all, “I also think Bonnie’s right about his belief that his actions might spur one of us to break our part of the spell. I mean think about it Stefan offered to take Jenna’s place. That alone could have possibly done it, so I’m certain Elijah hoped saving one family would also in turn save the other.”

As I finish mixing the pasta dough and move it into the pasta machine, I tell my family, “What I’ve learned of him since we met in this life leads me to believe he is a deeply changed man who truly understands the meanings of love, loyalty, and honor. Don’t get me wrong I loved Balthazaar and aside from my wife, he was probably the closest to already understanding those concepts though I’m sure his sister was probably the reason for his understanding just as she was mine. She’s the most giving, loving, compassionate, and selfless person I’ve ever known, well except maybe for Elena, and I know her love for both of us was our saving grace more often than not.”

I begin cranking the machine and rolling the pasta as I tell them, “Now that I remember him as my best friend and brother and after Klaus daggering him I’m certain he’ll fight with us for Stefan and ultimately help us kill Klaus. Although I also think he’s going to convince us to give his other siblings a chance to prove themselves and except possibly for the sister whom I know was very close to Klaus up until the ’20’s I think they’ll all follow Elijah’s lead. That will be especially true after we flash a little power around and make them realize that I can take them all in my sleep with both hands tied behind my back.”

When I’m done rolling and then cutting the pasta I turn to the pot of boiling water and put the pasta in. As the pasta cooks I tell them all, “Which for the record I’m 257 years older than Balthazaar, which is more than enough that I can honestly say him beating me would take an act of the Goddess or a once in a billion lucky shot to make happen, so I’m cautiously optimistic about tomorrow. Still a few well worded prayers wouldn’t be uncalled for if anyone feels so inclined.”

Bonnie puts her hand on my back as I stand at the stove taking the now cooked pasta out of the water to begin filling them and rolling them into manicotti and says, “I have an idea. I was reluctant to use it since I thought we’d need Elena to help convince him to help us but I might be able to talk to his consciousness while I sleep and let him know we’re coming to save him and that you remember everything now.”
She pauses then adds, “I can also let him know that we’re open to suggestions on how to free his siblings peacefully from their coffins without causing any unnecessary bloodshed. If we’re right about him, it’ll give him time to ponder the situation and perhaps work out an idea that might not be thought of on the fly.”

I look at her and bend my knees a little so I can look right in her eyes, “How tiring will this spell be? I know you have the power of more than 300 dead Witches now but you’ve already done some heavy-duty spells this week and you’re planning to do another tonight and then incapacitate a bunch of thousand-year-old Vampires for an undisclosed period of time tomorrow. I won’t put you at risk if we can avoid it.”

At her dark look, I hold my hand holding the slightly cheesy spoon up as if I’m a cop directing traffic and showing a stop signal and tell her, “I’m not saying no. I’m asking you to be frank about what you are and are not capable of doing without hurting yourself. Frankly, you’re far more important to me than the other Originals. I’m sure we can talk Elijah into keeping them daggered for a few more days if you need it, but I don’t want you to over extend yourself since I know you’re not ready to start taking my blood on a regular basis. Which means no unnecessary risks. So if you even remotely think it’s too much I want you to say so and we’ll go with the original plan.”

She smiles and nods before she kisses my cheek as I marvel at the idea that she’s really considering my turning her then she says, “Honestly I know it’s not needed, so I wouldn’t have mentioned it if I thought it would be too much. All it basically will be is me finding him in the Aether and talking to him. According to Tianna’s notes, my body will get a full night’s rest even if I spend the entire time from when my eyes close to when they open talking with him, so it should be relatively risk free. You could even come with me and it wouldn’t affect me tomorrow.”

I seriously contemplate her words then I smile, kiss her cheek, and tell her, “You’re the resident Witch, so if you say it’s safe then I’ll trust you to know better than I do about this sort of thing.”

I pause then as I remember the last part she said I ask, “Do you want me to come with you? I will if you want.”

She shrugs, “I mean on the one hand I feel I could be our representative but you interacted with him more than I did when he was in Mystic Falls, and if he truly does remember your previous lives then you being there would probably make more sense since he’s going to know immediately that he can trust you. So yeah I guess I do kind of want you to come and nobody else feel left out or take this the wrong way but I have this gut feeling Jer needs to come too, but I don’t know why I feel that way. Grams always told me, though, to listen when I get this feeling so I think me, Damon, and Jer should pile up in a bed tonight and go visit Elijah and try to figure out what we all should do.”

I think about it for a moment before looking at Jeremy, ‘What do you think, Little Gilbert?’

His eyes go wide and his mouth drops open so I add, “Don’t look so surprised that I’m asking for your opinion. While all of us have had bad ideas on occasion I’m finding that the rest of us tend to talk us all out of our bad ideas with pretty regular success, and you’re no different.”

His jaw is still hanging open and he’s blinking slowly so I add, “I know you’re the youngest, but youngest does not equal stupid or unqualified to give meaningful input into any of our decisions. You’re just as much a part of this family as the rest of us and this shit affects you just as much, maybe even more, since you’re Human, and if the Originals go nuts you’d be more likely to be at risk than me or Bonnie or even Care and Ty.”

I look him right in the eye and continue, “Furthermore, Bonnie has a gut feeling you should be there and I fully agree with her grams that gut feelings shouldn’t be ignored. So as a member of this
family in good standing would you mind giving up your sleeping hours to go try to help Elijah and us come up with a plan for dealing with his siblings. Bonnie’s feeling leads me to believe something is going to spark an idea in your mind that she and I or even Elijah won’t think of.”

He smiles and thinks for a minute then says, “Thanks for the vote of confidence. I don’t want you to think I think you treat me like a kid because generally you don’t, but I’m just a Human, so despite my ring I’m usually more of a liability than anything else.”

I half frown half smile as I interrupt, “Physically you’re weaker than most of us, but seriously Brother, you have a razor sharp mind and an unquenchable thirst for knowledge that totally makes up for any perceived liability you may be physically. And even with you Human there are few people I’d want watching my back more than you.”

He beams at that and then says, “Okay, thanks, so yeah I don’t have any problem coming and trying to help if you really think I’ll be able to make a difference. Bonnie are you sure taking three of us won’t put you at risk?”

Now he holds his hands up at the dark look she throws his way, “Don’t look at me like that, Bon. I’m asking because I care. Before you were talking about you and maybe Damon going, so if I go, I need to know that three people doesn’t change what you told us about the toll it’ll take on you.”

“Really guys, I could bring all of us there for years before it’d start to have a negative effect on me.”

He and I both nod and smile before he says, “Okay, then count me in.”

She smiles and kisses his cheek before stealing a tomato from the salad bowl that Tyler is slowly filling, so with a broad smile on my face I half-heartedly slap at her hand before she pops the vegetable into her mouth and smiles at me while slowly chewing her prize. I scowl at her and tell her, “If you can’t keep your fingers out of the salad bowl I’m going to put you to work.”

She holds up her hands in surrender and tells me, “I’m worse in a kitchen than Elena, so in the interest of everyone else’s safety I’ll keep my fingers away from the food until you give me the go ahead.”

I smirk and tell her, “Thank you, Sister.”

She smirks back and replies, “You’re welcome, Brother.”

I smile big just as I have every time anyone has called me that throughout the day, and then I go back to stuffing the manicotti as I ask, “So you have theories about the dagger and his strength?”

She looks shocked as she laughs, “Oh yeah almost forgot, anyway I found the spell Tianna used on you guys so I believe based on the notes I found in her book, that the dagger would only work until he and one of the rest of you remember who you are. If no one other than Balthazaar remembered, then the dagger would continue to work until two people remembered. So essentially once more than one of you broke the spell the only ways to kill the ones who remember are the old ways not any of the ways that were true in the newer lives. So now the only way to kill you and Elijah is to tear your hearts out, which according to Tianna is so impossible to accomplish it’s not even really an option.”

She frowns as she leans up against the counter as she stands beside me and says, “Truthfully, she wrote that the only reason pulling your hearts out works is technically to keep the balance within nature. No creature can be truly immortal, but the thing is no one in existence is actually strong or fast enough when you are your true selves to be able to rip out your hearts. Well that is except for
you Drago, you could probably kill them all and Dante, Balthazaar, and Briseis could probably
easily kill Lilith and Asya and each other if they’re the older of the fighting pair.”

I shrug as I stop what I’m doing to say, “With the exception of Briseis, I’ve had my hand on their
hearts dozens of times each, so I’m pretty sure you’re right though, again with the exception of
Briseis, they’ve all tried to do the same to me and failed. They usually gave up after destroying
wherever we were with our fight. And FYI you’re right about them being able to best each other if
they’re older. They’ve threatened to tear out each other’s hearts so many times I’ve lost track.
Finally, to prevent a catastrophe, I had to promise to kill the victor if they actually killed any of us.
But it’s good to know that I can’t die from a stake in the heart anymore.”

She smiles glad about that too, then she tells me, “Yeah and in addition to pulling out their hearts
death by fire will work for Asya and Lilith but not the rest of you since you and Dante are full-
blooded Fire Demons and Balthazaar and Briseis are Elementals who can also control fire. But even
for Lilith and Asya to be killed by fire the fire would have to consume them entirely all at once like
in an explosion or they’d heal too fast, which while it would be incredibly painful it wouldn’t
actually kill them.”

I nod, “Lilith was badly burned once in a fire that killed several members of the other families that
used the Pervonachalnyue spell but she managed to survive despite being badly burnt.”

She nods and smiles then continues, “Tianna actually wrote pages and pages about why she spelled
you guys. One of the reasons she decided to try to spell your family was that there was no way
anyone besides you would physically be able to stop the others. She knew you better than most, so
she also knew you loved them and wouldn’t be able to bring yourself to kill them all even if it
would save the world.”

I nod back sadly, “I actually talked to her about that a lot. I was very conflicted for thousands of
millennia. On the one hand, I wanted to keep my family safe but on the other hand, I didn’t and
couldn’t condone their behavior. At the same time though I knew just as she did that I would never
forgive myself if I killed them, and maybe a very small part of myself didn’t want Briseis and me to
be alone, never mind that I would have had to kill Balthazaar if I killed Lilith, so Briseis probably
would have hated me.”

I frown and sigh before telling all of them, “That’s part of the reason I’m not anywhere close to
angry with Tianna. When I said she dared to do what no one else could or would do, I was
including myself in that statement. I knew their behavior needed to be ended but I couldn’t bring
myself to be the one to end it.”

I smile slightly as I tell them, “Tianna loved me enough to do it for me and in a way that I think most
of us can and will be able to live with in the end. I think if it works as she intended, and so far as I
can tell, in regards to my own experiences, it will work exactly as she intended, then ultimately we’ll
be better and stronger people, worthy of the gift of immortality.”

My smile widens before I say, “I also think our family will be much stronger for having experienced
all of our various lives. That doesn’t even take into account that we all met you guys and basically
doubled the size of our family with honorable and noble people who can and have taught at least
some of us, i.e. me, very valuable lessons that we sorely needed to learn.”

They’re all nodding but I can tell they don’t understand just how much of a difference they really
made where I’m concerned. I pause for a minute and consider how to explain it properly, “I can tell
you guys aren’t giving yourselves the proper credit you’re due. Consider this, I, as Damon, fed from
Vicki twice. The only reason I didn’t kill her the first time was because I knew it would make things
difficult for Stefan.”
"The second time, I was starved for a week, and I thought I had killed her, but she somehow managed to survive, so to heal her I fed her my blood. If I had stopped there she’d still be alive, but I was bored and lonely so I snapped her neck and killed her knowing she’d wake in transition and not be able to resist the bloodlust. I knew she was the last person I should be making into a Vampire, her addictions alone told me she’d probably be a Ripper, but I still did it."

My frown deepens as I tell them, “I had convinced myself that it didn’t matter. That whether I killed her didn’t matter. Elena and Jeremy’s obvious pain over her death made me see that it did matter, and when Elena said the actual words, ‘It matters and you know it,’ I felt a physical pain in my chest because I realized I was deluding myself all those years and it really did matter. That’s why I offered to compel you Jer, I was in the process of realizing everything mattered in ways I hadn’t realized and I wanted to try to undo the pain I had caused you.”

I pause and then explain, “If Elena or Stefan would have allowed it I would have done the same to Elena too. And not just because I didn’t want either of you to know what I had done, but more so because I knew you were feeling a pain similar to my own in a way. I suddenly cared and wanted to keep that pain away from you both as much as I could. While it didn’t occur to me before I killed her that anything mattered as I stared down at her laying on the ground with a stake sticking out of her chest and Elena’s words ringing in my ears and my cheek still hot from her slap I suddenly realized every death I had ever caused truly mattered. With shocking clarity, I finally understood the pain and destruction I had caused for almost a century and a half.”

I smile just slightly as I look Ric in the eyes and admit to how stubborn I am, “Now admittedly I’m a stubborn ass so I fought those realizations hard and tried to continue to delude myself for a while longer. But Ric showed me similar truths with the obvious pain he felt over Isobel and his willingness to risk his life for others. He obviously thought it mattered just as Elena did.”

My smile turns into a frown as I remember the night of Founder’s Day and I turn to look Care in the eyes and tell her, “I surprised myself by caring about Anna and wanting to save her. Then later in the night when I found out that Care, Ty, and Matt were in the car accident I further shocked myself by actually caring about whether any of you survived. The shocks just kept coming though because I was honestly surprised that the answer was I wanted all three of you to live. That was a bit of a wakeup call because then I realized that not only did life matter, but there were specific lives that mattered more to me.”

I turn and look at Ty before saying, “I know I didn’t know you and Matt very well at the time but even your lives meant something to me at that point.”

I turn back to look at Caroline, “That’s why I offered to feed you my blood Care because I heard the doctor tell Liz there was only a 20% chance you’d make it through the night and dammit I wanted you to live. It didn’t even matter to me how annoying I found you back then and how down right mean and horrible I had been to you. You wonder of wonders actually mattered to me.”

She has tears in her eyes as I look her in the eyes again and tell her, “And while I’m at it I’m sorry I took for granted that you’d be safe in the hospital. I had no clue at the time that Katherine was back. However, I should have made sure you really were safe, but part of my not doing that was that I was still trying to convince myself that none of it mattered, so after I fed you my blood I had to get out of there, or there’d be no denying that it and you mattered.”

I turn back to face Bonnie to my right and tell her, “Then your pain, Bonnie, when you realized she was a Vamp and had killed someone, well that mattered too. As you were frying my brain and trying to set me on fire, I realized your pain mattered too, and if you thought I should die for what I had done, maybe you were right. You basically shoved a mirror in my face and showed me who
and what I had been. You were acting as my conscience by frying my brain anytime I did something ‘evil’ and even that made me realize that hey you know what Elena, Jeremy, and Ric aren’t the only ones who think it matters. Suddenly everything I had worked so hard at convincing myself didn’t matter for the last almost 150 years suddenly took on new meaning.”

I turn to face Jeremy standing on the other side of the counter across from me and tell him, “I found myself just showing up at the Gilbert’s house and just ‘chilling’ with you Jer, even and especially when Elena wasn’t home and in many cases would never know I had been by and acted like a decent person. Then the weirdest thing happened, I’d be talking to you and I’d actually care what you were saying, which for the record I never cared what Humans had to say before you Jer. They were just a meal and maybe a fuck or in the case of my aliases and their families there to keep a buffer between me and my enemies.”

I look around the room at the stunned faces of my family and tell them all, “Every single last one of you helped turn my switch back on and then break it in the on position. I know I wasn’t anything like Damon as Drago but by being Damon and seeing things from the perspective the rest of my family was viewing the world from for so long and then seeing it through all of you made me as Damon and therefore me as Drago a better man. You made me realize every life matters and I still don’t think you’re grasping just how amazing what each of you did for me as Damon truly was.”

I pause for a second then try to finish explaining, “Not only did you show me that everything mattered but wonder of wonders suddenly I mattered too. There were people willing to fight for me, beg for my life, and jump through fire to keep me from being ended. No one but Stefan when we were Human had ever cared about Damon like that. Suddenly I was loved and that was foreign to me and that foreignness was also contributing to my reluctance to accept everything you were trying to teach me because I have to admit feeling loved for the first time after 150 years of not being loved by anyone was really strange. It kind of hurt in a weird way at first until suddenly it didn’t hurt anymore and it felt amazing. You guys did the impossible and turned a monster back into a decent person.”

I smile and tell them all, “I don’t think I can ever truly thank you enough for what you all showed me and for actually bothering to look beyond the surface and see beneath the monstrous façade I wore to the man I had been and apparently could be again. I honestly thought that that man was lost forever, but you guys apparently knew different and set your minds to proving it to me. So thank you.”

They all look stunned by my admissions so I keep working on filling and rolling the pasta until finally they all seem to shake themselves from their thoughts and a few of them whisper “Wow.”

Elena walks to me and hugs me from behind so I put the spoon down and turn to face her and hug her back and then slowly all of them pile on and I’m in the middle of my first group hug. I laugh and tell them, “Here’s another first because I’ve never actually been in a group hug before.”

They all laugh at that and after another minute or two they slowly pull a way as Bonnie smiles and says, “Wow, just wow. I had no idea what you were going through, even with your memories now I didn’t truly understand the fundamental change you went through as Damon.”

Everyone nods deeply as Care adds, “For the record, I was never mad at you for not keeping guard over me in the hospital. That expectation that I’d be safe there was, in my opinion, a reasonable one. So just so you know I don’t blame you for my ending up a Vampire. That falls on Katherine alone, well her and Klaus since she did it to give him a Vamp to sacrifice.”

She smiles and then says, “I wouldn’t be here at all if you hadn’t fed me your blood, so in the long run it all worked out. I mean don’t get me wrong I wish Carter hadn’t died, but I’d rather be a Vamp and still be ‘alive’ than be Human and permanently dead, especially now that I seem to have the
bloodlust mostly under control.”

I nod and tell her, “Thank you for not being mad about it.”

She smiles and says, “Oh I was and still am mad but not at you, saving my life was your ‘fault’ but turning me into a Vampire is not now nor has it ever been your fault.”

I nod and Bonnie adds in, “I should probably apologize for trying to kill you when I discovered she was a Vamp. I honestly thought you had killed her on purpose and I was so upset that she had killed someone that I just reacted and badly at that.”

I smile and tell her, “After what I did to Vicki I wasn’t surprised that you or anyone else might think I had done it on purpose, so I forgave you for trying to kill me pretty quickly. Especially since I found myself caring that she had been murdered and turned into a Vamp so I could understand a little where you were coming from because if I had had an opportunity to kill Katherine right after I found out about Care I probably would have done it.”

She nods and then Elena asks, “Exactly how often did you show up at our house?”

I smile and chuckle a little, “Pretty much any time I thought Jer would be home especially if I knew you were with Stefan at the boarding house or otherwise out of the house. He mattered to me and I knew he had lost a lot of people so I wanted him to know he wasn’t alone even if I wasn’t ready to say those words or even really admit that I felt that way.”

She leans up and kisses my cheek, “Thank you.”

I smile, “I didn’t do it for you, but you’re welcome.”

Jer laughs and says, “Thank you, Brother, for caring even if you couldn’t admit it.”

I laugh back and tell him, “Thanks for not staking me the first chance you had.”

He smiles and says, “Yeah sure, no problem.”

I look around the room and Ric has a big smile on his face, but Ty is sort of smiling and frowning at the same time, in fact he kind of looks like he’s in pain so I ask, “You okay Ty? You kind of look like you’re in pain.”

He nods, “I just, I didn’t know about most of what you just said. I mean I knew the very broad basics of what had happened but you filled in some pretty big holes just now so it just kind of came as a shock, but I’m okay. Thanks for caring whether I lived or died.”

I smile, “You’re welcome, and that offer to fill you in the rest of the way and answer any questions you have, not just about Vicki but about anything that’s happened still stands so feel free to find me some time and I’ll do my best to finish filling in the holes.”

He nods, so I smile and say, “So enough heavy shit for now, back to Elijah, Bonnie, you have a theory about his strength?”

She smiles and as I start placing the rolled manicotti into the cooking dish she says, “Yes, I think he was doing a lot of pretending the whole time he was in Mystic Falls. He pretended you and yours were nothing to him. I mean if you think about it he forgave us for daggering him not once but twice far more easily than I think any of us would have. I think that’s because he knew you were Drago, so he overlooked the repeated slight since he was himself when you weren’t, and he wouldn’t wish you or yours harm.”
“I also truly believe he spent the whole time downplaying his abilities for our benefit so as not to spark any questions from anyone, namely you, Drago, and Stefan, who might know well enough to ask.”

I nod and when I look up from the food I notice everyone else is nodding too before I say, “That makes sense. That must have sucked for him to be so close to us and have to fake not caring. Even if he doesn’t remember, I’m not sure I’m going to be able to pretend he means nothing to me. That’s another reason I’m hoping he already broke the spell as I don’t want to risk fucking up his chance of breaking it by not being able to pretend to hate the guy.”

They all smile and nod, and the rest of the dinner prep and the dinner itself are lively with everyone jumping from conversation to conversation as the mood fancies them. When we finish eating those who didn’t help prepare dinner, namely everyone but Tyler and me, clean it up and then Bonnie and Jer go to their room to get what they need to undo the compulsion I inadvertently placed on Elena. Honestly, you would think it’d be more involved but we both cut our hands and then ‘Lena drinks the blood after it’s mixed with some herbs. Then Bonnie does her chanting thing, and the lights go out again. When they come back on Elena gets dizzy and then she falls into my arms. I can see in her eyes as the memory forms in her mind and the compulsion is reversed. I even see something in her very expressive eyes shift but I’m unsure what it means.

My muscles twitch and my mouth is dry as she looks at me for long moments and I’m totally not prepared when she smiles and nods as she tells me, “Damon, I was wrong. It’s you and it always has been and always will be you, not Stefan.”

My eyes widen as I stare into her eyes searching to see if she’s being honest, and I silently curse Katherine for fucking with my head and heart badly enough that I can’t just go on faith when someone tells me they choose me. Then when I realize that she’s completely serious and telling me possibly the most honest thing she’s ever told anyone before, I smile a breathtaking smile. She wraps her arms around me tightly and leans up and seals her vow with a kiss.

We don’t break apart until Care echoes my thoughts and whispers, “Sealed with a kiss even, aww.”

I rest my forehead on ‘Lena’s as I playfully growl, “I just had the best kiss ever so I’m going to ignore your teasing, Sister.”

She giggles and softly tells me, “I didn’t mean to tease I actually think that was the sweetest, most romantic moment I’ve ever seen, even more than The Notebook.”

‘Lena laughs and tells me, “If she’s saying it’s sweeter and more romantic than The Notebook then she really means it because The Notebook is pretty much her favorite romantic movie and the only movie she ever wants to watch anymore.”

All three girls are nodding as Elena continues, “Bonnie and I have probably been forced to watch it with her more than 20 times in the last 12 months and that doesn’t take into account that we took a break from it right after my parents died because I spent the whole movie crying.”

Bonnie’s nodding grows deeper. As Caroline opens her mouth in an attempt to convince me of how amazing the movie is I cut her off before she can get going. “Care, I’m a guy, generally the only reason we watch anything romantic is to please our woman. So unless Elena asks me to watch it, and be assured I will make her work for it, I’m not going to be viewing your favorite movie.”

The guys all nod deeply as all the girls giggle, while ‘Lena pats my cheek, “Don’t worry, Damon. I promise not to torture you with it unless you really piss me off.”
I give a great big sigh and then promise, “I’ll be on my best behavior, promise.”

After that, we peruse my movie collection and settle for the first The Fast and the Furious movie since it has hot guys for the girls and hot girls, cars, and action for the guys. I spend the entire movie with a huge smile on my face as I hold Elena against my chest with my arm wrapped around her shoulders.

It’s a good thing I’ve seen the movie before. I try really hard to focus on it but my fingers keep brushing circles and figure eights over her bare shoulder, so I repeatedly get distracted by every delicious shiver and case of goose flesh that erupts across her skin. When the movie is over, I have to admit I’m kind of grateful that I can finally stop pretending to pay attention.

I reluctantly ask everyone, “Do you guys want to watch another movie?”

Bonnie shakes her head and says, “No I think I need to go get ready to do my spell,” and then she stands and stretches as she promises, “It’ll only take twenty to thirty minutes to prepare so we’ll meet you in your room.”

She pauses then leans down and whispers to me, “Lena can be in the bed too with us if you’re so inclined. As long as she doesn’t drink the potion she’ll sleep normally.”

I smile and nod to show I heard her as she heads for the stairs. Jer quickly follows her up the stairs after promising “See you in a few minutes, Damon.”

I nod and tell him, “See you then, Jer.”

As he disappears up the stairs Care’s phone rings and she smiles as she answers and stands to go upstairs to her room. She pauses mid-walk and waves to us as she asks Liz, “Hey mom, what’s up?”

Tyler’s phone rings next and he groans as he answers and says, “Hey mom, hold on a sec while I go to my room since everyone else is watching a movie.” He holds the mouthpiece of his phone against his chest and says, “Good night guys, I’ll see you in the morning.”

He stands and Elena waves as he walks up the stairs and he waves back then Ric sighs and gets up telling us, “Well the old Human needs to get some shut eye so he’s on top of his game tomorrow so good night you guys.”

‘Lena smiles and tells him, “Sweet dreams Ric.”

He nods and heads to his room. Elena is obviously wondering what we’re going to do now that we’re alone, but before I have a chance to say anything she lets out a huge yawn, which causes me to chuckle and say, “I think my Human needs some sleep too.”

She smiles and asks, “Your Human huh?”

I nod seriously and say, “My Human just as I’m your Vampire, Always and Forever, Elena.”

Her eyes widen and before she can stop to consider the intelligence of starting this conversation now she asks, “Do you mean it, really, can you see forever with me, because I realize forever has taken on a whole new meaning now that the man I love is a Vampire.”

Ignoring the fact that she’s Briseis and trusting that the spell will keep her from questioning the validity of my words since she knows Briseis was my wife but doesn’t know she is Briseis I caress her cheek and tell her, “Yes, Elena, I can see myself spending forever with you, loving you ‘til the end of days. I would never again try to force that on your though. I’ll allow you to make your own
decision on the matter and respect whatever you decide. Although if you wish to talk about it or ask
questions I’ll happily tell you whatever you want to know since as I’ve said before being turned by a
Pervonachalnyui means different things than say Care or you being turned by a 170-year-old
Damon.”

She smiles and kisses me sweetly before looking into my eyes and telling me, “I know you regretted
forcing your blood on me almost as soon as you did it, and I know now you’d never make that
mistake again and try to force me to transition. And I have to be honest, before when I was with
Stefan I didn’t see forever or even want it, but the thought of leaving you behind one day when I die,
that scares me more than anything else ever has, so I promise to think about it, and if I have any
questions I’ll let you know.”

I nod and then lean in for another tender kiss, which she yawns into mid-kiss causing me to chuckle
again, “I think your body’s trying to tell me it’s time for you to go to sleep. Will you sleep in my
room with me tonight? I promise to be a perfect gentleman. I even have sleep pants I can wear.”

She giggles and tells me, “I’d love to sleep in your bed with you, but what about the spell you guys
are planning to do?”

I smile and tell her, “Bonnie says as long as you don’t drink the potion you being there won’t have
any effect on the spell, and you’ll sleep normally.”

She smiles and pecks my lips with hers before saying, “Then, yes, I’ll sleep in your room with you.”

I sit back and then stand up before giving her my hand and helping her rise, but her brows furrow
and she tilts her head to the side and purses her lips when I begin leading her towards the stairs away
from my room. I smile and say, “I thought we’d go get your things and bring them into my room for
ease of access.”

She giggles again and follows me up the stairs as I realize I’d go to the ends of the earth and back
again for her.
When we reach my room, I put her bag on the other bag stand inside the closet and then head into the bathroom with my sleep pants in my hand, as Elena gets ready to change into her pajamas. I change quickly and then putter around the bathroom until it sounds like she’s done changing. Finally, I ask through the door, “Can I come back out ‘Lena?”

“Yeah, I’m dressed.”

I smile as I walk into the room and see her eyes widen, as I’m not wearing a shirt. I give her a moment to enjoy the view and smile widely as I catch her licking lips. While she’s looking at me I look her over and smile at her in her mismatched short shorts, tank top, and socks before repeating what I told her the night I compelled her, “Cute Pj’s”

She laughs and picks up one of the pillows and hits me across the chest with it. I just laugh and steal the pillow from her before saying, “I don’t know ‘Lena, you seem kind of violent, you might be a bad influence on me. I mean I was just complementing your outfit, and you hit me.”

She laughs as she climbs into the high bed and tells me, “Hah, if anyone in this relationship is a bad influence it’s you. Between the fighting, killing, drinking, and day drinking at that, and all the sex you seem to have I think you’re actually the one my mom would have warned me about.”

I laugh, “You’re probably right about that, even Jenna thought I was shifty, though admittedly she thought she caught us kissing while you were still with my brother.”

She looks down and frowns so I ask, “I can’t fix whatever put that frown on your face if you don’t tell me what’s bothering you.”

She picks at the blanket in her hand as she lays there not looking at me before she asks, “Will you be mad if I tell you I don’t want to do anything more than kiss until after I can officially break up with Stefan? I don’t want to be like her.”

I frown as obviously Katherine has fucked with more than just Stefan’s and my heads. But the idea that I’d get mad because she doesn’t want to do anything more than kiss until she can have closure in her relationship with Stefan is ridiculous. She’s still not looking at me so I climb into the bed and under the covers before rolling to my side to face her and propping myself up on my arm I tip her chin up with my other hand so I can look into her eyes. When her eyes finally focus on mine, I tell her with a small smile on my face, “‘Lena, I know I can be an asshole sometimes. However, I would never get mad at you for not wanting to do more than kiss, with or without the reason of needing to end things officially with my brother. I’ve never forced or pressured a woman to have sex with me
and before you ask I’ve compelled them to act like we’re dating and maybe a kiss here and there, but I’ve never compelled sex. I wouldn’t do that to anyone but especially not to you. A woman’s right to say no is sacred, even to me.”

I pause then brush her cheek with my hand and tell her, “We’ll go at your pace and if it takes six years before you want me to make love to you, then I’ll patiently wait until you’re ready because nothing is more important to me than your comfort.” I pause and consider what I just said then add, “Well okay, your safety is more important but other than that nothing ranks higher in priority than your comfort. Hell if you told me you don’t even want to kiss until after we get Stefan back and you can break up with him then although I’d miss your amazing kisses, I’d wait for you to be ready. I’ll always wait for you ‘Lena, always.”

She smiles slightly though she’s still not making eye contact so I tell her, “And that nonsense about being like Katherine needs to stop. You two couldn’t possibly be more different. Your personalities and characters are polar opposites. For every flaw she has you have faultless perfection.”

When her lips press together tightly and her eyes flit around the room not staying in one place for longer than a second or two I tell her, “I’m serious Elena, she wanted to have her cake and eat it too. You’ve never been like that, while you’ve been honestly conflicted, and for the record a good chunk of that is due to the compulsion I inadvertently placed on you, you never strung us along or tried to have both of us.”

I cup her cheek and tell her, “You were always clear that it would only be one of us and until recently, you were crystal clear that it was Stefan. I told you I love you, and you tried as gently as possible to tell me that you didn’t feel the same way. You made it clear that you did care for me but not like that.”

I frown as I look at her lips pressed tightly together as she still avoids eye contact so I tell her, “Katherine was in the same position multiple times and she told Stefan and me both that we were the one she truly wanted. She told me I’d be with her forever and that she didn’t want Stefan forever. Obviously that was a lie as she gave us both her blood and then abandoned us both despite knowing I was looking for ways to free her from the tomb.”

I stroke her cheek and tip her chin up again so I can look deep into her eyes as I tell her, “You are her opposite in every way that matters. You’re not even identical in appearance.” When her lips compress together more tightly and she looks away from me once more, I tell her, “Oh I know at first glance you look identical. Not to bring up a possibly sore subject but I’ve seen her completely naked, and I’ve seen enough of your body to know you have at least two birthmarks she doesn’t have and I’ve counted three scars she also doesn’t have. Plus, she has two scars and a birth mark you don’t have so you’re not even identical in looks okay? The two of you couldn’t possibly be more different if you tried.”

Surprisingly she still won’t look me in the eye so I ask, “If you saw someone hurt what would you do?”

Her eyes widen as they shoot to mine at the unexpected question but she answers quickly, “I’d offer to help them.”

I smile, “While Katherine would be more likely to either laugh or use their hurt or suffering to her advantage. We already covered that if you were presented with two men in love with you that you would choose one and only one while she would play both against each other and try to have both. You are kind to a fault while she is cruel to a fault. You have, much to my dismay, tried to sacrifice yourself for your loved ones repeatedly where as she can’t even answer a simple question to offer helpful information without trying to work an angle.”
I caress her cheek as I tell her, “She doesn’t understand the meanings of the words love, loyalty, honor, and sacrifice. That’s why Tianna spelled us, because Lilith and the others didn’t understand those concepts. But you, I truly believe, you came out of the womb not only understanding those things, but your parents did such a fantastic job of raising you that any selfishness you might have had as a small child completely disappeared before you reached your teens.”

I lean down and kiss her softly before pulling back and telling her, “You are the most giving, selfless, caring, compassionate, and loving individual I’ve ever had the honor or privilege of knowing. Meanwhile Katherine is the biggest and cruelest bitch I’ve ever had the displeasure to encounter. I mean it ‘Lena, you couldn’t possibly be any more different and if I have to have this discussion with you every day for years I will until you know my words to be true.”

I kiss her lightly again then continue, “The things I loved about Katherine were lies and falsehoods in her but you have all those qualities I originally thought she had, and they’re true and pure in you. I wouldn’t subject myself to ever loving two Katherine’s in my lifetime, one was painful enough.”

That last sentence seems to do the trick as she smiles and her eyes finally meet mine before she leans up and kisses me, “I’m sorry I’m so needy…”

I shake my head, “You’re not needy, Elena. You look at everything she represents and is, and it sickens you, and that’s part of your appeal. You would never stoop so low as to do one of the many cruel things she’s done never mind all of them, but seeing the resemblance between the two of you and then falling for both Stefan and then me well it’s understandable that you’d worry about being like her since everything about her behavior is abhorrent to you. And you do have looks and Stefan’s and my love in common.”

I cup her cheek and finish my argument, “But trust me, Stefan and I both learned our lesson about her. We wouldn’t love you if you were anything like her beyond your similar looks, which once I knew I had been played honestly was more of a turn off before I started noticing the physical differences between the two of you and the different ways you carry yourselves. Now I can honestly say that out of the two of you it’s you who is more beautiful inside and out.”

Oops, now she’s crying. I quickly wipe at her eyes with the pad of my thumb and tell her, ‘Shit ‘Lena, I didn’t mean to make you cry.”

She smiles, “They’re happy tears.”

I look into her eyes until I can see that she’s not lying and her face is relaxed and upturned, so I kiss her sweetly moving slowly to roll on top of her. When her lips part in a sigh I slip my tongue inside her mouth and enjoy the slide of tongue on tongue as we kiss for long minutes. Her hands running up and down on my bare back sends shivers down my spine, and we continue to kiss until there’s a knock on the door.

I pull away and brush her hair back from her face, “I love you, ‘Lena, only you.”

She smiles brightly and tells me, ‘I love you too Damon, it’ll always be you.”

I smile back then peck her lips before I roll off her and say louder, “Come in.”

Bonnie and Jeremy both stick their heads in the doorway as Bonnie says, “If you guys need more time or you want us to do this without you…”

I smile as I get out of bed and head for the walk-in closet telling them, “Thank you, but that’s not necessary.”
As I return a moment later with a t-shirt in my hand I motion them to come in, so Jer shuts the door, and they walk to the bed. I walk around the bed, pick Elena up, put her on the far side of my huge bed, then walk back to the other side, and after pulling on my shirt, I climb in and lie next to her before looking at Bonnie and Jer and patting the other side of me saying, “Climb in.”

Bonnie hands the goblet she’s carrying to Jer before she climbs up onto the higher than normal bed then she takes the cup back, and he climbs in after her.

Bonnie turns to look at me then Jer and says, “Uh this is weird.” We all laugh at that then she gets down to business, “Okay, so each of you drink a third of the potion and then lay down and close your eyes. Try to keep your mind focused on finding Elijah.”

We both nod, drink, and then after handing the cup back lay down beneath the covers. She quickly drinks the rest, hands the cup to Jer who places it on the bedside table, then she whispers a short incantation, and grabs mine and Jer’s hands as we lay down, and the next thing I know I’m in a world full of fog. I can’t see the floor or the ceiling or more than maybe 10 feet in front of me. I start when I feel a hand in mine and smile as I turn and look at Bonnie to my left and Jeremy standing on her left side.

Jer looks around tilting his head to the side and then lifts a brow as he asks, “So Bon, where are we and where’s Elijah?”

She giggles at the look on his face and tells him, “We’re in the Aether but it should have taken us right to him so I’m not sure where he is.”

I turn suddenly and place them both behind me as I enter a defensive stance when we hear a very crisp, and very female British accent ask, “Who are you?”

My jaw drops when I lay eyes on her in her ivory flapper dress, as I wasn’t expecting to encounter any of the other Originals tonight, though I suppose I should have considered the possibility. She’s still one of the most beautiful women I’ve ever seen. I saw her in Chicago and also in Jer’s sketchbook so I know who she is, and say, “I’m Damon and this is Bonnie and Jeremy and you’re Rebekah.”

Her eyes pop open wide and her mouth falls open before she asks, “How do you know my name?”

I try to smile a reassuring smile as I force myself to relax my posture, “We met in Chicago back in the ‘20’s though you probably don’t remember me from Gloria’s. Anyway, I’m Stefan’s brother and an old friend of Elijah’s. We’re actually here looking for him so we can tell him that we’re planning to rescue all of you tomorrow morning.”

Her eyes widen further and she whispers, “You’re going to rescue all of us?”

I shrug, as do Bonnie and Jeremy, “Well yeah, if you promise not to try to harm our family or anyone we care about then why wouldn’t we rescue you. Daggering you was wrong and just one of the many reasons I’m looking forward to killing Klaus.”

She gasps and I remember a second too late that she was very close to Klaus. I rush to explain, “Sorry I know he’s your brother but he killed several people we care about including the woman I love who is Bonnie’s best friend and Jer’s sister and their aunt and he’s tried to kill Bonnie twice plus now he’s trying to turn Stefan evil again. Then add in that Elijah spared his life to save all of you and Klaus returned the kindness by daggering him, well that was just the last straw. And according to Elijah’s memories that Bonnie has and has told me about, Klaus didn’t even have good reasons to dagger any of his siblings. He just did it when you ceased to be useful to him or as revenge for
perceived slights, which sucks.”

She’s nodding with her head slightly tilted to the side so I finish, “Look, I realize he’s your brother so I won’t ask you to help kill him, but I will ask you not to get in our way when the time comes because frankly we won’t hesitate to kill you too if it means ending Klaus’s reign of terror.”

I turn again when I hear, “They speak the truth Sister and they keep their word.” I smile as Elijah seems to materialize out of thin air then I frown a little when I notice the two men standing behind him. He’s clearly unfazed though so he continues, “Mr. Salvatore, Miss Bennett, Mr. Gilbert, to what do we owe this unexpected pleasure?”

I smile a little and tell him, “I remember everything Balthazaar.”

His eyes widen and he takes a quick step closer as he asks with a smile on his face and in his voice, “Drago? Can it be true?”

“It’s me, Brother, and I truly remember everything,” I say as I nod, walk to him, and then engulf him in a hug.

He smiles and as he hugs me back he says, “Oh thank the Goddess. It killed me to pretend I didn’t care for you or yours.”

I smile as I pull back enough to look him in the eyes and tell him, “I’m sure since I told Bonnie and Jer earlier that if you didn’t remember I wasn’t sure I’d be able to pretend to hate you.”

He laughs and tells Bonnie and Jeremy, “He was always a horrible liar, even when we were young.”

I laugh and counter, “And you were always far too good at it, so we balanced each other out.”

He smiles slightly, which widens when I tell him “We’re planning to come free you tomorrow morning. We were going to ask you if you thought your brothers and sister will agree not to hurt any of us or try to help Klaus and if you agree we’ll free them too.”

I turn and look at the two other brothers and tell them, “I told Rebekah that we know Klaus is your brother, so we won’t ask that you help us end him, but we will ask that you not try to stop us or help him. And I was serious when I said we will kill you if you try to help him because he’s actively trying to destroy people we care about.”

Balthazaar frowns, “Elena, did she…”

Bonnie answers, “Her biological father and I found a spell, he gave his life to save hers, so yes she died but no she’s not dead and she’s not undead either.”

The three of us smile widely when he lets out whoosh of air, “Thank the Goddess for small miracles. I wasn’t sure how to keep her alive once you gave her your blood.”

I smile and tell him, “We know and we appreciate the obvious relief you feel at the news that she’s still with us. And for the record, she’ll forgive you just as Jer, Bonnie, and I have, though you will likely need to apologize.”

He nods and smiles a slightly crooked smile, “That’s one of my first orders of business once I’m free.” He turns to face his brothers, “Brothers, Sister, I vouch for Drago, Miss Bennett, and Mr. Gilbert, they keep their word, and like me the only reason they seem even remotely willing to break their word is in defense of their family. If they say you will be freed and safe from them if you vow not to harm them and theirs or help Niklaus then I believe them.”
Their lips are pressed together tightly and their eyebrows are raised so I add, “We know he’s your brother. I get that you’re in a tough spot basically having to choose between Elijah and Klaus. Having brothers of my own, I don’t envy any of you for having to make this decision. But consider this, Elijah is a man of his word. No one I’ve ever heard speak of him has any recollection of the last time he broke his word, yet he did just that to try to save all of you. He did the one thing he swore he would never do out of love for his family.”

I pause to let that sink in then tell them, “Conversely Klaus has killed all of you and locked you away in coffins for what I would call mere differences of opinion and in at least one instance simply because he felt like it and didn’t want to hear what you had to say.” I direct that last part to Rebekah as the whole time we’ve been here the Originals’ lives have been floating through my head. I think they’ve been seeing ours too.

“Then Klaus daggered Elijah after Elijah broke his word and saved his life. With all due respect to each of you and your family, I think with a brother like that who needs enemies?”

Balthazaar laughs loudly at that, “Oh Drago you don’t know just how true that statement is.”

Bonnie smiles and tells him, “Yeah actually we all do, the side effect of meeting you here is that we all now know everything the others know. I know all of your memories, and I’m willing to bet you all know all of ours, and while Drago and Jer didn’t know that would happen when they agreed to join me, I did know. I know if anything will help you decide not to betray us it will be the knowledge that we are trustworthy as seen through each of our eyes.”

The one I know is called Kol speaks up, “Honestly just Elijah’s word would be enough. If he trusts you, I trust you.”

I smile at him and tell him, “Thank you. We don’t take that admission lightly as we know how rare your trust of an outsider is.”

He nods then says, “I’m tired of always having to watch my back for fear that my own brother is going to dagger me. I can’t promise that I’ll help kill him but I certainly won’t help him survive or try to help him in some other fashion. And if you and yours swear that you won’t attack me if I don’t attack you and Elijah vouches for you then I’ll agree to peacefully coexist.”

Jer speaks up then, “Awesome, thank you.”

Kol just nods and then the other brother whose name is Finn says, “I’m so tired, Elijah if I asked you to would you end me?”

Elijah sighs heavily as do the other two Originals and with a small nod he says, “If that is what you wish, but, Brother, I told you about my first family. I am certain you would have a place with them if you wanted it.”

I nod and take over, “Can we call you Finn?”

He nods and Jer breaks in before I can continue, “Well, Finn, our family is very tight nit quite like what I imagine your family to be honestly, minus the evil brother killing us when we least expect it. I know whether you live or die is your choice and I, we, will respect whatever you decide but I would suggest trying to live with us.”

Jer smiles and tells him, “You might find what you’ve been missing all along. I can see how tired you are of being a monster, but I can also see that your switch broke in the on position, and you obviously feel guilt over the bad things you did while the switch was off. If I might be so bold, if
you kill yourself to escape the guilt then the people you killed died for nothing.”

He turns and looks at me briefly. I nod to show him I know what he’s going to say and I approve so he says, “Damon here says he tried to learn from the deaths he caused and be a better man almost in their honor in the hopes of giving their deaths meaning. Because ultimately they didn’t die for nothing if you learn the valuable lesson their deaths are obviously trying to teach you.”

He stops a minute then proves that being youngest does not at all equate to being stupid or unqualified as he says, “Guilt ultimately serves a greater purpose. If it’s felt strongly enough it spurs us into changing our behavior and if we’re lucky who we truly are. If you want redemption and peace, I don’t think you’ll get it by having Elijah kill you. I think learning to live with the guilt and maybe helping us protect our town and loved ones are more likely to give you the peace you so obviously want and in my opinion deserve.”

Finn’s eyes widen as Jer says that last part and he asks, “You, you think I deserve peace, after everything I’ve done?”

Jer smiles a warm smile at the older man, “I think everyone who wants one deserves a second chance at being a good and decent person. Look at it this way, Elijah helped save the asshole who killed my sister and my aunt, tried to kill my girlfriend twice and would have let Damon, whom I consider my older brother, die if Stefan, my other older brother, hadn’t sold himself into slavery for the cure to Damon’s Werewolf bite. Despite that fact, I was very active in trying to find Elijah and planning your rescues.”

He looks at me again and smiles slightly before he says, “Plus, when Damon’s switch was off he killed my first girlfriend, and then when his switch was first back on he actually killed me trying to turn the switch back off, and I forgave him for both.” All of the Originals’ eyes pop open wide at that admission but he just smiles and tells them, “If I can forgive the man who actually snapped my neck and killed me and truly believe he deserves another chance don’t you think it’s pretty easy to see that everyone who’s truly sorry and wants one deserves a second chance. No promises on third chances but I think everyone should at least get a second chance.”

He pauses again before seeming to remember something and saying, “And just so you know I think Klaus’ second chance was when Elijah saved his life and he threw that away by betraying Elijah. Damon considers Elijah family and honestly so does my sister so as far as I’m concerned he’s family too, which gives us one more reason to hate the asshole.”

He smiles then and looks Finn in the eyes, “Anyway, yes, you deserve to give yourself another chance to be a good man since it’s obvious you don’t like the bad things you did. Just as it’s obvious Klaus doesn’t want a second chance to be a decent man since he used up his last chance when he betrayed our brother.”

As he finishes speaking I smile. That right there is why Bonnie’s gut wanted Jer here with us. None of the other members of our family would have said everything he just said so elegantly or with such conviction. I can see that they’re all moved by his words and we all just kind of stand there for a minute absorbing the very deep words he shared with all of us.

Balthazaar seems to shake himself free of his thoughts first. “Finn, as I stated I truly believe that they are trustworthy, and Drago’s time as Damon aside, they are among the most decent individuals I’ve ever had the honor or privilege of encountering so if young Mr. Gilbert thinks you deserve a second chance then I implore you to at least try. If after a time you still wish to leave this life I will end you whenever you wish, you have my word.”

Finn’s been crying for most of the conversation regarding second chances, and he doesn’t seem to be
able to speak right away, so he just nods then after a minute or two he whispers, “I will try… if you think… I may be redeemed.”

Jer smiles with his shoulders back, his chin raised, and a glint in his eyes as he says, “I truly believe you can be redeemed if you want it, but see that’s the trick about redemption you have to actually want it in order to get an opportunity at obtaining it.”

Jer turns and smiles at Rebekah and I can tell it’s the same smile he gives Elena, “Can I call you ‘Bekah’?”

She smiles and nods so he continues, “Then you all can call us Damon, Jeremy, and Bonnie, or you can call me Jer, most of my family does. Anyway, ‘Bekah you’re the last to decide what you want to do. There’s a place for you in our family if you want it.”

She frowns, “I do want it, but Nik always wheedles me into doing what he wants. I’m not sure I can be trusted not to help him if he pushes the right button.” She stops then asks, “Did I say that right?”

Jer, Bonnie, and I nod, as does Balthazaar, so she continues as she turns to her brothers, “Would you all be terribly upset with me if I asked to remain daggered until Nik is dead? That way I won’t be tempted to help him by whatever ploy he decides to use.”

Now my eyes pop open wide as it never occurred to me that she would suggest such a thing. I blink rapidly for a second and then openly stare at her. The fact she knows herself well enough to know that weakness of hers and that she’s strong and confident enough to voice the weakness and offer to remain dead until her brother can be removed from the equation makes me just sort of stand there sucking in air.

I’m clearly not the only one who is shocked as Bonnie tells her, “Would it work if we just kept you at the boarding house and kept you away from Klaus, because I have to say the idea of leaving any of you daggered longer than absolutely necessary is truly abhorrent to me.” She pauses and looks at each of us then says, “Seriously it makes my stomach churn at the injustice of it all so if you think just keeping you away from him—”

Rebekah shakes her head and tells us, “No I think it needs to be the dagger. Don’t get me wrong I hate it and I want to help my brothers who are loyal to me. However, I have this soft spot for Nik that he exploits at every opportunity. I honestly miss him and how we were once, so I’m afraid I’d go looking for him, and then well I’d end up betraying the very people who are offering to save me in more ways than one. So all things considered I’d really rather wait to come back until I’m not a risk to all of you.”

Jer reaches out and takes her hand as he tells her, “Thank you ‘Bekah for being honest and thank you on behalf of all of our family for being willing to endure this a while longer while we put a stop to Klaus’ bullshit.”

He turns to Balthazaar, “Elijah do you know how to drive and have a license?”

He sort of jerks back at the question but says, “Yes, it has been a few years, but yes I know how to drive, and my license is still valid despite my rarely using it.”

Jer smiles and says, “Okay so if we undagger you, Finn, and Kol tomorrow and then rent a moving truck we could transport Rebekah’s coffin to the boarding house, which has been warded to protect against all those who mean our family harm. She’d be safe there, so you guys wouldn’t have to worry about her, and none of us would have to worry about Klaus discovering the rest of you are free and deciding to take it out on her.”
He shrugs with a sheepish grin as he says, “I have my learner’s permit, but I don’t know if I can use it outside Virginia, but I bet the others would be willing to take turns with you driving the truck. Then when we deal with Klaus you all can immediately undagger her, and we can get on with our lives and truly be a family.”

I smile as they all have slack mouths and wide eyes due to his quick thinking and his concern for their sister’s safety, but that’s Jer for you he’s a quick thinker, and he’s always looking out for others. Balthazaar finally nods and tells us, “Rebekah if this is your decision I trust the others and I will be able to transport you to safety and I trust that Bonnie’s wards will continue to keep you safe until you can be revived.”

She smiles and wipes away a tear, “Then that is my wish.”

Jer, Bonnie, and I nod and I ask, “So not to be a drag but I need to hear you all give your word that you won’t betray us and try to harm us or any one we consider ours.”

They all nod and the men bow and take turns saying, “I give you my word that I will not attack you or yours or betray you or your family by helping Niklaus or any other of your enemies. Furthermore, I vow to stand beside you and fight to protect you and yours.”

Honestly, that last part causes my eyes to pop open wide again but Jer and Bonnie are just beaming wide smiles at everyone. I turn to Rebekah and she curtsies and repeats the same vow her brother’s made.

I smile back at her and tell her, “To warn you, Rebekah, Klaus seems to have compelled Stefan to forget that you and he ever knew Stefan so currently he probably doesn’t remember you. And I want to be honest, right now he thinks he’s in love with Elena, but we all know that he’s actually Caroline’s mate, though she doesn’t know that yet either. None of you can tell them, anyway the point is I don’t want you to think that you’re going to rekindle any sort of romance with him because even if you did the moment he remembers his life as Dante he will only love Asya.”

She nods and says, “I know. That’s not why I chose your family over Nik, though I am hoping to rekindle my friendship with him at least. He used to be quite apt at making me laugh. However, really I can tell from your thoughts, all of your thoughts, that all of you love each other, and I’m amazed that you’re offering to include all of us. I think we’d all be fools to turn our backs on you and your family.”

She smiles and adds, “None of you are perfect and you’re all very aware of that, yet you seem to love each other flaws and all, especially if you killed Jeremy once, so I’m hopeful to be a part of your family. That’s what I’ve always wanted to be honest. We had it for a while as Humans but once we became Vampires that love seemed to drain from us just as we drained our victims.”

We all nod and Jer tells her, “Well if you’re looking for love I know a few guys at the high school who might be good enough for you.”

I turn and look at him and he shrugs and asks, “What, I know you were thinking it too. I know you. Besides I kind of want her to come to school with us, can you picture her and Care. ‘Bekah I think you and Care are going to clash at first but only because you’re each what the other admires most. I think that will, I don’t know, intimidate you or at least make you resent the other for a while, but I’m just as sure that once you both come to realize that you can peacefully coexist and that you actually have a shit load in common then I think you’ll be sisters just like Elena, Bonnie and Care are.”

He smiles then tells her, “And don’t worry, Elena and Bonnie here will love you pretty quickly once they realize they can trust you with their loved ones. That’s what it comes down to with all of us, if
you can be trusted with the safety and wellbeing of our loved ones then we’ll love you too, simple as
that.”

Rebekah nods and then asks, “I can see your memories of this high school, how long can you stay?
I want to know everything you can tell me. It’ll help hold me over until I can join all of you.”

Jer and I look at Bonnie and I can actually feel her ground herself for a moment. She turns and looks
at both of us and we smile before she turns and tells Rebekah, “It’s only about two in the morning,
and we don’t need to get up until seven, so we’ve got five hours to kill.”

Then Rebekah proves just how trustworthy she is, “You won’t be too tired after spending all night
with us will you? I want to know everything but not at the expense of your safety tomorrow. I’m
sure Nik has guards keeping watch over our coffins so you need to be sharp when you come to get
us.”

Balthazaar smiles obviously pleased and I smile at all of them as Bonnie tells them, “According to
Tianna’s notes this spell won’t drain us. Technically we’re in bed getting a restful night’s sleep as
it’s only our consciousness that’s here and while I’m pretty sure doing this every night for a decade
would take its toll doing it tonight and maybe every night until we can free you probably won’t
hurt.”

Rebekah sort of bounces on her toes at the prospect of us visiting her every night until she’s
undaggered. However, she again proves herself, “Okay, but if you start to notice it’s having a
negative effect on you I want you to just tell me that you can’t come back for a while and I’ll see you
when you free me.”

Jer and I smile and in unison all three of us tell her, “We promise not to put ourselves at risk,” I finish
the thought, “At least not just to visit with you. We can and will put ourselves at risk to protect you
though.”

She smiles a brilliant smile and says, “Thank you, I hope to prove I deserve that vow.”

Jer smiles and says what I’m thinking, “You already have.”

Bonnie closes her eyes for a minute and then suddenly chairs appear and we all sit down and get to
know each other better though mostly Bonnie and Jer answer all their questions about high school
and Balthazaar and I fill them in on what they’ve missed in the decades, or in Finn’s case nine
centuries, since they were daggered.

Around ten of seven Bonnie and I both seem to notice the time and she frowns ever so slightly,
“Okay it’s almost time for us to go. We’ll see you guys in a few hours. Rebekah if I’m not too tired
tonight Jer and I will try to come keep you company okay. Since the spell I did to keep our secrets
secret will prevent them from knowing they’re Briseis and Asya we’ll see if Elena, Care, and maybe
Tyler and Ric want to try to come too.”

Everyone nods and Jer and I shake hands with the men and Bonnie gives quick hugs to everyone. I
smile when Jer hugs Rebekah and whispers into her ear, “Welcome to the family, Big Sis.”

She kisses his cheek, and then with a smile on my face I open my eyes and turn to look at Bonnie
lying beside me and Jer on her other side both looking at me with the same smile.

We lay there until just before the alarm goes off and then Bonnie and Jer go to their room and I take
a shower before I kiss Elena good morning and then head out to find out if everyone else is awake.

When I reach the living room, I see that I’m the first one ready so I head to the kitchen and begin
making waffles.

Half an hour later Bonnie and Jeremy join me in the kitchen. I look up at them from the bowl of batter I’m making and ask, “So, I think that went as well as it possibly could have, basically the best case scenario. Do you both agree they are trust worthy? I think they truly wish to become part of our family and will fight beside us and even give their lives for ours. What do you guys think?”

They both nod and Bonnie says, “Think about it Damon, Rebekah’s been daggered for almost 90 years. I imagine she wants very little more than she wants to get out of that coffin and yet she admitted that she’s weak when it comes to Klaus. She’s willingly staying daggered until her weakness no longer endangers us and it was all her idea. And did you notice when I told her we’d try to come visit her every night the first thing out of her mouth was her asking if it would put too much strain on me. She agreed to wait alone if it means we won’t be putting ourselves at risk just to keep her company.”

Jer and I nod at her, so she nods back and says, “I truly trust all four of them, but we’re going to have to work on healing Finn, well, all of them really, but especially Finn. Did you see his memories, he was very gentle as a Human and when his switch turned off he did things that his gentle Humanity has a very hard time coming to grips with? It broke my heart when he actually asked Elijah to kill him though I’m very glad we, or should I say, Jer, convinced him to try to earn redemption instead of taking the easy way out.”

I interrupt to tell Jeremy, “Bonnie’s gut was spot on. I was really proud of you Jer. You gave an excellent argument for giving Finn’s victims’ deaths a purpose by teaching him the value of life and that if he wants redemption it’s his for the taking. Though, I was happy you were also clear to point out that only second chances are guaranteed, so it shouldn’t be wasted since third chances are hard to come by, and I agree with your decision to point that out clearly.”

Bonnie’s nodding and I laugh and tell them both, “I’m actually really proud of both of you. It seems like we had a really productive night while the rest of our merry band slept.” I hug Bonnie and give her a kiss on the cheek and then I surprise Jer by hugging him and whispering, “Good job, Brother, as you were the difference between Finn committing suicide and his agreeing to try being part of our family. You should be proud of yourself. I’m really proud of you and I know your parent’s, Jenna, and John are proud of you too. I honestly don’t think anyone else could have convinced him to give life another chance.”

Jeremy blushes at the praise as Bonnie wipes a tear away before either of us sees it though I wink at her so she knows I smelt the salt of her tears in the air, but I’m content not to bring it up if she doesn’t want to.

Shortly after the hugs and praise, everyone else joins us.

Jer and Bonnie spend most of breakfast recounting our evening spent entertaining the Originals. Before we know it, breakfast is eaten and cleaned up and we’re collecting our weapons and a big cooler full of blood to go rescue some Originals.
Saturday, June 05, 2010; just before 9 a.m.

When we get to the warehouse, Elena takes something out of her pocket and extends her hand towards Ric, “Here Ric, I think you might need this.”

He frowns when he sees the ring John left to her when he died sitting in the palm of her hand, “That’s John’s ring.”

She nods and tells him, “He left it to me, and I want you to wear it.”

He shakes his head and tells her, “He gave that to you for you to pass down to baby Gilberts.”

She smiles and tells him, “I’m with Damon now so I’m probably not going to have any baby Gilberts.” He still looks reluctant to accept the gift so she says, “How about this, you take it and wear it until there is a grown up baby Gilbert for me to give it to.”

She smiles and tells him, “Besides, think about it, you’re my family now just as much as Jenna, John, and Jer are and since we need a live guardian it’d be silly for you to go off fighting Vampires without it and get yourself killed. And if I need to guilt trip you I totally will since I think we’ve all buried enough family members in recent times without adding you to the list.”

He chuckles and tells her, “Okay, okay, but I will give it back to you if you or Jer have a kid to pass it down to.”

She nods and says, “You have yourself a deal.”

He smiles and takes the ring before placing it on his finger.

When the ring is firmly in place and Ric is just slightly safer than he was before, we decide to split up. I’ll go in the back door. Bonnie will go in the open loading dock while Care and Jer will go in the front door. Ric and Elena will wait outside the door I’m going in and also keep an eye on the loading dock which can be seen from their position. Tyler will wait outside the door Care and Jer will enter. The people outside are there to catch any stragglers who might try to escape or otherwise try to sound the alarm.

We set our watches and at exactly nine, I break through the back door and hear Care doing the same for the front door. I quickly encounter two Humans and a Vampire. Now that my spell has been broken, they’re nowhere near a match for me and I quickly move through the building heading for the front knocking Humans unconscious and ripping the hearts out of the Vampires. I pull the heart out of the third Vampire I’ve encountered when I hear Caroline yell, “Jer watch out!”
Then I hear Jer cry out “Oh god Care.”

A minute later Tyler follows that up with a “Shit, Care.”

I start to worry when I don’t hear a reply from her, and it turns out that I’m right to worry. As I reach them, Care is laying in Jer’s arms with a stake in her heart. There are two staked Vampires and an unconscious Human nearby. I squat beside them and reach out touching Jer’s arm before asking, “Jer, what happened?”

I say a quick prayer that the last words I heard her say mean she was protecting him and actually smile when Jer says, “That asshole tried to stake me and she pushed me out of the way, and he got lucky that she moved exactly how he needed her to. Damon, tell me it counts. She died protecting me; tell me it counts, please.”

I look into his tear-filled eyes and place my hand over his on her arm, “I’m hopeful that it counts, but we’ve got to pull the stake out okay, before Elena comes in.” He nods and I quickly pull the stake out.

Then a moment later, Bonnie and Elena reach us and are both on their knees hovering over Care’s desiccated body bawling their eyes out. Bonnie looks at me and asks, “Tell me it counts.”

I laugh abruptly despite it not really being funny, “She took a downward swing of a stake that would have killed Jer so unless she doesn’t really love him like a brother it should count.”

Elena tilts her head to the side and purses her lips as she asks through her tears, “What are you talking about?”

I sigh and pull her into my arms, she struggles to remain by Care’s side, but I cup her face in my hands and tell her, “Remember when you said I wasn’t telling you everything and I told you that you were right?”

She nods so I continue, “Caroline is Asya and she died protecting Jer from a blow that he’s certain would have killed him. She obviously thought so too if she stepped between him and a swinging stake so she should wake up in a few minutes, okay?”

Her lips tremble as she asks, “But what if she doesn’t?”

I scowl at the thought and try to relax all of my muscles that tensed at her words as I tell her, “Then I’m going to torture fucking Klaus before I tear his damn heart out, but until she doesn’t wake I’m going to remain hopeful okay. She told me it took me about 10 or 15 minutes before I started to come to. So from the moment I pulled the stake out we should know in about 15 minutes, 30 at most. I need you to try to stay calm until we know something is wrong can you do that for me?”

She nods so I kiss her softly on the lips and then turn to Bonnie, “I need you and Ty to stay here and watch over everyone while we wait for Care to wake up.”

They nod, but Elena asks, “Where are you going?”

I cup her cheek and tell her, “Ric and I are going to sweep through the building again and double check that we’re alone. I don’t want to take any unnecessary risks.”

She nods, so I kiss her again, then stand, and Ric and I set about thoroughly checking the building for anyone we might have missed the first time through before determining that we got all six Vampires and all four Humans. The Vamps are dead and the Humans are now fast asleep, mostly thanks to Bonnie who used her mojo to keep them unconscious after we knocked them out.
We go out to the car and grab the cooler and carry it in since Care’s going to need blood too probably.

As Ric and I walk up to the group hovering over Care she gasps and her eyes fly open. Jer tries to help her calm her breathing but it took me a couple of minutes to fight off the drowning feeling too so I’m not surprised that it takes her a few minutes to slow her breathing down.

Care finally looks around and then reaches up to touch Jer’s cheek, “You’re okay?”

He laughs and tells her, “Thanks to you since that asshole was Human, and my ring would have done jack shit to protect me.”

She breathes a sigh of relief and then her eyes find mine and she whispers, “Drago, I remember.”

I kneel down and touch her face, “I’ve missed you, Asya.”

She throws herself into my arms and cries for a minute then her tense body relaxes slightly and she pulls back, “Have you found Balthazaar yet?”

I smile, “No we were a little preoccupied with our sister dying.”

She laughs with a wide smile on her glowing face, “Sorry for the false alarm.”

Elena and Bonnie can’t seem to wait any longer and throw themselves at her so I get out of the way and then look at Ric who’s smiling widely now that Care is okay and Asya once again.

I turn to Tyler and ask, “Can you keep a look out for them while they hug and Ric and I will go look for the coffins?”

Tyler nods and smiles at the fact that I’m trusting him with their safety, “Sure man.”

I do trust him implicitly with the lives of those I care about so I nod and tell him, “Thank you, Brother.”

He smiles big as Ric and I walk towards the shipping crates and begin opening them. After the sixth one, we hit pay dirt. Five coffins. Then I pull up short, there were only four siblings last night. So who is in the fifth coffin?

I run back and tell Bonnie, “Sorry to interrupt but we have five coffins instead of four. Do you have any idea how to figure out who’s in the fifth one without putting us in danger?”

Bonnie nods and stands after kissing Care on the cheek and telling her, “I’m happy you’re okay.”

She follows me to the shipping crate and then proceeds to touch each coffin before opening it as she says, “This is Elijah. This one is Finn. And this one is Rebekah. This one is Kol. And this one is… Whoa… sealed with massive Magick but it’s someone named Esther.” She pauses and tilts her head as if to adjust her reception then her eyes widen and she tells Ric and me, “Shit I think it’s their mother, and she’s hell bent on destroying the Vampire race.”

I frown but ask, “How do you know that?”

Her face pinches as her eyes lose focus then her eyes refocus, and she raises them to mine and tells me, “After I did the spell to get your memories I got all of your family’s current and past memories. Then when we met up with these guys last night all three of us got all of their memories as well as each other’s and they got all of ours including our memories and interpretations of your family’s
memories. Now when I just touched the coffin I got all of hers though I don’t think she got any of mine because there seems to be a ward preventing anything from going in. Although, I think only a Witch could receive anything coming out and even then only her memories. We can’t release her. We need to convince them that she’s too dangerous.”

I nod slowly and frown before telling her, “Okay, first things first, let’s undagger the ones we’re supposed to and give them some blood.”

She nods so I lean over Balthazaar, pull his dagger out, and then do the same to the other two and then we wait. We wait long enough for the rest of our family to join us and I smile as Elena walks to me before she wraps her arms around me and I wrap mine around her. A minute or two later Balthazaar is the first one gasping for air. His color slowly returns to normal and then he sits up and looks around “Brother, thank you.”

I smile and tell him, “You’re welcome, but really you should be thanking the newest members of our family. Most of the work to locate all of you and rescue you was done by Bonnie, Jer, Ric, and Tyler, who among other things used his mom’s connections as Mayor of Mystic Falls to get the information on the deed and a set of floor plans to this warehouse expedited.”

He nods and turns to look each of them in the eye as he tells them, “Then thank you to each of you. I’d like to take this opportunity to apologize for betraying all of your trust. I promised to kill Klaus for you and I broke my word. I deeply regret that and not because he returned the favor by daggering me.”

We all nod and Elena speaks up from within the circle of my arms, “It’s not ideal Elijah, but we understand about rescuing family since that’s why we betrayed you the first time. He used the one thing that would cause you to break your word, the love of your family. I consider us even and I’m hopeful that you’ll all come to see us as family from now on, and it won’t be an issue again. Although, if you do betray us again I’ll not only let Drago kill you I’ll encourage it.”

He laughs and tells her, “Duly noted, Elena.”

I hold my hand out with one of the three daggers in it and tell him, “Brother, I trust this will be safest with you and I plan to give each of your brothers one. I figure it’ll even the playing field and make them feel safer to have each of you have one instead of one person controlling all of them.”

He nods and says, “Thank you, I’m sure they’ll agree with your opinion just as I do.”

Just then, Finn begins gasping for air, and Balthazaar is up and out of his coffin and whispering comforting words to his brother. Finally, when Finn seems to be calm again he looks around and then locks eyes on Jer which makes me tense my muscles until he says, “You really saved us.”

It’s more a shocked statement than a question but Jer nods and says, “We said we would. We meant every word we told you guys last night… Every. Word.”

Amazingly, Finn wipes a tear away and nods reminding me of the significance of every word being meant, and then I smile in Jer’s direction as Bonnie explains to everyone else that Finn was the one who wanted to die, and Jer convinced him not only to try for redemption but also that he deserves it. I pat Jer on the back just as Kol comes back to life.

Balthazaar calms him down pretty quickly as Care hands out blood while apologizing, “Here have some blood, hopefully we have enough. I had a problem with a stake in the heart a bit ago, so I had to drink some of what we planned to give you, but we have more back at the apartment, so if you need more let us know when we get there, and we’ll hook you up.”
I laugh when it’s clear Kol and Finn have no idea what ‘hook you up’ means so I tell them, “‘Hook you up’ is slang for ‘we’ll make sure you get what you need’.”

They smile and nod as they drink three blood bags each while I introduce everyone who hasn’t met yet. When they finish their bloods, it’s Balthazaar who asks, “Who is in the fifth coffin?”

Bonnie answers, “Esther, but before any of you get excited about reuniting with your mom, you need to know that she’s decided if she ever gets free she’s going to kill all of you and the entire Vampire race descended from your family.”

Her face pinches as she tells them, “It won’t affect Drago, Balthazaar, and Asya now that they’ve returned to their original forms. It would kill Finn and Kol, as well as Rebekah and anyone any of you turned and whomever they’ve turned all the way down the line to the youngest including Katherine and Stefan if they’re descended from an Original.”

Kol looks angry and says, “She wouldn’t, she—”

Finn interrupts, “She would Brother. She’s been whispering to me all these years trying to get me to agree to be her sacrifice to kill us all. Bonnie’s not lying about what it would do either.”

Kol’s shoulders are slumped and his head is hanging in his heartbreak and really, who can blame him, but he quickly snaps out of it and says, “Then we must destroy her.”

Bonnie shakes her head as she says, “It’s not so easy. If we open the coffin, she’ll get out. She was one of the most powerful Witches born in the last 3,000 years. She had to be very powerful to be able to perform the altered Pervonachalnyue spell she used to turn you all into Vampires, so we need to keep her in the coffin and hide it where no one can ever find it.”

I frown and ask, “Where is that?”

She shrugs as she pinches her lips and draws her brows together, “I have no idea, the cave maybe for the time being at least, but I think that should only be a short term location since any Witch who happens upon the entrance to the cave would be able to enter it. Although the spells my ancestors placed would keep those who mean harm out but still if we can come up with a better location that would be best.”

Just then Jer says, “What about under water. Elijah thought his family was lost at sea and that that meant they were lost forever so what if we drop her to the bottom of the deepest ocean and leave her there.”

Balthazaar laughs and says, “It’s lucky for us we’re all on the same side now because your mind, Jeremy, is a dangerous weapon when need be.”

I laugh and tell him quite honestly, “You have no idea, Brother. Give it a minute and the rest of them will improve upon his already brilliant idea.”

Bonnie laughs and turns to tell me, “Not that you need a bigger ego by being right, Brother, but we could Magickally reinforce the coffin to keep it from breaking when it lands or decaying in the water and maybe add an additional Magickal lock on top of the ones already there.”

Elena chooses that moment to throw her opinion out there, “Bon, what if Jer and Ty search the internet for the deepest part of all of the oceans. Then you could maybe do a spell like you did in the cavern… just Magickally move her to the deepest part and then we know it’ll be centuries before Human technology will be advanced enough to possibly find her and be a problem.”
Just to make sure our newest family members are clear that we’re a team Ty throws out, “If Bonnie moves her Magickally she could maybe even embed her under the ocean floor in the rock to help keep her hidden longer.”

Then Care speaks up, “And Bon, what about maybe a warning system like if anyone finds her a spell will be released that alerts you or a descendant of the forthcoming danger.”

Kol bursts out laughing so we all stop brainstorming and turn to stare at him, “S-sorry, it’s just you weren’t kidding. I was worried Klaus would kill us all even with Drago and Balthazaar on our side, but I’m beginning to realize that although you’re both the strongest physically you are by no means the only weapons at our disposal.”

I nod and tell him, “We’re very lucky that they love us and aren’t trying to kill us, or we’d stand no chance of surviving.”

Kol’s eyes widen ever so slightly as he nods and then Jeremy’s eyes turn grim and he says, “That’s not wrong.”

We laugh a moment then Ric adds, “Hey I’m going to go get the truck we rented so we can load Rebekah onto it, and are we going to have to take Esther with us too for now?”

Bonnie nods, “‘Fraid so Ric, we can’t risk Klaus coming back and releasing her.”

He nods back and runs out to back the truck up to the loading dock.

As we wait for him, Bonnie turns to Kol and says, “Kol I have a favor to ask.”

He raises his brow but nods so she continues, “Would you be willing to have Drago try to compel you to raise your hands?”

My eyes widen and my jaw drops just as Kol’s do so I’m not surprised when she bursts out laughing a moment later and says, “Oh God, your faces, that was classic. Anyway I’m asking because if it turns out a Pervonachalnyue can compel an Original then tonight when Jer and I go visit Rebekah we can ask her if she’d be willing to let Drago compel her not to help or try to contact Klaus. If she says yes then we can undagger her tomorrow morning and then I won’t feel so awful about leaving her daggered, which I can’t tell you just how wrong it feels leaving her like that.”

The Originals’ eyes all widen and they smile at the caring our family is showing towards them and theirs but Kol nods and says, “Drago, you may try if you wish.”

I catch his eyes and compel him without saying a word to raise his hands and place them on top of his head until I tell him to lower them.

Everyone’s eyes narrow and frowns form on their faces when I don’t say anything but I figure if I don’t say it out loud and change it slightly then I’ll know for sure if it worked or not. Thankfully, he immediately places his hands on top of his head and he and I both smile before I tell him, “Thank you, you may lower your hands.”

Bonnie smiles and bounces on the balls of her feet as she says, “Yay, so if no one has any good reasons against it, tonight Jer and I will offer to have Drago compel Rebekah and then she’ll be free too.”

Everyone nods to show they can’t think of any reason not to offer the alternative to Rebekah so a minute later I say, “Good we’ll plan on that.”
I take a moment to give Kol and Finn each one of the daggers used to kill them and tell them, “Here, these belong to each of you. As I told Balthazaar it’s only fair that each of you have one so that no one Original has the market cornered on the means to neutralizing each of you.”

Their eyes widen very much so I tell them, “I know you’re both used to Klaus holding his superior strength and speed as well as his inability to be daggered over your heads, but that’s not how this family works. It would be wrong for us to keep those and try to control you by threatening to use them.”

I pause then add, “Make no mistake, though, if either of you betray our family then I am perfectly capable of tearing out your hearts so know that I’m not giving up all of my options. However, the only reason I would even consider harming either of you is if you become a threat to our family or those we consider ours. So do what you want with those daggers but your new family won’t be needing them or the threat they pose to you.”

They both nod and say, “Thank you.”

Bonnie adds, “Just fair warning Drago and the rest of us will consider it a betrayal against this whole family if you use that dagger against one of your siblings so just be forewarned that behaving like Klaus will get you killed.”

I nod and they nod back and then tuck their daggers into their clothes for the time being.

Bonnie then asks, “Are they indestructible? If not, then maybe we could all destroy them and then none of you have to worry about them being used against you. It’ll also keep you from having to expend energy maintaining the safety of the dagger you’re in possession of because while we wouldn’t use them against you I’m sure there are others who would jump at the chance.”

Balthazaar speaks up, “To my knowledge they can be melted down and I don’t know if you all know this but we were once Witches so I know of a spell that might be able to destroy the melted down metal. If you’re willing Bonnie, you could do the same spell you did to move everything from your ancestor’s cave to find any of our family’s old Grimoires that may have survived. I personally hid my books using spells similar to those your ancestors used to preserve theirs so they should still be safe and intact and I’m sure my siblings did the same.”

They nod and Kol adds, “I hid mine too and then through the years I studied other forms of Magick despite not being able to use any of it, so I have additional books hidden as well and copies of the books of the Witches I’ve befriended over the years.”

Bonnie nods as Finn says, “I managed to save our mother’s books from our father so I know where mine and our mother’s books were hidden and I’m pretty sure Rebekah did the same too.”

Bonnie smiles and says, “Okay then, so when we get back to Mystic Falls I’ll see about moving your rightful things to the boarding house for you. Though I have a feeling we’re going to wait a few weeks before we do that spell, though I’m not sure why I think that, but I promise not to forget and we’ll definitely take care of it before September.”

They smile wide smiles and nod before thanking her. Just then Ric steps out of the cab of the truck and he says, “We should probably get a move on and get out of here sooner rather than later since we don’t know if anyone else is expected to come to the warehouse today.”

We all nod at that and a few minutes later, we have the two remaining coffins loaded onto the truck and after putting the desiccated bodies of the six Vampires we killed inside Klaus’ crate we close the crates we opened, and we head back to the condo.
When we get there, we roll the coffins onto the private service elevator that goes straight to the pantry in my condo’s kitchen. Then we head upstairs where after stowing the coffins in the upstairs living room for now and showing our newest members around we begin researching oceans and relocator spells.
Me and my merry band of Brothers and Sisters saved Elijah and his brothers and sister just under three weeks ago. We spent a week exploring the museums and various tourist attractions in Chicago before returning to the boarding house. The museums were actually quite a bit of fun as all the Vampires showered the Humans with stories of our travels and opinions on the history that was recorded and what we know of what wasn’t recorded. I can’t remember the last time I had so much fun and the others truly enjoyed our time at the museums as much as I did.

A weight I didn’t know was there lifted off my chest because Bonnie thought of a way to undagger Rebekah. All the members of our family, including the Originals, piled up in a huge makeshift bed on the floor of the condo’s living room the night after we undaggered the brothers and we visited with Rebekah and offered for me to compel her not to betray us to Klaus. She happily agreed, so we hung out with her while we slept and then the following morning we undaggered her and I compelled her before I even made breakfast.

She immediately began adding a spark of enjoyment to everything we did that I hadn’t noticed being there before she woke up. The only part I didn’t enjoy so much was the shopping trip to buy Rebekah and her brothers’ modern wardrobes. But even that wasn’t too horrible since I got to watch Elena try clothes on too. Wonder of wonders she even let me buy her a few things.

We’ve been back in Mystic Falls for almost 12 days and we’ve been spending most of our time researching several things. First, we’ve been looking for the coordinates that Bonnie should move Esther’s coffin to, which you would think wouldn’t be a difficult task but it’s proving to be harder than we thought. Second, since there are no tables of contents in any of the books we’ve spent the almost two weeks since we got back looking for the spells to first reinforce the coffin, put an extra Magickal lock on it, add a Magickal warning system to it, and then actually move it to the desired location. Third, we’ve been tracking Klaus and Stefan’s movements based on the bloody trail of bodies they leave behind.

I’ve asked pretty much everyone to keep that last effort to ourselves and not tell Elena about it since I don’t want to have to explain that they’re not Klaus’ victims but rather my brother’s victims. I hate keeping secrets but I know the truth will break her heart, especially if Balthazaar, Kol, Ric, or Tyler mention what the scenes we’ve been cleaning up have looked like and the state the bodies were in when we got there.

She’ll be angry when she finds out I’m keeping this secret and especially when she finds out what it is, but she’s not upset right now. That means she’ll be upset for a shorter time period than if I tell her now, and I know that’s about the best I can hope for, so I intend to keep this secret as long as possible.
None of my family members have treated the Originals any different than we treat each other. I think it’s actually been somewhat surreal for them since I overheard Kol telling Balthazaar, “I can’t imagine our family as tight nit as it was when we were Human having taken in a family of Vampires the way our new family has,” to which Balthazaar just nodded in response.

The girls, Jer, and Ty happily and excitedly spend all of their free time ‘hanging out’ with their new sister and brothers.

Balthazaar told me, “Honestly Drago, the Mikaelson family probably wouldn’t have worked so hard to find a way to undagger Rebekah sooner rather than later or be so enthusiastic about spending time with Vampires.”

He paused then told me, “Of course after we turned we pretty much destroyed families not preserved them, even our own.”

He also admitted, “Despite my prior knowledge of your family I’ve been shocked that your family, which my brothers and sister and I all feel we’ve been welcomed into unconditionally, isn’t like that at all. You all seem to truly respect us, and I can’t tell you enough how amazing I find it that you’ve all completely forgiven me for betraying you all to save my siblings, and that was before you even knew that I’ve forgiven you for daggering me those two times before the sacrifice.”

Right now, they’re mostly all sitting in the living room of the boarding house looking through books for the aforementioned spells. Elena and I are upstairs and when I exit the bathroom, I see her standing in front of the open closet where I’ve been keeping track of all of Stefan’s victims. When she sees me emerge from the bathroom she asks, “Why didn’t you tell me you were tracking Klaus’ victims?”

I sigh and walk towards her as I contemplate how to handle this. When I reach her I pull her into my arms, but she struggles and again asks, “Why didn’t you tell me you were tracking Klaus’s victims?”

Finally, I stop trying to hold her and step back before looking her in the eye and telling her, “Because they’re not Klaus’ victims, they’re Stefan’s.”

I don’t shout or raise my voice but it sounds loud even to my ears. Her eyes are wide and I can see the tears threatening to overflow as she asks, “W-what?”

I sigh and fold my arms over my chest just to have something to do with them as I try to explain as gently as possible, “I didn’t want to worry you while there’s nothing we can do about it. I was going to tell you when we find Stefan before we go get him back. I just figured you’d worry about him more if you knew, and I really wanted to keep your upset as minimal as possible for as long as possible.”

She’s frowning deeply and the tears are building in her eyes but haven’t begun their future journey down her cheeks so I tell her, “I am however sorry that you found out this way. I fully intended to be the one to sit you down and explain everything, and I wish you hadn’t found the cork board not because you now know I was keeping a secret but because I would have tried to explain it more gently than I just did.”

“You lied.”

I frown, “No, you knew there were things I wasn’t telling you. I just continued not to tell you certain details about Stefan but I never told an untruth. I wouldn’t have done that to you Elena. I would have told you nothing as I did or told you everything as I have now, well everything about this. I’m still keeping things from you about the spell placed on my family but that still can’t be helped.”
I try to take her into my arms again but she struggles again and then pushes me away and says, “Don’t, don’t touch me, I’m mad at you.”

Her eyes are hard and her chin is raised daring me to argue that she shouldn’t be angry with me. Instead I look her in the eye and tell her, “I know and you have every right to be. If you don’t want me to touch you right now, then I won’t.”

Her tears finally spill over her cheeks as her tense posture sort of collapses in on itself and she says, “You should have told me. I can’t be with you if you’re going to keep keeping secrets about things other than the spell. I get that you can’t tell me about that, but you knew I wouldn’t consider this part of that secret. You had to know I wouldn’t and you still kept it. I, I can’t, I, I have to go,” and she turns and runs out the door and down the stairs before slamming the front door closed behind herself.

I hear Asya explain to everyone who doesn’t have Supernatural hearing about what just happened. As I enter the living room a minute later Tyler looks shocked but he and everyone else already knew that Stefan has been the one leaving piles of bodies. Hanz and his men cleaned up all the scenes while we were in Chicago and Balthazaar, Ric, and I have actually been going to all of the scenes since we got back and cleaning up after Stefan. Kol and Tyler went with the three of us a handful of times.

At one of the messier scenes Tyler asked us, “Are all Vampires like this?”

We all shook our heads no, as Kol told him, “Only a Ripper and/or someone with their switch firmly in the off position would likely do this sort of thing to their victims.”

He frowned and pursed his lips before continuing, “I’ve known two Rippers who had their switches on and still did this sort of thing.”

I interrupted to tell the young man, “Which is what I think is happening here based on the fact that Stefan is putting the bodies back together as though he feels remorse after the fact. The bloodlust however overpowers his good and gentle nature and causes him to do this sort of thing even with his switch on.”

I frowned with my brows drawn together as I told him, “I’m sure the guilt is eating him alive if I’m correct and his switch is still on.”

Kol nodded then said, “Then there are those who have their switches firmly off and just don’t give a fuck. Though usually this behavior is perpetrated by the Rippers of the world I have known a few Vampires who weren’t Rippers by nature and did this sort of thing for fun. However, personally, while my switch was off I killed countless people, often for no real reason other than I felt like it, but even I, with my switch off, wouldn’t have done to these poor people what Stefan did.”

He turned away from the gory mess of body parts as Balthazaar and I nod. Kol looked at Tyler and he told him, “Rippers and the truly sadistic Vampires with their switches off are thankfully pretty rare. I hate both groups though as a general rule since they’re messy and make life more difficult for the rest of us. We’re actually pretty fortunate that this sort of scene happens few and far between.”

After that day of clean up Balthazaar assured Kol, Finn, and Rebekah that once Stefan remembers who he is his good qualities from all of his lives will mesh and the bad qualities will be drastically reduced. At least that’s what Elijah, Caroline, and I have experienced and Bonnie backed us up since she knew two of us while the spell was in place and has all of our memories, then again Finn, Rebekah, and Kol have our memories too so they know we’re being honest.
They’ve decided to reserve judgment until after Stefan has been recovered and his memories returned to him. Nevertheless, I hear several curses said under people’s breaths as Elena runs down the stairs and out the door with tears streaming down her face.

They all look at each other and shrug before looking at me as I stand in the entryway of the living room. I frown and say, “Perhaps keeping the identity of the killer to myself was not my best idea but I didn’t want to hurt her. Of course now I have.”

Asya gets up and says, “Bonnie and I will go find her and try to put it in perspective for her, okay?”

I nod and tell her, “I hear her talking to Matt, she’s going to meet him at the Grill since his shift ends in a few minutes.” She nods back and leaves with Bonnie to find my distraught girl. The rest of us remain to continue looking through the books.

Ten minutes later Jer is over on the couch with Ty and they’re excitedly whispering so I put down the book I’ve been searching through and wait to hear their presumably good news. Finally, Jer says, “Drago, or any of you really, what do you know about the Indian Ocean?”

We all look at each other for a minute then I supply, “I know it can be treacherous. I’ve heard of several ships sinking there and to my knowledge even centuries later their remains have never been found.”

Jer nods and Tyler smiles before taking over for Jer, “Right, it’s supposed to be some of the hardest waters to explore. That’s mostly because of the currants but it’s huge and the depth is an issue too though I’m not sure it’s the deepest. Still I think it might be our best bet to prevent treasure hunters or researchers from finding the coffin in the future.

Finn smiles a rare smile and says, “I may also be able to help with that. There is a spell in this book that keeps hidden ‘that which should not be found’. It looks to be a fairly straight forward spell and relatively easy all things considered, so if Bonnie can place it on the coffin beforehand then even if someday down the line, someone discovers the area it’s hidden in it should still remain hidden. I mean if the spells Tianna and her ancestors placed on the cave where we’re currently keeping the coffin in lasted thousands and in some cases hundreds of thousands years then surely Bonnie could do this much simpler spell and make it last as long or longer, no?”

I smile and ask, “Can I see the spell?”

He hands the book to me after flipping to the correct page and I read it over and then smile deeply before looking at Finn, Rebekah, and Kol in turn and ask them. “Have you three been told about the power of the few hundred dead Witches?”

Kol’s eyebrow raises towards his hairline and Finn, Rebekah and his eyes all shoot open wide and their mouths hang open a little before Kol says, “No… no one’s mentioned that.”

I laugh and explain, “A few centuries before Damon became a Vampire more than 300 Witches were burned in a specific field for Witchcraft. Most of the executions happened over the course of about a decade and a half though over the years that followed additional Witches were periodically burned there as well. They were the few times I know of where any actual Witches were accused of Witchcraft. Sadly, that was thanks to the younger Pervonachalnyue who used compelled Humans to perpetrate their revenge against Tianna’s descendants and Witches in general since they were unable to kill them in a direct assault. Anyway, for whatever reason they were all killed in the same location so a while back in our efforts to destroy Klaus, Elijah suggested that Bonnie go there and try to harness their power. So now, Bonnie has the power of at least 316 dead Witches.”
I smile and tell them all, “Honestly even before that she was one of the strongest Witches I’d met, easily in the top three behind only Fontina, who placed the original Pervonachalnyue spell on the six of us and Tianna who placed the spell making us Humans, and Bonnie had practically no training at that point. So with their combined powers and hers, which I’ve noticed have been getting stronger the more she uses them, I think it should be do able, but we’ll have to wait until she gets back to be sure.”

I pause then bring up something that’s been bothering me and I just haven’t had a chance to voice it yet, “So I know Rose sired Katherine, but do any of you know who sired her. I think we need to make sure we’re not going to kill Stefan and Katherine if we kill Klaus. Don’t get me wrong I want him dead more than most but we need to make sure he’s not the one Katherine’s line is descended from.”

They’re all nodding as Bonnie explained what she learned from Esther about if an Original were to die then all of their progeny and theirs and theirs all the way down the line will die. I should have realized that as I’ve seen it happen with the other six families back 200,000 to 170,000 years ago that used the same spell we did to become Vampires. Lilith compelled Humans to hunt them and when each of them died anyone from their direct line died too.

Kol interrupts my thoughts and says, “Beks, didn’t Mary Porter turn Rose-Marie?”

She nods and I smile, “Tell me you mean Scary Mary.”

They both nod and say, “I’ve heard her called that.”

Kol continues the thought, “There was a rumor a long time ago that someone named Vernell turned her but I never met him and I have no clue who turned him.”

I just grin wider prompting them both to ask, “What?”

“Finally some good fucking news, Mary happens to be of my line, three times removed but mine all the same. I was actually present when Vernell turned her, so I know for a fact whose blood was in her system when she was killed. So if we’re talking about the same Vampire then we don’t have to worry about accidentally killing Stefan or Katherine when we kill Klaus.”

Kol tells us, “She has ginger hair, green-eyes, and is a little shorter than Beks with very porcelain pale skin.”

That sounds like the beauty the Vernell I knew, one of my progeny’s progeny, fancied over 1,350 years ago. He had never made a Vampire before so I told him how to do it and at his request supervised her transition.

I smile and tell them, “It certainly sounds like the same woman.”

Just then I’m pulled out of my thoughts, as my phone rings, and I excuse myself and go out into the hallway, not that the Vampires and Werewolf in the room don’t listen to my conversation anyway, “Hello?”

“Drago, Luv, how are you?”

“Laraina, I’m okay, Elena just found out that the bodies we’ve been tracking are Stefan’s victims, not Klaus’ but other than that I’m good. Are you three still coming for a visit?”

She laughs, “We just passed the sign welcoming us to Mystic Falls. I called because we need directions to your house.”
I give them to her and then she says, “Excellent, we’ll see you all in about 20 minutes.”

I hope she can hear the smile in my voice as I say, “Looking forward to it,” then I hang up.

As I reenter the living room the Vampires and Werewolf in the room all have their heads cocked slightly as they wonder about who these three that are coming for a visit are, but I don’t make them wait long. A moment later, I tell Jer, “Jer remember me mentioning Bonnie’s undead ancestors?”

His head jerks back slightly at the question, and his eyes open wide, but he nods slowly, so I continue, “Well they’re on their way here and should arrive in 20 minutes.”

He smiles and says, “Cool, did you warn Bonnie that they agreed to come visit or did you decide to surprise her?”

I pause and look at my younger brother with wide eyes and an arched eye brow, “I’m not stupid or suicidal. I took your advice and told her once I knew they could come. I’m trying my best not to piss her off again.”

Jer laughs and says, “Good call, man.”

Tyler laughs at that too and honestly so do the rest of us.

I go back to reading and then look up 40 minutes later when no one has shown up. Just as I’m about to call and ask if they got lost, I hear Asya talking to herself, “Elena, why did you have to go and die, do you know what Drago is going to say when he finds out? He’s going to yell at me for not getting there fast enough and since you haven’t woken up yet you won’t be there to calm him the hell down. You’re going to owe me, Sister.”

I jump up from my seat and speed out the door. I only vaguely hear Balthazaar telling the others what’s happened after Kol asks, “What’s wrong, Brother?”

I tune out his answer as I focus on Asya, Matt, Bonnie, and my undead descendants who are all driving here. A minute later I’m standing in the middle of the road leading to the boarding house, and Asya slams on her breaks to avoid hitting me. As soon as her car stops, I open the back door and slide in under Elena’s head putting it in my lap before asking Asya, “Sister, what happened?”

As she begins driving again, she tells me, “Drago I’m so sorry. She got to the Grill before we did and some Vampire tried to snack on Matt, and Elena apparently tried to intervene, and the asshole snapped her neck.”

“There is nothing to be sorry for. So she died protecting her childhood best friend?”

She nods, “Yes.”

I smile despite the fact I’m holding the dead body of the woman I love and say, “Good then it should count.” I pause a moment then ask, “Is Matt okay?”

When she tilts her head to the side and looks at me through the rear-view mirror with her eye brow arched, I ask, “What’s with the look Asya?”

She frowns, “N-nothing you’re just handling this much better than I thought you would.”

I smile, “I know you expected yelling, but we’ve all known she had to die to return to herself, so I’m trying to remain calm.”
She nods then tells me, “To answer your question about Matt, the Vamp tore his throat up pretty good, but I healed him. He’s right behind me in his truck, so we can keep an eye on him until the blood leaves his system since I don’t know about you but I learned my lesson when Katherine killed me.”

I nod as we pull up in front of the house and tell her “Good,” before I open the door and cradle Elena in my arms before rushing past a worried Jeremy as I hurry into the house and up the stairs to my room to wait for Elena to wake as Briseis.
Friday, June 25, 2010; around 1:20 a.m.

I lay Elena down on my bed and then crawl in beside her pulling her into my arms. Jeremy knocks on the door a minute later, and I tell him, “Come in, Brother.”

Jer has tears building in his eyes, but they haven’t broken the surface of his eyes yet, so I look him in the eye as I hold his dead sister in my arms and tell him, “She was protecting Matt from some Vampire that tried to eat him. Since it’s Matt I’m pretty sure it counts, so I need you to hold on to hope for the next half hour at the most, okay, we’ll know by then if something isn’t right.”

His chin is quivering as he nods and comes over to lay on the bed on the opposite side of Elena. He strokes her hair as he says, “I really hope it counts because I’ve buried way too many fucking people this year, and the last person I want to lose is ‘Lena.”

I nod and tell him, “I know, but I really do think it counts. I mean think about it. She and Matt have, by all accounts that I’ve heard, been best friends since they were in diapers, even before you were born, if I recall correctly. I doubt her feelings for him are anything other than unadulterated love.”

He nods and says, “I know, but waiting is killing me.”

I laugh and tell him, “I hope not because ‘Lena will be pissed if you die for any reason but especially from having to wait.”

He laughs too and we lay there for ten minutes before she wakes with a series of gasps so I tell her, “You’re okay, Elena, try to breathe through your nose,” as her breathing regulates I tell her, “There you go.”

I kiss her forehead and then ask, “How do you feel?”

She frowns and apparently doesn’t realize Jer is also beside her as she says, “Everything seems brighter and I think I hear Matt and the others talking downstairs. How do I hear him all the way from here?”

I don’t answer her question instead asking one of my own, “What do you remember?”

“I remember calling Matt and arranging to meet up with him at the Grill when he was done with work. When I got there, I heard him scream, so I went around towards the alley and there was a Vamp snacking on him, so I took the stake out of my purse. Oh god, I, I died, the Vampire snapped my neck. How am I alive when I haven’t had any Vampire blood in weeks?”

“Remember when I told you there were things I wasn’t telling you?”
She nods so I tell her, “Well the main thing is that you are Briseis. You sacrificed yourself to save Matt so you should be returning to yourself. I’m unclear why you don’t remember being Briseis.”

Jer says what I’m thinking, “It might be because you’re still Human, and you’re probably in transition since your natural form is a 490,000-year-old Vampire.”

She turns her face towards him, and he kisses her brow before he says, “I’m glad it counted ‘Lena.”

I nod and ask Jer, “Would you mind donating blood? Or would you prefer I go get a blood bag?”

He frowns and asks, “Will it hurt?”

I smile and tell him, “No, I’ll bite your wrist, which shouldn’t hurt more than a second and then she can drink from it. She’ll only need a little and probably won’t take much.”

He nods and tells us, “Okay then.”

I look down at the back of Elena’s head and ask her, “‘Lena will you drink from him?”

She has tears in her eyes as she turns back towards me but she nods so I take Jer’s wrist in my hand and gently make a small bite before handing her his wrist. She drinks for about 30 seconds before she pulls away and whispers “Thank you Jer. I love you Drago,” as she falls back to sleep.

I look at Jer on the other side of my love and tell him, “Here, drink and I’ll keep an eye on you for a day or two, that way you won’t have an open wound while around a newly returned Briseis.”

He smiles and nods so I bite into my own wrist and he drinks for a minute as we watch his wrist heal then as I pull my wrist away from his mouth I tell him, “Let’s bring her downstairs since I have a few questions for the Witches in the house.”

He nods and gets up, so I rest her on the bed to get up, and then I pick her up and carry her downstairs where everyone stops talking when we enter. I tell them all, “She woke and drank from Jer then she fell asleep. Do any of the Witches in the house know what to expect since she was still Human when she died?”

Laraina and Bonnie both nod and Bonnie says, “I think she’ll sleep for about three hours then wake up with all her full powers and memories.”

I nod and lay her down on the couch with her head in Matt’s lap as I ask him, “Will you keep an eye on her while I go get some blood for when she wakes.”

He nods with wide eyes and says, “Yeah of course.”

I nod back, hurry downstairs, and grab three bags of blood before hurrying back up to the living room. I quickly reposition Briseis so that she’s in my lap as I want to be the first thing she sees when she wakes and remembers herself.

As I reposition her, Matt is explaining what happened to him and Elena, “So I was taking out the bags of trash that piled up during the day when some Vampire attacked me. So I figure I’m going to die, right, but then over his shoulder I see Elena trying to sneak up on him. I barely saw him move but the next thing I knew she was lying on the ground in a crumpled heap and there were three blurs fighting with the Vamp that attacked me. It was over pretty quickly. Actually I’d be surprised if the whole thing took more than three minutes from start to finish.”

He pauses a moment then says, “I was pretty shook up and certain ‘Lena was dead but then I think
her name is Laraina said ‘Lena would wake up again later as a Vamp. Then Care and Bonnie showed up and Care brow beat me into taking her blood.’

He smiles at her as she huffs and tells him, “Well I wasn’t just going to let you bleed to death, and you’re so pigheaded Matthew Donovan.”

He laughs, “I’m pigheaded? Um, have you looked in the mirror lately, Care?”

She laughs and says, “Okay, I might deserve that.”

Everyone else laughs too then after everyone calms down a bit, I turn to the three Vampire Witches and tell them honestly, “Laraina, Reyna, and Carys, thank you for helping my love and my brother.”

Matt’s head snaps up and his eyes widen slightly when I call him my brother, but as far as Elena and Asya are concerned, he’s family, so as far as I’m concerned he’s my brother.

I look in front of the fireplace for the first time and see the desiccated corpse of a Vampire with a stake in his heart. I raise my brow as I ask, “Is that the asshole that attacked Matt?”

Everyone nods as Laraina explains, “I brought him with us so we could burn him after you got a chance to see him just in case he looks familiar to any of you.”

I nod back and say, “He doesn’t look familiar to me, what about the rest of you?”

Everyone else shakes their heads no so I ask Balthazaar, “Brother, would you mind taking him out to the garden and burning him in the new fire pit? I think burning him in here would upset Matt, Jer, Ty, and Bonnie’s breathing since it’s such an enclosed space. The rest of us can just not breathe the disgusting scent but they’re not so fortunate.”

He laughs and stands before grabbing the lighter off the mantle and then carrying the Vampire out the French door to the fire pit I added to the middle of the garden last week.

Asya hugs the Witches, who were all born before one of my descendants, some 3,000 years ago, met and fell in love with a dark skinned woman, so Bonnie’s three Witchy ancestors have skin tone similar to mine rather than like Bonnie’s. When Asya finishes hugging them she makes official introductions. Bonnie smiles and leans over to tell Matt, “They’re my Witchy ancestors that Damon turned thousands of years ago.”

Matt’s eyes widen with shock before he asks, “Uh, don’t take this wrong, but if you’re their descendant then how come your skin is brown and theirs isn’t?”

Bonnie laughs and says, “I think the dark skin didn’t get introduced to Damon’s line until some 4,000 or so years ago.”

I nod, “It was actually about 3,000 years ago when one of my great-great times a thousand grandson’s, a boy named Lucian, fell in love with one of his family’s slaves, a dark skinned woman named Masha. She was actually much darker than Bonnie. Anyway interracial relationships, never mind a free man marrying a slave, wasn’t really accepted back then, even more so than during the 1800’s in this country, so it was a big scandal, but I knew they were in love and meant to be, so I sort of forced his parents to accept her into our family.”

I pause then tell them, “Unfortunately, his parents treated her and their grandchildren that she gave birth to like second rate citizens, so I took the whole family into my home. Now don’t think I was some forward thinking person who was ahead of his time. I wasn’t really progressive, but I knew Lucian loved her, and I could understand when he said he’d never want another woman, since I had
thought the same thing the first time I was re-introduced to Briseis.

I smile and tell them, “Anyhow Masha was very beautiful with skin the color of dark chocolate, and I’ve rarely seen a more beautiful woman, so naturally their children were beautiful, but dark skinned like their mother, and after that most of their descendants fell in love with people who looked more African than European like me. Through the years, though, the skin tone has gotten lighter and lighter, so Bonnie’s a rather light skinned black woman as opposed to Masha who looked like she was made of the finest dark chocolate.”

Everyone nods and sits for a minute then Matt seems to recall the second part of Bonnie’s sentence as his stance goes tense and his eyes shoot open wide and then focus on Care as he says, “Wait, thousands of years? Care, I thought you said Damon was born in the mid-1800’s?”

Jer looks at him and says, “You ready to know what’s going on or do you want us to continue to keep you in the dark. We’d love your help, but if you don’t want to know we’ll keep respecting that.”

He thinks for a minute, and I can tell when he decides he’d rather not be in the dark anymore, and I smile. Finally, the last member of our family will now be in the know as he says, “I want to be able to help from now on. Not wanting to know was just a knee jerk reaction since Vicki had just happened and then me kicking my mom out and then finding out that Care became a Vamp. I needed to take a step back, but I’m ready to know what’s happening and help if at all possible, though I’m only Human, so I’m not sure what good I’ll be, but if you want it you have my help.”

Jer nods and Asya says, “We always need you, even if you are only Human.” She winks at that so he chuckles and takes a seat for story time. To say he’s shocked by the time Asya finishes mostly filling him in is a huge understatement.

When Jer, Tyler, and Kol get to the part about the Indian Ocean Matt tells them, “The Indian Ocean is pretty treacherous and Kol was it?” Kol nods so Matt nods back and continues, “He’s right about shipwrecks being lost permanently out there, but if you’re looking for the deepest ocean that’s actually the Mariana Trench in the Western Pacific Ocean… I did a paper on it for my geology class last year. It’s something like 6.8 some odd miles deep and I’m pretty sure modern technology is nowhere near able to get that deep. And what I know of oceanography says it’s going to take some major technological advances before we’ll be able to get even close to exploring it.”

Kol laughs and says, “I swear this whole damn family, not a single unuseful individual in the lot. You all know the most random things, and I’d bet most of you have pretty high IQs too.”

Matt and I both laugh as Matt tries to tell him “I’m not really part of the—”

However, Asya interrupts him before I can and says firmly, “You are so part of this family Matt Donovan. The only reason we’ve kept you in the dark was at first to keep you safe and we were keeping everyone in the dark. And then after that we kept you in the dark because you asked to be kept out of it, but now that you feel like you’re on solid ground again I don’t think there’s a single member of this family that wouldn’t include you as part of it if asked.”

All his friends and I are nodding very deeply causing a blush to rise on his cheeks as he says, “Uh thanks guys, I love you too.”

After a minute, Matt asks no one in particular, “So how is Elena in transition since Care said she hasn’t had any blood recently?”

It’s Laraina who answers, “It’s because in reality she’s not Human but rather an almost 500,000-
year-old Vampire, so she needed to drink Human blood or Drago’s, either would probably work, and then she’ll sleep and then wake up in about three hours or so with all her memories and her full powers returned to her.”

“Uh 500,000? You just said really old Care. 500,000 is a little older than really old! That's like ancient!”

She laughs, “Sorry, but you know it’s not nice to ask a lady her age and technically I’m only 35,000 years younger than the rest of them, well except Katherine, she’s only 100 years older than me.”

“Elena’s evil twin has the spell on her too? Uh, maybe someone else should take over story time and fill in the holes Care apparently left.”

Jer laughs and he, Bonnie, and Ty proceed to fill in the rest of the gaps.

Matt sits quietly absorbing all the information he’s been told then asks, “So what are we looking for in the books? Give me one and I’ll help.” Finn hands him a book we haven’t read yet and explains what we’re looking for, so after Bonnie does the quick spell so he can understand all the languages he will encounter in the various Grimoires he starts reading as does everyone else.

Almost two hours later Elena moves in her sleep. A minute later, she wakes and looks at me with a sleepy smile on her face, “Drago?”

I smile, “It’s me, Briseis. What do you remember?”

She smiles and says, “I remember everything now.”

I nod, lean down, kiss her softly, then pull back, and pick up one of the blood bags lying beside me on the end table before handing it to her, “Hungry?”

She chuckles and says, “Yes, just a bit.”

She drinks the bag of blood slowly, so I relax a bit realizing I don’t need to worry about her accidentally attacking any of the breathers in the room.

I hand her another blood bag when she finishes the first one, and then when she finishes that one she leans up to my ear and says softly enough that I know I’m the only one who can hear it, “I want to help Tyler now.” I don’t want to let go of her, and her arched brow tells me she clearly knows that, but she tells me, “Seriously Drago, I’m fine. I sense all the Humans in the room, and I don’t feel like eating any of them. My control is even better than it was before we were spelled, promise.” It’s not just that I’m worried about her control. I have truly missed my wife, but I understand that she can help Tyler.

I nod and reluctantly let go of her, so she can go help Tyler but first she kneels in front of Matt. She raises her hand towards his neck, and I smile when he doesn’t flinch as Asya said he did when she first told him about being a Vampire. In his defense, it was probably a lot to take in all at once, and I think he handled it pretty well all things considered.

She touches his neck and inspects the clear patch of skin that only hours ago was a torn bloody mess, “Care took care of me, ‘Lena, no worries.” She lets out a sigh of relief and hugs him, which he quickly returns. “I’m okay, you saved me.”

She laughs, “Didn’t do a very good job of it though. Thank you, Sisters, for protecting him while I couldn’t.”
Laraina, Reyna, and Carys all nod and tell her, “It was nothing.”

But Matt seconds her, “No seriously, you didn’t even know me, and you protected me, and while I
know it was because you recognized Elena I still really appreciate it.”

They smile and Carys asks, “Didn’t we just cover that you’re part of the family?”

He laughs and nods, “Yeah we did.”

She smiles and nods once, “Okay then, nuff said.”

I stand and tell her, “Elena and Klaus’ blood are in the basement, let’s go get them.”

I lead her out of the room and down to the freezer where she promptly proceeds to drink several
mouthfuls each of Klaus’ and then Elena’s blood. She closes her eyes, and then tells me, “I can feel
the difference. It should work just as you suspect.”

I nod and lead her back up the stairs and then address Tyler from across the room, “Wolf-boy, we
should be good on the cure from now on.”

Tyler lets out a heavy sigh, and his shoulders relax noticeably, and I can understand why. It must
have sucked thinking he almost killed Asya and did kill me. Briseis walks over to him and softly
says something to him that I can’t make out before his eyes go wide and he says, “Right now?”

She smiles and says, “Well sure, the full moon is tomorrow night so you probably don’t want to
wait. I’m willing to do it right now so you don’t have to shift tomorrow if you don’t want to.”
When he nods with wide eyes she says, “Give me a sec.” She closes her eyes and then rips open her
wrist and hands it to Tyler who looks around the room quickly receiving nods from everyone else
before he begins drinking her blood. He drinks a lot and then Briseis pulls away and wipes his
mouth with her hand.

Before the Humans can process what’s happening she snaps his neck, and Matt’s on his feet, “What
the hell?”

By this time, I have pulled my one true love, my wife, back into my lap. I’ve missed her and I need
to touch her in any way that I can right now.

Asya walks over to him and puts her arm around his shoulders as she says, “Relax Matt, she’s
turning him into a Hybrid. It’s like turning into a Vampire. He has to drink her blood and then die
before waking, only once he wakes he has to drink her blood again instead of Human blood. He’ll
be fine, and he’ll be able to control when he changes. In fact, he won’t have to change at all if he
doesn’t want to. We’ve seen this done before, a very long time ago, so he should be fine, okay?”

He just nods with wide eyes and sits back down while he waits for his second friend in four hours to
wake from having his neck snapped.

Tyler comes to an hour later with a gasp. Briseis has been sitting leaning against me while we both
read Grimoires, but as soon as he gasps, she’s by his side and petting his hair cooing, “You’re alright
Ty, you’re alright.”

I’m surprised when he laughs and kisses her cheek before saying, “Thanks for doing that so fast. I
didn’t even see it until it was too late.”

She smiles back, “I didn’t want to give you time to think about it and freak out.”
He nods with a smile on his face then asks, “What now?”

She nods and tells him, “Now you drink again, but you should move to the middle of the room and take off any clothes you don’t want ruined as the first time you won’t be able to prevent the change.”

He nods and stands before he starts stripping down to his boxers. When he finishes he moves to the clearest part of the room right in front of the fireplace. She moves to stand beside him, closes her eyes again, then bites her wrist once more, and feeds it to him.

When she pulls away, she quickly zips back over to my side and we all wait to see what will happen. I’m hoping it works and we’re going to see him shift again. And sure enough he drops to his hands and knees and then much quicker than before he becomes a huge Wolf. Shocked Matt asks, “Is it just me or did that happen a lot faster and seemingly less painfully than when Damon got bit?”

Asya and I both nod and say, “Yes.”

Tyler huffs in his Wolf form for a minute and then a second later, he’s on his knees naked and all the girls are looking away. “Holy shit, I barely felt that. How is that possible?”

I throw a blanket to him and he covers up as I try to explain, “Vampire blood causes super quick healing so I assume the healing happens fast enough now that you barely feel the pain of your bones and muscles shifting and breaking. You should practice doing it in the next couple of days so that you can do it at will, which will be especially useful in a battle setting if necessary since as you know a bite from you will kill any Vampire enemies we have other than Klaus.”

I pause to let that sink in then tell him, “You’re now a very powerful creature and in a fight against Vampires, and other Hybrids if Klaus succeeds, you’ll probably win. Honestly, despite your age you’re now just as dangerous as the other Vampires in this room, and all due respect to Kol, Rebekah, and Finn you may be even more powerful than them since technically Elena, or Briseis really, is your sire. Based on the other times we’ve seen this done the only way to kill you now is to tear out your heart, fire won’t work on you, though it will hurt.”

He nods so I continue, “You might want to spar with some of us older Vamps later tonight or tomorrow to get a feel for how your body works now, and don’t worry about biting any of us. As I told you before, the Pervonachalnyue as well as Kol, Finn, and Rebekah are all immune to Werewolf and Hybrid venom.”

When Matt looks at me with a raised eyebrow and quirked lips I add, “It has to do with the spells used to turn us into Vampires, only descendants are vulnerable to Werewolf and Hybrid venom. The Pervonachalnyue and the Originals are immune to its effects.”

I smile and tell Tyler, “Since you are now obviously a Hybrid via Briseis’ Mimicry we now know that the cure will work through her too. Plus, the blood of the direct first generation of descendants that the two previous Hybrids before Klaus created was also a cure for Werewolf and Hybrid bites. So provided you or Briseis are alive then any descendants who end up being our allies won’t be killed by yours or any other Werewolf’s or Hybrid’s bite or Klaus’ either for that matter because we can simply feed them Briseis’ or your blood.”

Tyler smiles and lets out a breathy, “Thank god, I hated that I was a threat to you guys.”

I smile as I get up and grab Tyler’s clothes off the other couch, “We know. That’s why Elena wanted to do this now. She knew how heavily it weighed on your mind. To be honest the Vampires here heard you talking to Asya the other night too about how you didn’t want her near you
tomorrow night even if she did think she was immune.”

He blushes just slightly before I tell him, “We all heard enough to know your statement was because you felt it was too dangerous, and you wanted to leave Klaus’ blood for when we battle Klaus so it wouldn’t go to waste.”

He nods, so I look him straight in the eye as I tell him, “As if any of us actually think helping you is a waste, but that’s another matter we’ll get through your thick skull later.” When I finish I hand Tyler’s clothes to him and offer to hold the blanket up for him so he can put his clothes back on.

Tyler grins and quickly, I mean Vamp speed quick, has his clothes back on and is sitting back in his seat. He smiles widely and says, “Shit I didn’t even know a non-Vamp could move that fast.”

I laugh and as I throw the remaining blood bag at him I tell him, “You’re technically half Werewolf and half Vampire, so really you are a Vamp now. You’re going to need blood to survive. You should drink that now and try to keep the hunger satisfied to prevent you attacking anyone. As I said, Briseis is technically your sire despite her having used Klaus and Elena’s blood so your control should be much better than it was for any of us when we were first turned.”

He smiles and opens the blood bag so I tell him, “If you can get your mom off of Vervain I’ll compel her to let you move in here to make life easier if you want.”

He pauses from casually drinking the blood and says, “No need man but I will take you up on the place to live though.”

I narrow my eyes and raise my brow as I ask, “How do you plan to get your mom, who didn’t even want to let you come to Chicago with us for a week, to let you move in with me?”

“Easy, she already knows I’ve mostly been crashing here these past few weeks and technically I’m already 18. So really, I can do whatever the hell I want. I mean I’ll probably keep most of my shit at her house for now but—”

I interrupt, “You can all bring as much or as little of your stuff here as you want. I want all of you to consider this your house too. I’m just grateful I built four full sized wings when I built this place. There are four floors, two above ground for each wing that form the arms of an ‘X’ that branch off the center ‘body’ of the house and two floors below ground that cover all of the space from the outer edges of the property in a big sort of rectangle. The two above ground floors of each wing each have eight bedrooms. Before all of you, we only used the upstairs part of the Southeast wing that has mine and Stefan’s rooms in it.”

I frown then tell them all, “My great, great, great nephew, Zach, used to bitch about how big and empty the place was. He admitted he didn’t fill it with a family for fear of what I might do to them. Sadly, he was right to worry while I was Damon as I killed people he cared about one of the times my switch was off, but I think he’d kind of smile to see me now.”

I turn and look at Bonnie as I tell her and the rest of them, “Zach’s death and his fiancée’s death back in the ‘90’s are two more deaths I regret, as well as his lack of family. Admittedly, when I killed Zach, he and Stefan had starved me for close to a week, so all the deaths that happened that day were more a result of me going a week without blood rather than any desire to kill and wreak havoc.”

I pause and frown at the memories then tell them all, “Still I pretty much regret every life I took that day, including your sister’s Matt. I can’t express how truly sorry I am about what I did to her, and I know I have no right to ask for your forgiveness, so I’m not going to ask for it, but I do want you to know that she’s on my list of regrets.”
He looks shocked and I wonder if he hadn’t known that part of the story yet, but still I continue undaunted, “I didn’t do right by her at all. Incidentally, she’s also on the list of people and deaths who taught me important lessons.”

He nods slightly so I tell him, “She’s one of the lives I ruined that showed me with Elena and Jer’s help that I was on the wrong path. So I don’t know if it’ll help you deal with your grief or not to know this but her death was very important to me, in that it was the beginning of me wanting to be different.”

I look at Briseis and then look back to Matt, “I don’t think I can properly describe how I felt when Elena turned her disappointed and disgusted eyes on me after Vicki died while I tried to tell her it didn’t matter. She insisted that it did matter and that she knew I knew it and as usual she was right. That unfamiliar pain in my chest when she looked at me with those sad disapproving eyes was the very beginning of me wanting to be a better man. Suddenly I found myself wanting to be the man she apparently thought I could be, one who wouldn’t dare turn messed up but innocent girls into monsters.”

I pause to let that sink in then tell him, “If I had stopped and truly thought it through, I would have known that Vicki’s addictions would cause her not to be suited for this life. I don’t want any of you to think that you’ll turn into the mess she was if we turn you because all of you have your heads on straight for the most part and none of you really have addictive personalities, well other than Stefan but that ship sailed a long time ago.”

I stop and smile then continue, “And as stated several times before, my door is always open to all of you if you have any questions about becoming a Vampire. Matt I know this is all new to you, and your sister’s death has probably made you all ‘down with Vampires’, but the offer extends to you as well. I would happily and confidently turn any of the Humans in this room right now, and Bonnie too.”

I look around the room and tell them, “I’m not sure who I told, but being the direct Childe of a Pervonachalnyui is much different than being the so many times removed descendant of an Original. Vicki might have actually faired a lot better if I had been myself when I fed her my blood, of course if I had been myself I would have simply healed her and then kept an eye on her until my blood was out of her system.”

Matt’s obviously trying to process that I’m sorry for killing Vicki. His rapidly relaxing body language and his eyes going from slightly unfocused to not only focused but meeting mine head on tells me he knows I genuinely mean it. He’s also probably shocked that I’m willing to turn him and don’t think he’d go psycho like his sister did, but his acceptance of my apology seems to be overriding his shock at the moment.

A moment later Bonnie interrupts his internal musings, “I actually have thoughts on us turning. I found the spell Lilith used. Apparently, the Witch who wrote it, Fontina, who for those of you who don’t know was Drago’s great, great granddaughter and my ancestor, is the author of many of the books I got from the cavern so the spell is actually in one of the books.”

She smiles then continues by saying, “Her descendants even added a list of all the times it’s been known to have been used. You six were first, 455,000 years ago and then the seven younger Pervonachalnyue between 450,000 and 300,000 years ago, and six other families between 200,000 to 170,000 years ago. There is mention that Esther knew one of my ancestors and snuck a peak at the book and therefore likely read the spell and then copied it with a few minor changes.”

She frowns then looks at the Originals and tells them, “From what I gathered from her memories and the notes written in the margins of the spell by the ancestor of mine that knew Esther, the changes
your mother made are why you lost your Magick and were even more violent than the six older Pervonachalnyue. Some words she used made your switches more likely to turn themselves off, and honestly, I’m pleasantly and gratefully surprised they broke in the on position.”

She sort of half frowns and half smiles as she tells us, “Anyway Esther was powerful but not very well educated in Magick and at the time she did it she really had no business tinkering with a spell that powerful, especially since there was proof that it worked and didn’t require the kind of tinkering she did. She basically didn’t want her children to be more powerful than her, so she altered the spell to steal your Magick from each of you, and it back fired in major ways.”

She smiles fully and tells us all, “Personally, I need to know a lot more before I’d be willing to use the Pervonachalnyue spell, but if none of the current Pervonachalnyue in the family mind, it might be better to skip being sired and go straight to the source if you will. And the spell actually has a second spell that was started by Fontina after you all first turned and then was worked on by multiple generations who somehow knew we’d all be here, so it’s actually a mix of siring and spelling all in one.

Balthazaar and I look at her for long minutes before I ask, “What exactly do you mean by a mix?”

She sits up straight and tells us, “Well the Vampirism would happen due to the spell but the potion would have the blood of all of our family members in it. Vampires included. And everyone including the Vampires would have to drink. Plus, if Briseis bleeds Klaus’ blood into the potion and Tyler participates, once we drink and the Vamps snap our necks when we wake we’d need to drink from Elena through Briseis instead of a Human and yes that includes the Vamps too and all of us would be Hybrids.”

She pauses and then adds, “Oh and by all Vamps I mean anyone who wants to participate, Originals and my ancestors included. The spell would make all of us stronger and, as I said, Hybrids as well as it would link any who participate as true family and pretty much turn those who were originally sired or spelled with the incorrectly altered spell into true Pervonachalnyue like the rest of us would be.”

She smiles as she looks at Kol, Rebekah, and Finn and tells them, “I also think it will give the Originals their Witchy powers back so you should keep that in mind you guys. I can’t imagine what it must have been like all these years not having your powers, so I’m hoping you’ll all agree to officially become members of the family and I can right that wrong.”

Laraina nods and adds, “My mother was one of the Witches who worked on the second spell, and she taught me everything she knew, so my sister Witches and I will be able to teach Bonnie all she needs to know before the time comes, if she wishes that is.”

Bonnie smiles and says, “Oh I wish alright. Oh and while Tyler moving in here is fresh in my mind I think it’s time to do the cavern spell. I can do it for any of you and move everything that is rightfully yours into your rooms. I think I need to do the spell a separate time for each person though since it’s going to be so much stuff all at once and moving everything from the cavern kind of drained me a bit afterward, so I should probably only do it one person a day though.”

She looks at the older Witches who smile and tell her, “That would be wise, but remember you now have four Witches as well as Briseis who can harness our combined powers, and Balthazaar who has his own Magick. Except for the Pervonachalnyue spell, which needs to be stirred by a live Witch or Briseis, using your abilities she’s gotten from you while you are alive, we can do just about any spell you can. So we could each do one person and get everyone moved in in a couple of days.”

I see Briseis and Jer conversing with Ric before she speaks up, “Jer and Ric would love to have the
spell done whenever you can and I’d like to watch so I can do it in the future, maybe after I watch I can do it on my own belongings with your supervision.”

They nod so Tyler adds, “I’d like it done too,” as do Care and the Originals.

Laraina smiles and says, “If Bonnie is in agreement we’ll start tomorrow with Tyler, Briseis, Ric, Jeremy, Asya, and one of the Originals. Then the next day we can do the two remaining Originals, Balthazaar, and the three of us. Then we can do Bonnie whenever she’s ready. And Matt if you ever choose to move here just let us know, and one of us will see it done for you.”

Bonnie nods, and Matt’s smile wavers, and he’s suddenly avoiding eye contact with everyone, so I’m sure he’s wondering if he’ll ever be comfortable enough with me and more importantly my role in Vicki’s death to actually live here. I totally understand, so I sit beside him and say, “There’s no rush, and if you never move in that’s your call. We’ll all respect that, but know even if you don’t live here you’re welcome anytime, and you can stay over whenever you wish for however long you wish. Besides, I’d be a little worried about you if you were ready to move into my house so soon after discovering I killed your sister.”

I pause then bring up something I’ve wanted to mention to him for a while now but knew I couldn’t since he didn’t know I was the one who killed his sister, “Though, I do want to talk to you at some point about supplementing your income. I took away an able bodied person from your family who could have contributed to your household finances, so I should make up for that.”

His eyes pop open wide and his brows nearly go into his hairline they’re raised so high as he asks, “Seriously dude?”

I smile, “Seriously, back when I was the Demon equivalent of your age that would have been legally mandated, and I could have gotten into a lot of trouble if I killed an able bodied adult and then didn’t take on their financial responsibilities. It was supposed to prevent folks from challenging others to a duel if the situation wasn’t already a blood offense since if you won you’d be responsible for the loser’s family and if they had any debt it would become yours. Of course then you had those who dug themselves so far into debt they would go challenge a much wealthier peer and then intentionally get killed to clear away the shame they brought upon their families.”

I shake my head to clear it of memories of several times I personally saw it happen and tell him, “Anyway, if you’re willing to let me help you out I’d be happy to. It’s the least I can do, though know that I know it doesn’t really change anything about what I did.”

I hope he thinks it has a sense of honor to it and a moment later it seems as though he does as he nods back and tells me, “Let me know what you need from me to help out.”

I smile widely and say, “Bring copies of all your recurring bills and your bank account number and your bank’s routing number, and I’ll do the rest. And if you want to quit working I’ll make sure you have an allowance for living expenses, such as groceries and such, as well as fun money too, that way you can focus on school and our family without having the added stress of having to hold down a job.”

He shakes his head no as he says, “Oh I don’t—”

Briseis interrupts as she sits on the other side of him, “Let him do it Matt, your mom should be paying your bills not you, so let Damon take over as head of your family at least where the finances are concerned for now. The rest will take care of itself when you’re ready.”

He just nods so she smiles and gives him one of her much sought after hugs. He whispers, “I’m glad
you didn’t die today, ‘Lena.’

As she pulls back she smiles big and touches his neck where he was bit as she says, “Me too and I’m happy you weren’t hurt too badly.”

He smiles back and asks, “So uh, what did you want to talk to me about when you were coming to see me?”

“Oh uh, just the whole thing with Stefan. Drago’s been keeping the fact that the victims he’s been tracking are Stefan’s not Klaus’ from me, so I was angry about that. I wanted someone to talk me out of being mad because I knew you’d see and say that he was only doing it to protect me. I’m pretty much over it now that I have all of Briseis’ memories, which reminds me I need to go hug my older brother.”

She hops up, taps Balthazaar on the shoulder, and immediately throws her arms around him when he turns. He picks her up and swings her legs from side to side a bit before placing her back on the ground and kissing her forehead.

I smirk and turn to Matt who’s still sitting beside me and ask, “So Matt, I know you work at the Grill, but can you cook, or are you another member of this family I need to ban from attempting to use my kitchen?”

He laughs even as he frowns, so I tell him, “You should have seen the disaster Elena and Jer made for lunch yesterday. I think they were supposed to be grilled cheese sandwiches but they were burnt and soggy with butter all at the same time, which I didn’t even know was possible. Pretty much the only ones who don’t destroy what they’re trying to make are Ric and Tyler.”

He laughs again and nods as his smile grows and he tells me, “My mom and sister were even worse than ‘Lena and Jer, so I had to learn how to cook or starve, so I think I’ve got some kitchen skills that might prove useful to you.”

I smile widely, “Excellent, we are apparently pulling an all-nighter tonight, so it’s almost breakfast time, and research happens best on a full stomach, so I need to go make breakfast. Do you want to join me in the kitchen, and I’ll test your skills?”

Chuckling he tells me, “Sure, why not. Lead the way,” and we get up and head to the kitchen followed by most of the rest of the family who apparently wants to see how the new guy fares against me, as I hear the others refer to me as the ‘Kitchen Snob’.
I wake once around four in the morning when Matt comes into the house. His heart is beating steadily and he doesn’t seem distressed or upset, so I decide to let him be, pull my wife closer to me, and go back to sleep.

I wake again at seven and get up after kissing Briseis who is still fast asleep.

After taking a quick shower, I head downstairs as I pull my t-shirt over my head, and after grabbing my laptop out of the living room where I left it last night, I enter the kitchen to the sounds and smells of Matt and Tyler cooking something, bacon and sausage maybe. “Hey man, good morning,” they say when they see me.

I place the laptop on the counter and proceed to plug it into the wall socket as I reply to their greeting, “Good morning. Ty you went to bed the same time I did how are you up before me?”

He frowns but laughs and says, “My mom called because she went into my room this morning and noticed all my stuff gone. I’m kind of surprised she even noticed since it’s been almost two months since I moved all my stuff out. Anyway, she was not happy, so I spent an hour trying to calm her down and then decided I wouldn’t be able to fall back to sleep.”

I nod and tell him, “I’m surprised she noticed too since she didn’t seem to realize that you’re never there anymore, so I just assumed she was happy ignoring it.”

He nods, “Pretty much but when she went in and apparently expected to see me asleep and instead discovered all my shit gone she freaked and woke my ass up. She’ll probably call me later too and bitch some more about how I’m slacking on my family responsibilities. ‘Your father expected us to… blah, blah, blah’, man was an asshole who liked to hit me when I didn’t do as he told me to, so I don’t really give a shit what he expected.” He pauses then realizes what he just said and adds, “Sorry, obviously I have unresolved shit caused by my father’s sudden death. Anyway, I should probably warn you that she might get it in her head to come here and bitch you out so consider yourself warned.”

I laugh and tell him, “Oh I hope she does because guess what I’m not her kid and even though you are her kid you’re 18 so ultimately what she wants no longer matters. Besides if she comes into my house she better show me the respect I deserve, or I’ll throw her out on her ass.”

He laughs and almost bounces on his toes as he says, “Let me know so I can watch, okay?”
I laugh back, “Will do, Brother,” then I turn to face Matt and ask, “You got here at four shouldn’t you still be asleep?”

He smiles and shrugs as he cracks eggs and puts them in a bowl, “Nah, I slept from 10 to 12 and then couldn’t fall back to sleep, so I got up and went grocery shopping with my new expense account and picked up what I need to try a new recipe.”

I frown and look at him pointedly, “You went shopping in the middle of the night, alone, when any ole Vampire looking for a quick and easy snack could happen upon you?”

Tyler stops flipping bacon for a minute and frowns as Matt stops cracking eggs for his batter and looks at me with wide eyes and an open mouth before he says, “Well, I didn’t think of it like that, but yeah. I’ve been doing it since before I had a license. I’d ‘borrow’ my mom’s car and drive to the 24-hour Walmart. I only got caught by the cops once, and that was back when I was 12, so they could easily tell I wasn’t old enough to drive yet.”

Tyler and I laugh as I pull out a chair and sit down at the counter, “Is there a single member of this family that isn’t a trouble maker?”

They laugh at that as Matt turns his narrowed eyes on me, “You’re one to talk man, Elena says you’ve been the original trouble maker in this family since she met you some 490,175 years ago.”

I smile, “That depends on the type of trouble. I was a master at getting into stuff and breaking rules I shouldn’t. Driving to the store in the middle of the night when I was 12 would have been right up my alley. The others were more likely to get into brawls and such. Mostly I just bent rules until they were about to break.”

He nods. He and I have made some major headway in our relationship, and I know he’s pretty close to completely forgiving me for killing Vicki. Still we’re not as close as I am to the others, so I pause before I ask, “You want to talk about why you couldn’t sleep, or should I leave that to the others?”

He smiles, and as he begins whisking the batter he says, “I’d tell you, but I don’t know why I woke up or why I couldn’t fall back to sleep. I didn’t have any bad dreams, and other than this whole thing with Stefan there’s nothing that’s really worrying me. For once all my bills are up to date. I’ve been here constantly for the last two months, except pretty much when I rarely sleep at home like last night. Things are actually better than they’ve probably been since I was five or six so I’m clueless about what caused it.”

I nod, “Okay but talk to someone if you figure it out, okay? Take it from an expert, bottling shit up just makes it more prone to explode later down the line.”

“Will do. Now sit back. We’ve got coffee made, and we want you to just sit and relax for a single breakfast.”

I smile and ask, “Whatcha making, Donovan?”

He smiles and sort of bounces on the balls of his feet while he mixes some sort of batter in the mixing bowl, “Tyler and I found these two recipes for crepes and blintzes. Since the blintzes require crepes we decided to make both.”

The good news is Matt and Tyler were pretty decent in the kitchen two months ago, and since then I’ve been teaching them and Ric everything I know about cooking, so if anyone other than me or Ric can pull this off it’ll be them, so I smile and tell them honestly, “Sounds great.”

Matt pours my coffee and adds one sugar just how I like it and then as he hands it to me he tells me,
“So you haven’t really commented on what we found in the forest up in the mountains. I’ve never seen so many dead bodies. Do you know what was up with the dried blood on their faces? It looked as though they were extras in a zombie apocalypse movie with their eyes, nose and ears bleeding. I didn’t get a chance to ask before but I’ve been really wondering what’s up with that?”

I sigh remembering the family trip we took three days ago to try to find Stefan in the Blue Mountains. Instead, we seemed to have been a day late as all we found were dead Werewolves.

I tell them both, “Honestly, I think the blood was a result of a bad transition into a Hybrid. Remember Klaus doesn’t have access to ‘Lena’s blood so they can’t successfully transition. If Klaus had fed his blood to Tyler, the same thing would have happened to him. ‘Lena’s the key I’m sure of it, especially since we managed to successfully turn Tyler.”

Just then, my phone rings. I take it out of my pocket and look at the caller ID. It says ‘private’, so I reluctantly pick up and put it on speaker-phone as I say, “Hello?”

“Damon, imagine my surprise when I saw you hiking in the Blue Mountains the other day, since the last time I saw you, you were dead.”

I hold my finger to my lips when Matt and Ty’s eyes go wide and they nod as I say, “Katherine, what do you want?”

I can hear the snark a mile away as she says, “Why I simply wanted to tell you how happy, thrilled really, I am that you seemed to have done the impossible and returned from the permanently dead.”

I roll my eyes at Matt and Tyler as I tell her, “Yeah I’m just chock full of surprises, what do you really want?” which causes both men to stifle a chuckle under their breaths.

She seems oblivious to the fact that she’s on speaker phone and that I’m not the only one in the room as she asks, “Can’t I just call to catch up with my old love-er since obviously a lot has been going on what with you now spending time with the Originals. Imagine my surprise when I recognized the brothers and Rebekah with your little band of explorers the other day. Then again, you always were the more charming brother who could talk a saint into partying with Lucifer himself. But I am very curious how you convinced them to turn on their brother or why you believe they won’t betray you like Elijah already did once.”

I sigh, “I have my reasons Katherine, and since I’m the oldest member of this family, what with you out exploring the world, my opinion is the only one that counts.” The peanut gallery stifles another chuckle at that.

She pauses then says, “Hmm, won’t be long before the Originals put you in your proper place, to bad I won’t be there to see it.”

I sigh fed up with her shit already. My nostrils are flared and despite her being god knows where and unable to see it my teeth are bared since she’s ruining what was shaping up to be an excellent morning, so I ask, “What is the purpose of your very unexpected and incredibly unwanted call, Katherine?”

I can hear her pouting, it used to be that would work on me but not anymore, “Well if you don’t want to know where Klaus and Stefan are right this minute then I can just hang up, nice talking to ___”

Shit, my eyes connect with Matt’s wide eyes as I rush out, “Wait, where are they?”

I can hear the smirk in her voice as she drawls out, “What’s it worth to you?”
Matt and Tyler both roll their eyes as I’m reminded that I hate her bullshit, I really do. I don’t know how I missed what a manipulative bitch she is when I first met her, “How ‘bout you just tell me what you actually want, and we can skip the whole negotiation process, and I can simply say yes or no.”

Now I can hear her frowning, “Hmm, you’re no fun, is shacking up with your brother’s woman not keeping up your spirits anymore?”

That crosses the line so I say through gritted teeth, “Katherine… what do you want or I’ll be the one to hang up since we’re all perfectly capable of finding them on our own.”

I turn on the laptop and open my email account. Before I can type a message to Hanz and hit send, I see that he already emailed me almost three hours ago. The message simply reads, “Klaus and Stefan landed at O’Hare airport at 4 a.m. via a commercial flight. I will send you the details about where they’re staying when I have them.”

There’s a second email from about an hour and a half later that says, “Ms. Pierce landed by private plane at O’Hare at 5 a.m. Klaus and Stefan are staying at the Ritz-Carlton in the Presidential suite. Ms. Pierce is staying at one of her Bed and Breakfasts, which is owned on paper by a Mrs. Flowers just outside the city limits in Harvey. I have feet on the ground trailing both Klaus and Ms. Pierce. More information to follow as I receive it.”

I smile and tell Katherine, “You know what I changed my mind I don’t need what you know so thanks for calling bye now—”

Her voice is higher pitched than usual and she almost squeaks as she says, “Wait, I really do know where they are.”

I smile widely as I slowly tell her, “Hmm, the Ritz-Carlton in Chicago. The Presidential Suite I believe. While you’re staying at Mrs. Flower’s little B&B just outside the city limits in Harvey, have a good day Katherine. It’s been nice talking to you,” and I hang up.

My companions laugh and I tell them, “The only bad thing about that whole conversation is that we couldn’t see her face when I told her where they are or that I know where she’s staying. That would have made my year. The expression on her face probably would have made me forget all the shit she’s put me through, well for a little while anyhow.”

Matt smiles as he rolls blintzes as Tyler fries up the crepes and then hands them to him. Matt continues to smile as he asks, “So I assume you got an email telling you where they are? Who sent it?”

I smile back and tell them both, “A 1,400-year-old Vampire named Hanz Klein whose specialty is finding people and information others don’t want found or known.”

He pauses and looks at me with raised eyebrows before he opens his mouth, then closes it and then opens it again asking, “So you’ve known where Klaus and Stefan are the whole time?”

I shake my head no, as I tell him, “Yes and no. Usually they don’t stay longer than a few hours so because my information is usually a few hours old by the time I get it it’s mostly useless except for tracking where they’ve been so we can clean up the mess they leave behind. This time though, they used a commercial flight instead of driving. Honestly, we got lucky.”

I pause, Klaus will likely soon discover that his siblings are missing and he’s spoiled so I tell them, “I bet they’ll be there for a few days too, since we broke out his siblings, and Klaus likes to live it up, and they’ve essentially been slumming it all summer. At least I hope so since I don’t want to risk us
flying and giving him a heads up if he’s keeping tabs on us like I am on him. He’s probably not but I don’t want to risk it.”

I take a sip of coffee then tell them both, “Hanz has feet on the ground discreetly following them, so we’ll know where they are when we get there and if they leave early hopefully we’ll still know where they’re at. Though honestly I’d be more comfortable approaching them in Chicago than anywhere else at the moment. I know my way around, and I know the places they usually hung out the last time they were there.”

Matt nods and asks, “So what’s the plan?”

I smile a not nice smile and tell my brothers, “The plan is we drive all the pretty SUV’s I just bought up to the Windy City, and we go get my brother back and Goddess willing kill Klaus once and for all.”

Balthazaar enters the kitchen as I finish my statement and despite probably overhearing everything that’s already been said since before Katherine called he asks, “Do we know where he is now?”

I explain while Matt and Tyler cook and Balthazaar nods then asks, “What are the odds of keeping Katherine safe?”

I shrug, “You know as well as I do that it depends on how brave she’s feeling. Not to mention how confident she is that she’ll have back up, which is probably why she wanted me to know where they are. How much Klaus knows about her following his every move will be a factor too.”

I take another sip then continue my line of thought, “I’ve known she was following them since Hanz called the first time to tell me about the trail of bodies Stefan was leaving in their wake. Despite my knowledge of Katherine’s actions or the fact that Hanz and then the rest of us have been cleaning up their messes from the first pile of bodies I’m fairly confident that Klaus doesn’t know my man has been tracking him.”

I frown and tell him what he already knows, “However, Katherine is as subtle as a hurricane sometimes. Don’t get me wrong she’s obviously very good at running and hiding since she’s managed to stay out of Klaus’ clutches for the last 500 some odd years. However, I think after being so close to being free of him once and for all that she might be a little more reckless than she normally would be.”

He nods, “I agree.”

Slowly the rest of the family comes into the kitchen and we fill them all in and make plans. Matt and Tyler pull breakfast off perfectly and when their done eating, I clap them both on the back and tell them, “Excellent meal, Brothers. I don’t think I could have done a better job.”

They smile and move out of the way so the girls can clean up their mess since they cooked.

I ask Matt, “Do you need to go home before we head out?”

He shakes his head, “No man, I packed a ‘go bag’ weeks ago and it’s up in the room I’ve been using when I crash here.”

I laugh and tell him, “Okay then you and Ty can help Ric collect all the weapons.”

Ty nods and follows Matt and Ric out of the room to the basement where we’ve set up several weapon rooms.
Three hours later we’re packed and on the road. We take four of the SUV’s I just bought everyone and we take turns driving in three-hour shifts. We push through and make the drive in just over 12 hours. When we arrive in town, we head to my condo since I’d rather try to approach them during the day when Klaus is less likely to have Vampire back up.

I convince everyone to go to sleep and after kissing Briseis for a few long minutes, we follow suit and sleep dreamlessly.

I wake at six and after showering and kissing a still sleeping Briseis, I head out to the kitchen to make breakfast. As everyone comes out of his or her rooms, they all have grave expressions on their faces and when we finish having probably the quietest meal that I’ve witnessed this family have, I break out my laptop and check in with Hanz.

The first email from him says, “Drago, while you are en route Klaus and Stefan paid a visit to Gloria’s Club which is still located in the same building. She informed them that she needs to talk to Ms. Mikaelson to be able to answer Klaus’ question about why his siring isn’t working.

They left quickly and headed to the address you gave me down in the old warehouse district. I had to clean up four dead bodies after they left the warehouse as Klaus was incredibly angry to discover his family missing and six dead Vampires taking their place inside his shipping crate.

I also overheard Klaus release Stefan from his compulsion so I believe your brother now remembers his time in Chicago with Klaus and Ms. Mikaelson.

I believe they’re now heading back to their hotel room so I’ll give you more details as they become available. -Hanz”

Two hours later he sent another email which reads, “Drago, Klaus is calling in every favor owed to him and is currently throwing money around trying to discover who might have even known his family was in the shipping crate. I’m currently staying in a room eight floors down from the Presidential Suite and due to being older and from better stock I’ve been listening to his phone conversations while I’m sure he has no clue who I am never mind that I’m here. That said Klaus has spent the last two hours ranting and raving not to mention threatening all sorts of bodily harm to any and all he calls looking for information.

Somehow, word has gotten out that Klaus has pissed off a family of Vampires even older than his family. They even whispered the word Pervonachalnyui a couple times, which caused Klaus to laugh his ass off and say you’re just a myth as he figures he would have met one of you in his long life if you actually existed. He clearly doesn’t believe the four different individuals who told him he’s as good as dead if he doesn’t do what you want.”

I frown as I read. I’m not sure how the word got out that we’re back since we’ve been keeping a fairly low profile, but okay...

Hanz’s email goes on to say, “Klaus plans to go see Gloria again tomorrow morning to ask if there is a way to find his answer without having access to Ms. Mikaelson. I’ll email you again if he says anything that you might need to know during his ranting but your best bet at catching up with him is probably to arrive at Gloria’s before she gets there and wait for Klaus and your brother to show up.

Not that I think you need help but if you wish me to join you call me at the usual number and I’ll be more than happy to make myself and my men available to you and Asya for whatever you might need from us.

I’ll be in touch if his plans seem to change. –Hanz”
Matt has been reading over my shoulder, so he asks, “Why does she need ‘Bekah?’”

Bonnie answers from her place over my other shoulder, “I think it has to do with the necklace Stefan gave Elena. ‘Bekah recognized it when ‘Lena came with us when we visited her before we undaggered her.”

I nod as does everyone else so Bonnie continues filling Matt in on what he missed the first time we came to Chicago, “Right so ‘Bekah correct me if I get any of this wrong, but it’s Esther’s necklace, and it’s a powerful talisman. Her mother told her to never take it off and someday she could use it to speak with her when they were separated. So if Klaus is searching for why his Hybrids aren’t working then I’d say most Witches worth their salt would suggest talking to the Original Witch.”

‘Bekah is nodding as Bonnie continues, “Based on what you guys told me on the drive about Gloria and what Laraina and Carys told us about her I’d say she’s smart enough to not only know they need to talk to Esther but also what Rebekah’s necklace is and that it’s needed to do the necessary spell.”

I nod and tell them all, “Okay so my vote is we head to Gloria’s and wait for Klaus and Stefan to show up and then go inside. If Gloria hasn’t changed much, she won’t want any trouble in her club, which means she’ll be more likely to try to get us to leave and take it elsewhere.”

Everyone’s nodding so I continue, “I’m thinking I just head for Klaus once we enter and rip his mother fucking heart out before any of them know what’s happening. Any of the Pervonachalnyue can easily take him out so we all head for him. The Witches can keep Gloria from throwing out any spells and Kol, ‘Bekah, and Finn, if you want to come with us would you mind subduing Stefan. No pressure to come as we’ve stated several times we understand he’s your brother, so if you prefer to sit this out we’ll understand.”

All three of them nod as Kol says, “Drago, Brother, you’ve treated us with far more respect and consideration than Nik ever did, and I won’t try to speak for my siblings, but so far as I’m concerned you’re more my family at this point than he is. Whatever you need from me I will give in the effort to put a stop to Nik once and for all.”

I nod and tell him, “Thank you, Brother, I had hoped you felt that way as I already consider you one of my brothers but it’s nice to hear confirmation.”

Finn smiles a rare smile and tells me, “I agree with Kol, your family has given me a second chance when I doubt many others would have so whatever you need from me, consider it done.”

I turn to ‘Bekah who frowns and says, “I love him, even still, but he’s my past and all of you are my future. It’s not safe for any of us if he continues walking around so as much as I will mourn his passing I agree with my brothers that you are my family now, not Nik.”

I smile and nod at all three of them and tell them, “Thank you Brothers and Sister, we appreciate the pain we’re sure you will all feel at his death, but I agree he cannot continue to live. I will make it as painless as possible though in consideration for your feelings.”

They nod back, so I direct my next words to the room at large, “As much as I hate to do it without his consent we might need to compel Stefan as we have no way of knowing what Klaus has compelled him to do or not do never mind the fact that he’s likely got no control right now.”

Everyone nods as Bonnie says, “Unfortunately compelling Stefan will probably be a necessary evil and will probably continue to be so until after we get him back to Mystic Falls since he likely has no control over his bloodlust at this point.”
I nod at that last part and after everyone agrees with the plan, we go get ready and an hour later, we’re sitting outside Gloria’s waiting. Half an hour later Gloria shows up and two hours later Klaus and Stefan show up followed closely by Katherine who stays hidden down the street.

I text Reyna, “Can you go keep Katherine out of danger?”

She texts back, “Will do.” She gets out of her SUV and Vamp speeds over to Katherine. Katherine’s eyes widen when Reyna just ‘Magickally’ appears in front of her, which causes me to chuckle from my spot down the street. Reyna uses a Witch’s version of compulsion and tells her, “You will come with me now.”

Katherine nods and follows her into their SUV in a matter of moments. They’re far enough away from the building that they know Klaus can’t hear them so Reyna tells Katherine, “We have a plan and you getting yourself killed is not part of it.”

Katherine just nods and amazingly enough sits quietly as the rest of us get out of our SUV’s. I stick my head inside Reyna’s SUV and ask her, “Reyna do you mind staying out here with Katherine, the two of you should be more than enough to make sure we don’t get interrupted.”

I worded my sentence that way on purpose, so Katherine will think she’s an active participant but really I just want to keep her out of harm’s way. Reyna’s eyebrow arches and she smirks obviously understanding my true motive but nods and says, “Sure thing Drago, Ms. Pierce and I should be able to spot anyone who might get in our way while you’re dealing with Klaus.”

I nod and then the rest of us walk across the street before half of us go around back and the other half go around the front then a minute later we all enter the bar.

I have Klaus by the throat and my hand on his heart before he even realizes they’re not alone. I whisper into his ear, “Should have listened when you were told you pissed off a family far older than yours. Say goodbye Klaus.”

He struggles so I throw him over some tables, and he lands on one breaking it, but I have him by the throat and heart again before he’s even realized he’s moved. I pick him up and bang him against the wall as he continues to struggle very poorly.

His eyes widen when he realizes I’m stronger and faster than him and he barely gets out a strangled “How are you—” and then the next minute I rip his heart out and turn to see if Stefan and everyone else is okay.

Bonnie has her arm around ‘Bekah who is quietly crying as she stands beside Stefan whom Kol had to compel to stand still. Once Klaus is dead Kol nods to me and says, “Let me know when you want me to release him, all of Nik’s compulsions should be gone now.”

I nod and turn to look at Gloria, who looks to be in her very early 40’s not several decades over a century old like I know she is, so I say to Kol, “Hold him just a little longer,” then to Gloria I say, “Gloria, long time no see, time has obviously been very good to you. What can you tell me about what Klaus has been up to?”

She smiles and drawls out, “Well I’ll be, it’s not every day a bunch of Pervonachalnyue show up. I heard you were back to your old selves. The younger Pervonachalnyue have been hearing too and they won’t be in the mood to grovel for forgiveness anytime soon. In fact, if I were you I’d watch your backs where they’re concerned.”

She pauses so I nod since if Klaus was being told we’re back then I assume the younger
Pervonachalnyue have received the same information. I tell her, “I figured as much.”

She nods and a moment later she continues, “As for Klaus, he wanted to know why his Hybrids were dying despite his having done as he was told. I imagine that has something to do with you all. Maybe something you did?”

I smile, I always liked her so I tell her, “He sacrificed the Doppelgänger like he was told to but then we resuscitated her. She died but came back to life and if the spell we read was right, her Human blood was needed to complete the transformations. If he had truly killed her as he intended any and all chance of making Hybrids would have died with her because she’s the last of her line.”

I don’t want anyone else to know that Briseis can make Hybrids so I tell Gloria, “Doesn’t matter now since she’s a Vampire and her blood is now useless for that purpose. Anyways, now Klaus is dead and she’s Briseis once more so everything seems to have worked out. All that’s left to do is detox my brother and we’ll be on track to fix everything. We’re taking Klaus with us so you should be good, no?”

She nods appreciatively, “Yeah, I’m good. I can dispose of him if you want.”

I smirk and with an arched brow tell her, “No offense Gloria but I’m not leaving his body or his heart with a Witch as well versed as you. We’ll be burning him first chance we get to make sure no one gets any funny ideas.”

She frowns, “As if I’d be stupid enough to go up against the wishes of the six original Pervonachalnyue, or the remaining Originals for that matter, but if it makes you feel better I don’t mind not having to clean up a dead body.”

I smile, hand Klaus’ heart to Balthazaar, wipe my hand on my pant leg, take out 14 hundred dollar bills, and lay them on the bar, before I then bend down and pick up Klaus’ body. When I turn to leave she asks, “What’s the money for?”

I shrug as well as I can with an almost six-foot-tall man hung over my shoulder and tell her, “The ones who came through the back door broke the lock on the door and I broke a table. Our dispute with Klaus didn’t concern you and we still fought our battle in your place of business. If you need more I can…”

She smiles and shakes her head no, “That won’t be necessary the table will cost less than $200 and the lock shouldn’t come to more than $800.”

I smile and nod, “Okay then, keep the change and buy yourself something nice then.”

She nods and I nod back before leading everyone out the front door and to the SUV’s. We don’t let Stefan out of Kol’s compulsions until we reach the condo. And even then Kol is kind enough to place several on him to protect all of us until we get back to Mystic Falls and can lock him up and detox him.

Surprisingly it doesn’t take any compulsion to get Katherine to come with us, as soon as she sees me carrying Klaus’ heartless body out of the bar she agrees to do whatever we want her to do. I kind of think she wants to reunite with her family even if she doesn’t realize it.

Kol stays down in the garage with the body, Katherine, and Stefan while the rest of us go up and get our things and then within half an hour we’re on the road back to Mystic Falls.
Just four more chapters and an epilogue and this story will be completely posted so we're almost to the end. I hope you're all enjoying it. Until next time...
It’s been two weeks since the others and I rescued Stefan from Klaus, two weeks he’s spent down in the basement cell in the boarding house and just under two weeks since he smelled me all over Elena and vice versa. She officially broke up with him the day after we got back, so he knows we’ve been sleeping together and having outrageous amounts of sex ever since. I know that knowledge is killing him.

We explained about the spells placed on us. Stefan just listened intently and nodded, so he apparently knows we’re telling him the truth, but let’s face it that doesn’t lessen the pain of knowing his brother successfully stole his girlfriend. Everyone’s been clear that, except for a few kisses, we were both faithful to him until Elena could break up with him. His face softened when we told him that we didn’t do anything more than kiss even after the spells on both of us were broken and our memories returned to us.

I figured despite it being true that he’d be pissed and not believe a word we say but for some strange reason he seems to honestly believe we both remained true to him, which is good because I would have hated for Elena to remain true and still be called any number of unpleasant things by him. Mostly he seems very understanding, which is weird since he doesn’t have his own memories back yet but whatever, it works for us so I’m not going to complain.

I walk down the stairs, and when I’m standing in front of the door to the cell, I look through the window and take in everything that’s changed inside the cell since the last time I was held prisoner and forced to spend time in there. Stefan’s got a soft bed that’s just slightly smaller than the one in his room, a desk and chair, his journals and all his favorite books.

His shoulders tensed slightly when I arrived at the door but he finally looks up at the window in the door and frowns at me as I look in. I place a small water bottle of blood on the windowsill just as I do every morning around this time. “It’s Human and should be enough to hold you over for now.” I say that every day.

“Damon, Brother, I can’t drink Human blood, you know that better than most.” Now he’s repeating himself too.

I frown and realize he needs it all put into proper perspective because he’s clearly not seeing what I’m seeing so I tell him, “I know eating thumper wasn’t working. You need to learn moderation or you’ll go off the rails every couple of decades. You’re well on your way to moderation too since in case you’ve missed it the first week you’d immediately guzzle it down and then trash the cell and rage about being let out, and we can’t forget the threats against your family. You threatened to drain Jeremy every time he came down to see you for the first five days.”
I pause as we both remember his rants from that first week. Needless to say it wasn’t pretty and as his shoulders slump and he hangs his head I know he’s not proud of how he acted.

I smile and there’s a light in my eyes that he hasn’t seen there since before he forced me to finish the transition. He focuses on my words again as I continue my line of thought, “But for the last week you argue about drinking Human blood and then in an hour you’ll break down and slowly drink it before you sit quietly and read or write in your journal until someone else comes to visit with you.”

My smile widens as I tell him, “For the record, it’s been seven days since you last threatened any of us. And the last threat was directed to me when I threatened to go in there and force you to drink the blood, so we’re all pretty sure you’re well on your way to being a healthy well balanced Vampire.”

He nods slowly and rolls his shoulders slightly as he sits there. I can see a difference this time and I think he can feel it even if he hasn’t realized it yet. I think he’s somewhat surprised but hopeful. Lexi never got him to the point he’s at right now and that was definitely not for lack of trying.

I sense his thoughts are on Lexi too so I say, “I wish I hadn’t killed her. I’m sure she’s very proud of you right now. Since I haven’t said it sincerely and you definitely deserve to hear it and will, I hope, know it’s the truth, I’m sorry I killed your best friend. That was a shitty thing for me to do. It was wrong. I truly regret having killed her and also for causing you that pain.”

I pause then with a frown on my face I tell him, “I won’t try to explain myself just know that I know it was the wrong call, in fact I know it was the absolutely worst call. I should have baited some other Vampire to use for my ruse if I even had to do it at all. So anyways, for what it’s worth I’m truly sorry for killing Lexi.”

I pause and he nods with wide eyes and a slightly slack jaw. It’s very unlike me to admit to being wrong and I can’t remember the last I time I did so and then apologized all in the same breath still he nods slowly as his shoulders relax after a minute and he makes eye contact with me again.

I figure he’s ready for our surprise so I look at him and then say, “I asked Bonnie to look into something for me. She consulted her books, her three Witch ancestors, Kol, who is surprisingly very well versed in all manners of Magick, Balthazaar, the other Originals, and she communed with the few hundred dead Witches, so she was able to find a spell. So anyway, it’s permanent and it’s not a trick so I have someone who wants to say hello.”

I leave the window and nod to the young woman who just came down the stairs then he hears a voice I know he thought he’d never hear again, “Hey Stefan.”

I stay standing a few feet away though out of Stefan’s view. I don’t want to intrude on their moment, but I don’t want him to accidentally hurt her either because that would destroy him faster than anything else could. Plus, I genuinely don’t want her to be harmed. I hear him move to the window in a flash, “Lexi?” His head tilts to the side a bit and his lips flatten out into a thin line as he whispers, “Am I hallucinating?”

He’s not hallucinating, she’s real and alive despite him having watched me stake her, so she shakes her head at his question and tells him, “No you’re not hallucinating. It’s really me. Turns out your brother didn’t allow me to be buried instead he put me in a safe place and then your family’s Witches thought of a way to restore me, it actually involved Anastasiya’s blood.”

She pauses then asks him,” Did you know her name means resurrection?” When he shakes his head no she tells him, “Yeah I didn’t either, but it does and apparently her folks named her that because a Witch or Seerer or something told them she’d have the ability to resurrect the wrongly dead.”
I tense when he tenses and I figure he’s finally noticing her heartbeat that’s as fast as a Human’s. She pauses and he grabs her warm hand and holds on tight when she puts it on the sill. He makes no other moves though, so I let him hold her hand for the time being, but I’m ready to intervene if necessary as she tells him, “I guess they couldn’t bring me back as a Vampire but they have a plan to fix that just as soon as a few other things fall into place. Apparently they’re waiting on two more members of your family to join you all and then the Witch will turn any of your Human family members who want it.”

She shrugs slightly before she says, “I honestly haven’t decided yet, I’m kind of digging’ being Human again for the first time in over 350 years.”

She glances over to me very quickly and smiles slightly as she says, “Oh and don’t tell Damon but I’m well on my way to forgiving him, which is weird because I used to hate the guy as you well know. But he’s not so bad now a days. Your family has centered him and given him purpose where before he had none. Plus, his switch was definitely on when it broke so...”

She smiles and tells him, “Anyway, I almost shit myself when I woke up and the first thing he did was hug me and tell me how sorry he was that he killed me. I was tempted to return the favor but then I realized killing him would hurt you even more than him killing me so I decided to be the bigger person and let bygones be bygones.”

She pauses again and then asks him, “Do you know he’s the one who asked Bonnie to look into the possibility of bringing me back? Bonnie was worried about trying it, but she wanted to right the wrong Damon told her he had committed by killing me, go figure.”

She smiles as she pauses then she asks, “So enough about me, how are you doing? They said you’re actually doing really well and you still haven’t opened this bottle of Human blood and you’re holding my hand and not trying to feed on me so I think they might be right about your progress.”

I heard him in his room praying for her death to be nothing but a bad dream several times since it happened so his wide eyes and mouth hanging open, which I can just barely see from my spot to the side of the window, makes sense. “Damon asked Bonnie to do this for him?”

She smiles, “Sure did. I don’t know if you’ve had a chance to see them together but they’re tight, which I’m told is very different from how it was when you left with Klaus.”

He nods deeply, “Very different, they hated each other when I left.”

She smiles, “Well they love each other like Brother and Sister now.” She glances at me again and then continues with a grin on her face, “They’re actually pretty cute going around calling each other Brother and Sister. I like the effect she and the rest of them have on him. You must’ve noticed a difference in him?”

He nods and my brows draw together as he admits, “It’s almost like I have my brother back from before we ever met Katherine.”

She pats his hand with the hand not holding his, “He’s definitely back if you want him to be, he’s mostly just waiting for you to acknowledge the difference in him. Personally I say make him work a little harder for it.” Her eyes cut to mine again as she says that last part and I can clearly see the mirth shining in her eyes and know that once again I seem to have been blessed by wronging a woman with the capacity to accept a genuine apology when it’s offered.

He laughs at her words. Then his eyes shock open wide when she says, “We’re considering compelling you to stick to moderation so your body can get used to it without you worrying about
falling off the wagon and the Human members of our family won’t have to walk on eggshells anymore. Plus, everyone really wants to get you out of the basement and back where you belong.”

She smiles and tells him, “We all agree though that we shouldn’t do it without your consent so I want you to think about it. We could take it off you every now and then and test the waters so to speak but I think it might be the right tool to use. Lord knows I wished I could compel you into moderation many times through the years, now we have the means, so think about it okay?”

He nods and laughs as I work hard to stifle my own laughter when her stomach growls. She blushes and says, “I’m still not used to that, I don’t remember it doing that the first time I was Human and now it seems to do it a couple times every day.”

He laughs at her crooked grin and twinkling eyes and tells her, “Go, go eat, I’ll think about what you said, and I’ll let you guys know when I’ve come to a decision.”

She nods and squeezes his hand again before letting go and walking out of his view. I hope he stops and realizes he just held hands with a Human for close to ten minutes and appeared to have no desire to eat or otherwise harm her and he still hasn’t had breakfast. As he grabs the bottle of blood off the sill his brows are furrowed and he’s sort of half smiling and half frowning so I leave him to his thoughts.

I hear him turn back towards the door when he hears someone else coming down the stairs, I smile at ‘Bekah as she passes by me. She smiles back and I know only part of it is because I smiled at her. The other part is because it turns out Stefan missed his friendship with her almost as much as she missed hers with him. I can honestly say they’re well on their way to having it back. She comes down here every afternoon to tell him all about what he’s missing at school, which she is now attending and absolutely loving, though she admits that except for the modern science and history stuff she knows most of what’s being taught and especially knows when the books are wrong when it comes to history.

She has talks with Ric over drinks every evening correcting history’s misconceptions. Apparently, they both enjoy the process. I could be upset that she’s sort of stealing my best friend from me but mostly I’m just happy for them. They both need more friends and they let me join their discussions more often than not, so I’m truly happy they are growing closer. Goddess knows if anyone deserves more good friends it’s Ric. The man is a saint for putting up with my shit and for taking in the Gilbert’s after Jenna died.

Anyway, it’s Saturday though so now it’s time for ‘Bekah to go sit with Stefan. We’re all hell bent on making sure he knows we love him and still want him in this ever-growing family. We let him apologize the last two days then yesterday we all said the time for apologies is over and now it’s time to move on and be a real family and I’ll be damned if he doesn’t seem to believe it’s possible.

I stop at the top of the stairs and sit down to listen in as I hear her step up to the window before she says, “Good morning Stefan, how are you today?”

I can hear the smile in his voice as he tells her, “I just found out my best friend, whom my brother killed, has been brought back from the dead at his request, so I think I’m doing pretty damn good right now.”

I smile at that as she says, “Oh good, they told you. She’s been back for over a week but they wanted you to be able to talk to her without ‘freaking out’ about Human blood being so close by.”

His voice is tentative and soft as he asks the obvious question, “How did I not hear her before she came down here?”
I smile wider and settle my elbows on my bent knees as she tells him, “Bonnie is quite the accomplished Witch and growing stronger every day. It won’t be long before she’s ready to do the Pervonachalnyue spell. Anyhow, she did some spell that makes people unable to hear or know things they’re not meant to know yet. So you couldn’t hear Lexi until they told you about her.”

She laughs lightly and tells him, “I imagine if you focus now you’ll be able to hear her laughing at a silly Human story Jer just told her about the first time he got drunk and how his dad caught him and laughed his ass off the next morning because of Jer’s incredibly horrible hangover.”

I can hear them both laughing as he tells the story so I’m sure Stefan can too. He pauses as if he’s considering something then he asks, “If I asked you to do something would you?”

That raises alarm bells, so I sit up straighter and really pay attention. Apparently, she looks suspicious too as he laughs and tells her, “Relax, ‘Beks, it shouldn’t be anything that’ll make the family mad at you. It might actually please them.”

He pauses then adds, “I’ll understand if you want to consult with them first before making any promises. It’s actually something Lexi mentioned. I want to be compelled, but instead of being generally compelled to moderation, I want to be specifically compelled to stop feeding and return to this room immediately if I start to lose control. I’d want it to include that I should stop whatever I’m doing, be it feeding, arguing, whatever, and head straight to this room without doing anything else and stay here until I calm down.”

I smile at his words, and I can hear her smile as she says, “I’m not sure it should be me because Drago’s compulsions are much stronger than those of my brothers and me, but I’ll tell them what you want, and maybe we can all come down here and sit in there with you and brainstorm on the best compulsion. I’ve discovered the members of your, our, family are very smart, and if one of us has an idea usually the rest of us come up with a list of ways to improve upon the already great idea. In fact, everyone’s still here so let me go tell them and see when we can brainstorm okay, be right back.”

She zips at Vamp speed back down the hall and up the stairs nearly falling over me as I sit on the top step. She laughs and with a wide smile on her face says, “Hasn’t anyone ever told you, Brother, that eavesdropping is rude.”

I laugh back and tell her, “Hmm, I must have missed that memo, Sister.”

I stand up and walk into the kitchen with her hot on my heels. When everyone, including Matt, Ty, and Ric who’re finally getting to eat the meal they cooked, looks up at us from their meal, I nod at Rebekah and tell her, “Since he actually asked you, I’ll give you the honors.”

She giggles and then practically bounces right out of her skin as she explains what Stefan asked of her. They all obviously like her idea and Stefan’s. We plan to finish breakfast and then instead of us all congregating down there, where the hallway would be beyond crowded I offer, “How about I compel him to ‘behave’ if he’ll allow me to. Then that way he can come upstairs and we won’t have to try to fit all 17 of us in the hallway.”

They all nod with wide smiles, so since I’ve already eaten I go back down the stairs.

When I reach the window, I look in and tell him, “I like your idea, Brother. If you’ll permit me to I’ll compel you now not to attack anyone or leave the house and you can come upstairs and we can sort out all the details without all of us having to crowd around the door. Plus, everyone’s pretty excited about seeing you outside that cell even if it’s only for a little bit today.”
He nods, “I’m okay with you doing that.”

I smile and repeat what I said placing the compulsion being sure to leave an escape clause. As it snaps into place his eyes widen and he asks, “How do I know it’s there?”

I smile wider and tell him, “That was Briseis and Matt’s idea so you’ll be able to tell what actions are yours and what actions are the compulsion. The Humans all insist that allowing you to see your progress is essential to helping you heal and find moderation on your own. Personally, I have to agree with them.”

I pause for a minute then tell him, “I want you to know I think it’s great that you came up with your idea about the different compulsion. It shows that you’re actively getting better because you could have just as easily scoffed at Lexi when she mentioned the possibility, but instead you took it under advisement and may have come up with a better idea.”

I finish my thought by throwing the bolt and opening the door. He stands in place for a minute, which causes me to smile, but I still tell him, “Just to be safe, better eat your breakfast before you come up.”

His head jerks back and his eyes pop open wide because he forgot about the bottle of blood again, but he quickly picks it up off the corner of the desk where he placed it earlier. Then he slows himself down and slowly twists the cap off. He takes a small sip and then waits a minute before taking another small sip. 20 minutes later, he finishes the bottle and I smile and say, “You do realize my compulsion had nothing to do with how controlled you just were drinking that, right?”

His eyes get wider before he nods. It was all his own will power. He laughs and says, “Who’d have thought?”

I smile and say, “Your family.”

He smiles back and tells me, “Yeah, I guess you’re right about that.”

I turn to lead him upstairs but he calls out my name so I turn back to face him, “Damon, uh, I like you like this. I feel like I might actually have a chance at having my big brother back like you were before Katherine ever came to Mystic Falls.”

I smile since I might actually get my little brother back too and tell him, “Thank you, I like this me too and for the record you do have a chance at exactly that. Oh and speaking of Katherine, just to warn you, she’s going to be part of the conversation but Balthazar promises to reign her in if she gets to be too much. So just nod at him if she starts to get to you and he’ll remove her from the room, bodily if necessary.”

He laughs and nods deeply as he says, “I’ll keep that in mind then. It might be worth it just to see him force her to leave.”

Chuckling I say, “You have no idea. Come on the family is anxiously awaiting your return to the upstairs. Oh and don’t be afraid to speak up if the hugging starts pushing on your control, they’ll back off if you tell them it’s too much. They’ll hate it, but they’ll do it to help you, and they’ll even do it without complaining too.”

He nods and follows me to the stairs. When I get to the foot of the stairs, I turn to the small Magickally protected safe mounted in the wall and throw the combination in quick order before removing his ring from the safe and handing it to him. He puts it on and then follows me up to the first floor.
He looks around and everything likely looks the same until he enters the living room where there have been two couches and four chairs added to the space forming a sort of diamond within the space of the room. It’s about as homey as the room probably can get given that most of the furniture and such are antiques. Every available space has a body in it except my spot on one of the couches next to Briseis and the chair to the left of the alcohol cart.

As soon as he enters everyone stops talking and just stares, so he shuffles his feet and looks down before saying, “Uh hi.”

Everyone smiles and then the hugging starts. All the women, even Bonnie’s Witchy ancestors, hug him tightly and the men all shake his hand, except Jeremy who pulls him into a bear hug and whispers, “Good to see you up and about man, I missed you.”

I’m sure it’s the fact he said the words aloud that causes Stefan’s eyes to open so wide and not that Jeremy actually feels the sentiment. He hugs him back and whispers, “I missed you too, Jer.”

As Jeremy pulls back and steps to the side to let the next person hug Stefan, he smiles a wide smile and nods at my brother obviously pleased that Stefan returned his feelings.

Finally, everyone except Katherine has hugged him or shaken his hand and it’s clear from his closed off face and stance as he looks in her direction that he’s not sorry she didn’t participate. I chuckle to myself as I figure he might have tried to stake her if she suddenly tried to act as though she actually cares one iota about him. Oh I know based on the pain that flashed in her eyes when she thought I was dead and the few times her mask has slipped since we came back from Chicago that she cares about us, but it would probably seem very weird to Stefan if she Magickally began showing that she truly cares for us. Honestly, he’d probably think it was a ploy or a trick.

Still Briseis looks at her pointedly so Katherine rolls her eyes and says with a rather flat voice, “Yes, glad you’re not trying to kill all of us.”

I actually laugh as Balthazaar, who is standing behind her, tightens his hold on her shoulders until pain flashes in her eyes prompting her to say, “Sorry, welcome back, glad you’re feeling more like your old self.”

Balthazaar’s grip loosens and she sighs in relief. Too funny. Apparently, Stefan finds the humor in the situation too as he says, “Thank you Katherine, or should I say, thank you Balthazaar. I appreciate your herculean effort not to tear Katherine’s head off. I’ve always liked that carpet, and I don’t think we have nearly enough hydrogen peroxide to clean up that sort of mess.”

Amazingly enough it’s Bonnie and me who look at each other for a second and then burst out laughing at the same time followed closely by everyone else as Katherine huffs and rolls her eyes at the indignity of it all.

Finally, once I get myself back under control I say, “God I’ve missed your sense of humor, Brother.”

He just smiles in response then moves to the empty chair and sits down.

Everyone else seems to take that as their cue to sit down too. Despite it barely being past eight in the morning, I pour him a drink and hand it to him to help ease any cravings he might be having right now then as I walk to my seat I look around the room. When it’s clear no one’s quite sure how to begin, I start us off, “So Stefan, Beks told us about your idea. So we want to open the floor to see if anyone can think of any hitches we might encounter and how best to word it to avoid putting you at risk by not allowing you to protect yourself if necessary.”
His eyes widen as he apparently hadn’t thought of the possibility that the compulsion might interfere in a fight for his or someone else’s life. So after taking a big gulp of whiskey he asks us, “How would we word it to allow me to be able to keep protecting myself or others even if I feel I’m losing control and only have the compulsion kick in after the threat to me and ours is gone?”

Bonnie leans forward in her seat and puts her elbows on her knees before folding her hands in the air between her knees. She looks deep in thought then she says, “It might be as simple as saying, ‘If you feel your control is in imminent danger of slipping go to the basement room without doing anything else unless you, a member of our family, or an innocent is in danger. If they are in danger, then fight or scheme without killing or otherwise harming anyone who’s not a threat until the danger is passed then go to the cell until you can calm yourself.’”

He nods showing he thinks that covers all the possible angles of that hypothetical situation. A moment later he asks, “Can anyone else think of any other complications that could make immediately going to the cell a bad idea.”

Briseis frowns and says, “Well I think that depends on whether you plan to go back to school right away. We’d all love to have you there since it’s just not the same without you, but you can’t just leave school whenever you want, so I’m not sure what to do about that.”

Jer speaks up and asks, “You just need to be isolated and able to breathe without Humans suffocating you or tempting you to rip out their throats and drink all their blood as fast as possible right? Would your car work in a pinch?”

Stefan’s head jerks back and his eyes once again pop open wide as Jer voices the fact that Humans tempt him to rip their throats out. Still Stefan sighs and tells him, “Don’t take this the wrong way but I and the rest of the Vampires in this room can hear your hearts pumping and your blood flowing and even your breathing pick up when you’re scared or excited. All of that triggers the hunger or makes it worse if I’m having an… episode for lack of a better way to put it. And not only you effect the urge to tear your throat out and gorge myself, but my own emotions can positively or adversely affect my ability to resist the siren sound of your blood pumping through your veins. That said, in a pinch, a car at the edge of the parking lot furthest away from the building and crowds might do the trick.”

He’s been staring at his shoes as he talks and when he looks up, he obviously expects to see frowns or fear but all he sees are smiles and people nodding. He wonders though, “What’s with the smiles?”

Bonnie and Briseis laugh and Bonnie says, “I owe you dinner on me ‘Lena.” At his raised eyebrow she adds, “Sorry she predicted you’d be more open about who you are and that it would please all of us to see you openly accepting your nature or at least openly admitting to it and that you wouldn’t understand why that would please us.”

She pauses then smiles kindly as she tells him, “Which for the record, you can’t be truly happy or truly yourself for that matter until you accept the hard truths about who and what you are. You’re a Vampire Stefan. Everyone in this room knows this, accepts it, and loves you anyway.”

She looks him in the eyes as she says, “Most of us have some idea of the horrible things you’ve done through the years, and just to warn you since most of us visited ‘Bekah in the Aether all of us, except Matt and Lexi actually have all of your memories as seen through mine and Jer’s eyes. That’s in addition to Damon and ‘Bekah’s memories of the behavior they personally witnessed and despite having seen all of that we still love you. We forgive you for your weakness and really it’s not entirely your fault.”

When he opens his mouth prepared to argue that fact she holds up her hand and says, “Oh I know you chose to do the bad things and even chose to turn off your switch in the past but circumstances
being what they were didn’t allow you to have an older Vampire to teach you moderation from the get go.”

She pauses again and then after flicking her eyes towards a frowning Katherine she adds, “That’s not a dis at Katherine either, she had Klaus to worry about, and she needed to be gone to protect herself as well as you and Damon. However, the fact remains it would have been much easier for you and all your victims if you had had some guidance before you met Lexi.”

She frowns, “According to Lexi and your memories by the time she met you, you had already turned off your switch to deal with the guilt associated with giving into your dark and violent urges. If Katherine had been free to train you she could have taught you how to feed properly, because let’s face it despite her obvious selfishness and all around bitchiness she’s a good Vampire, and she’s in control probably more than most. Every move she makes is calculated to let her survive from minute to minute. She’s a survivor and she could have taught you all of that.”

Katherine’s eyes are now open wide and her jaw is open a little as she listens to Bonnie saying anything nice or positive about her. Fact of the matter is even I can admit that during the last two weeks I’ve noticed that Katherine does have a number of redeeming qualities when she feels comfortable and safe enough to let her true self shine through. Don’t get me wrong I’m still pissed about the bullshit she put Stefan and me through, but I can tell that she wasn’t just lying to us about who she was but to herself as well. I think now that Klaus is truly gone Katerina is beginning to show herself more often, and I may actually grow to like who she really is, well that is if I’m given enough time to get over the pain and heartache she caused me.

I shake my head ever so slightly and focus back on Bonnie in time to hear her say, “I also think your father’s role in your transformation and then his death is what damned you to not being able to control yourself. You said it yourself a minute ago, high emotions effect the ability to resist the urges to rend and maim.

“By the time you realized you needed to do things differently, you’d already gorged yourself, so your body was craving too much blood and the guilt was so strong, so you couldn’t control yourself. In the grand scheme of things, it’s not really anyone’s fault, well that’s not true I blame your father for being a hateful asshat who tried to kill his son twice in as many nights.”

She pauses just a second then wearing a frown says, “Him and fate. Ultimately, I think you were made this way to teach you something. Obviously the lesson is probably moderation and control. That said I honestly believe in the end you’ll be better and stronger for all the pain and suffering you and your victims were forced to endure at the hands of fate.”

She pauses again then sits back as she says, “So your car could work? So we could add that if you’re at school or somewhere else where just disappearing for the rest of the day might be suspicious or otherwise cause problems that you seek an isolated place such as your car. Then we add that if someone intrudes on that place before you’re in control, you are to seek an alternate place without hurting them or anyone else and if necessary leave to go to the cell despite the issues it might cause later. Because let’s face it having to explain or compel away the fact that you played hooky is far better than having to compel away dead bodies.”

Stefan and I both burst out with laughter, which causes his eyes to widen yet again as he tells her, “Yes, that’s much better.”

She smiles and then asks, “So anything else we can think of that might go wrong with our compulsion set as we currently plan it?”

Everyone sits obviously playing possible scenarios in their minds, but after a few minutes, everyone
begins shaking their heads no, so I stand up from the couch. I look at Stefan and ask, “So, Brother, are you willing to try this and see how it goes? If something goes wrong or you think of something that could go wrong, you need to come to me, and I or all of us will fix it okay? We need you to trust that we won’t stop loving you if this doesn’t work the first time, okay?”

He nods so I ask, “I’ll place it now then?”

He nods again so I quickly place the compulsion and its various clauses including an escape clause and then remove the compulsions I placed on him before he came up stairs. When I finish I notice his posture relax as though he feels an anvil lift from his shoulders that he hadn’t realized was there as the underlying fear that he’s going to snap and kill someone he cares about all but disappears. I smile at the soft look on his face and then say, “Why don’t you go upstairs and take a bath to relax a bit after the last few months you’ve had.”

He smiles and nods, “That actually sounds like a good idea.”

He speeds up the stairs and enters his room before just standing in the doorway evaluating the look of the room. There’s no dust anywhere and I’m sure he can smell that Briseis and Asya have been in there tidying up every day since he left. He likely also smells Lexi too as she’s spent a good amount of time just hanging out in there. I hear him close the door behind himself and then strip on his way to the bathroom.

I keep my ears tuned in to him just to make sure everything is working as we expect it to so after the tub fills I hear him sink down into the water and then let out a long sigh. I’m sure he hasn’t felt this good, this free since before he became a Vampire as his urges have always weighed heavily on him. While I took to this life fairly easily he’s always struggled with it and I think this might be the first time he hasn’t felt the weight of all of the deaths he’s caused hanging over him and taunting him with the possibility that he might lose control again and slaughter everyone.

I close my eyes and replay all the looks that were passed around today. I hope he knows we all love him and forgive him, every single last one of us. I’m sure while he was with Klaus he figured this, this sense of family, belonging, and acceptance would never be his again. And really this is actually much better than it was before he left because he finally seems to accept who and what he is, at least more than he did back then. Maybe not as much as he will though, one can hope that he’s not at the end of the road yet in terms of self-acceptance and peace.

I smile as I watch Asya, Lexi, Bekz, and Briseis go down stairs to collect Stefan’s things and then return a moment later before going up the stairs to put his things in his room. After a few seconds, I hear Asya knock and then say, “Don’t worry, Stefan, we’re just moving your stuff back into your room from the cell since you should be able to stay up here without any issues. We’re going to keep the nice big bed down there for the times when you need to chill down there but we thought we’d move your stuff back to where it belongs.”

I can hear the smile in his voice as he tells her, “Thank you Caroline, or should I say Anastasiya. Thank you for your part in bringing Lexi back.”

I can hear her grin too as she says, “You’re welcome. I was happy to help.” Then she goes back out to the bedroom and I hear her and the rest of the girls moving things around and putting clothes into the armoire.

A few minutes later I hear her whisper, “We’re done so we’re heading back downstairs now so it’s safe to come out and get dressed whenever you’re ready.”

He laughs and thanks her again and then he’s relatively alone again. He soaks for over an hour, so I
imagine he’s all pruney when he gets out, dries off and falls into bed without putting any clothes on. Despite it being close to ten in the morning I hear his breathing even out and know he’s asleep almost before his head hits the pillow.
Saturday, October 30, 2010; around 8:15 p.m.

My newly improved family rescued Stefan from Klaus the last weekend of August, mere days before school started. Now it's the end of October and Stefan has been attending school for the last five weeks. It's the day before Halloween and even I'm enjoying the festivities. Right now, we're at the Haunted House Carnival they hold at the high school every year. So far this year is going much better than this event went for us last year, what with Stefan having to stake Vicki and all.

Stefan and I are walking through the booths with Bonnie, Lexi, Matt, Beks, and Briseis. Stefan’s shoulders and posture over all is relaxed and he doesn’t seem to be noticing the mad crush of warm bodies all around us. Honestly all the Vampires in our not so little family have taken to leaving glasses of blood around the house. At first, Stefan could hardly focus on anything other than the glass, but except for the first two times we did it he hasn’t lost control and those two times the compulsions I placed on him worked exactly as we planned them to.

Now he notices the blood, obviously since he’s a Vampire and that’s what we do, but he can hold conversations and not really pay any attention to the glass.

He’s started feeding from Humans occasionally too to teach himself how to do it properly, though he says he’s not ready to do it unsupervised so one of the older Vampires in our family usually accompanies him out to hunt. He hasn’t killed a single meal and he only had to be stopped once.

All things considered, he’s doing remarkably well and we all feel like the worst has passed. He’s still cautious, which I suppose is the smart bet, but none of us are worried about Stefan hurting anyone anymore.

Still when the scent of blood, a lot of it, reaches my nose, I tense and despite his senses not being as strong as mine, a minute later Stefan is mirroring me. Bonnie notices first and asks, “What’s up?”

Stefan quietly says through clenched teeth, “Blood, a lot of it, maybe multiple people’s worth.”

Rebekah who has also tensed at the smell frowns and asks, “Do you need to leave?”

He shakes his head and tells her, “No.”

I frown as I look at him and say, “We need to investigate because I hear struggling.”

He nods and as Bonnie calls the others, we go in search of the source of blood. We find it back behind the dumpsters in the form of seven bodies with their throats ripped out.

Stefan’s eyes briefly change when they land on the bodies sprawled out all over the ground, but I
take deep satisfied breaths when a minute later his eyes return to normal and his fangs don’t even make a showing.

Ric and Balthazaar show up then with the rest of our family. The back of the school is blocking us from the view of all the other Humans, so no one sees us or the seven Vampires who are approaching us.

The one who addresses me has a large wart on her nose and pock marks all over her face, “Drago, imagine our surprise when we discovered you were hiding in this rat hole. What’s the matter? Were you afraid of how we’d receive you after your shameful time as a Human?”

I laugh, “None of us are hiding, Sekhmet, this is our home. And I have to tell you I’m not happy to find you hunting in our town.”

She smiles with bloody teeth and turns to feed from the Human her brother is holding. If I pull her off the girl, Sekhmet would likely tear the girl’s throat out in the process, so I watch helplessly as she kills the struggling girl who can’t be much older than Jeremy. Bahram drops the girl to our feet when Sekhmet finishes feeding then she looks at me and with a cruel smile on her face asks, “Oh yeah what are you going to do abo—”

I move faster than anyone can see and have her heart ripped out before the words finish crossing her lips. Everyone, including the remaining six younger Pervonachalnyue, freezes as I drop her heart to the ground then as if everyone snaps out of their shock all at once a fight ensues between us and them.

I turn to the next one, an ancient named Sophiya. I duck as she swings at me and throw a punch of my own that lands on her chin. She lunges and I reach out and shove my hand into her chest. Her eyes go wide and she says, “Please, don’t…”

I ignore the plea and tear her heart out a second later. Then I turn to see who might need help. Rebekah swings and ducks, trying to find an opening to reach into the chest of the one she’s fighting, a Persian named Bahram, but he’s much stronger and faster than her and I know her and her brothers and the Humans in our group are all just keeping them occupied until our Pervonachalnyue can rip their hearts out.

I move towards Rebekah the same time I hear Balthazaar cry out Katherine’s name. I see Asya step behind Bahram as ‘Bekah grapples with him before Asya surprises him by pulling his heart out from the back. Satisfied that Asya and Beks are safe, I turn to look and see what’s happening with everyone else. All the younger Pervonachalnyue appear to be dead and then my eyes land on Katherine.

I distractedly hear Rebekah say, “Thanks Asya.”

Her response sounds like it’s being spoken in a wind tunnel as I hear her say, “My pleasure,” she pauses and then says, “No seriously, Bahram has always been a sanctimonious asshole. In fact, I’ve wanted to do that to him for more than 402,000 years but Lilith always talked us out of killing them all despite the messes they always make, like this one here. I think we’re going to need to call my mom and show her the Vampire bodies too, so she knows the threat is gone.”

The wind tunnel effect is because all I really seem to be able to focus on is Katherine laying on the ground with her heart ripped out. Asya stops talking when her eyes land on the other Vampire, and she lets out a cry and rushes to her side. We all look at Lexi who’s hovering over Katherine. She has tears streaming down her face and blood on her throat and clothes from a torn wound on her neck. “She pulled him off me” She points at the Japanese Sai Kim whose heart has also been ripped
out, “And he tore her heart out.”

Balthazaar leans down and picks up Katherine’s heart and struggles to put it back inside her body and get her ribs to lie the way they should. When he’s done he picks her up and turns to me, “Brother, I think her death counted, so I’m going to take her back to the boarding house to wait for her to wake while you stay behind and clean up this mess. I’ll call as soon as she wakes.”

Everyone nods. I don’t think all of us are as sure that her death counts as Lexi isn’t one of the people I’d guess Katherine secretly cares for but I cross my fingers, as ‘Lena is so fond of saying, that she really does secretly love Lexi, and therefore her death counts towards breaking the spell.

Stefan looks confused and heartbroken at her possible death though also happy that Lexi is still alive, so I walk over to him as he quietly feeds Lexi some of his blood to heal her wound and ask him, “Do you understand?”

He nods, “She’s one of the six who had the spell placed on her, and Balthazaar thinks her sacrificing herself for Lexi counts towards breaking the spell.”

I nod and wrap an arm around him and Lexi whom he’s holding onto tightly now that her throat is healed. He’s not reacting to the blood all over her at all, as he looks at me and asks, “Who’s the sixth?”

I laugh, “Those who know have been sworn to secrecy as the sixth knowing would possibly risk breaking the spell not happening.”

He nods and I know Bonnie’s spell to keep Stefan and Katherine in the dark despite all the clues floating around them is still holding strong, and he has no clue that he’s the last of them to break the spell.

I squeeze his shoulders then let go and start flipping bodies looking and counting. After a minute, I finish looking at all the bodies and turn to look at my family as I ask, “Asya, Briseis, I only count six younger Pervonachalnyue and I’m not finding Valdis. Anyone see where she went?”

They all shake their heads as I watch Stefan walk Lexi towards the parking lot after he tells us all, “We’re heading home.”

We all nod at him and I tell him, “We’ll catch up when this mess is cleaned up.”

He nods and they disappear around the corner of the building as Briseis follows after them, “Hey, wait up, I’ll drive.”

A minute later we all run in the direction they went when we hear Stefan shout, “Lexi!”

When we arrive, we find Briseis standing over the heartless body of Valdis, the last younger Pervonachalnyui. Lexi is cradling an equally heartless Stefan in her arms as she cries.

I rush to my brother’s side and as I crouch beside the pair I ask in a whisper, “Lexi, are you hurt, what happened?”

“No I’m okay, He got in her way when she made a grab for me. He died protecting me, we-we need to get him back to the house before anyone notices he’s down.”

I nod and pick up Stefan’s heart and push it back into his chest and then push the ribs back into some semblance of where they should be before picking my brother up and placing him into the back of the SUV we’re standing behind.
As I shut the door and ask Briseis to take Stefan and Lexi home, Liz shows up. She’s obviously still nervous around me after she almost shot Jeremy trying to kill me, but after the good long chat we had once I woke up from dying I think she’s coming to grips with the fact that I am still her friend just like she always thought. I’m not sure she’s completely sold yet that we’re not all monsters but I think I made some headway in getting her to see that just as not all Humans are good and pure not all Vampires are evil. I nod as she asks, “Damon, what happened? I got reports of screaming.”

I try to explain with as little detail as possible and a well-placed lie since I don’t quite trust her to keep our secrets, “Some very old Vampires from our past, who were hell bent on killing the members of our family, created a diversion to distract us and then attacked. Elena killed this one here, probably a result of both the physical training Ric’s been doing with her and a very lucky shot to the heart since ordinarily I’d say a Human couldn’t rip a Vamps heart out. There are eight dead Humans and besides this one six other Vampire bodies and hearts out by the dumpsters behind the school that need to be burned post haste.”

She gasps and asks, “Shit Damon, eight victims?”

I sigh and feel my frown deepen as I tell her, “I know Liz, but there’s nothing we can do about it now, except clean this mess up. The good news is there shouldn’t be anyone else stupid or cocky enough to try to harm anyone in this town while we live here, especially when the rest of the Vampire world finds out what happened here tonight, and make no mistake we’ll make sure everyone who needs to know finds out as quickly as possible. I have a few contacts that like to talk everyone’s ears off so I’ll slip them the information.”

She’s frowning deeply so I tell her, “What happened here tonight will solidify in everyone’s minds that Mystic Falls is off limits. Especially since these seven Vampires were the only ones even close to strong enough to take us out. Everyone in the Supe world knows that, so this should be the last of the wild animal attacks until we need to leave because we’re not aging.”

Her brow furrows as she asks, “So what you’re saying is so long as you and your family are here the town should be safe?”

Her lips are pressed into a fine line, and she’s shaking her head at me, but I nod and tell her, “That’s what I’m saying. Though I’m sure someone else will decide to show up and stir up trouble eventually, but we can easily end anyone who tries, and we have people listening to the talkers so we should know in advance if anyone is headed our way.”

She frowns deeper still and she cocks her hip out as she crosses her arms over her chest and asks, “Then why didn’t you know about them?” she finishes by sweeping her arm towards the dumpsters.

I frown back, “Honestly, we knew it was only a matter of time before they showed up, but you have to understand, everyone in the Supernatural world is scared of my family, but they knew we were temporarily weaker, or at least they thought we were. So they were more scared of the seven we just killed, therefore, no one wanted to talk to us about their plans for fear we’d lose and they’d be made to pay for the betrayal.”

I look her in the eyes and tell her, “Now no one else will think twice about giving us information in the hopes of staying on our good side. So we should have a decent heads up the next time someone else decides to come to our town and fuck with the citizens. Okay?”

Her posture relaxes slightly as she nods and my eyes pop open wide when she says, “Okay, I don’t know why but despite what you are I still find myself trusting you and your judgment. If you say it shouldn’t be an issue anymore and that you think the town is actually safer after tonight, then I’ll trust you on that until you give me a reason not to.”
We all smile and nod as I tell her, “Oh rest assured your daughter would have something to say if we didn’t do everything we can to defend this town. So would the Human members of our family and while I know you think it’s the Vampires with the power, it’s really the Humans in our family who hold the power. We just do what they tell us to, well most of the time, I draw the line at watching romantic comedies.”

I laugh as does the rest of our family and I smile slightly as Liz joins in. After a minute, ‘Bekah speaks up, “Damon, why don’t I pull my SUV around back and I’ll start loading the bodies into the back.” She turns her face slightly towards Liz and asks, “Are we taking the Humans too or do you think, Sheriff, that this town can handle eight more Humans being attacked by yet another wild animal?”

Liz frowns and looks long and hard at me then shakes her head, “Damon I hate to leave the families wondering and never knowing but there have been too many animal attacks to stand up to much more scrutiny. I think the Humans need to just disappear too.”

I nod and Rebekah speaks up again, “Sheriff if you come over with me we can get the IDs and addresses of the victims and then we can compel the families who aren’t on Vervain not to worry about their loved ones. Maybe some of them ran off to be together or something?”

I’m still nodding as I say, “That’s an excellent idea Beks. Liz if you’re agreeable we’ll do that then at least the friends and family who aren’t on Vervain can be at peace about their loved ones’ disappearances.”

As her features darken and her eyes narrow she takes a hard obvious swallow so I hold my hands up in a defensive manner and tell her, “Don’t look at me like that Liz, I’m the first to admit it’s not ideal, but it’s all I feel we can really do at this point. Either the families never get closure or we compel them to have the closure they deserve. I will however defer to you on that decision, since you are the one who will have to deal with the families.”

Finally, she nods as she sighs and her shoulders droop. I rest my hand on her shoulder and tell her, “I’m serious Liz; it should be over at least for a while now. You all really are safer with us here at this point and I know I speak for my entire family when I say we regret that we weren’t able to prevent the deaths of these eight innocent kids. We were the target of this attack and they were used to draw us out, but I can’t emphasize enough how no one else is delusional enough to think they stand a chance against us.”

I smile slightly and tell her, “The town has maybe ten years until we’re forced to relocate for a few decades, but I think I again speak for everyone when I say even after we leave we will come back every few decades and protect the town until we have to leave again. With the exception of Ric, Lexi, Reyna, and Carys the rest of the members of my family were born here and all of us love this town and want to keep its residents as safe as possible.”

She nods and says, “I know,” she turns to Rebekah and gestures for her to go get her SUV, “I’ll meet you over there Rebekah.”

The Original nods and gets in her car. I pick up Valdis and carry her over to the other bodies. I arrive at the bodies a moment after Rebekah does, and we make quick work of lowering the seats in the back of the SUV into the floor boards so that they lie flat and give us more room to pile the Vampires into the car, and I make sure to grab their hearts as well. Then I gently pick up the first Human and place her in back of the SUV after Liz takes note of her identity and writes down her address based on what her license says.

We make quick work of it, and when we finish I get into the front passenger seat. Before I know it,
Rebekah is driving us towards the boarding house. Half way there, Balthazaar calls to tell me, “Brother, Lilith is awake. It really did count.”

I smile and tell him, “That’s surprising but welcome news, Brother. We’ll be at the house in ten minutes so I’ll come up and see her when we get there.”

We hang up and when we arrive at the boarding house, we quickly move the bodies to the garden in the back of the house where I built a fire pit. Granted my plan when I added it to the garden was s’more’s, which Rebekah loves, but it’s big enough to burn a body or two at a time.

When we’ve got them all piled up, we go into the living room through the French doors that lead to the gardens. Bek’s grabs the lighter off the mantle and heads back out into the garden to begin burning the bodies. Before she goes out the door she says, “Damon you can go check on everyone. I’ll start on the pile now since it’s going to take a while to burn 15 bodies, especially the Humans.”

I nod and as the rest of our family arrives, I go upstairs to check on Stefan and Katherine. Balthazaar, barely lets me enter the room before he says, “She’s fine, and she remembers everything so it really did count.”

Even though he already told me my eyes widen. It actually counted, will wonders never cease? My eyes widen even more when Lilith lays her hand against her breastbone and gives a heavy sigh before she says, “Drago, for what it’s worth I’m sorry I forced our family to turn, and I’m even more sorry I didn’t listen to you when you advised against turning the other seven.”

As Drago I’ve always been better than most at being able to tell when she’s playing someone or lying through her teeth, so I pause really looking at her and trying to see if she’s playing me now. When I determine that she’s serious and not giving me the line she knows I want to hear, I say, “I’m not going to say it’s okay because it’s not, and I hope from now on you’ll take all recommendations from your family members seriously, especially the ones from those older than you.”

She moves on her bed and then says, “I’m better than I was Drago. I know as Katherine I was still a pain in the ass, but I learned the lessons I needed to learn. I will listen to all advice from my family from now on and not just because I know you and Bonnie will kill me if I do something stupid or put any of us in danger in the future, but because I’ve finally come to respect people other than me.”

Her hand is back at her breastbone as she tells me, “I mean it when I say I’m sorry for all the trouble I’ve caused everyone, and not just as Lilith but as Katherine too. I shouldn’t have played Damon and Stefan off each other and messed with their heads and hearts. I hope someday you and Dante as well as the others can come to forgive me for the wrongs I’ve perpetrated as both Lilith and Katherine.”

My head tilts to the side slightly, and I narrow my eyes at her, but her words seem genuine, so I’m cautiously optimistic as I tell her, “I appreciate your apology, and I’m willing to give you a chance to prove yourself. As for forgiving Katherine’s actions, well that’s going to take some time for the wounds not to be so fresh.”

Her voice trembles and the scent of her tears perfumes the air as she says, “Thank you for the opportunity to prove myself, I won’t let you down.”

With a frown and furrowed brows, I tell her, “No one’s perfect, so I’m sure you’ll do something down the line that the rest of us won’t approve of. However, just as everyone has forgiven Stefan, Damon, Elijah and the rest for our wrong doings we’ll do the same for you provided you continue to be genuinely sorry for whatever mistakes you make. We’re all works in progress, Lilith.”
I smile as Bonnie enters Katherine’s room and says, “I couldn’t have said that better myself, Brother.”

I laugh as I turn to look at her standing beside me, “I’m pretty sure I was just quoting you, Sister.”

She laughs too as I hear Asya go out into the garden to stand beside Rebekah and offer, “’Bekah, I’ll stand guard and burn them while you go check on the others.”

I frown and I imagine Rebekah is frowning too as she asks, “Don’t you want to be with Dante?”

I can admit I’m wondering the same thing, so I shake my head when she says, “No, I’m too nervous. I’ll go up again once he’s awake, but right now, I need busy work to keep my mind off his being dead and worrying that it’s permanent despite my knowing he loves Lexi like a sister.”

Rebekah says, “Okay, then thank you.”

I hear her enter the house and then walk up the stairs and down the hall towards Stefan’s room as Lexi talks with Briseis and says, “I think I’ve made my decision, I don’t want to be the weak link anymore, and I don’t want to eventually die and leave Stefan. When he died protecting me I realized I’ve been given a chance at a family and immortality. I won’t throw that chance away.”

She stops talking and a moment later Rebekah tells her from her spot in the doorway, “I have to say I’m really happy to hear you decided that way, Lexi. For one, I like you, and for two, I’m not sure how well Stefan would handle your death a second time even if it was a natural Human death after living 80 more years.”

I agree with everything she just said. Stefan, even as Dante would not fare well if Lexi died again. I smile as I hear Lexi say, “I like you too ‘Bekah.”

I can hear her smile as she enters the room and asks, “How is he?”

Briseis answers, “He should wake any minute now.”

As if on cue, he begins gasping for air. I rush down the hall and suddenly I’m beside him holding him and trying to calm him down, “It’s okay, Brother, you’re okay, try to breathe through your nose.”

After a minute, he calms down and looks at the four of us then his eyes focus on me and he says, “I remember it all, Brother. I’m so sorry our behavior caused you and Briseis to be spelled too.”

I smile and tell him with shining eyes, “Think nothing of it, Brother; I honestly believe we’re all better for having been spelled. And I don’t think our family would be as big or as strong if Tianna hadn’t of spelled the six of us. I have no hard feelings towards her or the rest of you. Just don’t piss off any more Witches, okay and I’ll call us even.”

Dante laughs and says, “You have yourself a deal.”

I laugh back and then ask, “Are you hungry?” as I hold up a blood bag that Briseis placed on the bed side table earlier.

Dante nods and takes the bag and slowly, much slower than even Stefan would have, drinks it down, “Thank you.”

I smile, as everything is mostly right in my world. I believe everything has worked out how it was intended, all that’s left is for the Humans to become Vampires and then all will be right in my world.
Just a little warning. There is mention of a pedophile in this chapter, but nothing mentioned is more than what you might hear on the nightly news, so it shouldn’t be a trigger for anyone, but I wanted to warn you all the same just in case. For the most part you can skip this chapter if you feel it’s necessary as it’s mostly meant to tie up Damon and Liz’s relationship, which although important to the story arc won’t leave you clueless if you skip it.

Tuesday, November 23, 2010; 9:40 a.m.

Despite sitting in the living room, I can hear Bonnie sitting in her car out in the driveway. Her seat squeaks slightly as she leans forward and snaps the visor down presumably so she can see her face in the little mirror as she wipes at her eyes. The scent of her tears has been tickling my nose since she turned onto the street our house is on.

What happened that she’s crying? Right now, she should be at school with Stefan, Elena, Jeremy, Caroline, Matt, Tyler, and Rebekah. It’s very unlike Bonnie to leave school during the day, so something big must have happened to cause her to return to the house that has quickly become home to her despite it also being home to twelve current Vampires, a Hybrid, and five others including her who will one day soon become Vampires.

She takes a deep breath and then snaps the visor closed before getting out of the car and grabbing her purse and backpack.

Balthazaar, Lexi, Finn, Kol, Carys, Reyna, and Laraina were planning to go into the cave system and remap the tunnels for us today. Lexi stayed home instead of going out with them though after discovering yesterday evening that her Vampire boyfriend, Lee, whom she turned to spend eternity with, was so grief stricken about her death that a few months after he tried to kill me in Atlanta he killed himself. He died a few months before she came back as a Human.

Yes, that’s another death I regret. I told her as much, and she smiled a bit and told me Lee’s death wasn’t my fault because despite the fact that I killed her Lee is the one who decided to kill himself. She says I had no control over that and his actions fall on Lee and Lee alone. My chest is still tight and there is a pain in the back of my throat anytime I think about it, but I’m trying to let go of the guilt since she seems so certain it’s not my fault. I don’t want to compound her grief by adding my guilt into the mix. Anyway, she is obviously and understandably upset, so everyone agreed she
could stay home today, and if they find any Vampire free zones in their hunt today they can go back with her another day.

Besides Lexi, who is in her room towards the end of the lower Northeast wing, I am the only other person home right now. As Bonnie heads in and drops her bags by the foot of the stairs that lead to her room, I pretend I didn’t listen to her as she sat out in her car for ten minutes crying.

Still, I barely contain myself, so she hardly makes it into the living room before I casually ask, “Sabrina, did you forget some—” I can’t keep up the charade and cut myself off when I see her slack facial expression and trembling lips and instead ask, “Have you been crying?” I sit up straight and turn as I move my legs off the couch where I was lying reading the paper. At the concern in my voice, her tears start back up so as I fold the newspaper back up I ask, “What’s wrong?”

She shakes her head and kind of nods at the same time as she tells me, “Caroline’s mom called this morning. She was obviously shaken up and doing the mom thing by calling and making sure her baby was safe because they found the little girl that’s been missing for three days.”

I sigh and with a heaviness in my chest ask, “Shit, was it the same as the others?”

She nods with a set jaw and her lips thinned out she’s pressing them together so hard, “Far as I know, yeah, Drago we have to do—”

I shake my head ever so slightly as I sigh again interrupting to ask, “Bonnie, what can we do? I talked to Liz about it the first time you told me about it, but everything she and her people have says it’s a Human predator, not a Supernatural one.”

Her voice trembles as she asks me, “But there’s got to be something a family of Vampires and Witches can do to catch the asshole that’s hunting little girls?”

I give a long slow sigh and reach out my hand to her before I tell her, “You obviously have a plan, so tell it to me, and I’ll see if I can talk Liz into letting us do whatever you want us to do.”

She probably knew I’d do whatever I can to help her help, but her posture still sags as she takes my hand and sits beside me. I wrap my arm around her shoulders just before she says, “Well it’s not so much a plan as an idea that could lead to a plan. If the sheriff will let us see the evidence, then we could look for something the asshole might have left behind and I could do a tracking spell to find him.”

I frown and ask, “How are we going to know it's his?”

She smiles a little to soften her next words, “I know you don’t want to be characterized as a bloodhound, but your nose is even better than one of the K-9’s the sheriff’s department got last year.”

I laugh at that, “Okay, so to be clear you want me to smell everything and find the common smell and then figure out what was his based on what has the strongest scent of him on it.”

She nods and I can see the humor shine in her eyes briefly before she remembers the direness of the situation and the light in her eyes dies just a little, “I know it’s not ideal, but somebody has to stop him, he’s kidnapped, violated and then killed four little girls in the last two weeks.”

I nod and pick up my phone off the table where it was sitting. After taking a cleansing breath, I dial. When Liz picks up she’s obviously distracted so I tell her, “Liz I know you’re busy with the little girl who was found this morning, but Bonnie and I would like to try to help you catch this monster.”
I can hear her frowning as she moves to a more secluded area to quietly tell me, “Damon, it’s not a Supernatural.”

“I know. After you told me the details you could I agree that it’s likely a Human, however, what you might not realize is that Bonnie is a Witch, and she would very much like to try to track this guy using her Magick.”

She doesn’t say anything for a minute then just after I hear her run her hand through her hair she asks, “A real Witch? Like really, a Witch?”

I laugh, “Liz, you find it difficult to believe she’s a Witch even though you know Vampires and Werewolves exist? I think out of those three things the Witch is the less fantastical.”

She chuckles though I don’t sense much humor in it, “Okay I see your point. So what does Bonnie think she can do exactly, and what does she need from me to do it?”

I smile, as Liz is taking this much better than I thought she would. “Well first I’d have to smell the evidence you’ve collected to see if I can find a common scent that likely belongs to him and then use that to determine what actually belongs to him based on what has the heaviest concentration of his scent on it. Once I do that, Bonnie would need to be able to touch the item and could do a spell to track the owner of the object to his current location. Though I don’t know the specifics as yet I know she’s done a similar spell before that found Elena when she was missing, so I’m hopeful it’ll work.”

I pause briefly then add, “I know explaining how you found him will probably be a nightmare, but I could compel him to think you found him some other way or I don’t know maybe just to tell the truth and then you could ask him about the crimes and he’ll tell you everything you need. I figure the important part is stopping him before he finds his next victim.”

Liz sighs and I’ve seen her dark look with the narrowed eyes and pursed lips directed at me often enough in recent times that I can clearly picture her face as she says, “I don’t know if I’ll support compelling him about how we find him but I might consider you compelling him to tell the truth. Either way I agree the important part is catching him before he can hurt anyone else. I’m still at the scene where we found the last victim collecting evidence, so I’ll call you in a few hours when we’ve got everything collected, and then we can meet in my office and go through the evidence for all four victims.”

I nod despite her not being able to see it and tell her, “Sounds good. We’ll wait for your call.”

I explain Liz’s half of the conversation to Bonnie and then finish by telling her, “She’ll meet us at her office with the evidence later today as they’re still trying to collect evidence right now.”

She nods as another tear escapes her eye. I let go of her while I was on the phone, so I open my arms to her and she practically throws herself into them and sits leaning against me as I hold her occasionally whispering, “We’ll do our best to stop this monster.”

She falls asleep a few minutes later, so two hours later when my phone rings it clearly startles her awake. When I see it’s Liz calling I pick up and ask, “Liz are you ready for us?”

Her voice is strained as she quietly says, “No, he took another little girl who was playing in her front yard.”

Shit, I sit up straight and ask, “What? When?”

She sighs and I hear her run her hand through her hair again as she says, “About an hour ago.”
I pause and think for a minute then say, “That might actually help us. Can you get something that belongs to the girl? If so, instead of trying to track him, we can track the live victim. It’ll have a better chance of working since we’ll know for a fact the item is hers and it should tell us where he’s got her.”

Bonnie’s heart is beating fast and hard as she realizes what’s happened. She tugs on my arm and tells me, “Blood from a blood relative would be better if she’ll let you compel someone into donating a small amount.”

I repeat what she said and then Liz asks, “How will that work better?”

I narrow my eyes and tell her, “I’m not the Witch, but if Bonnie says it’s better then I believe her. Plus, I know it works Liz, someone took Elena 300 miles away, and Bonnie tracked her using Jeremy’s blood to within a mile radius of where they were holding her. If we’re lucky like we were then there will only be one or two shelters nearby and we’ll be able to find him more easily.”

She’s so upset she doesn’t realize I’ve been talking to Bonnie so she asks, “Okay, obviously time is of the essence here, so how quickly can you get Bonnie out of school?”

“She’s here with me now since she was so upset about the little girl you found this morning that she signed herself out of school and came home to ask me to try to help you, so we can meet you at their house any time now.”

She gives me the address then I tell her, “Okay, bring a map of the area with you.”

She replies, “I will, tell Bonnie I said thanks for this.”

I smile, “I will. See you then.”

When I hang up I say, “We need to go now, he took another little girl who was playing in her front yard.”

She stands and after grabbing her purse follows me out to my Camaro. Twenty minutes later, we arrive at the Sullivan’s house and Bonnie says, “God, I know Julie Sullivan. She’s in Jeremy’s class. I didn’t know she had a little sister though.”

I nod as we get out and walk up to the yellow tape blocking access to the yard and house. Deputy Jenkins is standing a few feet away so I wave him over. When he reaches me he says, “Mr. Salvatore.”

I nod and tell him, “Deputy Jenkins, Sheriff Forbes is expecting us.”

Liz must have warned him we were coming because he lifts the tape and he lets us into the restricted area before he walks us to the front door and knocks. Liz opens the door and steps outside as the deputy goes back to his post. Liz’s shoulders are tense and she wets her lips before asking, “How do you want to do this? I’m not comfortable compelling anyone more than absolutely necessary so…”

When she trails off Bonnie asks her, “Is Julie the little girl’s sister?”

She nods so Bonnie asks, “Is she here?”

When Liz nods, Bonnie continues, “Let me talk to her and we can get her to help without compulsion if possible and then Damon can just compel her to forget when we’re done.”

A pain flashes across Liz’s face. I know she would rather we not compel anyone, but it really can’t
be helped, and she clearly knows that as her brows pinch together, and she nods again before leading us into the house. We go up a flight of stairs to a pink bedroom with pink glitter letters stating it’s ‘Mary’s Room’ emblazoned on the door and surrounded by colorful fairy decals.

There are more fairy decals stuck to the walls of the room as a girl who looks to be about Jeremy’s age is sitting on the bed and hugging a little purple teddy bear. She’s quietly crying as she stares at one of the fairies stuck to the wall, so Bonnie heads in and sits beside her. She looks up and her eyes widen at Bonnie’s presence, “Bonnie, what, what are you doing here?”

She sighs and jumps in with both feet, “The sheriff knows I have a skill that might be useful in finding your sister. I need your help though. Will you come with us?”

Julie looks at the door and sees me, whom she’s never met, standing in the doorway with Liz. She blinks rapidly and rubs the back of her neck so Liz says, “I’ll be coming with you Julie, so you’ll be perfectly safe.”

Julie nods and stands on unsteady legs before placing the teddy bear down on the pillow of the bed. Bonnie picks it up and asks, “Do you mind if we take this for now?”

She looks ready to say no but Bonnie guesses at her reason, “I promise we’ll give it back after we’ve found Mary, okay?”

She nods so Bonnie hands the bear to her and we walk out of the room and down the stairs. I compel her parents not to worry and we head to our car. Liz obviously trusts me more than she did when she first found out I was a Vampire but not nearly enough to have Julie come with us so she says, “Julie and I will follow you. Where are we going?”

I give a small nod and sigh a bit then say, “The boarding house is probably the best bet as I know Bonnie will have everything she needs to do this if you brought a map of the area.”

Liz nods back, “I did.”

I nod and we get into our cars. Bonnie and I don’t talk on the way and I quietly say under my breath, “Please, Goddess, if you listen to the prayers of Vampires, let this work.”

When we arrive, I invite Liz and Julie into the house and the Magick finds them both trustworthy and loyal to us, so they pass through the doorway with no resistance.

Bonnie bites her lip and looks down before asking, “Drago, where should we…”

I answer when it’s clear she’s not going to finish her sentence, “I think Liz and Julie can be trusted to know about the rooms in the basement.”

She nods and leads the way. Liz’s eyes widen when we go down one flight of stairs, walk down a short hallway behind the stairs and then go down another flight of stairs instead of just the one flight she likely expected. Bonnie leads us past a handful of rooms full of books and comfortable reading chairs as well as a few tables like you’d find in a library, and that’s essentially what each room is, a library of Grimoires and Journals sorted by date and the ancestor who wrote them.

Almost everyone in our family has books written by an ancestor in at least one of the rooms, with Lexi and Matt being the only exceptions I can think of offhand. Even Ric is represented by all of Isobel’s research and his own journals chronicling his search for me and answers as to what happened to his wife.

I bring my thoughts back to the here and now as we enter Bonnie’s workroom, which holds
everything she might need to do a spell including shelves of jars holding herbs and various artifacts. She stops in front of a round table and holds out her hand, “Can I have the map please?”

When Liz hands it to Bonnie, she lays it out flat on the table and then gets a charcoal burner disk and lights it and a few different herbs she takes off her shelves before running the smoke over the map. Then she tells Julie, “I need to cut your hand, it shouldn’t be too deep. I don’t need a lot of blood, but it’s what will allow us to track your sister.”

Julie bites her lip and looks at her for a long minute with wide eyes before she asks, “You’re, you’re a Witch?”

Bonnie nods and surprisingly the younger girl nods back then she walks to Bonnie and holds out her hand. She grabs the dagger she now knows I’ve passed down through the generations and last gave to Tianna and drags it across Julie’s palm and then tells her, “Squeeze your hand a little and let the blood fall on Mystic Falls on the map.”

She does as she was told to and then Bonnie hands her a tissue to press against her wound. She says a few words and then we all watch as the blood begins moving on the map. Julie gasps as does Liz when they notice it moving.

Finally, after a minute it stops so Bonnie leans down and looks before pointing to it and asking, “Drago, I think they’re at the old quarry, but I don’t remember there being any buildings out there.”

I frown and tell her, “There’s an old maintenance shack and a very small and very old trapper shack that used to belong to a caretaker out on the far edge of the property opposite of where we were when we went there.”

Liz nods and says, “I know the buildings you’re talking about. They’re not much and probably wouldn’t stand up to a big storm, but they’re probably stable enough for someone to hide in.” She talks into her radio and tells her deputies where to look.

Twenty minutes later, after Bonnie has bandaged Julie’s hand, we’re all sitting in the living room waiting when we hear Liz’s radio say, “Sheriff, we got her. Suspect is dead. Mary’s a little dirty but otherwise unharmed from what we can tell.”

She sighs and smiles slightly as she tells the person, “Take her to the hospital just to be sure and I’ll meet you there.”

Liz stands as Julie sits sobbing into the purple fur of Mary’s teddy bear. Liz shakes my hand, and I can feel the difference. This event has helped solidify in her mind that though I’m a Vampire I’m not actually one of the monsters. She smiles at me and I can see the trust that had been broken when she discovered my secret has been, if not completely restored, at least most of the way restored. I know with time Liz and I will be back to where we were before she discovered I was ‘one of them’.

She then turns to Bonnie and hugs her and says, “I can’t thank you both enough for contacting me and helping out. We wouldn’t have thought to look there in time I don’t think.”

I say, “Happy to help, Liz.”

She nods and helps Julie stand. Julie hugs Bonnie and whispers “Thank you.”

She whispers back “You’re welcome.”

Then I catch the younger girl’s eye and tell her, “The sheriff got a call while at your house that they found Mary and she offered to take you to the hospital to see her. You won’t remember meeting me
or Bonnie’s involvement in finding your sister.”

She nods and repeats what I said then Liz says, “Thank you,” again and leads the still crying girl out to her cruiser.

Bonnie reaches for me, and I pull her into my arms and kiss the top of her head before telling her, “Well done, Sister, you just saved an innocent little girl from untold horrors and certain death.”

She bursts into tears, and I move us, so we’re sitting again as I pet her hair and repeat over and over, “I’m so proud of you Bonnie. You saved that little girl… and who knows how many that would have followed. Today is a good day.”

She cries herself back to sleep in my arms, both of us confident that there is at least one less predator hunting in Mystic Falls and just in time for Thanksgiving.
Monday, June 04, 2012; just before 7:11 a.m.

It’s been two years almost to the day since I died from a Werewolf bite I got protecting Caroline and Matt from Tyler as he changed after Klaus kidnapped him and Care. To say my world has changed for the better since that night is pretty much the understatement of my entire 490,456 years on this earth.

My family that at the time of my death consisted of Stefan, Elena, Caroline, Jeremy, and me has grown to include eleven Vampires other than me, including the four remaining Originals, a Hybrid, four Humans, and a Witch. The Witch, Bonnie, at the time I died, hated me through and through and now, well now she loves me as though she’s my sister, and right now she’s preparing the spell we’ll need to turn the Vampires, Humans and herself into Vampire Hybrids using the reworked Pervonachalnyue spell.

The only reason we waited two years was so that Jeremy could graduate from high school as a Human at least once. We had a party for him the night before last after the ceremony. Now we’re sitting in Bonnie’s Magick workroom at the round table that sits all 18 members of our family comfortably.

Laraina, Carys, and Reyna are watching everything Bonnie does as she prepares to stir the spell. They’ve been very clear that this is one of the very few spells that requires a live Witch or Briseis to stir it.

Jeremy is handing things to Bonnie as she asks for them. He hands her a bottle of some dried herb and asks, “So will we all need nifty day rings too?”

Bonnie laughs and looks around the table at each member of our family as she says, “No right now, the rings and necklace Drago, Dante, Asya, and Lilith wear are merely decorative. They don’t need them anymore and just as those who’ve already experienced the original version of this spell are immune to the rays of the sun we’ll be immune to it too. Besides, Tyler doesn’t need one after being turned into a Hybrid and since we’ll all be Hybrids too we won’t need them either.”

Jer smiles and sort of bounces as he says, “Cool.”

She smiles and then looks at me, “It’s time. I have to add everyone’s blood in the order of oldest to youngest.”

Lexi speaks up then, “Uh where do I fall on that list, I mean on the one hand I was 350 when I died the last time, but now I’ve only been Human again for less than two years.”

Bonnie smiles at the question and says, “Well, the spell we did to bring you back brought you back
as a 21-year-old Human so now you’re technically three months’ shy of 23, so you’re after Ric but before Me, Tyler, Matt, and Jer in that order.”

We all nod and Bonnie walks to me with the dagger Lilith and Balthazaar’s daughter used to feed me the first time I woke as a Vampire. I hold up my hand and she slices my palm over the bowl Jeremy’s holding for her. There are 18 of us who need to drink this potion, so I keep my wound open as long as possible as she holds my bleeding hand for a long while to make sure she has enough blood from each of us.

She slowly goes around the table collecting blood from everyone, though she collects blood from Briseis three times, once with her own blood between Balthazaar and Lilith, once with Klaus’ blood after Finn but before Kol, and once with Elena’s blood after Matt but before Jeremy. When Bonnie has everyone’s blood she stands back at her seat and begins adding various herbs to the mixture. When she’s done with that, she begins chanting and after three minutes she stops then adds another herb, which I’m surprised to see is Vervain.

I raise my brow towards her but she just smiles and says, “This will make us all immune to Vervain. It’ll even allow us to compel those who have it on or in them. I wasn’t going to do it but the 316 dead Witches and most of my ancestors all visited me and told me we’re all now worthy of this gift, so here we are. Incidentally, in a second I’m going to add Wolf’s Bane and we’ll be immune to that too.”

Wow, for one Witch to think Vampires or even Hybrids are worthy of those gifts is amazing but hundreds, possibly thousands of Witches? Just wow.

Still I nod and watch as the mixture begins to boil and bubble likely from the Vervain reacting to the Vampire blood in the bowl. She says some more words over it and then a puff of smoke erupts from the bowl as the bubbling stops. The three Witch Vampires and the Originals all smile so I know it was supposed to do that. Then she repeats her actions with the Wolf’s Bane.

My muscles are quivering and twitchy and there are butterflies that feel like they’re break dancing in my stomach. I can admit, even if only to myself, that I am pretty nervous, not about adding Vampires to my family, but about whether the spell will work. Don’t get me wrong I trust Bonnie implicitly, but if the Magick chooses not to work then my Human family members will be permanently dead.

She opens her eyes and smiles at all of us before pouring some of the concoction into each of our goblets, which she had commissioned specifically for this day and are sitting in front of each of us. When she finishes she smiles and says, “Okay, it’s time, everyone drink up.”

A number of us let out nervous chuckles and a few of us rub the backs of our necks while everyone else pretty much bites their lips as we each pick up the goblet and then quickly drink the whole thing down. I notice we all take a sip and then chug the rest as apparently my memory of the horrible taste was not nearly as accurate as I thought and that’s saying something because I always thought that it tasted like raw sewage and the most disgusting thing I’d ever put in my mouth.

When we’ve all finished drinking I stand and faster than the Humans can see I’m around the table and as agreed upon I snap each of the Vampires’ necks, followed by Tyler’s and then Ric’s neck and then I quickly snap Lexi’s, Matt’s, Jer’s and finally Bonnie’s neck. Afterward I sit and wait for Dante to wake so he can snap my neck.

I rub my neck repeatedly and actually get up and begin pacing and occasionally looking at everyone who is either is in a heap on the floor or slumped over the table as they sit in their seats. I glance at
the clock on the wall and realize they’ve been unconscious for 27 minutes when Dante sits up. I move over to him and he smiles at me before standing and snapping my neck.

According to the clock 27 minutes later, I wake to see Dante looking at me with a serene smile on his face. While I was unconscious each of the previously Vampire members of our family woke up, probably in order of age. We sit quietly all uncharacteristically fidgeting and shifting in our seats every few minutes obviously too nervous to talk.

As she was previously told to by Bonnie, once I wake Briseis walks around the room and, in order of age again, feeds each of the Vampires Elena’s blood. When I drink from her I get really dizzy, which hasn’t happened since I was dying from Tyler’s bite, and then I feel my muscles and bones changing positions almost painlessly and the next thing I know I’m a Wolf.

I stand there on four legs for a minute trying to adjust to the change in perspective. I notice that I seem to have retained my, for lack of a better way to put it, Human mind and Humanity plus all of my control seems even stronger than it was an hour ago.

I watch through Wolf eyes as Dante feeds from Briseis and then changes form. When Briseis finishes feeding Balthazaar, she drinks Elena’s blood left over from before she broke her spell and then she shifts into a Wolf. The four of us look at each other and then shift back. After Briseis puts on the clothes she brought down for this occasion she goes back to feeding everyone only stopping a couple times to drink from a few bags of Human blood.

I change into my own set of spare clothes and watch as everyone feeds and turns into a Wolf before changing back and then putting on some clothes that they also brought down here at Bonnie’s instruction.

Finally, at the one-hour and twenty-first minute mark Ric moans and sits up on the floor before rubbing his neck and saying, “I’m not sure if I should be thanking you for doing that too fast for me to notice or if I should be angry that I didn’t see it coming even though I knew it was coming.”

I laugh, “Be happy, Ric, you hopefully weren’t afraid for longer than absolutely necessary and I hope it hurt as little as possible.” He nods as Briseis goes to him and feeds him her blood. He quickly shifts too and then the other formerly Human members of our family begin waking.

After we’ve all fed from Briseis and then shifted Bonnie stands up and smiles before saying, “Wow, everything is brighter, that’s kind of neat.” She pauses then says, “Holy shit, I can hear people talking and animals moving miles away. How the hell do you stand all the noise and not go crazy from it?”

I laugh and tell her, “You should figure out in an hour or two how to focus on one or two voices or sounds alone and zone out everyone else. After that you should be able to zone everything out if you choose too and then it won’t drive you crazy.”

She nods, as does everyone else since everyone, me included now has improved senses because of the spell. The spell basically added the strength, speed, senses, and control I had as the oldest to everyone else’s strength, speed, senses and control. So now the formerly Humans have the strength, speed, senses, and control of a 490,456-year-old Hybrid and I now have everything a 980,912-year-old Hybrid would have. Everyone else’s age has basically increased by my original age so for instance the Originals are now essentially 491,497 years old give or take a few years based on when they were born.

I pause as I myself work at tuning the noise out since my range apparently more than tripled, then turn to all of them and tell them, “Welcome to the family.”
They beam at me as I sit and pour blood from blood bags into their goblets and motion everyone to drink. None of them reacts to the blood despite it being Human. Bonnie and the other Witches assured me beforehand that this time everyone even the newly turned Vampires will at least have control similar to my own just before Bonnie cast the spell. In fact, that’s part of why her ancestors decided to rework the original Pervonachalnyue spell to keep everyone from killing anyone. And although I am certain eventually at some point each of them will lose control and possibly kill someone I am confident that the love of their family will help them learn from the experience. They will never be plagued by the guilt of having killed thousands of innocents the way the older of us have been.

I look around the room as my family enjoys the first of many Vampire meals together. After taking a sip of my blood I say, “Thank you Tianna.” All those years ago she placed a spell on six entitled, disloyal, unloving, and spoiled Vampires and effectively turned us into a loving and loyal family who would willingly die to save the ones they love, their family.
June 04, 3012; morning

As I roll over in bed, I notice the time on the clock on the nightstand on the other side of the bed. It’s five in the morning and I really just want to go back to sleep but I know we’re going to have a full house today as most of our descendants are coming for the party. What party you might ask? Well every year on the day the reworked Pervonachalnyue spell was cast we, read that as Asya, throws a party to celebrate another year of us officially being family. This will be the 1,000th year celebration so I’m expecting it to be way over the top.

Originally, the only guests invited were the 18 of us but now our descendants come too. More about that in a minute, first, Bonnie and the other Witches, including Briseis, Balthazaar, and the three Originals who regained their Magick when the reworked spell was cast, have done a lot of spells to help our family in the last thousand years.

First we hid Esther in the Mariana Trench just as Matt suggested after placing a number of spells on the coffin to prevent it from breaking or decomposing or being opened if found. Bonnie also did the spell Finn found so even 1,000 years later no one has ever found the coffin with the Original Witch inside it despite Humans regularly exploring that section of ocean in this day and age.

Some of the other spells they’ve all done for this family included spells to make us all both appear younger for a time so we can attend high school if we want. They also do spells to make us appear to age as though we’re Humans, which also allows the Witches to make us all look slightly different each time so we look like we’re related to ourselves but not clones. We take turns being the adults in the family so some of us are always spelled to look like we’re old enough to be out of high school and the rest are spelled to look the right age to attend junior high and high school and then we all age like normal Humans after that. Then when we look to be in our 80’s or 90’s we fake our deaths, and then we come back as preteen or teenage long lost cousins of the younger ones who suddenly lost their parents and are in need of legal guardians. Therefore, except for the occasional stint at college and the many vacations we all take as a family we’ve been able to live in Mystic Falls pretty consistently.

The reworked Pervonachalnyue spell had an unintended consequence or more specifically turning us
all into Hybrids had an unintended consequence. A month after the spell was cast all the women were surprised to find that they were menstruating. As I’m sure you realize that was a little startling for some of the women who, except for their time as Humans, hadn’t bled for hundreds of thousands of years. As a safety precaution, we all started using condoms and the women went on birth control. However eventually each couple decided to stop using the birth control and we’ve all had children together. The first time in 455,000 years that Briseis told me we were expecting was easily one of the best days of my long life. Incidentally, the first time Bonnie told us she and Jer were expecting and that mine and Briseis’ and Balthazaar and Lilith’s lines would be continuing was one of the best days too.

Our children and theirs are all Hybrids too, Vervain and Wolf’s Bane immune Hybrids to be specific. The ones descended from Balthazaar and Lilith, Briseis and me, Bonnie and Jeremy, Carys, Laraina, Reyna, and the three other Originals all also have Magick due to at least one person in each pairing being Witchy or in Balthazaar and Briseis’ cases Magickal.

Our descendants all know our secret though we did begin compelling the younger children not to tell our secret to anyone after two incidents where children got angry with us and tried to out us to the council. When they’re older and less prone to temper tantrums we remove the compulsions.

Since Bonnie included the Wolf’s Bane and Vervain in the potion that made us all Vampire Hybrids we’re all able to compel even those who ingest Vervain on a daily basis, so the council was no match for our compulsions despite all of them taking Vervain regularly.

There have been a few times when folks suspected we weren’t Human but that was usually fixed by compelling someone to suggest they slip Vervain and/or Wolf’s Bane in our food and see what happened. And again since Bonnie made us all immune to the herbs nothing happened and the council was convinced we were all Human.

Of course, since a Lockwood has held the office of Mayor most years since Tyler’s great, great, whatever became Mayor, with the notable exception of the four years that Caroline Forbes held the position, the job of keeping our secrets secret is much easier.

In case you’re wondering, her becoming Mayor happened only because she made one comment too many to Tyler about how easy his job should be. He dared her to find out and one things for sure after she held the job for four years she never made another disparaging comment in regards to his job as Mayor.

Briseis, Jeremy, Asya, Tyler, Ric, Dante, and myself are all always on the council when we reach adulthood so that helps with not only the secret keeping but the peace keeping too. Asya helps keep up appearances with her event planning business. Mostly she organizes the town functions every year such as the Founder’s Ball and the Miss Mystic Falls Pageant, which incidentally she, Beks, and Briseis usually take turns winning that event every three Human lifetimes. She also does a few weddings or birthday parties here and there for the wealthier or more ‘important’ members of the community, sweet sixteens are her favorite.

My friendship with Liz Forbes was fully restored, as was her trust in me, shortly after we helped rescue Mary from the pedophile that was hunting in our town. We remained very close until her death in 2056 of natural causes. After Liz retired in 2038, there were a few short-term sheriffs before little Mary Sullivan, who had been so moved by being rescued by the sheriff’s deputies, became Sheriff. However, after she retired, the job has been in the hands of one Stefan Salvatore ‘Jr.’ and Stefan/Dante and Caroline/Asya’s descendants.

Ric is still a history teacher, and Rebekah, who married him right after she graduated from college the first time, usually teaches English at the high school. Incidentally, Jeremy did end up going to art
school after all, and he usually teaches art at Mystic Falls High too.

Kol, who married Laraina, teaches history at the local college. His brother Finn, who has completely come to terms with who and what he is and has found peace and happiness within our family wound up teaching Art History there as well. His wife, Reyna and Laraina both help Bonnie and their descendants run the Witches’ Brew, which is her little Witchy shop that she opened in the center of town in Grayson Gilbert’s old office building after it was repaired from the fire that killed the tomb Vampires. It and most of the buildings in town have been torn down and rebuilt multiple times in our thousand years here but we all still think of it as the building where the tomb Vampires died.

Carys, mostly just raises her children with Tyler and does the things a mayor’s wife is expected to do, so all the charity events that she helps Asya plan and the like.

Lilith and Balthazaar own a financial planning firm that they run together. I wound up giving a good chunk of what I inherited from the tomb Vampires to each of the members of our family. Lilith and Balthazaar’s business allows them to manage most of our families’ huge fortunes and vast holdings as well as keep an eye on everyone else’s finances.

There are only ever maybe a handful of ‘wild animal attacks’ every decade or so since everyone in the Supernatural world knows Mystic Falls is off limits when it comes to killing. But when one happens we have a pretty easy time covering it up since Elena/Briseis and our descendants became doctors and fill the position of Coroner through the years.

Then there’s Matt, I bought him the Grill for his 30th birthday, so he and his children with Lexi and their children have been running it ever since, which allows us to keep tabs on the rumor mill since drunks still have loose lips even a thousand years later.

I pull my thoughts from my memories and focus on getting up and getting breakfast started, as I know 23 of our descendants arrived last night and hundreds more are expected later today.

As I get dressed, I look out the window at the neighborhood I had built for everyone while we were in college the first time after the spell was reworked. The boarding house is just down the street from the neighborhood I built where the forest used to be behind the boarding house. I started the neighborhood with eight houses, in addition to the boarding house, that are all comparable in size to the boarding house. Dante and Asya moved into one, while Balthazaar and Lilith moved into another. The remaining ones were originally intended for Kol, Finn, Beks, Laraina, Carys, and Reyna. However, by the time they all graduated from College, Kol was paired off with Laraina, Finn was with Reyna, Lexi was with Matt, Rebekah was with Ric, Tyler was with Carys, and Bonnie and Jeremy were still going strong so each couple got a house to call their own.

Of course, since we’ve had many children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren, etc., in the thousand years since I died from Tyler’s Werewolf bite the neighborhood has grown considerably. Every so often, I buy up all the properties adjacent to our neighborhood and then tear down what’s there and build new and bigger houses for the descendants that want to remain close to us.

All the houses have subbasements and they’re all connected to each other and the boarding house, which allows us to both travel between the houses without anyone knowing and also allows for room for all the books each of our Magickal members of our family have written with all their spell work in them. There’s even room for the journals of those members and our descendants who have taken after Dante, Briseis, and Ric and prefer to record everything that happens.

As I walk down the stairs of the boarding house, I laugh that Briseis hasn’t changed much since Dante and I signed over the house to her. We’ve made repairs through the years since it was built so very long ago but the spells Bonnie originally did to prevent mold, decay, and aging, seem to have
applied to the house as well and not just the items inside the house. Therefore, for the most part it’s
the same house. Briseis and I still live in it with our family and every morning all the many members
of our family congregate in the many times remodeled and drastically enlarged kitchen for breakfast
as made by Matt, Tyler, Ric, Finn, me, and some of our children whom we made sure followed after
their fathers’ cooking footsteps and not their mothers’.

Today is no different, and as I enter the kitchen, I discover Matt, Tyler, Ric, and Finn have already
arrived and started the coffee pot. We quickly set about making hundreds of pancakes, strips of
bacon, and links of sausage and soon various members of our family begin filtering into the room
and sitting down to eat.

I smile as Matt kisses Lexi good morning when she comes in and hands her the coffee he made for
her. She smiles as she’s greeted by the other members of our Vampire family. I turn my smile on the
Donovan children and tell them, “Vic, Kate, Matty, it’s ‘bout time you got here. I need my favorite
nieces and nephew to help make baby pancakes for all the kids who are still sleeping, can you guys
do that?”

They nod and practically vibrate out of their skins before they set about helping make breakfast. It’s
just a normal morning in the lives of 18 Vampire Hybrids and their family. Goddess I love my life. I
don’t think it gets any better than this. I say a prayer of thanks to whomever listens to the prayers of
Vampires and then continue making pancakes, which are still made exactly how each member of my
family likes them, even after all these years.

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The End

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Chapter End Notes

Well that’s the end of this story. What did you all think?

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!