



# The Lovely Letters

BOOK 1

by Rea Marie

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# Introduction

“Is no one ever on time anymore?” I wonder to myself as I drum my fingers across the polished wood of the conference table I am sitting at. The frosted glass of the double doors across the room doesn’t allow me to see into the entryway but my eyes stay locked on them anyway, waiting for movement. I’m not bored, anxious, or even irritated. I’m just very bad at waiting. I was always told when I was younger that patience was something you developed as you grew older. After a few thousand years I gave up trying for that virtue figuring that I was as mature as I was ever going to be.

I believe some explanations are warranted but in order to understand you will have to throw out all you ever thought you knew about my kind. That is to say, everything you thought you knew about vampires. When I say vampire you probably conjure the image of one of Hollywood’s versions of the provocative monster stalking after young girls to seduce them into his waiting arms and tear their throats out with his teeth. Or perhaps the tortured soul of the man who regrets all that he has become and chooses to live his life hunting deer or rats. Yeah, you’re going to have to forget all that. I am not a man whose soul was consumed by a demon, nor was I turned this way by another, although that is in fact a possibility. I was made the same old fashioned way that almost everything else on earth is made, a mother and father who are exactly like me. Now there is a process in which one of my kind can turn a human into a vampire but the process is so taxing that it can only be done once. We call them the blooded kindred because they become our closest relatives by choice. That does however rule out another of those Hollywood plots, no master vampires gathering hordes of soulless monsters to do his bidding.

What else about me and my kind is different? Ah, yes, bursting into flames if the sun touches my skin. I believe this notion came from the myth that vampires are cursed by God to walk the night with the other creatures of Hell and be punished

if daring to seek the light of day. Well, as I have said, not cursed and as a matter of fact, I personally prefer the warmer, dryer, sunnier regions. I can't even hold a dark tan at the rate I heal so I suppose that's a punishment? Another myth of the vampire sleeping in a coffin during the day or buried deep underground. How about the fancy idea of sleeping in the soil of your homeland. I find the idea of sleeping in a coffin to be morbid, bordering on macabre and being buried in dirt, from my homeland or not, seems claustrophobic and unpleasant to me. There is also the matter of vampires turning into bats, wolves, mist or whatever other forms they are supposed to take. Although that might be useful, it's not an ability we actually possess. We are limited to the bodies we are born into, again, like almost everyone else. Speaking of useful skills and abilities, I would have preferred mind control to perfect skin. My life would have been so much easier to date if I could have simply put ideas into or taken thoughts out of a person's mind as I saw fit.

Now there are some things I suppose the myths got right. We are very strong and very fast. I don't often find it necessary to use these abilities anymore in any practical manner since the invention of the automobile and airplane. Why run when you can drive or fly in comfort? My father has an arena of sorts, think of it like a gym for vampires, where I enjoy going when I feel the need to flex a bit and not get caught. There *are* creatures out there in the world with far superior eyesight and hearing than I have but mine is still far greater than that of the human population. I do not age, at least not physically and I haven't since I was about thirty years old. I have long since stopped counting the years, decades, centuries and even millennia that go by, but I am sure if I asked my mother she'd remember exactly how old I am.

Alright for the last part, yes, I do consume the blood of mortal living humans. I do not however, drain them of their blood leaving them to die of exsanguination. It doesn't take a lot to survive and live healthy, normal albeit very long lives. On a normal basis, with all things being equal and nothing traumatic happens to me, I usually only need to ingest what would amount to a cup of blood per week or less than an

ounce per day. I prefer the weekly dose to that of the daily, while it's true swallowing that much down at once is much harder than the smaller doses, I just can't stomach it on the daily. Ah, I forgot to mention the true curse of the vampire, given to us by evolution itself, we are completely revolted by the taste of blood. We have no need or desire to hurt anyone when taking blood from them and every family has others in their house, clan, tribe or whichever way you define extended family, that know what we are and help us by being regular donors. Now, don't start judging our society based on yours. These are not people we keep as cattle, they are not the family pet, they are as much a family member as the ones born to us and most stay a part of our family for generations. At any moment in time they can refuse for any of their own reasons and nothing would change for them. They are like the caregivers of the family, only what they give is from their own bodies. I will not try to justify it more than that except to say that they are simply the human side of our family and they are loved and love us the same way.

I look up to the clock on the wall before sighing and staring back at the doors. There are so many things in my mind and such an overwhelming feeling of urgency and I don't know where it comes from but it's been driving me for weeks now, leading me here to this meeting. Just as it was important to forget what you thought you knew about vampires, you will need to let go of your thoughts on shifters as well. The first being that like vampires, they are a true species that walk, talk, work and play with humans on a daily basis. There are so many groups of shifters that it would be like listing all the species in the animal kingdom. I have personal knowledge of dragons (yes, yes, dragons), bears, wolves, eagles, lions and other big cats. Predators at their finest, yes, that's true but I've even met shifters who were rats, snakes, peacocks and even a sheep once. In their human form they are stronger and faster than mortal humans, yes, even the sheep but they are not as fast or strong as vampires. On the other hand their senses are far more advanced than ours. They can see in the dark just as well as in the light, they can see for much longer distances and in far greater detail. They can hear you whispering in a locked room a block away if they choose to. They do not however

shift on any lunar cycle and they begin shifting from birth although they are not in full control of their shifts until puberty. I have known a few shifters that can shift certain parts of themselves at will while maintaining a mostly human form, like a claw or talon from a fingertip. Shifters and vampires alike are thoroughly rooted in the human world but for the more obvious reasons we are also quite separate from it. The group I am waiting on includes a few shifters, high ranking ones at that.

There is another race of the supernatural who, we are fairly certain, was a mixed breeding of humans and shifters. Obviously we can't prove it but it makes the most sense. They have all the attributes and strengths of the animals whose DNA they share, but they do not shift, they do not sprout fur, claws or feathers. To look at them they would always be considered human and they have complete use of all their gifts including strength, speed, enhanced senses and above average intelligence. This race is known as the Hybrid.

In the United States the species of vampires, shifters and hybrids are collectively known to each other as the supernatural community. This community has been broken down into five regions governed by the more dominant, or Alpha, of the area. Cato, the alpha of the Swift Wind Dragon Clutch, handles the Southeast. Leander is the alpha of Golden Pride, home of the lion shifters, which is located in the Southwest. Sebastian, the alpha wolf from the Black River Pack holds the Midwest. There is Benard, the hulking bear shifter alpha from the Pine Valley Den that takes care of the west. The current leader, for the last two hundred years, of the Northeast is Damon, a hybrid human/lion and he's one of the men I'm still waiting to show up. I have called a meeting with these leaders to address an issue of possible uprisings from inside the community and outside threats and what I want to do about them.

For as long as we have been alive we have had to make sure we stayed off the radar for those who would attempt to wipe us out. Namely, humans. I'm not making any political statements here when I say that humans seriously suck. No matter what the species, if it's not human, it will be hunted by

humans. If they don't kill it on sight, they will poke and prod it until they are satisfied with whatever they can learn from it and then they'll kill it, or try and reproduce it in order to control it. Having superior strength, speed, senses or even the ability to change into an animal can't save you if your numbers are drastically inferior to those who believe you don't belong here or are a subspecies not on par with theirs. We have all been called monsters, mutants or my personal favorite abominations when they tell their tales. The thing that annoys me the most is that up until the invention and widespread use of cellphone cameras and social media, the supernatural has always been mostly that of a myth, a story, a campfire tale. They never actually saw us, but they heard of us, tales told from family to family and the stories grew into a worldwide cultural fan base complete with trendy t-shirts and shot glasses. If only they knew the hype was so much more exciting and romantic than reality maybe they wouldn't have pursued it so hard.

It used to be mildly annoying but mostly amusing to see snapshots of Bigfoot or the chupacabra or to listen to clips of Banshee screams and werewolf howls. The problem is that so many people started taking the wrong thing seriously that now they are accidentally searching for the right things. As if that doesn't complicate things I have been hearing whispers that throughout the different territories some of the supernatural groups are getting restless and tired of 'hiding' from humans and feel they should come out and be acknowledged. That could go, hell, I'd bet *would* go, very badly for a great many people. I need to find out if these whispers and rumors are just that of a few select radicals or if it's becoming the prevalent feeling of the larger groups.

Just like the humans have their myths and legends, we have one that holds out a hint of hope for us if this situation begins to spiral out of control. It's a vague story about a council of women who stood between the supernatural world and the human world. They acted as liaisons, judges and mediators for any occurrence between different species of supernatural with each other and also with humans. The thing is, humans don't know about the supernatural so it doesn't

make sense and on top of that I cannot find any information about the women. Who these women were, why they were in this position, when they were even around, where they had held court or whatever it was they did. I know that I have no particular reason to even buy into this story, I have never found a shred of proof of it, but for some reason, perhaps the extreme lack of evidence, it just rings true to me and so I am here to see if I can get assistance from these leaders to go forward with my research. However since it would sound rather absurd to summon the Alphas from all five regions for assistance with a myth, I have to proceed in a more roundabout way.

Finally they appear in the hallway outside the conference room. Do they synchronize their arrival times or have they been having their own private meeting before deciding to come speak with me. Ah well, if they want to be suspicious I can't blame them, I did request a leaders only meeting. I suppose it could look like I planned to take out all the heads of the regions but they should really know me better. Besides, that would be pointless, stupid, time consuming and messy. Nothing I'm interested in.

I stay seated and watch as Cato, Leander, Sebastian, Benard and Damon go to assume seats that are all across from and facing me. Let me tell you what the stories do *not* get wrong. Alpha attitude. It's a thing to behold, seriously. I'm not going to laugh but Lord do I want to.

"Thank you all for coming, gentlemen. I know that requesting a meeting without your Betas or Enforcers," I look over at Damon, "I apologize Damon, I do not know the title Aaram and Julius hold. However I know that it is a show of faith that you have agreed and- "

"Orion and Bodhi are both right outside the door, Avalon." Leander cuts me off. "I was summoned to this meeting and I was curious what you could possibly be so concerned about that you wanted only regional heads present, but my Beta and my Enforcer are never left out. I simply came in alone out of respect for you. "



The other men at the table nodded their heads in agreement and I just sigh inwardly. It really wasn't all conspiratorial, they could have simply said they only come as a trio. I left my brother Raphael and his blooded Phillip, as well as my blooded and best friend Nichlos out of this meeting simply because I didn't see the need. I represent and speak for our family and our kind so dragging them out for this seemed needless. Besides, Raph absolutely hates groups of more than, well, one I think.

"It's fine. I left my cloak and dagger at home, you don't have to leave them in the hall unless you feel there is some danger they should be watching for. Whatever you wish." I say gesturing toward the door while looking at each man.

"Enter." Cato says in that strange dragon voice of his that is always present even when in his human form. Such an odd sound but, at his word the room fills with ten more large men who file in behind their Alphas. Betas always stand behind and to the right while top Enforcers always stand behind and to the left.

"Well, I see no reason not to just jump in now if that's okay with everyone?" I'm still torn between annoyed and amused at this point. Leander nods his head at me and waves his hand telling me to begin.

"I wanted to check in with all of you in regards to your people and their safety in light of the onslaught of supernatural hunters that have been springing up across the country. In our own community we have had to take steps such as removing children from public schools, placing individuals in positions such as police and even minor political roles. Mostly so we can be informed of a situation as soon as possible and ascertain how to handle it." I leave off so that one of them can pick up the thread and again Leander is the one to speak up.

"We have done all of those things as well, Avalon. We have also built our own clinics, hospitals and labs to improve health care without the need to cover up the blood work and test results. We have brought in doctors as well as veterinarians from our people to run things. There are humans

employed and of course we can care for them as well but our main focus is the healthcare of our people. ” Leander leans back looking proud and rightfully so. Locking down an entire Healthcare system is an amazing feat and gift for his people.

“We have small clinics set up as well although all of our testing goes through the facilities set up by Leander’s people.” Benard, the alpha bear chimes in “Recently we have acquired a local television network which helps in keeping some of the problems that can arise from these stories to a manageable level. Even if we can’t stop a story from running elsewhere we can offer a different perspective so to speak and show more logical reasons for things that might happen. It comes in handy.”

“My people are working on neighborhood watch programs.” Sebastian states and leans over to look at Leander, “The local hospitals are an excellent idea but the labs must have been difficult.”

“To get started, yes, we’ve had to buy the land, build the facility, buy all the equipment that was needed, we had to train everyone who worked there and we have to monitor constantly to avoid accidental leaks.” Leander says.

Cato and Damon haven’t said anything which is fine because I’m really not concerned about how they look after their people. That’s literally their only job and I never hear complaints about them or talk of usurping them so I assume they do a good job. I do however need them willing to share for the next part.

“I never doubt your abilities to look after your constituents but it is always good to hear from others what is working for them and I may be able to help apply it elsewhere.” I say, then I take a deep breath and get to the part that concerns me. “I wanted to ask you, have any of you had trouble with or heard rumors in your territories about people, our people, trying to rise up and take action that would in effect bring all of us to the attention of humans?” I watch their faces, all of them, not just the leaders, for any sign that we may be heading towards discovery and disaster. I see nothing

until Jasper, Sebastian's Enforcer lips thinned slightly, it wasn't much but it was enough.

I stare straight into Jasper's eyes. "You know something huh, Jasper."

Sebastian jerked his head up at me and pulled his lip back for all the world looking like the snarling wolf he was. "If there is something you want from one of mine you can address me about it, Avalon. We don't keep secrets from you." Sebastian turned his head and seemed to stare at Jasper like he was reading him, the other man tilted his head slightly and Sebastian turned back to me. "We have our concerns, yes. Are you asking Avalon, because you think us incompetent to handle any discord with our own? Or are you looking for a check in from our territory?" The last part was practically a growl. If it wouldn't just irritate the man I'd laugh. Focus, Avalon, bigger picture.

"The information I am seeking pertains to what could threaten the entire supernatural world, Sebastian. I'm not questioning your ability to care for and govern your people. I will say this as directly as I can. If there are factions inside families, inside clans, packs and dens, inside communities, that are looking to create trouble, it doesn't matter what region it starts in, it will spread to all of the others. I'm hoping to head this off, prevent the inevitable outcome from something like this." I am speaking in as even a tone as I can. I do not want to sound paranoid and conspiratorial but I also need them to see more of the picture than they are used to looking at.

"In my family, there is a legend about a group that used to belong to both the human race and that of the supernaturals. The details are not really there but I know that they acted as liaison of sorts. Helped to calm and contain matters." Oh this is going to be really hard to express *without* sounding crazy.

"I know them." My head swerves over at the first words Damon has uttered. "Well, I suppose I know *of* them. They were women, my father called them ambassadors I believe. If there was a problem on either side they had some tricks or abilities or something that would settle the matters. I'm not sure about anything else."

“They were witches, real witches. Not the bone tossing, bowl of blood, spell casting type.” Leander says, rubbing his jaw. “That is how I was told anyway. Witches that settled arguments.”

“They just disappeared one day though, right.” This from Cato. Hell, even the dragon had heard of them. “No one knows where they went, who they were or even *when* they were. A legend, Avalon. What is your interest in it?”

It’s a fair and honest question but I am really struggling with verbalizing and maintaining the seriousness of the situation. “I have a sense, a feeling I suppose, that we are on the edge of a dangerous new reality. One where it’s humans against us, humans against other humans who may stand with us. Our own people who desire more than equality or peace and choose war against humans and those of us who would not stand for it. I feel these things are coming gentlemen from things I have heard and seen. If we’ve heard the whispers then in some room somewhere it’s being shouted to those who agree. “

“That’s a lot of doom and gloom, Avalon. I told you we have our concerns, we’ll look into it. What is it you are trying to do here besides threaten an apocalypse and bring up the tale of the witches, ambassadors, council, whatever.” He says, rolling his eyes and waving his hand as if to dismiss the matter.

“It’s not just negative thinking Sebastian, events follow in a predictable order. How many wars have you lived through that you don’t recognize how they start. We’ve had peace in *our* world for a very long time but that’s because we’ve stayed on the outskirts of theirs and stayed far from any spotlight. If any, and I do mean *any*, of our kind decide to put the spotlight on us, it *will* go badly.

If there is even a thread of truth in the legends, just a hint. I’d like to try and find them. Do whatever I need to do to get them to help us. If they cannot help us stop it, perhaps they can help us contain it, keep the number of massacres down.” I finish feeling the weight of what is without a doubt coming if the tide doesn’t turn.

“They were human witches were they not? Humans with abilities but still humans.” Benard says, raising an eyebrow. “Which means that they would most likely be long dead and gone. Gone so long that only a vague legend remains.”

“But, what if they were real, do they have descendants, if they do, do they have any of the abilities their ancestors had? If they have any of their abilities that means they belong, at least in part, to our world as well. If we can find them, if they have the ability to help us, if they will help us, maybe we can use them again as the” I look at Sebastian, “Ambassadors their ancestors were.”

“That’s a lot of ifs based on a little legend.” Cato says not hiding his doubts.

“Raphael, Phillip, Nichlos and I will be starting the search. Phillip has been trying to dig into the legends and stories but it’s actually amazing how much isn’t there. He found a painting once and it had a large group of women in a half circle around a group of wolves and men. There is no way to really understand what was going on in the painting, it’s up for interpretation at this point, but the interesting part is that all the faces of the women were blurred out. Like they had been wiped, in contrast you could see the details of each face of the men and even the wolves. It’s things like that. He finds something but then it’s not enough to be anything. Due to the fact that they were supposedly an integral part of our community I would ask you all to grant access to your archives to me, Raphael, Phillip and Nichlos.”

“You want us to open the archives of each individual clan, to you and your group, so that you can possibly find more details on a legend about women who are most definitely dead and gone and who may or may not have had descendants, that may or may not have the abilities their ancestors had so that they could or could not agree to help us with an apocalyptic reckoning that may or may not be coming. This is what you want access to the archives for?” If Cato had sounded doubtful, Damon was flat out incredulous. Yeah he thinks I’m crazy but luckily in the end he’ll roll with it.

“There is nothing more we need from you, no secrets that you keep that would require an elaborately concocted story to justify looking through your records, archives and vaults. If you think I am wrong or crazy then you would simply be placating an ancient old man losing touch with reality. If you think there is the slightest chance I could be right about any of it, you could be helping to save a lot of lives and an entire way of living.” I say calmly.

Cato takes a deep breath and rolls his shoulders “Well, what the hell.” he shrugs “We have nothing to hide from you, the only things we do hide, we hide from humans. If you feel so strongly I’ll let them all know you are coming and you will have access without all the normal steps taken.”

“I’ll agree with the dragon, this time.” Benard says.

Leander rolls his eyes and says “Whatever, it’s your wild goose to chase.” and looks over to Sebastian who nods his head once. I’m taking that as an agreement and I look to Damon.

“If I wanted to allow Aaram” Damon says waving to the man on his right “access to your files and archives, would you allow it?”

“Yes.” I said, nodding.

“I still don’t buy into all this nonsense but fine, whatever, like Leo over there says. It’s your chase.”

“Leander, not Leo, you ass.” Leander gripes at him.

“Leo, like the lion, you know, because you’re a lion.” Damon looks at Leander like he is missing the whole point.

“So are you.” Leander huffs at him

Damon grins at Leander “Only on the inside.”

“Alright then,” I say interrupting the two men, they can have play time after I leave. “I will get with Nichlos, Raphael and Phillip and we’ll keep in touch with what we find. Please, gentlemen, keep your eyes and ears open, if you do hear of any more threats keep me in the loop.” I stand up, turn and

walk towards the doors. Just before I open them I hear Damon again.

“Good luck on your witch hunt, Avalon ”

# Chapter 1

I have been at the Pine Valley Bear Den in Montana for over a week now sifting through everything from scraps of paper, bound volumes, family bibles and even some ancient scrolls. My blooded Nichlos is at the Golden Pride in Arizona, home of the lion shifters. He's been working with Leander, whether it's because the pride Alpha is genuinely interested in helping or because he wants to maintain control over what Nichlos is looking through, I don't know. My brother Raphael is doing the same with Sebastian in the Black River Wolf pack den located in Nebraska. Sebastian though is not even pretending interest, simply sitting back in the room on his phone or in his own reading while Raphael does the research. Raphael's blooded, Phillip is probably having the worst time of it though in Tennessee at the Swift Wind Dragon Clutch. From what I hear Cato is actually doing his own digging in outside human resources and texting or calling Phillip with any tidbit he might find.

On the one hand, I'm grateful that they are at least not blocking or preventing any access for us. On the other hand, I don't completely understand some of the interest they are showing. Do they believe me, believe in the council? I haven't been able to make it over to Maine where Damon has the clan hall and from what I understand a vast library that would rival that of the library of Alexandria. I also have no one else in my family I can send as my sister's are all busy with their married-with-children lives. Damon has made no attempt to hide that he feels I am wasting my time as well as everyone else's and is doing nothing to assist us although if we do make it over there we'll have total access to that library.

I sit flipping through the pages of a book of photographs of ancient Greek wall mosaics when I come across one of a large group of women, spread out in a crescent shape around what looks like a group of lions on one side and a group of men on the other. The men appear to be holding spears and actually wearing lions heads and skins and their



hands are reaching out toward the women or pointing towards the lions. If you were to look at this from a human point of view it could easily be thought of as these warriors offering these lions as tribute for alliance, gifts for their beauty or even a price for a bride. You could assume that the women are looking at the men with respect and are even flattered by the gesture.

I was suddenly looking at this photo from a very supernatural point of view though. Those lions were not in cages, they were not leashed and they were not attacking. The men seemed to be leaning back, away from the women, their hands outstretched more in a pleading manner or as if they were trying to explain something. I could plainly see the different styles of dress the women wore, it was all very first century and earlier Greek attire but some wore simple folded dresses like the priestesses wore, some were wearing more pleated and draped dresses like the highborn citizens and two of them even wore armor like a soldier of the day would have. There were cards in the hand of one woman, one looked like she held a harp, the two in armor each carried weapons, one a bow and the other had both a sword and a shield. One of those ladies was even holding a lion cub in her arms, her face pressed into the cub's fur. However you could not make out a single feature of the women's face. There was the same look on this mosaic as had been on the painting Phillip had described to me, as though someone had wiped their hand across the women's faces while it was still wet, leaving everything else in the painting in perfect detail.

I am trying not to get excited. There are plenty of reasons that this painting could have these figures and my interpretation of it is completely out of bias. I grab my phone and send a text off to Phillip to have him start a video call to include the four of us. Within two minutes the laptop next to me alerts me to join a call and I see the familiar faces on the screen. I keep the book on my lap face down while I address Phillip skipping any normal greetings.

“Phillip, I need to know if you can describe for me again that painting you had found before. The one that started this search.” I work hard to keep my voice level and calm.

“Of course I can, Avalon, but I don’t have to. I took a picture of it when you were so interested in it.” Phillip says, pulling his phone out of his pocket. He slides his thumb across the screen a few times looking for the right photo and then with a nod he enlarges the photo and it suddenly fills the screen where Phillip’s face once was.

I click the maximize button on Phillip’s small square and begin to study the painting in detail. The large group of women are standing about in the same semi circle formation. On the left side of the painting there was a pack of wolves, one standing slightly in front of the rest of the pack, on the right side a group of men, some standing with bows, some kneeling on one knee, some looking over at the wolves. I focused my attention on the women. The clothing that was worn looked more like the fifth century Europe, although they all appeared from the same time period they looked to be from different classes but what really makes me focus my eyes is the two women wearing obvious armor.

Trying to zoom in more on their hands I see what I was holding my breath for. One of the women is holding several cards in her hand, another with what seemed to be a lute, several of them had different color orbs in their hands. I can feel a ripple of excitement because there are differences but there are entirely too many similarities to be coincidence. The difference in the time period could explain those details though. I need more evidence, something with a tangible lead.

“Phillip, Nichlos, Raph, I want to adjust the search. We’re going to go through anything that references art from any time period. Anything that depicts these women” I pick the book up and put the picture in the camera, “because this I think is our most solid lead. “

Nichlos stares at the picture and back at the box where Phillip had been holding the other, his mouth hanging open slightly. “So, maybe you’re not that crazy.”

Raphael shakes his head. “It’s thin Av.”

“Of course it’s thin, that’s why we need to find more. I’m thinking we might need to go to Maine. Damon’s library is

huge and more likely to have what we're looking for." I say.

"It's not like we can Google this Av, we need to know at least when, where and what we're looking for and *how* is that going to get us to *who*?" Raphael asks.

"The when is any time. The where is everywhere and the what is obviously any piece of art depicting this group of women. I don't care if it's a motif, a mural, a painting on a tomb wall or a sketch on a tablecloth. Our answers will be there." I say forcefully because I know I'm right. I know these human women spanned generations. I can feel it, they are out there somewhere.

"When I'm done going through what I have here I'll head out to Maine. Since I can rule out a lot of what's here." Nichlos said.

"Why don't you show what you have to Damon, maybe he would be willing to help with the search with this new evidence?" Phillip asked.

"I'm not there yet, Phillip, and please send me a copy of that picture." I said taking my phone out to capture a picture of the mural in the book I was holding.

"You got it. Do you need anything else? If not -" he trailed off waiting to be dismissed.

"No. I'll talk to all of you later." I clicked out of the call.

I start going through the books of history and anything about art. What I want won't be in family bibles, diaries or journals. I need pictures, painting, sketches, hell I'll take pottery and statues if it has what I am looking for. If I addressed these paintings as proof of my search then I know that the group of women were in Greece, or at least a territory heavily influenced by the Greeks, in the first century or earlier and somewhere between the fifth and 11th century they were in what appeared to be England. It was a very early medieval look. It can only help to validate the theory if we find anything else before or during those periods but I need to try and find something later. As close to our current time as I can.

If we stand any chance of finding the descendants of these women we need to narrow down when they stopped showing up and where the last location was. My brain is running through thoughts so fast that I'm doubling back on ideas and I'm starting to feel like I'm on a mental hamster wheel. I walk, well it's more like pacing, all around the room trying to reach a calm in my mind. Why is this so important to me? Why do I feel like *this*, the descendents of these women are the only way to face what's coming? On that note, *why* am I so sure that something really catastrophic is in fact coming? I have been alive for many thousands of years, I wasn't lying when I say I've forgotten, I just stopped counting. Why am I so sure these women were a real and true vital part of the supernatural world when I can not remember a single thing about them. I don't know anyone that remembers anything about them and if those paintings are in fact a representation of something they were involved in then that was ancient Greece and medieval England. Both of those time eras I have memories of, not all pleasant and I should remember at least one intervention but as much as I wrack my brain there is nothing there. This. This is the mental hamster wheel and I can't seem to jump off.

Air, I need fresh air and something else to look at. I walk over to the doors and pull them open roughly and very nearly knock over Rufus, Benard's head Enforcer. He looks me up and down and then narrows his eyes at me.

"Ben says for you to come with me." He tells me and turns and starts walking away. I wanted to get out of there anyway so whatever, I guess.

I follow him and the layout of the den is pretty straight forward so within a minute or so I realize we're going to the kitchen area. As we walk into the kitchen I see Benard sitting on a stool at a large L shaped island. There are several men standing nearby. He looks up and I raise an eyebrow at him.

"I hope your porridge is not too hot." I say keeping my face straight and adding a concerned tone to my voice.

"It's just right, thank you Goldilocks, but it's you I'm concerned with." He says, waving at me to take the stool next

to him.

“Eh, I’m really not that hungry, Ben. What I need most right now is just a quick change of scenery and some fresh air.” I tell him, not taking the seat.

“Avalon, you’ve been here a week and in that time I’ve seen you do many things. I know you’ve showered every day. I know you’ve checked in with your kin every day. I know you have napped occasionally and all the rest of your time has been spent sifting through any and every thing in the library and archives. Do you know what I haven’t seen you do, Av?” He doesn’t actually give me a chance to answer. “Eat. I haven’t seen you eat a damn thing. Maybe you aren’t aware that I am an alpha den leader, Av, not a human, so I actually know you eat food. I really don’t need or want anyone assuming we have mistreated you or starved you because you are wasting away in the damn library.” He shoves a plate of steak with a baked potato and some broccoli smothered in cheese at me.

“Ben, I can’t eat that.” I say looking at the plate

“It’s not the only option, it’s just the best one with all the food groups. What will you have? The kitchen is fully stocked.”

I look around at all the people in the room and sigh looking back at Ben.

“I have nothing to wash it down with, *Ben*.” I say pointedly. If he’s going to claim alpha knowledge he should at least have all the details, right.

Ben laughs, “What do you think these guys are here for?” He nods at each man in the room. “They all have a different blood type, we didn’t know which you preferred.”

“I’m sorry, what?” I heard my own voice crack as my eyes popped open at Benard.

“Okay, I’m trying to decide whether you are being rude by thinking my den isn’t good enough to supply you or just obtuse and don’t realize we are offering to cater to your very

specific dietary needs.” This time it’s his eyebrow that pops up.

My brain really hurts now. I have to think, he is definitely offering me one of these men to take blood from, so he does at least know that I haven’t been able to eat because I haven’t taken in any blood to keep my system functioning properly. I won’t die, but another week or two and I really won’t be doing well. However, as generous as he’s being, taking blood off of shifters would be a horrific waste of time. I can’t really smell them from here but being in the room with Benard in the den they must be shifters as well. My God, how easy life would be if I could just walk up to a supernatural being, explain I’m a vampire and ask to bite them for an ounce or two.

“I appreciate the offer, I am not being rude. The blood I require is human and human only. It’s also an unpleasant task but I am very grateful to you and yours for the extreme hospitality of your offer.” I say, not wanting to sound rude at all.

“Obtuse it is then.” Ben says and leans forward getting closer to my face. “Every so often, no matter what branch of shifter you are, there is a child who is born who is completely mortal. One hundred percent human. The bigger your population of course, the more you up those odds. The men in this room all belong to our den, they are our family the same as the rest, but they are completely human. They are, might I add, here willingly to help you.” He narrows his eyes at me and I understand that if I refuse now I *am* going to be considered very rude.

This is so weird. Not the concept I mean come on, I’m a vampire, I am used to having donors on hand. This makes me feel like I’m hitting his family up the way someone might borrow twenty dollars off of them. I look around at the men and not for the first time wish that I could *want* this. I wish that I could *thirst* for this. But, no. The damn thing that makes me a vampire is the same thing that curses us. Blood type doesn’t actually matter unless I was so damaged that I required a transfusion and at that point I’d need several of them.

“Have you ever seen a vampire taking blood, Ben?” I ask, because I am not done going through this library and really don’t need him kicking me out.

“Why do you never call it drinking or feeding or even consuming? Why do you always refer to it as taking and no, I haven’t seen a vampire at meal time.” I notice that as he’s talking the men are starting to bounce from foot to foot and move restlessly.

“It’s not pleasant for me, Ben. It doesn’t hurt the donor when done properly but it’s not some ecstasy inducing event. I accept the offer and you all have my gratitude but as long as they are human and not a child it can be any one of them.” I say looking at each man.

“I wouldn’t offer one, but, why not a child?” his voice says curiously as he motions to all the men to come closer.

“Because I am a vampire, not a monster from a twisted fairy tale. I couldn’t even make myself bite into a child.” I actually shiver from the revulsion that just thinking about that act causes me.

Two men who look to be in their mid thirties step forward together. As I look at them I take stock of my body and think of how long it has been since I have taken any blood. Longer than the week that’s for sure. If I’m going to reach my healthiest peak to be able to hold off doing this again any time soon I will need to take a bit from both.

“If you happen to have orange juice in your stocked kitchen could I please get two tall glasses and then gentlemen if you don’t mind I will probably need to take some from both of you.” I say as I work to keep my stomach from rolling over and prepare myself for this with an audience because hell no am I going to ask him to send his people away while I sink my teeth into others.

Two tall glasses of orange juice are placed in front of me and both men stand next to me and pull their long hair back and tilt their heads to the side and back, baring their necks. Nah, fuck that. Apparently another vampire lesson is in order.

“Man I am just not into you two like that. I appreciate the submission and all, but if you’d just bare your wrist I won’t feel like I have to kiss you after.” I wink at one then the other.

Benard rolls his eyes and nods to the men and they both stretch their wrists out to me. I grab the one closest to me and I feel his instinctual pulling back for just a moment and then he relaxes and allows me to lift his wrist. With my right hand I wrap my fingers around the area above his wrist and use my left hand to hold his fingers to stop him from flexing his fingers not wanting him to increase the blood flow if he can prevent it. I open my mouth and drop my fangs down and before I rethink it I bite down, I quickly retract my fangs and pull against the open holes taking the blood into my mouth. The blood is thick and has a combined taste of something metallic and organic and I pull as hard as I can and swallow as fast as I can to get it over with. I then run my tongue over the holes in his wrist so the wound can start to close and pull my mouth away. My left hand darts out to grab the first glass of orange juice and I quickly swallow it down before the gagging and dry heaving can start up.

The man looks at his wrist and takes the roll of bandage that Rufus hands him from somewhere behind us. The second man steps forward and puts his wrist out and I lift my finger letting him know I am going to need a moment. I can only assume that for anyone who has only ever known the vampire of books and movies I must look like an absolutely ungrateful freak. The way I feel however is like a vegetarian who has no choice but to consume the occasional hamburger to survive. Once I am sure I have a handle on the churning stomach sensation I reach for the other wrist and repeat the process once again draining the glass of orange juice once I am done. I cannot stop the shudder that runs from my shoulders down my spine.

“Thank you, I’m quite fine now. There should be absolutely no reason to” I look at Benard, “feed, again.” I reach over and grab the tray sized plate of food and the fork. I stab the fork into a piece of broccoli, not even caring if it’s cold at this point. “Except for this, this we can repeat.”



“That was-” Benard looks at the two men, then looks over at Rufus, then back at me. “You’re telling me that vampires actually *hate* drinking blood?” Yeah, he sounds pretty shocked. “That was fucking *disturbing* to watch, Av. Like, your fangs were in his arm and somehow I was feeling bad for *you*.” Now I know he’s just feeling conflicted but it’s not like I didn’t warn him.

I have nothing to say to any of this. I can’t explain it, I can’t make it make sense. I’ve been living this way for many, many thousands of years and it still makes no sense to me. I finish my plate and push it back on the counter. Well this was fun and informative, I think to myself. Standing up I can feel my body back in fighting form and nod to the room as a whole.

“Again, thank you. If you don’t mind I will head back to the library now, there is still a lot I have to look into. Hopefully in a day or two I’ll have something to report.” Benard’s face is still kind of dazed looking and he does a sort of half nod at me so I turn away and head back to the library.

Three days later as I was looking through a sketch book of Egyptian hieroglyphics wishing I had paid more attention to what they meant. At the time though the construction of the pyramids had been far more fascinating than whatever stories they had been telling. Again I’m frustrated that I have such clear memories from so long ago, although I do admit to forgetting the name of the architect I had followed around for months. Well, I never did have a very good memory for names, but still. The laptop on the table made the electronic chiming sounds that signaled a group call from one of his brothers.

One by one their faces popped up on the screen and I raised a questioning eyebrow waiting to hear what the unexpected meeting was about. It was Nichlos who spoke first and he seemed to be vibrating with excitement.

“I found them.” He said and stood back holding a large painting in a simple dark wooden frame. Very similar to the others, women in a half circle each holding something in their hands, this time there were two groups of people in front

of them. As much as I was excited to see he had found another piece of the puzzle, I still didn't see anything in this picture to say that he had "found" them.

"You want to explain how this is finding them?" I asked patiently.

"This is very similar to the other pictures is it not?" Nichlos asked as though all the answers were laid out in front of me and I'm the one missing it.

"Nichlos, I can see this is part of what we are looking for. I can see this is what I asked you to find. What I am not seeing is the ta-da moment." I said flashing my hands out in front of him, palms up.

"They are in the United States, Avalon, look. The group on the left, look at them." He said "The clothing says either very late 18th century or early 19th."

I looked at it again, focusing on the group on the left. The women were dressed in the long gowns and bonnets of the pre-Victorian era. As with the other paintings the location was nondescript at best. It was a clearing in the middle of a forested area, a forest that could have been anywhere. Focusing on the group on the left I saw the men in their heavily beaded leather clothing, a few with feathers attached to leather strips tied around their arms, some with varying amounts of feathers in their hair. I had no doubt these were native Americans and I'm leaning toward Cherokees which in the early 19th century would put them where? The Carolinas I believe.

"Okay, Nichlos, I'm getting there. I am estimating early 18th century Carolinas, yes?" I asked, trying to coax him for what more information he might have gleaned from it.

"Yes, that's the conclusion I came to for the when and where. It's the woman in the center, the one wearing blue." he moved around the painting slightly and pointed with her finger.

I once again turned my eyes to look at the detail he pointed out. Her body had that smeared look but I could see

her dress was a pale blue color. It was her face. Her face was crystal clear. I could see her brown eyes wide and round, her tiny nose that tilted up at the end, her small but full lips and even that she had a round but heart shaped face. I couldn't make out the color of her hair hidden as it was under a white bonnet with blue flowers. She was absolutely stunning though.

“I see what you see, Nichlos. Now tell me what you are thinking our next step will be. What do we do with this?” All the anxiety and energy that has been driving me starts to come to a head and I need to direct it somewhere productive. As much as I felt more and more validated with each piece of the puzzle that snaps into place, I feel like the puzzle gets bigger and blurrier and the need to see the whole thing clearly is driving me into action. I just need to know what actions to take.

“I think Phillip is already on that.” He said putting the picture down beside his chair and sitting down.

“Send me a photo of that, Nichlos ” I said before he was fully seated. Then I looked at Phillip. “What is it that you are already on?”

“A pattern recognition program. Since it was the first time we found any detail on any of the women I figured I'd try to run it against any images on the web. I set the search to anything within an eighty percent match. I don't want to go any lower than that even though there can be many differences from the generations in the last 200 plus years since this painting was done. If I go any lower I could be looking for any brown eyed girl with a face.” Phillip said and looked directly at me. “Avalon, I have had over 400 hits already.”

I felt everything inside stop and then start again at a racing speed. If the descendants were able to be found, if the feeling inside me that the stories of the council of women were true, does that mean that the feeling of upcoming chaos and disaster is also more probable. I am completely locked in feelings equal in excitement and dread. I kept looking at Phillip, waiting.

“Because I have not adjusted the image to show aging, I have eliminated any images of women who appear over 40 or images that were taken more than twenty years ago. Because we decided to use the United States as a location, I eliminated all the images from overseas. The matches I have remaining at this point are women between 25 and 40 years old from all over the United States. I am now working with Raphael to identify and get a current location on all of them. As of right now I have four with names, current address and places of work.” The words were a statement but there were questions there as well.

“Send me the names and how to find them. I’m leaving now.” I wanted to say more, to thank them for believing me, for the effort they had put into this hunt, but the need to move was pounding in my head and through my veins. I clicked off the call and grabbed my phone heading to the kitchens. I hadn’t planned to but I was going to have to avail myself of the den’s hospitality once more before I headed out into the human world in the greatest hopes that I would find one that was actually a descendant of the beautiful woman in blue.

## Chapter 2

### Prayer

You know those days that just seem to go on forever. The ones where you look at the clock twenty times and it's only been five minutes. Well, that would be a good day compared to today. Living in Seattle I have gotten used to the gray skies and the rain and cool temperatures. Today however just seemed oppressive, dark and damp and just not conducive to my job as receptionist at a popular day spa. I'm supposed to be welcoming and relaxing, two things I do not feel today. The sunny disposition I was hired for is just not showing up and I've chewed holes into the insides of my cheeks to keep from snapping at people.

Coffee. I need a whole lot more coffee. I mean like enough caffeine to amp up a full squad of cheerleaders. I look over at the clock and see I have fifteen minutes until my break. I feel my first burst of joy when I think about going next door and getting a nice hot vanilla lavender cappuccino. It's an odd flavor, I don't think that anyone else even orders it but since they advertised any combination of flavors I had taken up the challenge. When I need to find my happy place, most times it is in the bottom of that cup.

My other happy place, the place where I go when I need to release everything and dissolve my mind from anything that could be weighing on me, my ultimate guilty pleasure, the darkest sci-fi or paranormal romance novels I can find. I have one in my bag right now and you better believe that my eyes will be eating up word after word while I am sipping my drink. What can I say, today is a day to make it through until breaks. Speaking of breaks, time to get my happy on. I turn to slide out from behind my desk and as I do I see another client walk in. Okay, slight delay, I can do this.

"I'm here for my one o'clock appointment with Sarah." The tall blonde says before I can even greet her. Having just looked at the time I knew it was only a few minutes after

eleven o'clock and I can sense my cup of happy being put back on the shelf.

I smile at the woman but inwardly prepare for the battle of the entitled. "Sarah is currently with her," I look at my desk calendar and then at the clock, "ten-thirty appointment and sitting right over there is her next appointment. If you would like to sit and wait I can have something to drink brought to you-"

"I do not have time to wait. I had an urgent meeting come up and the stress of what I'm facing is overwhelming me and I cannot go to this thing without my treatments from Sarah." She interrupts me. Of course she can't. What was I thinking?

"If it is an emergency," I try so hard not to choke on the words. Emergency, uh huh. "I'm sure Sarah would be willing to let another therapist take care of you. I can see who is available right now." I use my most patient tone because honestly, you should always be polite to clients and customers. I will not however agree to that old 'the customer is always right' mantra. Sometimes they are straight up wrong, we can always be polite though.

"I have been coming to see Sarah for the past seven years. I do not want anyone who is not Sarah and I do not have all day to wait for you to accommodate me. Show me to Sarah's waiting rooms, I can start to make myself comfortable there."

And there goes another hole in my cheek. I *want* to call her an impatient, entitled, liar because Sarah is twenty-one years old and has been working here for the last six months. Just in case I have somehow forgotten the name of one of the therapists or masseuse that work here I check the roster and the date books. No, no it's not me, there is only one Sarah. *Hold on to that smile, Prayer.* I tell myself, looking at Sarah's one o'clock appointment.

"Mrs. Whitlock, I'm very sure that if you would allow me to bring out either Eric or Allie, either of them should be able to make you comfortable and you can decide from there

whether you would like to avail yourself of their services or relax until Sarah becomes available.” Maintaining the calm is becoming more difficult as I can sense the others in the waiting room growing frustrated not just with her demands but my attempts to placate her as well.

“Do either this Eric or Allie use the rose infused oils or only candles for lighting? This is what I have become accustomed to, the only thing that truly relaxes me.” She says as though Sarah had written a prescription just for her.

“I believe Allie will be just what you need and have you feeling your best in no time.” Not wanting to give her the opportunity to make any other demands from me, I quickly turn, stand and go into the back to find Allie who, fortunately for me, had not made any appointments until the afternoon because she was spending her morning looking through new catalogs to order from and restocking her rooms. I give her a run down of what is going on out front with Mrs. Whitlock and her eyes flash annoyance for only a moment and then she sighs and follows me back out. She introduces herself to the impatient woman and lays a hand on her back and gently pushes her toward the back rooms as she talks with her and outlines what treatments she would prefer to have used.

I look at the clock again and groan inside. Any second now the clients who had been in their appointments will begin trickling out and wanting to make their next appointments and I’ll have to send the ones waiting with their proper attendants. I kick my bag further under my desk and fold my hands on top and just wait to play my part until lunch time.

By the time my day has ended I feel like I am dragging my bag and my soul behind me. I know there are jobs and careers that are more stressful just in the nature of the tasks being performed but it really does wear on a person to feel like they are juggling so many others needs. Do I sound melodramatic? Yes, I’m sure I do but that is how it feels. Now all I want is to get home, make some tea and curl up with my book. The bright side of all of this is that I have two days off and one of those days will be my bi-weekly video meeting with my beloved book club, The Lovely Letters.

A bunch of us sci-fi romance readers who love to talk about our guilty pleasures with like minds but also enjoy our anonymity. Not everyone needs to know what it is I enjoy coating my gray matter with, even if they use the same materials. If I pass a person on the street I do not need them knowing I am fascinated by what an alien male with a tail and fangs does to his mostly willing human captive. I do not want the people I work with wondering what possesses me to read about human women being dominated by men with animalistic traits. I most certainly do not need anyone from my neighborhood thinking about my obsession with aliens with different shades of skin, and I mean blues, reds, greens, you know, alien.

The Lovely Letters allows me my freedom to read and share in my sci-fi dream guys and stay completely unknown. It's a comforting platform. We each have our own masquerade style face mask that we wear during our video meetings. We also all go only by the first letter of our names. I love that we retain all of our privacy but can still express ourselves with our creativity and originality. I mean honestly we could attain the same thing wearing black hoods and white masks and go by handles or even use avatars or voice only calls. This just feels like it fits us perfectly.

So, tomorrow night when it's Lovely Letters night, I will be P and I will have my mask that I designed myself with what looks like purple and green lizard skin and faux emeralds and amethyst dotting the areas around my eyes. It's a nod to my absolute love of all things alien romance. The last book we were reading and reviewing was from W and it had been the first in a series, no cliffhanger thank God, but I already want to get to the next one. However, I doubt that X, and boy does my curious mind wonder what her name really is, will pick the same author. I just wonder how long it will be before someone else picks it back up. Technically I could continue the series on my own but that somehow feels like cheating.

Time for tea. As much as I love the vanilla lavender cappuccinos during the day, when the sun goes down and it's time to relax I'm all about the chamomile lavender. Yes, I have a thing for lavender, it's literally everywhere in my life. The



colors in my home, the scents in my body washes, shampoos and body oils. I fix my cup and grab one of my favorite books and snuggle down in my overstuffed cozy chair. This is pure satisfaction and comfort. The day had been so long and mentally draining that by the time I had finished my cup and read two chapters I could feel my eyelids closing without my permission. Dragging my body up out of the chair I set my book down by my empty cup and head toward my bedroom. I grab the throw blanket I keep folded at the foot of my bed, curl it around me and just lie down on top of all the bedding, falling asleep quickly.

When I wake up the next morning I'm stretched out on the couch. I absolutely never remember moving in my sleep but at least if I sleep walk I keep it indoors and find a comfy spot. Anyway! It's my weekend, for me it's Friday and Saturday and I have so much to get done today that I know I have to haul myself up and out of bed. I have to do some shopping, bills I can pay online for the most part, laundry is a must and I really should clean my bathroom and kitchen today. Everything starts with a shower and getting dressed and heading out to splurge on some morning coffee. Coffee that I sorely missed yesterday.

I jump into the shower and my Friday showers are my favorite because I can take as long as I want or until the water runs cool. After washing and drying off I pick out my me outfit for today. A me outfit is exactly what it sounds like, an outfit that represents my personality and my mood and has nothing to do with uniforms or dress codes or any regulations. All me. Today I chose a red strapless bra and matching boy shorts, a black sundress that flares at my waist with spaghetti straps. I add a wide white belt, white ankle high socks and my high top red sneakers. I fill my right arm with black, red and white bangle style bracelets, throw on some large white hoop earrings and I feel like I look as punky as I feel.

When you are exactly five feet tall with curves suited to an hourglass you have got to learn to accessorize to create your own style because nothing is designed for you. I spend a little extra time on my hair because even if it's not my best feature it's the thing I like most about me. I have a great shade

of platinum blonde hair and it has just enough wave in it to let me do whatever I want and it won't fight me. I keep it just past my shoulders and today I have it down with the ends curled under. A little red lipstick that stands out with my deep brown eyes and to finish me off I grab my large floppy sun hat before I go out the door.

I live about two miles from work and my favorite coffee shop and most days I opt to walk, unless it's too cold. Today is chilly but the sun is out and I need to walk. I would bounce there if it wasn't likely they'd refuse to give me coffee and most likely call for someone with a wagon. I can't help it though, I'm a genuinely happy person with an amazing amount of energy, you know, most days.

As an orphan, or I suppose it's possible I was simply an unwanted child, most people wouldn't think I would have such a shiny disposition. The thing is I am self contained. I don't need anyone in my life to make my day brighter or to improve my moods. I don't have friends because I just don't enjoy contact with other people. The most contact I have with people is at work and I always keep it to a minimum. Other than those occasional days where I feel like everything is out of sorts, I stay sunny and calm.

It doesn't take long to get to the coffee shop and when the barista sees me he automatically starts my order and that makes me happy too. I'm a cup of predictable with a dash of spontaneity. I might pop in at any random time but I'll know what I'm getting. I choose a table over by the floor to ceiling windows that seem to accompany most coffee shops, pull out the book I was re-reading last night and let the world around me melt away. This will be the highlight of my day until my book club meeting tonight.

After enjoying my coffee and a couple chapters of my book I head out and begin the actual weekly chores. Since I opted for walking this morning that means I also opted for minimal groceries so that didn't take long. I spend the next few hours scrubbing the bathroom and kitchen until they shine and handle the two loads of laundry. I pay what needs to be paid online and the next time I look at the clock it's almost

time for book club. I've been waiting almost two whole weeks for this! A simple salad with a small basket of garlic knots and a glass of red wine sounds perfect for tonight.

Getting all the ingredients ready and tossing the knots in the oven I run into my bedroom to get comfy in my book club pajamas, the satiny green and purple ones that go perfect with my mask. I throw my food together in a way that guarantees I'll never be a guest chef on TV, carry it into the living room, and sit down to eat my food. Well, I actually destroy my food but hey, I'm hungry and there's no one here to impress. When I'm done I take my dishes to the kitchen, and prepare my pot of tea that I'll be sipping on all through the meeting.

Returning to the living room I pull out my laptop, open the page I need to go to that will guide me to tonight's chat server. The best way to stay anonymous is to be unpredictable. I realize that my mask isn't on and hurry to grab it, putting it into place as I sit back down. I log into the server and click on the 'join call Lovely Letters' button. I see my picture pop up and shrink down to a small square to join several others already on the screen and talking.

"P, you're here. Did you love it? I know you loved it! Tell me how much you loved it" W squeals from behind her mask. Her mask is covered in alternating black and white diamonds surrounded in a gold trim that flares up over the left side of her forehead.

"Was there ever any doubt that I would love it? You know you had me at tails." I laugh. "Hot aliens with tails and kilts will do it for me every time. Now that I think about it, I want one for Christmas."

"I knew she'd be crazy about this one." R says. Her mask, made entirely of red lace and sequins, sparkles even coming from her small square on my screen. "Not sure who is more into the tails between these two."

"Me" W and I both holler, jumping and waving at the same time.

Eventually we settle down into a discussion about the book and where we think she might take us and of course we have our favorite lines, best scene, if we had any cringe moments, favorite side characters, we talk about it all. A, D and T prefer to use audiobooks and they go on forever about the narrators and his drool worthy voice. They have an entire list of ‘men who can read a phone book while I get off’. I’m not kidding, I think I wrote it down once. As the night gets late everyone agrees to wrap it up and X chooses a book from another great author with an alien series as our next read. I push my impatience aside that I won’t be getting to book two of my beautiful tailed aliens and order myself a copy of X’s selection.

I close my laptop and take what’s left of my tea over to the couch. Tucking my feet up under me I grab one of my favorite re-reads and dissolve into another world until I pass out.

# Chapter 3

## Avalon

Three out of four of the initial identities Phillip and Raphael had located had not panned out. A school teacher whose image had appeared in a staff photo in a yearbook from a high school in Montana. A nurse, her match had come from photos of her on a social media site, living in Idaho. A shoe saleswoman who had had so many sales that she was highlighted in a news article for her company, smiling pictures included, a resident of Oregon. I had found a way to get near enough to each one of them to be able to smell them without having to introduce myself. All three had smelled completely human. I might not have the keener senses of the shifters, hell I can't even smell the difference between shifter breeds, but I can smell the human blood in their veins if I can get within a few feet of them. I know that these women are supposed to be mortal humans as well, but there is no way they would have controlled the supernaturals at any point in time if they weren't at least a little supernatural themselves. I'm counting on being able to sense it or smell it in their blood and that it hasn't been completely diluted over time.

Phillip was right not to go below his 80 percent match. The first three I had found I could see the resemblance at a distance or even when they turned their head just the right way. Overall they looked nothing alike though I still made sure I got close enough to be sure of their scent. One left to check out and then I'm going to make my way back to where either Phillip or Raph are until we get more results. I look at the page in my folder containing the information for the next woman on my list. She works as a receptionist at a day spa and they have a group photo of all their current employees. I really need to find out from Raphael why he isn't running this reverse image search, or whatever it is, on driver's license and state ID photos.

As it is I am standing outside of the day spa that Prayer Walker works at. The last few days have been sunny and bright here but today, when I finally found the damn place,

rain. Rain followed by drizzle followed by dark clouds and then more rain. So far with the other three I've been able to maintain a distance and still catch their scent. I'm not sure that will work right now when all I can smell is rain and wet roads. I don't even think I'd be able to smell her if I had my nose in her hair but I am sure she'd notice that. Just as I am beginning to think I'll have to give up for today and hopefully try tomorrow she comes walking through the glass door entrance. She stops for just a moment and then starts off again.

I stand straighter and prepare to follow her when she goes into the building directly next to the one she came out of. I look up and it's one of those fancy coffee houses. Well if nothing else comes of this I can get a good cup of coffee to help balance this let down weather. I wait a moment longer and then follow her into the Cafe. I find myself relaxing into the ambiance of the place immediately. There are short cream colored couches and deep armchairs all with coffee tables and end tables next to them as well as tall round tables for two and four people all around the walls and windows with high back bar stools at them. The floors are all dark wood but there are deep purple and cream colored shag throw rugs everywhere. In the middle of the room acting as room dividers between the individual sitting areas are almost ceiling tall and at least eight feet wide bookcases filled with books.

I have to refocus because this is just the kind of place I would come to relax and have a hot drink if I lived in this dark, wet city. I walk up behind her to stand in line and breathe in deeply trying to catch her scent without looking like some lowlife creep. The first thing I smell is Lavender, everything is lavender. I'm pretty sure it's in her hair, on her skin and even her clothes. It's a very pleasant fragrance but it overwhelms me for just a moment because I need to get past the artificial perfumes and smell deeper, the scent of her blood. I take another step forward and carefully lean towards her and breathe in again, hoping no one notices my odd behavior and believe me I know it's odd.

An aroma that to my knowledge I have never smelled before enters my senses and I feel the ground tilt slightly. What is that? It's not any supernatural I have ever scented

before but it's certainly not human. She has reached the cashier now and I try once more before I will have to let her walk away. Again I can't figure out that scent, it's not faint like I expected it to be after all these years but, as strong as it is, I still don't know *what* it is. The ground rocks under me once again and I'm lost in thought trying to process what's happening and why. I notice she is thanking the man and I fix my eyes on the menu board above the cashier's head to avoid any chance of making eye contact with her. I step forward to order my own drink and the man smiles at me and puts a tall to-go cup in my hand. "From the lady." He says, nodding in the direction Prayer Walker just went off in.

I look at the cup and in an ornate script are the words "It's vanilla lavender, I hope you like the taste as much as you like the scent." I turn and look as she is walking past the windows back to her workplace. I laugh. I laugh hard. That could have gone so much worse. Little Miss Prayer Walker of questionable origins, just called me out. Still laughing, I take my phone out and walk over to one of the tables by the window. I press the button that will initiate a group call and wait until all three have answered before saying "I found something."

"*Something*?" Phillip asks.

"Well I really don't know what to say. I found Prayer Walker, she is most definitely not human. However," I say louder as all three began to speak at once, "I have no idea what she is."

"How do you not know what she is? Wait, she isn't human?" Nichlos asked.

"I scented her and I've never smelled anything like her before. I tried several times but I can't place it from any species. I have no idea what she is."

"What did she say when you asked her?" Raph asked

"I haven't asked her anything yet." *Or even spoken to her.*

“Avalon, you have had us all on a mission to locate certain women. You have some wild apocalypse in your mind if we don’t find these women. We find one, you scent her, she’s not human and you just walked away?” Raphael’s voice takes on an incredulous tone there at the end.

“A couple things there brother. Number one there is a difference between *believing* these women are more than a legend and finding out they *are in fact* real people. Believing she is human and finding out she is not. Because of that, I hadn’t really thought ahead as to what I should say but even if I had a whole speech prepared, she walked away from me first *and* it’s a little awkward ” I finish grudgingly, knowing this is going to be unpleasant.

“Why is it awkward, Avalon?” Nichlos asked.

I take a deep breath and mentally sort out what parts I’m willing to divulge. “I couldn’t catch her scent the way I did the other three. I had to get a lot closer than I planned and I guess I wasn’t as subtle as I thought I was and she figured out what I was sniffing her.” I cringe, not because of her reaction or being caught but because I have to recount at least part of this to my brothers and this will be fodder for their jokes for years to come.

“How do you know she figured you out?” Phillip asks.

“She bought me a coffee and left it with the cashier and the cup had a note on it indicating she knew what I was doing.” I said, really wanting to get past this.

“Indicated how?” Raphael asked, drawing out the word.

“The message said the coffee was vanilla lavender, like her scent, and basically that she bought me the cup because I seemed to like it so much.” I wanted to be annoyed because it was embarrassing but looking back down at the cup still in my hand all I could feel was amusement.

“The lady called you out, for sniffing her. Shouldn’t you have more stealth and grace than that by now, Av?” Raphael said laughing.



“Enough. I have to figure out how to get her to talk to me and answer some questions without making her think I’m stalking her. I have to figure out how to actually approach her.” Now I am getting frustrated because my mind is forming many scenarios but none where there is a happy ending and almost all with her kicking me right between the legs and running away screaming.

“Why didn’t you approach her before all this went sideways?” Raphael asked.

“The first three women I was able to catch a whiff of and they smelled completely human so I didn’t see the point in making contact. I didn’t think I would need to approach her and by the time I realized how close I had to get I was already embroiled in this mess.” I answer annoyed now.

“Well, you owe her a coffee” Phillip says “start there. You know she works again tomorrow, you can take a coffee to her at work. It gives you an opening and you won’t have to stand around stalking her.”

He sounded sure that it was a good idea and I can’t really think of anything better so I will hope he knows what he’s talking about and buy her a coffee tomorrow. A coffee that tastes absolutely horrible, I realize when I finally get around to trying it. The smell is one thing, it’s actually pleasant and calming, the taste however, I feel like I just swallowed a handful of flowers. As I am leaving the coffee house I pour the nasty drink into one of the potted plants and take the empty cup back with me to the hotel I’ve rented for a few days. I rinse it out and set it on the dresser and lie down on the bed and think hard about the things I need to ask Prayer Walker and what I should say to get her talking to me. I come up with many ways to open a conversation and toss them almost as fast as I think them up. After a great deal of deliberation I grin to myself as I finally know what I’m going to say and how I’m going to say it. Looking at the clock in the corner of the TV I see it’s after four in the morning, time to grab a few hours of shut eye before I try again with Miss Prayer Walker.

## Prayer

Today had started off like any normal work day. I got up, had my shower, got dressed, did my hair, grabbed a fast breakfast I could eat while I walked and headed out the door. There were no clients pushing my buttons, the phone was a normal steady stream of callers, all the appointments were on time and I even got out for my coffee break on time. That's where normal came to a screeching halt. When I had walked out of the building I had glanced up and for just a second I had seen him. He had taken my breath away just for a moment.

He was tall, above average but not freakishly, I would say probably somewhere around six foot three. His hair was black and long, I could tell it goes down his back just from the way the sides fell across his shoulders and onto his chest. He was wearing a long sleeve button up pale blue shirt and I wondered if it would match his eyes, I couldn't see those from across the street. A pair of black slacks and I couldn't make out the shoes much either but probably dress shoes. From what I could see he was a work of art and I took a mental picture so I could take that image out later and play with him in my dreams.

While in line at the coffee shop I had heard someone come in behind me and sensed when they were standing behind me. It was the sniffing that had gotten my attention. I know what I smell like. I go out of my way to be sure that I smell that way everyday. The lavender is a clean, pretty scent that I can use at work without offending anyone there but also staying apart from all the oils and essences and lotions that the place carries. The second time he sniffs at me I can tell he is closer behind me and I'm trying to decide if I should turn around and call him out or take the passive aggressive route and simply comment out loud about manners or the lack thereof.

I step up to the counter to place my order and oh dear lord, he does it again. Deciding to use the kill them with kindness method, I quietly order a second cup, scribble a little note on the to-go cup and pay for both. With a wink at the cashier I leave the cup on the counter and subtly point to the

man behind me. I turn and go to walk past the man and my heart skips one single beat when I see the beautiful man from across the street. I was wrong, his shirt does not match his eyes because they are a very deep green. He doesn't notice me looking at him and I walk out and return to work. He may be the first man I have felt even the most fleeting interest in but the whole sniffing thing was setting me back a bit.

The rest of the day goes by without a hitch and as I'm tidying up my desk I see my empty coffee cup and it makes me think again of Mr. Tall, dark and sniffy. Out of the blue I am hit with thoughts that should prove I'm losing my mind. What if I smelled bad to him? What if he actually hates lavender? What if he's allergic? What if his mom died recently and she always smelled like lavender and I was accidentally traumatizing the poor man? Wait, what? Why am I doing this to myself, I didn't do anything wrong. Only I could handle a cringe worthy moment with what *felt* like perfect poise and humor and wind up blaming myself a few hours later.

I shake my head at myself finishing up and head home ready to end the day and start fresh tomorrow. I'll get through tomorrow and then it's my weekend and I'll get the reset that I always need after a full week. When I get home I look at the kitchen and decide no, not cooking tonight, deli meat sandwich and some tea and I'll be in my pajamas in no time. While preparing my dinner I make sure to put all thoughts of the hot guy with the nose out of my mind. At the very least I make an effort to do so, but like when someone says 'don't look down' and you just have to look down, the harder I try not to think of him, the more I'm thinking of him. This would not be so frustrating if it wasn't for the fact that my total knowledge of his existence is somewhere between six and eight minutes and I didn't learn much in that time.

I know he's beautiful, hot, sexy even, but I can't nail it down to one feature. I give up the battle and while I'm eating I take out my mental photo collection and review. He's tall and well built, but that's an easy one, lots of guys are tall with good bodies. His long hair is so black and not like a shiny raven's wing either. It's like the light doesn't reflect off of him but is actually absorbed by him. Those eyes, so deep and

heavy but the color is like an aerial view of a dark green forest and why is it that men always get the long beautiful lashes. I have a feeling that just like a forest, I could get lost in those eyes. His nose is long and straight but with a regal effect to it that balances out the more delicate looking cheekbones. His bottom lip is perfectly round and almost pouty while the top lip is thinner and more stern looking. When taken apart and viewed separately there is nothing remarkable there but when you look at him overall he's simply stunning. Literally the only other thing I know about him is that he sniffs people in public places.

I think it's people in general anyway. After washing the dishes I start getting ready for bed and my brain latches on to that bizarre thought. Does he go around smelling everyone he comes in contact with? He has to, right? It couldn't be just me. Unless, oh God, what if he really was allergic to me? No, stop this. Stop this circle of stupidity before you even jump in. It's late, you are tired, admittedly that was a weird experience and he would have been memorable without the cringe. Feeling I have done what I can to lecture my wandering mind back into place, I focus on my breathing and begin to feel that heavy feeling of sleep pulling me down. Just before my mind goes completely black an image of those deep green eyes appears and I take one last deep breath and fall asleep.

# Chapter 4

## Prayer

The next morning I wake up next to instead of on the couch and bump my head on the coffee table as I'm trying to sit up. Ah, a great start to the day I see. I pull myself up onto the couch and flop my arms out beside me, annoyed at my sleeping self for leaving me on the floor. The laptop is on the island counter separating the kitchen from my living area and I can't see the screen from here. I have no idea what time it is because like a normal person I keep my clock next to my bed so I can see it when I wake up. Unlike a normal person I'm not always where I left myself when I wake up.

I pull myself up and head to my bedroom feeling grateful that today is my last day this week and I can feel my reset coming on. It's a Lovely Letters weekend as well and I start to feel a slight energy run through me until I look at the clock. That clock does not say seven o'clock, it can't. I have to have everything ready in the office by eight. Nope, not a great start at all. I fight my way out of my pajamas, because when you are in a hurry absolutely nothing will work with you, tossing them on the floor as I walk to the bathroom to shower and brush my teeth. So it appears today will be one of those no makeup, wet hair in a bun, whatever clothes I find in the closet kind of day. Well damn.

I perform spectacular feats of aerobic body and hair washing with my toothbrush stuck in my mouth. Five minutes later and I'm out, buffing my body with a towel in one hand while pulling things out of drawers and off hangers with the other. I run in circles around the house, pulling on clothes while putting my hair up in the messiest of all messy buns. I grab a mango smoothie out of the fridge and race out the door hopping as I try and get my shoes on with one hand holding my purse and liquid breakfast with the other. I wonder offhand if I look as crazed as I feel running at top speed with my bag bouncing in the wind while I slosh down my not so smoothie.

I make it to the doors with five minutes to spare so I make sure the doors are unlocked and hit the button that opens all the blinds. Dashing through the door back rooms I turn on lights and plug in oil warmers and other instruments and get the coffee started in the break room. I am pretty sure that my lungs are attempting to collapse but I keep forcing air into them and for that my ribs are cramping and my stomach muscles are bunching when I fall down into my chair just as the staff start filing in. I get a bunch of cheerful greetings and I place a smile on my face and wave at each one, sucking air in between my teeth hoping my breathing will right itself soon.

Thirty minutes later I have calmed down, everything is running smoothly and the day is looking up. For the next two hours I do my normal routine of answering calls, making appointments, handling clients and generally keeping the place running smooth. I'm excited, it was a rough start to the day but now I'm just counting down the hours. I can feel the call of the weekend and I need to remember to pick up ice cream on the way home. Now, should I just have ice cream for dinner, I mean damn if I didn't work out enough just getting here today. I'll pick up cookies and they can be ice cream sandwiches-.

My brain loses thought as a tanned hand with long, strong fingers wrapped around a coffee to-go cup slips into my view. I blink a few times trying to focus on the cup. There is writing on it that says 'Your scent is pleasing, I'd call it devine, Your coffee tastes awful, Won't you try mine.' My eyes shoot up and I'm staring into the forest green orbs of my beautiful, umm, stalker? I sniff at the cup and look him in the eye.

"Is that peppermint mocha?" I ask him raising an eyebrow

"Yes." Alrighty then do I have to give him another cup to write on to get more words?

"Dude, who *are* you?" I ask him trying not to sound like I'm the crazy one.

"That's what I'm trying to find out." He smiles at me. Nah, not getting off that easy pretty stalker boy.

“You don’t know who you are?” I stare at him with confusion.

“No, I-” He tries to answer me but still, nah. Poetry from stalkers isn’t a freebie.

“If you don’t know who you are, do you think I know you? “ Trying very hard to sound concerned and helpful.

“No, I am-” Nope, not done with him yet.

“Oh, are you following me because I remind you of your dead mother?” I ask him with wide eyes.

“My mother is not dead. I-” He looks at me narrowing his eyes and I have to keep my face plastered in a look of concern.

“Your dead sister then?” I ask again, giving him the wide, innocent and concerned eyes. I’m going to be wanting an award for this performance, thank you.

“My sister isn’t dead either. Why are you so sure all my family is dead? What have we done to you?” He asks me. Okay then, he may have suffered enough.

“I don’t know if you have done something to me or not. Do you know why?” I ask him, smiling.

“No, I mean, I really don’t.” He looks so confused, poor guy.

I lean in and lower my voice “It’s because.” I raise my voice “I don’t *know you!*” He takes one step back and I’m pretty sure the word aghast applies to the look on his face.

“I’m Avalon, I apologize.” I really don’t think he says that much.

“You should have led with that, Big Guy, I’m Prayer Walker.” I say holding my hand out and giving him the biggest ‘I-win’ smile I can. “You know you deserved worse, right?” I say still smiling at him.

**Avalon**

What exactly, just happened? I'm staring at Prayer's hand as she is shaking mine but I don't feel as though I'm actually a part of this moment. More like I'm watching it from across the room or something. I knew she wasn't human, but I'm not sure she's, well I mean is she in charge of all her faculties? She's talking, wait no, I have to listen to her, I have questions. I'm not sure she's capable of reasonable answers but I still have to ask questions, I can't ask them here, but she thinks I'm a stalker, how will I get her out of here. Oh damn, she stopped talking, and we all know wasn't listening. I can see it on her face, she knows I couldn't focus on those words to save my life. She did that on purpose. What had she said? I deserved worse. Oh blah, just confess and take the loss.

"I don't think I heard a word you said once you slapped me with the 'you deserved worse' line." I say honestly, staring down at her hand still holding mine.

"I said my name is Prayer Walker, you said Avalon, Avalon what? Or is it just Avalon? Like a rock star or something?" she asks, gently pulling her hand out of mine.

"We really didn't use them when I'm from. I'm not in the habit of using it. My name is Avalon Sippar." Not entirely true but not a lie.

"When is that from Avalon?" she asks.

"What?" I look down at her and I can feel that confusion setting in again. I swear she talks like a spider spinning a web and I am going to be in the middle I can feel it. Who is this woman? What is she?

"You said *when* I'm from." she states.

"I meant *where*, I'm sorry." I try brushing off my slip.

"No, you meant when, but that's ok because I am learning to just expect crazy from you." she says, and doesn't sound the least bit distressed.

"My brother's often say that I am a little bit off, or I suppose crazy also, but I'm the oldest so I expect it." What exactly am I doing? I need her to leave with me and talk to me alone and here I am implying to her that I am in fact a crazy



person. “So now I’m the crazy stalker person who can’t stand your coffee.” I think, and then realize no, no I said that outloud. Lovely.

“Yeah, but as long as you accept it we can work with that.” She says grabbing her purse and walking around her desk heading toward the door. She stops and turns around. “Are you coming?” I would say she looks at me like I’m crazy but I’m thinking that’s just going to be her permanent expression until I can explain everything.

“I think so, yes, I’m coming.” I agree, having no idea where we are going or why she decided to leave. She didn’t take her coffee though so I turn back real quick and grab it from the table. It’s fine if she doesn’t like it, that lavender concoction was, I have no words actually, I can still drink this cup. I’m pretty sure I’m going to need it anyway.

I follow her out the door and start planning in my head the things I have to say to her. I try and make lists of the questions I need to ask her. I’m here for information. This woman is living proof that my theory could be correct and I’m just following her around, letting her believe I’m what? An idiot? Daft? Mad as a hatter? This should only get better when I not only tell her I am a vampire but that she is also not human.

How am I meant to say these things and why the devil didn’t I think that before, well before I even left the den? I stop focusing on my thoughts for a moment and look around me, a little shocked that we’ve gone this far without me noticing. I know where we are but I really don’t want to let her *know* I know. Hey, this is your house. No, I promise not the stalker you think I am, just a vampire trying to stop a supernatural catastrophe and need to know what species you are. I roll my eyes internally at the whole situation. I should have had Phillip doing this. She wouldn’t have thought he was an insane stalker. She’d probably have looked at him and said ‘awww such a sweet man’, like they all do. However, that causes me some annoyance to think about so I push it aside. I can’t be an insane vampire stalker who is also just randomly pissed off.

She comes to a stop on the sidewalk and I stop with her, assuming I will look confused about where we are. I'm not, I know it's her house, but I am confused about *why* we are here. Does she always bring people she thinks might be nuts back to her house? I look toward the house then look back at her, am I supposed to say something? Oh no, has she been talking this whole time? Worst. Habit. Ever. I tune absolutely everything out when I'm thinking. You know what, I'm doing it again.

"Do you know where we are, Avalon?" She asks looking up at me.

I'm not going to lie to her, I don't even want to, but if I can be evasive she might not notice. So, I cock my head slightly to the side and raise an eyebrow at her in the universal body language for 'tell me, I'm clueless'.

"It's my house. Do you know why I brought you here?" She asks.

This one I can answer. "No, I have no idea why we are at your house." I mean I really don't know. I'm also not sure I want to.

"I love a good story. You, Avalon, I sense you are a good story. I don't have a lot of people I talk to and I don't think you have any friends--"

"I have friends." I say cutting her off somewhat offended.

"Of course you do. However, I want to hear this story. So here's what we're going to do. I'm going to call my job and tell them something came up and I won't be coming back from break. Then we're going to sit and chat and you will tell me what your interest is in me and then I'll let you know if I have any interest in you." She says and walks up to her door.

That is the most condescending and again borderline offensive thing I've heard. I think maybe ever. I truly need to know who this woman is, where she comes from and who her people are or I would be tempted to walk away right now. Run, I would run away. I am curious though, if she thought I

was stalker material or crazy, maybe just a liar, why is she bringing me into her home?

“Prayer, I believed you thought I was crazy, following you, whatever. Why are we going in your house? That doesn’t seem safe. Does it?” I ask her just trying to piece together how this woman thinks.

“Avalon, you are not a threat. Yes, you were kind of rude to be sniffing me, but you did it in a public coffee shop, not at, I don’t know, a bus terminal or something. Yes, you showed up at my job, not completely sure about that yet but, you came in and talked to me, not hanging around a corner waiting for me so you could attack me. Let’s not forget, I told you that you were coming in my house to have a talk and *you* asked if that’s really safe. For *me*. Nope, not scared of you. ” she finishes, opening the door and waving me into her home.

She’s right. I’m no threat to her, at least not physically. The things I need to tell her, the things I can tell she has absolutely no idea exist, there is a definite threat to her mind. The world, as she knows it, is about to stop spinning.

# Chapter 5

## Prayer

I know that Avalon is not wrong. This is a wild and reckless move and if you asked me, I could not tell you what has possessed me to bring this strange man, who I have known for a collective two hours, into my home. It's just he seems so relatable. I'm not really sure that's the right word. Familiar isn't it either though. It's like I know where he's coming from and I feel like reaching out to him is really only meeting him halfway. No matter how many times I look at the situation and how strange it is, I just can't make myself feel alarmed in his presence. Even when I was thinking of him as a stalker I just couldn't be put off. It's like I get him. He's odd, has horrible communication skills, and he might be coming from way out in left field, but I get him.

I go into my kitchen and put a kettle on to boil. I don't know if he drinks tea or not but his options are tea, coffee or water so best to get ahead of it. He comes to the kitchen with me but he's standing on the other side of the island and I can only assume he's trying to be polite and give me space. I can feel an odd tension coming off him, the kind you feel when you look at someone and you just know they have something to tell you. That's what it is. I know he has a story to tell, it's all over his face. I think maybe he's having a hard time figuring out how to start, or maybe exactly what to start with so I need to give him his opening.

"I'm pretty sure that coffee," I say nodding to the cup in his hand. "is cold. Would you like to warm it up or would you prefer some tea or ice water perhaps?"

"The coffee is fine as it is, I often drink it cold." He says, but doesn't take a drink.

"As you like. I'm going to make some tea and call work and then we can go into the living room and talk. Are you hungry? Would you like something to eat first?" I ask because, well dammit, it's polite.

“I’m fine for now, thank you though.” he says.

I shrug, grabbing my cell phone and calling my job as I look through my teabags deciding which I’m in the mood for. When someone answers I explain that something has come up and I won’t be back in. Everyone in the place saw me talking to and then leaving with Avalon so I think it’s very lucky that I’m not asked anything more than is everything ok. I make sure that they know I am fine and not in any danger or trouble and I’ll be back in on Sunday morning like usual. Disconnecting the call I grab the boiling kettle and finish my tea, raise it to Avalon signaling I’m ready and walk into the living room.

I sit down on the couch, propping myself into the corner so I can face him wherever he chooses to sit and curl a leg under myself. Blowing across the top of my tea I watch him and I can see him deciding if he should sit and if so where. I’m not helping. I’ve done all I can to make him comfortable in my home and he’s just going to have to jump in. He does, taking a seat at the other end of the couch mimicking my position. That makes me smile but I hide it by taking a sip of my tea. Tea which is still scalding hot and burns my mouth, makes me cough and brings tears to my eyes.

Avalon jumps forward to help me, grabbing the cup from my hand before I can slosh the liquid all over which would probably have given me second degree burns. I stop coughing and wipe my eyes choking out a thank you. Smooth Prayer, really smooth. I sit back again and eye the tea cup.

“I’ll just let that sit there a moment, I think. So, Avalon, tell me.” I say as he sits back down.

“Tell you what?” he asks with eyebrows furrowing.

“Your story. Tell me everything. Whatever is in that rather nice looking head of yours. The things you are just dying to tell me.” I smile encouragingly at him and then fold my hands in my lap and wait, not looking away from him. I watch him take a deep breath and open his mouth to say something. His mouth closes and he shakes his head. He raises a finger as though to make a point and opens his mouth again

and again the mouth closes and he tucks his finger back into fist and drops it onto the couch. “That bad, huh?” I say blowing out a heavy breath.

“Well, no. It’s not bad, it’s just a perspective issue.” He says cryptically.

“Uh, who’s perspective?” I ask cautiously.

“From mine, everything is fine and perfectly normal. From yours, probably not that good at first, I’m expecting disbelief followed by annoyance and probably anger or fear after that.” He sounded like he was methodically ticking off the expected side effects of a medication.

“OK, now that we know how it’s going to go, how about you give me my story.” I sit back into the cushions letting him know I’m settling in, ready for it.

“You want me to weave you a fancy tale like out of story books but I can’t do that. I will tell you what is, I am even going to tell you what I believe, but I have to do it like the proverbial band aid and just say it. So, here it goes.” He pauses a moment, then he locks his eyes on mine and tells me his truth.

“I am not human. I am a vampire.” His tone is calm and steady like he’s telling me he’s got dark hair or something. I fight to keep my eyes from going wide and my mouth from dropping open. I want to stay quiet until he finishes so I roll my hand at him for him to continue on. His eyebrow lifts at me for just a moment but I refuse to react so he goes on. “What I mean is my species is vampire, not that I alone am a vampire. We all share the planet but we live outside the human world in what we’ve dubbed the supernatural community. Vampires, shifters and hybrids we all keep to ourselves and stay out of the focus of humans even though we are deeply integrated with them. They only know us as humans because that’s all we let them see. Does this sound like anything you may have heard before? Perhaps in your past?” He asks me and I’m pretty sure he actually wants an answer. Oh I’ll give him an answer alright..

“I’ve heard all about vampires, shifters and even hybrids. Is this a prank? A joke? Has one of my letters figured me out and sent you here as a hazing? Gorgeous man finds me and tells me he is a vampire in a secret world. I *know* I have read that one once or thirty times. Who put you up to this, Avalon. Or whatever your real name is.” I just laugh then because seriously, why would anyone think this would work. I’m obsessed, not insane. Unlike some people.

“Okay so we got the disbelief and annoyance out of the way.” He says dryly. He hasn’t taken his eyes off me yet though. He seems to be very good at this and if he is lying intentionally well, how disappointing. If he’s just crazy I can forgive him and play along a bit.

He keeps going. “I ask if you had ever heard any of this because you are not human either. I don’t know what you are, I’ve never smelled anything like you before, but your blood does not carry the scent of a human.” Ah, the reason for the sniffing. Hey, that’s creative and I’m almost proud of him for finding a way to dodge an apology for what he considered sound reasoning for his actions.

“I’m afraid I’m going to have to stop you there, Avalon. I promise you, I am human but that’s really not where I want to focus. You, you are a vampire, and you brought me coffee. At my job. During the day. With the sun out and then you drank the coffee. The *not* blood laden coffee. Very minty actually. ” I tilt my head at him and wait hoping he’ll just let this go whether because the prank is over or because he sees I’m not buying into the lie.

“I can exist in the sunlight, yes. I can also walk and chew gum at the same time, although I don’t do it very often. ” He smiles.

“Is it the fangs? Gum gets all stuck to them does it?” I ask sarcastically.

“No, it’s not the fangs because those don’t come out unless I need to take some human blood, which I do as little as possible.”

“Very considerate of you. Most vampires would just tear out a throat or sink teeth in as often as they wanted to.” I am riding the sarcasm train all the way to the station.

“No, that’s not what most vampires would do because we absolutely abhor the taste of blood. It’s just something we *have* to do. None of that is important right now. What is important is I believe you are a descendant of a group of women who used to act as a guide or liaison between the humans and the supernaturals. It took a great deal to find you and I’m hoping you will be able to help me find the others and perhaps avoid calamity in both worlds.” He finishes leaning forward, hands clasped together on his knees waiting for me to say something.

I lean toward the crazy man and decide I will just have to call his bluff. Either he will admit he’s lying or I’m going to have to figure out what to do with him. I tilt my head to the side and stretch my neck out, baring it to him.

“I think you are going to need to bite me.” I tell him.

“Prayer, I already told you I take human blood. I also told you you are not human. I’m not going to bite you for no reason.” he replies.

“Oh that’s just too convenient, Avalon now come on.” I almost growl at him because seriously, how does he have an answer for everything? I go to say something about the fairy tales he supposedly wasn’t going to weave and I stop suddenly. Avalon throws his head back and opens his mouth wide and from behind his top row of teeth I can see two protruding and curved, well, fangs. They don’t look anything like canines or any vampire teeth I have ever seen in movies or television. I don’t recall any novels depicting them this way. They look like snake fangs that are behind his regular teeth and oh lord, as I watch they disappear back into the roof of his mouth.

“What, no hissing?” I taunt him. I admit he had me stunned for a moment but honestly if he’s going to try and be this convincing then obviously he’d have the theatrical gear and effects. I’m impressed really.



“You are being intentionally difficult. I am trying to tell you the truth and you are making it very hard. This is important, Prayer. I need you to get on the same page with me.”

“Avalon, I’m not even in the same book as you. I can’t take this shit seriously and what exactly do you want from me?” I say holding onto my patience.

“The moment I caught your scent and knew you weren’t human I realized you could be the key to us finding all the remaining offspring of the original council. If they are all what you are, which I cannot guarantee, they will all have the same scent in their blood. If I can bring you, a person who had no prior knowledge of the supernatural, to meet them, it might go a long way in getting them to accept their places as heirs.” He states as though all of this is a forgone conclusion and not the preposterous ramblings of a madman. Vampire. Whatever.

“I’m not human.” I say to him.

“You’re not human but, before you say it, I really don’t know what you are. I’ve smelled every living species on this planet for one reason or another and I have a very large database of blood scents in my head. Your scent is new to me.” He was under the misunderstanding that she was coming around to his explanations.

“Perhaps I’m a mermaid. Have you ever smelled a mermaid? Maybe if I soak in a salt bath you’ll get a better sense.”

“Prayer.” He said his lips pinching.

“Fairy?” I asked, ignoring his growing frustration.

”*Prayer*, I know you don’t know me. I know you have no reason to believe me and that for you this must seem rather far fetched and implausible but I am telling you the truth.” He said and I’m not sure but I think he might actually believe this story he is telling. No, it’s not possibly, he’d be locked up somewhere. He’s still just screwing with me.

“Avalon, you know if that is your name.” I say annoyed that it’s genuinely starting to bother me that he’s

keeping this up.

“My name really is Avalon. Why would I lie?”

“Avalon” I say with amazement that he’d have to ask. “Like King Arthur. You’re named after the island? Really?”

“I’d say there is a good chance it was named after me.” He said, looking thoughtful.

“You must be older than dirt. You look good though. Honestly you are the best looking vampire I’ve ever seen.” I smile at him because, why not.

“I’m not older than dirt, I am however older than plumbing.” He says dryly.

“Now that’s not that overly old, Avalon. Certainly not medieval old. I would assume my grandmother wouldn’t have had indoor plumbing. You still make geriatrics look good “

“Prayer, I said older than plumbing, not older than indoor plumbing. Can we move past my age and please start to focus on what’s important?” He asked, sighing.

“No, no I don’t think we can, Avalon. I -” I stopped talking as his phone started ringing. I looked up at him and in as level a voice I could I asked “Your vampire friends calling?”

Avalon looked down at his phone and shook his head and didn’t look happy about the call. “No. Wolf shifter Alpha. This is probably not good, he doesn’t like checking in. “

## Avalon

I’m fairly certain that whatever Sebastian is calling for I’m not going to like it. If he wasn’t the Alpha of the Black River Wolf Pack and the Midwest region, he’d be walking the path of a lone wolf. He hates answering to anyone or having his decisions questioned and since he has never once called me for anything less than life or death I’m really dreading answering. I’m not ready.

The phone stops ringing and begins ringing again. Well shit. I look up at Prayer, the woman who makes me wish

someone would write the ‘Guide to understanding Women’s Sarcasm’. I know the words she is saying. The words are in English but the tone and context leaves me confused, something I am not used to. Usually the longer I speak to someone the more clarity I get with them. Not Prayer. Hell no. Fucking mermaid, really? She’s staring at me and I look back down to my ringing phone.

I can’t ignore him forever. It really does have to be important for him to call, but I can’t lose any ground I’ve gained with Prayer either. The ground being that now she just thinks I am a complete liar out to haze her but I am no longer insane. At least for now, I believe there is a chance I could be after a while of being with her. The phone goes off in my hand again and Prayer looks at me and rolls her eyes. I’m not trying to hide anything from her, we only hide things from humans, it’s our most important law. No secrets from each other, hide everything from the humans and she is not human. Well, she still thinks she is but I know she’s not. Ah fuck it, no way to know how this is going to go.

I answer the phone on speaker and immediately Sebastian is on the line growling at me. I listen for a second and no, I think he might be snarling into the phone. I look at Prayer who has her eyebrow raised looking at the phone and her mouth is hanging slightly open, cute.

“I speak several languages, Sebastian, wolf isn’t one of them. What’s going on?” I ask him calmly.

“How long have I been trying to reach you, Avalon? The phone just kept ringing and ringing, not even going to voice-mail. Now you want to know what’s going on? And *how* do you not even have voice-mail?” Sebastian was definitely irritated. I accept blame for that.

“I won’t check the messages so why set it up? I answer texts frequently and I may or may not answer a call, but I’m not going through messages. Now I’ll try again, what has happened that has you calling me?” My tone very clearly states, get on with it I’m busy.

“You specifically wanted to know if we heard anything and we’ve heard a big something. Apparently Camillo Wyatt, a member of the red fox shifter community in Nantucket, Rhode Island is in talks with his alpha about getting some justice for his daughter. From what I understand the girl was out on private property in the evening in her fox form and some human hunters got on the property and shot her. She’s not dead but she took the shot to her leg and apparently she has been so traumatized that she won’t shift back so she can be healed.” Sebastian took in a deep breath and let out a low growl.

From where she was sitting Prayer could hear everything and I was grateful Sebastian couldn’t see her when she rolled her eyes. “You guys really are committed to this supernatural thing. Is it a big club? Do you have staged events like those civil war buffs?”

“What the fuck, Avalon. Who is that? What’s going on?” Sebastian demands.

“I’ve located one of the descendants. Her name is Prayer Walker and she’s not human. She just doesn’t know she’s not human.” I tell him, keeping my eyes on Prayer.

“They’re real? Not just a legend? You actually found one? If she’s not human what is she? Are there others? What do you mean she thinks she’s human?” He fired off questions in rapid succession.

“Sebastian, I can’t head off to Rhode Island while I’m trying to help Prayer understand how things really are. I need to know how things are being handled, what’s happening on our side? Is Damon handling this?” I ask him, avoiding all his questions and refocusing him on the information I need.

“Damon is tied up in phone calls and handling things as they come at him but that has him grounded to his offices in Maine. Cato has left Eshaq in charge and he and Marcus are” He pauses and then says cautiously “flying up from Tennessee to help handle the Wyatt family and get the rest of the pack to back down. I was going to head that way with Jasper but

Damon didn't want them making a bigger deal out of it with too many Territory Alphas showing up. “

“We don't want this getting out of hand on either side. We're no where close to ready should any of them show the humans who and what we are. Get the girl somewhere safe with her family. Separate them from their pack but not from our people. They are more likely to raise aggression with those closest to them but I don't want them feeling punished for it. Find another fox clan and place them there, let them know it's for her safety while she's still unable to turn. I'm pretty sure there is one out where Nichlos is now. He can help watch over them. Impress upon them the need for her safety and that Nichlos will do everything to help her.” I say firmly.

“Is this one of those ‘yes, my lord Avalon’ moments or a suggestion on how you think it should be handled?” Sebastian asks, his tone questioning but not rude.

“You know I hate that shit. Still I think it best if you relocate the family to be under Nichlos's watch. It would not be good for so many Alphas to be out of their territories if this comes to light. We need to be able to suppress everything as it comes up but I don't want the people thinking we're going all dictator on them. ” I reply with determination. He'll get the message, I dislike the use of alpha aggression.

“And the girl? Prayer I mean. What are you doing with her? Are you going to give me any answers on that one?” He asks, again keeping to a curious tone and showing no disrespect.

“I have no answers to give you as of yet, Sebastian. I told you I found her, she's not human and she doesn't know it. That's as far as I've gotten and I've told you. It's fine if you want to tell the other leaders, but there is no reason for anyone else to know until there is more to tell.”

Sebastian concedes the point and we say our goodbye with him promising I'll be notified if anything should escalate or should something new come up. I send off a text to Nichlos quickly bringing him up to speed on the problem in Rhode Island and let him know he'll be having guests. Hopefully he's

done at the pride house and he'll be able to be with the Wyatt's when they get to the new fox clan home. Right now though, I've got to focus on getting Prayer, the beautiful yet stubborn and sarcastic woman to understand the difference to her reality. I look up from the phone from texting and she's staring at me with disbelief.

“Wow, Avalon. Just wow.”

# Chapter 6

## Prayer

I'm shocked. Completely amazed that there is an entire group of men, at least three that I know of but many more were mentioned in his phone call, that actively live out a fantasy life. The odds are they are not all insane so at this point I'm ruling it out for Avalon. So he's not insane, just an extreme supernatural enthusiast. If vampires had been my thing instead of aliens I might have jumped on the crazy wagon with him, I mean they seem dedicated enough to have lots of fun with it. Now the really weird thing is that no matter what I think about Avalon and his friends, their games or their warped version of reality, I still want him around.

While he was on his phone talking to the wolf guy Sebastian my mind had been in a constant battle with itself. Back and forth the thoughts flung through my head. Keep him talking my friendly but lonely side would say. Then no, make him shut up you don't need this from my more logical but snarky side. Friendly: Invite him to stay for dinner. Snarky: you should really kick him out right now, just hand him his cup of crazy coffee and show him to the door. Friendly: I really like him though, he's concerned and funny. Snarky: That's stalker and crazy not the same thing. Friendly: He feels comfortable like he belongs here. Snarky: He is on the phone with one of his buddies pretending to be a vampire while they pretend to be a werewolf or something. Avalon looks up from his phone and Snarky won.

"Wow, Avalon. Just wow." He looks cautious but happy. "Out of curiosity, how long did it take to set that little routine up? Did you have a preset number of callbacks to set the story?" Avalon's face fell and settled into a frown.

"Dammit woman. I don't know what I have to do to prove to you that what I say is true. I am trying to move forward, to explain what is happening and why it's important you understand but you keep putting everything off as a lie. Either I was crazy, a liar and manipulator or an actor with an

obsession. I need to know what to do to prove it to you.” He didn’t sound angry, more like almost desperate.

What am I supposed to tell him? How am I meant to deal with this? Most importantly why is it so damn important to me to keep trying to understand him? Who is this man and why does he have such an impact on me? If this was literally anyone else on the planet I would have called him nuts and thrown him out the door. Oh who am I kidding. If this was anyone else on the planet I would have handed back his peace offering of coffee and sent him on his way. No one else would have gotten this far being normal let alone all the crazy talk.

I need to think of a plan. I can’t figure out why this man I just met who says things that should have me putting a mental illness clinic on speed dial, has me wanting to keep him right where he is. I have several times thought to tell him to leave but every time I do my mouth seals shut and I can’t move. For the thousandth time since he put that coffee cup in front of me I try to figure out why I have no fear, no apprehension, no warning bells, nothing foreboding in the least when it comes to him. He wants to prove it to me but I want to look in a different direction for now. We’ll come back to the proof later.

“Let’s skip that bit for now. Let’s say I believe everything you are saying. What is it you want then? What is it you need from me, need me to do?” I ask him, giving him the opportunity to say more.

“It’s not going to matter if you don’t believe me, but I need to find out more about you. Where you came from, who your people are, stories and tales that have been told. Any of this might have the information I need to find others like you.”

“And you are sure there are others like me?” I ask

“In all the evidence we have found it points to a large group of women. You are the first that I have located but the only method we have of identifying the group is foggy at best. There are images and my brothers are running comparisons against them for familial markers. Hundreds came up matched



within the parameters set but when I located the first three I knew right away they were not who I was looking for. When I scented you and distinguished your scent as unique, I knew I had found an heir. “

“These images you are referencing, I’d like to see them. Maybe it would help me to understand, to see what it is that you see.” I said tentatively.

Avalon stared at me for a long moment and then reached out, picked up his phone and started swiping through it. Finding what he was looking for he moved closer to me and turned the phone so I could see the image. It was an ancient mosaic that depicted a large group of women in front of some men and a pack of animals. The women have no faces, looking as though they had used blank tiles with no details. I look up at him questioningly and he flips to another picture. I don’t know the era but it looks like the dark ages with another group of women and a different group of animals, they’re faces appearing smeared as though touched when the paint was still wet. I nodded to him and he flipped to yet another picture and as I’ve already become accustomed to the scene my eyes focus immediately on what is different. One woman has a face, a distinct and clear image of her face.

“She looks like me.” I say with amazement.

“When we ran the image in a reverse search many of the women resembled this face. We couldn’t make the parameters too tight because we didn’t know what physical changes could have occurred in the following generations. Each time I found one of the identified possibilities I could see where some of the features favored the woman in the painting but none like you do. In my mind there is no doubt you are related to her.” Avalon said enthusiastically.

“But what do you think finding me does for you? What information do you want me to give you? Even if I did believe all this, and I’m still not saying I do, what is it that you think I know? Or do you want my blood vampire?” I asked, really wanting to get to the brass tax of the situation.

“Any details you can tell me about your parents or grandparents. Anything you might remember about where they were from or stories about your heritage. Anything to give me a start off point. Are your parents or grandparents still alive? Does your whole family come from Washington?” He was letting the questions fly and I hold up my hand to stop him.

“I hate to do this to you buddy, I really do, but there is no way I can answer even the simplest question concerning living family. I honestly don’t know. The only memories I have are from a children’s foundation when I was a very young child. No clues at all of where I originated from. I want to say this as clearly as I can for you. If you are hinging your, shall we say, investigation on me then you have hit a very dead end.” As far as I can recall I’ve never even mentioned that to anyone other than my therapist. Avalon was staring at me and I could see this was the last thing he expected.

“You know what, Avalon. I’ve decided we’re going to be friends for a few reasons. One, I genuinely like you, you are fun to be around even when I think you’re nuts. Two, I’m intrigued by your research and although I can’t help you the way you hoped perhaps I can still help you. Three, and this one matters the most to me, I can talk to you, tell you things and listen to you talk. So, do you have somewhere to be in the next few days?”

Avalon was still just staring at me and shook his head slowly from side to side. Not sure if he’s telling me no or trying to clear his head from my probable whammy. I’ve had many therapy sessions over the years that helped me reach a place of acceptance for how my life is and any details that might be missing from it. It took me a while to reach my self made and self sustained happy place so I can deal with his disappointment. Since my mind still can’t wrap around letting him out of my sight let alone out of my life, this is a good thing. I want to show Avalon we can be friends and have fun outside his make believe world.

“Right then, I’ve made a plan. I have two days off and except for a few hours tomorrow night, not negotiable, we are going to see what we can find excluding me from your

equation. Let's go into the kitchen and get dinner started. We'll eat, then we can do something fun and then we'll have a sleepover. You'll be on the couch. Tomorrow after breakfast we'll get started on the history of your art." I said, watching his reaction to my take charge plan.

"I have a room at the hotel but if this is a real offer I'm going to take you up on it." He said standing up and moving toward the kitchen. Well alright then. The list of highly unlikely, spontaneous and irrational decisions just keeps getting longer.

## Avalon

Once again this woman has my head spinning. I've told her about me and the world around her and she thinks I'm nuts. I show her my fangs and she thinks I'm keeping some type of prop around to trick her. I allow her to listen in on a call from an Alpha and she thinks I set the whole thing up. I show her the pictures and when I finally think she is coming around she pulls the rug out from under me telling me she is an orphan with no past. That was a contingency I was not prepared for. The strangest thing yet though is her insistence on a sleepover. A sleepover.

I'm standing in her kitchen and trying to piece together what happens at a sleepover. I thought that sleepovers were something that adolescent children did for bonding or rights of passage or something. Back when I was a child you were either learning a skill or using it from the time you opened your eyes until you closed them at night. Having someone stay with you would have been pointless. Nichlos and I did everything together but still went to our own homes every night. I try to picture what I've seen done in movies and television so I can form some idea of what's expected of me and what I should expect of her. Also, my brain blitzes out on me and I try to figure out how the hell I got here. Seriously, what the hell is happening with this woman?

She's chopping, I don't know, vegetables I think. Didn't I just try to apologize to her this morning, bring her coffee? I'm not wrong, that was this morning. How did she do

this? I came here for answers, answers which I now know she can't give me, and I'm standing here watching her prepare dinner before we-what? I'm ruling out the makeovers and bouncing on the bed in colorful pajamas. The only other thing I've ever seen is women sitting around watching sappy movies and talking about relationships and I am putting that firmly in the no column. I am so far out of my element and no idea how I even got here.

I just keep watching her as I lean up against the island across from the counters she is preparing food at. You'd think the lack of conversation would be awkward but she seems perfectly content to bounce back and forth around the kitchen as she is preparing some type of meat and vegetable dish in a single pan. I'm just as happy to watch her and enjoy the smells coming from her efforts while I stay lost in my thoughts. It's actually really effortless to enjoy her company. I watch as she turns from the stove and reaches up in a cabinet to grab plates and set them out on the counter. I do an internal checkup on my body to be sure I'll be able to process this meal because no way am I having her think I'm insulting her cooking.

Without a word she grabs two sodas from her refrigerator and hands them to me. She fills the two plates with food and picks them up gesturing to the table in a little nook off to the side of her living room. I open the cans and put one in front of her and sit down across from her. I keep expecting that awkward feeling to creep up on me but it just feels like I've always done this with her. Again, what is it with this woman?

"Is it weird that this doesn't feel weird?" She asks as if reading my mind.

"A little, under the circumstances anyway." I agree.

We finish the meal with a comfortable silence and I stand up and grab the dishes before she can and take them into the kitchen. I smile to myself because she doesn't protest even a little and just lets me go. I clean up from dinner and come back out and she is on the couch and has the remote in her hand scrolling through options on her TV. Now I'm not

exactly sure where to go because she is in the middle of the couch, and I really have no idea what the proper custom is. Do I sit next to her or do I pull up one of the dining chairs or how about I just stand here like the awkward vampire in the room.

“You have options,” she says, patting the seat next to her. “Standup comedy, rom-com or docu-series. Think quick I have an itchy finger with a remote.”

“Docu-series. Pass on serial killers, pass on politics and pass on religion. What does that leave us?” I respond quickly. No thank you to rom-coms.

“I’m going to pass on anything Royals and science and say let’s go with the history of music.” She grins at me, starts the program, lays the remote beside her and puts her feet on the table. “If you want to get comfortable you better just do it. If you wash dishes, you basically live here.”

I prop my feet up next to her and we watch as the history of music and its meaning to different cultures is explained. I am enjoying myself, having a good time in a pleasant and relaxed silence but part of my brain is still trying to figure out how we got here. In the back of my mind I list the events of the last twenty-four hours and no matter how many times I look at it I just can’t figure out what happened. A few episodes later, Prayer stands and stretches and points to the couch.

“I’ll bring you pillows and a blanket. Tomorrow we will make a fancy breakfast for the fun of it and then we will start finding out what the world has to tell us about the art you are so enthralled by.”

She walks out of the room for a few minutes and comes back with her arms full of fluffy pillows and a comforter and they are all her trademark lavender and smell the same. She tosses them down and gives me a wide smile, waves goodnight and bounces back to her bedroom. The woman fascinates me. Twenty-four hours ago she thought I was a rude stalker and now I’m sleeping on her couch. I want to stop myself but I just can’t. Why am I still here? Why am I

sleeping on a couch in her living room when I have a bed in a hotel?

I lie there for hours awake and staring around the room because my mind just won't turn off and I have this tension running through my body. Suddenly I can feel a change in the atmosphere of the room and I sit all the way up alert and tense. There is a static sound that reminds me of when you turned off an old television set and touched the screen. A quiet crackle that you could both hear and feel faintly across your skin. Out of the corner of my eye I see flashing color in the space by the couch and I can feel my eyes growing wide. As I sit there watching, literally in front of me, the body of a sleeping Prayer appears on the floor. I pull my legs up on the couch because what the fuck! Did she just teleport? In her sleep?

# Chapter 7

## Prayer

I wake up the next morning and I'm on the floor in front of the couch, again. I'm on my back and when I look up, Avalon is sitting in the corner of the couch, one leg crossed over the other his elbow on his knee, his chin propped in his palm. His eyes are filled with curiosity and wonder but also a little freaked out so I am assuming he's never seen anyone sleep walk before. I lean up on my elbows and smile at him. I'm very hungry this morning and I need to go do my morning thing.

"Give me about thirty minutes to pull myself together for the day and I'll get breakfast started." I say cheerfully.

"You don't seem even the slightest bit surprised to find yourself waking up on the living room floor when you went to bed in your room." He says and I guess yeah I can offer some sort of acknowledgement. I probably scared the poor man walking out here completely unresponsive.

"I'm sorry Avalon, I should have warned you it was possible. It's not every night but there have been many that I will go to sleep in my room and some time in the night I sleepwalk my way out to the living room. I never have any memory of it though. I just know I wake up on the floor or the couch. Lucky for you I chose the floor huh?" I say, making light of it so he knows it's not a big deal.

"You sleepwalk? You say you walk in your sleep? Walk? From your room to here, in your sleep, you walked?" His tone is utter disbelief.

"Oh my cheese Avalon, it's not a rare condition or anything. Lots of people sleepwalk. I'm lucky that I stay in the safety of my house." I say a little defensively.

"I think your condition is extremely rare but yes, you are very lucky that you stay within the confines of your home."

“I promise you it’s not that bad. Let me go get washed up and stuff and I’ll meet you in the kitchen. Coffee, tea or juice with breakfast but I have none of your mocha mint stuff here.” I say as I head back to my bedroom.

It’s my day off and a Lovely Letters night so I’m already pumped but add in Avalon’s interesting art mystery and I’m psyched for the weekend. I haven’t said anything to him yet, but depending on how today goes, I may take my two week vacation. I’ve just been holding on to it not really making any plans and it would give me the time to figure out whatever this thing is between us. It’s a crazy pull I have toward him like nothing I’ve ever experienced and although I am always polite and cheery with people, I never let them in. Not to my mind and not to my home. I can’t make myself let him out of either even though it seems every other minute with him is a different form of crazy.

I momentarily regret the loss of my long shower today but perk back up as I start routing around for my perfect me outfit. I’m feeling the steampunk investigator vibe today. I pull out my black leggings and a black and rust colored striped shirt with a stand collar and long ruffled sleeves. A black choker and my black Camille lace up boots top off my look for the day. I lay them out on the bed and jump in the shower to get this show rolling. Fifteen minutes later I’m applying black eyeliner and a russet lipstick. I pull my hair into a bun on top of my head and add a black lace and pearl hair clip to the side of it. I look myself over in the mirror and call it good.

When I come back out and enter the kitchen I see Avalon making breakfast already. He has fried potatoes with onions and peppers in one pan, another filled with sizzling bacon and he’s already serving up what looks like a farmers omelet. I am so going to feast this morning. I go to the fridge and pull out a container of orange and a bottle of grape juice. Lifting both toward Avalon I wait until he points to the orange juice and put the other away. I fill two glasses and take them to the table then come back to make a cup of coffee because the beautiful man has already made the pot.



A few moments later, while I am sipping up my go juice, Avalon brings the plates of food out to the table and I am ready to dive right on it. Most days I wake up and I'm just ready to go, but on the days that I've been sleepwalking I notice I need the coffee early and a bigger breakfast. I always wonder if I do anything while I'm walking around that takes so much energy. I lift my head up when I hear Avalon talking to me.

“So, there are some things I want to, well no, I need to talk to you about but I'm afraid that will put us right back at square one and I really don't want that. ” He says, picking up his glass of juice and rolling it around.

“We can't go back to square one because in square one I thought you were a rude, possibly insane, stalker. Seeing as how you slept over, washed dishes and cooked breakfast, I'm going to say there isn't a whole lot of squares you can go back to. ” I tell him agreeably.

“Remember I tried very hard to tell you, to prove to you that I am a vampire and that you are not human either.” There is apprehension there but I'm not going to attack him. Not yet anyway.

“It would be very hard to forget that. Are we revisiting that already?” I ask.

“Some things have come to light and I don't see anything else to be done except to pursue the matter until it's clear to you. I also believe wholeheartedly now that the women in the painting are definitely related to you. No doubts, Prayer, not one.” He says seriously.

I hold a piece of bacon and narrow my eyes at him. I take a bite and chew slowly and deliberately, staring him down while I wonder why he's back at this so strongly this morning. I had already said I'd help him with his paintings and if that woman was an ancestor of mine we'd have no evidence to compare it to so why is he still so focused on that.

“Out with it Avalon, what happened? Did you get another phone call? Are your people giving you more trouble

for not snaring me into your group? Club? Cult? Whatever you have.” I ask as nicely as I can.

“I couldn’t sleep last night. I was just lying on the couch staring around the room thinking a lot. I never did close my eyes.” he says tentatively. I know he’s not finished so I just wait for him to continue and after several moments he finally does. “You didn’t sleepwalk into the living room, Prayer, you teleported. You were sleeping and you didn’t wake up but you weren’t there and then I watched you materialize out of nowhere.” He said warily.

“Teleported. I teleported into the living room. Honestly, every time I think you’ve capped the limits of your imaginary world you open a new door. How about we just skip this part and we move on to the researching of your art mysteries.”

“Could you please tell me what you think I can possibly gain from lying to you about any of this? Why would you even want to know me if you think I’m manipulating you into a lie or suckering you into a hoax? What advantage do I get? What is my payoff for these fabricated stories?” he asks, obviously frustrated with me.

“I don’t know, Avalon. I’ve been trying to figure that out. Let’s see what I have been dealing with shall we? We don’t even have to recap the last *two days* of our association, we can just jump in where you want me to accept that vampires are real, you are one. Shifters are real, the guy on the phone, Sebastian, he was a wolf. I am also not human and while I am sleeping I teleport from room to room without waking up. No, I honestly cannot figure out the point of all that nonsense. I should shove you out of the door and out of my life, but I can’t. Literally cannot make myself do it. So give me a damn break and let’s get to work on your art. “I said almost desperately.

“Prayer, the painting, finding the others, none of it means anything to me or my kind of I can’t even convince you that you are one of us. There’s no hope of getting through to them if I can’t get through to you. ” He said dejectedly.

I stare at him. I can't help it, I just stare at him because seriously, what am I to do with this? What person would believe any of this? So, now he doesn't want my help with finding his information because I won't be convinced that we live in his make believe world? What do I do? I know what I should do is kick him out and call my therapist. I'm sure he would have a lot to say about the last two days. I can't though, every time I try to form the words it's like my mind puts a clamp over my mouth. This is so ridiculous. I am entranced by a man who thinks he's a vampire and I'm, well he doesn't know what I am. I am screaming so loud in my head right now.

Outloud I ask "So you don't want my help, do you want to leave? Say no." Dammit. What the hell. "I mean if you want to leave, which you don't, right?" Oh my God, Prayer, something is wrong with you, I shout at myself. Clearing my throat I insist I will say it this time. I stare at Avalon who is looking mighty confused, yeah sorry buddy, me too. "If - you - would - like - to - leave, I will not understand, I will not be okay." I slap a hand over my mouth, stand and run to my bedroom. I have no words.

## Avalon

I stare at the empty chair that had up until a moment ago held the woman who is constantly testing the limits of my sanity. Even if I had never scented her and figured out she wasn't human it would have been a dead give away when she shimmered into an empty space right before my eyes. She is the one teleporting around while she is asleep and yet she is also the one in denial that anything besides humans exist.

Also, what is this mixed message game she is playing now? Leave, don't leave. I'm not leaving. How does she not already know this? Everything about this woman boggles my mind on a continuous basis. I need to go find her. I need a shower and a change of clothes which means a trip to the hotel but with the way she's acting I'm worried about what she'll think if I leave. Getting up I head towards the back rooms where I've seen her go. There are three doors down the hallway. Two on the left and one on the right. I open the first

one on the left and it's her extremely purple bathroom. The little half bath she has in the front of the house isn't even close to this extreme with the lavender so this must be her private bath. The next door down should be her bedroom then right.

I open the door and look inside at more purple and see her lying on the bed, her face in her hands, shaking her head back and forth. Is she crying? What the hell happened? I walk over to her and sit down next to her and touch her back lightly. I'm not good at this. I can argue points and opinions but I don't even know what happened or what's wrong with her.

"Prayer?" I don't really know what to ask. I mean I don't even know what happened. She lifted her head up and looked at him. I realize with relief that she isn't crying but she looks completely bewildered. "What is the matter?"

"I don't know what's wrong with me. I don't understand what's happening. What are you to me? Do you know what happened out there?" She said pointing toward the door.

"You asked me if I was going to leave and then you got upset" I shrug, "that's the extent of my knowledge." I tell her honestly. I'm just as befuddled as she is, maybe more so since I have no idea what started it.

"I *tried* to ask you if you wanted to leave. I *tried* to give you the option to leave, because I won't buy into your fantasy world. Even though I could logically think of reasons to tell you to leave me alone and go away, I couldn't make the words come out. So I tried to give you the option, so it could be your idea, but I couldn't even do that. My mouth just contradicted itself, I wasn't doing that on purpose." her eyes got so big while she was talking.

"I'm not sure I understand. Are you saying you want me to leave?"

She nods her head momentarily but then firmly says "God, no."

"And you're not doing this to mess with me? Because you think I'm a crackpot or something? You honestly want

me to go, you just can't say it? Like being hypnotized or something like that?" What is this woman trying to tell me? At this point I can not tell her I'll walk away, it's not possible after I've seen what she does. But I hate the idea of distressing her as well, causing her to be uncomfortable around me.

"No, Avalon, I do not want you to leave. For some reason I can't understand, even a little bit, I need a man who I've known for two days to stay with me. Now who's the crazy one? I'm here telling you I don't believe a word you're saying and please don't leave me." She groans and buries her face back in her hands.

"I'm not leaving you, Prayer. I can't, even though you think it's based on a lie, I can't leave you knowing what I know. But, even if I could. I don't think I'd want to." I said, being honest with her. I reach my fingers over hers and pull them off her face. I brush the hair away and lean down and place a kiss on her forehead. "Come on now, I have to go back to my hotel" I smile and run my fingers over her cheekbones lightly when her eyes get big and round, "for an hour or so. I need a shower and a change of clothes. You might actually send me away for real if I don't clean up soon."

"Can I come with you? Oh my cheese, I'm one of those people. No, it's okay you go. I'll wait here. In my house. Where I live." She said dejectedly.

Adorable. The only word to describe her right now. Well, no. Adorable, beautiful, absolutely delightful with a touch of unimaginable. She's so distraught by her clingy behavior but besides making keeping an eye on her so much easier it's also endearing. I kiss the top of her head before pulling back and standing up. I don't know why she thought I would have an issue with her going but I'm not going to drag her with me just so I can shower and change.

"If you want to come with me it's fine, Prayer. I just need a shower and change of clothes. If it will make you happy I'll grab all my things while I'm there and bring them here. Just don't worry." I try to reassure her because what else am I to do?

“No, you go ahead. I’m acting like a big baby, or whiny brat, I haven’t decided. It’ll be fine and yes, ridiculously clingy and oddly possessive as it sounds I would like very much if you would bring your things here. ” She says.

“I won’t be long. Then we can plan what we’re going to do about those paintings if you are still up to it. ” I say walking to the door.

“I’ll be up for anything by the time you get back. You can bet on that. ” She had put her face back in the pillow and sounded all mumbled but I was able to make it out.

I leave her house and walk back to the hotel which had been conveniently located only three blocks from Prayer’s job. There are several people in the lobby waiting by the elevator and my room is on the fourth floor so I take the stairs. It’ll be faster than waiting for all the stops and traffic off and on. When I get to the room I go straight to the bed and pull my bag out from underneath. I pull drawers open and toss everything except the change of clothes I’ll need after my shower.

I turn the water on and take one of the fastest showers I’ve ever taken. I don’t usually spend a lot of time relaxing in the shower but this is especially speedy. I want to get back to Prayer as soon as I can. I realize it’s not just to comfort her, it’s also where I want to be. I get out of the shower drying off and pulling on clothes. I am reaching for my shirt when I feel it. The static sizzle in the room. Just tiny particles of energy floating around me. I turn around in circles not seeing anything and growing concerned. I hear a gasp and turn around again to see Prayer standing in front of me. In my hotel room. Oh, this is going to be..

“Holy shit on a stick! What just happened? Avalon, what happened? Where am I?” Her voice is getting higher and higher and her eyes are almost popping out of her head. I’m not sure if she’s going to faint or just collapse to the ground but she is shaking and weaving back and forth. I grab a hold of her and pull her against me so if she does collapse she won’t fall. She looks up at me and she tries to smile. “I guess you

took too long, huh.” She says as her legs go out from under her.

# Chapter 8

## Prayer

So that just happened. I don't know what it was but I know it happened. I had been pacing my room back and forth.. I didn't even want to go into the living room while Avalon was gone. I couldn't believe I was missing him and I couldn't stop thinking about him and wanting to be with him. Suddenly a strong image of him came into my mind and that same pull to be with him except I could feel it so much stronger. Like part of me was missing and I had to get it back or be miserable. I had closed my eyes just focusing on Avalon and the next thing I knew I was standing in front of him inside his hotel room. A hotel room I didn't even know the location of so no chance in me trying to tell myself I might have been sleepwalking.

What do you say at a time like this? 'Oh, I'm sorry. It seems you were right about non humans and me being one.' Or wait, maybe I am human but just have the ability to teleport. Yeah, no. I know that's not it. But what do I *say*? I've been giving him such a hard time and honestly if it hadn't been quite literally popping in on him I still would be, oh let's face it I all but called him a liar. I look up at Avalon holding me against him and realize if he weren't I'd be on the floor. Shock maybe? Then again, it could be all the effort it takes to dematerialize and re-materialize in another location. Who knows. Obviously not me. I owe him something though.

"I'm sorry, Avalon. I'm sorry for not believing you about me." I say sulkily.

"But you believe me now? It's important, Prayer. You believe me now?" He asks hopefully.

"I don't see how there is any question as to what to believe. I was in my room and then I was in your hotel room." I tell him honestly.

"Do you remember what you were doing when it started happening?"



“I know what was happening with me but I don’t know what made this,” I motion to myself and then motion around the room, “happen. I didn’t *do* anything. ” I don’t want to tell him that I am so obsessed with him that my body jumped the boundaries of time and space to find him. Ha! To think at one point I thought he could be a stalker. I certainly have the traits to become one.

Avalon is watching me and I see him start biting the corner of his bottom lip. His fingers start tapping on my back absently and there is no doubt he has questions. The thing is either I don’t have answers or I don’t want to answer them so I’m going to try and redirect this. Of course considering the magnitude of what has happened, me changing the topic depends entirely on his willingness to allow it.

“You’ve showered.” Well that was intelligent but I just noticed he has no shirt on and he is still holding me against him. My mind has gone blank now and my fingers are sliding up his arms to his shoulders without my conscious consent. My eyes are locked on his and I notice as an awareness sparks in them and they darken ever so slightly. His body tenses under my hands but he sets me firmly on my feet, kisses the top of my head, steps away and pulls his shirt over his head. I watch, feeling like that should be at the very least a misdemeanor crime, as he covers up that beautifully designed body.

“I have. I have also put all my things in my bag so I can check out of here if that’s still what you want. I can stay with you but if you changed your mind I can stay here, whatever makes you happy and comfortable.” He says sitting on the bed next to his very large duffel bag.

“Please don’t ask why just yet, but I have a feeling it’s imperative at this point that you stay with me. Are you ready to go then? Is there anything else you need to do?” I ask steering away from the questions I’m not ready to face

“Anything else I have to handle I can handle from your house. We can go now.” He stands up and takes my elbow in his hand guiding me, stops and grins wide at me. “Do you want to use the door this time?”

“You know, I think my way is faster but since I can’t do it on command I’ll just go the old fashioned way with you.” I tease back at him. I wonder at the ability of, well not the human brain I guess, but whatever I am to just keep rolling with the punches. As if two days ago I wasn’t just a receptionist in a locally owned day spa who’s biggest concern was temperamental clients.

Avalon opens and holds the door for me to proceed through and I wait to follow after him because I’ve never been here before and don’t know the way out. There is one thought that keeps running through my mind. It’s Avalon. It has to be him. For all the fates or destiny or whatever you believe in has brought us together, there is no doubt that the ability awakened inside me is in direct relation to Avalon. I have never been in this hotel. I didn’t glitch out in my bedroom and show up in the lobby.

I came directly to him. In front of him. It was him and I’m not ready to deal with that yet. I’m astonished to learn that I am far more ready to deal with not being human than I am to do with what is happening with me and this man. Oh shit. A thought just occurred to me and I am dazed it hadn’t hit me yet. If what he said about me was true, and to at least some extent it obviously was true, then what about him being a vampire. Oh my cheese. Oh my cheese is he really? We are in front of the elevator when I whirl to face him and say “Show me your fangs.”

A ding sound comes in from behind me and Avalon looks down at me. “I’d really rather not. Not here.” He says, nodding to the doors. “I’m certain you can wait until we are back at your house.” He added, chuckling.

The whole time in the elevator, in the lobby, and walking home all I can think about is two things. One I can teleport and am therefore probably not human as Avalon had said. Two Avalon also said he was a vampire and I honestly have no good reason to doubt him now. That being said, I still want to see the fangs again. So I can look at them without thinking they are a prop to a silly prank.

Another thought. It's Lovely Letters night and I have the ace, the cherry and sprinkles, the crown taking story of a *true life sci-fi* and I can't say anything. I mean I'll still be at the meeting, I'd have to be dead to miss it, but it will be so hard knowing there is a vampire in my house and I can't say anything while we drool over aliens. We'll be talking about X's choice and then Y will choose something. She'll step away from aliens since they aren't her favorite but she's a good sport with those of us that are crazy about them.

Walking into the house it's like Avalon has always been here, like he's supposed to be here. He drops his things down by the couch and I shake my head at him, point to the bag and then wiggle my finger to follow me. I show him to the door slightly down and across from mine. I've always kept it ready because if not, what did I have it for? The bed is beige and blue but still feminine. Just not as in your face girly as mine is. I like a lot of pillows so I just assume everyone does and there are seven on that bed. A downy comforter, beige on one side and blue on the other, is folded down on one side. The pillows also alternate between the two colors. It's clean, it smells nice, it's not too girly, he should be okay here.

Someone tell me why I'm acting like I just got a new pet. I feed him, I give him a comfy bed to sleep and I keep him hostage with me. Exactly like if I had a new lap dog. I think I should apologize for being so possessive and go to say something when I see Avalon bouncing his butt up and down on the bed, I assume testing it out. He smiles big and throws himself back against the pillows tucking both arms under his head. Oh, that's right. He didn't sleep last night. Poor guy. Because I am quickly becoming a possessive hoarder of this man, I turn to walk away and leave him to rest. As long as he's in the house I seem to be calm and - I stop in my tracks and turn back around. He is looking at me with an eyebrow raised and his lips twitch at the corners just a bit.

"Did you forget something?" He asks.

"You know I did. I want to see your fangs." I declare folding my arms over my chest.

“So you figure out you can teleport and now you want to see my fangs because I’m a vampire.” He says, taunting me.

“I figured out you weren’t lying about me teleporting and therefore could *possibly* not be lying about other things including but not limited to you being a vampire,” I pause looking up at him uncertain, “of sorts.”

“Of sorts.” He nods his head. “Which sort would that be?”

“I don’t know, I’ve never met a vampire that didn’t put his teeth in right before squeezing the tube of fake blood in his mouth. So I’m not really sure what to expect from you.”

Avalon laughs and raises his hand calling me over. “Come over here and I’ll show you again. I’ll do whatever you need to help you understand all this.”

I walk over to him very curious now and stand in front of him as he leans his head back, opens his mouth and slowly pushes his fangs forward. How did I think they were fake? Had I even looked? Maybe it was how fast he had sprung them down at me before. I reach out a finger to touch one and then stop, pulling my finger back and wrapping it into my palm. I was going to stick my finger in his mouth just because I was curious. How rude of me.

“Do you want to get some rest while I look into the paintings? I have nothing planned before my meeting tonight.” I offer.

“You have a meeting tonight?” He asked curiously.

“It’s a video conference. Every two weeks I have a group session with some ladies and we talk about a book we all read in the last two weeks. I never miss it. Like I said though, I have plenty of time to do some research and look for some leads if you want to catch up on some sleep.” I take the quick topic change approach because I have a habit of just running my mouth at him and I’m not up for the Lovely Letters conversation either.

“I think you’d probably need my help with some of this. The Greek mosaic is probably public knowledge since I

found it in a book. However the painting that Nichlos found was in the private collection of the lions Golden Pride in Arizona. Uh, basically like a headquarters for the territory but a lot of the lion shifters live there. Anyway he found it there. It is also only a couple hundred years old but that's still quite a long time in a private collection. What steps do you propose we take to help identify any details?" He asks.

I'm trying to get my mind to stop spinning as several thoughts rush in at once. First thing was another 'oh my cheese' moment. Lion shifters. There are people out there, people Avalon knows personally, that turn into lions. They have a lion's pride! I almost burst into giggles. Then the fact that the painting was privately owned means it could have been done by an unknown artist. It could have easily been a family member. If there is any hope though the ideas I'm tossing around in my head seem sound.

"What I want to do is like comparison shopping. If we can't find the exact women in another painting or photograph even, then perhaps we can find out about the location or possibly even the painter themselves. I want to look at everything from art history to art auctions. There might be other paintings from the same artist in other collections. Maybe nothing pans out but it can't hurt to try looking outside your circle."

"You're not wrong." He says "The women I'm looking for would have been known to both sides of the world. Human and nonhuman. I just can't figure out why no one remembers them. Why no one remembers anything more than a legend. I should remember them. I should have met a few of them." He is looking away and I get the sense that he is thinking out loud.

As he has done to me several times I lean over and kiss the top of his head. Something about finding these women is very important to him and he has become the singularly most important thing to me so I am going to help. He also believes them to be ancestors of mine and to be honest the resemblance is uncanny. If there *are* others and they are like me, maybe that will help me learn where I came from or at least what I came

from. It really is a shame I cannot discuss this over book club or hell, it wouldn't be good in therapy either.

“Let's go old man. We have things to do.” I state leaving the room knowing he'll be right behind me.

## Avalon

It seems to be developing into a habit for me to follow her wherever she needs me to be and although she won't say it with words, it's pretty obvious she needs me to be everywhere. I had been completely surprised when she had just popped into my hotel room but not because of the teleportation exactly. I mean I saw her do it in her sleep and stay sleeping so for whatever reason I don't think the actual process requires her mental focus. My surprise lies in the fact that even if she had known which hotel, which floor and which room, it was directly in front of me that she had appeared. Not for even a moment do I believe that Prayer sat at home and tried to figure out how to get to me which means her ability brought her here intuitively.

What I am not entirely sure of is why. Whatever motivated her was outside of her ability to consciously reach, so what had happened while I was gone to trigger her? What about me in particular is it that she needed to bring her to me on that kind of instinctual level? I have a thousand questions in my mind but everything about her, from the way she steers the conversation to the looks on her face and tone she uses tells me questions are not yet welcome. Since the only thing I actually want to do is protect her, I leave it alone and let her lead me around, again.

From the moment I saw her across the street, her beauty had entranced me. In the murky light of a rainy day in Seattle she had stood outside like a beacon that I was forced to follow. Once near her, her scent had intrigued me and pulled me even closer to her. Finally it was her personality that captivated me and holds me firmly in place next to her regardless of what I should or should not be doing. One thing I am going to have to do eventually is find a blood source. It's not something to worry about just yet, I am not getting weak in

any way, but I refuse to allow that to happen in case she may need me.

Pulling myself back into the moment I follow Prayer back into her living room and sit on the couch beside her as she pulls her laptop over and begins searching for different headings. She is very creative in her research, not actually mentioning anything about the art we have but rather opening up search queries like paintings with groups of women outdoors or art depicting large groups of women holding court. She changes her phrasing and looks through and points out different possibilities but none of them grab me the way the ones we already have did. She points at my phone on the table and asks to see the newest one again, the one that led me to her. I open it up and hand her the phone so she can examine whatever she wants.

She draws in a sharp breath suddenly and looks at me intently. “Would you mind if I printed this out? I don’t have to take it anywhere. I have a printer here. I’d like to try something if it’s okay.” Her tone is excited but also controlled. I get the feeling she wants to try and verify whatever she saw before she says anything. I nod to her and she plugs my phone into her laptop.

Prayer brings up an imaging program and opens the picture. She begins cropping the image and blowing up sections at a time, slightly adjusting contrasts and colors and bringing smaller details into focus. Each time she is done editing a section she sends it off to her printer which I hear somewhere behind her dining table. I stand up and walk over lifting the first pages. They are enhanced far greater than if we had the actual painting in front of us. I look at the paper that was just under the ones she printed and pick it up, raising an eyebrow at Prayer.

“I like to play with the cover art of the books I read.” She says defensively as she jumps and tears the paper out of my hand with the picture of a half naked man, tan and very muscular holding a woman pressed up against him and what I believe to be his tail wrapped around her. I can’t stop myself from grinning at her.

“These are the kinds of books you read?” I ask, teasing her.

“These are the kind of books I read for entertainment. I read other things as well.” She said, rolling her hand around the room as if she was looking for her proof.

She takes the pictures she just printed and lays them out edge to edge across the dining room table forming a much larger and higher quality version. She flips them over and then rummages around in a drawer until she finds what she’s looking for. She holds the roll of tape up in her hand and looks absolutely adorable as she grins triumphantly at me. After she has taped the edges together she turns it back over and carries it to her wall. Directing me to hold it in place while she tapes it down to the surface. Content she pulls on my arm and we step back to admire her handiwork.

The way she has edited the picture and the new size of it adds so many more details that it is almost like looking at a different painting. She’s so happy with her work that she is positively radiating. She goes back to her drawer and reaches around until she pulls out a magnifying glass. I look at the object in her hand, back to the drawer and then back at her. What other items or gadgets is she going to pull out of there? She leans in close and focuses on the face of the woman who so closely resembles her. Squealing she turns to me and claps her hands.

“We *are* related! It’s true Avalon, your theory is true. At least for my part. Look!” She is so excited she is shaking. She hands me like magnifying glass and points at the woman’s face. Looking at where she is pointing I look back at her not understanding. She points again at the picture where the woman’s face is lifted and turned just slightly and I hold the glass to it trying to discover what she had.

“Prayer, believe me I want to see it but..” I stop as she turns her head so she is in the same pose as the picture. She points to her neck just under her jawline on the right side of her face. There is a pinkish red patch that follows her jaw to the backside of her ear and although there are no identifying



patterns it would seem more likely that the same family would carry the unusual location.

“Have you ever seen anyone else with this?” She asks curious but excited.

“Well, no. To be fair though, I didn’t see it on you either.” I say honestly.

“If it was just the birthmark I would say maybe other people could have it as well, but when you combine it with the fact that she looks so much like me. I wish I could see her hair better. I wonder if our hair color is a family trait. Oh my cheese, Avalon. You found part of a history I didn’t even know I had.” Her eyes misted up a little and she wrapped her arms around me and hugged me close. “I know we are hunting for something important to you and we will keep going I promise, but this means so much to me.”

I put my arms around her and hug her back. I am amazed at how much I enjoy simply holding this small woman in my arms. She’s right that finding others is important and the feelings of uneasiness have not left me just because I have become enchanted with Prayer. I do still have the literal big picture to look at but just seeing her happy and content calms my sense of urgency.

Since it is the object that brought this tiny powerhouse into my life I look again at the painting over the top of her head thinking I’ll want copies on my phone, in my wallet and probably every room in my house. I’m letting this moment go on longer than I should but if she’s good with it, I certainly am. Suddenly I hear her stomach growl and I press my mouth to the top of her head trying not to laugh. I really need to feed her. I lose track of time when we’re doing things or talking.

“I know you’re laughing on the inside so you might as well laugh on the outside too. I need to go make lunch. You made breakfast, so it’s my turn again.” She said, pulling back from me and narrowing her eyes at me.

“I will make lunch. You just keep up that creative thinking and see where it takes me next.”

“Us.” She says earnestly and steps back into me. “It’s us now. You for your reasons and me for my own but it’s us now.”

“Well ‘us’ needs lunch. You go think outside all the boxes, I’ll go see what’s available to cook around here.” I smile down at her and turn her back to face her new mural.

It takes me thirty minutes in the kitchen just to find possibilities and another forty-five minutes to get it all ready. She comes flying into the kitchen when I call out that it’s finally ready. I laugh as she devours the fried chicken tenders, macaroni and cheese and baked beans. She has two glasses of ice tea before she jumps up saying she doesn’t know if she had actually been on to something or hallucinating from hunger and runs back out into the living room. I clean up the kitchen and head back out and sit on the sofa and pull out my phone.

I hate for anything to distract me from Prayer but I do have many people I should have been contacting regularly over the last couple days. I narrow it down to eight and shoot a text out to Benard, Damon, Sebastian, Leander, Cato, Raphael, Phillip and Nichlos. I send it in a group text so I don’t have to do it repeatedly and let them know they can answer privately if they feel the need. I fill them all in on just a few details. That Prayer has started to accept what I say is true. That she has figured out that she really is related to the women or atleast the one woman in the painting and then I tell them I plan to bring her with me to whichever territory I visit next.

When I hit send I count to ten and watch as my phone starts to light up from everyone but Nichlos. Why does everyone assume I am crazy? I cannot, no I will not give them answers about Prayer until she is prepared to discuss things openly with me. A few texts later, calming them down but staying evasive, I put the phone back on the table. I go over and pull up a dining room chair and sit and watch Prayer for what turns into several hours. I’m just stretching out my legs when I hear Prayer say ‘oh my cheese’ as she always does when shocked or excited. Her hand comes up to her chest, her eyes go big and she runs from the room. I walk over to the

wall to examine what could have gotten such a reaction from her.

A few minutes later Prayer comes back out and is wearing, well I think it's furry neon green pajama bottoms with a purple jersey and a green and purple mask on her face. She is clinging to a book that has another half naked man, I think, but he is very blue and I think has scales. I look at her questioningly because seriously, this woman has so many behavioral fluctuations that I can't keep up. She raises a finger at me and I stand still waiting.

"First." she says, "No judging from you. Second, you have two options. One is you can stay and be quiet and not judge and the other is you can go somewhere until I'm done." She has placed everything out on her coffee table and begins fluffing pillows and shaking out the blanket as she speaks.

"Is there a limit to how far I can go?" I ask her just because I truly enjoy teasing her.

She sucks her bottom lip into her mouth and begins chewing on it. Ha, hadn't thought of that had she? "I suppose I'll be able to control myself as long as you are in the house and did you have to point out that I am a possessive, frantic, almost maniacal vampire kidnapper?"

"Yes, I felt I should point all that out before you banished me and then disappeared on camera." I say dryly. "However I think I will stay over here and just be quiet and think. Observe the, whatever you are, in your habitat." I grin at her and sit back down.

A few minutes later I am thinking I chose poorly. Her screen had lit up with so many different women all in masks similar in nature to hers but none looking the same and the chatter started instantly. The chatter that went on for three hours and although I honestly tried to keep up with what they were saying the only thing I was able to clock on to was that apparently they all used letters of the alphabet for identification and they all loved science fiction romance. As soon as Prayer had closed her laptop I stood up and walked over to her, kissed the top of her head, grabbed my cell phone

and walked off to the room she had given me. Having sat the whole way through that 'meeting' I feel like I can probably sleep for a week.

I've been wrong before though. I lie in the bed with the blankets all turned down and wonder what new and fascinating thing Prayer will bring into my life tomorrow. She is a constant surprise and I never know what will happen next. At that moment I start to feel the static in the air again and I put my face into the pillow so as not to laugh out loud. Prayer's sleeping body, still wearing the furry green bottoms and purple jersey, materializes right beside me. I don't even try to stop the smile as I kiss the top of her head and reach down to bring the blanket up over us. Prayer makes a contented sighing sound and snuggles deeper next to me. I wrap my arms around her, tuck my face into the back of her neck because I love her smell and drift off to sleep with her.

# Chapter 9

## Prayer

In the morning, right as I am waking up, I can feel that something is different. You know, I already know what happened. I just can't believe I did it again. Listening carefully I can tell the man, who I already know is behind me with his arm over my waist, is still sleeping. I don't want to wake him up but his phone is on the dresser buzzing away. His fingers twitch against me and I turn over keeping his arm across me and watch him as he begins to wake up. Avalon's body stretches out and he pulls his head back and smiles at me.

"So, are we further limiting the distance I am allowed to travel?" He laughs and nuzzles into my neck.

In my whole life I have never liked physical attention and have always held everyone at arm's length. Every touch from Avalon, no matter how small, calms and relaxes me. The feel of him next to me, the sound of his laugh, the teasing in his voice has me laughing and feeling happy regardless of how odd the whole situation is.

"Part of me wants to apologize for constantly invading your personal space. The other part blames you entirely and feels you should just tolerate it for waking it up anyway. I usually limit any contact with others to a short handshake when necessary. With you, I need you close, apparently really close, all the time. I wish I could explain it but I can't so I am just hoping you can roll with it the way I am." I say pleading for understanding. I'm still not ready to talk about what this is, there is so much more to deal with and whatever this is, I'm not there yet.

"This is who you are and I've grown very fond of who you are. I don't just accept you this way, I enjoy it. I'm happy this is who you are." He rubs my back softly as he is talking and I want to drift back into sleep.

His phone buzzes on the dresser again and I look guiltily at him. "It's been doing that for a while now. It's

probably important. “

“So is this.” He says and pulls me closer and nestles me into him. The phone goes off three more times and Avalon sighs. “I suppose I should deal with that. “

I giggle when he gets out of bed because he sounds so pitiful. I am just bubbling over with the most insane happiness. It's like I've been building a puzzle for years and it's been so frustrating because I haven't had all the pieces. I feel like some are still missing but I've finally got all my edges. I am still smiling like a loon when I see Avalon frowning down at the messages on his phone. I'm startled to find how distressed I get and how quickly it comes over me just seeing the look on his face.

“Avalon, is everything okay? You look like something is wrong.” I really need to get a grip on this emotional roller coaster. If I can't keep up I don't know how anyone else is supposed to.

“It's not world ending, but it's not good. I'm going to have to make a trip out to Sebastian's territory. Damon is still dealing with peace keeping in his territory and Cato is lending a hand there. Meanwhile I have Nichlos waiting for the arrival of the Wyatt family in Arizona and Leander has to stay to make sure problems don't start up when they get there. I don't want to pull Ben from his territory either because I don't think our people would take it with too many Alphas in one place. It starts to feel like a police action and that will work against us. So I need to head to Nebraska and see what is getting Sebastian all worked up and if we can quell it fast enough. “

“You know I'm coming right? ” I feel bad for all he has to deal with but as he was speaking I could feel my body trying to go to him. It is something I can feel physically pulling me towards him as well as a powerful urge to help carry whatever burden he has. Staying behind while these feelings are running rampant and uncontrolled inside me is not an option.

“Sweet girl, I think we both know that, at least for now, there is no way I could or would leave you anywhere. I won’t take risks with your well being.” He says echoing my thoughts.

“Okay then, I’ll go get my shower first, then start packing. We can do breakfast before or after your shower whichever you like. ” I walk toward the door but I stop halfway there. I sigh heavily because for real? This is insane! “Avalon, are you okay?”

“I have a lot on my mind Sweetling, it will work itself out I’m sure. Well, I’m hopeful it will all work itself out.” He says with more confidence.

“Please understand I’m trying to fight this and I’m not trying to make you uncomfortable. ” I say in a way of warning as I walk over to him. “Don’t get mad at me.” I feel like I have no more choice in this than I do to take my next breath. I lift my arms and wrap them around his neck and lift myself on my tiptoes to be able to press my lips against his. I’m not trying to make out with him but the need to comfort and be part of him is overwhelming.

Avalon brings me closer against him and instantly takes over the kiss. His lips are soft but demanding and without thinking I open my mouth for him. I feel his arms tighten around me and I am lifted until I am no longer touching the floor. My fingers move up into his hair and I hear him groan softly as I feel his body relax ever so slightly.

I revel in the knowledge that something as simple as kissing me can alter his mood so completely. It transforms that overwhelming need to soothe him into a sizzling excitement. Thrilling at the feel of him on my fingers, against my body, his hands and arms holding me and the taste of him I strain to get closer. Avalon’s phone buzzes again and through the intoxication of his kisses I realize it’s an incoming call, not a message and I pull back gently but firmly. I look up at him hoping he doesn’t think I’m playing with him.

“Please stop trying to control that at all. I’d really prefer it if you just let that happen whenever you feel it. I

promise not to get mad. ” He says grinning down at me and before I can even think of a response he pulls me in for a fast, hard kiss. He lifts his head, places a sweet kiss on my nose and then grabs his phone again.

I feel better, because I’m insane. I leave to go get my shower and start packing for a trip to Nebraska. What’s in Nebraska? Does it even matter? Until Avalon and I figure out this thing between us I’m sticking to him like glue. There is a bright side to this and that is, I get to meet shifters. Men and women who go from human to an animal. Wait, that is the bright side, right? I have gone from not even knowing the supernatural existed, to being a part of it and traveling with a vampire to meet shifters! Literally every single day since I have met Avalon it has been something new and eye opening. To be totally honest, I’m more concerned by how fast I get past it all.

Hey, you can teleport. Well of course I can, can’t half the population. This guy here, he’s a vampire who takes outings during the day and enjoys ice tea with his dinner. That’s to be expected. What self respecting vampire doesn’t enjoy a refreshing ice tea? You are totally enchanted by this vampire and would follow him into the pits of hell. Also true but we’re not going to talk about that right now. There is trouble in shifter territory so we have to go check it out. On a side note, who thinks shifters pee on nearby trees to mark their territory? I’m voting yes, for the wolves anyway.

I stand in the middle of my bedroom, shower, dress then pack, or pack, shower then dress. It makes more sense to go ahead and get out all the outfits I’ll be taking plus today’s. No sense going through it twice. I’ll take one dressy outfit because I have no idea what I’m getting into and I have to be prepared for all the possibilities. Four pairs of jeans, two pairs of stretch pants. Don’t judge, a girl has to have comfort day clothes. Some pajamas, a handful of bras and underwear and definitely socks. I look at my bed and it’s just piling up and I know I won’t get that all in one bag. How do they make it look so easy on television? The clothes float across the air, land on the suitcase filling each corner so that after the person has



emptied their entire wardrobe they just walk over, put a knee on the bag and zip it up.

I grab another bag. It's fine. He's strong. He can carry extra bags. I finally get through all the outfits I want to take and am pleased that even with shoes both bags have closed. I did however forget the outfit for me to wear today. I pull that out and toss it on the bed and then jump in the shower. I wonder when he is wanting to leave and how we are getting there. I also wonder what it is about Avalon that has the other leaders calling him every time a situation arises.

After getting out of the shower I start pulling on today's outfit. I swear dressing in my own style is one of the highlights of my day. I love using outfits as a form of personal expression. Today I'm going Boho all the way. Perfect for traveling comfortably and still fun. Black flared boho style pants with different phases of the moon scattered across the legs. A cream colored crochet cami top and a matching color cardigan. Finally I layer beads and rope necklaces and pull on some cross tied wedgies. I do my makeup in neutral colors and decide to wear my hair down and wrap a peach colored bandana around my forehead.

Feeling ready and excited to see what new adventure awaits, because I am absolutely certain there will be one, I head out to the kitchen. Avalon is on the couch and points over at the table. He's already laid out a breakfast of pancakes, bacon and orange juice. Alright, maybe I took a little long getting ready.

"Are you going to eat too?" I ask him, sitting down at the table.

Avalon stares at me for a long moment before getting up and coming to the table. He sits across from me and raises his juice glass to me. I respond in kind and we both tear into our breakfast. When did this become a habit? He had just cooked breakfast and waited until I was ready to sit and eat. How did we become so domesticated? I wonder suddenly if it will be like this in, wait where in Nebraska are we going?

“Where exactly in Nebraska are we going? When are we leaving? How are we getting there? What are we doing when we get there?” I unload question after question onto Avalon until he holds a hand up.

“Whoa, Sweetling. One at a time. Kearney, Nebraska is where the Black River Wolf Pack is. When and how is around eleven o’clock this morning and by airplane. A taxi will be here soon to take us to the airport and hopefully we’ll be on the ground in Kearney around five pm, give or take delays. When we get there I am going to get you situated and then find Sebastian and most likely Roman and Jasper. Once they have gotten whatever it is off their chest and we work out a plan to keep his territory safe, I want to start working with you to control that ability of yours. Also I folded up your mural and placed it with your laptop in your travel pack.” He thoroughly explained. Then he grinned that beguiling grin of his and asked, “Are there any more questions rolling around in that beautiful head of yours?”

I popped a piece of pancake into my gaping mouth and shook my head. Seems he has answered all my questions the same way he handled all the issues. By the time we had cleaned up from breakfast the taxi was here and Avalon had it loaded in one trip. We sat in a relaxed silence on the drive to the airport and once there we picked up our tickets at the e ticket kiosk. We boarded in plenty of time and as he had said, we were in the air by eleven. After a few minutes I had relaxed from the whirlwind which had become my day. Week. Life? I absent-mindedly lace my fingers into Avalon’s, staring out the window looking through the clouds and the next thing I know, I’m asleep.

## Avalon

When Prayer had finally come out to breakfast this morning I was temporarily stunned by her outfit. I absolutely never know what fashion persona she will show up in next and each one is more charming than the last. I had been busy getting everything ready so the morning would be as stress free for her as I could possibly make it. It never ceases to amaze me that I can talk to her about anything that comes up

and do not feel the need to hold back information unless I feel it will cause her discomfort to hear it. I will always protect her so there is no danger to her but I don't want her worrying unnecessarily about the things that are going on. Once she is settled in and can see she has nothing to worry about, I'll let her in on more of what's happening.

I hadn't thought Prayer had been so tired but when I felt her hand slip into mine on the plane I looked down and saw she was falling asleep. At first I wanted to shake her awake. I had only seen this woman sleep twice but both times she dematerialized and showed up somewhere else. We're on a plane. I have cause for concern. The only reason I don't freak out is because I am sitting right beside her, holding her hand and I am certain it's me her mind has been searching for when she teleports. Showing up in front of me all three times is a pretty big clue. I don't mind it at all. If I could keep Prayer with me twenty-four seven I'm positive that's where I would want her.

Another thing that I am most undeniably certain of is that Prayer is mine. I'll give her time. All the time she needs to figure that one out on her own. I don't want her thinking I'm pursuing her for her abilities or because of my search for the women in general. No, it's important that she understands her reaction to me and her inability to fight it is because she is mine and I am hers. Time will not be an issue, just being close to her will be fine until she works her way through all this. Now space, that's not my fault. I can't give her one room away at the moment without the adorable woman popping up and that's how I want it.

I've had thousands of years of being alone and only ever spending any real time with my family and the Territory Alphas. I'm not antisocial per se. I just don't go looking for long term time investments with people. This particular person just feels like mine and my time, although still commanded by responsibilities, is best spent with her. Hopefully adjusting to both the new aspects of her life and in mine will be quick and painless for her. So far, she has taken everything remarkably well and hasn't argued anything, once she learned the truth. I know she looks on it more like an adventure and a mystery to

be solved and that's good. It would be so much harder to get through this if she was in a constant state of panic. Even if she undoubtedly would deserve the right to panic now and again.

The flight from Seattle to Kearney is less than six hours and surprisingly Prayer sleeps that whole time. I honestly hadn't thought she'd been deprived of that much sleep but perhaps it's the teleporting taking a toll on her. I've really got to look into a way of helping her train that ability. She's lived her whole life with it and most likely, from what I have seen, she's accidentally used it from time to time. Maybe Sebastian and the others can help her. Learning how they gained control over their abilities might help her do the same.

The plane touches down and I wait until we are almost to a stop to wake up Prayer. She rolls her head back against my shoulder and smiles up at me. Damn, one little smile and I want to wrap her up in my arms and keep her next to me. She is always beautiful but when she smiles she is radiant. I have decided that all those smiles are mine and I am never going another day without them. I bend my head and give her a quick kiss, because screw resistance. I personally have no wish to deny myself what affection she will allow.

"Are we there already?" She asks, yawning and looking out the window.

"Already? Sweetling you've been asleep for almost six hours. My brother, Raphael and Sebastian along with whatever entourage he brings, will be waiting for us when we have cleared the baggage claims. We'll be driving straight out to the Black River Wolf Pack so if there is anything you want to ask or you want to say, now would be a good time."

"I need to pee." She says cheerfully. I say again, this woman is all mine.

"Duly noted. We will find the restrooms then hit the claims and then find the guys." I say smiling at her and following her out of the plane. We find the bathrooms, finish up and head outside.

Leaning against a long black SUV stands Raphael, Sebastian, Jasper and Roman and I do not know how they

could look any more cliché. Raphael, Jasper and Roman are all wearing jeans and black short sleeve t-shirts while Sebastian is wearing black slacks and a long sleeve black button down with a black tie. Really, a tie. I wrap Prayer's arm around mine and tuck her in close to my side. She has taken everything really well and I'm sure she'll be fine here too, but just in case meeting four strangers sets her off her game, I want to make her feel safe. I lead her up to Raphael first.

"Prayer, this is my brother Raphael. Raphael this is Prayer." I look at Raphael with a warning look to be nice.

"It's nice to meet you, Raphael. I look forward to getting to know you." She smiles sweetly and puts a hand out for him to shake but I feel her lean her body into me. As terrible as it is I get a dark sense of pride knowing it's me she takes her comfort from.

Raphael lifts a dark eyebrow in amusement but folds her hand into his. "I'm very pleased to meet you, Prayer. This is Sebastian, Jasper and Roman." he says, nodding to each man as he introduces them.

Prayer pulls her hand back from Raphael and shakes each man's hand in turn. After she has greeted each one, Prayer steps back and tucks herself back into my side. Raphael's eyes shoot up to mine and there is a question there but he doesn't say anything. Sebastian opens the rear passenger door and I put my hand on Prayer's back as she climbs inside. I get in next to Prayer and she immediately puts her hands back in mine. Raphael and Sebastian climb in across from us, Roman jumps in the passenger seat and Jasper in the driver seat.

Raphael keeps a steady stream of pointless smalltalk going and I'm grateful because I can tell it is helping Prayer to stay calm and relaxed. The drive to the pack house is relatively short and when we stop I get out first and reach my hand in for Prayer's. We walk into the pack house and Prayer draws in a sharp breath. I look at her and her eyes are as big as saucers and her mouth is wide open. I look around the room trying to figure out what could have caused her such shock.

I say her name and when she looks up at me I raise an eyebrow in question.

“It’s huge, Avalon. I mean we walked in the door and it’s a mansion here. How many people live here that it’s so colossal?” She asks in astonishment.

“It’s also the Territory Alpha’s residence. You can think of it like a Governor’s mansion. It’s not just because a lot of us live here, although, a lot of us live here. It is also open to all our people in the territory for meetings and emergencies.” Sebastian stepped forward to answer her. “As soon as we knew you and Avalon were on your way we prepared two rooms for you.”

Prayer lifted her head and looked at me and grimaced just a little. I stay quiet because I don’t want to embarrass her and although I have clued them in on her abilities I have said nothing about her and I or where it is she appears at. I am about to accept as graciously as I can for both of us when Prayer puts her hand on my arm silencing me.

“We will only need one room.” Prayer says and lifts her chin slightly daring them to judge.

“I’ll have all the bags left in Avalon’s room.” Sebastian says and makes no other comment about that but then turns his head to me and says, “As soon as you are able, we could really use a little of your time.”

“Let me show Prayer upstairs and get her situated and then I will join you in the library. I should only be a few minutes.” I tell them and turn back to Prayer. “You’ll be okay for a little bit while I talk to Sebastian? I won’t be far.”

“That remains to be seen.” she leans up and whispers in my ear.

I grin at her and decide to hell with it and plant a quick kiss on her mouth and lead her toward the stairs. I do not have to turn around to know they are staring at us, I can feel it as we walk away. I’ve already determined that she is mine and I may be willing to give her all the time she needs to acknowledge it but I have no intention of letting the others think she is

available. She is mine. I walk her up the red brick staircase lined with cream colored carpeting, through the hallway and to the double doors that open onto the room that is always kept for me.

The gasp that Prayer lets out amuses me because I'm not sure what she was expecting but obviously it wasn't the dark green and white bedroom in front of her. Glass vases and plants are scattered throughout the room and even hanging from the ceiling. The bed is a king size four poster bed with a deep green comforter and matching pillows and white throw pillows. There are tall arched windows on two of the four walls and they are layered in sheer muslin of the same deep green. I walk over to the closet and open the doors to show Prayer that there are no dressers but drawers located in the walls of the closet.

I turn to Prayer and grab her up and pull her up against me. It's almost like I need a fix to feel her up against me and I lean down to kiss her and my heart jumps when she stands up on her toes to kiss me as well. I slowly lower my hands over her shoulders and down her back until I get to her ample curves and using both hands pull her up and completely flush to my body. Prayer lets out the tiniest whimper but the sound sets my blood on fire and I kiss her deeper, as though I could consume. I feel her hands come up at the base of my neck and her fingers tangle in and pull my head to her more. When I feel her grinding her hips against me I almost lose it. With a burst of self control that guarantees me nomination to sainthood I pull my mouth away and step back from her just enough to let her catch her breath. I press my forehead against hers and hold the back of her head in my palms.

"Are you alright now?" I ask. I mean, I'm not, but I want to make sure I haven't crossed any lines that pushes her away from me. Her laugh floats up to my ears and I take a deep breath and let it out. We're good.

"Now did you think I wasn't alright before the kiss or after? Were you fixing me up or trying to wreck me?" She smiles that heart kicking smile at me.

“You got that all wrong.” I tell her and tangle my fingers deeper into her hair.

“I do? Which part? I’m pretty sure you had some kind of intent there.”

“That kiss wasn’t about what you needed at all. That was all about me.” I grin at her and kiss her once more very lightly on her sweet mouth that given time I will in fact wreck. “That kiss was for you.”

“Oh, sir! You have initiated a war sequence. Would you like to attempt an emergency stop before it gets out of your control?” She bats her eyelashes up at me.

“I’m fine. I-” Her hands push at me and she swings out of my arms and across the room before I know what’s happening.

“Very well, my fine kissing nemesis, it is how they say ‘on’. I believe you are required at a meeting downstairs” She says as she swings the door open and bows me out.

“Don’t stay too mad at me, Sweetling. I’ll be back as soon as I have found out what is going on with Sebastian.” I say over my shoulder as I walk out the door before she can throw me out.

Downstairs I find all three shifters and my brother waiting in the library. When I walk in all of them begin at once but Sebastian holds up his hand.

“There will be conversations about you and Prayer, Avalon. Right now though I have bigger issues. Word is spreading rapidly that the Wyatt’s are being relocated. The questions being asked are out of fear and anger but, we may have problems even here in the pack house.” He states and looks just anxious enough to bring my focus completely around.

“They think either we are afraid of the humans and cannot protect their pups or that we are covering up for the humans and should not be trusted to protect anyone.” Raphael adds, rubbing his temples with his finger and thumb.



“Right here in the pack I’ve had to break up three fights in the last two days because discussions about whether the Alphas and princes have lost their strength are becoming heated. It’s actually starting to look like a division of loyalists and challengers. Right now that is staying amongst themselves, they have not brought actual challenges to the door.” Jasper announces.

Three fights in two days? From inside the pack house. Aggression over leadership is a telling precursor and I would like very much to avoid uprisings from the inside while Damon and Cato are trying to get legal justice without giving away that a child was shot and not just a young fox on private property.

A bang on the door lets me know the trouble is closer to the surface than they are even letting on. Before any of us can cross to the door it slams open and five large shifter males stomp in. Their hands are clenched and they are snarling and not even attempting to control their beast side. This is pissing me off and not even from the threat to me or my men. I do not want this to be the impression of shifter Prayer is given her very first time in a pack house.

“Back the fuck down if you want to talk.” I demand of the man taking point and obviously leading this fiasco. “You know this won’t go well for you if you attack us.” It’s true. There is nothing you can do to kill a full blood born vampire like Raphael or myself. The same applies to a full strength blooded like Nichlos and Phillip.

The lead man takes another step in our direction and I feel the blood zinging through my muscles readying for a fight. I will not let this happen under any roof Prayer is staying. I will keep her safe at any cost.

“They are *our* children getting hurt. You are doing *nothing!*” He yells and leaps forward with wolf jaws transforming.

Before I have a chance to register the static in the air and feel panic for Prayer entering the area, I see the shifting man go flying across the room and all forward motion of the

others stop. Standing in front of me her open palms outstretched as though she had just pushed the man, was Prayer. Her chest heaving and I'm not sure at this point if it's my imagination or not but I think her eyes are glowing. She is seething and pulsing fury and snarls at the group of men.

“Stay the fuck off what's *mine!*” She growls

# Chapter 10

## Prayer

I can't see anything past the raging red blasting my eyesight. I am overcome with such fury. I can't think straight, I just want to tear something apart. No, not just something. Someone. Someone who threatened something of mine. What is it? What do I have that someone tried to take from me? I can't get my breathing to steady, my blood is roaring through my ears and I can't hear anything else. What did they try and take from me? Suddenly the answer hits me and I whirl around. Avalon. They tried to hurt Avalon. Yes, but then what happened?

I'm so confused. I'm furious but I feel lost and adrift in a churning sea of emotions and I can't make sense of anything. From a distance I start to hear something that loosens the tangle of feelings inside me. I can't pinpoint it, it's too far but I listen for it to get closer. I reach out because I need this sound that soothes me to bring me back from this edge of rage and destruction. I don't know what happened. My fingers are clasped in long, strong fingers and I know, I just know, it's Avalon.

I can feel my breathing begin to slow and the tempo of the pounding heartbeat slows and begins to quiet. My eyes start focusing back in and I step into him. The confusion is beating me down and I can feel my body growing weak. I cling to Avalon and melt into him needing to hide myself inside him. I need answers, I know that. I just don't know if I can handle them right now with my mind swirling around and around.

"Take him to get patched up. I don't want to see any of you again until you are ready to talk like men and not just attack like wild beasts. This is not how we handle things." I hear Avalon telling someone behind me.

"It appears Avalon, that we have far more to talk about than we first thought." This comes from behind Avalon but I can't figure out who it is just yet and I'm not willing to move my eyes from Avalon's chest.

“Sweetling, can you tell me if you are alright?” Avalon asks me quietly, ignoring the others for now.

“No.” I tell him because honestly I’m struggling with conscious thought let alone making words out loud. Besides I don’t know if I’m alright or not because what the fuck happened?

“Av, we can’t put this off man. How did she get there so fast? How did she know to get there to begin with? What made her show up like that?” The man is asking a lot of questions and really you would think he would understand. If I don’t know how is Avalon going to know.

“She has a way of sensing me. Twice when she was asleep she teleported in right next to me and she stayed asleep the whole time. Once when she got impatient for my return she teleported right in front of me in a location she had no prior knowledge of. The only thing these instances have in common as well as with this one is that she seems to have no control over it. She senses me and she basically brings herself to me.” Avalon explains to the strange men’s voices. Apparently Avalon does have an answer and it even makes sense. Way to go babe.

“She did a far cry more than just show up looking for you. Avalon, I don’t even think she knows what she did. I don’t even know if she knew she could.” The voices are clearer now and I know I’ve heard them before but I can’t place them.

“I know she doesn’t know what she’s capable of, Sebastian. I told you when I found her she thought she was human. Look at her. I have to get her calmed down and back with me. This is going to have to wait.” Avalon is talking to Sebastian, I vaguely remember that’s a wolf.

Then I remember. I was in Avalon’s and my room. He had gone to a meeting and I was waiting for him to come back. I thought he might give me a tour of the house, well the mansion. He hadn’t been gone long but I felt something shift inside me. I had felt calm, curious and a little concerned but nothing out of hand. Then in the blink of an eye I felt wary,

annoyed then growing to threatened and angry. It wasn't me though, it was Avalon and he was under attack from men who were wolves. The shifters, in this house.

I release Avalon and turn out of his arms to stand in front of the men who live here. I can feel the fury building again. They would have let Avalon get hurt. The men who attacked him were under their protection, that's what Sebastian is right? He protects the people in this house. Although it's never been a problem for me before, I suddenly have no ability to speak. I am just so angry that anyone would try and hurt my Avalon. Now I can feel the rage and also a little hesitancy. When did he become *my* Avalon?

"Easy there, Prayer. No one is hurting anyone else ok. They were angry men. Avalon knows this." The one standing next to Sebastian says. I have got to get my head clear. I can't remember who they are except, I look over at Raphael, because I know that's Avalon's brother.

"They attacked Avalon." I choke out. Quite literally having to force out every word. What is wrong with me? What is happening?

"Yes, and you threw him across the room for it, Prayer. Did you know the man couldn't kill Avalon? No one can. Did you know he'd have lived?" Sebastian asks this like that matters to me. First, go me if I did the man across the room. Second, who cares if he wouldn't have died, would he have been hurt? That's enough reason for me to stop some shit from happening.

"Hurt?" Would they have even stepped in if he was hurt? Oh the anger is rising again.

"No, he's a little banged up but he's a shifter so he's probably halfway to perfect." The one on the other side of Sebastian says.

I roll my eyes that they think I care at all. I know I am not normally an aggressive person. I know that I would not normally hurt a person. I know that normally I would not be *able* to hurt a regular old Joe so definitely not a shifter. None

of this is normally though so I roll my eyes again and wave it away.

“I don’t think she gives a shit about Harley. I think she wants to know if we thought Avalon would get hurt. Raphael says quietly. Harley huh. I have a name for that Wolfman now.

I feel arms come around my waist and I sink into Avalon as he pulls me back against him. Am I being violent? Threatening? Oh well, I mean other than popping in very unannounced, and supposedly tossing a man across a room and then not being able to speak. That might appear aggressive I suppose but, no, don’t care. If it makes Avalon feel better I’ll go ahead and stay quiet and let him take me away. Even if I would like to slap the ones who didn’t care enough to even move. Oh my cheese, there is that rage again and I can hear a growl low in my throat. All four sets of eyes focus on me and grow huge.

“Avalon, are you sure you are safe with her?” Raphael says and I burst out laughing. Like I could or ever would hurt Avalon.

“Yeah, I think you should already know that Raphael. Look if she doesn’t calm down and get out of this feral state I’m not going to be able to get or give answers. I am damn sure she has questions in her own head and I’m taking her away.” He turns both of us and walks me with him to the door.

“Hey, Av.” Raphael and the others are all laughing at something now. When Avalon stops and looks back at them. All four of them together say “Congrats on being a claimed man.” and start laughing and talking to each other again. Avalon rolls his eyes this time and goes back to walking me away from them.

Right before we get to the stairs I see a group of men coming from somewhere down the hall and I recognize *him*. The angry man. Harley. I feel prickly and as though my skin is on fire and my fingers clench into fists. I think my intent is to attack him but I am swooped up and thrown over Avalon’s shoulder and he’s running up the stairs so fast I wonder if it’s a

form of teleportation. He opens the door, steps through and is almost to the bed before he sets me down.

“Are you alright?” He asks again but with less trepidation than last time.

“I’m actually very well thank you.” And I am shocked to hear it come out like I haven’t been fighting for words the last twenty minutes.

“Do you know what happened?” He asks as he runs his fingers through my hair.

“You were being attacked I think, and then it was like I was on fire and the next thing I knew I heard your voice from far away trying to reach me.” I tell him honestly.

Avalon cups my face in his hands and rubs his thumbs over my cheeks, staring into my eyes. “How did you know what was happening, Prayer? What was it that made you think I was in trouble?” He asks me, so softly.

“I felt you. I felt you getting angry. I felt a threat and like you were getting ready for a fight. When I started to tune in on those feelings I could hear what you were hearing and seeing and I can’t say anything more than that because the next thing I knew I was hearing your voice like I said.”

“You had no idea what was happening to you? You had feelings and then you felt a physical reaction and then you heard my voice? Do I have that right, Sweetling?” He asks again gently.

“Yes, that is all I can tell you.” I say and try to pull my face out of his hands. “I don’t know what else to say. I can’t remember anything else.”

Avalon moves so fast I don’t register what’s happening until his lips are on mine and he is demanding a response that I can never help but give. His hands run to the back of my head cupping the base of my skull and moving my head as his mouth moves over mine. Am I breathing? I don’t think I am. I also don’t think I care. If I die in this man’s arms with his mouth on mine I would go gracefully because I would have known happiness. My whole body lights up at his touch and I

can't get close enough. I slide my hands up between his arms so as not to break his hold and wrap my arms up behind his neck.

I feel his hands come down my neck and over my shoulders until his hands rest on my lower back. His fingers splay out and he presses me closer to him. His body is hard and strong and at the same time he makes me feel wild and out of control he also makes me feel safe and protected. Avalon's lips move off mine and he places little kisses across my ear and down my neck across my throat and back up to my other ear. My whole body shivers and I lean my head back to give him more access to my throat. Avalon growls and nips at my neck and I smile that he is as overwhelmed by these feelings as I am.

"Prayer." his lips move against my neck as he speaks. "What are you doing to me?"

Just because I think he deserves an answer he can understand, I move my head quickly to the side and sink my teeth into his neck. Not drawing blood but definitely getting his attention. I felt his arms go tight against me as he picked me up off my feet and slammed me into the wall at the same time his mouth came back down on mine. Hmm, it seems I poked the vampire, I grin to myself. I will have to remember that. Avalon's hands are everywhere and I revel in the fact that I can feel his need for me consuming him. His hands come under my butt and he lifts me up against him and I wrap my legs around him. A stream of curses burst from his lips as he grinds against me. I slide my fingers up into his hair and grip it tightly and pull his head back to look at him.

"Holy shit." Avalon exclaims "Prayer, your eyes!"

## Avalon

I now have no doubt that I will be a certifiable basket case by the time this woman is done with me. She had appeared out of nowhere, which to be fair, I do expect that from her on occasion. When I felt the familiar tingles from the static type energy that precedes her appearance I was terrified she would get caught in the middle of some shifter aggression and be



severely hurt or even killed. Everything inside me went into protection mode but even before I could act she had appeared and struck out. Raphael was wrong, she hadn't thrown Harley across the room. She had shoved him, like she wanted to push him backward. She had used so much force that it appeared he was thrown.

As amazing and awe inspiring as that is what really blew my mind was that she had so obviously not known what she had done. She had sensed I was in trouble and she flew, well ok not flew, but she came to me to be by my side to defend me. An unkillable, immortal vampire. If you cut off my head I will wait patiently while it grows back and then I will find you and a beheading will be your greatest wish. You can drop me in a vat of acid and I will contemplate all the ways I can make you regret every one of your actions while I wait for my cells to re-form. This is the being she decided to jump in front of to protect. No one who knew anything about me or my brothers would ever bother to try to save one of us. Her concern wasn't even whether the attack would kill me, only the possibility that I could be hurt.

I needed to kiss her just to ground myself to her. Whatever this thing is between us it feels like it consumes my entire soul. Every time I kiss her, she ignites with passion and she drives me to the very edge of my sanity. When she bit me I thought I was going to be engulfed in the flames that she is forever driving higher and higher. She pulled back to look at me and her eyes were a blazing white light. I have never seen anything like it. Even the shifter eyes simply reflect light. With Prayer's eyes the light comes from her, like a beacon.

I need to get her comfortable and at least a little trusting of Sebastian. I absolutely need his help teaching her to get a handle on this power of hers. If she can learn to control it, who knows what else she is capable of. I am desperately hoping she sees this as a good thing and is willing to work with him. I'm also hoping we can start this soon because with the aggression levels in this house I need Prayer to have a solid understanding of what she is. Before we get this situation with the Wyatts under control there are bound to be quite a few more flare ups. Tempers are going to rise as they are

apparently losing trust in their own Alphas and princes. Another thing I will have to discuss with Prayer. The list just keeps growing and I feel the pressure of time. That thought makes me laugh. Time has never been an issue.

I slide Prayer down to the floor and stand there holding her waiting as her emotions come under control and her eyes dim down back to their normal deep dark chocolate brown. When she smiles up at me I promise myself to do everything in my power to keep that smile on her face. I kiss the tip of her nose because if I go anywhere near those lips there is a good chance I will wind up losing myself and just throwing her down. There is a small blood matter that has come up but I want to get out of the bedroom so we can talk without me constantly thinking of getting her naked. It's taking far more effort than it ever has for me to get control.

“Prayer, will you please come down to the library with me. There are a few things I need to discuss with you and if you are calm and focused now I would like us to be able to talk with Sebastian and the others.” Prayer's eyes flare up momentarily and I've got to settle this. “Prayer, I was never in any danger. The guys all knew that. I have to be able to stand my ground in front of a few disgruntled, even pissed off, shifters or a lot of things are going to go to hell quickly. I want to explain everything to you. I want you to know everything and be able to make conscious decisions and you need more information to do that. I want to help you discover who and what you are but I will need the help of the Alphas and perhaps even my brothers.” I wait. Either she agrees, or she doesn't and I have to carry her off to the library because by all that is mighty I cannot stay in this room with her much longer.

“Avalon, I was ready to go with you when you said 'will you please come down to the library with me'. The reasons are yours but I would think you might have noticed by now that going with you is what I do. I really do want answers. If Sebastian and the others can help me find them then I am one hundred percent in. Do you want to go now? Or did you want to kiss me some more?” Her smile is wicked this time and I laugh and kiss her on the nose again and drag her to the door.

“I assume you prefer a more dignified entry into the library. Or would you like another shoulder toss?” I pretend to bend in front of her to hoist her over my shoulder.

“Don’t you dare. I must say though that you do move very fast. I could feel the wind when you were taking the stair what? Three at a time maybe?” She shoves me aside and heads down the stairs.

“I wasn’t counting the stairs. I wasn’t trying to impress you with my feats of strength and agility at the time or I would have challenged myself. I was concerned at that moment that you were about to turn Harley into toast.” I frown, feigning concern.

“My Heart, you may frown at me and even scold me if you choose to do so. The initial attack on Harley was of my doing but not intentional. Well it was very much intentional but I did not set out to do it. So I feel I cannot apologize honestly for that. The thing in the hall, well, I have no desire to apologize for that one”. The saucy nature of this woman. Again, mine.

Entering the library I see that the guys are all still here and have gotten comfortable stretched across the couches and armchairs. I hug Prayer close to be sure she feels safe and confident and she leans her head against me just a second before standing up straight. You can go thousands of years trying to express what you are thinking or feeling through verbal communication and even the written word and know that no one gets it. So much of Prayer’s communication with me is through body language and gesture and yet I am never left guessing if she understands me or is getting what I am saying. Now I step just slightly away from her so she can address the group on her own two feet as she wanted me to understand she is ready.

“Are you feeling better, Prayer? I must say you look a lot less, ow.” Raphael turns his head in the direction of Roman who had just kicked him. Hard. “Watch it, Fido. I don’t bruise but you do.”

“Who are you calling Fido? Fang Boy. I bet I could get you to bruise at least for a few minutes.” Roman taunts.

“Seriously guys, there are things I *need* Prayer to know about and the sooner the better. So can we please lose the locker room antics?” I say and project just the slightest alpha tone. They are not used to it, Sebastian and Cato throw alpha energy around far more than any other alpha but all Alphas have the ability.

“Yeah, Raphael. Respect your elders, which is literally everyone in the room except Prayer. You just have to respect her because she can probably whoop your ass.” Jasper digs at Raphael with a huge grin.

I walk over and sit on one of the couches and Prayer sits down next to me. I’m trying to sort out what order I should tell her things. Is any one point any more important than another? It will all be new to her. I look over to Raphael and he says nothing, just shakes his head. Jasper and Roman repeat the gesture when I look at them as well.

“Start with who you are, Avalon.” Sebastian says and I knew that was coming.

“Who you are?” Prayer asks, pulling her head back to look up at me? “Well, who are you, Avalon?”

I don’t actually want to start here but I suppose it makes the most sense. Explaining who I am. Explaining what I am. Explaining what is happening with our people. Explaining the need to take in blood shouldn’t be difficult but can she actually handle that I have to bite someone. Explaining Nichlos and therefore Phillip. The feelings I’ve had that started the process of finding her. Suddenly there is a hand waving in front of my face and I blink rapidly for a moment to clear my vision.

“There we go. You back with us now, My Heart? Are you ready to begin your tales of enlightenment?” Prayer smiles at me as she settles back down into the couch. Have I mentioned how much I love her smile? Especially the ones that I know are all mine. She doesn’t give them to anyone else.

“This is going to sound cheesy as hell, Prayer, but. A long time ago before our kind became united we had temperamental debates that led to deadly fights that sometimes led to terrible battles. Territorial disputes, property disputes even enraged violence claims. There is a bloodline of vampires who, for whatever evolutionary glitch, cannot die. When I say cannot die I mean they cannot be killed. They can be stopped indefinitely I suppose, if you put your mind to it hard enough. This group of vampires lived through countless wars and atrocities done to our people unbelievably enough, by our people.

Eventually they got together with different shifters and some hybrids and they formed a sort of coalition. Left to natural causes, shifters and hybrids do not die either. However, they can be killed by violent means. They all agreed that people should be able to govern themselves but they wanted an authority figure for final decisions and if you ask me, someone to blame. ” I look over at Sebastian who nods his head and grins like he won the grand prize. I set my gaze back on Prayer who is looking at me very intently and I continue.

“They settled on a vampire king, for lack of a better word, and for generations the sons of this bloodline have been the kings and princes of the supernatural world.” Prayer’s hand comes up and I stop talking and wait.

“Not to be *that guy*” She says tilting her head to the side curiously, “but if vampires in this bloodline do not die, why are their heirs? Shouldn’t the old grandmaster original vamp be sitting on a throne of dinosaur bones or something?”

Raphael, Sebastian, Jasper and Roman all burst out laughing. “You will have to give better details for your pretty little wifey.” Raphael quips “she’s not going to buy into any half-assed tale you tell.” I let the wifey comment slide because, well, because I like it.

“Vampires can get really tired of just being alive, Sweetling. Except for the particular bloodline and any blooded kindred they might have, vampires can be killed. When they fall in love with someone and whether by accident or design

they lose that person, after a while they just don't want to be anymore." I say sadly, thinking of my own grandfather.

"Be what? A vampire?" Prayer asks.

"Be anything. Awake. Alive. In the world but wishing they weren't." Raphael says quietly.

"Yes," I respond "Raphael's right. They just don't want to be a part of things anymore. Sometimes it's the loss of something else that brings it on but usually a spouse, sometimes a child if the gene skipped them. When that happens a vampire will go find a cave or even dig a hole and simply lie down in it until they're consciousness drifts far away from not taking any blood, food or water. In these situations the heir takes over and becomes King and the next generation become princes. My father is the current King." I divulge warily, and wait.

# Chapter 11

## Avalon

“That is an incredibly sad story, Avalon. Just going alive into like a crypt or something and lying there for all eternity because someone you love died. That is truly awful.” Prayer exclaims.

“Uh, yeah. Prayer, hunny, do you understand so far the things I am trying to explain to you?” I ask her.

“Yes. Your father is the vampire king of all supernaturals, you are a vampire prince and if anyone you love dies you might end up in a hole somewhere, wishing you were dead. Does that sum up what you were trying to tell me?” She says rather dramatically,

“Well, it’s not a sure thing that I would wind up in a hole somewhere, but it does happen. So I guess you are fine with those points. On to the next thing to talk about which is the way we take blood.” I have no desire to do this but what do I do if she can’t stand who and what I am on every level.

“I haven’t seen you do that. It’s been several days. How often do you have to do it? Where do you get your blood from? I have a thousand questions but they seemed rude to ask. However, many, many things have changed in the days since I met you, so. Do you use blood bags from donors? If not, do you drink straight from the person’s vein? Are they willing or do you hunt them like in movies? Tell me everything!” Prayer blurts out excitedly.

I’m going to answer her, I am. First, I have to wait for the men in the room to stop laughing. Then I have to get past the fact that my darling Prayer actually seems excited, damn near jubilant that I need to take blood. I still hate the term drinking. I drink iced tea, I drink soda, I drink juice. I do not drink blood. I friggin gag on it. What will she think of that? Oh good lord, is she going to think I’m less of a vampire because I hate the blood. I would say ‘That’s Prince vampire’

but she apparently doesn't care a rat's ass about my title so, yeah. No more stalling brain.

“We take blood directly from the source, a person. Animal blood doesn't contain what we need to keep our bodies functioning in top form. Finding a blood source for some vampires is a difficult task, especially if they don't belong to a family. For thousands of years vampires had sworn fealty to kings across the globe without them knowing what they were. They would fight in battles and wage wars and feed under the guise of battle deaths. Some still do that as soldiers around the world. The thing is, Prayer, we hate it. I mean we really hate it. It's disgusting, revolting even. It turns our stomachs and we each develop our own tricks for being able to keep it down. Our families have humans who know what we are, they are part of the family and they live amongst us daily. When one of our kind becomes in need of blood one of the humans usually offers to sustain us.” I finish and search her face carefully to see how she is taking this part. Regardless of what Prayer is, she's always lived as a human.

“Oh, now you *have* to bite me, Avalon. You have to.” She repeats as I shake my head at her. Sometimes I seriously wonder about this woman.

“I am not biting you, Prayer. That isn't happening.” I say decisively.

“Raphael, will you bite me?” Prayer looks over at Raphael who up until now had been laughing quietly at my dilemma. At her request, he abruptly stopped laughing and turned a lovely shade of green. “So, that's a no, huh?” she says after watching him.

“I'd hate to have to punch my brother because he was dumb enough to bite you in front of me, Sweetling.” I sigh at her.

“Can you both just leave me out of it? I may not bruise easily but I have a sensitive stomach. I have the worst gag reflex in the family. No biting.. No thank you.” Raphael says, shaking his head.



“Avalon, you say you don’t know what I am. You say you can tell I am not human just from the scent of my blood but you also say you have never smelled anything like me before. Raphael, Sebastian, Jasper, Roman, can you smell me? Is there something different?” She asks and Raphael walks over and sniffs her like he was smelling a vase of flowers. The other three don’t even move.

“You smell different. It’s an unknown scent, not unpleasant or anything.” Sebastian said and all of them nod their heads. I have the urge to beat each one of them for that show. Shifter senses are so sharp they could smell her from upstairs.

“Avalon, bite me. If nothing else you’ll know the difference between my blood and a human’s or I guess shifter and, what is it? Hybrids.” She reasons.

“You know what? Fuck it. I’m doing it and then I am spanking your ass for making me do this to prove anything to you. You better not get all grossed out by this.” I say and grab her arm.

Then I think better of it. If I’m going to suffer through this ordeal I’m going to find some pleasure in it. Holding her wrist I drag her over onto my lap and bend my head to nuzzle into her neck. I take a deep breath of her scent because that I do love. I kiss up and down her neck and nibble on her ear.

“I cannot watch this fiasco.” Raphael says and leans back in his chair but keeps his eyes on me and Prayer.

“Last chance to change your mind.” I whisper against Prayer’s ear.

Prayer leans back and looks me in the eye. She grins and quick as a flash she bites me on the ear. She doesn’t break the skin but my blood rushes through my veins and I lean forward and lick from her collar bone to her ear before coming back down and kissing at her neck. I can feel her pulse under my lips and her heartbeat is pounding but definitely not from fear. I cover her pulse point with my lips and opening my mouth I lower my fangs and sink them into her jugular. My eyes pop open as the sweetest thing I have ever tasted slides

down my throat and I groan and pull her closer to me. My mind tells me over and over again to stop but in the entirety of my life nothing has tasted as good as her blood does and my senses go into overdrive when I hear her laugh and feel her fingers go through my hair holding my head to her. I feel myself yanked back and away from Prayer and I lash out from pain and anger and my fist comes into contact with Sebastian's face.

“Shit! Avalon, get a hold of yourself. You *know* that's not normal. It's not right. I couldn't just let you keep going even if she showed no signs of draining. That was far more than I have ever seen you take.” Sebastian says firmly but pleading with me to understand. I look up at him and he audibly gasps. “Oh what the fuck, Avalon. Your eyes are glowing white!”

I look over at Prayer who is touching her neck and she looks up at me. Her eyes go wide as she sees me and I look all around for a reflective surface so I can see what they are seeing. I spot the silver vase on the bookshelf and walk over to check myself out. My eyes are pure white lights in the sockets. Well this is unexpected and new. Nothing has ever transferred from another being to a vampire through a bite. Then again no other being has ever tasted anything besides revolting to a vampire. I turn and look back at Prayer. She has that lost in thought look and I'm concerned not knowing which way this turn of events is taking us.

“My heart, I do not wish to upset you but it's going to happen. Raphael has got to bite me now.”

“The fuck you say? Not on your life, you are mine!” I say and hold my hand up to stop Raphael as he had actually thought to bite *my* woman.

“Avalon, he has to. You won't like it, I understand that. Don't watch if it's going to upset you but I have to know, you have to know, we all have to know, if it's my blood because of what I am. Am I going to be hunted by vampires for my taste? Because I don't make you puke when you feed? Am I going to be hunted for the whatever you got from it although all I see is being the loser in midnight hide and seek.”

I really hate that she might be right. I don't want to watch this but at the same time I can't let it happen and not watch it. I wave at Raphael and point to her wrist and I'm pretty sure he gets the message. I watch as he lifts her wrist and actually sniffs it like he's expecting something different. He brings her wrist to his lips and her body leans backwards slightly away from him which has the effect of calming me down from the anger I was feeling build up. His teeth sink into her wrist and I watch him take a hard pull. Before I know what is happening Raphael pulls back and throws up all over the floor. I jump up and run to Prayer, hoping she is ok.

Prayer pulls a pillow out from behind her and hurls it at Raphael who is still bent over gagging and retching like he was turning inside out. Raphael takes the hit and it literally knocks him over. She reaches behind her again and throws another pillow at him and he lifts his hand up to her pleading for her to stop.

"Dammit woman can you not?" He says wearily.

"Did you have to *throw up* all over the place? So rude you nasty thing. A simple 'it's not the same for me' would have sufficed." She yells at him, clearly pissed. Now I have to laugh because of all the things to be angry about.

"I thought I told you I had a sensitive stomach, weak gag reflex. In fact I know I did, I said no biting. I said no. You and my brother convinced me to try, you put me through hell and now you're pissed at me for it. Go figure."

"I'm not pissed Raph. I just have more questions now than ever before. Why did my blood react for Avalon but not for you. Not only are you both the same kind of vampire, you are brothers. Why are Avalon's eyes white? Can he teleport? What made him like the taste of my blood? Are we attracted to each other because of the blood or is the blood amazing to him because he is attracted to me? Do you see my dilemma here? I don't know what to do, is anything I feel, anything you feel, Avalon, real?" She stands and rushes out of the room and now I am once again left wondering what in all the levels of hell just happened and how does she do this?

## Prayer

I knew the tears would be coming and since I didn't want them to be witness to my insanity I ran. Any self respecting woman would have. It's not that I think they would tease me or make me feel weak. They simply wouldn't understand. Three days ago Avalon was a stranger. Now it feels like he is my whole world. I accept that I was, am, falling head over heels in love with him but now I have to wonder why.

Everything I learn, from pretty much minute to minute, I have taken and not just rolled with it but embraced it. My world turned upside down with what is real and what isn't and instead of freaking out about things outside of my control I adjusted my way of thinking and moved on. At the heart of all my acceptance though was Avalon. From the moment I laid eyes on him my everything was drawn to him. Physically he makes my long dormant libido go into hyperdrive. The part of me that has stayed disconnected from everyone on earth clings to him. When things should be scary and terrifying I feel safe and protected. I was happy that this happened.

Until I made him bite me. Even then the fact that my blood had such a positive effect on him had made me laugh. He was damn near euphoric and I could feel it radiating from him and it swelled up like joy inside me. I know I wasn't wrong, I needed to know if this was how it was for Avalon was I in danger from other vamps wanting to for once enjoy their meal, or whatever they call it. Raphael not being able to stomach my blood, very literally, destroyed me at the same time it relieved me. I was safe from being hunted as a walking buffet but now what.

Was it my blood that drew Avalon to me? Is the connection between us nothing more than a symbiotic relationship between a hunter and his prey. I know logically that Avalon didn't do anything to me. I know that the changes in my mind and body are not his fault but they are because of him. I went my whole life believing I was like everyone else and then he awakened something in me. He says it was my connection to a previous group of women and to an extent I

believe that but what if he was looking for this strange ability I possess.

The longer I am with him the stronger I feel for him. Even now I hate that I ran from him but the stronger I feel for him the more things keep happening. It's like he is pulling these things from me and I feel like it's my soul responding to his. What I don't know if he's *trying* to do it or not while it just happens for me. He became extremely possessive of me very quickly. I've already acknowledged I was insanely needy and possessive of him but is it for the same reasons? Is he being taken for this ride or is he the one driving it. I just don't know what to think. It was all so sudden and so powerful, the more I think about it the harder it is to believe it's real. I mean the abilities thing, that's kind of obviously true. The vampire thing is also true. It's the feelings I have had no control over from the beginning that I doubt.

Walking into the bedroom I find my bags and start pulling things out. I need a hot shower and some pajamas and some sleep. It's been a long day and now I'm physically and emotionally exhausted. I pull out my comfy flannel nightshirt, my body wash and my shampoo I brought with me. Entering the bathroom I'm shocked again. It has a whole dressing area, complete with vanity and full length mirror. The towel racks are lined with thick fluffy towels and there are even two bathrobes hanging on hooks by the shower. Did Sebastian have enough time to get this ready or is this how Avalon's room always looks?

I open the glass doors and look for the knobs to turn the water on. Now why does this have to be complicated. The only thing I can find is a panel on the inside wall that has buttons and a digital print. I press buttons until I figure out that one is for temperature and not knowing the exact number but guessing higher than body temperatures I set it to one hundred and two. Perfect. Now I just have to make it come on. I can see that one looks like a water drop so I'm hoping that it handles everything. I press it. Nothing. I try again. Nothing. I step inside and press it and water comes from everywhere.

After a few minutes of spewing water out of my mouth, I have the best shower of my life. I can feel my head clearing and my body relaxing. The scent of lavender is all around me again and I'm ready to get some much needed rest. I dry off, put on my nightshirt and run a brush through my hair. I work at blanking my mind completely because tomorrow is another day. I'm very hungry but sleep just sounds more appealing than going downstairs. Coming out of the bathroom I see Avalon sitting on the bed and I groan inwardly. I knew he'd be coming, of course. I just thought I'd have put myself to sleep and avoided this.

"We need to talk." Avalon starts using the four words no one ever wants to hear.

"Not right now, Avalon. I'm not up for it. Or did my dramatic exit from the room not clue you in on that?" I respond. I don't want to do this right now.

"That's not fair, Prayer. I have been honest with you from the first. I have tried to tell you everything from the moment you spoke to me. I have not done anything to deserve you shutting me out right when we need to talk the most." His tone is beseeching and I don't like it because other than this swirling mess of confusion in my head, he has done nothing wrong. I just need to know the reasons he has done everything right.

"I know you haven't done anything wrong, Avalon. I'm not here against my will. You didn't make me into what I am. You haven't taken anything from me. What I don't know is did you know this would happen?" I ask nervously. I need and do not want the answers.

"I brought you food. We'll eat and talk. Like I always do I will try and help you understand what is happening to the best of my ability. Some of this, though, is extremely new to me as well. Those points I can't help you understand. I will also tell you the things I am planning and it, as it has always been, will be your decision to accept or decline. Will you come eat?"

"Yes, thank you. I actually feel like I'm starving. What did you bring?" This, this I can do right now. The weird

domesticated normal with Avalon. The one thing that should not be normal. Since my emotions are all over the place and I'm battling myself back and forth I will accept any feelings of normalcy.

"It's after nine at night, Sweetling. You haven't eaten since breakfast before we left Seattle, of course you are starving. I brought some of what the guys had for dinner so nothing fancy, chicken wings, fries and a variety of sauces." He points to a tray at the foot of the bed. As soon as my focus leaves him I can smell the spice from the wings and I swear I am about to drool.

"That was nice of you. Where is yours?" I tease as his eyes drift over the tray with three plates of chicken wings in what I would guess are barbecue sauce, buffalo sauce and some kind of garlic sauce. The little cups of ranch and blue cheese are tempting me too. I give up and smile at him and move the tray over so it can be between us and sit on the bed.

I watch as Avalon lifts a chicken wing to his mouth and takes a bite. Grinning, I grab one, pop it in my mouth, bite down and when I pull it out there is just the bone left. Avalon chokes on his food and I cover my mouth to stop a food spray as he keeps staring at me. I know, I know. Not very ladylike, but it's my food and I'm mostly alone. And if he can take big gulps of my blood by sinking his teeth into me, he can deal with me devouring one of my favorite foods. I raise an eyebrow at him.

"That is a very effective way to eat wings." He says and I laugh again. "Prayer." he begins but I cut him off. If we're doing this, then we're *doing* this.

"Did you know this would happen, Avalon?" I make sure my tone reflects only the seriousness of my question. This one thing is key to everything possibly working out right or going horribly wrong.

"That question has too many answers." He starts. "Too many 'this would happen' from the beginning. You want total honesty and you want to clear up your own head so you will have to be very specific in what you are asking. I'm sorry but I

do not want it to come out like I only told you parts of things. If you ask, you will get answers. For now that's the best I can do." He sounded open and honest and I need that more than anything else so I accept that offer.

"When you went looking for the relation to the woman in the painting, did you know she would have powers or abilities?" Not what I really want but I need to start somewhere safe.

"When I went looking I was pretty sure they would not be human, I didn't think a group of human women would be able to hold an entire population both human and non human at their mercy or whatever it was they did. If they were in fact not human I guessed there was some likelihood of them having some type of ability. Like strength and speed for vampires, advanced senses and animal counterparts for shifters, or like the hybrids appear human but have all the strengths of vampires and shifters. I had absolutely no idea you would be able to teleport, be unimaginably strong or have glowing eyes when your emotions pop." That seems fair enough.

"What was your purpose in finding me, whoever turned out to be the descendant of that woman? What is it you wanted her for?" still hedging. I just cannot make myself ask the burning question that is going to tear everything open.

"I wanted to validate the legend. Everyone in our community has heard stories or remembers legends told of these groups of women who solved problems and settled matters for the human and nonhumans. No one, not one single person I talked to could remember if they were real or mythology passed down. There didn't appear to be any records at all in the human communities. When we started finding art that came from hundreds or even thousands of years apart but depicting similar scenes, we thought we had perhaps begun to turn mythology into history. The thing was, even the oldest mosaic, well, honestly if they were that big of a deal I feel like I should have remembered them." He says and sounds frustrated.



“Do you remember everything that has happened across the globe since you were born, Avalon? Is there maybe a possibility they just were not involved in what you would have noticed day to day?” I certainly don’t know who is holding court from one place to another. Maybe its a

bigger deal with my ancestors but it’s possible he missed it.

“I remember when Hammurabi had the first code of laws inscribed on stone, almost four thousand years ago. It was a new concept with the laws to be followed and very detailed punishments for when they were broken. I remember farther back than that but the point is if something like that was happening, laws and ordinances being dealt with, I would have paid attention. It’s my family line, Sweetling. I have to know what is happening in the world that affects my people. I have been a Prince of my people for over a thousand years now. I should have known some of those women.” This really does have a brain scrambling effect and I can see it as he shakes his head back and forth trying to clear it.

“Okay, so you don’t remember them but you set out to prove they were true beings. It was after you began the search for evidence that you found the art? The art didn’t start the search?” He said be specific, so I will be as precise as I can. “What made you start looking, Avalon?”

“A feeling. I watch the world, as I said. I keep up with what is going on across the globe because my people are across the globe. Right now I stay here in the states but my mother and father stay in Greece most of the time. My sisters live all over the world as well. Things have been happening in the last fifty years but by far they have gotten worse in the last ten. With social media, night vision, cameras on phones and sensitive recording devices it has been getting harder and harder for our people to stay safely hidden. Human hunters, even if they don’t all call themselves that, are constantly searching for my people.

The thing about humans though, it’s all fun and games when we are myth. They make movies, write books, even dress up and pretend to be ‘supernatural’. If they actually

found us, it would be terror over the unknown, not caring that we've been here the whole time. We would become the hunted enemy and if not killed, then caged and experimented on or sold as exotic pets or enslaved for whatever we could do for them. My people, understandably, would not take this treatment for themselves, their families or communities. The uprising would bring a slaughter on both sides. Not to mention the division of the sides themselves. Humans who stand with us and possibly vice versa. It's a nightmare and I know it's going to happen soon if I can't find a way to address both sides." He finishes and slouches down.

I need to get to the root of my personal issues now because the situation he just described is horrific at best. I picture shifters raging out at the treatment of one of their own and rending humans into pieces. Humans fighting with guns, knives and any other weapons they possess, taking out community after community of supernaturals. There would be blood on every street while the sides battled back and forth for what they each deemed their own rights. I grab the bedding tightly in my fist as I force myself to ask the question.

"Did you set out to make me fall in love with you? Did you know that if I loved you I would have to be with you always? Did you make me love you so you could own me?" As hard as it is, I don't look away from him while I wait for the answer. Avalon looks shocked at first then confused and then his face clears and he smiles at me.

"I didn't know you *could* love me, Prayer. In the world you know, I am a monster. My greatest hope was that you would be willing to come with me to help my people based solely on your own choice to do so. Kindness, compassion, sympathy. Those are the feelings I hoped you would express. If you actually love me, that is a gift, not something I can ask for. I was, I am, willing to give you all the time you need to know that it is true, but you are mine not because of your abilities, not for what you can do for my people, not for your blood. I didn't know any of those things to be true when I felt the need to keep you as mine." As he is speaking his fingers reach over and release mine from the hold they have on the blankets. When he is finished he raises each one and kisses them before

holding them to his chest. “I didn’t think love for another like this was meant for me. I never looked for it and I didn’t expect it. I didn’t expect *you*. I am, however, keeping you as mine for as long as we live, if you will have me.”

I’m going to be honest. If I was the swooning type, that would be my swoon moment. Alas, I am not that girl but I do feel the honesty in his words and the knot inside me loosens and I know I can hear him out now. I can give myself to him, to his plans, to his world and help him in whatever it is he has coming up. I reach over and pull him down to kiss him quickly because he needs to know I am with him but he also needs to keep talking.

“I’m all yours, my heart. Now tell me what the next steps are.”

# Chapter 12

## Avalon

She is mine. Nothing else matters for just a moment as my heart pounds away in my chest. When she fled from me downstairs I didn't know what to do. Did she just need space? Should I leave her alone and let her try and come to terms with everything that had happened? I wasn't even able to do that yet. Thankfully Sebastian had kicked me into action. No, he really did. He walked over and kicked me in the foot, called me a dumbass prince and told me I needed to go talk to her or she'd be 'all up in her head'. That had been accurate. When I was leaving the room I saw the clock and realized my woman hadn't eaten anything since we left and went to see to that first.

When I reached the bedroom and heard her in the shower I was in another new hell. I was sitting on the bed with chicken wings and fries and she was in the bathroom naked. I looked down at the chicken and then back at the door of the bathroom. The chicken was looking less and less appealing to what I could be having. *IF* she didn't currently think I was using her for whatever was in that head of hers. I don't blame her, in three days time how would you believe a stranger has fallen completely and maddeningly in love with you. So I sat and waited and honestly at first thought she might risk the midnight teleport and kick me out anyway. The fact that she didn't gave me hope. By the end of our meal when she gave me the all clear with the words 'I'm all yours' I could have been the first of my kind to die from relief.

I really wanted nothing more than to take this woman and make her mine in every way but she is right. There is much more at stake than just my need for her. As much as I am determined to find out if there are any more descendants of the original group, I feel like Prayer is in more danger with her abilities out of control. I love that so far it has been me that she comes to when her emotions take over, but what happens if it's something else. Also, her attack on Harley shows the

unexpected power and strength she has but if she can't focus it she is still in danger of being overwhelmed.

I haven't talked to Sebastian yet but I am fairly certain he and his men would be willing to help train Prayer. Right now, and possibly indefinitely, she is the only one of her kind and if everything else goes to hell the way I think it will, I want to at least be sure she can take care of herself. If she can get control of her teleportation so she can use it on command I will feel better knowing she can at least get out of a situation. Her strength is awesome and if she was just going to be throwing cars around I wouldn't worry about it. Since the only time I have seen her use that strength is when she was furious she needs physical control over it and to be able to access it whether threatened or not.

The thing with her eyes, I don't know what that even is and I am further confused by it's passing to me when I drank her blood. Holy shit I drank her blood. I enjoyed it. What is that about? Back on point, after she has gained control of herself and whatever abilities she has I will be willing to resume the search. Perhaps Phillip or Nichlos will have some new information by that time. Time to focus.

"I need you to sleep. Get lots of rest tonight and have a solid breakfast in the morning because I am going to ask Sebastian and his men to begin your training. As children they learn to control their shifting instead of letting their emotions control their shifting. They also learn how to use their senses and tune into them. I think they might be the best bet to bring your abilities to surface on your command and not just when you are in an emotional blaze." I lay it out for her as simply as I can.

"You want me to learn how to teleport on command. Like I want a soda from the kitchen, poof, I'm there? That kind of control?" She asks and obviously thinks I'm asking for the impossible.

"Yes. I also want you to learn how to fight. With your fists, with your feet, with your teeth if you have to. I need you to be able to defend yourself, not just attack because you are angry." I say lightly.

She lifts her hands up at me and makes little fists that would amuse me if I hadn't seen her toss a man across a room with just a push of those tiny hands. I know she doesn't know what she did, not really. She also doesn't know what she's capable of because at this point no one 4zdxdoes. The real trick here is going to be getting her to understand how important it is that she learns this without her thinking it's for my benefit. What benefits me is being able to think clearly without being in a panic about what will happen to her next.

"You will come with me tomorrow? Agree to let Sebastian train you?" I ask hopefully?

"I will try and do whatever you think is best. I will not promise not to burst out laughing at things that will seem ridiculous to me. You know, like me punching things." She says patting my shoulder.

I stand up and take the now empty tray and set it on the dresser. When I turn back around I see Prayer up on the bed on her hands and knees pulling the bedding back and pushing pillows around. I don't even bother trying to contain the groan that she elicits from me. She turns her head to look over her shoulder at me and I think again that I will be the first one of my kind to die this time from pure need.

"I think you are right, Avalon. I definitely need to get a good night's sleep." She winks at me and dives under the covers.

I stomp over toward her and she squeals and pulls the covers over her head. Climbing on the bed I grab a hold of the blankets and laugh as she starts shaking her head no under them and making more high pitched noises. I straddle the blanket blob that is Prayer and wriggle my fingers under her grip on the blanket.

"No fair. You are bigger. You are stronger." She wails from under the blankets and starts bucking to get me off.

"I admit to being bigger but the stronger part remains to be seen." I laugh and pull hard removing the blankets from her.

Prayer lifts her arms and pushes at my chest and I grab both her tiny wrists with one of my hands and pin them down above her head. With the other hand I keep pulling and tugging the blankets while she bucks and tosses about beneath me. I press my knees firmly into the bed successfully keeping her in place. I drag my other hand up the side of her leg to her hip and hold it there and turn my gaze back to Prayer. Her laughing smile and shiny eyes have been replaced with an open mouth and blazing eyes and I draw in a sharp breath.

“You shouldn’t tease a man so ruthlessly, Sweetling. You never know what might happen if he snaps.” I say quietly, bringing my hand up from her hip to her waist. She doesn’t say anything but she wiggles under me and pushes her hips up, grinding against me. I raise an eyebrow at her and I am truly amazed at my powers of self control. I congratulate myself repeatedly just to keep my confidence up.

“My precious Sweetling. You are going to be the death of me with this body of yours and the thoughts you keep putting in my head.” I kiss around her neck and her chin and up to her ears and whisper “ There will be lots of time for us later, tonight you rest.” and lean back to kiss her goodnight. Her eyes are blazing white and for a moment I am stupidly scared.

Before I know what she is planning, Prayer without moving her hands from my wrists, bucks up her hips and flips, taking me off balance and throwing me down beside her. In her next move her hands are free and she is on top of me straddling me and has one of my wrists in each hand. She looks like a goddess, her platinum hair tossed all about, her lips wet and parted and her eyes glowing so bright and white it’s almost blinding. She leans over me and runs her mouth down one side of my neck and up the other and I can feel the shivers start running through my body from every point of contact with her. Prayer keeps running her open mouth along my jawline and up to my ear where she sucks on it and nips at the lobe with her teeth. Pretty sure I am about to die.

“You shouldn’t tease a woman when you don’t even know what she’s capable of My Heart.” she whispers against

my ear and bites down onto my neck.

The desire to consume her is instantly overwhelming and I strain against her and then marvel that I cannot get out of her grasp. She lifts an eyebrow over those white eyes taunting me before she bites down again in another spot and then another working her way down my chest. I am pissed I didn't think to take my shirt off before I got in the damn bed because I really want her against my skin right now.

Prayer moves my arms and puts them above my head just as I had done to her and holds them there with one of her own tiny, unbelievably strong hands. She looks down my body and her lips purse together into the sweetest looking pout. Her hands come across my chest and I can feel her fingernails through my t-shirt. She grinds her hips down on me and my eyes fly up from watching her body to lock onto her eyes totally distracted. I feel a pull and hear a ripping sound and my shirt is in half lying open with my chest bared to her. With one hand. Just to be sure I pull on my hands and yeah, she's still holding them tight.

"Prayer, Sweetling?" I whisper because damn, seriously, damn. It is getting very hard to be the good guy and fuck if that's not the only thing hard right now. "Prayer." I try again but still can only croak out her name.

Prayer runs her fingernails down my chest scratching and then leans down pressing kisses over the marks her nails left behind. Her fingers come across my ribs and over my waist and her mouth drags over and she nips at my nipple. Involuntarily my hips buck hard against her and my hands pull fiercely against her restraint to get free. Suddenly she wraps her free hand under my neck and pulls me up to her. If I wasn't turned on to the point of imploding I might be embarrassed at the ragdoll treatment.

Prayer tosses her hair to the side and pulls my head down until my mouth is at her jugular. She releases my hands and holds me to her, one hand around my neck and the other keeping my chest flush with her. Even if I wanted to protest at this moment I couldn't because I want her so badly that any part of her will do. My fangs slide down from behind my teeth



and I slowly sink them into her enjoying the feel of my fangs penetrating her skin. Prayer shivers under me and rocks her hips against me. While I am drinking from her I can feel she is getting herself off. My bite has driven her past the point of no return and she is desperate for completion.

I drop an arm behind me for support and angle my hips so she can grind harder and faster against me and I can tell that she isn't the only one who is too far gone to stop. Prayer calls out my name and presses her teeth down on me and I can feel my body release as her blood continues to coat the back of my throat. Panting hard Prayer eases herself away from my bite and places kisses across my cheeks and to my ear, which seems to be a favorite spot of hers, then pulls back and smiles at me. Her eyes are back to that deep brown that I love so much and she looks sated and content instead of wild and abandoned. I love this look but I already miss the other.

“I think I will sleep very well now, Avalon, That was a wonderful idea.” She kisses every inch of my face and neck before climbing off of me and pulling the blankets back up from the foot of the bed. “You will probably want a shower before going to sleep, My Heart. I do love you but I will be asleep before you get the water on.” she says yawning and slipping under the covers.

I am still stunned at everything that just happened. If it wasn't so damn personal, and things do not get more personal than this, I would want to tell Sebastian because she had total control of herself the whole time. Hell, she had total control of *me* the whole time. I get up and head to the shower and by the time I am out Prayer is sleeping as she said she would be. I don't bother with anything more than some boxers and slide in behind her pulling her next to me. This is how I intend to go to sleep every night until the end of time.

## Prayer

After the deepest sleep I have ever achieved I wake up then next morning with Avalon still asleep curled around my back. With his face tucked into my neck, his arm over my hip and his leg over mine he has completely surrounded me.

Instead of feeling stuck or claustrophobic I wriggle down closer to him. I don't know what time it is and I really don't care. Until I remember I never called in my vacation time and had told everyone I would be at work today. Well, hell. I start extracting myself from under all of Avalon's limbs and I feel his arms tighten against. I didn't want to wake him up but my sense of responsibility will not allow me to just lie here.

"I'm sorry, My Heart. I have to get up and call my job and tell them I won't be in for a while. I don't want them to start to wonder and send a search party or call the police out." I tell him, attempting to gently lift his arm.

I'm really struggling and that makes my brain twitch. Didn't I completely overpower this man last night? Was he not unable to break my grasp or get out of my hold? Had I not utterly pinned him down and owned him. Now I can't lift his friggin arm off me? Oh I am totally talking to Sebastian this morning. This is not fair. I can get all the strength I need when it involves action for Avalon but when I want to make a call I'm a jello baby. OK to be fair, maybe a little action for me too but most of the time it's him I go into whatever mode for and *always* because of him.

Annoyed that I am pinned and should be able to break free I stop being as gentle and start pushing and shoving at his arm and trying to twist under his leg. I hear his breathing change and a low very masculine laugh surrounds me and for just a moment I still. His laugh always brings me joy in the deepest parts of me. However! I begin struggling again because there are things to do and calls to be made. Avalon leans up on his other arm and drags me down under him and is still laughing when he kisses me straight on the mouth.

"Damn it, that's not fair. I couldn't even move your arm." I pout at him, twisting my head around to avoid his kisses.

"Maybe you are a night creature and that is when you are strongest. It's definitely something we should explore. Perhaps I should recreate the situation?" He says nipping at my ear,

I won't lie, I can feel a flame licking up inside me like my soul is catching on fire but I press it firmly down and stamp it out. I will ask later if that's a good thing or bad thing but for now I just want to get up, make a call, get a shower, get some food, get dressed and talk to Sebastian. Not all in that order because that would be awkward. I mock glare up at Avalon. Damn he's hot. No, no, no! We have to get up.

"Avalon, My Heart. I will make you an offer you might not want to turn down." I say smiling sweetly at him,

"I don't think I want any part of this. You have a very wicked look about you." he says and climbs up off me and the bed. I wait until he has taken a few steps towards the closet.

"Oh, I was just going to say that if you let me up to make my phone call and get my day started, I might be agreeable to you taking a shower with me." The words have barely left my mouth when Avalon moves with pure vampiric speed and pounces back on top of me.

"Give me your offer." he says from on top of me and his green eyes go almost black from instant desire. I shake my head at him and he groans. "That's not what I thought you were going to say" he complains and sulks off again towards the closet. I laugh while I get up and find my phone.

I call work and excuse myself for two weeks and use up what vacation time I had saved. I am heart and soul with Avalon and have no desire, or even ability it would seem, to be away from him. I still don't want to just walk away from my life like it doesn't matter. Surrendering to having Avalon, to his cause, to his people doesn't have to mean surrendering myself and I need to figure out where and who that is before I just let my personal life go.

After buying myself two weeks to freely explore my relationship with Avalon, my abilities and how to control them, as well as to learn all I can about this world, I take the second most perfect shower ever. This should be a standard of living. If there is one thing in the world that people should be able to enjoy no matter how else they live, it should be a shower. I spend enough time in the shower that had I been at

home it would have been cold at my halfway point. Getting out regretfully, I look around the room but I don't see Avalon.. I go to the closet to choose my me outfit of the day. Avalon wants a warrior hmm?

Black cargo pants with straps buckled randomly around the legs, a solid black corset that comes to my belly button and a long sleeve white crop top t-shirt. I want to wear a kickass pair of boots with this outfit but I honestly feel like sneakers could be needed most depending on how today goes. I pull my hair up into a high ponytail and head for the door. So far since being here I had only gone from the door to the bedroom and bedroom to library so that's the only place I know to go.

When I walk in my eyes zero in on Avalon in a room that's almost crowded with men. Wait. What happened *now*? Did I lose more time than I thought in the shower? How late was it when we woke up? I hadn't bothered to check. I don't know what is going on but I know Avalon is in the middle of it so I start taking careful steps in his direction.

Avalon is standing in the center and Raphael is on his right. Standing on his left with his arms crossed over his chest is Sebastian with Roman and Jasper on his left. This cannot be good and I move a little faster to get to Avalon. I knew he had seen me as soon as I entered the room and his eyes tracked me as I moved. Instead of breaking the formidable wall of alpha vampires and shifters I slowly walked around and behind them. I don't want to interfere, I just want to know what is happening and be able to see Avalon while it's happening. Avalon's arm comes up and folds behind his back and I place my hand in his while he stays facing the group in front of him.

"I am trying to explain to you all, we are not hiding the Wyatts. We are not trying to keep them quiet. We are trying to prevent this very thing from happening on a greater scale. I know you are all concerned about your children and families but we cannot go out there and hunt down a human for shooting a fox. Neither can we reveal that she was not simply a wild fox. We are working within the parameters we have to make sure that families remain safe. Seeking vengeance will

get us nowhere good.” Avalon speaks slowly and clearly to the men but his tone is firm and I feel a sense of pride that he can face so many without bending but without sounding challenging either.

“You haven’t relocated the whole community, Avalon. We haven’t heard of any new protection features for that community. What happens when they come looking for some wolf furs, or they think it’s the local wolf population killing their cows, or whatever nonsense they make up? What will you do when they attack a wolf and the wolf attacks back? Are you going to send that wolf family away too?” The man I know to be Harley is intentionally provoking Avalon.

I lean back slightly so I can look around the men and see the faces in the room. There are some who look furious and are directing menacing expressions at Avalon and Sebastian. Some men appear to be contemplating the situation or look lost in thought. Others, and not as many as I would like, seem to find Harley’s words unnecessarily aggressive and move protectively toward Sebastian. This is clearly a divided room and I know Avalon wants this to end on a calm note or at least a controlled one.

“The Black River Territory is one of the safest in the world and you know it, Harley. You have no reason to take up against Avalon where the Wyatts are concerned and you are making problems where there are none.” Sebastian’s voice is low and there is a timbre in it I hadn’t heard before. Some of the men noticeably back down, almost cower, a few of them flinch slightly but stay as they were. Harley looks to actually puff up. To grow bigger somehow.

“You want to pull alpha rank to shut me up, Sebastian? Why are you standing there with Avalon instead of with your own people? He is a full blood born vampire. If the humans come and start shooting at us, we die, he walks away without a scratch. Why would you assume he has our best interest at heart?” Harley takes a step forward and I close my eyes to will myself not to react. Avalon’s hand tightens on mine and I keep my eyes closed, not watching, just listening to what is happening.

“Harley, what is your goal here today? Did you come for answers or are you trying to rile up the entire pack? Avalon is the Prince of Our People. You know it’s his duty to see to all of our safety and protection. The Black River Territory is safe. The Northeast Territory is safe. I ask again, what are you hoping to get out of questioning everything Avalon and I are saying?” Sebastian is very obviously getting angry at the verbal attacks on Avalon.

“Maybe we question whether it should be you and Avalon making the decisions for our lives and that of our families.” Harley says dangerously close to a threat and I open my eyes.

“Who exactly is ‘we’” Avalon practically growls and now his voice has an echo of that timbre to it but it’s deeper and I see even Sebastian shiver slightly.

Most of the men in the room take a step back and Harley seems to deflate just a little. A few of the men actually exit the room but the area around Harley and five other men thin out and leave them standing on their own. I can feel that flame burning inside me again and I press myself to Avalon’s back and turn my head to face only Sebastian. Sebastian looks at me and shakes his head slowly and I have to wonder what it is he sees.

“If you are here to challenge the Prince and your Alpha, stay exactly where you are. If you are here because you thought something different was taking place, please feel free to leave. Now.” Sebastian allows the warning to hang in the air a moment when all but the six men standing firm in front of them exit the room.

“Have you thought this through Harley, or are you currently running on your rage for the actions of the humans? Is this an action you really want to take? Against us?” Raphael speaks for the first time and I roll my head the other way to look at him.

“It is.” Is the only thing I hear before I feel Avalon turn and grab me and push me into a corner.

Six men leap forward toward Avalon and Sebastian but it is six huge wolves of varying colors that land in front of them. Their jaws open and snapping, three of them circle Avalon and Sebastian while the other three move to stand in front of Jasper, Roman and Raphael, snarling with their fur raised up on their backs.

“This is the only chance you are going to have to stop this debacle. It won’t end well.” Avalon says as he squares his shoulders and looks the largest wolf straight in the eye.

The wolf motions his head towards Avalon and the two wolves on either side of him, a red one and a gray one leap at once and try to lock their jaws around Avalon’s arms. In a blink Sebastian is no longer standing there and the giant black wolf taking his place stretches out his neck and drags his teeth across the hind leg of the red one, bringing him to the floor. Avalon grabs the gray one midway through the air and slams him down onto the floor. Raphael turns his body to the side and kicks out sharply and hits another wolf in the jaw.

Harley, the big red wolf with a black mask in the center of the room seems to be gauging the damage being put out and starts to back toward the doors. I am incensed that he would lead these men into a fight with odds that he should have so obviously known were not in their favor. The flames lick up at my insides when I see the red wolf pull himself up off the ground and try to spring forward toward Sebastian’s throat.

I try to swallow back the rage because I have no idea what will happen but I watch as Harley continues to back his way to the door leaving his men to face off against two vampires and an Alpha with his Beta and Enforcer. Avalon notices the same thing and surges forward to stop Harley when the gray wolf digs his teeth into his right side. Avalon bellows out in pain and rage and my vision grows bright and hot.

The next thing I know I am behind the wolf attempting to escape and as though I am in a dream I see myself as I reach out and grab him by the throat. My eyes lock onto his and I can see the man inside the wolf’s eyes. I bring his face directly in front of mine and feel the white heat blazing out of my eyes into his. In the background I can hear Avalon saying my name

and I know he is trying to calm me but it's not about Avalon. This man was willing to sacrifice his own, for WHAT? My eyes blazed hot and I felt the wolf in my arms start to move. I watched as the large wolf shifted back into the bastard Harley.

I am still holding him by the neck when Avalon's voice finally penetrates my rage. I look away from Harley and see all eyes, vampire and wolf, staring at me. I keep my fingers wrapped around Harley's neck while I turn my attention to Avalon. I see him standing apart from everyone else and he is holding a hand out toward me. Out of a natural instinct I drop Harley on the floor and walk past him to place myself inside Avalon's arm. Harley is on his knees and rubbing the back of his neck, staring at me with something like horror.

“What the fuck are you lady?”



# Chapter 13

## Avalon

Not the way I expected my morning to go. Not even a little. I woke up to a playful woman who was ready to get on with things. As soon as the bathroom door had closed, Jasper was at the door saying I was needed downstairs. I hadn't wanted to leave her alone without knowing how long it would take. She didn't even know her way to the kitchen yet. He said it was urgent though so I didn't see where I had a choice.

When I got there, Harley had rounded up what looked like all the males of age of the Black River Pack plus a few from elsewhere. The argument was the same as it had been last time but I felt like his aim in this was more sinister than last time. The amount of men he brought with him told me he was looking to overpower us either by popular opinion or by force. There was no way we were going to be able to let this second rebellion slide by without consequences.

When Prayer had found her way back downstairs I was proud of her for not backing down and walking through what had to be intimidating circumstances for her. Even in the middle of the controversy going on, my heart beat wildly knowing she always comes to my side. She is someone I can always count on. When Harley took things to another level, coming at me and Sebastian in a full blown challenge, I was more concerned that Prayer would react if anything happened to me in a fight.

It wasn't ego or conceit, just past experience that made me understand I was an emotional trigger for Prayer's abilities. I felt sure that I had expressed in no uncertain terms that I couldn't be taken down by these wolves but I don't know if she felt we might be overwhelmed or taken off guard. There were six of them and five of us but they were far outmatched and Harley knew it. I believe it was him trying to escape and leaving his men behind that triggered Prayer, she seems to have a keen sense of right and wrong and reacts strongly to

injustice. I have more questions now that need answers and this seems to be the time.

“Prayer, can you tell us what it is you did to Harley?” I ask her, looking down at her tucked into my side.

“She fucking made me shift is what she did. I couldn’t stop her. I couldn’t hold my wolf. What is she, Avalon? What else have you brought down on us? Do you hear me? I couldn’t keep my wolf! She made me shift back!” He fumed.

“You brought this down on you. You know there will be consequences for your actions Harley. You cannot be allowed to continue instigating such upheaval. Sebastian and I will be calling the other Alphas and having a discussion on what to do with you but for now, Jasper will be in charge of finding you appropriate holding. You can damn well think of it as a prison sentence for all the freedoms you will be allowed.” I do not hold back any alpha energy. He will understand what he has done.

If we were in the days of my grandfather’s rule he would have put him down like a rabid dog. Actually there is a really good chance that is what Cato will want to do as well. Probably offer to bite his head clean off. Considering the eternal life of all supernatural beings, barring incident, a lifelong sentence could be considered harsh in comparison to even decapitation. My father prefers leniency where possible and I’m not sure where a failed attempt at insurrection will fall on his scale. Before any long term punishment can be handed out, all the Alphas will have to be informed and unanimously agree on the penalty. That is my father’s only requirement. If we cannot all agree, the decision falls to him alone.

Harley sneers at Prayer and her head comes up in defiance. “I don’t know what you did to me but when my kind, the real shifters, not these vampire whipped puppies, find out what you did they will come for you.” He snarls at her and Jasper rushes at him and puts him to his knees with a sweep to the back of his legs.

I can feel that Prayer is in total control of her emotions. She is breathing normally, her heart is not racing, her body

next to mine is not shaking in fear or anger. Yet when she faces him completely I see her eyes blazing white again. I reach for her arm to pull her back to me but she firmly pulls it back and then pats my shoulder.

“Do not worry, My Heart. I will not harm the ‘real shifter’. At least, not again so soon.” she winks at me and turns back to Harley. She drops down to her knees in front of him and speaks in a calm, almost friendly voice. “I should be thanking you right now Harley. Your actions have brought a clarity to my mind that I have sorely needed. Do you know what you did for me?” she grabs his face in her hands and her eyes are blazing directly into his. “You helped me find myself. My true self. Something so insignificant to you, the lives of your friends, the well being of the men you undoubtedly led to this mutiny with lies and manipulation.” she releases his face and walks back to stand next to me and honestly I am spellbound by her disclosure. I am desperate to hear the rest of this rousing in her.

“You are correct Harley, you could not hold your wolf form because of me. I could see the human in your eyes the same way I can see the wolf there now. In that instant, and I do thank you for this sincerely, all that I am capable of opened to me.” In the blink of an eye Prayer is no longer standing beside me but is behind Harley. She grabs him by the back of his neck, again, and hauls him to his feet. Even had we desired to put a stop to this the five of us were all too stunned to do so.

“You want to know how it works, Harley? This is how it works.” If I stood there for a million years I would never have expected what I see happen. Prayer’s eyes blaze brighter still into Harley’s and he begins to twitch uncontrollably until he suddenly screams and shifts right there in her hand into his wolf. She continues to hold him by the back of his neck and he cowers and whimpers, turning his head and baring his neck to her like a wolf cub does to an alpha.

“Do you feel like a real shifter now, Harley? Do you still feel superior to the ‘vampire whipped puppies’? I realize now that I could end you very quickly if I chose to do so.” As an example she pulls back the head of the wolf which is at

least twice her size and puts her other hand at his throat. “All I would need here is a simple blade, I could probably make a spoon work as bad as you piss me off.”

Instead she blazes those eyes into his once more and within a short moment the man Harley is there and still she has a hold on him. She drops him to the floor and in a blink she is standing back beside me and I almost feel my head spin off my shoulders. I knew, I always knew there had to be something. There just had to be something that those women could do to control an entire population and bring order to both sides. I never in my wildest imagination would have imagined that any of them would have the ability to force a shifter in and out of forms at will.

“It’s not my place to pass judgment on you, but if I were you, I would submit to your Alphas and your Prince and accept whatever is coming at you. I have no qualms about forcing you to submit to their will myself.” She turns her face up to me and kisses my mouth firmly. “Excuse me, Prince of My Heart. I need to leave here.” and she is literally gone the second she says it.

Harley is on the floor and is still shaking from, well from a lot of things. Fear, anger, exhaustion from shifting so frequently, humiliation because, yeah, she didn’t spare him any of that. I look around the room and all the men are standing, barely, and their mouths are hanging open. Sebastian is the first to recover and he raises a hand to Jasper and waves at Harley.

“Get him out of here. Find someplace he can’t make any more trouble. Until we can reach a ruling on this he has no contact with anyone else in this house. He’s not to be mistreated, make sure it’s a decent room. The rest of these men also need to be separated but they need medical attention first. Get some men and lock them up. If they have families inform them of the situation but be sure they know not to try and get involved until this is settled.”

Jasper moves into action at his words and grabs Harley up by the elbow hauling him out of the room. Sebastian turns to me and his mouth twitches until he can’t hold back anymore

and he breaks into a wide grin. “You better go find your woman, if you can. I’d say she won’t be needing any of that training you had planned for her.”

I shake my head and hope that in her new found control of her abilities, Prayer didn’t just port herself to some unreachable or unknown place and stride out the door to find my unpredictable and impulsive woman.

## Prayer

It might be dramatic or even selfish but I had to get out of there and I was very grateful that my ability was teleportation. I know Avalon has questions, he deserves answers and he will get them. Just as soon as I do. I wasn’t lying when I told Harley that I have become aware of what I am capable of. I can feel it inside of me now, sizzling just under the surface of my skin. I just don’t know what *it* is. I don’t know what *I* am. I know that I could choose at this moment to be on top of the Eiffel Tower and I’d be there before I could say the name. I don’t know how, I just know I can.

I know that Avalon is more than a man or vampire to me. That whatever I am recognizes him as the other part of me. My other half, my mate, the one I am meant to be with. I am fairly certain I’ve known this since I laid eyes on him. No one had ever affected the way he had. In my life I had never been interested in anyone to give them a second look let alone attach myself to them the way I had locked body and soul onto Avalon. He is mine and I am his, my mind needs no more clarification on that.

What I also know now is that it is not Avalon that triggers my abilities. It is me and how I feel about the situation. Obviously in the beginning, you know four days ago, I was in total denial and I know now that the part of me that I didn’t know was there was reaching out to Avalon. The very deepest part of me recognized him as mine and was unwilling to give my conscious, controlled self any distance until I was able to claim him. As I think back to Avalon telling me how I showed up at his feet while I was sleeping, it finally

catches up to me that my mind had been trying to tell me for a long time. I thought I was sleepwalking. I groan inwardly and put my head in my hands. It seems obvious now but even I have to admit that sleepwalking sounds far more plausible than what really happens.

My mind skips tracks on me again and I see myself holding Harley up by the nape of his neck. Harley as a wolf. A wolf much larger than any ever in the wild and much larger than me. The reaction to stop him hadn't been because of Avalon. I couldn't believe he was going to abandon the men he had led into that obvious challenge of dominance. I want to laugh at that. What kind of dominant being runs leaving the weaker behind. That is not dominance that is cowardice and it enraged me. Still, preventing him from leaving had been a knee-jerk reaction to that rage. When I looked in his eyes and saw the man inside the wolf the dominoes in my brain started falling.

It was when he furiously told Avalon what it was that I had done that what I *could do* clicked into place. I felt it there right under the surface even though I was no longer angry. I was calm because honestly Avalon and Sebastian had everything under control. It was never actually *out* of their control. I had to prove to myself and everyone else that I was in fact in control. I had to be sure the thoughts I was having, the control I was feeling were real and true because it was wild even to imagine. I had grabbed him back up to look at him and I could see the wolf in his soul. I could force him out.

Now, don't get me wrong. I don't feel like the wolf and I communicated. I don't think I could have a conversation mentally with the human or the wolf. It was more along the lines of I could mentally drive a wedge between his will to keep one form or another. At least that's the best way I can explain it at this time. I need more points of reference and I don't think Sebastian would be keen on that sort of practice or training. Although I think Raphael might beg to watch. I cringe just a little. I hope that Sebastian, Roman and Jasper don't think less of me. I would never do anything against them.

I close my eyes to try and focus on any one particular train of thought. I am all over the place and I need to find a center. Instantly Avalon appears in my mind and he is searching for me. So many questions but mostly he just wants to have me back near him. I open my eyes and look at the sky from where I am sitting on the roof of the house. Okay really this is not a house, this place is huge, I hate the word house for this place. Anyway, I had chosen this spot because I knew no one could just come find me and I needed some control over my time and space for just a little while.

I know it's unfair to be able to pop in on anyone else regardless of how they feel about it, but my brain is too scattered to care about double standards. I close my eyes again and I can see Avalon searching the house getting more upset by the moment and my brain is not too scattered to care about that. I'd rather he were up here with me but it will be faster to go to him. I cannot abide him being upset especially when it is my doing. Sighing I focus on Avalon again and basically just will myself to him.

Avalon is running up the stairs to check again in our room when I materialize a few steps up. He looks up and his first reaction is shock followed by relief. Then I see his eyes spark and turn that deep green that is almost black. Avalon growls deep in his chest and races at me, tossing me over his shoulder. I laugh because this man's reaction to things I do and say are as unpredictable as I am. I expected him to be angry and demanding answers for what I had done to Harley as well as my disappearing act. Instead I have a feeling it's something else he'll be demanding from me and I feel my blood heat at the thought.

From my upside down perspective I watch Avalon's long legs move rapidly until he comes to a momentary stop at what I assume is the bedroom door. I wonder to myself if this man will ever again let me walk through the bedroom doors on my own or if I can only gain entrance over his shoulder. This time he places me down as soon as the door closes behind him. There are a few things I need to tell him but I'm not sure how to go about it. I have the deepest love for my sci-fi romance

books and I try very hard to find a heroine to draw strength from to address this bizarre situation.

I look up at Avalon prepared to tell him what he needs to know. To tell him what I have come to understand. He already knows I love him. As ridiculously fast as it was he still accepts that I do love him. He knows I am his, I have told him and again he has accepted it as truth. What he needs to know is what being mine actually means. I don't know why I know, it's just a feeling inside me. How do you explain something to someone when you can't even make the words form in your own head? I don't even know what will happen, I just feel that making Avalon mine, truly mine, will change something in a fundamental way. I may not be able to express my concerns properly, but I have to say something.

"Avalon." I start and his arms come up around me and drag me against him.

"No. Not talk time. Kiss my woman time." he said and began placing kisses on my forehead and around my face before bringing his mouth down on mine. His hands come up and circle the back of my head and his fingers thread into my hair. The man loves to hold me where he wants me when he is kissing me. I can feel a change in Avalon, a need burning inside him and I want to fill that need. I just need a few minutes of his time before he overpowers all of my senses.

"Avalon." I barely breathe out when his lips move off mine to trail down my neck. No matter what part of me he is touching I can feel him everywhere. My body responds reflexively, my head leaning back while my arms wrap and his neck. "I have to say something, My Heart." I say quietly as my head rolls side to side with his kisses.

"Is it how much you need me? How much you want me? How you cannot delay this any longer?" He asks between kisses and nips.

"Not exactly." I answer honestly, trying to focus.

"Then it will wait." His lips move against my throat. "What the hell, Prayer seriously?" Avalon groans as I port



myself out of his arms and over to the bed. “We need some real ground rules with that shit, Sweetling.”

“And we’ll have them, Avalon. As soon as you let me say what I have to say. Shit!” I practically screech as he uses his speed to almost nab me before I was ready. “Speaking of ground rules, My Heart, there will be none of that either.” I say and port myself into the bathroom because I already know he’s on the move.

“I will promise anything you want and stop hunting you down as soon as you stand still and let me get my hands on you woman.” He growled and was inside the door before I could close it.

“Avalon, something is going to change. I don’t know what it is, but I know if we do this, if we surrender completely, something is going to change. What if it’s bad?” I say holding my hands up and keeping him back, barely. For myself, I would sacrifice anything to be with Avalon for as long as the universe permits, but I need him to make that decision with the facts. Avalon stops his seduction and stares at me intently, narrowing his eyes.

“Are you saying there is something you feel should keep us apart? To stop us from being together? Something you don’t want?” He asks cautiously.

“No. Not for me, My Heart. But think for a second. ” I hurriedly say as he tries to get at me again. “What if the cost of our being together is the sacrifice of your immortality? What if being with me means that the next attack you suffer is your last? What if your world hates that you are with me and riots against a prince that would knowingly mate with an unknown species.” I whimper before giving in and collapsing against his body. I did my part. I have tried to warn him. I wish I had a better way of knowing what the change would be, but warning him against possibilities is better than nothing.

“I don’t care. I don’t care and I don’t care. The first thing you need to know, Sweetling, is that if being mated to you means I have one year of life left then I can guarantee you it will be the best year out of over ten thousand of them. I’d

easily sacrifice another ten thousand years without you to spend a few with you. My people don't get a say in this and I am better off with you than without you if they do decide to revolt for any reason. Even if I had not figured out that you are the mate for me, that would still be true." Avalon looks at me for a second more before taking my lips in another of his mind melting kisses.

Avalon bends and wraps an arm under my legs scooping me up and with that speed that always makes me laugh in anticipation. As he brings me to the bed I fully expect him to just drop me but he lays me down gently and comes with me keeping himself braced on his elbows by my head. The weight of him on my body pushing me into the bed sends another heatwave through me and my body rises up to press against him.

"No matter what happens, Prayer, forever and always you are mine." His voice is so thick and his eyes so dark that it sends a shiver down my spine.

"I want to be yours, Avalon, forever and always. I give you all that I am." Perhaps not the traditional vows humans use but I feel no less bound to him than if there had been rings, a church and a document.

My mouth is quickly covered again by his and this time as his mouth moves over mine his hands are exploring the rest of my body. I feel his fingers sliding under the hem of my shirt and corset and decide shy is not for the two of us. I cross my arms in front of me grabbing both shirts at once and pull both over my head and toss them to the side of the bed. Avalon pulls back his head to look at my body. My bare chest because who would wear a bra with a crop top and corset? If it was possible I believe his eyes got even darker and his look became more intense. My body reacted to just him looking at me and I craved his touch.

"You are perfect." he said against my ear as he began licking and kissing his way down my neck. His finger splayed across my hips and belly and I could feel the tips of his fingers brush the underside of my breast lightly. An almost touch that had me longing for more and I again arched my back up into

him, silently begging him to intensify his touch. Instead his fingers continued the feather light touches while his mouth came down my neck across my collarbone to my right shoulder where he stopped and lifted his head.

“You have a tattoo.” He smiled at me and ran his tongue along the edges of the sparkling blue butterfly that is normally hidden from anyone’s view.’

“I do.’ I gasped and was lucky to get that out. All my senses were focused on what his mouth and hands were doing to me from one moment to the next. Conscious thought was fading rapidly.

“I like it. A lot.” He said and pressed kisses to the butterfly again before coming back across my collarbone and down my chest. His lips and tongue ran around the underside of my breast and the desperate need for his lips, tongue, fingers, anything to touch my nipples was driving me to move under him. In a move so fast it took me off guard, Avalon wrapped his lips around the nipple and sucked it into his mouth. My head flew back and my arms wrapped around his head pulling him closer to me.

While his mouth was still attached to my breast his hands busied themselves getting me out of my cargo pants and he had my underwear gone with them. Completely naked with him on top of me my body was screaming for all of him. It was an injustice that his beautiful body was still hidden behind all of his clothes while I was bare before him. I do not tolerate injustice. My fingers gripped his shirt around the collar and tore the shirt down the center, pulling it away from his body.

“If you keep doing that I am not going to have any clothes.” He laughed moving his head to the other breast as he spoke.

“If you keep wearing clothes in this bed you won’t have them anymore.” I moaned as he began working the other nipple in his mouth. His head popped up and he grinned at me and before I could blink he was standing at the side of the bed dragging the rest of his clothes off. My eyes were glued to every inch of skin he revealed and as soon as he was done my

hands came up to drag him back down to me. Avalon lays back on top of me and I move my legs apart to cradle him against me.

He tucks his head against my neck and groans as he slides his hands back around my body moving them from my hips to my breast and down again. Some day in the future I will let him take his time and explore but my body is on fire and my soul is crying out to join with his. I wrap one arm around his head and bring his mouth to my neck and one leg up around his hips.

“I want you to take all of me, My Heart. My soul is on fire to join with yours.” I whisper in his ear as I press his mouth tighter against my skin and pull him down into me at the same time. My teeth come down in his shoulder as Avalon opens his mouth and sinks his fangs into my neck.

He begins moving inside me and my hips rock up against him matching him thrust for thrust. I can feel my eyes blazing as the fire builds rapidly out of control inside me. Avalon keeps his teeth sunk into my neck taking hard pulls of my blood into him. He takes both of my hands in his, twining them together over my head and pushes hard into me. In that instant my body splinters into a millions pieces and I scream his name, my body locking onto his.

Avalon pulls hard against my neck, my blood pouring down his throat as his body shudders and slams harder into me. I keep my legs locked tight around him and my hands squeeze against his until I feel him begin to slow and his breathing starts to calm. I press kisses to the side of his face and I feel his fangs release from my neck and his hands release mine. I run my hands through his hair and down his back loving the feel of being with him.

“You are all mine now. No take backs.” He says and I stare in awe at his glowing white eyes.

“You are definitely mine now, My Heart. Your eyes are glowing white as stars.” I say kissing each one gently. “Avalon.” I say, waiting for him to look at me “I’m starving. I

never got anything to eat when I went downstairs this morning and now I am absolutely famished.”

He laughs and slowly separates our bodies and climbs off the bed. He takes my hand and guides me to the bathroom and starts up a warm shower. Inside the shower he lathers his hands in my lavender soap and makes sure he has covered every inch of my body in bubbles.

‘I love this smell on you. I will never again smell the scent of lavender and not think of you.’ He said, kissing my shoulder right before he took me again up against the wall of the shower.

By the time we were dressed I was ready to eat the pillows. Avalon came over to me and wrapped me in his arms. Kissing me again and again he started walking me towards the wall by the door. He pressed me hard against it and lifted me up until I wrapped my legs around him. His kisses got more and more demanding until I pulled my mouth away to take a deep breath.

‘How hungry are you exactly, Sweetling?’ He says kissing the sides of my mouth. ‘Do you feel it is absolutely necessary to leave this room right now?’

‘I am starving, Avalon. Feed me or I will be unable to meet any of your appetites, you insatiable beast.’ I laugh trying to slip from his grasp.

‘I’m thinking you are much stronger than that, Sweetling. Another hour won’t kill you.’ He grins, locking his arms around me tighter. I decide it is strictly in self defense if I port out of here at least as far as the main hall and only because I still don’t know where the damn kitchens are. I smile sweetly at him and kiss him lightly on the lips before I send myself off downstairs.

‘Well, that’s new and fairly interesting.’ Raphael says as I appear in front of him and Sebastian.

‘So is this an anyone rides kind of deal or mates only?’ Sebastian grins but I am far too focused on the fact that I am still being held by Avalon.

“Just one day my love, just one day I would like to make it past lunch without saying ‘What the hell is happening now’.” Avalon states with dry humor. Me too, I think silently. Me too.

# Chapter 14

## Avalon

How many ways can I express the unpredictability of my life connected to Prayer. I wouldn't change it for anything in the universe but I would like to keep up with it at times. Every time I think I might be on the path to finding answers, more questions arise. This particular situation has me wondering if our being newly mated has her abilities growing to the point that she can teleport other people in general, whomever she wishes or if it's only me as Sebastian pointed out because I am her mate. Speaking of which, how did he know that?

I look over at Raphael and Sebastian who are grinning like total fools. We will be having a long discussion later but for now my woman is starving and I suppose I am to blame for that. The desire that has sparked in me for her seems to be an eternally lit fuse. If she wasn't complaining about food I'd drag her back upstairs and have her again. Although I suppose there are other more pressing issues to attend to, my body certainly doesn't seem to care. The only thing I want to spend any time on is Prayer.

"Prayer, Sweetling, I know you are hungry. If you go down the hall there and to the right you'll find the kitchen. Are you okay to go alone?" I ask her because I need to talk to these two but I don't want her to think I'm ducking out on her. I would also have liked to have gotten something to eat.

"I'm fine. Go do your thing." She says and stands on her tiptoes to give me a quick kiss. Instantly I don't care what I have to talk to the guys about nor do I think of food. Just Prayer. She pulls away and grins at me knowing and turns and rushes down the hallway.

"Damn, are you ever going to be able to get anything done again?" Raphael asks, watching Prayer walk away.

"Hey, stop looking at her like that. That's mine." I snap at him moving to stand in front of his view of Prayer.

“So it is and I am delighted that’s happened. But right now we need to figure out what to do about Harley. Jasper locked him up in one of the downstairs rooms for now but you’ve got to get the other Alphas on a conference call or something and get this settled. Harley had told everyone he was going to confront you and Sebastian about nothing being done about the men who hurt the Wyatt child and wanted them to witness your response. Then you sent them all away before Harley attacked, Harley is screaming he’s being imprisoned for challenging your decisions. It’s our word against his that he got violent first.” Raphael finished, shaking his head.

“What the hell is this guy’s problem? There is no way he is this concerned over the Wyatt girl. He doesn’t even know the family and it’s in Damon’s territory. Unless we are directly requested we never get involved in another’s territorial issues.” Sebastian’s tone is frustrated understandably. We need to know what this man’s ultimate goal is.

“What do we know about Harley? How long has he been a member of your pack? How long has he been in this area? How many members are blood kin to him? Where is his extended family located?” I fire off the questions I hope will dig deeper into this uproar that Harley has caused for seemingly no reason.

“No blood kin here in Black River and he’s actually been here about ten years now.” Jasper says as he enters the hall. “As far as we were told he has no kin anywhere Not sure what happened to them or him to bring him here but the last place he said he lived in was in a small town in Texas.”

“I’m always so damn jealous of your shifter ears.” Raphael admits to Jasper. Sebastian grunts and looks at me.

“You wouldn’t be jealous of our hearing if you had to listen to your brother claiming his mate earlier.” Sebastian declares and Raphael almost doubles over laughing.

“We’ll be skipping the part about my love life and moving on to Harley. If he lived in Texas we should find out what information Leander has on him. I need that conference call. I know Damon and Cato are knee deep in issues but get



them anyway. Sebastian and I will go set up and get a hold of Benard and Leander. Betas and Enforcers are of course welcome if not otherwise busy. Raphael, try and get Phillip and Nichlos and then join me and Sebastian. We'll be in his private office." I always try to leave everything to the Alphas so as not to step on toes or raise tempers, but this part is my job. Bringing them together so we can get a resolution to a problem.

Raphael pulls out his phone and points at me with it then walks off to get a hold of Phillip and Nichlos. Sebastian heads toward his office and I go to follow him when I feel Prayer's hand on my back. I turn around to face her and I know my smile is huge when I see her holding a plate of sandwiches in one hand and a tall iced tea in the other. I take a kiss while her hands are too busy to swat me, then the plate, another kiss, the drink and then another kiss. Prayer is laughing and the sound still echoes in my ears when she disappears off to who knows where.

I am elated that she has not only accepted who and what she is, to the extent of our knowledge of what she is, but that she actually seems to enjoy using her powers now. I hope there is no hidden battery life because I'm pretty sure her porting around has become her new favorite mode of transportation. I still have a whole lot of questions in that department as I am sure she does as well. At the top of my list is if she was able to teleport me, which was very strange but also very awesome, because we are linked together or because her power has grown.

I enter Sebastian's office and he waves his hand for me to look at something. The computer monitor has the faces of Benard and Leander both. I nod my head in thanks to Sebastian who leans his head slightly and we both pull up a chair in front of the screen. I apologize in advance for my voracious appetite and within a few minutes I have devoured the sandwiches and the tea. I contemplate waiting for the others because I don't know what Sebastian has told anyone yet when Leander makes an odd coughing sound getting my attention.

“I hear congratulations are in order , Avalon. The community has a new Princess huh? I didn’t expect that news ever, at all. Like never. Who is she?” He asks and I turn my head to Sebastian because surely he would have...

“There wasn’t a lot of time.” He says, shrugging.

“She is one of the women that we were looking into. Her name is Prayer and there is a lot you will need to know about her. She definitely proves the legends are based on facts. The most important fact though is that although I was not searching for a mate, she is in fact mine.” I tell Leander, watching his facial expressions.

“Congratulations regardless,” Benard says. “A mate no matter how you find them is a wonderful gift. Or at least, so I’ve been told.”

“Thank you. I’m sure you will be pleasantly surprised when you meet her. She has,” I look at Sebastian who just shrugs again, “skills. She has very useful skills.” As I am talking, Nichlos and Phillip link into the call and Raphael enters the office. A moment later Cato and Damon are also linked in and I notice Damon looking particularly worn down,

“You look like shit, Damon.” Leander says, always willing to provoke Damon.

“Which is still better than you Leo, so at least that’s in my favor.” Damon replied in more of a reflexive way than any real irritation.

“Gentleman, I need to know how much you all know about the situation going on here at Black River.” I say taking control of the conversation.

“I know that the shit going on here in Rhode Island or the shit that Damon is dealing with in Maine is nowhere near critical enough to cause drama in Nebraska.” Cato states crossly.

“None of what we know matters right now, Avalon.. What we need is for someone to bring this Harley out for questioning. We need to hear what he believes to be true because we need to know what he has been telling others. You

are the one who was worried about dissent and uprisings in the community so you should agree getting this out in the open and cleared up is the priority. His punishment would be secondary.” Leander declares, almost challenging.

“Of course I want a speedy end to this Leander. However, bringing that man out and allowing him to spew whatever garbage is in his head concerns me. I don’t even want to publicly acknowledge his theories. It’s also only been a few days even if it feels longer and I feel like we may be rushing things going public with accusations and sentencing which we haven’t even discussed.” I explain.

“If you don’t make it all public you will give credence to his rants. That we are hiding things and dealing with issues unfairly. We cannot banish him and any other form of punishment is going to look rash if reasons are not made clear. No matter what his claims are, we can’t refute them if we don’t allow him to speak.” Benard points out.

“Is this how you all feel about the situation? You want him brought in with an audience and what amounts to a trial? You are all willing to take the risk that this appears to be nothing more than justifying our own actions against him?” I ask. That uneasy feeling welling up inside me. Each man in turn agreed and the plan was set.

“As leaders Avalon, you know better than anyone that sometimes you do have to justify your actions to the masses. Everyone knows the fox pup is still suffering from her attack. True it has only been a few days but this is a child and it’s not just her parents that are raging over it. Some may have looked at it as an accident had the pup wandered from the territory, She was instead on her own home lands when she was shot by hunters, Harley’s accusations against us saying that we are unable to protect our people are going to fester with the ones who are already angry and looking to blame us for *not* being able to attack the humans. We have no choice.” Sebastian says very seriously and the men all agree with nods and some grunts of approval.

“Very well. Raphael, you and Jasper bring Harley to the great hall. Roman, make an announcement that anyone

who wishes to do so can observe the proceedings from there and we will set up video calls for the other territories should they decide to observe as well.” I cannot get rid of the edgy and strained feeling inside me.

Roman leaves the room to give the message to a few people to spread the word through the house and to begin making calls. Raphael goes to join Jasper who has been overseeing the guarding of Harley and help him be escorted to the great hall. The largest room in the mansion, it is positioned on the ground floor directly in the center accessible from the main foyer, the kitchen and dining areas, the entertainment rooms and the sporting areas and even a small door that opens directly to the library.

There is a long table up against one wall which Sebastian and I drag forward. Several dozens of folding chairs line the walls always ready to be set up should the needs arise. We don't bother setting up more than we need for Roman, Sebastian and I as Raphael and Jasper will remain standing with Harley. In front of our seats at the table we place the monitor where we will be able to see our fellow Alphas and behind us up on the wall a large screen carries the same image for the room's viewing. In their own locations they will have images of the same type, Alphas on one screen and the view of the audience on the other.

The Alphas have an excess of attitude and pride, they are quick to flare and almost never back down, they can appear uninterested and set apart from everything else, high handed and perhaps unfeeling, It is the exact opposite that leads their actions, no matter how they appear. They are cautious and wary of everything because they are so concerned about the welfare of their people. They are determined and strong because it is their shoulders that for good or bad the weight of decision and action falls on. Including when to send another of our kind into action that may be dangerous and for that they must appear separate and not allow it to affect their judgment. The very reasons they appear so callous is the deep love they carry and protectiveness they feel for all of our people, not just the ones in their own territories. I know this particular chore weighs heavily on them.

Different families who live on and around the grounds begin showing up and I can hear them outside. I rub my ear to clear it because as I have stated, my hearing is more advanced than a human with good hearing but nowhere near as good as a shifter's. No, I can plainly hear them coming up the steps and even some arriving in their animal forms and shifting to human outside. Not outside the room, not in the hall, outside of the house. My mind races and I tune my ears to listen for the sounds of Prayer. I can hear her, she is talking with one of the women, no a group of women. They are talking about their husbands and I suddenly want very much to listen in on *that* conversation but my eyes catch hold of Jasper and Raphael entering with a calm but clearly pissed off Harley. I push away the desire to talk to Prayer about my enhanced hearing and focus on the room.

“You have things you wish to say to us, Harley. Now will be your chance to air your grievances before any sentencing is passed down on you for your attack on two princes, an alpha as well as his beta and enforcer. You will also answer for the men who you led down a destructive path and then tried to abandon to their fate.” I say to him as I walk around the table and stand with Sebastian and Roman on my left.

I look around and the room is filling with whole families, as well as individuals and I realize that Sebastian was right. There are many who are obviously concerned about the safety of their young and what's being done about it. I can feel that ball of tension growing tighter in my stomach. These proceedings will not have the answers these people are looking for. This could very well go as badly as I feared or perhaps worse. The truth of the matter is that besides strengthening our defenses and legally protesting any trespassing or encroachment on our lands there isn't much we can do about the actions the humans have taken. From a human legal standpoint a few disrespectful or simply unmindful hunters strayed onto private property and attempted to kill a wild fox pup. The punishment that the shifters would seek would in no way befit the crime that the humans would see. Trespassing and poaching would most likely receive a

monetary fine. Perhaps even a steep one, but there would be no imprisonment over a fox, no blood shed or banishment over a wild animal on private property of a small community.

“I want only for the truth to come to light and the people to be able to see for themselves that their mighty leaders who they revere so highly are nothing more than figureheads from the dark ages. That we live in a modern world now. Humans have already acknowledged their beliefs publicly and even make television shows and documentaries about their belief in our presence. You leaders think to keep us hidden and in the dark, unable to protect ourselves so we can rely only on you for protection and justice.” Harley looks around the room and inside I feel the unease spread through my entire body as the dissension and discord I feared starts to take shape in my mind. This is what Harley wanted. This was his goal. He wanted a platform from which to speak so that anyone with even a halfhearted feeling of betrayal could listen and latch on and we handed it to him. Worse yet, it was no longer possible to stop this without giving him the proof they would all be watching for.

“Except that we aren’t actually safe and there is no real justice. Is there Avalon? Damon couldn’t stop the hunters from coming onto the lands in his territory. Our people were angry and in need of answers but they got Cato sent to them to ‘help keep order’ instead. The Wyatt family themselves deserved answers and justice for their child who is so traumatized by the event she cannot even shift back into her human form. A child locked inside her fox. You sent that family to Leander’s territory, specifically in the care of Nichlos. The prince who carries your blood, Avalon. Do you honestly expect that we all believe this is done for the protection of our people? It seems much more likely to me *and* many others of us across the territories that you and the other Alphas are covering up the deeds and handling matters in a way to keep us under your rule. To prevent us from being natural citizens in this world.” I felt the tension grow into trepidation as he was speaking and mumbles and sounds began coming from the audience in the room.

The faces of the other Alphas gave nothing away as they listened but I could sense the tension in them. I knew without a doubt that there was something more Harley was holding on to. Some key point he had yet to make and as much as I wanted to put an end to any more of his rantings I knew at this juncture I had to let him finish. Nothing more could be done to fix this blunder until he had gotten his message out. My impatience and irritation as well as that damn anxiety keeps building and I feel on the verge of exploding.

I curse silently to myself for not being able to control my internal emotions better as I feel the static and instantly sense the presence of Prayer just behind and off to my right. The faces on the monitor all register a moment of shock before they pull themselves together and hide all expression once again. None of the men even acknowledge Prayer's entrance or look her way. Harley however locks his eyes onto her and they narrow in what could only be a menacing way.

I glance at her momentarily, unable to stop myself and I see that her eyes are still that deep brown color that I love to stare into. She is in complete control of herself and had come to my side at her choosing and although I am not sure about the timing, I feel a lightening in my heart and a slight sense of relief. Something only she is able to bring me. That is until I hear Harley's next words.

“The new bride of Prince Avalon. The woman who Avalon himself brought against our people. The witch who was able to *force* me to surrender my wolf and who then, just to show her power, forced me back into it. The witch who was able to overpower and throw me across the room at one point and then held me in the air preventing my escape from harm at the hands of these men who then held me prisoner until being brought forward for this sham of a trial.” He says pointing at Prayer at times, shaking his head, portraying the victim of some violent attack at her hands.

The lies were actually starting to get outrageous but because he had planted them with the very deceptive and twisted seeds of truth they were easier for the people in the room to believe. When you take into consideration the

entrance into the room prayer had made and the fact that she appeared right by my side it lends more credit to his accusations. At this very moment, I wasn't sure there was much we could say that would clear any of the allegations against us to the satisfaction of the people.

“Excuse me, my Lord Avalon.” I hear my mate's voice speak calmly but powerfully so as to be heard by all. “Is anyone permitted to speak in this hearing or only the ones standing accused of wrongdoing by the Alphas?”

“What could you possibly have to say witch?” Harley practically bellows at her, causing my temper to boil up. Prayer lays her hand across my arm but addresses the men on the monitors.

“Is it permitted that I answer him, with what I have to say?” She asks them and also looks at Sebastian. She is making sure that anything she says is not simply because her mate allows it but that the Alphas have allowed it as well.

“Harley himself seems to be interested in what it is you have to say, Prayer. Please feel free to express whatever it is that is on your mind.” Leander says and waits for the others to agree or disagree.

In their usual way when they agree, they all nod into the cameras. The only thing I could do now was wait as Prayer removed her hand from my arm and stepped forward to address Harley and the room as a whole.



# Chapter 15

## Prayer

I originally had no intentions of getting involved or even joining Avalon in his meeting with the Alphas. I had worked my way around the main rooms of the mansion finding people to introduce myself and even chatting with some women I had found in the dining area. I learned that many of the men who worked around the mansion as guards, groundskeepers, mechanics and other serviceable jobs either lived in the mansion or on the property with their families if they had one.

At first it had been difficult to get more than a few polite greetings or comments about the weather and I had to fight the feeling of being put off or unwanted. I then thought about it and realized they had no idea who I was or why I was here in their home. I explained that I was the mate to Avalon and in that moment the walls came down. I learned of the more than fifty shifter families who lived on the mansion's property and at least another fifty households on the surrounding property.

Many households were composed of groups of single men or women who hadn't yet found their mate or spouse. I wondered about and so asked the difference in the culture between a mate and a spouse. I knew that I had referred to Avalon as my mate, as in a pair, the other part of a matching set. I had referred to his claiming me in the bedroom as mating for more carnal reasons. I had not known however what to call him until I had heard Sebastian ask about mates only. I wanted to know and understand the difference if there is one.

According to the women, some supernaturals know almost immediately that they are mated to the person they meet. A sort of instant attraction that they cannot ignore or fight. That sounded like exactly what happened with Avalon so I can accept that yes, Avalon is my mate. There are also those that meet someone outside of their genetic line, like a bear shifter meets a raccoon shifter, and they spend time together and fall in love the old fashioned way. They choose to spend their lives together and have a ceremony so the whole community can

acknowledge their choice. It's a beautiful sentiment to know that when there is such a thing as a mate that is chosen for you somewhere out in the world, you can choose to live and love as you see fit.

I enjoy getting to hear some stories about their husband and mates but as time passed I started to feel on edge and anxious. A few minutes later a man had entered the doorway and said that anyone who was interested could come to the hearing regarding Harley's actions and detainment. I still was willing to let it go but the women had gotten up and went to collect their families apparently very interested in the goings on in that matter. I don't blame them but I continue to control myself as Avalon needs to be able to control the situation. That is until I feel the anxiety and pressure building in him until I think he may do physical damage to either Harley or someone else. Either way his pressure point is at an all time high and I can no longer deny my need to go to him. He needs to know that I am here for him, it's what a mate is. You don't wear a single sock, you don't set a salt shaker down without a pepper and you don't make Avalon suffer without Prayer. So I go to him,

Now, what I find is honestly nothing that I was expecting. I thought maybe Avalon and Sebastian in a room with Harley and some witnesses. I did not expect to see the whole Alpha force, or whatever they call themselves, not to mention a whole room full of people with standing room only watching the proceedings. I also was not prepared to be verbally accosted by Harley the moment I got there. To be called a witch.

I have no desire to insult the Alphas and I really am not sure about any of the etiquette at a supernatural hearing. I barely know how a human court of law hearing goes. I need to make sure the Alphas are fine with me having a one on one exchange of information with Harley. I say exchange of information but I really just want to rip him a new one. A witch? You know when Avalon or anyone else has said it so far I felt like they were referring to a place of power, of abilities, someone you looked up to. When Harley said it I saw flashes of Salem and women hanging and burning, not the

same feelings. Harley has only insulted me and blamed my actions towards him on Avalon. I cannot stand for that.

Once I am given permission to speak with Harley I intentionally step forward away from Avalon mostly to symbolize that I am speaking for myself and *not* for my mate. I make a mental note of the things I want to address with this ass monkey. I do not like bullies. I do not like liars and manipulative people. However, I absolutely abhor someone who will use another's weaknesses against them. These people are terrified of things happening to their children because it has already happened. Harley using this against the Alphas is just plain horrible to everyone involved. I will take each thing he throws at me one by one but by all that is good in this universe he will answer to me as well.

“Harley. I feel first of all that we were never properly introduced. My name is Prayer Walker. I am a receptionist at a day spa near my home in Seattle, WA. Correction, I was, until Avalon found me. Do you know how he found me, Harley.” I ask politely.

“I do not care who you are, lady. I don't care where you came from or how you got here. What I care about is that you were able to prevent me from staying in my wolf and then you were able to drag my wolf out of me like I had no control at all.” He snarls at me and I am hoping Avalon can hold his temper.

“I believe there are many points that should be addressed, don't you? For instance Harley, why is it that you were in your wolf form?” I inquire, maintaining my polite demeanor.

“Avalon and his flunkies there, were going to imprison me simply for asking questions. Questions they don't want to answer. Shifters sometimes shift when threatened, you'd know that if you were part of our world.” He replies in no less a gruff manner.

“Before we go into other lines of questioning with each other I want to tell you that I am not impressed by nor am I intimidated by your absolute disrespect to YOUR Alpha, Beta

and Enforcer. You will try to remember during our discussion that Avalon is MY mate and when you disrespect him in that way it makes it very hard for me to stay focused on something as simple as a conversation.” There is a slight edge to my voice but that’s because I want my tone to carry the threat I cannot verbalize.

“The first thing that you have to understand, lady, is it doesn’t matter to me what you think and feel. You have been a part of our world for what two days? You have no idea of the things that have been going on or how we’ve been forced to live because of the rules impressed on us by YOUR mate and his *flunkies*.” It takes all I have not to lash out at this intentional disrespect.

“Are you trying to make it clear to everyone in this room that your aggression to Avalon and all the other Alphas is on a vindictive personal level.? Harley, what is the name of the child who is stuck in her fox form? Camillo Wyatt’s daughter. What is her name?” I ask and I am barely containing my own temper at this point.

“Her name doesn’t matter, witch. What matters is how the family was dealt with. That these Alphas put their own ambitions, their own desire to keep control of us before everyone else. They have no clue how our lives are affected by their demanding rules.” He grinds out. My faith in these good men is very strong though.

“Do any of the Princes or the Alphas know the name of the child or how old she is?” I look at the monitors and then around the room.

“Her name is Ruthie, she is six years old.” The words are heard in concert as every Alpha, Prince, Beta and Enforcer that are present answer.

“It seems to me Harley that perhaps the leaders of your society actually are in tune with the people. At the very least they know her name and age, which is more than you know and in your debate they care less than you. Besides six year old little Ruthie Wyatt that is trapped in her fox form, what other examples of your leaders not understanding your plight

do you have? Or would you prefer to go back to the point where you attacked them for calling you out on inciting dissent, the way you are doing now? I ask and now the acid is flowing in my voice. I am one step away from losing it on this man.

“You are trying to make this about me, it is about them!” He roars at me and that is the end of that. In a blink I am standing in front of him and I know my eyes are blazing white but I will not hide what I am. This is who Avalon found and awakened and this is who he needs. I will not hide myself in a shell hoping not to distress the others in the pack.

“This hearing started because of you, it is all about you. You are the one who caused dissent by twisting the truth and manipulating people to listen to you. You are the one who challenged your leaders and left them no options but to protect themselves. You are the one who was willing to escape from their wrath while letting the ones who stood by your side to be the ones to take the punishment. That was in fact why I pushed your wolf back down and made you stand for your own punishment. At the time that punishment amounted to confinement in a bedroom while the men who had stood with you were in hospital beds. And here you are, seeking to escape any form of punishment again and blaming anyone and everyone in your path.” The heat is rising and I know it is not mine alone. I cannot take the chance of looking at Avalon because his rage will only cause mine to flare.

“You know, I knew this would happen. I had no doubt that these Alphas would want to make a public display of their accusations. And here you are putting on a show with your radioactive eyes and your popping in one place or another. You don’t scare me, witch, and I have no intention of simply letting you get away with persecuting me into backing down. There are others who believe as I do and they will not stand for it either.” At that moment Harley raised his fist in the air and all of Hell broke loose.

The wall behind where Avalon was standing and Sebastian was sitting with Roman suddenly blew apart. I can hear the sound of guns firing and I am momentarily stunned

until I see Harley smile so wide it sickens me, right before he shifts into his wolf. He runs rapidly from the room in the direction of the gun fire and my instinct is to chase him down and destroy every molecule of him. Before I can make that choice I hear Roman shout in fury and pain and look over to see all three of them injured with the majority of blood to be pouring out of Sebastian and Sebastian is a wolf.

Avalon cannot be killed. That one fact gives me the ability to breathe and I warp over to the men and focus my attention on Sebastian and Roman. Sebastian has what appears to be bullet holes in several different locations and Roman seems to be bleeding from his shoulder. I can still hear gunshots but I don't see anyone else taking immediate damage so I scream at Raphael for him and Jasper to get the others to safety.

“Hold on to me my love, and cross your fingers this works.” I look Avalon in his blazing white eyes as he wraps his arms around me. I bend slightly to put my hand on Roman's shoulder and one on the giant wolf's head and I focus intently on the closest place to find help that there is. I have no idea if this will work and if it works how it will work, where we will end up but I cannot watch them bleed out in front of me.

I open my eyes and I am really not sure where we are. I see Sebastian in his wolf form bleeding from so many places and even though it appears it is only Roman's shoulder he is still losing quite a bit of blood. I don't know anything about shifter medicine or how to help them so I look to Avalon. If worse comes to worst I will have to go find help while he stays to protect them. Even if Sebastian wasn't hurt, his wolf is so obviously larger than any other that someone would note it and possibly question his species.

“Avalon, what kind of healing do shifters have? Will he heal from a gunshot? Do you recognise this place? Do you know where we are?” I ask, trying to hold the panic at bay. I am scared I made the wrong decision and brought Sebastian and Roman to a place where they might die. I didn't feel like I had any other choice in the moment but looking around at a

room with nothing more than a bed and a dresser, I have doubts.

“I don’t know where we are, Sebastian’s body should be pushing those bullets out. I don’t understand why it isn’t. Roman, can you tell me what’s happening with your wounds?” Avalon asks him bending down in front of Sebastian.

“I don’t know what’s wrong, Av. I’ve been shot before. I can feel the bullet radiating in my shoulder but my body can’t push it out. I can’t even shift to get it to move. I can’t communicate with Sebastian in human form while he is in wolf form and even if we were both wolves it wouldn’t be of any help. We wouldn’t have a conversation. It doesn’t work like that. Shit this hurts more than it should.” Roman grabs his shoulder tighter and slides down to the floor. Sebastian is lying there whimpering and I can’t just watch this happen.

“I am going to find help. You need to stay here and guard them, My Heart. I will be back as soon as I can but please understand there is no time for you to debate with me. I love you.” I kiss him quickly and I zip myself across the room to the door I see before he can say anything to me.

I open the door and step out into the hallway and look both ways and all I see is an empty hall. I look back in the room for a moment just to see if there were any other doors but I don’t see one so I walk back out and close the door behind me. Sebastian needs help and there is none behind me so forward I go. I don’t see anyone around so I warp down to the end of the hall. I look around and I see more doors but they are odd. Taller than normal doors and wider too. I hear noises and decide no matter what the best bet is probably going to be to follow the sounds. If there is danger I can always port myself out and not have to lead them back to the men.

I follow the sounds and I hear the voice of a woman. I can’t hear everything she is saying but her voice is soothing and I pick up some words like “calm”, “easy” and “rest there”. This gives me hope and I run forward to find her. She is a small woman, no bigger than I am but with jet black hair running all the way down to her butt. She is wearing scrubs,

kneeling in front of a large cage and speaking quietly to what appears to be a bobcat. I feel my heart beat just a little faster. I don't want to scare her but I also really have no time to waste.

“Excuse me please, Miss.” I say stepping forward and I place my palms up when she whirls around to face me. She is wearing one of those disposable face masks that we all got used to as standard procedure of the Covid19 ordinances.

“Who are you? Why are you here? Wait, how did you get in here? Why are you covered in blood? Is that your blood?” The woman stops at first but as she is speaking she draws closer to me and it seems she cannot stop herself from actually checking me for injuries.

“I am sorry to have startled you and I don't want to alarm you but I am in need of your assistance. My ma.. My husband is in another room with a friend and a very large wolf. The wolf has been shot multiple times and our friend is shot in the shoulder as well. This was the only place I could think of to bring him for help.” I say because hell, I cannot say ‘I teleported them out of an ambush focusing all my energy on finding a hospital and found you’.

“Of course you would bring a wolf to a wildlife sanctuary!” She exclaims pulling her protective gear off at once. “Please show me where you took them.”

“I wanted to be sure they were away from harm before I left them to find help.” I tell her, trying not to show my utter relief at having landed my ass in a wildlife sanctuary. My insides are doing a little happy dance at what my power is actually growing to be capable of. I walk my way back to the little room where I had left the people who were quickly becoming my family and open the door.

Roman is still slouched against the wall and his head doesn't even lift when I walk in. Avalon is sitting on the floor with Sebastian's head in his lap and thankfully his eyes are no longer white but now that green that covers my soul in a layer of calm. The woman behind me gasps audibly and races forward and at the sight of her, Roman tries to stand. She raises her palms up to him and points at Sebastian.



“I come here to help with animals that are severely wounded and won’t allow anyone to touch them without sedation. I like to be here when they wake up to help them get back on their feet. They are very rarely afraid of me and a frightened animal is always the most dangerous. I will not hurt him. Your friend said he was shot and I want to see if I can help.” At her words Roman slips back down and his head falls forward.

“Avalon, I am not a doctor, not even a nurse but surely you can see that is much more damage to Roman than a bullet in the shoulder. Please check him out, can you try and see if an artery or something was nicked? More damage done then what we can see maybe?” I really do feel helpless because regardless of the abilities I do have I only know basics like cleaning a wound, bandaging and even some stitching. I cannot do anything with gunshots and men bleeding out from wounds they should be able to heal for themselves.

Avalon crawls out from under Sebastian and pulls Roman’s body onto his lap. His fingers dig around inside the wound causing Roman to flinch and jump occasionally but Avalon keeps going. Meanwhile the nurse lady is petting Sebastian’s muzzle with one hand while also feeling around his fur for his wounds and her face is pinched in concentration and worry.

“He is so very big. I don’t think I have even seen an animal this big, not even in the wild. It’s no wonder he was being hunted. Stupid trophy hunters. Always trying to kill the biggest or fiercest or most beautiful thing out there.” As she speaks I actually find myself wishing it had been trophy hunters. I would prefer an act of ignorance over an act of betrayal. “I can’t move this mountain by myself and your friend doesn’t look to be in any way capable of helping either. I don’t know how you got him here and I don’t care but can we at least get him up on the bed?” she asks me and my heart races.

I look at Avalon because I desperately want to do whatever I can to help this woman help Sebastian. Every minute he is losing what life he has left. Avalon looks

distraught but shakes his head no. I don't know what else to do so I offer to retrieve anything she might need.

“As luck would have it, you chose to hide them in the room I stay in when I am here. Go in that top drawer of that dresser and bring me, hell, bring me everything.” she says and waves to the dresser.

I open the drawer and see all kinds of packages, bottles, boxes and tools in plastic casings. I look over to the bed and grab the pillowcase off the pillow and start putting everything inside it. As I am emptying the drawer I hear Avalon say something like “a ha” and I look up and see him holding a tiny circular object in his fingers.

“It has a green coating on it. I don't know what it is but I intend to find out. Sweetling, give me one of those bottles of water, peroxide, alcohol, I don't care which, I have to flush the residue out of Roman's wound.” Avalon states and holds his hand out.

I rush over with my makeshift medical bag and set it down in front of our nurse and then hand a bottle of saline to Avalon. The nurse has managed to get several of the same bullets out of Sebastian and is searching around for more when she reaches over and grabs my hand. I look up at her and her eyes are bright and focused, and I am confident in that moment that she will be able to save Sebastian.

“If those bullets are in fact poisoned I will need you to grab the peroxide or more saline and wash his wounds out while I try and find the last pieces of this one.” she says and holds up a piece of metal that obviously broke off from a larger piece. I grab the bottle of saline and start pouring it into the wounds. The deeper wounds are actually bubbling out a green colored ooze and I am filled with a new rage that I must keep under control for the time being. This was a direct hit, no doubt in my mind, ordered by Harley. He was waiting for that explosion, he knew it was coming. Which means he knew that there would be guns firing and that means that bastard knew those bullets were coated. So much treason, so much betrayal in one act. How many more had been involved in this?

“Can’t heal if can’t shift.” Roman grunts out and points at Sebastian before his hand drops back down beside his leg.

“He’s right, Sweetling. The wolf is good at a lot of things but not healing. We need some decisions made and action taken right now. Oh and, I love you too.” He raises an eyebrow at my shocked look. “You think you’re the only one who can say wonderful things with the most awful timing?” I want to laugh, I really do, but Sebastian owns my focus.

“Have you gotten all the shards out of him Miss?” I ask her, my eyes glued to Sebastian.

“I believe I have. I am just rinsing the last wound out. I am going to need to prepare stitches though and some of them are going to require multiple layers. His muscle tore open in several places but I don’t think anything hit his organs.” She states matter of factly and moves over to her medical pillowcase.

“Avalon, I have no choice but to take the chance. Don’t be angry at me.” I say over my shoulder and focus my attention back on Sebastian. I can feel the power surge through me as my eyes lock onto Sebastian’s and his head lifts up just a little to meet my gaze. “Miss, I want to thank you for helping my friends and if you care even just a little you will try not to scream and keep this to yourself until, well forever. No one can know about this. Their lives are still in your hands.” I say as I pull hard on the man inside of the wolf to free him from whatever the poisons have done to him.

“What are you doing? What is happening?” She screams as Sebastian regains control of his wolf and shifts in what looks like an incredibly painful act back into a human. A very good looking and mauled up naked human. I race over to the bed and pull the blankets off, then run them back over to Sebastian and throw them over him. The nurse’s mouth is hanging to an extent that I’m not entirely sure her jaw is still connected. Her big blue eyes have taken on all new proportions and I’m not sure they are still connected either. I try to cover all of Sebastian so that hopefully he will be able to heal and come around with some privacy.

“Prayer, Sweetling.” Avalon looks between me covering Sebastian and the nurse’s expression. “I’m pretty sure the cat’s not going back in that bag.”

# Chapter 16

## Prayer

“So yes, that did just happen.” I say kneeling in front of the woman who had backed herself up against the bed and was sitting dumbfounded on the floor. “Does it sound really cheesy to say we mean you no harm?” I watch her carefully for her reactions. I don’t want her having a heart attack here on the floor of the room she saved Sebastian in.

“I’m Prayer, the man slumped against the wall is Roman and that handsome devil in front of him is my beloved husband.” I look at Avalon as his lip curls down into a pouty frown at the word. “Oh fine, you big baby, my mate Avalon. The one under the blankets is Sebastian.”

“Kassie.” she says quietly, looking up at me with a whole lot of questions in her eyes. “Kassie Lester.”

“It’s very nice to meet you Kassie Lester, and very fortunate for Sebastian that you were here to save his life.” At that very moment Sebastian groans and begins sitting up and Avalon jumps over to his side.

“He was really big for a wolf. I mean he was really big for a bear but for a wolf he was just gigantic. I knew that something wasn’t right. He wasn’t scared of me. I mean why would he be scared of me? He’s about the size of a small car, or maybe a medium size car? They don’t make cars like they used to, have you noticed the more they improve things the smaller they seem to get and yet they always seem to cost more. I bet it costs a lot to feed a wolf the size of any car though.” As Kassie keeps rambling on I see Sebastian’s head turn and look at her like she is purple with three eyes. The look is mirrored on the faces of Avalon and Roman and I cannot stop the laugh.

“Kassie, I have to get my boys home. We have a lot of problems right now and to be completely honest with you feeding Sebastian isn’t anywhere on that list. I’d offer to take you with us but, well it’s complicated.” I say trying not to look

at a very disapproving Avalon, but seriously man come on. She saved Sebastian and she saw him shift and her first reaction is deciding whether he is the size of a Honda or a Chevy?

“You know it would have to be complicated. I mean you wouldn’t expect anything different right. The part I am especially curious about is, is that man planning on walking out in a blanket? Will he be turning back into the incredible wolf? What is worse than worrying about that feeding bill? Oh my god. Are there others that were hurt? Shot like he was?” She stands up quickly and I watch the shocked and bewildered woman once again become the steadfast nurse who had raced into the room to help.

“We have a few matters of treason, some sabotage, a traumatized fox shifter pup..” Kassie chops her hand through the air cutting me off.

“Traumatized animals are my specialty. I am going with you. Wait, *shifter, pup*. Huh, Yes well I am still going with you. I cannot in good conscience let you leave me behind when I am the trained professional with wounded animals and a natural at calming trauma victims who have four legs. How is the pup traumatized? Like first time in new skins or hey watch me chase my tail, oh damn it keeps getting away, this sucks I hate being a fox? There are levels of trauma you know.” She is an endless source of drivel and I am just in absolute joy with the men’s reactions to her.

I look at Avalon and he looks resigned with what is going to happen and I go from feeling joy to pure elation. There is not one single way I can figure to explain to her what is going to happen so I shrug my shoulders and walk up to where the men are. I kiss Avalon firmly on the mouth and smile against his lips.

“Come on My Heart, it’s going to be fun.” He kisses me back and grabs a hold of me holding me tight against him.

“You will have your fun, then I will have mine. I might also let you have a little more. However,” His hand comes

down on my backside very firmly and I squeak out a protest. “That is for making bad ideas into a hobby.” I laugh anyway.

“Kassie, will you be a dear and come place your hand on my waist. As of this moment I’m not sure how else to do this and I wouldn’t want Avalon putting new holes in Sebastian or Roman if I had to have one of them grab me. Yes, just there, thank you, no don’t squeeze, just keep your hand on me.” I grin at Avalon because *come on!* Placing one hand on Sebastian’s shoulder and the other on Roman’s the last thing I see before I blink us out is Sebastian grinning and shaking his head.

As soon as our collective eyes have opened the men are instantly on guard against whatever might come at us. I brought us to the library because it is connected to the great hall but also because I am hoping Raphael or Jasper will be nearby. Roman is much steadier on his feet and takes off to the door that leads to the great hall. Avalon helps Sebastian to a chair and then heads off through the other doors calling for Raphael.

“Umm. Umm. Ummm.” Kassie looks for words but they appear to have left her for now.

“Do you just have to make sounds regardless of whether there are words there or not?” Sebastian says to her and I am pretty sure, if I let him, he might put tape over Kassie’s mouth.

“I was trying to find the right words, you ungrateful butt sniffer. I just had all my molecules blown to bits, thrown through space and time and then reassembled back here and I was a little startled trying to figure out what happened. You seem to have no shortage of words even when they are rude.” She hurls back at him.

“We just call it teleporting. It seems to take less time to explain than all that.” He says taunting her further.

“You know a really interesting fact? In my career I have sat in on over thirteen different neutering procedures of several different species. I could probably do it in my sleep.” She says

looking over at me and my smile is, I am sure, touching each of my ears.

“That was uncalled for. I am going to find Jasper to find out what the hell happened while we were gone. How long was I out for, Prayer?” He asks, standing up and locking his legs underneath him.

“The attack on the hearing was a few hours ago. It took me a few minutes to find Kassie but she had to work on you for a while getting all the shards out of you.” I tell him and then under my breath “You ungrateful butt sniffer.” and I snort another laugh.

“You know damn well I heard that. You two stay here and bond over your combined levels of estrogen. I have to go see what needs to be done to get Harley back in custody. I’ll probably have to start an investigation into who it is that helped him by *blowing up my home*. I need to find out what’s being done about the pup, where my brother Alphas are and if anyone else was injured in the attack. But *please*, feel free to keep insulting my nose and threatening my balls.” I know that after that tirade he had planned a stomping away exit, but his injuries that he was still recovering from forced him to hobble out and he growled the whole way. Ah, the trials of men.

“Come with me Kassie, I have a plan that my mate is absolutely going to hate. I am going to do it though because, well if you ever see his face when I annoy him, it’s just so adorable. A woman has to make her own special moments. Besides, it’s a really good idea.” I tell her and grab her arm to lead her from the room.

“Oh, we’re walking now? Are you out of juice?” I laugh and warp us directly to my bedroom. “So, no then.”

Kassie and I are basically the same size so I offer her my shower and what clothes I have available. When the water comes on in the bathroom, first I hear shrieking, followed by whoops and then some really awful but clearly happy singing. Once she is out of the shower she comes flying out the door, grabs her clothes and heads back into the bathroom. I hear the



water start up again and the whole shrieking, whooping, singing process starts again. Well, she seems fine.

“You have not lived until you have used that shower. In case I die anytime soon, which considering what has happened in a few hours of knowing you I am not ruling it out, I had to use it twice. No taking chances on something like that. Also you should totally allow anyone with that experience on their bucket list to use your shower. It is definitely bucket list worthy.” I hold up my hand at Kassie and her mouth snaps shut. She is wearing my black yoga pants and a hot pink tee with a criss-cross back. She looks awesome in it with her long silky black hair and big blue eyes that require no make-up.

“I will make sure you have a room with an awesome shower while you are here.” My back hits the bed when she shrieks loudly and runs at me for a full body hug I wasn’t ready for. My brain is suffering whiplash with the way this woman’s mind works and the things she does.

“Well, this is awkward.” Avalon says walking in the room.

“Oh good, you’re here.” I say twisting out from underneath Kassie and jumping up to go to him. “I have a brilliant idea and you are going to love it.” I say and wrap my arms around him standing on my tiptoes to kiss him deeply.

Avalon’s hand comes up behind my head and grips the back of my hair and pulls my head back and runs his lips down my neck and into the hollow of my throat. I close my eyes and revel in his touch and how instantly my body responds to him. I open my eyes when I hear Avalon’s deep, rich chuckle which sends tingles down my spine.

“Were you looking for someplace more private than our bedroom, Sweetling?” He laughs and his humor forces me to look past his beautiful face.

“Oh my cheese, Avalon. I did this? Oh my cheese I am out of control.” I groan, looking around at my lavender scented, lavender colored bedroom in my house. In Seattle. Six hours away. Or one kiss in the arms of my mate, whichever.

Avalon's hands come down and cup around my rear and he pulls me flush against him, I am fairly certain if he could figure a way around it, I would be plastered to him always. One hand keeping me planted firmly against his body where I can feel him growing harder and harder by the second. The other hand is running up inside my shirt and going immediately to cup my breast.

"I have been wanting to get you back in the bed, naked and under me since you ported us into the foyer. I believe I have suffered enough today to deserve a good dose of my mate. I need this, Sweetling." He whispers across my ear nipping and sucking at me roughly as he grabs my butt tighter and squeezes.

Avalon's need for me fires my blood as it is. To be desired so powerfully is a seriously heady feeling and I am a roaring blaze by his touch. It is never enough and always too much. I am sensitive everywhere his hands and mouth travel and I am panting, unable to catch my breath as he starts to undress me. My hands come up to his shirt and with speed I have never before seen from him he moves away from me across the room and to the other side of the bed.

"Prayer, Sweetling, I have no clothes here and your history with my shirts is, well just let me get this real quick." His fingers fly over the buttons and my eyes go to his because I know he is fast, has always been fast, but everything about him seems a bit faster. "Yes, love, much faster, I can hear far better as well. I don't think the side effects you were worried about were all that bad." He laughs and then pulls the shirt off followed by his pants.

I get lost in sensations when I see that gorgeous man uncovered and I forget all about my clothes and warp right into him and knock him down onto the bed. He laughs at my aggression until my mouth comes down on his throat and I lick a path to his shoulder swirling my tongue around in circles before going back across to the other side. One arm goes around and under him while the other hand holds onto his hips pulling him into me while my mouth continues to lick and suck at his upper body.

“You still have a whole closet here.” He growls, reaching up and tearing my shirt from my body. His hands quickly go from cupping my breast to sliding down my waist to inside my pants and when he finds what he’s looking for he moans against my skin. I rotate my hips against his hands and just when I feel like I am going to explode he pulls his hand free. Flipping me onto my back he pulls my pants free of my body much faster than before. I smile up at him and bend and spread my knees in a move that needs no further invitation.

Avalon throws himself down on me and latches onto my nipple in a fierce suckle at the same time he slips himself inside me in one fast, hard motion. My feet plant firmly into the bed and my hips lift up completely into him arcing my body into a bow. As his tempo increases the only word my mind and mouth can form is his name. Avalon’s hand comes up behind my neck and he lifts me to him so that now only the soles of my feet touch the bed. The rest of my body is held firmly against his. He brings his mouth to lick over my neck and I can feel myself spiraling out of control, losing touch with everything but the feeling of him in and around me.

His teeth sink into my neck and I grab him tight and wrap my legs around him so that the only thing holding both of us up is the power he has in one arm. I use my feet to pull tighter against him, rocking him deeper into me as I feel him start to slip over the edge of ecstasy. I explode screaming his name, feeling his body go hard as steel as he begins to pulse inside me. In another moment Avalon lowers me slowly down to the bed and pulls his fangs from my neck. He kisses a slow path from my neck to my ears, across my cheeks and presses tiny nibbling kisses against my mouth.

“Being with you will never get old, Sweetling. I love having you wrapped around me completely.” He is being sweet and loving and now is not the time for me to mention that one day I will in fact get old. It will be a lifetime for me but for him it will seem like just a brief moment together in his eternal existence. I am afraid that in the end, that will be the tradeoff. The pain of losing me. I know if I had to face losing Avalon I wouldn’t want to keep going but there are plenty of

years yet before he even starts to notice, if I take care of myself.

“I love you too, My Heart.” I lean up and kiss him on the shoulder and smile up at him because he makes me smile. All the time. It has become a reflex from the joy and contentment I feel with him. “You know we have to go back now, right?” I say squeezing my legs together, squishing him slightly.

“That cannot possibly be the method you get to make me move. Unless” he rocks his hips slowly forward still inside me. “this is how you want me to move.” he bends his head down and takes my lips in a soft but deep kiss as he keeps moving and I surrender to him once more.

An hour later I am pulling on new clothes and wonder which room at the mansion we should pop in when we go back when he grabs my Lovely Letters mask off my desk and puts it inside his shirt. I lean my head to the side eyeing him and he just shrugs. Perhaps I will be back soon, perhaps I won't but he's right that I will want it. Not that I couldn't have just popped in and got it at any time.

“Ok My Heart, we need to go so we can get back and I can tell you about my absolutely amazing idea and how much you are going to love it.” I wrap my arms around the most beautiful man ever born and I take us back to the library.

Avalon

“That is without a doubt one of the most terrible ideas you have had yet.” I declare, glaring at Prayer because her calculating little ass waited until my men were all present to explain her idea. “You have no idea how dangerous that is. What if you are off by a few feet and that few feet is the middle of a lake, or you are standing in traffic or any other horrible thing that could happen from just getting a GPS location to *teleport to*?” I wish I could say I was shocked that she would take such chances with her life and her abilities but let's be honest, it's Prayer, that's what she does.

“It's a good idea Avalon, she doesn't appear to be any worse for wear any time she uses her abilities, minus eating

like three grown men and we really need the help to track down Harley and whoever he had working with him. We have no way of knowing who they are and they could be sitting in the kitchen right now waiting to pull off another stunt that the bastard sets up.” Sebastian says completely healed and standing arms crossed over his chest in front of the window.

“You say that so easily because it’s not your mate you are sending off into who knows what danger.” I turn to look at Prayer again. “If you are dead set that this is the plan you are going to follow, I know damn well that you are going to do it. Uh uh, no way are you allowed to find this funny lady.” I snap when she starts smiling and batting her eyes at me.

“Avalon, she is not just your mate. Man, you found her, claimed her and made her your mate. She is now your Princess as well. *Our* Princess. The choices she makes to help our people should be revered, not questioned.” Sebastian advocates and I think I might have to hurt him.

“I’m going with you. For every single trip no matter how many you make to where and what you do there and who you are bringing where. My only terms with this dumb ass idea is that you don’t do it alone.” I grind out because seriously, it’s a stupid idea, but it won’t kill *me*.

“My Heart, there was never any question as to whether you would go with me or not. I have no desire to go popping in and out of shifter homes without you.” She said, sounding reasonable and yet, there was something triumphant about her tone. I narrow my eyes at her before turning back to Sebastian.

“You make sure there are enough rooms ready for the whole Wyatt family. I also want to be sure that Kassie has her own room and your beloved Princess promised her a room with amazing showers. I’ll be having Raphael stay here to help organize the search for Harley. You will have to focus on the Wyatts and the investigation into who helped him escape and nearly killed you and Roman. I want to know what the coating on those bullets is made of, what the exact effects are and who the hell made them and gave them to Harley’s men.” I begin listing off all the things in my head and every time I tick one off, I think up two more to replace it.

“Avalon, they know what to do, My Heart. They are your men, you have trusted them for centuries to make their own decisions about everything concerning our people, surely you can trust them in this as well. They will get the job done. You and I are going to be on the move for a while. If you can keep that temper in check mate, we may make additional stops while we’re alone.” Her voice takes on an inviting tone and I am sunk.

“Well, I’m ready to go.” I say grabbing Prayer around the waist and dragging her back against me and nuzzling my face into her hair. I don’t even care as every man in the room breaks out in laughter and a variety of comments about my whipped status.

“Oh my cheese, My Heart. I have to go talk with Kassie and make sure she wants to stay here. What she has offered to do is help a traumatized fox pup. She has volunteered to see to any injured here although thankfully there were none. She has not, however, said how long she was willing to stay here.” She pulls forward trying to leave my arms and I pull her back locking my arms around her.

I love her laugh, but there are times when I hear it and I know that she is about to do something to vex me. So when I hear her laughter bubble up around me, I am not surprised when my arms are left grasping the air. The men have another round of laughs at my expense and I pick up a book off the table next to me and hurl it at Sebastian. He sidesteps to the left and stares at the book as it slams into the wall putting a small hole in it. He looks back and raises an eyebrow at me and I shrug, he would have healed. I reach into my pocket to pull out my phone and call Nichlos. He needs to let the Wyatts know about their relocating yet again.

When I get off the phone with Nichlos I take the time to call each individual Alpha personally instead of throwing them into a conference call. I don’t want any of them feeling pressured to comply due to the opinions or sentiments of another. My pride in the Alphas, not only as leaders but also as men, doubles as each once agrees to do whatever they can to bring Harley to justice as well as offer their services to

Sebastian to help heal Black River. If Prayer teleports the Alphas to Black River, they should be able to pick up the scent of Harley and his co-conspirators, as well as get familiar with the coated bullets used against Sebastian and Roman. Whatever assistance they are willing to give in the rebuilding and restabilizing of Black River will also be hastened with Prayer's help.

My attention is caught as always by the static sensation I feel when Prayer is making her entrance and before I even finish the thought she is standing in front of me with Kassie right beside her. Kassie looks around the room and I recognize the expression of disorientation on her face and chuckle lightly. That will take some getting used to, I know.

"Kassie has agreed to stay here as long as Sebastian agrees not to be an ass or as long as she can neuter him if he pushes her too far." Prayer says bouncing on her toes. I have noticed that Kassie thoroughly entertains Prayer and I find her reactions equally amusing.

"Ungrateful butt sniffer." Kassie mumbles and I turn my head to look at her staring daggers at Sebastian. I look at Sebastian who is frowning at Kassie and I know that somehow, I have missed some important detail. I look at my mate for answers and her grin takes over her face reaching from ear to ear.

"He wasn't very welcoming when we first got here and Kassie seems to be holding a grudge against him." She shrugs and faces Kassie. "Avalon has already told him to have a room readied for you with one of those amazing showers so, you have that to look forward to."

Kassie squeals and throws herself at me, locking me in a full body hug and my eyes swing to Prayer yet again. Before I can formulate words I discern a scent on Kassie that has my breath catching and my eyes going wide. Deep under the scents of her shampoo and body wash she smells exactly like Prayer. In her blood I can smell the same blood that runs through Prayer's veins. I look around the room and then back between Prayer and Kassie.

“Well, shit.” I say and close my eyes not quite ready for this.