

NEVER AGAIN



Book of Origins, Volume One

ALYSE NENNIG

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Never Again: Book of Origins, Volume One

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For my husband, Andrew
for putting up with me and my writing, I love you.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Chris, Jane and my mother.
Without your support and encouragement this novel would be but
an idea.

And thank you to my family tree for all it's inspiration.
May people always be remembered.

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Prologue



Never again. Just two little words, although deeply engrained in my mind, can't dictate one's life....or can they? All over the world there are people affected by just one single word and here my life is being run by two. I have told myself 'never again' over and over for the last ten years hoping it would change my fate and give me the strength to not end up like him. Like my father.

On the day of my thirteenth birthday my father took me on my first scouting mission. He thought I was finally old enough to understand the family business he hid so well from me since I was six. But, as I was a typical teenage girl, I strongly disliked the idea. To me going out at night with my father and his friends to the creepy parts of town just screamed "come rob me, please". I tried to get out of it but he wouldn't have it. And that is how every scouting mission has started since - I would fight, he would win, and I would wind up in the back-seat.

Every scouting mission started that way and ended with telling myself "never again". Never again was I going along on those crazy trips. Never again was I going to listen to him say vampires existed because they simply didn't. I mean how could they? It all made him sound insane, but I always ended up going along with the delusion as I thought it was just his way of coping with the past. And so it went on like that for a few years, training at home and going on a mission once a month. While other girls were going to the movies he was grooming me to kill vampires and I was taking it with a grain of salt.

Then came the fateful day I turned fifteen. He said he found solid proof that vampires were going to be at the Founder's Cemetery in New Haven 20 miles away. As usual I thought he was nuts but I went along anyway. We arrived at the cemetery around

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one in the morning with only the full moon to guide us through the graves. The car slowly came to a halt by a maple tree and as I began to gather my titanium stakes the wind picked up and howled like a wolf. It made being in a cemetery in the middle of the night all the more frightening.

Minutes later we made our way to a crypt and that's when my father spotted two men not more than 50 feet away. Being the first time I encountered people on a mission everything I was ever taught left me. Immediately I froze where I was. It must have shown on my face how scared I was because I was ordered to stay put and keep out of sight. Given my surroundings and what was going through my head I more than willingly obeyed him.

As I sat behind the enormous crypt, my father and his partner gathered their guns and stakes. I couldn't watch them walk off to fight so I just stared at 100 year old headstones in front of me. Whispering the worn out names slowly calmed my nerves until I heard the bullets discharge followed by agonizing screams. It only took me seconds to peer around the crypt and make out what happened. In the distance I saw my father outnumbered as three more men had arrived and a scene that would forever haunt me: men biting into my father's neck and his face draining of color. I was so terrified that all I could summon was a silent scream. After what felt like an eternity I peered again around the crypt and saw the cemetery was void of the monsters that hurt my father. Without any hesitation I ran to him, gathered his limp body in my arms and tried to wake him up. But he wouldn't. Amid my sobbing I realized what I just witnessed and my thoughts instantly flashed back to my mother.

My mother had died when I was six and of all people to find her body it had to be me. I had blocked the memory out, but seeing my father's pale skin with two tiny holes in his neck at the artery caused my mother's memory to resurface. She was quiet and still in a hammock in our back yard with a glass sitting on the table next to her. I went to tell her that someone was on the phone, but as I walked closer I saw two tiny holes in her neck. Though I started poking her she wouldn't wake up. My mother wasn't moving and she looked as pale as a ghost. A week later we gathered beside the small lake behind our house and let the subtle wind carry her ashes away.

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Everyone told me afterwards that she had committed suicide and I believed them. I realized the truth of my mother's death, however, as I sat on the cool grass clinging to my father's dead body. But knowing that isn't what hurt the most. My father's death was, because it took vampires murdering him to show me the truth of his world and make me a believer. And if I would have just believed him sooner.....maybe I could have saved him.

I am Hannah Jacobs.
Vampires killed my parents.
Now I hunt them.

Welcome to my life.

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Chapter One



Hannah

New York City - May 27th, 2016

I hate birthdays. Looking out across the city lights from my living room window I realize that thought has gone through my mind all day and rightfully so. On my birthday I can't help but relive my past like it was yesterday. Even now as I glance at the coffee shop across the street filled with customers picking up croissants for tomorrow morning all I see is my lifeless father in my arms. And sadly the last nine birthdays have all been like this, a constant reminder that I am an orphan, but also the very thing that has kept me going.

Since my father's death I leapt head first into the world of vampire hunting while still keeping a life that the outside world would view as normal. Leaving Virginia in the past, I moved here to New York City with my best friend Jayne after high school and it has been one roller coaster ride after another. Unlike Virginia, New York City allows me to do what I have come to do best. In this vast city I hunt vampires and offer up one of two options: either they convert to a vegetarian/blood bank diet or they die. The majority tends to choose the former option, but as there are more here than anyone could dare dream I am kept quite busy. Tonight, however, they will get a reprieve from seeing my beautiful face. Though I would much rather work, Jayne is dragging me out to celebrate turning another year older and she never takes no for an answer.

Glancing at the clock it already reads 8:30pm. Putting away my thoughts, I trudge across the living room to the foyer and unlock the door as Jayne should be arriving right about.....now.

"I brought clothes!" Jayne screamed as she burst through my

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door.

"Well hello to you too." I stated this to no one in particular as Jayne was already laying outfits on my bed. Upon entering my room I noticed I was in for quite the night.

"So what do you think? I brought the deep red halter with matching Jimmy Choo pumps and my strapless animal print. Thought either wild or sexy was appropriate for tonight since it'll probably be the last time I get you to have any fun. Try them on, please! Don't make me beg," she said pleadingly.

Eyeing the dresses I quickly decide on the red halter. I had never cared for anything strapless and what girl would say no to Jimmy Choo. "If I must go then I'm wearing the red halter. I hate strapless. I can never get them to stay put."

"Good, I was hoping you'd say that. Now go shower and get changed. We're leaving in an hour for the club. They don't let people in after 10pm so if we're late I won't speak to you for a week."

"Like you could last a week," I half laughed.

Seeing her grab a slipper I bolt for the bathroom and swing the door closed. Throwing it at the door she yells, "I can at least try."

After forty minutes of showering, shaving, plucking eyebrows, styling my hair and applying mascara I finally look how a 25 year old woman should on a Friday night. I barely recognize the woman looking back at me, however, because the face I see is my mother's. I have the same sea blue eyes she had, the same wavy chestnut hair, and the same heart-shaped face. Most women my age would be envious of these looks, but all I see tonight when I stare into the bathroom mirror is the mother I was denied a life with. Then suddenly I was thrown out of my flashback and into the present.

From the kitchen Jayne yelled, "Hannah, are you done yet? It's almost time to go!"

"Yes, I'm coming!" I then muttered to myself words of encouragement, grabbed my black clutch and headed for Jayne who was half way out the door.

She started ushering me into the hallway as she said "Come on, I have a taxi waiting downstairs already." I hurried to lock the door and as soon as my keys hit my purse she was pulling me

down the hall.

"Okay, okay. Impatient are we?"

"Maybe, but can you blame me? We rarely go clubbing and its time we find you a man," Jayne said with a completely straight face.

Stopping in my tracks I told her "Hold on. Let's just have fun tonight and worry about men later. I need the extra practice anyway."

With a smirk on her face she said, "Based on the number of dates you have had in the last five years I would say that's an understatement." At that I couldn't help but agree. Climbing into the elevator we selected the lobby button and finally made our way to the taxi.

Twenty minutes later we arrived at The Morning After, hands down the noisiest club around but also the club with the best music. After two margaritas I started to loosen up and decided to hit the dance floor with Jayne. Salsa music was playing and everyone traded partners as if they knew each other. Letting the music take over I joined in until the DJ put something on I didn't recognize. It didn't affect Jayne as she stayed on the floor twirling in circles and being as wild as her dress would suggest. I, on the other hand, made my way to the bar for some water and pretzels, but as I sat there I started to wonder if this was really a good idea. I was about to get up and tell Jayne I was leaving when the most gorgeous man I ever laid eyes on said hello and instantly changed my mind.

At about 6ft tall with a lean muscular build he seemed to wear his suit like every inch was made for him. Short sandy blonde hair, deep blue eyes and lips to die for completed the package. I could have sworn I was in heaven because a man this perfect shouldn't exist.

"I'm sorry, are you okay?" he asked with a hint of an accent.

Realizing I was still staring at him and hadn't said anything I quickly recovered with a lie. I could have told the truth but what was I supposed to say to a complete stranger - that I was mesmerized by how handsome he was? Hell no! A lie in this case would do just fine. "Oh, uh the lights and noise are starting to make me dizzy. I'm not used to places like this." Hopefully he bought it because to admit I was staring at his beautiful physique

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would be too humiliating.

"Well since you should probably remain sitting why don't you have a glass of water and chat with me for a while? This is my first time here and I have to admit it's not really my scene" he said with actual sincerity. It was astonishing that a man this hot in New York would care about a woman being dizzy and offer to sit with her. I bet he's gay. Well, only one way to test that theory.

"I will stay only if you tell me the story behind your delicious sounding accent," I said with a teasing smile.

"Okay, I can do that. But then you have to explain why you are as out of place here as I am. You don't strike me as the type who sits back while everyone else has fun" he said with all honesty.

"Agreed, but you have to spill first. By the way, I'm Hannah."

After a brief pause and looking at me like he was trying to see something beneath the surface he started his tale. "Well, I guess the only way to tell a story is from the beginning. My name is John and my 'delicious' accent, as you called it, comes from a very old part of England for I was born in Staplegrave, a parish in Taunton, the county town of Somerset. Sadly, my mother died during childbirth so I never had the pleasure of knowing her, though my uncle told me once that I look like her. Of my few relatives, he was the only one who offered to care for me. He was a good man; he died when I was nineteen. And now I have no close living relatives that I am aware of. While being all alone is quite depressing it, however, allows me to travel the world without feeling the need to put down roots. And that just happens to be perfect for my job as a ghost writer because my current work has brought me to the same club as you tonight. How is that for a beginning?"

As we both sat at the bar John patiently waited for an answer while I searched his face for any hint of deception. As the seconds went by he appeared as serious and truthful as his story implied, so...I decided to be truthful as well.

"Honestly that is a very sad beginning. I'm sorry you've been alone all these years. I...know the feeling." Realizing I created a segue into my own depressing life story I quickly added, "Anyway, please tell me the middle and end are much happier."

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"Well I would except I am way too young to have an end yet and the middle of my story won't feel complete without you in it. So you see, Hannah, if you want to hear the rest of my story you will just have to stick around to help write it," John said with a hopeful tone.

Thinking about what he was implying and strangely contemplating it, I snapped back to reality. "Very nice pick-up line," I said aloud, celebrating on the inside that he completely crushed my gay theory. To cover my excitement I sipped my water while he quickly downed his glass of scotch, hailed the bartender for another, and abruptly turned to face me again.

"Did you really mean that or were you just trying to lighten the mood? For the record, I am serious about what I said and didn't intend for it to come across as a pick-up line."

Seeing that I had possibly hurt his feelings I tried to make amends but ended up leading into my own story, a place I never go to with anyone. "I'm sorry; it wasn't meant to sound rude. You just surprised me. But, if you are genuinely being serious, I should warn you this would never work. You won't want me as a co-writer to your 'story' after you hear my own depressing tale."

"Why don't you let me be the judge of that? Come on, your turn to spill."

Knowing he was right, I stared into my water glass and whispered, "Okay. If you want me to then here it is." I summoned the little courage I had and turned in my stool to face John, fidgeting with my hand in my lap.

Not sure of where to start I chose the beginning like John did, hoping it would paint a picture of what a mess I truly am. "Like you, my mother died. Only it wasn't an accident or natural causes. She was murdered when I was six years old. Being too young to understand, everyone told me at the time that it was suicide. I was the one who found her body. Afterwards my father seemed to go a little crazy. He would be gone all night long a few times a month and when he came home he never spoke a word. It went on like that for a long time until my fifteenth birthday. That day had started off perfect but ended with witnessing my father's murder and holding his lifeless body in my arms. How's that for depressing?" Still fidgeting with my hands I waited for a response, convinced this was going to chase him away. To my surprise,

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though, he did just the opposite.

"Very. What you must have gone through is unimaginable, but judging by tonight it's made you stronger."

"In some ways, yes, but I don't feel I am emotionally. If I was stronger I wouldn't have waited so long to open up. To be honest I'm not completely sure why I even told you. You're the first person I've told details like that to in years," I slowly confessed. Then there was brief silence as my honesty surprised him. John tore his concerned eyes from mine to take another drink, making me think what I had said finally scared him. But, just as before, he didn't make an excuse and leave. Instead he returned his deep blue eyes to mine and with caution asked to know more.

"Might I ask if they ever caught the murderer?"

"Uh, no they didn't. It's been ten years and I'm not any closer to finding him. I didn't get a good look at his face that day." With that I looked away, battling tears that threatened to surface. John must have noticed my wet eyes because as soon as I started turning away he took my face in his right hand and gently wiped a tear away with his thumb.

After a few seconds of staring into his eyes, something I seemed to be doing a lot of tonight, I wiped away the rest of my tears. With a half smile creeping onto my face I attempted to lighten the mood and salvage what was left of a night meant for fun. "John...um, would you like to dance with me? I could use a little fun right now."

Smiling he said, "I'd love to but must warn you I am a terrible dancer to modern music."

"And yet you found your way into a dance club of all places," I said as I took his hand and let him lead me to the dance floor.

Chuckling he knew he was caught. "Yes, well, that is why places like this aren't my scene. I only came tonight to get perspective on a client's lifestyle. If I am going to write an accurate biography then I should know some things first hand." He then proceeded to do just that. John twirled me around, the bottom of my red dress floating in the air like it was made to do. He then brought me close, lowered me into a dip, and when I rose back up he held me so tight I swear our lips almost touched. It took all I had to not kiss him right there.

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"You are a lot better at this than you let on," I managed to breath out instead of making a move to kiss him.

"Maybe I just needed the right partner" John whispered as we gazed into each others eyes. In his I immediately saw longing and desire but, staring into mine, he took his time to see my need for him. A gentleman, he wanted to be sure of my feelings, so he searched my eyes for a sign. Knowing my feelings mirrored his own, I gave him one. Briefly John smiled, and then feverishly crashed his lips into mine, deepening his kiss as he held me tighter. This moment would have been perfect if only Jayne hadn't interrupted.

"Now that is exactly how every woman's birthday should end. Hannah, do you want to introduce me?" asked Jayne with a huge smile on her face.

Feeling completely embarrassed I briefly hid my face in John's jacket. If Jayne could see how red it was I would never hear the end of it. "Jayne, this is John. John this is Jayne, my best friend and the reason I am here tonight."

"If that's the case I should be thanking you, Jayne. Before I met Hannah my night was missing something and now I think I found it" John said more for my ears than Jayne's.

Fumbling her words but still smiling she replied, "Oh, ah...you are so very welcome. And I hate to break up the fun, especially since it's usually Hannah doing that to me, but I need to steal her away. It's already 12:45am and we have work in the morning. I'm really sorry."

"She's right. I have to go," I admitted.

"I understand. Look, I am flying out to California tomorrow for a few days but I'd like to see you again. Can I take you out for a coffee when I get back?" asked John as he took a business card out of his jacket pocket.

Before I could even say one word Jayne was already handing him a piece of paper with my name and number on it and took the card in return. She must have prepared for the possibility of my one day being asked out on a date. Sometimes I honestly wonder what I would do without her. Jayne slowly tugged me toward the exit as she said "That's her number. Make sure you call after 6pm."

With that I added, "But before 9:30pm. I usually don't

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answer my phone after that." I had to make sure he knew because with my luck he would call when I am out hunting. That's one reason why I never date. Vampire hunting and relationships are like oil and water - they don't mix well.

Almost as if he knew what I was thinking John said "I *will* call you. And Hannah..."

"Yes?"

He quickly stole me back from Jayne and drew me close with one hand on my mid back. The other entangled in my hair, he proceeded to gently place a kiss on my lips. Once he released me he sweetly said, "Happy birthday."

With a smile I rested my forehead against his. "It is now."



As soon as we crossed the threshold of my apartment door Jayne began interrogating me. "Hannah, it's time to fess up. I restrained myself from badgering you in the cab ride over here but now it's just us girls. So tell me....what happened tonight?"

Seeing in her face the stubbornness I know so well I set my black clutch on the kitchen counter and motioned for the living room couch. Once we were seated I began to divulge every moment of our encounter, from the innocent flirting and the seriousness of our conversation to how incredible his chiseled body felt against mine. Jayne said my slight flirtation was perfect but I could tell she seemed worried, most likely about what his intentions might be, and I knew her compliments would cease after I reveal a crucial piece of the night.

"Good to know I did something right because I haven't told you the most important thing...I...told him about my parents...."

"You did what!" blurted Jayne before I could continue.

"I know, I know, it's practically a relationship death sentence but Jayne,...all I saw was pain in his eyes when I told him. It was like it hurt him to know what I had suffered through. And to answer your next question, - no I didn't."

"Good! Now you sure that wasn't all an act? I mean, yeah, he is one hell of a specimen, but he is still a man. I don't want this to become a 'pursue and conquer' that leaves you on my couch at

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three in the morning eating cookies 'n crème because he dumped you over the phone. And before you say anything, yes, I wanted you to find a man, but I didn't expect you to fall off the deep end within the first five minutes. What he was feeling seemed pretty obvious from what I saw, but, only you know if it felt real. You need to be sure of his feelings as well as your own."

"There's the overprotective big sister demeanor I know and love" I whispered as I stood to get the cookies 'n crème ice cream she spoke of from the freezer. I may have said it sarcastically but I meant every word.

Jayne must have heard my remark because she replied "Yes, but I prefer overprotective better looking twin sister. We may have different parents but I was only born three days before you. For all intensive purposes we are fraternal twins."

I couldn't help but smile knowing she felt as I did. Not having any siblings, Jayne had become the closest thing I had to a sister, so I took her opinion seriously. Thinking about how I felt tonight I wondered if there was any truth to what she said.

"I think you might be right. I am falling for him and even though I am rusty I know his kisses were the real deal. Do...do you believe in love at first sight?" I asked with a little hesitation in my voice.

With downcast eyes and a smile developing on her face she said, "Yeah, I do. I just hope someday I have a chance to feel the same way you do right now. Just promise me one thing - wait until absolutely necessary to tell him about your night job?"

Looking her straight in the face I replied, "Agreed." That was the easiest answer I gave all night.

Ten minutes later the living room clock read two in the morning so I told Jayne good night and proceeded to get ready for bed. I brushed my teeth, removed all signs of make-up, pulled on my camisole and matching shorts, and climbed into bed. There was just one problem: I couldn't sleep. My thoughts of John wouldn't permit me even one minute of reprieve.

After what felt like half an hour of staring at the ceiling I decided to distract my thoughts. First, I located all my stakes. I checked their tips, and made sure they were concealed appropriately, yet were easily accessible. Then, I went to clean my knife collection and sharpened each of them twice. Lastly, I sorted

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through all my hunting clothes to make sure they were in good condition and ready to grab at a moment's notice.

There wasn't a need to perform this weapons check and uniform inspection until tomorrow night but doing so never failed to be an excellent distraction. A good hour must have passed by the time I felt sleep calling. I attempted crawling into bed again and, within seconds, surrendered to my dreams. And what dreams they were.

Chapter Two



John

I've never understood what all the fuss was about that dance clubs seem to generate. A client of mine spends a lot of time in them so, to give his biography justice, I decided to visit one and see for myself. The music proved too loud for my taste and many of the patrons were scantily dressed but I suppose typical men of New York enjoy themselves in places such as this. I, however, was far from typical so, to make my time worthwhile, I took a seat at the bar and ordered myself a scotch on the rocks, my usual. After twenty minutes of painting a mental picture of my client's New York nightlife I had come to the conclusion that I was very unimpressed. That was until she sat down.

I had just glanced to my left when I noticed a beautiful brunette sit in the chair next to me. She donned a red halter dress that left her stunning and looked to have legs for days. She hadn't noticed me staring so I turned away inconspicuously; I didn't want to catch her off guard. For the next few minutes I slowly drank my scotch while she seemed deep in thought with one hand by her ear, and eyes locked on the bar before her. As she turned in my direction to rise to leave I caught her gaze and resolved right then and there that she wasn't going anywhere, not yet anyway. I had to get to know this woman next to me so I convinced her to stay, learning her name was Hannah and, like me, was an orphan.

Our conversation had left tears in her eyes so she suggested we dance to change the mood and it worked. Not long into dancing I realized I was moving her closer with every turn. After I brought her back up from a dip I couldn't restrain myself any longer. I stared into her eyes and, with noticing she felt the same, crushed my lips against hers. With every second our kiss deepened, sending shocks through my body that made me wish we were

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alone. The moment was perfect until her friend showed up, announcing they had to leave.

Feeling compelled to see her again we exchanged numbers and before letting her go I drew her in for a gentle kiss good bye. A few seconds later she tore away from me and disappeared from my sight, but the moment she did something happened I never thought possible. Listening closer I swear I heard my heart falter, as if it feared never being near hers again.

Physical pain shortly followed and while I didn't understand the why behind it all I did know two things: Hannah had a hold on my heart and I desired her deeply. This revelation placed me in unfamiliar territory and left me with more questions than answers, especially those concerning my heart. Knowing there was only one person who could put my questions to rest I reached for my mobile and dialed a most familiar number, waiting for it to ring.

"Price, I need to talk....Yes, I know what time it is....No, it cannot wait.....Okay. I'll be there in forty minutes," I said.

Wasting no time I exited the club and hailed a taxi, gave him directions and silently went through what I was going to tell Price in my head. Before I knew it I had arrived at Price's modest brownstone and, since it was now almost 1:45 in the morning, I quickly paid the taxi driver, giving a generous tip to speed it up. Then I ascended the stone stairs to his door and eagerly pushed his doorbell. Price must have occupied himself until I was to arrive because it took no more than five seconds for him to open the massive oak door.

"So do you want to tell me what urgent matter has you dragging me out of bed at one in the morning or shall I guess?" stated a sleepy Price as I entered his foyer and began pacing.

The sound of the door clicking closed signaled to me that he was awaiting an answer and I wasn't sure I had one. Turning to face him I took a deep breath and with slight hesitancy said the name that had invaded my mind. "Her name is Hannah."

Price stood in front of me for a few moments looking dumbfounded and as confused as I felt before heading for his office. He waved for me to follow him, so I did, right up to his counter of high end scotch, whiskey, and bourbon. He proceeded to pour two glasses of 50 year old scotch when he said, "Something tells me this conversation calls for hard liquor. I've

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never seen you like this and, correct me if I'm wrong, no one else has either." Price then lowered himself into his leather Lazy Boy recliner while I grabbed my glass, immediately swallowed half of it and got comfortable in his matching leather couch. I stared at the ice cubes in my glass before laying out the sequence of events that had me torn between confusion and clarity.

I left not one detail out, afraid doing so would make it difficult to understand what was happening to me. Many women had caught my fancy in the past but I was never left feeling like I could fall to pieces; this was something completely baffling so if anyone could provide me with answers it would be Price. He may not be New York's most eligible bachelor but, at age 55, he has thirty years of marriage in the experience department and his job provides him with vast resources to answer any question I throw at him.

I decided to end my rambling with the most important thing and yet the most confusing. Sitting across from him I leaned forward, stared into his expressionless face and said, "I swear my heart is skipping beats, Price, and it hasn't stopped since she left. In all my years it's never done that."

Upon hearing that confession his face went from void of expression to nothing but curious. "Are you sure about this? I know your hearing is excellent compared to others but clubs are loud. Is there any chance you could be mistaken?" asked Price with an inquisitive tone.

"Yes," I said firmly. "I not only hear it but it's painful as well."

After a few seconds of just staring at me he said with a beaming face, "Holy shit. I mean...wow; I was starting to think I'd never see the day."

"What day?" I said with confusion evident in my voice.

"The day you find your mate."

I was nothing but shocked by this revelation while Price was as giddy as a kid at Christmas who finally had the toy he had waited all year to get. He couldn't stop smiling as he rose from his chair and walked to the copy of Rembrandt his wall safe hid behind.

Watching him closely I asked, "What does anything in your safe have to do with my love life?"

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"Everything," he told me with that same smile. Once the safe was open he pulled out thick volumes of books that looked to be over 500 years old. He brought them to the coffee table in front of me and sat down before he explained further.

"You know how in the past few years I had extra time at the university to study European legends and myths. Well, this is what I found and there are some rather interesting stories here that could help us understand you better."

Completely stunned, I picked up a book for myself to page through. I then muttered "I'm not the only one am I?" while Price found the page he was looking for in a brown leather book whose binding was in desperate need of repair. The book I held was of similar appearance with thick discolored pages worn from years of neglect. With each page I turned I saw what appeared to be stories, diagrams, and hand drawn pictures of what the book's authors believed to be demons. Each of these pictures depicted hideous creatures and proved as easily discernible as the last, but I couldn't tell what the descriptions said for the writing was in some form of Middle English. Luckily, aside from being a tenured European history professor, Price was also the resident linguist at the university where he taught.

"How long have you had these?" I inquired.

"A few months; it took years to track them down and now it's taking a while to decipher them. Would you like the short or long explanation of what I've found so far?" asked Price as he looked at his notes scattered across the table.

"Short please. It's late and I don't want to keep you much longer."

"Alright, short it is. This particular story talks of a man with enhanced senses, the gift of never aging, and a penchant for blood. He came into a small village in Southern Wales where he caught sight of a beautiful farmer's daughter. When they locked eyes he knew something had changed in him, he could feel it but, knowing what he was, he ignored it. As night descended he tried to walk down the village road toward the river but he got no further than the last hut when he heard it."

"Heard what?" I eagerly asked.

Smiling wide he said, "He heard his heart skipping beats and thought it would stop if he kept heading down the road away from

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the village. He had heard rumors of strange happenings to a heart like his so he quickly turned to run toward the village to test his theory. As he got closer to the center of the village he heard a normal heart rhythm again. And as he stood outside the hut that belonged to the farmer's daughter his heart beat stronger. In that moment he knew the rumors were true. He had found his mate but...she was mortal."

Clearing the knot that had formed in my throat I said, "That sounds like what happened between Hannah and I."

"Yes, it does, and if it wasn't for what you told me I don't think I would have believed this," confessed Price as he glanced at the book in his lap. Suddenly the look on his face turned grave and with hesitation he continued, "John I'm afraid there's more and you aren't going to like it. It says he loved her more than life and, even if he knew whether she would survive the transformation, he didn't want her to share his fate. He had never heard of a successful transformation by a blood-born so he chose to die with her when it was her time. He knew it would be easy because the rumors foretold that when one mate's heart stopped beating the other did as well. All he had to do was avoid his craving. He thought his pain over losing her would be enough to stifle his thirst and he was right. He died within a day of her death."

More than five minutes of silence passed as I wrapped my head around what Price just told me. It was amazing that I finally had proof about others like me existing. However, what was written in the book also caused me great pain as it sounded like I only had two options. One: to stay away from Hannah for as long as she lives and suffer with a dysfunctional heart. Or two: live my life with her, but watch her grow old while I remain the same and pray I would be with her in the afterlife. The former I know would be unbearable to do if what I have experienced since she left the club is any indication. And the latter, though more bearable, takes away from Hannah the life she deserves. A life that allows her to put down roots instead of constant moving to protect what I am.

Price must have sensed my anguish as I silently weighed my options. He tried to say something, no doubt reassuring, but instead retreated into the book that had the Southern Wales account in it. Tired of the awkward silence I finally rose from the couch and moved to go pour myself a double scotch on the rocks.

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"I can't do that Price, any of it. I cannot leave her. I cannot watch her grow old while I stay a mere 27 years. And I cannot ask her to move from place to place so my cover isn't blown. It's not fair to her. I...*I can't do it*," I declared with absolute conviction and a hint of anger beneath the surface.

"Maybe I'm missing something. I haven't translated the entire book yet," said Price as he reached for another book that looked to be the oldest in the pile.

He began skimming through the first chapters but looked up, as there was obvious anger in my voice this time, when I said, "I hope your right because this is the year 2016 for Christ's sake. Why can't we find another option, something that doesn't involve anyone's heart being put through hell? Because I assure you that's what it will feel like."

"You know, let's face it, we aren't going to solve anything right now," he said as he closed his book, gathered the others and rose to put them away. "Why don't we both get some much needed rest and in the morning we will have a fresh perspective on this. And while I try to find you a happy ending I suggest you call Hannah like you said you would and get to know her better. If you truly feel the way you say you do it shouldn't be hard."

"You are going to find me a happy ending? People like me have short-lived fun Price; we don't get a happy ending. We don't deserve one," I remarked with a sorrowful tone, trying to convince myself more than him.

"John, if anyone deserves a happy ending it's you. Now let's call a taxi and get you home before you fall asleep on my couch. I promise I will call when I find something."

Price led me to the front door and tried to instill some words of encouragement in me before I said goodbye. As I waited for the taxi cab I replayed in my mind everything that had happened, or that I had learned, since 11:30pm last night: I met an amazing woman named Hannah, felt my heart skipping beats since she left, learned she is my mate, and found out that it will be difficult to have a life together that's fair to us both. Could my life get any bloody worse right now?

Choosing to not answer my own question, for I already knew what it would be, I decided that getting to know Hannah while Price worked on a miracle was good advice. Now I just have

to hope she still wants to get to know me.



The second my alarm sounded I jumped out of bed. I may have only slept for a few hours but if I was going to stay near Hannah I very well couldn't travel to California on my business trip. Still rattled by last night's events I wasn't in the mood to test how much distance I could put between Hannah and I before my heart would give out. So I headed to my study and proceeded to call the airport to cancel my flight and call the Hilton in Los Angeles to cancel my reservation. Once the cancellations were complete I thought a hot shower would help relax me and take my mind off the problems I would eventually face.

The water was scalding hot as I entered the stone tiled shower. I turned the temperature down slightly; with the steam and green border tile it made me feel like I was in the tropics. I quickly washed, first my body and then my hair, when images of last night flooded my mind. I was pulling Hannah close, so close I could feel her warm breath on my neck. My left hand entangled itself in her wavy chestnut hair while my right kept her body flush against mine. As our lips met in a gentle kiss my heart pounded and every one of my senses went into overdrive.

Fearing my imagination would lead to Hannah in much less clothing I turned the shower knob to ice cold. The freezing water hit me like a million tiny icicles, chasing away the dirty thoughts I was about to have. I may have fallen for Hannah within hours of meeting her but I was still a gentleman and refused to let myself imagine her in a state of undress when I can't yet call her mine.

Ten minutes later I had completed my shower, finished dressing, and brushed my teeth. It was 8:30 in the morning and, now that I had cancelled my trip, I had two full days to kill before I could ask Hannah out for coffee. She was under the impression I left New York this morning and I didn't want to call her early and explain why I had changed my mind, at least not yet. I think the speech where she is a vampire's mate will have to wait until I know she has committed herself to me. Revealing this to Hannah anytime before that I fear would scare her away or have her think I

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was crazy. Honestly, if either were to happen, I would prefer the latter because knowing she was scared of what I am would be the death of me.

Needing to keep busy I decided to get some work out of the way but hunger beckoned me to the kitchen before I could return to my study. Opening the refrigerator I had many options, such as eggs and orange juice, but I reached for my daily eight ounce diet of bagged blood instead. After so many years of failure I finally learned that drinking one glass of bagged blood a day satiates my hunger enough that I don't feel the need to drink from the vein. It has been years since I had done so and I plan on keeping it that way. I closed the refrigerator door, grabbed a glass out of the sink, poured the blood into it, and headed off to the study for some work.

As I sat down in my black professor's chair behind my solid oak desk I began rubbing my chest. My heart continued to skip beats, and at times it rather hurt, but until Hannah was mine there was nothing I could do. Trying to ignore the pain, I booted up my computer and set to work on a manuscript and proof read two papers for literature journals. Next I shuffled through my drawers to find a new project but to my dismay I found nothing. I was actually ahead of schedule by three weeks and couldn't think of anything else to distract my thoughts. Looking up at the clock it read half past noon so I left my study to make a sandwich and returned with the notion that a little research might help keep my imagination at bay.

I placed the paper with her information on it next to the screen and brought up the Google search engine. Typing in 'Hannah Jacobs' showed me numerous results that had nothing to do with her so, trying again, I added New York to the search. Eventually I discovered her address and where she worked. Many would call this slightly stalker-like but as I fully intend on dating her, for as long as she will have me, I call it being prepared. It's not like I am going to sit outside her bedroom window every night taking pictures while she sleeps. That is for people who cannot get the girl, something I won't have a problem with if the way she returned my advances last night were any indication.

I jotted down the information off the screen before I cleared my search and added a new topic. Hannah had mentioned at the

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club how she had found her mother dead and saw her father murdered at such tender ages. I hadn't pressed her for more information; it was hardly the time or place to do so and I could see she was already in pain just from the mention of them. With searching for articles on her parents I hope to better understand why I feel there is more to her past than she lets on. My intention is not to pry, but to know what has made a young orphan girl into the strong, beautiful woman that owns my heart.

Chapter Three



Hannah

Incoming Call.

Those two words blinked across my phone as it rang with a personal song I had chosen for John so I was less likely to miss his call. Not that I was paying much attention but he was due back in New York today and for the last few hours I struggled to not wait by the phone. As I lost that battle I found myself debating whether our encounter nights before was the start of something real or a game a hot as hell New York man was playing on a pretty woman susceptible to heart break. As his song began, however, all my doubts vanished and were replaced by a fear and nervousness that paralyzed me where I stood. It wasn't that I was afraid of John, but of what I would be opening my heart up to, and the possible aftermath I would endure if it were to be broken again. I have had enough heartache to last a lifetime and I know I won't survive another.

Suddenly the song's chorus played, alerting me that I was about to miss John's call entirely. Afraid I would, I forgot my worries and instantly reached for the spot on my wooden coffee table where my phone had resided all day. Quickly moving my finger over the screen to answer, I brought the phone to my ear and took a deep, calming breath.

"Hello?" I asked as I looked down at my carpet and fidgeted with my shirt.

"Hannah? It's John, from the club the other night. I, ah, hope it's still alright to call you." He said this with a nervous tone, a complete surprise considering the confidence that had rolled off him when we were together last.

Biting my bottom lip I decided to be perfectly honest. "It is,

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John. It's actually more than alright. I've...kinda been waiting for my phone to ring."

"Oh. If I would have known that I would have called sooner," he said with the confidence I was familiar with. Knowing I had anticipated talking to him seemed to change his mood which in turn, changed mine. Any nervous feelings I had fled, leaving pure excitement for where this conversation might lead. "Well," he continued, "any chance you would want to go on a day date with me? I thought that would be appropriate based on how the other night went."

"There is, but it would depend on what you have in mind," I replied with a hint of flirtation in my voice.

"I thought, since we already know chemistry isn't a problem, we could grab a coffee and then stroll through the park. We could find a quiet little spot under a tree somewhere and play 20 questions. I want to know if we have anything else in common."

Stunned speechless, I just stared straight ahead.

"Hannah?" John asked with worry evident in his voice. I could tell he was afraid that I wasn't going to say yes, that maybe his version of a date was too old fashioned for my taste.

"I'm here. I've never had a date like that but it sounds wonderful. Um, I don't work tomorrow, or is that too soon?"

"Tomorrow is perfect. Shall we meet at the Yorktown Coffee Shop by Central Park at...10:00a.m? If things go well I plan to convince you to have lunch with me. "

"Oh, John you can try, but what makes you think you'll be successful?" I asked teasingly.

"Well, based on experience you seem to have a hard time resisting me. However, if being charming doesn't work, I am not opposed to begging. It will only prove how much I desire your company," said John.

"I see. Now you've piqued my curiosity. 10am it is."

"Terrific. Well, until then, I bid you good night and sweet dreams...perhaps of me."

Smiling brightly at his charm I said "Good night, John," and hung up the phone. Collapsing onto the couch I clutched it tight against my chest, afraid parting with it would mean our conversation was but a dream. My fear quickly subsided when I heard a knock at the door. Looking at my living room clock on the

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wall it read 9:30pm.

Shit. "Coming!" I yelled from across my apartment.

Hurrying to the door I opened it and let Robert enter as I slipped my leather coat on and laced up my cargo boots. I was so preoccupied with John's call that I lost track of the time and hadn't been prepared for Robert's arrival. Standing at 6' 1" with dark shaggy hair and sculpted muscles he's a hunter like me - who happens to live in the apartment building across from mine. We were partnered together years ago and ever since have been riding into work together. Normally he shows up late but tonight he arrived right on time.

"Sorry I'm not ready. I was actually counting on you being late tonight," I stated as I threw my hair into a messy bun.

"Han, did something happen, because this is completely not like you? You're always prepared and I'm the one who's disorganized and late. If you start switching roles on me I may be forced to find a new partner." Robert said this with sincerity and humor, something he is very good at and a trait I will never get tired of.

Not sure if I should provide an answer I chose to mumble under my breath, "nothing I want to talk about right now" as I turned in the direction of my bedroom.

"I heard that. You wishing I was late can only mean one thing, Hannah" pressed Robert, sounding more concerned than he did moments ago. Following me Robert blocked the doorway and bombarded me with a question that seemed more fitting for an over protective brother than my Council partner. But, if I were to be honest, Robert was the closest I would ever come to having a brother and I couldn't ask for a better one.

"Who's the guy?" he inquired as I turned around, nearly slamming into him.

Instantly rolling my eyes I gave a huff and sternly said, "I said I didn't want to talk about it yet."

That clearly didn't satisfy him. Robert crossed his arms, stood his ground and waited for me to break. Throwing my hands in the air to signal defeat I plopped down on the end of my bed. He sauntered over to sit next to me as I fiddled with my hands, wondering how much to say.

"His name is John and we are going on a date tomorrow.

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That is all the information you are getting right now, okay? If I want to be clear headed tonight I can't be thinking about him or the date so *not* discussing it is best."

"Okay Han, I respect that, but afterwards you will tell me all about him. For as long as I have known you, you aren't one to let people in easily so, when someone new comes along, I get protective. But, can you blame me?" With that said, Robert gave me a squeeze and grabbed the deep green duffel bag sitting by my feet.

"Come on. Let's get to work before Julius realizes we're late." He said with a half smile creeping across his face.

"First, we're always late thanks to you," I replied while standing, "and second, if I put up walls then how did I ever let you in?"

"That's easy." Suddenly Robert had a full smile that spread from dimple to dimple. "I broke in."

Instantly, Robert's boyish charm that always made me smile brightened my mood. I even shook my head to suppress a laugh as I turned to grab my keys and purse from my dresser. Then I headed into the kitchen for my phone, leaving Robert to carry my bag as punishment for an attempted interrogation. Needing nothing else, I entered the foyer.

"Well, are you coming or planning to suffer the wrath of the almighty" I yelled to him. As I opened the door I glanced around to make sure everything was off. Once Robert entered the hallway I turned off the last light and locked up behind us.

"You're driving, right?" he asked, putting his arm over my shoulder as we walked into the elevator.

Shaking my head I asked back, "Don't I always?"

Forty minutes later we came to our destination. It was a building that, at first glance, looks like it should be condemned with its rusted doors, seemingly leaky roof, and boarded up windows. Once inside, however, you step into a whole other world. This location, like all the others, was chosen to protect ourselves from the outside world. Very few people would think of wandering around a place such as this, but when they do we are well prepared. Our security is top of the line and hidden extremely well. It would take hours for anyone to spot the dozen or so cameras and sensors placed around the outside perimeter.

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One shining example of how secretive the Council is would be how we enter the facility. Once past the chain link fence I drove around the right of the building to a boarded up door the size of a single car garage and pushed a small remote attached to my belt. Within seconds the cleverly disguised door opened up to a car lift that took us down roughly three levels to a parking garage. Apparently some of the benefactors felt it was necessary to hide our transportation and not draw attention to ourselves. Truth be told - it made perfect sense. I also would find it incredibly odd to see dozens of vehicles congregated outside an abandoned warehouse in the middle of the night.

Two minutes later Robert and I were exiting the parking garage. As we headed towards the locker rooms a short haired brunette passed by and informed us to hurry. Julius was looking for us and in one of his moods. Knowing full well what his moods entailed all we could do was take a few seconds to contemplate what we were about to walk into.

"Huh. I know we're late but compared to usual we're 15 minutes early. Wonder what's got his undies in a bunch," Robert said, rather curious.

I giggled in response to his childish remark. Then I raised my eyebrows and, with a playful smirk, mentioned the one thing that unnerved him at work. "You tell me. He's your uncle."

Without hesitation he pulled me out of sight and began shushing me. "Han, you know that's supposed to stay a secret!"

"Yes, and it will remain a secret. The last thing I want to do is get Julius in trouble and you transferred to another facility. You two are like family but you should have seen the look on your face. It was priceless."

"Glad you found that so amusing. Now if you don't mind can we go get chewed out for being tardy and find out whose ass needs kicking tonight?"

There was no need to apologize for my comment; Robert knew I didn't mean anything by it and would take his secret to my grave. When it came to those I love I would do anything to protect them, from lying to dying. "Sure.....but you know, if we aren't careful next time we might get sent straight to the principal's office," I said with a smile and ended with a completely straight face.

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"Ha ha. Well, aren't you a bag of laughs tonight," replied Robert as we headed down the hall to the Central Command room.

"Don't you remember? I'm in a good mood."

Looking at me he pulled me close to give a sideways hug and didn't let go for a few seconds. "Yeah, I remember. It's just rare for me to see you like this. For you to be joking around at work, of all places, you must be really happy."

"Well, let's hope it stays this way." Placing my hand on one of the steel, gray double doors that opened to Central Command, I motioned to Robert for him to enter first.

"No, no. Ladies first, I insist," Robert said in the most polite way possible so he might come across sincere without an underlying reason behind his words.

Tilting my head to the side I tried to read between the lines but he was always hard to decipher. "This wouldn't have to do with Julius liking me more than you, now would it?"

"I swear 50% is me being a gentleman and, well, the other 50 is me being scared of my own uncle. And if you ever tell a soul you can find yourself a new partner, clear."

Pushing the door open I began to answer when we were summoned. "Cryst -".

"Holt, Jacobs! So nice of you to join us," yelled Julius from his office doorway 40 feet away.

Looking in his direction one could instantly pick Julius out of a crowded room. Standing tall at 6' 2", he had dark mud brown hair in an army style buzz cut and was wearing the Council's classic black shirt, cargo pants and matching ranger boots. It would take a stranger only seconds to know he was the man in charge. Julius reeked of power but was never drunk in it; he had every one of our backs and we had his. His power and level of influence was well deserved due to his esteemed service record with the Council as Deputy Director. And it happened to be the sole reason for allowing Robert to be under his command. It was forbidden to have family work in the same department because of the risk of death we face everyday but, provided it remained confidential, Robert became an exception.

Robert tried to make light of the moment and responded in true Robert fashion, "You know us; we like to make an entrance." Waiting for a response, we stood frozen in place staring at Julius

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while our hands were folded behind our backs as a sign of respect. A few seconds later he was finished contemplating us and delivered one.

"Yes.....I do."

Turning around Julius walked to his huge mahogany desk and picked up a blue file folder that had a red level 4 sticker on the cover which only ever meant one thing - deadly.

"Take a seat. We have a new development I need to share with you two." He said this with a grave look cast on his face as he descended into his leather chair and refused to look either of us in the eyes. Immediately I sensed something was amiss because Julius always insisted that eye contact instilled confidence and right now he was providing us with anything but the very thing we needed.

"How come my gut is telling me this is going to be a mission you would rather not have us go on, Julius?" I hesitantly asked as I sank into my chair.

After taking a deep breath Julius began speaking. "Because, Hannah, your gut has yet to be wrong." Then he paused, wiping his hands across his face as if searching for the right words but there were none. There was only the truth.

"I don't want you two to go on this mission because I love you both. You are my nephew, Robert, and you have been like a daughter to me, Hannah. I don't want to lose either of you and that is a very *real* possibility this time." After another breath Julius continued, "The Council needs its best agents for this and that would be the both of you. While you have escaped death numerous times before this will be *far* more difficult to accomplish because it involves the elusive, self-appointed...vampire Prince."

At the mention of him our eyes went wide. It had been decades since there had been a sighting and since then only rumors circulated the city with little fact to go on. He was brilliant at keeping under our radar and deadly at hand to hand combat. Agents had been sent after him before but our records showed that no one ever came back alive. So, if we were truly going after the highly sought after and highly dangerous Prince then there was only one thing for me to say, "God help us."

"My sentiments exactly," agreed Julius.

"So he's really been spotted?" Robert finally broke his

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temporary vocal paralysis and joined the conversation.

Solemnly, Julius gave a nod.

I looked to Robert - his face was etched with worry as he dropped his head into his hands. For a few seconds we all sat in silence, watching him let his mind wrap itself around what Julius had informed us of. I had rarely seen Robert like this but around here one knew that if he was worried then there was good reason to be. After what felt like a minute had passed he raised his head, looked Julius straight in his eyes, and started asking specifics about the mission with absolute composure.

"Is it just him; how many are we looking at? And how long do we have for recon?"

Before responding Julius swallowed hard as if he dreaded what he was about to say. "We believe there's a whole clan. It is possible he is starting his own army but we can't be certain. On the bright side you get 6 weeks for reconnaissance and they are permitting you a team given the nature of the mission. I am ordering you to take it."

The gears already turning in my head I blurted out, "on one condition - we hand pick our team and the Senior Director can't say a thing about it. Clear?"

"Absolutely." Handing us the folder containing mission description and last known locations Julius added as we all stood, "Tonight you will pick your team but after that it's surveillance time."



Over the next hour Robert and I went our separate ways throughout the facility to assemble our team. We agreed to meet in the firing range where soundproofing would prevent any eavesdroppers from hearing sensitive information. I walked in with Renee, our forensic and chemical expert, and Chris, my mentor and surrogate older sister. We needed Renee for analyzing blood samples and for her own original chemical creations to either subdue the vampires or kill them. She is the one who made our UV bullets possible. And we needed Chris because, though the student has surpassed the teacher, she is very knowledgeable in hand to

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hand combat. Before me, she was the best female agent this facility had seen in decades.

Robert arrived with two agents as well: our surveillance expert Stephen and another field agent like us named Henry. Normally when a team is required ten agents are assembled but in this case we only wanted those we trusted completely. Stephen and Henry gathered by the far wall with arms crossed while Chris and Renee slid into chairs, all of them waiting to be briefed.

I began speaking first.

"As you all know this is a level 4 mission involving the vampire Prince and a possible army he is assembling. We have 6 weeks for recon before the Senior Director wants to see some action taken. Henry and Chris, we will need you two in the field. Your strength and combat knowledge will be invaluable."

"Done," they replied in unison.

"Renee and Stephen, we will need you two to work together on the surveillance equipment and in the lab," Robert chimed in. "Renee knows computers and I know Stephen has a way of coming up with ideas without realizing it so, in this case, two heads will be better than one. We need to know how the Prince has evaded us for so long so working together is crucial."

"Okay," answered Renee as she looked at Stephen and continued, "but let's not step on each other's toes, shall we?"

"Wouldn't dream of it," quipped Stephen. We let their comments go as we knew they were just playing a game with each other. Outside the Council they were a couple but once they set a foot in the facility no one would ever guess it.

I looked to Robert and he nodded for me to take the lead on this. I always excelled at planning our missions and we both were brilliant at carrying them out.

"All right, let's get started."

For the next few hours we drew up a plan with timeline of events and made a list of supplies and weapons. Duties were assigned to all agents and before leaving for the night we agreed to meet in the firing range in two days to begin setting our plan in motion.

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Chapter Four



Hannah

Beep, beep, beep, beep. Jumping out from under my warm covers I quickly slammed the dismiss button on my alarm clock and hurried into the bathroom to begin my morning routine before leaving for the coffee shop. I may have only slept about four hours but my excitement for today was providing me with enough energy to wake up feeling refreshed. Whether I will feel the aftermath of my short sleep will depend on how my date goes - if it crashes and burns I will undoubtedly fill my face with ice cream, watch rom-coms, and take a long nap to wash the sorrow away. If it proves to be everything I am hoping it will, however, I won't be sleeping anytime soon. I will be too high on cloud nine and won't feel like coming down.

Once out of the bathroom I faced my only problem for the morning - what was I going to wear?? As a day date I knew anything I would wear to a club was out of the question, but I also didn't want to wear something I would be seen in at work, after all it was still a date. It took me almost ten minutes to settle on a knee length printed skirt and light blue eyelet blouse with cap sleeves. Blue seemed like a safe choice knowing it would accent my eyes. Everyone in my life has mentioned at one time or another how they are my best feature.

Turning in front of my full length mirror I decided that I was finally put together and ready to meet John for coffee. I glanced at my clock and noticed I still had plenty of time to kill before needing to leave. To pass a few minutes I searched for a matching blue purse, courtesy of Jayne. If it wasn't for her nothing in my wardrobe would have accessories that color coordinate. I've just never been that girly.

I attempted to think of something to do while I waited a bit

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before hailing a cab but instead all I managed to do was fidget with my purse and hands. Recognizing the signs of nervousness I immediately dropped my hands to my sides and tried to relax myself but only one thing was going to help. "Screw this. So be it if I'm early. If I wait any longer I'll be tempted to back out," I said out loud as a kind of pep talk. It must have worked because I checked my hair and makeup in the mirror one last time and hurried out the door before I could change my mind.

Since I was wearing low heeled dress sandals I chanced the stairwell so I wouldn't have to wait for the elevator. Though it was four flights of stairs, I reached the lobby in no time and just as quickly exited its doors to signal a cab. Less than ten seconds later one pulled to a stop in front of me. I gently slid in the back seat, closed the door and gave the driver my destination. He said with the light traffic this morning we should be there in no time; it heightened my excitement to know this but also stirred the butterflies that were brewing in my stomach. And then another emotion surfaced - guilt.

I started to feel guilty that I was allowing myself to feel this way again, to feel joy and love for another when in the past terrible things had happened to those I loved. If Jayne were here she would say that none of it was my fault and my parents would want me to love again and not hold back because of them. And as usual she would be right. So I told myself to get my mind off the past and focus on today and the gorgeous, sensitive man I am meeting for coffee who makes me feel unhinged when around him.



John

I arrived early to the Yorktown Coffee Shop but chose to lean against a shade tree across the street so I could watch for Hannah to arrive. I couldn't stay home any longer knowing I was so close to seeing her again. It was driving me insane not being near her and my heart continued to skip beats all weekend, serving as a constant reminder that she was somewhere else.

Looking down at my feet, while in a moment of thought, a cab slowly pulled up next to the shop and that's when I knew she

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was here. I didn't have to see her to know. My heart rhythm returned to normal the second the cab arrived meaning only one thing: my mate was near. A few moments later the cab drove away and there remained Hannah, slowly scanning the crowd and checking the time on her phone.

Unaware of my presence across the street, she moved to take a seat at a shaded table outside the coffee shop. Then she began to fidget with her skirt and play with a strand of hair. I would have walked over to her by now but seeing she was nervous I was curious if it would get the better of her and tempt her to leave. Watching a little longer I saw her play with the strap of her purse and slowly scan the crowd again, for me undoubtedly, with no luck. Then she checked her phone again.

That signaled it was time to stop watching and start asking questions. I want to know everything about her and currently there is no time to waste. Checking for traffic I crossed the street. And that's when Hannah noticed me.

As I came up to her she asked, "Were you there the whole time?"

"Ah, yes. I've been standing by that tree for almost half an hour. I couldn't wait at home and when I saw you arrive I couldn't help but watch. I hope that doesn't seem creepy. I didn't intend it to be."

Staring at me, Hannah said, "Under some circumstances it would be, so I guess it depends. Did you learn anything?"

"Well," motioning for the chair across from her I added in, "may I?" and she nodded for me to sit while trying to conceal a slight smile forming on her smooth face. "I observed that when nervous you fidget terribly and that you were also quite excited to come today, otherwise I don't think you would have looked through the crowd as much as you did. Am I wrong?"

After a brief pause I quickly added "Also, you look beautiful this morning."

Hannah started to say something but at my last comment she closed her mouth, continued fighting a smile, and looked off into the crowd. Then, while side-glancing at me, she gave in and smiled a deep, honest to god smile, one that cannot be faked.

"John, how is it that someone like you is still single?" Hannah asked with a slight laugh thrown in there.

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"What do you mean?"

"You seem to be.... honest, observant, sensitive, and very good looking. In a city like this those traits are hard to find in one man. I just wonder why you aren't tied down."

Smiling wide with a hint of mischief I replied, "You forgot charming. Let me buy you that coffee I promised and I will tell you anything you want to know."

"Alright, but I think shameless flirt fits better than charmer" she answered as she gathered her purse.

Rising from my seat I said "That's possible since I have had plenty of time to perfect my game but I would never use it on you. You deserve better than that."

Staring straight into my eyes Hannah searched for a hint of deceit. Finding none she finally rose from her seat and placed her purse strap on her right shoulder. As we walked toward the coffee shop entrance we interlocked hands causing something strange to happen. A burning desire for more physical interaction with Hannah erupted and reminded me of how I felt when we danced at the club. Only now, my body was on fire and the only thing causing it was our interlocked hands. I quickly stole a glance at Hannah to see if anything seemed different about her. She must have felt something as well because seconds later she changed course for a shaded bench.

Standing inches from me Hannah asked with an unsure voice and racing heart, "John....you wouldn't happen to be feeling, um, unusual, right now would you?"

Before supplying Hannah with an answer I saw her lick her lips and bite the bottom one. It may have been a reaction to what she was feeling but it certainly caused a reaction in me. Feeling the fire inside burn hotter, spreading to every inch of my body, I had to resist the urge to crash my mouth onto hers and taste the lush lips she was keeping moist and swollen. It was turning me on to the point of no return and we were still in a public place. Ripping her clothes off and having my way with her on a bench in front of a coffee shop with an audience of strangers is exactly what might happen if I kiss her and can't control myself afterward. No, we had to get out of here.

Staring into her hungry blue eyes, ones that seemed to mirror my own, I replied as my breath quickened, "I am and I think

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we need to skip the park and go somewhere more private. I'd hate for something to happen we might regret. We are in public after all."

"Yes...um, what about...your place??" Hannah asked as she breathed deep and toyed with my hand in hers.

Leaning in a moment so our lips just barely touched, I quickly tightened my grip on Hannah's hand. Then I turned us toward the street to view oncoming cabs. One was headed right for us, so I immediately raised my hand to wave the driver down. Once he rolled to a stop I opened the door and said, "After you."

Hannah slid into the cab and fussed with her skirt while I hastily gave directions to the driver and told him to step on it. We needed to get behind closed doors fast because even though we sat with distance between us the sensations within me continued to spread and pulsate, never relenting. I glanced at Hannah and found that she couldn't sit still either; one minute she had her smooth left leg perfectly placed over her right and the next they were switched. She didn't realize that with each adjustment she made a little more of her thigh reveal itself to me, driving me and my imagination wild.

My thoughts weren't the problem, however. With my heightened senses I could smell the arousal that rolled off her beautiful form and it only made it worse to control myself. Asking how much longer it would be, I stared out into traffic and gripped the door handle as Hannah's sex rose, causing my cock to throb, and me to chastise myself for not bringing my jaguar. At least then we wouldn't have had an audience to worry about.

Finally we pulled up to my building and once stopped I literally threw money at the cabby, grasped Hannah's hand, tried to ignore what her touch did to me, opened the cab door, and bolted for the lobby. Rushing to get inside I didn't even count how much I gave him and frankly didn't care. Hannah was my priority - getting her behind closed, locked doors and loving the bloody hell out of her was at the top of my list. *Hell, she was the list.* I realized this while my need to ravish her body rose, causing me to halt in front of the elevators and the stairwell next to them. The stairs would be faster but also a work out and right now I prefer the kind with less clothing and way more panting. The elevator would spare us breath but would result in the following - ***Hannah + enclosed space + me***

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+ *burning hot desires* + *security camera* = **OVER MY DEAD BODY!**

I knew what my choice was but since I wasn't going to be a gentleman much longer I looked to Hannah. "Stairs", she said as she pulled me in their direction, understanding the burning expression written across my face. With Hannah gently in tow I pushed the heavy stairwell door open and practically leapt up the stairs to the fourth floor, all the while grateful she wasn't wearing heels.

Once to my door I fumbled with the keys as my mind toyed with ideas of how to drive Hannah wild. I contemplated breaking the door down but quickly dismissed the thought. We needed locks for what I knew was about to come and you can't lock a door if it's broken.

Finding the key I wasted no time in opening the door, ushering her through, slamming it shut, and bolting it tightly. At the same time I checked the gentleman at the door and let the passionate lover enter, a lover with every intention of letting sexual cravings erupt with Hannah being on the receiving end ten times over.

Like a wild cat stalking his prey, I slowly turned toward an equally frustrated Hannah. I eyed her with a steel gaze full of hunger for her and proceeded to close the distance between us. Reaching her I lifted my hand to gently stroke her blushed face. Then I made a lover's confession before acting upon my desire to give Hannah a feeling of pure ecstasy.

"Hannah, I wish I could explain why I love you but I can't yet. I do know that I am yours in body and soul and nothing, *I mean nothing*, will ever change that." I drew her tight against my body after that, letting her know firsthand how much she affected me. Having one last thing to add I gave her a gentle kiss laced with a hunger for more on each cheek. Between heavy breaths and intense restraint I pleaded, "So Hannah, let me love you. Give *me* your body and soul.....*please*." I let these last words drip with yearning, making my intentions very clear. Now if only Hannah would love me back an eternity on this earth wouldn't seem so bleak anymore.

Swallowing hard, Hannah breathed deeply. Her gaze never left mine as she began to bite her lower lip again. Gently shaking

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her head while continuing to lock her eyes on mine she hastily made her own confession.

"I love you too. I don't understand it, at all, but I feel it and that's all that matters. So yes....I'm yours...." Grabbing the back of my head Hannah pulled me in and crashed her lips on mine for a hot, feverish kiss. After half a minute passed she reluctantly broke free and, with her lips skimming mine, breathed out the one word to send me over the edge....."*forever.*"

And that was it. At once I had her pinned against the wall, my sculpted body pressing against hers, letting our sexes tease each other. With my mouth back on hers, tasting and devouring her lush lips, I fumbled with the button on the back of her blouse while she began to undo my belt buckle. As she whipped my belt across the room I moved back slightly and raised her shirt up over her head and let it land at our feet. Then Hannah began to undo my shirt but I was too impatient and ripped it open. Hastily she pulled it off me.

Now skin on skin I grabbed her ass tight and lifted her up the wall till she wrapped her toned legs around my hips. She began placing wet kisses along my neck, driving me insane. Claiming her mouth once more my hands wandered down her thighs and beneath her skirt. They travelled back up to her perfectly taut ass and squeezed them until she moaned heavily against my mouth. With the fire inside burning hotter I let my fingers do the walking. While one hand held her in position the other slowly left her ass cheek and fingered her panties to the side, providing unlimited access. As I traced her wet and throbbing flesh she gasped loudly and fisted one hand in my hair while the other was suddenly on my wrist.

"John, wait. God, this is embarrassing." Hannah seemed torn on what to say next as she nuzzled her head in the crook of my neck. Puzzled by this interruption I reluctantly removed my hand from her clit and raised her chin till her eyes met mine.

"Baby, what's wrong?" I inquired, stroking her face gently.

Looking down Hannah began to play with the hair on my chest, twisting little strands around her fingers. When she was finally ready to talk, what she confessed was no surprise - I had smelled it on her from the moment I met her.

Still looking down Hannah said quietly, "I...I'm a.....virgin."

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"Well, then, I'll go slowly for you....until penetration." I raised her chin so my gaze could capture hers and with a devilish smile added, "After that, baby, I make no promises."

Hannah took a deep breath, pushing her bra covered breasts firmly against me. Hunger and greed for more consumed her, I could tell this because she was biting her lower lip again. Quickly shaking her head she breathed the magic words between gulps of air.

"Okay. Take me then, please, 'cause I... I can't stand it anymore."

"As you wish, baby," I growled deeply before possessing her mouth. This time my tongue licked her soft, succulent lips, forcing them to open wider and let my tongue intrude. Every surface of her mouth was tasted and, god, did she taste heavenly inside and out. But of course, that was not nearly enough. I had to have more. The need to possess Hannah completely erupted from me. I urgently moved us away from the wall and toward my oversized sofa. So consumed by Hannah, I almost had us falling into it. Bracing myself against the armrest I released Hannah so I could lower my pants to the floor and kick them off. Grabbing her I turned us around and that's when she truly surprised me.

I was going to lower us both to the couch but instead she pulled away and pushed me down into it. I watched her every move intently, from the way her deep blue eyes burst with love to the way her hands slid down the sides of her body from her sun-kissed breasts to the zipper of her skirt. Then I watched it fall to the floor. Slowly she stepped out of it, donning only silky white panties and a matching bra that conformed to her breasts perfectly. With slow, sexy steps Hannah came to me and lowered herself until she straddled my hips. Instantly I was on her again. First I claimed her mouth, then moved slowly down her neck and traced a path with the tip of my tongue until I reached her bra strap. All the while she was moving against my erection. She rubbed back and forth slowly at first but must have loved the feel of me on her skin because slow turned into rapid.

Not able to resist anymore I kicked our fucking into high gear. I unclasped Hannah's bra, ripped it from her delectable body and rolled her over. Tasting her skin again I moved further down this time and began teasing her taut nipples. First I flicked them

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with my tongue and then brought them inside, sucking and biting until she screamed bloody murder. I knew she was almost ready when she fisted the sides of the couch and arched her back, pressing herself into my erection. Yes, Hannah was almost there, but not yet.

"John!" she cried out.

"Almost, baby, I promise."

I wanted her a little more wet so I trailed kisses down her flat stomach and stopped at her panty line. Five seconds later they were over the couch and I had one hand strategically placed on a breast while the other began fingering her throbbing clit. It was so moist but, since Hannah was a virgin, I wanted more. I teased her at first, causing her to moan and arch against my fingers. I playfully pinched her folds, then stroked the pain away. Her clit began pulsating with need against my hand and instantly I had to feel all of her.

Slowly I pushed a finger past her clit's slick folds. Hannah's pussy was so tight, so wet, her sex hugged my finger as it gently slid in and out. To loosen her up I added another. With two fingers I moved inside her with increasing motion, pressing on all her sensitive spots. Hannah began to ride against my hand the faster I went. It sent her into orgasm, so I removed my fingers from her slick sex. Urgently, I took my boxers off. Lowering myself onto Hannah every feeling within me exploded. My heart raced wildly and my breathing quickened. My skin felt on fire and my cock was throbbing to touch her.

I brushed it's tip against her clit, teasing her folds with light circles. Hannah gasped and tightened her grip on the couch. Then her body arched toward mine, pressing her clit against my cock. Gently her folds parted. I went slow at first, providing soft thrusts against her tightness. Each time I went deeper until I hit her hymen. The tip of my cock pushed hard against it, yet it didn't break.

"Baby, I have to move harder, faster."

Hastily nodding her head Hannah demanded and pleaded with me at the same time, "Do it, John! I need you so much it hurts!"

With one hard thrust it broke. And Hannah screamed - loudly. But I kept the thrusts coming, my hard cock sliding in and

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out of her moist, tight pussy. My mouth kept busy as well. Returning to her breasts I moved from one to the other, suckling and biting, till they were swollen. That, along with rapidly fucking her pussy, sent Hannah into ecstasy, giving her multiple orgasms. Hungrily I possessed her mouth one last time, drinking in the taste of her sweat laden skin. I tightly gripped her body as I smelled her arousal reach its climax and I pressed every surface of her hot skin against mine. Then, with one last mad thrust, I came. And so did Hannah.

Chapter Five



John

"I don't think I'll ever get enough of you," I admitted as we lay there in bed, the clock reading half past five in the morning. Hannah had stayed the night after having hands down the best day/night of my existence - intense first-time sex on the couch, then sex in the shower followed by a late lunch and hours of talking. And then more sex. Eventually Hannah broke away, raiding my DVD and music collections and browsing through my extensive library. And in the process she showed me the real Hannah.

It was like I was the key that unlocked her heart. She had been holding back so much of herself from others and now everything flowed out at once, leaving herself vulnerable to me. It saddened me to know she hid the amazing person she is from the world but at the same time I knew that if it weren't for the locks on her heart I might never have found her.

"What if I don't want you to?" Hannah whispered as she looked up at me.

Cupping her smooth face I sincerely replied, "Then you would make me the happiest man on earth."

"Hmmm...good. That's the way I want it. But, ah, to change the subject, can I ask you something?" she asked while playing with the hairs on my chest.

"Anything. What is it?"

"John, what...exactly...happened last night?"

"Honestly I wish I could tell you. As soon as we linked hands outside the coffee shop I began having...uncontrollable...urges and feelings for you, ones that weren't going away. I craved you, desired you, *had* to have you," pausing I lifted her chin so she could see the truth in my eyes when

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I added, "but believe me when I say that I had already loved you and our intense physical attraction to one another is just an added bonus."

Still looking at me she asked, "And that's the honest truth?"

"Honest, I swear."

"Well, I believe you, I do, it's just....I wish there was an explanation for all of it. The exact same thing happened to me and it makes me wonder why, you know?"

"I do, but, having an answer wouldn't change how you feel about me would it?" I gently asked as I tucked a strand of loose hair behind her ear.

Smiling wide, Hannah moved closer and gave me a heavy, short kiss and then confessed, "No it wouldn't. Nothing will, I promise." Another sweet kiss was laid upon my lips, a little deeper than the last but still just as short. Long kisses weren't an option right now. Last night Hannah told me that a few days a week she works at a local library, besides having her night job. Today she had to go in for a shift, so her needing to leave was no surprise; we couldn't stay locked away from the world forever anyway, right?

Stalling had never been my strong suit but I used her weakness for my body against her and I brought her close before she could pull away. My plan was to strategically place light kisses down her soft neck and across her bare shoulder. However, this gave her full view of the clock on the far wall. Because of what she said next I regretted ever placing a clock in my room. They ruin everything.

"Now while I would *love* nothing more than to stay cooped up in here with you I *really* must go."

"No, I beg to differ" I said ardently.

"Really? Well then maybe you can go to work for me instead. Based on the library you built for yourself I'd say you have the qualifications except I also work tonight so let me think. Hmm.....nope. Sorry, sweetie. You don't qualify for that one." Hannah teasingly replied.

"You think so do you? Well I might surprise you." I said as I skimmed my lips across hers. Since she was teasing I thought I'd do a little of my own.

"There's lots of training so you'd have to be a fast learner."

"Oh, but baby, I am." Then I leaned in to silence her for

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good but my stunning mate's independence and mind of her own won out.

Pulling away from my kiss she had a smile plastered on her face but still said, "While you taste so irresistible I really must go, John."

With both hands up I chose to surrender. "Alright, I concede. But might I make a request?"

"You may make one and I may agree or disagree to fulfill such request." Hannah teased as she tried to sound English like me. Surprisingly she wasn't far off on the pronunciation but it wasn't the real Hannah.

"Was that supposed to have been me?"

"Perhaps, but I only said it to be playful. I actually love the way you talk. Promise me you'll never lose it." She lovingly demanded of me.

"Anything for you. And on that note, why don't you get dressed before I decide to take you prisoner and I'll start breakfast. Care for anything specific this morning?"

"Hmmm...surprise me. Think of this as a learning experience." With a sweet smile adorning her face, Hannah placed a brief kiss on my lips and left the warmth of the bed. I couldn't help but stare at her magnificent naked form as she gathered her clothes from on the hutch at the foot of the bed and headed off to my attached bathroom. In my eyes Hannah was a goddess and I her devoted servant, loving and protecting her till the end of days.

I was taken out of my reverie as the bathroom door gently closed. Not knowing how long she would be I couldn't afford to waste one second. Hannah spending the night in my arms was completely impromptu and didn't leave me time to decide how to handle my morning diet with her present.

Already an hour past when I drink my 8oz. of daily blood, I began feeling my fangs descend. I wasn't going to lose control or anything but I certainly wasn't going to let Hannah see me like this. I wanted more information about what lies ahead for us before telling her what I am and what she is to me. So, to quench my thirst before Hannah was to emerge again, I quietly sped to the kitchen and began pouring my blood into a clear glass.

Once gone, the glass found its way into the sink and I in front of an open refrigerator. Seeing I didn't have much to choose

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from, scrambled eggs and toast seemed like a safe bet. I had the eggs half done and bread on its way to the toaster when Hannah ever so quietly came up behind me and wrapped her arms around my waist, resting her head against my back. She thought she had snuck up on me but little did she know I heard every slight step she made.

"Those smell delicious." Hannah said as she breathed in their aroma.

"I hope scrambled eggs are okay. They are pretty universal..."

Shaking her head she interjected, "No, they're perfect...and my favorite." Sighing slightly as she took a seat at one of the kitchen bar stools she continued with a story about her father.

"When I was little, on his good days my dad would take time in the morning to cook breakfast before school. I would be sitting at the kitchen counter watching cartoons, something like Timon and Pumbaa from the Lion King movie. He almost always made scrambled eggs and toast. Well, burnt toast actually. He tried to convince me that burnt was better but he never succeeded." This glimpse into her childhood brought a smile to Hannah's face as she suppressed a laugh. It barely masked the sadness hidden in her eyes.

"Well I promise there won't be anything burnt on my watch."

Pointing to the toaster behind me Hannah laughed and said, "Um, I wouldn't be so sure about that."

"Oh, bloody hell!" I quickly released the blackened toast and tossed the slices into the garbage can. All the while she was laughing at my little mishap. "At least the eggs survived. Can my promise be postponed until tomorrow?"

"Alright but tell me something...." She paused to take another bite of eggs from the plate I had placed in front of her. "How is it that toast can kick your ass but these eggs taste amazing?"

"Contrary to what you witnessed just now I am actually a great cook. If you don't work tomorrow night why don't I cook dinner and you can put me to the test?"

"Hmm... sounds perfect. But how about you stay at my place tomorrow? Until we know what the future holds for us I

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think splitting our time between apartments is best."

Nodding as I looked at my watch I quickly said, "I couldn't agree more. But, you will have to call me later with details for tomorrow. I called you a cab and it should be here in a few minutes."

"Oh, thank you. I didn't realize it was getting so late." She quickly finished her eggs and orange juice before grabbing her purse and phone. "What are your plans for today?"

"Mm... dull stuff really. Probably edit some papers and then give Price a ring." I answered as we walked to the door.

"Price?" she asked.

"He is the closest person I have to family. Everyone else is gone but he has always been there. I don't really know how to classify him."

"He sounds great. Well, I should go. Don't want to miss the cab." Then she leaned in for a good bye kiss. She meant it to be short and sweet but I wouldn't have it. I deepened the kiss and added a little tongue in there so she would have something to dream about during her nap before work tonight.

Breaking away from Hannah's lips I sighed as I stroked the side of her face and said, "Don't forget to call me later."

"Wouldn't dream of it." Hannah replied as she opened the door to sneak into the hall while I would still let her.

"Good. And Han, I love you."

She had a brilliant smile on her face as I said those three little words. Hannah came back to me and placed a gentle but lingering kiss on my lips. As she backed up in the hall again she bit her lower lip and then, smiling again, said, "I love you too."

I watched her walk to the stairwell and turn to look at me one last time before she disappeared behind the heavy gray door. Forcing myself to close my own, I walked to the kitchen to clean up the dishes and silently gave myself a much needed pep talk. It was only one day that I needed to contend with but as the pain in my chest slowly increased since she left I knew it would feel like an eternity without her.

After about a half hour the kitchen was spotless once again, leaving me to proof read a few papers I just received and sort through my notes for my current ghostwriting job. Neither kept me distracted for very long. Giving up on work I chose to ring Price in

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hopes that he had made some headway. He had been working on some new translations from the books he showed me last week. It was a long process but once he had the basics down it didn't take him long to understand the rest.

Ringing....ringing....ringing...."Hi John. Checking in are we?" asked Price.

"Good morning to you too, Price." I answered halfheartedly.

"Uh oh, you don't sound too enthused. Have you talked to Hannah yet like I advised?"

"Yes, I did. We met for coffee yesterday, but didn't have the opportunity to buy any."

"What happened?" Price asked with concern in his voice.

"Well...we, ah, linked hands and then something strange happened to both of us. I'd rather not get into detail right now, but, needless to say, we spent the entire day and night together. She only left a little while ago to get ready for work."

"And now you have to suffer with a painful heart until you see her again, am I right?"

"Completely, and I can't take anything to numb the pain because you know what happens."

"Yes. I remember you tried that in the sixties and seventies. Not one medication or narcotic worked. Your blood just diluted everything; same for the alcohol. You tried so hard to get drunk during Woodstock but it barely affected you." Price said, reminiscing to when he was a child and my secret was under the care of his father before being passed to him.

"And some would say that is an advantage, but not if you are drinking to numb the pain." Sighing heavily, we both let brief silence linger before I continued. "Have you found anything in the books yet?"

"I haven't translated much else but found a lead on another book. There's just one problem. I called the college library in Virginia I traced it to and they haven't been able to locate that book for over a decade. It was last checked out and returned by an Andrew Jacobs but, since it was technically returned, they couldn't say he still had it. It was deemed lost in the system."

"Price, did I really hear you say the words Virginia and Jacobs?" I asked skeptically.

"Why? Is there something I should know?" Price asked,

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sounding more hopeful than he did before.

"Hannah is from Virginia and when I researched her parents deaths the names that came up were...." I paused for a second, almost not believing what I was about to say. "They were Penelope and Andrew Jacobs."

And then dead silence ensued.

"Do you think she knows - ?" Price began.

Quickly interrupting his train of thought, I retorted

"no....well, I don't know. Maybe. She hasn't given me any reason to believe she would."

"Okay, let's forget I asked. But if these two Andrews are one and the same then let's say for arguments sake that somehow he still had the book. With him dead his belongings would resort to Hannah. Is there any chance she would still have it in her possession?"

Letting this hypothetical talk sink in I closed my eyes and pinched the bridge of my nose. Knowing that this missing book could hold the key to a future with Hannah I told Price where to find her.

"Price, you will find Hannah at the Jefferson Memorial Library this morning. I think she is done at noon but you best leave now in case you do find it. Chances are she has the book or at the least knows its whereabouts. She may have had a hard life with her father but based on how she talked about him this morning she loved him and wouldn't just let everything go. I am positive she has kept some things to remember her parents by."

Stunned Price said, "Now I think I am hearing things, though it could be my getting older. Did you say Jefferson Memorial Library?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I know you don't believe in coincidences but how about fate or destiny because I am already there," he answered.

"You must be joking. Tell me you are joking, Price." I snapped at him.

"Before you called I was already coming up to the library entrance. There is a reference for a student's paper I need to cross-check before entering a final grade. Like I said, maybe it's fate or destiny. Maybe we are meant to look inside that book. Otherwise why would Hannah and I be in the same place at the same time?"

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"You are probably right, as usual. Well, when you get inside look for a woman with deep chestnut hair, big sea blue eyes, and a heart shaped face. She will be the most beautiful one there," I advised Price, smiling as I did so. Just the thought of her was making my heart go wild but at least it didn't hurt.

"Alright, I will try to be tactful but depending on how much she knows I can't promise anything. You know, if we are lucky she would have tucked the book away on a shelf that rarely sees visitors. A library this size would be the perfect hiding place for a book you don't want found."

"Yes, I suppose it would. Well you best get in there and be careful on approaching her. Her past is something she doesn't openly share with others."

"I see. But, ah, she did with you?" Price softly asked, not sure if he should have in the first place.

"Yes, she did. But I will give you details after you get that book. I need to know what our options are," I replied.

"Okay, I won't press you further but don't sit by the phone waiting. I will call you after I'm done here. Bye John."

"Good bye." Ending the phone call several emotions ran through me at once. I was elated at being so close to this book Price says could be the key to everything, but was also apprehensive about what it will tell us. Most of all I feared that Hannah may know about the world I was born into, making me wonder if she would accept me for who I am no matter our feelings for each other. I suppose we shall find out soon enough.