



ALL OVER AGAIN

KIRAN MICHAELS

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CHAPTER 1 – WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?

"Can't stand up alone
Can't say anything at all
In ten minutes I'll be laying out flat on the floor"
"Flat On the Floor"
Nickelback

My mind woke slowly, in a thick fog that I had to swim through toward consciousness. The first thing that I became aware of was that I was lying on my stomach with my right arm pinned underneath the weight of my torso. I was on a hard surface, definitely not a soft bed or couch, and I was cold.

I was wearing only a pair of pants and I could feel my long hair that was covering my cheek and left eye. The strands were stiff, not soft against my skin like they should been, as if something was in it that had caused it to harden. My goatee and mustache were stiff as well.

As I continued to slowly awaken I could hear what sounded like a train line in the distance, maybe just a couple of blocks away, that was busy with activity. I could also hear sounds of other traffic that was close by, but the sounds were muffled, making me think that I had to be inside a building of some kind. Air was gusting through the open room around me, making me wonder if I was in a large open space like a garage or a warehouse. Insects were flying in the air, too, and the sounds of their wings were helping me to wake up faster as well.

My mouth tasted like I had been asleep for a long time and from the light that I could see behind my closed eyelids I was pretty sure it was daytime, either early morning or late afternoon.

My left hand rested near my face on whatever surface it was that I was lying on and my left leg was bent slightly at the knee. I flattened my hand so that my palm was completely touching whatever the surface was and I felt something sticky and cold beneath my palm. The more awake I got the more I understood that the same sticky substance was under my face and chest as well.

The putrid smell of meat that had been left out at room temperature for too long began to fill my nostrils. A slight metallic smell that wasn't overpowering but made me feel even more nervous about my situation as I continued to climb to wakefulness.

Slowly I opened my eyes and looked around without lifting or moving my head in anyway. I could see that I was in an area that appeared to be like a warehouse that hadn't been used in a few years. There was a stack of broken pallets in my line of vision, but I didn't see much else as my gaze moved to my hand and focused on what I saw.

My brain was slow to recognize the fact that my hand and arm were covered in blood that was so dark it appeared black, meaning that it had to have been there for a long period of time.

Holy shit, I thought to myself frantically. What the hell is going on?

I then remembered the stickiness that I had first felt under my cheek and chest and even though I didn't want it to be, I knew that it had to be blood as well. I couldn't allow myself to think about it for the moment.

What was more important was that I realized that I had no idea how I got there. I didn't know what is going on.

Hell... worst of all I didn't even know my fucking name!

Calm. I had to stay calm. There had to be a valid reason for this, right? As I lay there looking at my hand for what had to have been minutes that only lasted seconds, I tried to figure out some possible explanation as to what the hell had happened to me. My mind wasn't telling me shit and that left me completely frustrated.

I figured that there had to be something nearby that would be a clue as to who I was and I was also sure that if I could find that something, everything else would come rushing back. I didn't see any jewelry or a watch on my left hand, nor did I feel any other form of jewelry anywhere else on my body.

Knowing that I was going to have to move so sooner or later, I used my left hand to push myself onto my right side. I saw then the pool of blood that I was laying in and how big it was, but again I couldn't let myself think about it right now. It would have to wait.

When I hoisted myself up I felt a long cut on the back side of my left arm that burned like a bitch with the pressure I was putting on it. I hadn't noticed it before, but my head was hurting on the right side as well, starting just above my right temple and running half way around my skull in an ache that promised to get worse.

I felt a little weak and off balance, but none of my wounds seemed to be life threatening for the moment. I flexed the fingers of my right hand to get the blood flow going through them again as I continued to roll over to my back. I could feel more blood beneath me, but for the moment I wasn't worried about it as I mentally checked my body for any other injuries.

I lay there a moment, trying to will myself to remember what had happened, but nothing came to me. Absolutely nothing. For all intents and purposes my life began when I woke up a few minutes ago. I couldn't think of my name, had no idea what city I was in. Nothing came to mind.

The sound of the insects caught my attention again from off to my left so I turned my head to glance in that direction. The first thing I saw was a male hand, laying palm up and not more than three feet from where I was. My eyes followed the hand up the arm and found that it abruptly stopped at the elbow. That was where the insects were hovering, buzzing in the air around the stump as well as feeding off the blood and flesh that had once been part of a person.

I felt bile begin to rise in my throat as nausea threatened to overcome me and I had to keep swallowing quickly in order to hold it down as I turned my head away. At least I now knew where the smell had been coming from even though the presence of the severed hand only added questions.

I looked straight up, knowing that I needed to move, needed to find help, but I was afraid to know what else was around me. I couldn't help but wonder if I had done something to kill someone or was I supposed to die, too. Am I a victim or a perpetrator? were the words that kept running through my mind at the moment.

Cold continued to creep deeper into my being, pushing me into action or go into a shock that would surely leave me immobile. I took a deep breath and rolled back to my right side before using my right hand to push myself to a sitting position. I kept my movements slow because I was already dizzy and I dropped my eyelids so that I looked around me through half closed eyes. After seeing the hand a moment before, I was afraid of what else I would find. Soon enough I found that my fears were justified.

It looked as if there had been a fight of some sort around me because everything in my immediate line of site was destroyed, either ripped or torn apart savagely. It looked like a wild animal had gotten loose and just went to town on someone.

The carnage mostly included a body. There was a great deal of blood in spotty areas where it had pooled around whatever body part it happened to be under and the number of bugs circling each mass was increasing rapidly.

I was on the verge of puking from the sight around me so I closed my eyes and dropped my head so that if I opened them again I would be looking in my blood soaked lap instead of the strewn body parts. I did some deep breathing to calm my stomach again and it seemed to help. For now at least.

I slowly moved to stand and was quickly reminded that my head was throbbing as dizziness threatened to put me on my ass again. I managed to stay on my feet long enough to open my eyes and stumble over to one of the support beams that ran down the middle of the building. The beam seemed really far away at first, even though it was only a few feet, but it became the anchor to my world as I put my hand on it and used it to steady myself. I was now facing away from the bloody scene I had observed a moment before, and I was relieved by what I found. Rather, what I didn't find.

There was no more blood and gore in this area of the warehouse so I now began to look for a way out. There was a garage door in one corner of the building and a smaller door to the left of it. My first instinct was to get out of here as quickly as possible and to find some sort of help so I started toward the door. I was aware of the fact that I had blood all over myself, but that fell second to getting away from the devastation that lay behind me. I headed for the door and the dizziness started to go away the more I moved.

As I walked I used both hands to pat the back pockets of the jeans I was wearing and I found a bulge in the left one that signaled there was a wallet there. That should help to provide some answers as to who I was and maybe why I was here, but it would have to wait until I was out of here. Getting away had to remain my first priority.

As I got to the pile of pallet pieces I saw when I first woke up I noticed what appeared to be a woman's foot on the ground on the other side of it. I couldn't see any blood from this vantage point and my stomach lurched at the thought of looking at another piece of what had once been a person. As I got closer I discovered that the foot was in fact attached to a young woman who was dressed in casual clothing and had long dark hair that pooled on the floor under her head.

I looked her over visually in an attempt to see if she was dead or just sleeping, but her clothes were black so it was hard to tell if there was any blood on her. She was lying as if someone had gently laid her down there, but I didn't recognize her and had no idea how she had come to be there.

Hoping that she might be able to shed some light on what had happened here, I carefully moved up to her right side and tentatively dropped to one knee. She made no move to open her eyes and I felt disappointment rise as I tried to wipe off the blood from my right hand before I touched her. Some of the dried blood peeled away from my skin, but much of it still remained. I reached out to check her neck for a pulse and was saddened when I didn't find one on her cool skin.

I didn't see a purse or anything else around her, but I did notice that she was wearing a pair of diamond stud earrings and that there was an engagement ring on

her left hand where is rested on her abdomen. I wondered how she had died and who was responsible even as I silently prayed that it hadn't been me who had killed her.

I checked the young woman over without touching her further and after a moment I was able to detect the bullet wound in her chest. Being around so much death and destruction without knowing how much of it I had caused left a sour taste in my mouth as I stood again and looked around the body, hoping that I had missed something that might tell me who she was, or better yet, who I was.

What appeared to be the shredded remnants of a flannel shirt, socks and a pair of tennis shoes were strewn on the floor about a stride behind me and that struck me as odd. Unfortunately I was finding it hard to concentrate by this point because the cold was really beginning to get to me and so far I hadn't found anything to cover myself with.

I continued to the door and when I got there I cautiously pushed it open to peer outside. There was a paved parking lot just out the door and I found no people close by. There was, however, a pick-up truck about ten feet from the door.

The cool colors of the twilight sky made it easy for me to tell that it was evening; maybe about a half an hour or so until sundown. I had no idea how the thought came to me, but for some reason the chill in the air told me that it was late fall. I left the building and went to the truck to look inside the passenger window, hoping to find a jacket or blanket that I could use to cover myself with. It wasn't a brand new vehicle, but it was in good shape. There wasn't any rust from what I had seen, nor were there any dents in the body. I wondered if it belonged to me or one of the dead people inside.

There was a pack of cigarettes on the dash and a map book on the seat. A half drank bottle of Coke and a Twix bar were on the seat as well. An empty McDonald's bag that had been waded into a ball and a pair of empty cups from the same restaurant were on the passenger side floor.

I stepped to one side to open the door and was disappointed to find that it was locked. So much for a way out of here, I thought to myself as my teeth started to chatter a little from the cold. A glance in the bed of the truck revealed an old suitcase that looked pretty well traveled and a makeup case that looked a great deal newer.

Inspired by the possibility that I hadn't yet checked the front pockets of my jeans, I patted the denim and found a lump that turned out to be a car key. I pulled it out and found a single key on the chain that was accompanied by a weird looking symbol, but I had no idea what it meant.

I tried the key in the passenger lock and was rewarded with an audible pop. I opened the door and grabbed the suitcase from the truck bed, then laid it on the seat so that I could open it up. Inside I found male clothing that didn't look familiar to me, but they looked like they would fit. I began to pull out the rest of the contents of the pockets of the ruined jeans I was wearing and dumped everything into the top of suitcase before stripping off the jeans and leaving them on the ground next to the truck.

I still had dried blood all over my body, but I was able to cover most of it by dressing in a fresh pair of jeans and a long sleeved t-shirt. The only real obvious place where blood was still visible was on my face and hair, but for the moment I was still more concerned about who I was. Now that I was out of the bloody carnage that was inside I felt that I could think better.

Once I was dressed I started to look through what I had pulled from my pockets. There was, of course, the wallet that I had found initially that I moved it to the seat of the truck to go through last. There was a handful of change and a five-dollar bill that I had pulled from one of my front pockets that I gathered up and put in the pocket of the clean jeans I had just put on.

Next in the pile was a key card for a room at a Holiday Inn Express with room number 112 written on the envelope it was in. It didn't say what city it was from, but I put it in my pocket as well, thinking that it had to belong to whatever city I was in and if I could find the right one, I would at least have the opportunity to sneak in and shower without raising questions as to where all the blood had come from.

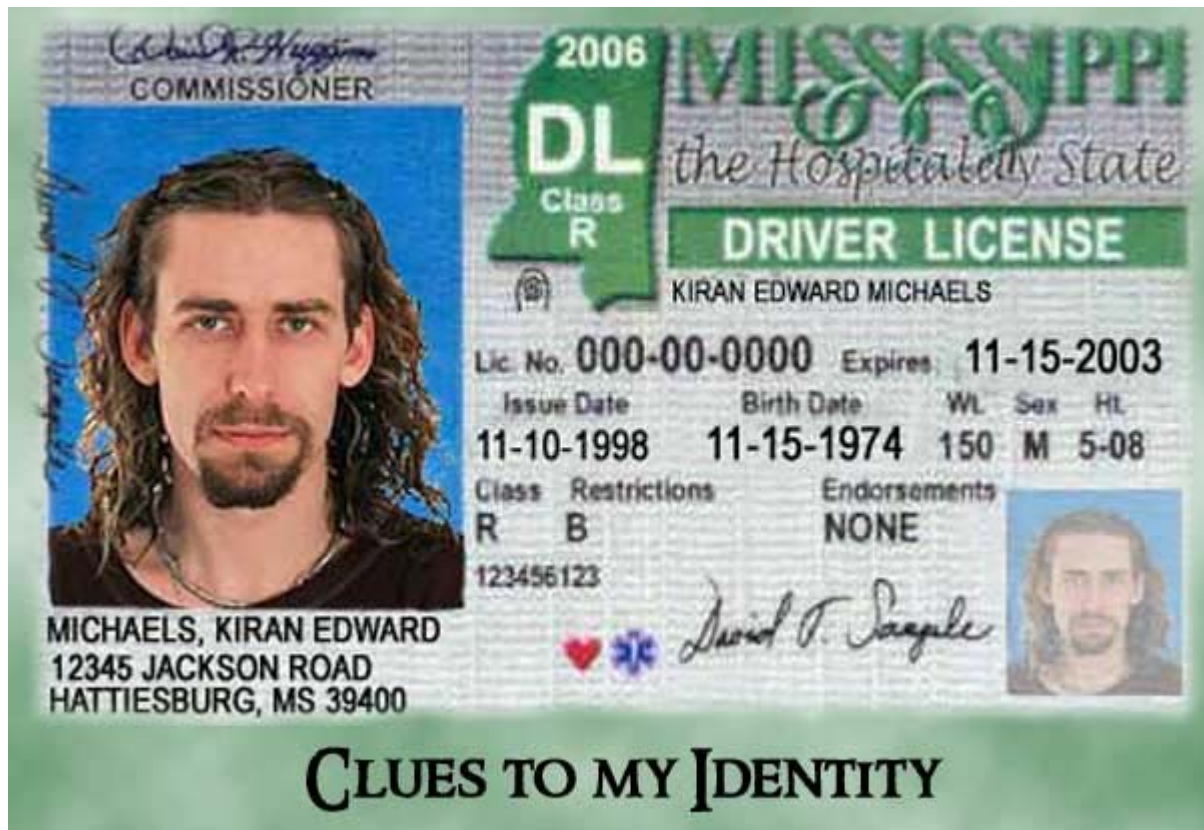
Lastly, there was a pack of matches from what appeared to be a restaurant/club in Montreal, Canada called Bardeco. The name meant nothing to me, but maybe someone there would know me so the matchbook became one of the few leads I had to find out who I was.

I closed the suitcase and grabbed the pack of cigarettes from the dash, lighting one with a match from the book. As I took a long drag I looked down at my still bare feet, knowing that I would somehow have to find a pair of shoes before I went too far. But before I worried about that, I needed to locate the Holiday Inn that the key belonged to so that I could get cleaned up before someone saw me and called the cops.

The cigarette was half gone when I grabbed the other case from the back of the truck and dropped it on the passenger seat. Inside was the lipsticks and mascara that I had expected to find, but there was nothing in it that identified who the owner of the case was. I thought about the girl who lay dead inside the building and I wondered if this case belonged to her. That thought led me to wonder if we had arrived here together since the suitcase containing clothes that fit me were in the same vehicle. I slammed down the lid of the case in frustration, wondering if I would ever know the truth.

I told myself that there was no use beating up a piece of luggage since it had nothing to do with my predicament and there were better things to do with my energy. What I needed to do was go through what I hoped would be my most valuable clue as to who I was. I had left the wallet for last because I hoped that it would contain much of the information I was looking for and I wanted to go through the rest of the items that had been on me first.

I snapped shut the latch to the case and put it back in the bed of the truck next to the suitcase of clothes. As I finished the cigarette I walked around the truck, checking it out as I did so. All the wheels were full of air and I didn't see any signs of damage to the body of the vehicle, which was a good thing. The plate was from Indiana and the tags were set to expire in June of '05. I got in the driver's side and found that the seat seemed to be perfectly adjusted for me, as were the mirrors, leading to me to believe that I had been the last person to drive it.



CHAPTER 2 – CLUES TO MY IDENTITY

"I can't escape these things inside I know
When all the pieces fall apart"
"Let Me Go"
3 Doors Down

I picked up the wallet and looked at it for a moment, half hopeful about what I would find inside and half worried that it wouldn't contain all the information I wanted it to. Slowly I unfolded it and the first thing I saw was a driver's license through a clear plastic window. I pulled it out and looked at the picture of the man in the lower left-hand corner.

He had jaw length, dirty-blond hair that was curly and wild looking. There was a mustache and goatee on his face that made me touch the hair that I had felt on my own face earlier and I realized for the first time that I had no idea what the hell I even looked like. I pulled my gaze from the driver's license and leaned over so that I could look in the rear view mirror. The light was fading, but there was enough left for me to see that my face matched that of the man in the picture.

My hair was longer now. And it was hard to identify that it was that dirty-blond color through all the dried blood, but the eyes that looked back at me were the same and so was the half smile that I found on my lips when I felt the relief that I would now at least know my name.

I looked down at the license again and saw that my name was Kiran Edward Michaels and I was from Hattiesburg, Mississippi. According to the date listed, my

birthday was November 15, 1974, making me believe that I was somewhere in my late twenties because the expiration date for the license was 2003. I then began to wonder exactly what year it was because the license plate on the truck expired in 2005. So I had either let my license expire a year ago, or the plates had been renewed for two years rather than one. I didn't know which was the case, but it was secondary to the immediate things I needed to deal with.

There was one hundred and thirty-eight American dollars cash in the bill compartment of the wallet. I also found a 'Frequent Gambler' card from the Casino de Montreal that triggered nothing in my memory as to how I had gotten it.

I also found a piece of paper with a name written on it that, like everyone else I had found, meant nothing to me. Jean Larue. There was an address as well and both were written in what looked like a man's handwriting. I wondered if I had been the one to write it and who Jean Larue was.

The last thing I found was a picture of young girl with red hair who looked to be around twelve years old. I looked at the back of it for a name, but there was nothing there. When I looked at the girl's smiling face again, I wondered who she was and what made her so special that I would carry her photo with me. Was she my daughter? Friend? Niece? Would I ever know?

I put everything back in the wallet and slipped it in the same back pocket that I had originally found it in. I then looked around the inside of the truck, wondering if there was anywhere else I could check out to find other clues as to how I ended up being inside that building.

My eyes fell on the glove box and before I even had a chance to think about it, I leaned over to open it up. Inside I found tons of paper napkins from various fast food restaurants, but from under them I pulled out three of maps, one of Indiana, one of Ohio and finally one of Quebec, Canada. I looked at all three and began to form the opinion that I had to be somewhere at least close to Montreal based on the card I had found in my wallet, the matchbook from a bar in the same town and now the map of Quebec.

One strange thing that I noticed while staring at the maps was that I, of course, had no problem reading the two maps from Indiana and Ohio because they were both printed in English. The really startling thing was that the map of Quebec was in French and I was able to read it without a problem as well. This little tidbit made me wonder how someone from Mississippi had managed to become fluent in another language, especially French since Mississippi seemed so far removed from any French speaking places. Unless you counted New Orleans, but I didn't know how close my hometown was to Louisiana.

This newfound piece to the puzzle only led to more questions. Did I travel a lot? Was that why my license might be expired? Had I moved to Montreal or somewhere else in Quebec and not applied for a new license yet? Was Kiran Michaels an alias that I had been using for some reason?

I looked in the glove box again and this time pulled out the registration and proof of insurance for the truck and saw that both were in the name of Vivian Waits from Bedford, Indiana. Again, this name meant nothing to me no matter how much I wished that it did. I couldn't help but wonder if I had stolen this vehicle from her and if so, what had happened to Vivian Waits?

As my mind continued to come up with more and more questions that I didn't have the answer to, my gaze dropped to a fourth map that I had seen on the seat when I had first looked in the truck. This was a map for the city Montreal,

confirming for me as much as possible what I was already thinking, that I was in that city.

I looked around the interior of the cab for any other cubbyholes, but all I found was one in the dash with some change in it. There was a pair of sunglasses hanging from the driver's side visor that were female in style so I figured that they must have belonged to Vivian Waits.

I lit another cigarette from the pack and sat there for a moment, knowing that I really needed to get as far away from here as soon as I could, but there was one word that kept sounding over and over in my head that kept me immobile. That word was why and I couldn't help but feel a cold emptiness in my chest because I couldn't answer the voice in my head that kept asking the damn question.

Briefly, I thought about trying to find the police about the scene that lay inside the warehouse, but things didn't look too good for me as far as if I was the one responsible for what had happened in there. I couldn't see a way to alert the authorities without implicating myself in the process, so finally I was able to prod myself into action by considering the situation logically. I wouldn't be able to find out who I was or how I happened to be in that warehouse if I was sitting in a jail cell. I started the engine and looked at the controls on the dash long enough to see that there was a half a tank of gas. That should get me where I needed to go.

It took me about fifteen minutes to come across a Holiday Inn Express after leaving the warehouse. Hunger and thirst were beginning to make their way into my consciousness, but I knew there was no way in hell that I could even go through a drive-thru the way I looked at that moment. Thankfully the doors to the rooms were on the outside of the building, so I drove around it until I found the matching room number that was on the envelope and I pulled the truck into an empty spot in front of the door.

I said a silent prayer that there wasn't anyone in sight as I cut the engine and slipped out of the truck, hitting the power locks and palming the key in one hand while I fished the pass key out of my pocket with the other. I felt like the Fates were smiling down on me when the door to the room unlocked and I pulled my sleeve down over my hand to turn the knob so that I didn't leave any fingerprints when I did so.

I switched on the lights with my elbow and looked around the room. It appeared as if no one had been here yet and I wondered if this was the right place. Figuring that I would take a quick shower and get out of there before I was found, I quickly went back out to the truck to grab the suitcase, putting the makeup case in the cab and locking the doors again before quickly returning to the room. I locked the door behind me and turned off the lights before going into the bathroom and starting the shower.

It took a while to get all the blood out of my hair and as I was trying to scrub it out; I found that there were two puncture wounds in my head. They felt like they were about the size of a skewer or a nail and were in the same location where I had felt the intense pain when I had first woke up. At first I was really alarmed because with all the water in my hair there was no way to tell if I was still bleeding. After probing around carefully I found that they felt as if they had scabbed over; so for the moment I was cool.

I wondered if the head injury could be the reason why I didn't remember anything, but then again that was just a guess. As far as I knew I wasn't a doctor

or anything so there was no way to be sure. I was up and walking so the damage the injury may have caused seemed to have affected only my memory.

Once out of the shower, I checked out the wound on my arm in the bathroom mirror. There were actually two deep scratches on my tricep that are already scabbed over as well and were spaced about the same distance apart as the puncture wounds I had found on my head. My arm was a little stiff, but other than that I was relieved that I didn't have any wounds that required medical attention because I had no idea what I would have told an emergency room doctor. At least luck was with me on that one.

I got dressed in one of the remaining sets of clean clothes in the suitcase and after that I sat in the dark room on one of the two double beds. There were three things that I was thinking about at the moment. One, I needed to get something to eat because by now my stomach felt like I had missed my last two meals and the hunger pains were beginning to make me feel queasy. Two, I needed to acquire some sort of shoes so that I didn't stand out like some kind of weirdo to anyone who might see me. Three, I needed to figure out who the hell I was.

I didn't know if I should trust it or not, but something told me that I wasn't staying at this hotel. I turned on a lamp and started to open the dresser drawers where I found women's clothing along with a purse.

I pulled the purse out and went through it, hoping that there might be some more information inside it that could shed some light on to what had happened to me. The license in the wallet belonged to Vivian Waits and the picture matched the dead girl I had found in the warehouse, which made my stomach feel like someone had just kicked me. At least I now knew what had happened to the owner of the truck, even though it wasn't a happy ending.

There was three hundred dollars cash in Canadian currency that I took, as well as two credit cards and a checkbook that I left behind; knowing that I wouldn't be able to live with myself after stealing anymore from a woman that I was afraid I had a hand in killing. There were pictures in the wallet as well, but I didn't recognize any of the people in them.

I came across a small box in a drawer amongst the dead woman's underwear and inside I found a matching wedding set, minus the engagement ring. I remembered seeing an engagement ring on the woman's hand at the warehouse and I slipped the man's ring out to try it on my left hand. It fit like it had been sized for me and I prayed to God that she and I hadn't been a couple.

I took out the woman's ring next and put it on my pinky finger of the same hand. It was a little big for that finger, but I decided to take the both of them. If push came to shove I figured that I could pawn them for cash and right now they weren't doing the dead woman any good. I needed money to survive and the rings were the only things of value I had found so far.

I was once again plagued with feelings that I had committed some serious crimes that I couldn't remember. The hunger pains in my stomach were continuing to leave me feeling weak so I decided that I had to get on with things. I used towels to wipe down everything I remembered touching in the room to remove any fingerprints and used a clean towel to wrap the clothes I had put on so that no blood got on any of the other clothes in the case. Most of the blood had been dried by the time I had put them on, so there wasn't much of a chance of contaminating the other clothing I had, but I wanted to play it safe.

I looked out the window to make sure no one was around the truck before I opened the door. I put the case back in the rear of the truck and left the hotel carefully so that I didn't draw any unwanted attention to myself. I pulled into the nearest McDonald's drive-thru and ordered a Super-Sized Big Mac meal and a couple of apple pies. It was the first time I had heard myself speak out loud and I was a little surprised to hear that I had a southern accent. I guess the realization shouldn't have struck me as odd since the license in my wallet was from Mississippi, but it was an odd thing to actually take in when I heard it.

I was eating in the parking lot when I noticed something else in the back of the truck. Burger still in hand, I got out and checked it out and found that it was an acoustic guitar in a case that had been stowed tightly under the lip of the passenger side of the bed for safe keeping. I didn't know how I had managed to overlook it earlier, but I decided that I would look it over later, after I had found somewhere to spend the night.

When I was finished eating, I drove around, looking for some kind of department store where I could buy a pair of shoes. It didn't take too long to find one and I put on a pair of socks before going in and buying a cheap pair of twenty-dollar gym shoes.

After checking out, I had an idea and stopped to ask the person at the customer service desk to borrow a pen and paper. The girl smiled prettily at me as she handed me what I had asked for and I wished her a good night before heading for the front door.

There was a payphone near the entrance so I went over to it and pressed '0' after putting the receiver to my ear. The operator answered a moment later and I said, "I'm lookin' for some information as to how to find a number for the States."

"I'm assuming you mean the United States?" the operator asked.

"Yes, ma'am," I answered.

"Do you have the area code?"

"I have the town and state," I offered hopefully. "I don't know the area code." I then told her the town and state that appeared on my driver's license and crossed my fingers. She gave me the number to dial go get the information and I quickly wrote it down on the paper.

I thanked her and told her to have a nice evening, then hung up and called the number she gave me. I got a different operator this time and she asked for what listing I was looking for.

"Kiran Michaels," I said without hesitation.

The other end was silent for a moment then she said, "I'm sorry I don't have a listing for that name."

"Do you have a listing for any Michaels' in that town?" I asked, trying not to sound too desperate, regardless of the fact that I was feeling that way.

There was silence again and I heard typing from her end. "Yes," she said finally.

"Could I have it please?" I asked. The operator rattled off the number and I quickly wrote it down on the paper under the first number I had been given. "Is this the only Michaels' listed?"

"Yes," was her reply.

"And what is the first name please?" I asked anxiously.

"Allison."

I smiled, wishing the woman were there so that I could kiss her for all her help, even though she didn't know how helpful she had been. "Thanks a bunch," I told her happily. "Have a nice evening."

"You, too. For a dollar fifty I can connect you directly," she offered.

"No, thank you," I replied. "I will call it myself. Thanks."

CHAPTER 3 – FINDING FAMILY

"I walk a lonely road
The only one that I have ever known
Don't know where it goes
But its home to me and I walk alone"
"Boulevard of Broken Dreams"
Green Day

I took a deep breath and dialed the number, not sure what I would say if someone actually answered. It rang four times before I heard a woman speak. "Hello."

I cleared my throat. "Good evening. Is-"

"Kiran!" she cried, her voice full of relief. "It's been so long."

I sighed heavily, relieved myself that someone actually knew who the hell I was. There was also a part of me that didn't feel like I was all alone anymore.

"Where have you been?" the voice asked. She had a Southern accent as well, but hers wasn't as thick as mine was.

"Montreal, I think," I answered, wondering how in the hell I was going to explain to this woman that I didn't know who she was. I should have taken a few minutes to gather my thoughts before calling the number, but I had been too anxious to know if there was someone out there who cared that I was still alive.

Allison echoed 'Montreal' while I was thinking, sounding as if that was the last place she expected me to be. "When was the last time you saw me?" I asked her.

"What?" she demanded, obviously not happy about my question. "You know, first, you call to say that you have this huge news and then you don't call for months and now you want to know when the last time I saw you was?"

I silently cursed myself for setting her off. "I'm sorry," I told her, hoping that she didn't hang up. "Listen, somethin's happened. I know this is gonna to sound really weird and I'm sorry but..."

"Kiran, what's wrong?" she asked, her voice once again changing so that now she was concerned again.

"I don't know what happened," I began, not wanting to tell her the details over the phone. "I woke up in this... I don't know what it was for sure. But I woke up and I have no fuckin' idea who I am. I only have my name from a driver's license I found in my pocket." I knew I was probably scaring her and I hesitated for a moment, wishing like hell that I didn't have to put her through all this, but powerless to do anything else. "I called information lookin' for a Michaels' listing in the town on the license. Are we related or somethin'?"

Allison paused, as if she were trying to take in what I had just told her. "Kiran, I'm your sister," she said, her voice telling me that she was just as upset about this whole mess as I was and that helped me to trust her more.

I sighed again; more grateful than I thought I would have been by the knowledge that I had managed to find a member of my family. "Thank God," I breathed. "I don't know what to do."

"You're in Montreal?" she asked.

I nodded, looking around me to make sure that no one was watching me oddly. "I think so. There's maps of Indiana, Ohio and Quebec in this truck and I've found a matchbook and some kind of gambling card that both say Montreal on them."

"Ian went looking for you," she said. "He tracked you as far as Pennsylvania."

I frowned; not knowing who this man was that she had brought up. "Who's Ian?"

"He's our brother," Allison explained. "Hold on a minute." I could hear that she was walking somewhere, and then I could hear her typing.

She asked where I was and I gave her the name of the store where I had gone in to buy shoes. Within minutes she informed me that she had narrowed down my location. "There's a hotel about a mile down the road," she said. "It's a Marriott. I'll make you a reservation and get a hold of Ian. I'll have him meet you there as soon as he can. But it might be a couple of days. Are you okay? Are you hurt?"

I shook my head. "Somethin' hit me on the head, but I'm okay. What day is it?"

"It's Tuesday, September 15, 2004," she informed me, her voice catching slightly. "It's Labor Day."

I was immensely relieved to know that there was someone out there that cared for me. Someone that, even though she was hundreds of miles away from me, was willing to help me. I didn't want to let her hang up just yet and I remembered something that I could ask her about. "My license expired last year," I told her. "Why didn't I renew it?"

Allison was quiet for a moment. "I haven't seen you in three years," she said sadly. "I don't know."

"Why? Have we fought or somethin'?" I asked, hoping that I hadn't damaged our relationship in any way.

"You've had wanderlust," she attempted to explain. "It happens."

She seemed pretty blasé about her explanation of our time apart, but unfortunately it only led to more questions on my part. "Wanderlust? What's that?" I asked.

"Look I can't get into everything over the phone," she said. "I'll find Ian and he will explain everything to you."

I nodded, knowing that she needed to find our brother before he could even begin to travel here. I hated to admit that I didn't want to be alone, somehow it felt incredibly unmanly, but there was no one that I could trust and for some unknown reason, that was what I needed the most right now. "Okay," I told her. "The Marriott you said?"

"Yes. It should be about a mile down the road."

"Okay. I have this number. I won't lose it."

I could hear the smile in her voice. "Call me when you get settled. Do you need anything? Do you need money?"

I smiled as well. "Right now all I need is a friendly face, darlin'," I said, wishing she were there beside me.

"I wish I could be there," she replied. "But I'll find Ian as soon as I can."

"Okay. What does he look like so I know him?"

She laughed nervously. "He's shorter than you are with dark hair and hazel eyes. He'll know you."

I sighed again, really not wanting to hang up. "Thanks."

"Get to the hotel and call me," she directed, causing me to smile again.

"Yes, ma'am." I paused for a moment, then said quickly, "I'm sorry, darlin'."

I heard her snuffle then and I knew that she had started to cry. "Be careful," she managed, making me wish that I hadn't done this to her.

"I have been so far," I assured her. We said our goodbyes then and hung up. I got back into the truck and found my way to the hotel Allison told me about and checked in without incident. Once I was alone in the room my mind went back to my original worries that I had been the one responsible for the death of those two people back at that warehouse and I wished to hell that there was some way that I could know for sure what had gone on there.

Maybe I was running from the law or maybe I had kidnapped that woman, Vivian Waits. I just wasn't sure of anything at the moment. Thankfully the room was a smoking one because I lit up as soon as I closed the door behind me. I had brought my suitcase and guitar in from the truck, but had left the makeup case locked in the truck.

I couldn't allow my thoughts to get too lost in things that I had no control over so I picked up the phone and called Allison back as promised. She was relieved when she heard my voice and she asked if the room was okay. "It's fine," I told her. "Did you get a hold o' Ian?"

Allison exhaled, obviously frustrated. "No. I'm still trying. I'll find him, I promise. And if I can't I'll find some way to come myself."

"I'll be fine," I assured her. "It's just that some stuff happened when I woke up that I'm not sure about. Stuff I don't think I should talk about over the phone."

"How bad was it?" she asked, almost as if she had expected that something had happened.

I hesitated for a moment, not wanting to go into it over the phone. "Very bad," I answered in low voice.

"Oh, Kiran," she replied, her tone full of what sounded like sorrow.

I couldn't help but feel surprised at her lack of alarm and I knew that my voice reflected that. "Have I done bad stuff before?" I asked.

She hesitated. "Sometimes," she said slowly.

I couldn't speak for a moment. It was like all of my worst fears had just been fucking realized and she hadn't even really explained anything. Had I killed those people? My mind went back to what I could remember of the scene I had woken up to. There had been body parts all over... blood... and I was right in the fucking middle of it.

But there hadn't been any weapons around that I could remember. If I had done it, how could I have possibly torn that man apart? I knew that I wasn't strong enough to do it with my bare hands. How had I done it?

"It will be alright," Allison was saying on the other end of the line. "Ian will explain things so much better when he gets there."

"It's not goin' to be alright, Allison," I told her, barely controlling my trembling voice. "You didn't wake up to what I did."

"I've woken up to some very bad things," she confessed, but in a sure voice she said, "It will be alright."

"The police may be lookin' for me," I admitted.

"Then keep your head down," she advised.

I thought about it. Obviously there was something about the situation that made her feel that everything was fine, so for the moment I decided to go along with her. "Will do. Do you think the phone is tapped?"

She laughed shakily. "Probably not. But it's still not something we should be talking about on the phone."

"I have no idea what to... it'll be okay," I said, hoping that I sounded convincing.

"It will be alright. Just wait for Ian." She paused then said quickly, "I gotta go. I gotta find him. Last I knew he was heading for New York."

"Okay." Then I remembered the picture I had found earlier and asked, "One more thing though, are you the red head in the picture I found in my wallet?"

She laughed again and I found myself loving the sound. "No, baby. That's Peta. She'll be with Ian?"

"Who's Peta?" I asked.

"She's our baby sister. Though, don't tell her I said that. She gets bigger than I am."

I hesitated, and then figured that the baby of the family must have grown up to be a big girl. "Will do," I said, feeling better about knowing exactly what one of them looked like, even if the picture was an old one.

Again we said our goodbyes and hung up. I turned on the television and started looking for a channel that carried the local news, hoping to find out if the police had discovered the murder scene yet. It was still early, though, only around nine o'clock, and no news would be on until eleven so I left the television on that channel and wondered what to do in the meantime.

I paced for a while, trying not to feel caged in and failing. Allison had said to keep my head down, but I was craving a beer pretty bad so I decided that I would leave long enough to get a six-pack and a couple more packs of smokes to get me through until Ian showed up. I called down to the service desk and found out that the nearest store was only a couple of blocks away and I decided to walk there for my supplies. I had made the decision that I wasn't going to use the truck anymore if I could help it and the walk would give me a chance to clear my head.

It only took about ten minutes to walk to the little convenience store that was surprisingly empty for the time of day. Inside as I was considering which brand of beer to buy, I noticed a young Asian woman who seemed to be noticing me as well. At first I was a little on edge by her attention, but she quickly turned her concentration to what she was there for and I told myself that I was being stupid.

I was standing in line by the time she left and I watched her get into a nice Lexus with a male driver who seemed impatient. I couldn't help but notice that the girl was kind of nervous about something and that the guy behind the wheel was speaking to her in what appeared to be an angry tone. As I left the store I noted that they took off in the same direction as my hotel, but since I was on foot I quickly lost them in the nighttime traffic.

I made sure that I kept an eye out for cops and generally kept my head down as I walked back to the hotel. I went to the back entrance where my key card would open the door and as I did, I noticed that there was a woman sitting on a big rock near the drive that I would have take in order to get to the door. It was obvious that she was crying and was hiding her face in her hands.

I stopped about ten feet away from her. "You all right, ma'am?" I asked, sounding textbook southern.

She made an attempt to stop crying and glanced up enough to look at me. "Yes," she sniffled, obviously embarrassed at having been found in the state she was in and wiping her face in quick, jerky movements.

I was surprised to find that it was the same woman from the liquor store and I wondered what she was doing here and more importantly, where was the man she had been with. I took a quick look around me to make sure that no one was lurking in the shadows to jump me, but there weren't any bushes around for someone to jump out of. I knew that it would be just my luck if this girl was a plant of some kind and that the guy she was with had something to do with what happened to me, but I tried to suppress my feelings that everyone was out to get me for the moment. "What happened to the gentleman you were with back at the liquor store?" I asked quietly.

"He was no gentleman," she answered bitterly and I saw that her mascara was runny from her tears.

I tried to play it cool, like I wasn't nervous about the situation. "Do you need to get somewhere?" I asked her, already telling myself that there was no way in hell I was bringing her up to my room.

"No, I don't have anywhere to go," she replied in a low voice. She took a deep breath and wiped her face again before getting up from the rock. She stumbled a little; drawing my gaze down to her foot to see that one of her heels had broken off. She cursed colorfully then pulled the offending shoe off and threw it into the nearby field. She then removed the other shoe and tossed it as well.

The light in the parking lot wasn't the best, but I was able to see that she had a hand sized red spot on her cheek that would probably be an ugly bruise by morning. I wasn't sure what kind of a man I had been before I woke up tonight, but I was pretty damn sure that hitting women wasn't something I found acceptable.

"Where you from, darlin'?" I asked, thinking to myself that I really didn't want to be involved in whatever her situation was, but it seemed that she wasn't there to bring me down or anything.

"San Francisco," she replied.

"You're a long way from home then," I commented. "How are you gettin' back?"

She shrugged; trying not to look too scared about the predicament she was in. "Walkin' I guess. Better get started. It's a long way to go."

I held out a hand, not to actually stop her or anything, just enough to get her attention. "Wait. Is there someone who you can call?"

Her gaze told me that there was no love lost for the man she had been traveling with, but I could see a little fear there as well. "You mean besides the bastard who dumped me here?"

"Don't you have any family or anythin'?"

She shook her head. "Not that I can call."

I juggled my bag containing the beer and cigarettes and reached onto my pocket for my cash. "I don't have much but here, take this," I offered as I pulled out two fifties. "Get a room for the night and maybe you can think of someone to call in the morning."

The young woman shook her head and held up her hand. "No, I cannot take your money. It wouldn't be right. But thank you for the offer," she said before starting to walk away.

I did put my hand on her arm this time to stop her. "Wait. I know it's not much, but I've had a bit of a bad night myself." I held out the money again. "Take it, please. It would make me feel better."

She looked at me for a moment and then hesitantly took the money from my hand and leaned in to kiss me on the cheek. "Thank you. At least I've met one gentleman tonight."

"I hope things work out for ya," I told her.

She gave me a half smile before saying, "Thank you."

I let her walk away this time and I worried about her as I entered the hotel. I was worried that she was alone in a strange city with no money, but I knew that my situation was too precarious to bring her in to it right now. I would like to think that if I had an idea of who I was that I would have offered for her to stay with me in my hotel room until I could help her get home, but there was no way that I could do that now. I went up to my room and popped open an ice cold beer, taking a long drink before lighting a cigarette and sitting on the bed as I tried to push my worried thoughts of the girl out of my mind. I had bigger fish to fry.

Hours passed and as promised, the news came on at eleven o'clock. The top story was what I had feared... murder in the Old Port of Montreal district. The anchorman described how police had received an anonymous tip about a possible homicide in one of the warehouses and how two bodies had been found. Next the television screen changed to show a picture of the warehouse where I had woke up a few hours earlier and then a sketch of the dead woman I had found. The anchorman informed watchers that police were looking for clues as to the woman's identity as well as that of the other unnamed victim, this one a male.

What I hadn't expected to hear was that a suspect had already been apprehended in the case. Apparently whoever had been arrested was also wanted for three other like murders that had occurred over the past year and had been eluding police for months. The screen then changed to a guy who was being held tightly by two police officers as he cried out, "I didn't do it! It wasn't me!"

The guy didn't look familiar to me at all and I couldn't help but feel a little guilty about the situation. I still wasn't sure about what my role had been in the murders of those two people, but I was half convinced that I had done it myself... and I couldn't help but think that there was a history of it in my family based on some of the things that Allison had said on the phone.

But I was trying not to get swept away by it. What I needed to think about was that at least the police weren't looking for me and that was certainly one thing to be happy about. And to be honest, I did feel a bit relieved even though an innocent man might be in custody instead of me.

For the moment I was safe. I was hoping that Ian would get here soon and that he would be able to explain why Allison wasn't freaked out when I told her what little I had about I had woke up to.

I also hoped that somehow this guy that Allison said was our brother would spark a memory of who I was. I was sure that it was too much to hope for that seeing him would bring back some of what had brought me to that warehouse in the first place, so I was just hoping to recognize him when he got here.

I decided the best thing to do was to turn in for the night. I had polished off the six-pack while I had waited for the news to come on as well as about a pack and a half of cigarettes. I hoped that the morning would bring more answers as I stripped down to my boxers around one o'clock and I soon fell into a troubled sleep.

CHAPTER 4 - WOMEN

"Another face that I don't know
Another night of people asking what I have to give"
"Who I Am"
Smile Empty Soul

Red.

I was lying on my back on the floor, and everything around me was red. I could smell the metallic scent of rotten meat that lingered in the air like a sickness as insects buzzed nearby. There was a cold stickiness of blood on my body and I could taste it in my mouth.

"No," a woman's voice said firmly.

In the blink of an eye I was suddenly laying on a soft bed beside a beautiful dark haired woman, holding her close in my arms as I kissed her. Her lips tasted like coffee, and she smelled like vanilla. We were both naked, and her soft hands were caressing my body in all the right places as our mouths fed from each other. She whispered my name as she pushed me onto my back and began to kiss her way down my body.

Just as suddenly she was gone and I was back on the floor, once again lying in a pool of cooling blood. I looked up and saw that blood had been splashed on the ceiling above me, and now it dripped down from several places, landing on my chest and face.

"No, Kiran," I heard the woman's voice say again.

Next I was standing in a park, watching the same dark haired woman play with several young children. She looked familiar to me, but I didn't know where I had seen her before. After a few minutes, their parents came to collect the children, and after they were all off she came over to me, putting her arms around my neck. "It's days like these we live for, isn't it Kiran?" she asked as she went up on tip toe to kiss me.

As our lips touched and I felt a sharp pain in my head where I had been wounded when I woke up in the warehouse. I reached up and felt something long and wooden attached to my skull. I pulled it out and saw that it was a 2 x 4, with two long, thin spikes driven through one end. The spikes were covered in blood and little pieces of brain matter. I dropped it to the floor and fell to my knees, retching from both the sight of my own blood and the pain in my head.

"Kiran, stop it," I heard the woman say, her voice concerned and urgent.

Then the pain was gone, and I found myself sitting on the end of a bed in a hotel room. The dark haired woman was coming out of the bathroom, wearing nothing but a pair of underwear and a towel draped around her neck, barely covering her breasts.

"You have to stop doing that," she said softly as she reached me. She then dropped to her knees at my feet, lifting her warm hands to touch my face.

"I have to," I heard myself say.

The hotel room shifted and I was then standing in the middle of the warehouse again, holding a gun and pointing it at the woman's chest. I realized in that instant that this is the woman whose body I had found in the warehouse, Vivian Waits. I

pulled the trigger and the gun fired, but somehow the bullet never got to her and she started to walk toward me.

"Stop it," Vivian said again, looking upset. "You didn't kill me."

"Who did then?" I asked, still holding the gun. She was quite a ways from where I had awakened, but there was none of the blood and gore that had been where I now stood.

"A dead man," she told me as she continued to move closer.

"I don't remember what happened," I told her. "Please... I gotta know."

Vivian tried to smile, but her gaze was troubled and she looked toward the door. "We came here to help Mia."

I looked at her in confusion. "Who's Mia?"

"A friend. She and Jean are trying to make peace. We need to help them," she told me, then hesitated sadly before correcting herself. "You need to help them."

Somehow I knew that I was giving her a puzzled look. "Make peace with who?" I asked.

I heard a knocking from somewhere but I didn't stop to think about it. The knock hadn't come from anywhere in the warehouse, but I still heard it and ignored it for the moment. Vivian seemed to hear it as well because she looked around as if she were trying to find it too. Her eyes found mine again and she pleaded, "Find Mia. Help her."

I reached out to her. "I can't help her. The police are probably gonna to be looking for me. I can't stay here."

The knocking got louder and she shook her head. "You have to help her. That's what we came here for-" she hesitated, then spoke as if she was correcting herself. "What you came here for." She started to fade then and so did the warehouse around us.

"Wait," I called out. "I gotta know. You say that I didn't kill you, but what about the man who was ripped apart? Did I kill him?"

The pounding was getting louder and louder. Vivian's features became firm and she said; "Only one, but he deserved it."

I awoke with a start and remembered instantly that I was in a hotel room that my sister had reserved for me in Montreal. I also noted that the reason I was awake was because someone was pounding on the door and not letting up. It wasn't morning, given the lack of sunlight teasing at the corners of the curtains. I turned my head on the pillow to see what time it was and saw that it was four in the morning, barely three hours since I had fallen asleep to begin with.

I switched on a bedside light before I stumbled to the door to look through the peephole. I realized on the way that I was still kind of drunk, but I had enough of my faculties about me to wonder who the hell was at my door at such an early hour.

It took a moment for my sleepy mind to process that there was a red haired woman standing in the hall, one who looked really impatient. She was pretty enough, and the way she was dressed told me that she wasn't in any way affiliated with the hotel unless she was off the clock. She was wearing a tight vest that exposed as much of her bosom as it covered and she had these earrings in her ears that looked big enough to use as a satellite dishes.

"Who is it?" I asked, my voice grumpy from being woke up.

Her voice was full of impatience as she looked at the peephole. "Damn it, Kiran, just open the door."

Well, she seems to know me, I thought, so I opened the door enough to look at her. "How do you know me?" I asked, but she forcefully pushed the door open, causing me to take a step back to avoid having her run right into me. She stepped in the room without another word and smacked me really hard across my cheek once she was inside.

"I'm not going to play games with you Kiran," she said fiercely as she threw her arms around my neck and pulled my mouth to hers for a hot kiss. I tried to resist her at first, but the combination of alcohol and the beautiful woman that was so eager in my arms caused me to forget the fact that I didn't know who the hell she was for the moment and I began to kiss her back.

I pushed her back against the closed door and she seemed to like it, if the moan that escaped from the back of her throat was any indication. She began to caress my body where she could touch it and I liked the contact as well.

After the kiss had gone on for a while I had a moment of clarity where I remembered that I had no idea who this woman was. I tried to pull back to say something, but she wouldn't let me since her hands were now fisted in my hair. I was soon lost again in the heat of her talented mouth and I slipped my hands under her shirt to touch her warm skin.

One thing quickly led to another and before I knew it we were on the bed, her clothes lost somewhere along the way as were the boxers I had worn to bed. I was on top of her and I pulled back enough to say breathlessly, "Darlin', I hate to say this, but I hope that we know each other if we're carryin' on like this."

She frowned slightly. "It's only been a year, Kiran. Don't tell me you forgot me already," she said before pulling me down to her for another kiss.

My mind was taken over by the need to possess her. I didn't care that I didn't know who she was, all I thought about was the need I felt and that hers appeared to be as great as mine. She seemed to know exactly what I liked because she was touching and kissing me in all the right places that drove me crazy and I must have had some inherent knowledge of her, too, because she was also responding well enough to what I was doing to her.

After we had both reached satisfaction, we lay on the bed side by side, neither of us saying a word. As my mind became my own again I thought about the questions that were in my head to ask her and I turned to voice some of them, but I found that she had already fallen asleep.

I tried to wake her up to ask her who she was, but she didn't stir. I wasn't feeling the effects of the six-pack anymore and for that I was grateful. I got up and found my boxers close to the bed and pulled them on, then turned to take stock of her clothing, finding her purse near the door where she had dropped it.

I only felt a little guilty going through it, but I figured if she had given me a chance to talk before she had attacked me with her incredible mouth I wouldn't have to go through it to find out who she was.

In her purse was a palm pilot and a couple other strange looking electronic devices that I didn't know what they were. Her license was in her wallet and said that her name was Sarah Pearl, from Minneapolis, Minnesota. Also in her wallet was a picture of the two of us, looking rather 'together' with our arms around each other, so I felt a little better about having just slept with her. At least she wasn't

some stranger to the man I had been before today and hopefully I could find out something about myself from her.

There were various tubes and jars of makeup in her purse as well as both American and a considerable amount of Canadian currency, over one thousand dollars total. There were a couple of chips from the Montreal Casino and a frequent gambler card like the one I had found in my wallet.

Maybe gambling was something we had in common, I mused to myself.

There was also a set of car keys, but there wasn't a strange symbol on the ring that matched the one I had found on the keys for the truck.

I went back to the bed and tried to wake her up again. This time my prodding worked and she woke with a start.

"How do you know me?" I asked, my voice very serious.

Sarah stretched languidly, bringing my attention once again to her bare breasts as she did so. "I know you quite well," she said with a knowing smile before frowning slightly. "I thought we weren't playing games."

I had to turn to step away from the bed, keeping my back to her because just the sight of her naked body was making me want her again. "This isn't a game. I woke up tonight without a clue as to who the hell I am."

I heard her move as if she was sitting up on the bed, but I didn't turn to look at her. "What are you talking about? Do you have amnesia?" she asked as if the possibility was crazy.

"I have a couple of holes in my head from the feel of it," I told her, still not looking in her direction. "I don't know what happened."

She got up then and walked over to me, putting her hand on my shoulder from behind. "Where?" she asked, her voice full of concern. "Show me."

I turned to face her, trying hard to ignore the fact that she hadn't even bothered to wrap the sheet around her as I took her hand and put it in my hair so she that she could feel the two scabs. She then looked around the room and as if finding what she was looking for, went over to the table and opened her purse. "What did you do, go through my purse?" she asked in surprise. "I thought we talked about this already."

"You didn't give me much of a chance to find out who you were, Sarah," I explained. "I had to know." She pulled out one of the devises I had seen and came back over to me. "What is that?" I asked.

"A little something I made," she said, an amuse smile tugging at the corners of her mouth as she held it about an inch from my head, but I backed away and took her wrist so that she couldn't bring it closer again.

"What is that?" I asked again, my voice hardening a little, causing her to look at me in confusion.

"It's a biopack," she explained as if I should know exactly what she was talking about. "It won't hurt you."

The thing looked like something from the inside of a computer. It was two inches square and had red and green lights all over it that were twinkling. "What are you, some kind of Trekkie or somethin'?" I asked her, trying to lighten the mood by giving her a half smile as I loosened my fingers around her wrist.

She smiled back. "Not really."

She tried to move the device closer to me again and this time I let her, but I kept my fingers around her wrist to pull her hand away if I wanted. I was watching her closely, but she was focused on what she was doing and didn't notice. I smelled something that reminded me of brand new electronics in the air as she looked at the device for a minute or two and she frowned. "What hit you? Nails? Spikes?" she asked.

"I don't remember anything before this evening," I explained as I dropped my hand from her wrist and looked at her.

"Not even why you're wearing a wedding ring?" she shot back as she glanced at the hand I had just dropped. There was no mistaking the fact that she sounded a little disgruntled about that fact and sounding very jealous in the process.

I lifted my hand and looked at the two rings I still had on. "I'm not sure," I said, not wanting to disclose the fact that I had only taken both rings in case I needed money and had to sell them.

She looked at the gadget as I spoke and I could smell that electronic scent again. "You stole it?" she asked in astonishment after a moment.

I took a step back, not sure how in the hell she had known what I had been thinking as I glanced at the device in her hand and wondered again what it was. "I figured I could hock it if I needed to," I explained. "It was before I called my sister." I watched Sarah closely as I said that last part to gauge her reaction. If we had really been together then I figured that she would have to know my family.

Sarah crossed her arms under her breasts, making sure not to crush the device in her hand. "What, you had Allison's number in your pocket?" she asked as if she still wasn't convinced I was telling her the truth.

"No," I said, turning away from her and the reminder that she was standing naked in front of me. I was getting aroused again just looking at her and right now I needed to think about other things. "I called information," I explained, my voice sounding strained.

I felt her as she came up close to me from behind and put her hand on my wounds again. "I tried to heal it," she said in a low voice close to my ear. "It didn't work."

I stiffened when she touched me and moved a little away, but not enough to totally break the contact. "Thanks for the thought, darlin'. But it's not like we can just heal people with a thought."

She laughed lowly. "Well, some people can."

I took the chance and looked over my shoulder at her. I could feel the heat of her body because it was so close to mine and I could see that she was amused. "What's that supposed to mean?" I asked.

She smiled. "Some people can do a lot of things with their mind," she said secretly as she put her hand on my back and began to run it downward my spine. "Some people just use instinct."

Her touch reminded me of her state of undress and I decided that there was time for me to question her more about the subject later, I turned to face her again and put my arms around her. She leaned into me so I could feel her heat down the length of my nearly bare body and I loved the way our bodies fit together.

"And what do you use? Mind or instinct?" I asked in a low, husky voice as my fingers glided over her skin. I didn't really care about her answer, but I asked anyhow.

"I use everything I can," she said with a provocative smile as her hands started to roam again on my chest and shoulders. "My mind. Your instinct. Whatever works."

I picked her up easily and moved back to the bed. Sarah carefully put the device on the table next to the bed, and then put her arms around my neck. "We'll discuss this more," I said just before kissing her neck. "Later, though."

She laughed a little, saying nothing as she moved her mouth to meet mine and for the moment she was the only thing that mattered to me. Tomorrow would be soon enough to figure the rest of it all out.

CHAPTER 5 – STRANGE BEDFELLOWS

"I paint a picture of the days gone by
When love went blind and you would make me see"
"I Remember You"
Skid Row

I awoke to light coming through the curtains. Sarah was snuggled up against me; naked and sleeping like a baby. I slipped carefully out of the bed and went to the bathroom have a shower and clear my head. When I was done I found that she was still sleeping peacefully, one bare leg visible against the white sheets that only covered her otherwise to the waist. I lit a cigarette and sat at the table to watch her. Within a couple of hits she was stirring on the bed and I waited for her to open eyes. "Mornin', darlin'," I said when her gaze met mine.

She smiled sleepily. "Mornin'."

"You hungry?"

Her smile got bigger as she eyed me like I was the main course. "For food?" she asked, openly challenging me as she bent her knee and the sheet slid even further up her leg.

I raised an eyebrow at her and took another hit from the cigarette, not saying a word.

She stretched lazily, never taking her eyes off of me as she did. "Why don't we call for room service and have a picnic," she suggested.

"As long as we keep it in here," I told her with a smile. "I promised Allison I'd lay low until Ian got here."

Sarah's expression brightened. "You mean I finally get to meet some of your family?" she asked enthusiastically. "I was beginning to think they were figments of your imagination."

"You never know," I told her ironically as I tapped the cigarette in the ashtray that was on the table to ditch the ashes that were on the tip. "They might be."

She laughed and I found myself liking the sound a great deal. It was easy to see that she was a free spirit, someone who was never tied to one place for too long and doing everything on her own terms. I thought that must have been what had attracted me to her in the first place. "Where'd we meet?" I found myself asking her.

She smiled a little smile that said she was remembering the time we had been together and her eyes glazed a bit. "Minneapolis," she said, biting her bottom lip slightly.

I tilted my head to watch her better. "How long ago?"

"Two years."

I hit the cigarette again. "How did we meet?"

The smile got bigger. "I was in a backroom poker game when you walked in and joined the table."

Poker, huh? That was interesting. "Really?" I asked. "Was I any good?"

"You took every hand until I had nothing left to bet... except me," she said with a flourish of arm movement, causing me to grin. Her arms dropped to the bed again and she continued in a low tone, "You won that hand, too."

I adjusted myself in the chair and crossed one leg over the other so that one foot was on the knee of the opposite leg as I continued to look at her. "Last night you said somethin' about not seein' me in a year."

Sarah nodded. "That's right."

"Why is that? What happened?"

Her expression turned sour. "You tell me. One day you were there, the next you weren't," she said bitterly, her eyes not meeting mine. It was obvious that she was... annoyed by my actions... pissed off may have been a better word.

I found myself wishing that I knew what had happened. For both our sakes. "What do I do for a livin'?" I asked, changing the subject.

She smiled. "Do? I don't know. Anything. Everything. Not sure I ever saw you work, except with a guitar." She looked at the guitar case then and my gaze moved to it as well. "You sang for your supper. I'm really lucky at... well, cards, slots, dice. We got by."

"How long were we together?"

There was no mistaking the bite that was in her next statement. "Almost a year before you walked off," she said as she looked at me defiantly.

Her impertinence was almost lost to me because I was busy trying to piece together the timeline of my life. "So that was what, 2002... 2003..."

Sarah nodded, her eyes avoiding mine. "You left in July of 2003. I met you in August of the year before."

I knew the subject had to be a hard one for her, but since I had no memories of the time I had spent with her I had to ask about it. "Did we live in Minneapolis then?"

"Yes."

I thought a minute, figuring that it must have been really hard for Sarah when I just up and left like I had. Even though I had no idea of the circumstances, I felt incredibly guilty because of my actions. "I'm sorry if I hurt you," I said finally, knowing that there was no way this late apology would make everything better for her again. I liked to think that I had a good reason for leaving the way I had, but I wasn't sure I would ever know that for certain and I wanted her to know that I recognized the fact that I had been wrong.

My heart lurched a little when she looked away quickly and grabbed the sheet to cover her bare chest. "I was real mad for the first six months," she said stiffly, then shrugged. "I got over it."

She sat up then, holding the sheet over her chest as she did. We were both silent for an awkward moment then Sarah moved to the edge of the bed and stood up. "Why don't you call for room service?" she suggested as she wrapped the sheet around her body.

I nodded, glad for something to do after the tense moment. "What'd you want?"

She shrugged. "Whatever you're having. I'm going to go take a shower."

She didn't have to come close to me to get to the bathroom so I stood and moved to block her path. There was still one question that I had to ask before we went any further. "How'd you know I was here?" I asked.

She gave me a half smile and met my gaze boldly. "A woman told me that a tall, blonde, southern gentleman gave her money to help her out." She reached out and touched my chest with her fingers lightly. "It had to be you, darlin'."

I nodded, remembering the girl from the night before and hoping again that she was all right. "Where'd you see her?" I asked.

Sarah glided her hand up and down the center of my chest lightly. "The casino. She won almost as much money as I did."

That bit of information caused me to laugh slightly. "Well, I'm glad the money helped. She was with a real shady character."

There was no way that she could have made up the girl I had encountered the night before so I stepped back, giving her the space she needed to move into the bathroom. Sarah looked at me and smiled one last time, then brushed by closely as she went in to bathroom. Minutes later I heard the water running and I had to pull my thoughts away from the picture of her wet and in that big shower stall all by herself.

I ordered breakfast from room service and while I waited for it to arrive I thought about Sarah as I began to wonder again if she was telling me the truth. Part of me wanted to think that she was, she seemed to be as far as I could tell. I smoked another cigarette while I remembered how she had known of both Allison and Ian, lending credibility to the fact that they were actually my siblings, even though she had never met them.

Room service arrived about the time the shower had shut off. I let the guy in and gave him a tip before shutting the door and locking it again after he left. Sarah came out, wearing nothing but a towel and looking like a goddess as she crossed the room with absolutely no inhibitions to look at the food that I was starting to transfer to the table. I smiled at her and waited for her to say something as she looked over what I had ordered, then she reached out to grab a piece of toast off one of the plates and took a bite of it.

"This all right?" I asked as I moved to one side of the table where I had put one of the plates.

She looked at me and practically purred. "It's fine, darlin'" she said playfully. I could tell that she was only using the word darlin' because I did and I had to admit that it sounded cute coming from her.

"How was your shower?" I asked, unsure what else to say. She looked really good in that towel. So good that my mind was toying with the idea of forgetting about breakfast for a while and having her instead. But I held my more primal urges in check for the time being. There were more important things that I needed to get out of her than another roll in the hay. There would be time enough for that later.

"Fine," she replied as she took a seat across from me.

We talked easily while we ate. She told me about how she left Minneapolis about three months after I did. She had gone up into Canada and worked her way across the country by gambling along the way, never staying in one place for too long. I asked her where she was staying in town and she smiled.

"At the casino. They have real nice rooms for high rollers."

I grinned as I pictured her taking a bubble bath in a luxurious bathroom complete with gold faucets. "I'm sure they do," I told her. "You stayin' here long?"

Sarah looked out the window, her face glowing in the warm rays of sunlight, as her hair seemed to become a cloud of fiery sunlight. "I don't know," she said playfully as she shrugged. "I stay till I feel it's time to go, or someone catches on that I win more than I should."

I couldn't help but smile at her. "D'you cheat?" I asked.

Her gaze returned to mine and I could see that the fire had moved to her eyes because of my suggestion. "I don't cheat," she said, her mouth turning up in a grin. "I'm just real lucky."

"Sure ya are," I replied, my smile widening as we teased each other back and forth. I found myself wondering again why I had left her and if I would ever know the reason. We obviously got along rather well and I was beginning to like the idea of keeping her around. We chatted over breakfast about little things and the more we talked the more I enjoyed Sarah's company.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

Sarah shrugged. "A couple of weeks. I met a few nice people, made me want to stick around a little while."

I glanced up at her as I swallowed the last bite of eggs I had been chewing. "Who's that?"

"A group of people in a place called Sky House."

I looked at her questioningly as I reached for my coffee cup. "What's that?"

She smiled. "A chantry."

I lifted an eyebrow in confusion as I looked at her. "What is that, a gamblin' club?"

Sarah shook her head and I caught a mischievous gleam in her eyes. "Not exactly. It's a place where people like me go to study and practice... magic."

I wondered briefly if she had slipped something into her coffee and was now hallucinating. Magic? What the hell was she trying to pull over on me anyway.

"Okay," I said, trying to figure out what she was up to. "You know what? I know that I don't remember anythin', but I think I remember that we don't live with no Jedi Mind Shit," I told her sarcastically as I leaned back in my chair to watch her.

"No, darlin'," she said as she leaned forward to observe me closely. "It's a world of darkness. Witches, vampires, shapeshifters, we all exist, it's just no one knows about it."

I reached for the pack of cigarettes that I had laid on the table earlier and lit one. "Okay," I told her, still sounding very sarcastic, not believing her in the slightest and wondering what she was hoping to gain from her ridiculous story.

Sarah smiled and without moving a muscle she was suddenly holding my cigarette and I could smell that new electronics scent in the air again.

I pushed my chair back and looked down at my now empty hand. "What the fuck?" I asked in disbelief, wondering how in the hell she had managed such a trick.

Sarah smiled. "Magic, darlin'," she said as if that should answer all my questions. She lifted the cigarette to her mouth then and took a long drag.

This was too much. I stood, not sure what to do. Part of me had quickly become accustomed to her presence and how well we seemed to get along. Another part, a much bigger one now, wanted her and her weird parlor tricks gone and that part was winning out. "Look," I began as I started to move away from the table. "It's been real great seein' you again, but this is a little crazy."

Sarah tilted her head sideways as if she didn't understand, or better yet, as if she thought I shouldn't be a freaked out at all. "Don't get an attitude on me, Kiran," she warned. "People are amazed at what I do, they freak out at you."

I frowned; feeling slightly offended even though I had no idea what she was referring to. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

She leaned back in her chair and took another hit off the cigarette, her demeanor very relaxed. "They're more afraid of shapeshifters than witches," she commented, not looking in my direction.

I gave her a look that said 'you've got to be joking'. "You tryin' to tell me I'ma werewolf or somethin'?" I asked incredulously. This was crazy. I couldn't believe we were having this ridiculous conversation.

"Of course not," she replied, but her face told me that I hadn't hit the nail too far off in her little game.

"Look-" I started, but she cut me off.

"You're a werecat."

Her words hit me as an idea that strangely made sense. Of course it was ludicrous, the thought that I was a werecat, but somehow it explained a lot, mostly the scene in which I had woke to the night before. It also lent some credibility to some of the things that Allison had said, too, but I still couldn't put it all together.

"There was silver in whatever went into your head," Sarah was saying. "That's why it's not healed, that's why don't you remember anything."

I hated to admit it, but I was leaning towards believing her even though it went against my better judgment. Her claim still seemed far-fetched, but I couldn't ignore the fact that it explained some things. I put my fingers in my hair and felt around my scalp until I found the two round scabs. "That's crazy," I heard myself say, my mind remembering my dream about something in my head, which lent more credibility to what Sarah was saying.

"Where did you wake up last night?" she asked, causing me to glance at her quickly.

"Why?" I asked, looking away again. There was no way in hell that I was going to willingly admit to anything, no matter how good a lay she had been and no matter how many names she knew of members of my family. I still didn't know her from Adam and I wasn't confessing a damn thing.

"Were you naked or almost naked?" she pressed.

I glanced at her nervously and frowned. "Yeah."

She gave me a satisfied smile. "Then you shifted."

I killed him, I thought to myself as I moved further away from Sarah and what she was telling me. "I musta killed him then," I said out loud to myself, not sure how I was going to handle this new found information. It had been bad enough when I had just thought that I was responsible for that man's death. It was something altogether different when I was faced with concrete evidence that I had done it.

Sarah was quite firm in what she said next. "If you did then he needed killing. You wouldn't hurt anyone who didn't deserve it."

I looked at her, not sure if I wanted to believe her or what she was telling me. Not about what I was, not about what she claimed to be. "Well, that makes one of us then," I told her dryly.

She cocked her head to one side curiously. "One of you what?"

I turned to face her. "One of us that believes that I didn't kill him for shits and grins." I ran my hand down over my mouth to smooth my goatee as I studied her.

"You probably shouldn't be here. The cops have someone in custody, but I'm sure they'll figure it out soon enough that the guy they have isn't the one responsible. I don't want to take you down, too. Ian should be on his way here by now. I'm waitin' on him."

Sarah shook her head. "I don't think so. If the cops are looking for you, then you'll need someone like me."

"Sarah," I started, completely torn between wanting her here and wanting her to go for her own good. I was still a little freaked out about this whole thing she was trying to get me to believe, but I was beginning to come to terms with it. "I don't know what happened there. There might be others who know it was me that was involved. I don't want to risk you."

She laughed softly. "I wouldn't stay if I thought it was a risk, Kiran, and I wouldn't let you stay either." She crushed out the cigarette she had finished and stood. "Chill out, everything will work out."

I looked away from her, a little uneasy about her blasé attitude. "So you can do magic?" I knew that I sounded like I didn't believe we were talking about this subject so easily, but I couldn't help it.

"I can," she replied with a smile. "Helps out a lot, believe me, especially when the cops come nosing around."

I nodded in understanding, sort of. "What kind of stuff can you do?"

She shrugged, light from the window dancing off her skin and distracting me for a moment. "Lots of things. I'm learning more all the time. I've been studying with the people I told you about here in town. I might stick around enough to learn more."

I decided that there really wasn't any other explanation that could justify what I had woke up to in that warehouse so I was going to go with what Sarah was saying for the moment. Now I was settling for being in the 'I'm looking for answers' mode.

I moved over to the bed and sat on the end of it as I looked at my companion. "So what are these people like?" I asked.

"Gwen owns the house," Sarah said. "She's a very strong person, but then she's had to be. Burt is her second, and he's a great guy. He's a lot happier now since he started dating Mia." Something about that name triggered a little switch in the back of my mind, but the link didn't come right away as Sarah continued, a frown coming to her features as she tilted her head. "You know, Mia has amnesia, too."

CHAPTER 6 – RELEARNING ABOUT MYSELF

"The fire grows inside
The feeling cannot be denied
And everywhere I turn the size of guys they push me"
"Who Am I"
Smile Empty Soul

I felt my entire body go still when Sarah mentioned Mia a second time. Was this the same person that Vivian had talked about in my dream? Mia wasn't a very popular name as far as I knew, so the odds that it was the woman I was supposed to help seemed to be pretty good. How coincidental could it be, though, that Sarah knew her as well?

I realized that believing something a dead woman told me in a dream might not be the most logical route to take at the moment. But I figured that if I believed that I was a werecat and that Sarah could do magic, maybe it was possible for the dead to get messages to someone through dreams.

And then again maybe I'm just losing it, I thought to myself dryly.

I decided to remain calm, not wanting to jump on the subject of who Mia was just yet. Besides, I didn't want to give away to Sarah that I was interested. She seemed like a jealous person by nature and she might think I was interested in the other woman if I asked too many questions. The fact that she, too, had amnesia put me on the defensive a little, making me wonder just how much trouble this entire situation was going to be and if I could do anything about it.

"Tell me more about this Mia," I said casually.

Sarah shrugged. "I don't know that much about her. She was sick when I rolled into town. Gwen says that the werewolves poisoned her and her boyfriend, but I'm not sure about that. If a shifter wants you dead, you usually end up in pieces. I guess it was a near thing, but Gwen and her pet wolf pulled Mia through. When she woke up she didn't remember a damn thing."

I continued to show as little interest as possible as I thought about what Sarah said, ignoring the comment she made about people ending up in pieces because it hit too close to my situation. "Don't the werewolves and them get along?" I asked. "I mean, why would they want to poison her?"

"Sky House and Red Moon Pack have been warring for decades, I guess," she explained casually before sipping her coffee. "The chantry blames every bad thing that happens on the werewolves, from what I can see. I still can't figure out how Gwen abides one living in her house, let alone sleeping with him all the time."

"Have you heard what started it?" I asked, still trying to sound blasé as I tried not to look at Sarah too much. The towel she was wearing was beginning to open a little at the bottom where it brushed over the tops of her thighs, offering a glimpse of what lay beneath it and causing me to remember how soft her skin had been under my hands.

Pulling my thoughts to what I needed to be learning, I found myself thinking that if I was supposed to help diffuse the situation I might have known the answer to the question I just asked before I had lost my memory. It was kind of hard for me to comprehend the two groups not getting along. It just made sense that if supernatural creatures did exist that they would want to be friendly with one

another. I couldn't imagine there being that many of Sarah's kind, or mine for that matter, in the world. Seemed like you would need all the friends you could get.

This new revelation did give credibility to what Vivian had hinted at in my dream. Was I supposed to help end the conflict between the two groups. The dream was so real. It seemed possible, but how was I going to do that now? I wanted my memory back now more than ever because I wanted answers.

Sarah shrugged and I turned to her as she spoke. "Not really. Probably a territorial squabble over the chantry's node, but who can say after all these years?"

She moved slightly and the towel opened a bit more, making me quickly tear my gaze from her again so I could continue to think about the answers I needed instead of how amazing her body was. It was crazy how much she could distract me in such a short amount of time. "I did hear that the werewolves killed Gwen's father," she offered.

"Sounds like nice enough people, I guess," I said with a shrug, wondering how I was supposed to help this Mia if the people she was friends with hated me and my kind. "Is it just werewolves that they have problems with? What about someone like me?"

Sarah shrugged. "They've got a werecat with them already, so I don't see why they would have a problem with you. Do you want to meet them? I could take you to Sky House, if you want."

I stood then and crossed over to the window of the room so that I was standing next to her. "Maybe after Ian gets here," I said offhandedly as I looked down at her. "I told Allison that I would lay low until he did."

I was sure that my features plainly stated that I still wasn't real sure about everything she had been telling me, so I asked, "Well... I guess it's safe to assume that you know about me shiftin'. Do you mind if I asked you some questions about it?"

"I can tell you what I know, sugar, but that's all," she returned with a smile, prompting me to do the same as I reached out to touch her cheek.

"I would appreciate any information you can give me," I told her, then turned my eyes again so that I looked out the window as I dropped my hand. "So, how close is it to what you see in the movies? Do I only change on the full moon?"

She laughed softly. "That's just movies, darlin'. You can shift any time, but mostly I only saw you do it when you're angry, or upset."

I thought about what she said for a moment as I continued to look out the window and all of a sudden a panicked thought crossed my mind as I remembered the scene I had woke up to and I quickly looked at her again. "I never hurt you in the time we were together, did I?" I asked, sounding worried. I didn't think I would be able to live with myself if I had.

Thankfully Sarah shook her head. "No, Kiran, you never hurt me," she assured me in a calm voice.

I was finding it hard to shake the picture of the dismembered man that I had killed from my memory. I could feel the relief of Sarah's assurances soothing me and I nodded back at her slowly. "So, then silver hurts me," I said, changing the subject. "That's an old wives tale, right?"

"Silver hurts any shapeshifter," Sarah said. "You can't heal it, not like a normal wound."

I could see that this was going to get really complicated, really fast. "So what's a normal wound?" I asked with a frown.

"Bruises, cuts, broken bones," she listed as she reached out to take my hand.

"So what, I can heal those faster?"

Sarah smiled. "Yeah."

I looked down at our joined hands and how her skin was so much softer than mine, causing my thoughts to stray once again to her even softer places and I knew if I didn't keep talking I would forget my intentions and take her to the bed. "Did you see me when I changed before?"

"A few times," she replied, looking up at me.

My gaze met hers. "What was it like?" My voice was quiet. I felt really vulnerable, not knowing what my life had been like before yesterday and I hoped that I was asking the right questions. I had so many and right now the only person who knew anything about me was the woman sitting next to me. I still didn't know what the circumstances were that led to me leaving her, but I was really glad that she was sharing with me what she knew about what I was.

"Rather interesting, actually," Sarah said. "Kinda like the stop motion photography of flowers they do."

Interesting, I thought. "What do I look like?"

Sarah smiled widely as she slipped her hand from mine and adjusted herself in her chair so that she could look at me easier. "Sugar, why don't you just shift and look in the mirror?" she teased.

I looked at her in astonishment, then around the room until my gaze fell on the dresser and the mirror that was attached to it that was big enough to almost see all of myself. "I have no idea how," I told her in defeat.

An auburn brow lifted as she nodded in understanding. "That could pose a problem."

I lifted my hand to my head and tapped the area where the two puncture holes were. "Don't remember anythin', remember, darlin'?" I teased with a smile.

Sarah regarded me seriously for a moment, and then said, "That knowledge still has to be inside you, Kiran. You still remember how to walk, how to talk."

She could be right, I thought to myself. I let my thoughts go, trying to remember how to change my form. We were both quiet for a moment while I thought and after a minute, I was pretty sure I had an idea of where to begin.

"You might want to take off your clothes before you try," Sarah suggested, smiling provocatively. "They tend to shred."

I looked at her surprised, but then what she was saying made sense. "That must have been what I saw in the warehouse then," I commented. "There were clothes, shredded."

"I'm sure it was," she confirmed with a nod of her head.

I wasn't really comfortable just stripping down in front of her, regardless of the fact that we had just spent most of the night together. I left the window and went to the bathroom where I took off my clothes before putting a towel around my waist and joining her again.

For her part, Sarah seemed amused at my sudden modesty and I noticed that her towel had slipped open a little more, giving me an even better display of skin from her upper thighs. I didn't say anything, just moved to stand in the center of

the biggest open area of the room, which happened to be in front of the dresser with the mirror, and tried to follow my instincts. I heard some kind of an inner voice that sounded like a big cat's growl so I started to listen to it.

But nothing seemed to be happening. I stood there and concentrated for a few minutes, then looked over at Sarah as I shook my head. "It's not workin'."

She shrugged. "I'm not a shapeshifter, darlin'. I have no idea how you used to do it. Maybe you should try again."

I felt like a first class idiot, wearing nothing but a towel and trying to turn into something I had no idea how to. I gave her a frustrated look, then took a deep breath and listened for that inner voice again. The word 'Chi' came to mind and I got the idea that I had to be in the right frame of mind in order to be successful in what I was doing. So I cleared my thoughts, pushing out all my mental negativity and putting myself into a clear spot. I seemed to know how to do this without a problem, so I figured I was on the right track.

Suddenly I felt taller. I opened my eyes and looked into the mirror in front of me and saw that I was, in fact, about three to four inches taller. I could see that my eyes were now set further apart and because of it, my peripheral vision had extended so that I could see further around me than I had before. I studied my reflection for a moment and found that my ears had elongated and were now slightly pointed upward. My eyes were larger, too, and were slit like a cat's.

My hair was longer and I could feel a light covering of it all over my body that had the beginnings of spots on my arms and chest that looked like a spotted panther's would. I could feel air moving on the whiskers that had grown out the sides of my mouth, as well as the fact that my canines had lengthened like a cat's, as well.

Briefly I realized that the towel was now on the floor, but I was no longer concerned about being naked in front of Sarah because there was so much more to take in. I could smell better. The remnants of the beer I had drank the night before. The ashtray. I could even detect Sarah's own personal scent and the sex that we had shared just a few hours ago.

I also felt a tail, which disturbed me a little at first, but it felt so natural that I didn't give it another thought. I could feel Sarah watching me from her chair as I quietly checked out what my body had changed to and I was glad that she chose not to comment. I needed a minute to take in this visual proof that she had been telling me the truth.

I looked down at my hand and arm to get a closer look at the spotted hair that was now covering me and I was surprised when I flexed my fingers and claws extended out where my nails had been. "Holy shit," I said, realizing that I sounded funny to myself and thinking that it must have something to do with the teeth. I turned my head to look at Sarah and found that she was busy admiring the view with reckless appreciation.

"So is this about what you've seen before?" I asked her.

"Darlin', that is just the beginning," she said with an eager smile that bordered on pleasurable laughter. "There's more."

I stared at her, not sure exactly what to expect. "Like what?"

"You can get a lot bigger than that and still stand upright," she informed me. "Then I've seen you like a saber tooth tiger, and like a panther too."

I mentally counted the different forms Sarah listed as she talked about them. If she was right, then we were talking about five different stages, including my human form. I was confused, not really sure how to pick one form out from the others and I decided to play it safe as I cleared my head again and this time tried for the cat form.

I felt myself move through the other two forms Sarah had mentioned on the way to the panther one and when it was done, I was on all fours and looking around me. The form felt natural to me, absolutely nothing felt foreign whatsoever. I began to move around the room and I could feel my muscles ripple under my skin as I stretched and paced. I felt more dexterous, stronger, faster.

My thoughts were exactly the same as they had been when I was in my human form. I knew things by the same name and I had the same perceptions of objects when I looked at them, they were just 'deeper' because of my heightened senses. The whiskers on my face were telling me things like they would for a normal cat as I moved around the room and even they felt natural to me.

I jumped on the bed to test how easily it was to do so. I found that my balance was excellent and I quickly left the bed to move toward Sarah, smelling her, rubbing my face on her like I was marking my territory as any other cat would.

Sarah chuckled a little, and then started to scratch and rub my coat like she would a regular cat. As she did so, I looked at my fur and found that the spots that had been barely visible before were plain as day now, leaving me with the conclusion that I looked like a regular panther in everyway.

I hoisted myself up so that my forepaws where on Sarah's thighs and really checked her out, using all five of my senses. She looked at me intently as well and she moved her hands so that she could scratch my ears. I liked it.

After a while I moved away so that I could explore the room little more. When I got near the door when I started to smell smoke. Urgency filled my senses and I had to concentrate hard so that I could shift back to my human form. I was still on all fours after shifting back and I stood up quickly. "Get dressed," I told Sarah quickly. "I smell smoke."

She gave me a surprised look at first, but she must have taken me at my word because she got up and moved quickly to do what I said. While Sarah dressed I went back into bathroom so that I could change as well. By the time I was back in the main part of the room I could smell smoke in my human form as well. As I quickly threw my things in the suitcase, I remembered that I didn't recall seeing any fire escapes. We would have to go for the stairways located at each end of the hotel, depending on where the first was.

Sarah was dressed as well by now and was busily looking around the room to make sure that we had everything. I secured the closure on the suitcase and picked it up just as she put her purse strap over one shoulder and grabbed my guitar case.

"We need to get out of here," I told her and she nodded in agreement.

We moved as one to the door and I carefully touched the handle to make sure it wasn't hot before opening it. Smoke immediately came billowing in from the hallway and I found myself muttering about the faulty fire alarm system as I looked up and down the hall. The smoke was coming from the right so I took Sarah's hand and pulled her to the left, leaving the room wide open behind us.

We were both coughing within a few seconds of exposure to the smoke as the hall began to fill with people who had also become aware of the fire in the hotel. Sarah pulled on my hand downward until I crouch over as we made our way to the

stairway at the end of the hall with the other hotel guests. I kept a tight hold on Sarah's hand, worried that we might become separated in the throng of people who were now pushing their way forward.

The surge of the crowd threatened to get out of hand quickly and I knew someone had to do something to make sure everyone got out safely. "Don't push," I called out as Sarah and I entered the staircase. "Let's take it easy and we'll all get out okay." I then repeated what I had said in French and I was glad when everyone seemed to heed my words and the pushing stopped. My room had been on the second floor so it didn't take long to get to the ground level and I was incredibly relieved when we made our way outside the building.

"Do you have a car here?" I asked Sarah over my shoulder as we moved with everyone else away from the burning building. I could hear sirens in the distance and I hoped that they got there before too much of the structure was lost.

She nodded. "Yeah, an Aztec," she answered, pointing to the back of the lot where I had parked the truck the night before.

Most of the other guests were running toward a restaurant that was directly across the street from the hotel. Over the din of people yelling and crying, I heard an air pulse of some kind coming from the burning end of the building. I didn't know what the noise was so I pulled Sarah to a stop and asked, "Can you hear that?"

Sarah opened mouth to speak, but no words came out. When I glanced at her I was horrified when I saw blood soaking her vest near her waist. I quickly realized that what I had heard must have been silenced gunfire and I had a feeling whoever was shooting at us wouldn't stop until we were dead. We were about twenty feet from the Aztec and my mind focused on getting Sarah inside it so that I could get her somewhere where she could receive medical attention.

I let go of her hand and put my arm around her waist to support her as I pushed both of us forward. Sarah clutched at the wound mutely with the hand I had let go, bending over in pain as we moved. The Aztec was parked closer than the truck, but I didn't even glance at the other vehicle as we made for hers, bullets continuing to fly through the air around us as we did.

"Open trunk," Sarah said weakly, somehow managing to stay moving and still hold the guitar case at the same time as her blood oozed between her fingers. To my amazement the trunk opened and was fully extended by the time we reached it. I helped her into the trunk as another bullet whizzed by my head, nearly missing me.

I said a few choice words about the assholes that were trying to kill us, and I may have gone after them if Sarah hadn't been shot and pulled me in the back behind her. I closed the hatch behind us as Sarah fell in a heap on the floor of the trunk and closed her eyes.

"Start," she commanded and the engine roared to life. "Sky House, now."

The car lurched into gear and started to drive itself quickly through the parking lot. I moved over Sarah, seeing that she was at end of her strength and bleeding badly.

I looked around the vehicle for towels that I could use to stop the bleeding. All I found were some clothes hanging up, but they looked a little too nice to use for bandages. Without thinking I pulled off the shirt I was wearing and pressed it to the wound.

"Will this get us there?" I asked her, praying to whatever God there was that she didn't die. I couldn't handle another death. Not now.

Sarah nodded weakly. "Yes," she managed to say just before she passed out.

CHAPTER 7 – DON'T DIE

"We're not indestructible, baby better get that straight
I think it's unbelievable how you give into the hands of fate"

"No Easy Way Out"

Robert Tepper

"Shit," I muttered, hoping that someone was at this Sky House place where we were heading as I did my best to hold the shirt to Sarah's wound as we careened through traffic.

She had been shot in the side, low on her torso and near her waist. As carefully as possible, I rolled her over slightly and felt for an exit wound. I didn't find one so that meant the bullet was still inside her and it would have to come out, I knew that much. This wasn't the place for something like that and I sure as hell didn't know how to do it on my own. The best thing I could do was maintain the pressure I had on the wound and try to keep her from bleeding to death before we got to her friends.

I saw a blanket near the front of the vehicle and I used it to cover Sarah's unmoving form to keep her warm because she was going into shock. Then I watched where we were going in the hopes that I would have some idea of where we were heading, the whole time monitoring her pulse closely with my other hand. It seemed to still be strong, but it was beginning to slow and I wondered how far we had to go to get there.

The car was moving relatively fast, dodging in and out of traffic as if a professional driver were behind the wheel. There were some near misses on the way, but eventually the car pulled into a gated drive that thankfully happened to be open. The driveway was long and the car finally pulled to a stop near the front doors of a big house that I didn't take the time to study too closely. There was a dark haired man pruning bushes who stopped to look at the Aztec as it pulled up.

Hoping that the vehicle would respond to my voice I said, "Open trunk." To my relief it complied and I called out, "I need some help over here."

The man dropped his clippers and came rushing over over, cursing in French when he saw Sarah lying unconscious.

"She's been shot," I told him, automatically switching to French myself.

"Hold on, I'll get Gwen," he said, and then he took off in a run toward the house.

"Hurry up," I yelled, maybe a little too harshly, but I didn't care.

"We're here," I told Sarah as I bent over to whisper in her ear. "You're gonna get help, you're gonna be fine." I saw a flash then of Sarah being the dead woman, Vivian, from the warehouse and I knew that I couldn't let that happen to her, too. "Don't you dare die on me, not now Sarah," I pleaded through clenched teeth over and over.

I was relieved when a woman suddenly appeared at the back of the car. The man was by her side and looking at the scene with a worried gaze. "Move," she said, taking command of the situation.

I was kneeling next to Sarah in the back of the vehicle. The t-shirt that I had pressed to her side was soaked with blood by now and I moved back, leaving the shirt over the wound. The woman didn't bother to get in the back with us, but I did

notice as I moved back that I felt cold and anger coming from her as she concentrated on Sarah. She didn't even put a hand on her and I moved even further back and used the back of my blood soaked hands to wipe the hair from my face, trying not to think about the fact that blood was on my hands again as I concentrated on Sarah.

I didn't immediately notice a difference in the blood flow, but it was hard to not notice that she was very pale. After a few moments, Sarah's coloring started to get better and she breathing began to ease as well. About the same time the cold and anger stopped and the woman looked at me.

"What the hell happened?" she asked harshly.

I reached out and pull the t-shirt off Sarah's side, looking at her skin as I answered. "The hotel I was stayin' at had a fire and we ran out. Someone shot her." Once the shirt was gone I could see that the wound looked like a fresh scar rather than the open hole it had been when we had first climbed in the Aztec. I noticed that the bullet was in shirt, but something instinctually told me not to touch it so I wrapped the ruined shirt around it and looked once again at the woman who had just saved Sarah's life. I remembered Sarah saying something about my kind not liking silver, so I wondered if that was what the bullet was made of. If that were the case, then I realized that it was meant for me, not Sarah.

"Why?" the woman was asking.

I shrugged. "I have no idea," I answered her honestly.

The man next to her pointed to where one of the bullets had lodged itself in the interior of the car. "Silver," he said.

Well, that settles it, I thought to myself. I decided to play dumb for the moment, not sure if I should immediately tell these strangers what I was. "Silver. Why would someone be shootin' silver bullets?" I asked.

The man looked at me with raised eyebrow and I noticed for the first time that he had the most intense blue eyes I had ever seen. "Don't you know?" the woman asked, drawing my attention back to her.

At the moment I was more concerned about Sarah then having any verbal sparring matches with this woman, so I shook my head, trying to play dumb for as long as possible.

"I can't help you if you lie to me," she stated plainly.

"I don't know who was shootin' at us or why," I told her. "Only that they did and they were silencin' their bullets."

The woman looked at me for a second, then said, "I can tell that you're a shapeshifter, I just can't tell what kind," she told me as if I should be impressed by the fact that she could acknowledge that much. "Are you going to tell me or do I have to find out by myself?" Clearly she was uneasy not knowing exactly what I was and I guess that made sense considering the feud that had been going on between her group and the werewolves.

It was my turn to study her. "Apparently I am a cat, darlin'," I told her, trying to sound nonchalant as I made the decision that I didn't want it to be known that I had no memories of my life prior to the night before.

The woman visibly relaxed a little, but her gaze still held a hunger that said she would do whatever she had to in order to gain what she wanted. What she considered hers. "Do you want to bring her inside or should I have Sloan do it?" she asked as she took a step back from the Aztec.

I glanced at the other man who had to be Sloan, and then moved to pick Sarah up myself. She seemed to be sleeping peacefully and I gently lifted her against my chest then followed the woman inside.

The house was very big and looked more like a showpiece than a home. The woman that I assumed was the Gwen that Sarah had told me about, led the way down a hall and into a bedroom that was very expensively decorated, but didn't feel homey in the slightest.

"Put her on the bed," she instructed as she moved toward a dresser and pulled out a silk nightgown.

I pulled covers back, then laid Sarah down gently, making sure she was comfortable. The woman came forward with the nightgown and I asked Sloan to leave so we could change her.

The other man looked at the woman, who nodded and he moved toward the door. "Get something for me to wash her up with," she said and he nodded before closing the door behind him.

Between the two of us, we managed to undress Sarah without jostling her around too much. As we worked the woman introduced herself as Gwen Amarosa and the man as Sloan and I found myself looking at her, considering what to tell her.

"I'm Kiran," I offered, carefully omitting my last name.

"How do you know Sarah?"

I looked down at her sleeping form and smiled. "We dated a while back."

There was a knock on door then and Gwen went to retrieve the bathing supplies from Sloan. I made sure that I was the one to wash Sarah, taking the opportunity to feel her pulse as I did, and found that it was much stronger than it had been before. "How long will she sleep?" I asked.

"As long as she needs to," was Gwen's answer. "She'll be fine in a few hours."

I nodded as I continued to bathe Sarah, washing my own hands and arms free of blood in the pan of water as well. Together, Gwen and I put the nightgown on Sarah and after I pulled the covers up over her I turned to Gwen and said, "Thank you."

She smiled slightly. "You're welcome. Do you have any idea why someone would try to kill you?"

"I honestly have no idea," I told her.

She looked me up and down then and offered me a place where I could clean up. There was something about the woman that just didn't sit well in my gut and I wanted nothing more than to get the hell out of here. But Sarah needed to rest and I wasn't going to leave without her. She was my link to my life until my brother and sister got here and I didn't think I would let her go even after they arrived.

Thinking of Ian and Peta reminded me that hopefully they were on their way. I would need to contact Allison as soon as possible and let her know that I was no longer at the Marriott and get her a number for where I was going to be.

"I've got a suitcase in the car," I told Gwen, mentally noting to call Allison as soon as I had a moment.

She moved toward the door. "I can send Sloan for it."

I shook my head. "No, that's cool," I said as I followed her, playing off on my laid back, Southern accent. "I can get it myself." I reached the door about the same

time she did and I continued, "I don't need anyone to wait on me. I'd appreciate it if I could maybe do a load of wash, though."

Gwen smiled. "I'm sure we can arrange something," she said. She led me out of the bedroom and down the hall toward the front door where we met another man in the entryway, whom she introduced as Burt Walters. I shook his hand and Gwen started to tell him about what had happened to Sarah while I excused myself to get my suitcase as well as Sarah's purse and my guitar. I didn't want to leave her alone too long and I really didn't want to wait and hear a story that I had been the one to live through.

After accompanying me back to bedroom, Gwen then showed me into a freaking huge bathroom, complete with a separate shower area and a large tub. I saw that there was a set of stairs in bathroom area, but I wasn't interested in learning where they led to at the moment. What I wanted to do was get cleaned up and get back to Sarah.

She was still resting peacefully when I came back after a quick shower, so I took the opportunity to call Allison. "Hello," she answered on the second ring.

"Hey, darlin'." I said with a smile.

"Kiran, is something wrong?" she asked, panic in her voice.

I looked over at Sarah and sighed. "Not unless you count a fire and someone tryin' to kill me," I said.

"What?"

"There was a fire at the hotel and we were getting' out-"

"Wait," she interrupted. "Who's we?"

"I had a knock on my door last night that was someone who knew me," I explained. "Do you ever remember me talkin' about a woman named Sarah?"

Allison thought for a moment. "Possibly. If you did it was a long time ago."

I nodded. "2003, she said. Anyhow, she came knocking on my door last night and was able to clue me in on a few things that I didn't know about myself," I continued, then with an obvious smile I added, "I'm assumin' those are the things you thought Ian was going to explain when he got here. Am I right?"

A smile was in her voice as well. "Probably. How did that go?"

I chuckled. "Well, lets just say I look all cute when I'm spotty and jumpin' around all dexterously," I told her, causing her to laugh as well. "I just wanted to call and let you know that I'm not gonna to be at the hotel. How close is Ian?"

"I expect him to be there later today," she confirmed.

"How's he comin' in?"

"Driving. Tell me more about who tried to kill you."

I shrugged. "I didn't see them, I was more concerned about Sarah. She was shot."

"Is she all right?" Allison asked, concerned.

"She should be, she's sleepin' right now. She's got friends here that have, shall we say, special abilities? Not like my own," I told her, and then remembered that we hadn't established if she could shift, too. "Our own?" I asked.

Allison laughed again. "Yours, darlin'. I didn't get those genes."

"What about Ian?"

"Ian, on the other hand, got those genes."

"And Peta?"

"Yep," she answered.

I nodded, finding that I couldn't wait to meet my siblings again. "She with him still?"

"She is," Allison confirmed.

Smiling, I said, "All right. Listen, I can find out where this place is and let you know. Does he have a number? Carry a cell or anythin' like that?"

Allison laughed and when she spoke her voice was dry. "Those things tend to get lost. Can you give me your number?"

I went to the phone pedestal and looked for a number. "I don't know. I gotta find out and call you back. You said later today?"

"Mmmhmm. Possibly this evening, I'm not sure."

"I'll get a number and call you back," I promised. "Was he gonna to go right to the hotel?"

"Yeah."

Shit, I thought, hoping that he wouldn't get there and think the worst. "Are you gonna talk to him before?"

"He was going to call when he hit Montreal. I'll let him know plans have changed."

I was relieved. "All right, I'll go find someone right now so I can call you back."

"Okay." We hung up and I went over to the bed to check on Sarah. She was still sleeping peacefully and her pulse was good. Her color was improving and I leaned over to kiss her forehead before leaving the room to look for someone to get the number from.

I heard voices from down the hall as soon as I opened the door. Quietly I slipped toward the room where the voices were coming from, making sure that no one came up behind me. From what I could tell Gwen and Burt were talking to another woman about the events concerning Sarah and myself and they were just finishing up. The conversation wasn't a private one, so I moved to the doorway and waited for them to notice me.

It was the living room and Gwen and Burt were sitting so that they saw me immediately. Burt stood as I walked in and said, "Kiran, this is Mia Quinn."

Finally able meet the woman I was told I was here to help, I turned to Mia and smiled at her, then moved toward her and took a hand from my pocket to shake hers. She stood when I approached and there was something in her hazel eyes that said she had expected to see me as well. I found that odd considering the fact that Sarah had mentioned that Mia was suffering from amnesia, too, and I decided I could ask about it later, when I had a chance to talk to her privately.

CHAPTER 8 – MEETING MIA

"Talkin' about what might have been I'm thinkin' about what I used to be"

"No Easy Way Out"

Robert Tepper

"Pleasure to meet you, ma'am," I told Mia as we shook hands. She was a pretty woman, probably close to my age, but most likely younger than myself. She had dark brown hair that hung thick and straight down her back and had heavy bangs that covered her forehead. She was petite in build and stood no more than five feet, eight inches, which was short compared to my over six foot frame.

"You too," she replied with a friendly smile.

I took a step back, then looked at Gwen. "I'm expectin' a family member to come into town sometime this evenin'. Would it be all right if I gave the number here for them to contact me?"

"Would they be like yourself?" Gwen asked, her tone sounding slightly worried, like it had been when she had asked me what I was.

Trying to put her at ease, I nodded casually and said, "Yes, ma'am."

Her face smoothed then and she smiled. "Of course." She then proceeded to rattle the number off out loud, but thankfully Burt came forward and handed me a business card, pointing out which number was the right one for me to use.

"Is there anything else you need?" Gwen asked.

I glanced at Mia, wishing that I could have a few moments to talk to her so that I could let her know what had happened to me. "Just, point me in the direction of the laundry room," I said with an easy smile. "I'm gonna sit with Sarah and make sure she sleeps all right."

As if sensing my secret wishes, Gwen looked at Mia and asked her if she could show me to the laundry room. Mia agreed without hesitation and smiled as she turned to face me. There was something there that said she wanted to talk to me, too, and I was glad for the chance to speak with her privately.

"Thank you," I told Gwen. Mia and I left the room together, stopping back at the bedroom long enough for me to check on Sarah and grab my suitcase.

Once we were in the laundry room Mia turned to me and asked, "Where's Vivian?"

Her question was the last thing I expected to answer right away and I cleared my throat, needing time to figure out what to tell her and knowing that my body language wouldn't be comforting to her in the meantime.

"I'm sorry," she said, picking up on my discomfort. "Did I say something wrong?"

"I believe that, uh..." I dropped my gaze, not able to look at her as I worried that she might have known the woman that I had come to Montreal with. I worried that maybe she was related to Vivian; they did have similar features after all.

"Vivian is dead."

Mia's shocked look and fast intake of breath told me that while she knew of the woman, she didn't remember her any more than I did. "How... what... but, I just got an e-mail from her," she managed.

"When?" I asked eagerly, hoping to learn something more about Vivian and what she and I had meant to each other. If my dreams were any indication, we may have been lovers and after what had just happened to Sarah I was secretly worried that I wasn't mourning her like I maybe should have been.

"This morning, I guess," she answered, looking away herself this time as she thought about what I had just told her. "I didn't... sometime after four yesterday afternoon."

I nodded, mentally placing this new piece of information into my time line. So Vivian had been at a computer no more than an hour or two before I had woke up. The idea was an interesting one and made me wonder where she had been as well as how long I had been out after I was hit in the head by the silver spikes.

"I need to get a hold of Vaughn," Mia was saying.

I looked at her questioningly. "Who's Vaughn?"

Mia glanced at me, and then moved her gaze to the floor again. "Vivian's brother, my ex-husband. He told me that you guys were coming to help me."

"Vivian gave me your name in a dream last night," I told her. "Sayin' that I had to help you." I knew that I had to tell her that I couldn't remember anything. She deserved that much so that we could figure out where we went from here. Mia was silent for a moment as well so I decided to get it over with. "I woke up yesterday afternoon... in a warehouse, with no idea who I was," I told her, knowing that I sounded uncomfortable, but there was no way around it.

"That sounds familiar," she replied dryly. She looked at me and continued, "I woke up four days ago in this house with absolutely no memory."

I already knew that she had no memory as well, but four days seemed like a really interestingly short span of time between the two incidences. "That's odd," I commented.

Mia nodded and said, "Yes, it is."

"Do you have any idea what happened to you?" I asked.

"I was poisoned," she answered, which shocked me a little. These were big baddies we were dealing with here and I was beginning to think that they had to know exactly who was working toward ending the big feud between the werewolves and the witches. The big question was who were 'they'?

I slid my fingers into my hair and touched the twin puncture marks. "Two silver spikes," I told her.

"Someone doesn't want us around," she commented.

"Yeah, but who?" I wondered out loud. "Damn, I wish I would have gotten a look at them."

Mia looked at me questioningly. "Who?"

"Whoever shot Sarah."

"They'll try again," she assured me. "We'll know to be looking."

I nodded. "Did you watch the evenin' news last night?"

Mia shook her head. "No, I didn't."

"The warehouse was down in the Old Port of Montreal district. Someone shot Vivian."

"Do you think they were aiming for her or you?" she asked.

"I have no idea," I said as I brought my hands together so that I could touch the matching wedding rings I was wearing with the fingers of the opposite hand. "I found her layin' on the floor."

"Do not say anything about Vaughn," she warned me suddenly, sounding as if her very life depended on it.

"I don't know him," I assured her, not knowing who he was other than her ex-husband and Vivian's brother.

Mia glanced around to make sure no one was coming. "Don't even mention his name in this house."

I looked at her in confusion. "Why?"

"It's part of the reason you and Vivian were here to help me."

I was beginning to doubt that I wanted anything to do with this whole mess or not. It was like we were working undercover during World War II or something and I didn't like not knowing about the side I was on, much less remembering all the key players from both sides. "Vivian said something in the dream about you makin' peace," I told her, hoping to learn more about what she had been working on.

Mia gave me a brief history about why the werewolves and witches didn't get along. Gwen studied her magic under her father until he was killed by the leader of the pack, who they then killed in retribution. There was bad blood before the two deaths, but with the leaders of both groups dead the feud took on a new life.

Apparently Vaughn was working on the werewolves and Mia was doing the same with the witches, trying to get them to come to a peaceful arrangement. She confessed that she believed there was a third group that was actually causing all the problems, antagonizing the other two groups so that peace couldn't happen naturally.

"No one knows that I'm here undercover," she explained. "No one knows I was married to Vaughn and no one knows he's in town."

"Is it just you that's here?" I asked her.

"I can use Sloan to get messages through," she explained and I nodded in understanding, glad that I at least knew another person I could trust in this house of questionable people.

"My brother and sister are comin' into town this afternoon," I informed her. "They'll be of some help."

"At least you have them to help you," she said sadly, making me wonder who she had to talk to about what had happened to her.

"I don't know what kind of help I can be," I warned her. "I can barely shift at this point. I need to learn everythin' all over again."

"So do I," she confessed. "At least you know why you're here. As soon as I talk to Vaughn, I'll let you know what we're supposed to do."

I nodded in understanding. "Tell him he can find her things in room 112 at the Holiday Inn Express. Clothin', purse. The police are lookin' for her identity, so he can probably approach them with some story to get the body back."

"As soon as I hear from him I will let you know. Be careful," she warned. "Don't trust anyone in this house, but don't let on--"

"I'll do what I can," I assured her, knowing that there was no way that Mia could do this alone. "If that's what I was here for, then I'll do my best to help. Have you had any luck in figurin' out who that other group may be?"

"I have an idea," she said. "I have a file."

"Who is it?"

"A group called ITM." The name meant nothing to me and Mia soon went on, "I hope to spend some time with Vaughn, show it to him. Maybe he can help me."

"What do you know about Sarah?" I asked, wondering if she would lend aid. She had seemed like she wanted to hang out here in Montreal for a while and learn what she could from the people at Sky House. She seemed be loyal to me to a certain extent, but our break up... or should I say my walking away, made the situation touchy and it would be iffy as to which way she might go if it came to choosing.

"She's good at gambling," Mia observed, clearly not knowing much. "I only met her yesterday, but she seems nice enough. Gwen was going to ask her to stay."

"I think she would help us," I told Mia, hoping that my guess was a good one. "She's not from here, we were together in Minneapolis."

Mia regarded me seriously for a moment then said, "Don't say anything to her until I talk to Vaughn."

I nodded. "All right. I need to get word to my family."

"Do you need to get some things from the hotel?" she then asked, making me wonder again what Vivian and I were to one another. If my dream could be believed we were together, but so far no one I had talked to had been able to confirm that fact for me.

I looked over at the suitcase and said, "This and my guitar is all I have."

"You had nothing left in the room?"

I shook my head. "No, I took it all."

"If you need anything let me know." She then told me how to get to her room in the house in case I needed to find her.

I took note of her directions and said, "Talk to Vaughn and let me know what I can do to help." She agreed and left me there to start my laundry. I returned to the room afterward and upon seeing that Sarah was still sleeping, I called Allison back to give her the number.

After that, I sat close to the bed and quietly messed around with the guitar while I waited for Sarah to wake up. I wondered briefly if I should have someone go to her hotel room for a change of clothing, or go myself, but since I didn't know where the casino was, nor did I see a key in her purse earlier, I figured we would just have to wait until she woke up for that. Gwen probably had something she could borrow until she could get to her own things.

About twenty minutes later she started to move around a little and I went to the bed to sit next to her. Eventually she opened her eyes and looked around groggily.

I put my hand on the side of her face and studied her features closely. She seemed to focus on me rather quickly and as far as I could tell she looked okay. "How ya feelin', darlin'?" I asked with a smile.

Sarah smiled back. "Tired," she replied sleepily. "What happened?"

"You were shot when we were leavin' the hotel," I informed her. "We came back to Sky House. You programmed your car or somethin'. Anyhow, Gwen fixed you up. Can I get you anythin'? Some water?"

She nodded and I went to the huge bathroom for a glass and brought it back for her. I helped her up, sitting behind her so that she could lean back against me while she drank. At first she tried to hold the glass herself, but her hand was shaking a little so I said, "Let me," and gently enclosed my fingers around hers to steady her hand.

She took several slow drinks from the glass then moved it away from her mouth and looked up at me. "Did you get hurt?" she asked.

I smiled and put the glass on the bedside table. "I'm fine," I assured her.

That seemed to put her at ease and she leaned back against me, looking around the room. "Is this Gwen's?" she asked.

I shrugged. "I'm not sure. I think so. She seemed to know where everything was." I looked down at her and saw that she still had some deep circles under her eyes and I knew that more sleep would only benefit her situation. "You should probably get some more rest, you haven't been asleep that long."

Sarah took a deep breath and cuddled closer into my chest. "If Gwen healed me I'll be fine. She's a doctor."

"You should probably get some more rest anyhow," I pressed, holding her close against me. "You lost a lot of blood." And I should know, I thought to myself, remembering my hands red with it only a little while ago.

She turned a little to look at me. "I'm fine, Kiran, really," she said in a low voice and I put my hand in her hair to press her head close to me again.

"You scared me, lady," I told her, trying to sound harsh, but not seceding. "Don't do that again."

"I'll try not to," she promised. "Maybe you should get some rest. You've had a long day."

I tried to smile at her worry. "Not as long as yours," I commented wryly. I looked at the bedside clock and saw that it was 9:30 in the morning. I had to admit that I was feeling a little tired and I was sure that my presence would make it easier for Sarah to fall asleep again. I eased her back down and lay beside her, telling myself that I would only stay long enough so that she could once again go to sleep.

"I'll be fine," she said tiredly as she yawned and settled against my chest to sleep.

"Sure you will," I said with a grin as I kissed her temple and closed my eyes.

CHAPTER 9 – GETTING TO KNOW SLOAN

"All I wish is to dream again
My loving heart
Lost in the dark"

"Nemo"
Nightwish

I was lying in bed, half awake, and next to a beautiful, dark-haired woman that I recognized as Vivian Waits. She turned to me and reached up to touch the side of my face. "You must take care, amante," she said softly, just before she kissed me.

My arms went around her and even though I still didn't remember who she was to me. She felt damned familiar pressed against me like she was. The kiss seemed to go on forever, passionate, loving, but eventually she pulled away to look at me.

"You mustn't blame yourself, Kiran," she said softly as she started to fade from my arms. "Don't let my brother blame himself, either."

I tried to hold on to her, but she was gone, leaving me holding nothing as I woke, startled by what I had dreamt. I looked down at Sarah to make sure that she was all right, then at the clock to see that it was just after eleven-thirty.

I lay back for a while and thought about the dream for a minute. From the familiarity I had experienced with Vivian in my dreams, I couldn't stop thinking that she and I were involved in a relationship of some kind and that it wasn't just my dreams. I also thought that if it was the case I wasn't honoring her memory very well by hooking up so quickly with Sarah since she had only died less than twenty-four hours ago. On the other hand, it wasn't like I remembered anything about what might have gone on so I could be just thinking that and the idea was somehow translating itself into my dreams.

Rather than dwell on something I might never know, I decided that I should make myself do something useful until Sarah woke up. Remembering that I had put my clothes in the washer over two hours ago now, I carefully got out of the bed so that I didn't disturb Sarah and headed to the laundry room so that I could put my clothes in the dryer. I found Sloan already there and he was pulling the last of my load from the dryer where he was folding them and stacking them neatly on a table that was in the room.

"Hey man, you don't haveta do that," I told him with an easy smile as I came up to help him finish.

"It's no problem," he replied softly. "I was doing some laundry myself."

It was easy to see that the other man was pretty quiet in nature, like he was used to being in the background and not noticed much. Together we finished folding my clothes and I thought it was a perfect opportunity to get to know him. "You're Sloan, right?" I asked. He nodded and I held my hand out to him. "I'm Kiran."

He hesitated a moment, then took my hand in his. "How's Sarah?"

I studied him for a moment, trying to gain a better impression of him and the kind of man he was. "Gwen says she'll be fine," I said easily, beginning to think for the first time she was right. "She woke up a little while ago and her coloring was much better."

I got the impression that he wasn't used to people talking to him much because he seemed a bit uncomfortable that I was. Then again maybe he was just really shy, I wasn't sure yet.

"Gwen is a good healer," he informed me a bit reluctantly, as if he didn't want to say anything that wasn't nice about her. At the same time, though, it was like he was trying to put me at ease. "She saved Mia's life not long ago."

I remembered Mia saying that she got messages to her friends through Sloan and I wondered how much he was involved in the conspiracy. "That's what Mia mentioned earlier," I commented as I put my clothes back in my suitcase, checking them to see how clean they were as I did. They seemed no worse for wear and I was glad since I didn't have many clothes in the first place and I needed to be conservative. "You live here then?" I asked, making conversation with the other man.

Sloan reached down to open up the washer and began to transfer clothes from there over to the dryer. "Yeah. Looks like you're coming up a little sparse on clothes," he commented, and then paused for a moment before saying, "We had someone pass away a week ago. He didn't have any family that we know of, so I put his clothes into storage in the basement. I'm fairly certain they'd fit you, and I don't think anyone here would mind."

"I'd appreciate that," I told him honestly, grateful for the chance to add more clothing to the small amount that I had. "I'd like to check them out if you don't mind. What are you doin' after this? I think that Sarah is goin' to sleep a while yet, but I don't wanna go too far from her."

"I've got some time," Sloan said. "I can bring some of the things up if you want."

I imagined that there was no sense in him lugging a bunch of stuff up if they wouldn't work. "Are they down in the basement?" I asked. "You don't gotta bring them up, man. I can go down with you." I gave him a warm smile, hoping that maybe we could be friends in all this. Just because he seemed to do most of the work around here didn't mean that he had to do crap for me as well. "You don't need to wait on me."

His gaze met mine for the first time as he shrugged and I was struck by how intensely blue his eyes were. "I'm used to it. You can go down with me if you want, though."

I smiled at him. "Sure. I'll go down with you." I snapped the closures shut on the suitcase and put it on the floor. "Do you work for Gwen or somethin'? I know we arrived under some crazy circumstances, but you were clippin' some bushes, weren't you?"

He turned away so that I couldn't see his face, but his voice contained just a hint of bitterness to it as he started to fill the washer with the next load of dirty clothes. "Yeah, I was. I do what she tells me."

His statement struck me as an odd comment. "What do you mean by that?" I asked, bewildered by his statement.

"Just what I said. She gives the orders, and I follow them." His voice was strangely empty now and had no sign of any emotion, leaving me confused as to what his situation was here.

I thought about what he said for a moment and I decided that Gwen probably wasn't the easiest person to please. "What, is she a dragon lady to work for, or

somethin'?" I asked with a laugh, waiting for him to finish starting the next load of laundry.

He didn't laugh in return as he added laundry soap and softener to the washer. "I suppose that depends on what you are."

I studied him for a moment, remembering how he seemed to immediately identify the silver bullets and I wondered how he had known. "And what exactly are you?" I asked slowly, very serious now. Hadn't Sarah said something about him being a werewolf? Something wasn't making sense here.

He hesitated a moment, then confessed in a low voice, "Werewolf. She doesn't like werewolves."

"I've gathered that much," I answered dryly. I eyed him curiously, wondering what he was doing here then asked. "Why are you here then?"

He shrugged and answered cryptically. "Don't really have anywhere else to go."

I frowned slightly. "What about your family, man? How'd you get involved in all this anyhow? It seems odd for someone like you to be here with all the shit that's been goin' down between the shapeshifters and the people who live here. What's the deal?" I leaned against the wall casually, watching him.

"My family is dead," he answered in that same emotionless voice as he put the cleaning supplies back in the cupboard above the washer and dryer. "I don't remember anything about them. I grew up here, in this house." He then turned to me and attempted to change the subject. "Are you ready to go look at those clothes?"

I shrugged casually and nodded. "Sure, but I'd like to check in on Sarah first." I pushed myself away from the wall and let him lead the way out of the room. Regardless of how guarded he seemed to be, I felt a closeness of sorts with Sloan, probably because he was a shifter as well and the only one I had met since waking up with no memory. "So, how close is your kind to mine?" I asked, sure that I had to have met other werecreatures prior to that fateful night, but now I would have to relearn what I had known and this was a perfect opportunity to start that re-education.

"Fairly close, but don't let anyone know I said that," Sloan answered. "I mean, I don't know much about werewolves other than what I've learned by myself, but from what I've seen, there isn't much difference, except the animal we turn into." He stopped near a door next to the kitchen. "The stairs are here, you wanna just come down after you check on her?"

I nodded, looking around me to make sure I knew where to go. "Sure. I'll only be a minute." I took off in the direction of the room where Sarah was sleeping and as I did I thought about what Sloan said. Why wouldn't he want me to tell anyone that he knew some things about what he was? That didn't make sense to me because if he was living here then they must trust him, if even a little, right? I was starting to get a bad vibe about all this and I knew that I was going to have to ask some hard-core questions of him soon so that I understood.

I suddenly felt ill at ease in the house and I didn't know why. Sarah was still sleeping easily when I checked in on her. Her color was good and her pulse was strong. It didn't look as if she had moved since the last time I checked on her, so I quietly slipped out of the room and went back to the staircase where Sloan had told me to go.

I stopped at the bottom of the stairs and listened for him. He must have heard me coming because he called out, his voice leading me to a storage room to the left

that was filled with large shelving units that held plastic totes and cardboard boxes. The ceiling was tall here, and the shelves went nearly to it. I found that Sloan had pulled a large plastic tote from a higher shelf already and was reaching for another one as I came into his view.

"Found 'em," he said as he started to lift the heavy tote down.

"Here, let me help you," I told him as I quickly moved next to him and reached up to grab the tote. Together we sat the second tote on top of the first one and Sloan lifted lid off, revealing neatly folded clothing inside.

"You look like about the same size as Jean was," he said as he picked up a shirt and unfolded it. "You shouldn't have a problem wearing any of this."

I took the shirt from him and held the yellow t-shirt up in front of me so that I could see it for myself. It had a logo for some restaurant in Montreal printed on the front and looked as if it would fit. I dropped the shirt long enough to pull mine off and then replaced it with the shirt from the box. Sloan was right, it did fit me.

The other man smiled for the first time. "I thought you looked about his size. You should probably try on some pants to be sure, but I think you can take your pick from either of these totes."

I returned his smile. "Thanks. I'll take a look through them. Are you sure this is okay?" I really didn't think it was a big deal about the clothes, but I just wanted to make sure it was cool.

"I'm sure," Sloan reassured me. "Like I said, Jean didn't have any family, and no one was really his size. They'd have stayed down here until someone like you needed them."

"I really appreciate it," I told him. "I'll have to take you out for a beer to say thanks."

He smiled, but shook his head ruefully. "I'd love to, but I'll have to settle for a beer in the backyard."

I smiled slightly, not sure why he would say something like that and wondering how I could ask without seeming nosey. "What, you under house arrest or somethin'?" I joked.

"Something," he replied as he bent to take another piece of clothing from the tote. "Gwen likes to keep me close to home."

I was in the middle of taking the t-shirt off again and I went still as I looked at him curiously. I didn't say anything for a moment, but when I did, my voice was low and controlled. "I realize that I don't know the status quo around here, but somethin' tells me that I'm not gonna to like the end of this story."

Sloan didn't look at me, instead keeping up the pretense of looking through the clothes in the tote. "It's nothing to get upset over, Kiran," he said in a carefully controlled voice. "She expects certain things from me, and I stay here because I have no where else to go."

I continued to look at him skeptically, not believing what I was hearing. "That sounds fucked up," I commented, trying not to sound too blunt, but it came across that way anyhow. "What 'certain things' does she expect from you?"

Without looking up he shrugged but didn't answer. He pulled out a pair of pants from the tote and held them out to me. "Try these on," he said, attempting to change the subject.

I took the pants, but I didn't move to put them on as I waited for an answer. "Judgin' by your lack of words, I'll assume it's not all fun and games," I observed.

"There must be somewhere you can go. Man, I'll help you get out. No one should live under someone else's thumb."

"Look, I appreciate the thought, but like I said, I don't have anywhere to go," Sloan tried to explain. "The werewolves hate me because I live here, and I don't exactly have the credentials to go out and get a job and live on my own. I'm used to living here. I get by."

"Gettin' by isn't livin', Sloan," I said passionately, knowing myself that I wouldn't be able to completely live my life if I never ended up remembering everything I had lost with my memory. "And fuck the werewolves. You don't need to stay here, man."

He was starting to get a little irritated by the way I was pushing him, but I knew that he would have to get pissed if he was going to take back his life. "No?" he challenged. "Where the hell would I go? I don't have any money. I may not know much about the world outside of this place, but I don't think there's much call for a fetch and carry boy out there. Are you gonna support me while I figure out how to get a life?"

"I'll help you do whatever you need to, man," I promised. "I couldn't live with myself if I didn't."

He looked as if he was seriously considering what I had said, but he ended up shaking his head. Before he had a chance to say anything else, I heard a female voice behind me. "Ah, there you are," she purred. "When Gwen told me there was another cat in the house, I had to see you for myself." I turned to see who was talking just as she gave Sloan a contemptuous look. "I hope the dog isn't bothering you."

CHAPTER 10 – NOT ALL CATS ARE POLITE

"I know I can stop the pain
If I will it all away"
"Whisper"
Evanescence

I couldn't believe that another werecreature would say something so mean spirited to another. I knew that the look I gave the girl who had joined us was just as disdainful as the one she was giving Sloan and I didn't give a fuck. She was young, but in my opinion that shouldn't have anything to do with her manners, or lack of.

She looked about seventeen with long, light brown hair and a pair of blue eyes that might have been pretty if they weren't filled with such scorn for the man who stood next to me.

"His name is Sloan, and he isn't much different than you or I am, so why the attitude?" I asked, my voice a little harsh.

She looked at me in surprise. "Because he's a werewolf," she said, speaking slowly and carefully as if that should have been explanation enough. "His kind know nothing more than killing, isn't that right, dog?" she taunted him.

I looked over at Sloan and found that he was looking down at the ground, his hands gripping the shirt he was holding tightly.

But the girl wasn't done with her jibes. "Oh, that's right, you know how to fuck," she added with a seriousness that had me looking at her wide-eyed. "Isn't that the use Gwen puts you to?" The other man still didn't answer, keeping his gaze down into the tote of clothes. "See?" she asked me. "It doesn't even know how to talk."

I smoothed my features so that I looked at her in mock distaste, seeming to be playful. I was sure that I had to have come across werewolves in my life prior to the other night, but since I didn't recall any of those instances I decided to try to play the situation as vague as possible. No one here but Sarah knew anything about my lack of memory and I wanted to keep it that way.

"I would probably keep my mouth shut as well if I were treated the way *Sloan* is," I said, emphasizing his name to her as I turned to face the girl fully and slipped my hands into my pockets. I made my tone real slow and playful, like my good ole Southern boy image would have sounded.

"You say that his kind know nothin' but killin'," I continued as I looked over my shoulder at Sloan so that I could smile and wink at him if he was looking up, which he wasn't. "But he's been nothin' but helpful to me. What makes you think we're any better than he is? You never killed anythin'?"

Because I know that I have, I thought to myself.

"I never tortured and killed any innocent folk. Werewolves do that," she accused. I chuckled a little bit to try to keep myself from wringing the little bitch's neck for being so malicious. "Because it's not their line, it's ours," she continued. "They kill our folk."

"To what purpose?" I asked, somehow knowing that the gene for being what we were was carried by only a certain kind of person. What this girl was claiming was that the wolves were killing the humans who carried this gene in the hopes that no more creatures such as herself and I would be born.

"To destroy us, why else?" she scoffed, confirming what I was thinking. That reason wasn't good enough for me, however, and I gave her the 'I-don't-believe-you' look.

"I've seen it happen, right there in front of me," she went on. "The dogs held me down and they killed him, but not before they..." She stopped then, her eyes full of a powerful emotion and I realized that she seemed very sincere in what she was saying.

"There must be some reason why," I said, trying to sound reasonable. "I mean, it doesn't make sense to exterminate those of the same kind. We're all werereatures."

She shook her head. "They don't see it that way."

"Just the ones you've come in contact with," I pointed out.

Her stormy eyes looked at me and I could feel her dislike for me was building, not that I cared. "Why would I need to see any more? The one time was more than enough."

"Do you know why they did it?" I asked.

She shrugged, as she looked at me defiantly. "For fun. For pleasure. To exterminate our kind. I barely got away."

I glanced at Sloan, not sure what to think and knowing that he wasn't going to be any help in forming an opinion. I was amazed to see that he was watching me in surprise, like he couldn't believe someone was actually sticking up for him and I guess it must have been an unusual situation for him.

I decided that I was going to reserve the right to not believe what this girl was claiming until I can get here to either confirm or deny what she was saying. I just couldn't see a genocidal viewpoint as being a beneficial way of life for either werewolves or other wererecats like myself. Not for the first time in the past day, I wished that I remembered the experiences of my life, but for now I was just going to have to live on my instincts.

"It's unfortunate that you've had a situation like that happen to you, but I highly doubt all of the wolves behave that way," I told the girl as I looked back at her.

"I hope it doesn't take running into a pack of them to make you change your mind," she countered disdainfully just before she turned and flounced off like a child going out for recess.

I closed my eyes briefly; thankful that she was gone, then I turned to Sloan. "What do you know about the situation that she was talkin' about?" I asked him.

Sloan shrugged. "Not a lot. She showed up about nine months ago, bloody and beaten, claiming her lover had been killed by Red Moon Pack."

I knew that Sloan was on our side, but I didn't know if he had been let in on the fact that I was, too. I had already dropped some hints but I decided to play dumb for a while until either he gave himself away or Mia said it was okay. "That's the group of werewolves here in town, right?"

Sloan nodded as he started to pull clothes from the tote again as if nothing had happened with the girl. "One of them."

I wondered how many more there were as I took a step closer to where he was so that I could look through the clothes too. "Do the people here only have problems with the one pack?"

"Most of the time. The other one stays out of town."

I nodded thoughtfully as I contemplated whether or not the other pack would be a help or a hindrance in trying to establish peace between the wolves of Red Moon Pack and the witches. "Is she from here?" I asked him.

"I don't think so. She's not exactly all friendly with me," he replied quietly.

"She's a fuckin' bitch," I told him, meaning it and not caring if my opinion cut me off from someone who might be able to help me with what I needed to relearn. Sloan smiled and I picked up the next pair of jeans in the tote. "All right, let's go through this shit and see what's here," I told him good-naturedly.

We spent the next two hours going through the clothes and I managed to find enough that I liked to fill a smaller tote, adding to my current wardrobe substantially. Sloan, still thinking that he had to play errand boy, tried to carry the container upstairs for me, but I stopped him and hauled it up myself.

At the top of the stairs I thanked him again for letting me go through the clothes, then turned to go back to Sarah as Sloan went to the kitchen. After closing the door behind me quietly, I set the tote next to my suitcase that I had dropped off earlier and moved closer to the bed to look at the woman who was still sleeping peacefully. She began to stir a little as I watched her and I moved over to the chair where I had been sitting earlier, my guitar still propped on the arm where I had left it.

Sarah opened her eyes about ten minutes later and I stood to go sit next to her. A glance at the bedside clock said that it was two o'clock and I studied her features evenly as my fingers automatically moved to her wrist to check her pulse.

She looked as if she had taken a good nap and her pulse was steady. "Is everything okay?" she asked as I looked down at her.

I gave her a lazy smile. "Everythin's fine, darlin'."

"Then why do you look so worried?" she asked, her eyes studying me closely.

I was still thinking about the girl who had come down to the basement and I hadn't realized that my face showed how much her assumptions angered me. "I'm not worried," I assured her as I brought her hand to my mouth so that I could kiss the back of it lightly. "How are you feeling?"

Sarah was quiet for a minute, as if she wasn't sure if she should call me on my little lie or not. "I'm fine, but to look at your face I'd think I was dying."

I was glad that she assumed my current frame of mind had to do with her health and nothing else. "Gwen seems to have done a fine job. I'm just glad you're awake." I leaned down to kiss her forehead and Sarah lifted her hand to put it on my shoulder as she smiled.

"And hungry," she informed me just before I heard her stomach rumble slightly.

I sat up then and returned her smile. "I can go to the kitchen and see what they've got," I offered. "I know that Sloan was goin' back there. What do ya feel like?"

Sarah's smile widened and she moved to sit up a little. "Going to the kitchen and seeing what they have," she said, clearly not wanting to be waited on.

Knowing that there would be no arguing with her, I stood and moved away from the bed so she could get out of it. "You'll need something else on..." I allowed my statement to drift off as I remembered the nightgown Gwen had provided for Sarah to wear and the fact that there wasn't much to it.

Sarah looked under the covers to determine her state of dress, and then started to look around the room. "Is my purse in here?" she asked.

"Yes," I told her as I pointed to where I had left it earlier when I had brought it in from the car. Sarah pulled back the covers and crossed the room to retrieve it, proving as she did that there were no lingering mobility problems from the gunshot wound she had received. She took one of the devices from the purse and soon the smell of new electronics filled the room just before an outfit appeared on the bed in front of her.

"You are such a smart ass," I told her with a grin as I tried to sound blasé, remembering how I had thought about going to her room at the casino to grab something for her and seeing now that I needn't have worried.

She looked over her shoulder at me saucily. "At least you're not running away from me this time," she teased, and then she pulled the nightgown off and started to change.

I averted my gaze from her naked form and tried to concentrate on making conversation with her. "Sloan helped me acquire more clothes. Have you met the female werecat that lives around here?"

I heard her stop moving behind me and I glanced at her to see that she was looking at me questioningly. "Kyna? Yeah."

"Is that her name?" I asked, seeing the girl in my mind again. "I like to think of her as 'Bitch'."

Sarah chuckled a little and started dressing again. "She's not that bad, except when it comes to Sloan."

I knew that Sarah hadn't been around the people at Sky House much, but if everyone else was as vocal as Kyna had been concerning how she felt about Sloan, I was guessing that Sarah might know a little more about his situation than he was comfortable telling me himself. "What's Sloan's deal, anyhow?" I asked her.

"I'm not sure," she answered. "He lives here and does whatever Gwen wants him to. Everyone treats him like shit; I don't know why he sticks around."

I was still trying to keep my gaze from her, but that didn't stop me from being aware of the fact that she only had her bra and underwear on. "I get the feelin' he thinks that he can't make it. I think it's shitty the way people treat him around here, he's a human being, not a lapdog."

"He may be right. I think he's lived here for at least twenty years and I don't think Gwen's dad let him go to school. He probably couldn't make it on his own." Sarah sounded sympathetic toward Sloan's situation, but I got the impression that she didn't think she could do anything about it. I planned on seeing about that but at the moment I was having a hard time with the fact that Sloan may have been deprived of an education.

"Are you serious?" I asked her, my voice clearly showing the shock I was feeling. Was that legal? How did Gwen's father get away with not sending Sloan to school and why the hell was he living here in the first place?

She nodded. "From what I can tell, yes."

"How could he do that legally?" I asked, voicing my thoughts.

Sarah smiled wryly and answered, "Some people don't live by the rules, Kiran."

"If they don't live by the goddamn rules, they should at least live by humanity," I told her passionately, knowing that this wasn't her fault, but needing to share my feelings with someone. "That's fucked up."

"I wish there was a way to get him out of here," she offered.

I looked at her for a second, wondering if she really felt that way. I realized that while I may have known her before, I didn't now, but from what I could tell she appeared to be sincere in her wish. "Maybe somethin' could be arranged then," I suggested.

Sarah frowned slightly, fully dressed now in a pair of low riding jeans and stomach baring shirt. "Do you have somewhere in mind for him to go?"

I thought about my sister in Mississippi and wondered if she would let me bring Sloan there to help him get a fresh start. "I might be able to figure somethin' out," I told her as we started toward the door together. "What do you think would happen around here if he did turn up missin'?"

I opened the door and Sarah looked out it, then said, "Let's talk about it later, okay?"

I nodded and we headed toward the kitchen. Sloan was still there and as if he had anticipated us showing up, he had something to eat for both of us already prepared. Sarah ate like she was starving, but I was able to keep up a pleasant conversation with Sloan, who hung out with us while we ate. I didn't mention anything to him about the possibility of leaving for the moment, knowing that if Gwen got word that I was attempting to liberate her boy she might try to stop me.

It was three o'clock when we finished and by then the three of us were on our way to knowing each other pretty well. Sloan had been a little introverted again while Sarah ate, but once he warmed up to her it was easy for her to see how nice a guy he was. I was glad that Sarah treated him like a person and not like some substandard being like the rest of the people who lived here.

We could hear others moving around the house, but no one came in the kitchen to bother us and I was glad to not have to see any of them. "Who's around?" I asked, wondering who might pop in.

Sloan thought a moment. "Kyna, obviously," he said. "But I think she's in her room. And Shea should be back soon."

"Have you heard from Mia at all?" I asked, wondering when she would be back.

"She went to work with Burt. I assume she'll be coming home with him tonight."

I nodded. "Okay."

We were just about finished with our meal when a young girl with dyed black hair and semi-goth style clothes came in and said hi on the way to the refrigerator. I didn't know her so I remained quiet along with Sloan and Sarah returned the greeting, and then introduced the girl as Shea, the person Sloan had expected back soon.

Shea came over to me and shook my hand, a friendly grin on her face. "You're the new kitty, right?" she asked, mirth evident in her hazel gaze.

I nodded in answer to her question and the expression on my face must have said that I didn't appreciate her calling me a kitty because Sarah said, "You shouldn't call them kitties."

Shea smiled and replied dryly, "Big, damn cat is just too long."

I couldn't help but laugh at her response as she then said hi to Sloan and caressed his shoulder slightly on her way to the fridge, causing him to blush at the attention and mumble hi in greeting before asking if she wanted something to eat. "No, I'll get it myself," she told him as she opened the door and examined what was inside.

Surprisingly, Shea easily joined in on our conversation, asking Sarah how she was feeling after sharing that she had seen a report on the news about the hotel burning and finding out that she and I were there. I brought up going to Sarah's hotel room so that she could get her things or whatever, and I was relieved when she told me that she wanted to stay there that night. I was glad that she didn't want to stay at Sky House and we decided to wait around at the house for the call from Ian, then we could figure out a place to meet he and Peta when they got into town that evening.

"Maybe we could meet him at the casino," Sarah suggested.

I told her how Ian was supposed to call Allison when he hit town and at that time she would give him the number to the house. I also told her that I didn't know for sure when that would be and Sarah said that she was okay with hanging out here and waiting in the meantime.

As if it taking a cue from our conversation, the phone rang then and Sloan went to answer it. He held the phone out for me a moment later and I took the receiver from him.

"Kiran," a male voice said from the other end. "Are you okay?"

The voice wasn't familiar to me, but I was hoping that it was Ian. "Yeah," I answer, then hesitated before asking, "Ian?"

"Yeah," he answered, his voice full of relief.

I smiled. "Glad to hear your voice. Where you at?"

"Just comin' into town," was his reply. "Where can we meet you?"

"Just a minute," I told him, then looked at Sarah. "Did you want to meet him at the casino?"

She had been watching me since I had taken the phone and now she nodded. "Yeah, at the La Bonne Carte Lounge."

"Can you find the Casino de Montreal?" I asked Ian.

"No problem."

I repeated the name of the lounge Sarah suggested and he said that they would be there in about a half an hour. Sarah agreed that we could make it there in that time and Ian said he would see us there.

I hung up the phone and looked at Sloan. "I'd like you to come with us," I told him.

CHAPTER 11 – MEETING MY FAMILY

"Catch me as I fall
Say you're here and it's all over now"
"Whisper"
Evanescence

Sloan gave me a doubtful look. "That's not possible," he said quietly, trying hard to wish that circumstances were otherwise.

I wasn't about to take no for an answer. I still didn't know who had tried to kill me earlier today and an extra pair of eyes would be a blessing. So far Sloan and Sarah were the only ones around here that I trusted, that's why I wanted him to come with us. "I'd like to make it possible," I told him. "I don't know who it was that shot Sarah today, and I sure as hell would appreciate an extra person with us."

"If you can talk Gwen into letting me go, I'll go," Sloan agreed, sounding like the idea was very unlikely.

"Where is she?" I asked as I got to my feet. I wasn't about to take no for an answer, especially since I didn't like the idea of asking in the first place.

Sloan pointed toward the backyard. "She's out by the pool."

I headed in that direction and as I did I heard Shea say, "Are all werecats crazy?"

I found Gwen lying in a lounge chair by the pool. She was wearing a black bathing suit that barely covered her body and was reading a magazine through large, black sunglasses. I carefully schooled my features so that I hid my dislike for her and when I was close enough I cleared my throat and said, "Ms. Amarosa."

Gwen looked up and a faint smile touched her pink lips. "Kiran. There's no need to be so formal. I'm Gwen."

I smiled at her lazily and decided to approach her carefully. "Gwen, I have a favor to ask of you," I began.

A delicately shaped eyebrow lifted curiously. "What is it?"

"I just got a phone call from my brother," I said, trying my best to sound charming. "He'll be in town in about a half an hour. We're supposed to meet him at the casino and I want to take Sloan with me. I don't know who shot Sarah, but I don't want to take any chances, and I'd appreciate someone at my back."

Gwen looked at me questioningly. "Are you sure you want him at your back? Werewolves can't really be trusted."

"If I didn't want him I wouldn't have asked," I replied, keeping my smile on my face when I really wanted to leer at her.

She thought about it for a minute then said, "Normally I'd have to say no, but I appreciate your concerns about Sarah. Keep him on a short leash, he works better that way."

I smiled slightly. "Of course," I told her out loud. Bitch, I was thinking to myself.

"How is Sarah doing?" Gwen inquired.

I cleared my throat. "She just ate, so she's feelin' better. She'll be goin' with me."

"Of course. Just see that Sloan is back by eight, you should have all the backup you need when your brother shows up."

"Thanks." I headed back in the house before she changed her mind. My gaze hit Sloan as soon as I was back in the kitchen. "Get your coat," I told him.

Sloan looked as if the impossible had just happened as I came up to stand beside Sarah. "She couldn't have said yes," he breathed in disbelief. I only gave him a look without saying anything.

"Holy shit, she said yes," Shea commented. "Better put your dancing boots on, Sloan."

Sloan didn't reply, instead leaving the room to retrieve a jacket with a triumphant gleam in his eye. "We should get your things," Sarah suggested. We said good-bye to Shea then and went back to Gwen's bedroom. Between the three of us, we got all my stuff out to Sarah's Aztec and within ten minutes we were on our way. The hole on the inside of the vehicle where the bullet had gone in was still evident, but it looked as if someone had tried to clean up Sarah's blood from the interior. Most likely Sloan, I thought to myself.

"Do you have an ID?" I asked him after Sarah had pulled out on the road where Sky House was located. He gave me a look that automatically told me no from the backseat where he seemed to be excited about going outside the house without Gwen.

"Have you ever been to the casino before?" I asked him, wondering how 'behind' he was in the times.

"A few times," he replied, looking out the window.

We continued our get-to-know-each-other small talk in the car and I told him how we were going to meet my brother, Ian, and my sister, Peta. "If you see anythin' you have a question about, I want you to ask me or Sarah, okay," I told him seriously. I wanted to help Sloan become educated about the outside world so that he would be better prepared for it when I got him out of Sky House.

"Are your siblings werecats, too?" he asked, taking my up on my offer.

I nodded. "Yes." As far as I know, I thought to myself.

We arrived at the lounge with about five minutes to spare before the scheduled meeting time. It was close to the dinner hour so the lounge was fairly quiet with some low music playing in the background. La Bonne Carte was a casual place and we found that most of the tables were empty as we walked in through the open French doors. There were about a dozen people inside so it was easy to find a table where we could watch the entrance so the three of us took a seat, Sarah to my left and Sloan to my right.

The waitress came over for our drink order as soon as we were settled. Sarah asked for something that sounded very exotic while I ordered a Heineken. Sloan looked as if he had no idea what to order so I told the waitress to bring him a beer as well. She looked as if she were about to ask for his ID, when I smelled that now familiar scent of new electronics and she thought better of it.

I grinned at Sarah slyly, knowing that she had done something to the waitress to deter her from asking for the ID and I was grateful that she had. We didn't need the attention right now. "Do you know when your birthday is?" I asked Sloan.

He looked at me in surprise. "No idea."

"Do you know how old you are?"

He thought a moment then guessed, "Late twenties?"

"Are you from Montreal?"

The other man shrugged. "I've been here as long as I can remember, but that doesn't mean much."

I didn't want to put him on the spot or anything by asking him questions that were too intense for where we were. He and I were developing the basis for a good friendship and I didn't want to invade his personal space. Sloan started to ask questions about America that made me hesitate since I couldn't remember anything about my life there. I still hadn't confessed my situation to him, but I knew it would only be a matter of time before he found out.

Thankfully Sarah came to my rescue and started telling about what life had been like where she had grown up. The waitress returned with our drinks and I watched Sloan study the bottle in front of him.

"Have you ever drank before?" I asked him.

Sloan grinned at me lopsidedly; looking really relaxed for the first time. "A time or two," he said.

At least he's not going to get cocked off one beer, I thought wryly to myself as I lifted my bottle to my lips.

We didn't have to wait long before two newcomers entered the bar. The young girl was familiar to me and I realized quickly that she was an older version of the picture I had found in my wallet the night before. She didn't look any older than eighteen and she had red hair that hung straight over the shoulders of her worn jean jacket that looked as if it was years older than she was. I stood, somehow instinctively knowing who she was, but wanting the assurance that she recognized me first.

The guy with her was older, in his mid-twenties if my guess was right. He had short, brown hair that was starting to curl on the ends as if he were overdue for a trim. He was close to my height, but still an inch or two shorter and at least six inches taller than the girl. He looked worried and took in his surroundings carefully, as if he were walking down a dark alley and was taking no chances.

Because of where we had chosen to sit the two newcomers saw us pretty quickly and the girl grinned as she started across the bar quickly. The man was slower as he continued to check out who and what was in the bar and I moved around the table to meet them.

Peta managed to hold herself back until she was about ten feet from table, then she started running toward me and threw herself into my arms with a squeal of delight. I caught her easily beneath her arms and lifted her small frame off the floor until I was standing straight, her feet dangling beneath her. If I were asked, I knew that there were no words to describe how happy I was in that moment that I had family here, tangible evidence of who I was.

"I recognize you from your picture," I told Peta as she returned my hug with her arms around my neck.

She leaned back, her nose crinkling slightly and her blue eyes danced with good-natured mirth that I wished I remembered. "You still have that ninth grade picture in your wallet?" she asked, her voice carrying a Southern accent like mine as she rolled her eyes. "God, I'm so embarrassed. You didn't show anyone, did you?"

I grinned back at her. "I had to take out that ad in the paper cause I didn't know who the hell I was," I teased. "And that was the only proof I had, darlin'."

She laughed then and wiggled in a way that meant she wanted down. I complied, but I wasn't ready to relinquish all contact with her so I kept my left arm around her waist as I turned my gaze to my brother who was now standing in front of me.

"Stop hoardin' him," Ian teased our sister as he took a step forward. "There's enough to go around." He moved forward then and together the three of us gave each other a big group hug and I was able to feel really secure for the first time that I remembered.

"Good to see ya, bro," I told him.

He felt a little familiar to me, but not enough to form a memory of any kind in the blackness that was my mind. "Good to see you in one piece," he replied as he pulled away and looked me over as carefully as the public room would allow him.

I kept one hand on his shoulder, as I looked him over, too. "Well, almost in one piece," I commented dryly as I squeezed Peta tighter to me.

"We'll work on that," Ian assured me then looked over at the table to check out Sarah and Sloan, his eyes lingering slightly on the other man and I wondered if he somehow knew that he was a shifter as well.

I turned then to make the introductions. "This is Sarah Pearl and Sloan," I said as I continued to hold Peta close to me. "This is my brother, Ian, and my sister, Peta."

Sloan stood and shook Ian's hand before nodding at Peta, who for her part was giving Sarah a close once over. She seemed to accept Sarah without question and started to chat with her a little as the three of us moved around the table to sit.

Sarah moved over to sit next to Sloan while I took her chair, Peta and Ian sitting on my other side. I looked at my sister and asked teasingly, "Are you old enough to be in here?"

She rolled her eyes again and I found myself wondering if it was an action she did all the time. "You should know better than to ask a lady's age, Kiran," she warned me prissily, causing me to laugh.

The waitress came back and Ian ordered a beer, while Peta ordered a soda, saying dryly how someone had to be able to drive.

"Tell us what happened," Ian said as soon as she moved off.

I glanced over at Sloan, knowing that he was about to learn what had happened to me right along with my siblings. "We are about to get into some information that no one at Sky House knows," I told my new friend. "And I'd like to keep it that way."

The other man smiled in return. "I'm good at keeping secrets," he assured me.

I nodded, hoping that Gwen had no way of getting information out of him that he wanted to keep hidden. In that moment I also realized that I was going to be letting Sarah in on why I was really in Montreal and I hoped that I could trust her with the truth as well.

I then proceeded to give a fairly tame version of what I had awakened to, avoiding the blood and gore details for Peta's sake, but still making sure to mention the ripped up body that had been lying around me.

Sloan was just as interested in what I had to say as Ian and Peta were, and thankfully he didn't seem offended that I hadn't told him about it before. I then told them about the girl I had found dead in the warehouse and the wallet that had

been on me when I woke. Sarah knew some of these details, but she listened to the whole explanation with as much interest as the others.

"That's how I knew my name," I explained, and then I told them how I had called information for the town on the license and had then got Allison's number as a result.

"Do you know who the girl was?" Ian asked.

"Vivian Waits," Sloan offered surely.

I looked at him in surprise. "How'd you know that?" I asked, hoping that it wasn't too late to be suspicious of him.

"Her brother is the friend of a friend," he explained. "And Mia's ex-husband."

I remembered the conversation that I had with Mia and the fact that she had already told me about Vaughn. She had also said that Sloan could get messages through, but I hadn't been sure how deep his knowledge of what Mia was doing ran. I had to wait to ask him which friend until after the waitress dropped off Ian and Peta's drinks.

"Not really a friend," he corrected himself. "More like an information contact. Her name is Susie."

"Is this who you get messages to?"

Sloan nodded, slightly surprised that I knew about his role in the house. "Yes."

I looked around the table to address everyone. "As far as I know, Vivian and I were comin' here to meet up with Mia to help with the situation."

Sloan was nodding in understanding. "Because Jean died, that makes sense."

This was the first that I had known that Jean was involved in the peace attempt as well. I wondered if his death was supposed to have happened or if he was supposed to be an amnesia victim as well. "Did you know Vivian?" I asked, hoping that maybe I could learn something from this unknown font.

I was disappointed when he shook his head. "Not at all."

"Did you know of her?"

Sloan shrugged. "Susie said that help was coming, but she didn't say who."

"Well, Mia seems to think that there's a group in town that is actually responsible for keepin' this feud alive," I reported to everyone at the table. "She's tryin' to figure out who it is, because she doesn't know anything either." I then told them how Mia had infiltrated the group of magic users in the hopes of bringing things to a peaceful resolution between them and the wolves. I looked at Ian in particular and said, "Somethin' meant enough to me to come here and help with this problem. While I don't know what that reason was, I still feel that I need to do what I can to help."

He opened his mouth to speak, but I didn't hear what he said because I heard someone calling out my name. The voice was a female's and very faint so I went still and looked around the room to find who it was. I didn't see anyone looking in my direction, but I did smell vanilla, which was odd.

"What is it?" Ian asked, looking around himself.

"I hear someone callin' my name," I told him. I heard the voice again, very clearly this time and it was coming from behind me. I stood and looked around, not seeing anyone. "Do you hear it?" I asked everyone at the table.

They all glanced at each other and it was clear that none of them heard the woman. "Not at all," Ian confessed. "Are you sure you hear it?"

I nodded that I did just as I heard the woman say, "You have to help them."
I realized then that it was the dead woman from my dreams. Vivian.

CHAPTER 12 – ANOTHER MESSAGE FROM VIVIAN

"This is me for forever
One of the lost ones
The one without a name
Without an honest heart as compass"

"Nemo"
Nightwish

"Why?" I asked the air above my head, wondering how the hell this was happening. It was one thing to dream of a dead woman. It was something all together different to hear her voice in broad daylight.

"To find out the truth."

"About what?"

"Why I died. You have to help them."

I looked around myself in confusion. "Vivian, is that you?" I asked, needing to be sure it was the woman/spirit in question as I took my seat again before I drew too much attention to myself.

"What's going on?" I heard Sarah as beside me, drowning out Vivian's next response so that I couldn't hear what she said.

I reached over and took Sarah's hand reassuringly as I held up a finger for her to wait a minute. "What was that?" I asked the voice.

Sarah's drink suddenly tipped over, the contents spilling onto her lap for no apparent reason. She managed to jump out of the way before much of the liquid soaked her clothes and grabbed a napkin to clean up the mess on the table.

In the back of my mind I still wondered if Vivian and I were involved prior to coming to Montreal, but the obvious act of jealousy that had just happened to Sarah spoke volumes and it provided more evidence in my mind that Vivian and I had been lovers, maybe more if the wedding rings meant anything. I figured that I had to make a stand now before Vivian thought that she was justified in her actions.

"That was rude," I told her sternly. I waited as Sarah continued to clean the mess and when there wasn't an answer I said, "Vivian, you know I can't remember anythin'."

Sloan was looking at me like I had lost my mind and maybe he was right. Peta and Ian seemed to have more patience, though, and were watching the scene as if they had done the same thing many times before.

Vivian didn't say anything; instead I saw a flash in my mind of a tall, dark haired man with rugged features. I wondered silently if it was her brother, Vaughn. "Who's that?" I asked her.

"He'll help you," was her reply.

That wasn't good enough. I was in a really precarious situation here. I didn't even know how to do most the things that came with being a werecat and here I was in the middle of a fucking feud, trying to diffuse it. She was going to have to give me some more answers. "Who is it?" I asked again.

All I got was the word 'brother', but that was faint. "Are you leavin'?" I asked, but got no reply, giving me the impression that the encounter was over. I looked around the table in shock, then took a long drink from the bottle of beer and pulled

cigarette from my pocket. I knew that I was visibly shaken by the encounter, but thankfully not completely freaked out by what had just happened. Talking to spirits didn't seem real familiar to me, but then I remembered my sibling's calm demeanor and figured it wasn't totally out of the bounds of reality.

"Vivian's spirit just talked to me," I told them finally after a couple long drags off the cigarette. "She told me I needed to help with the situation."

"What else did she say?" Ian asked.

I told them everything about the conversation and gave them all a description of Vaughn and what his name was. Then I looked at Ian and Peta, hoping that they would understand what I was about to ask of them. "I was able to figure out how to shift, but I don't know how readily I'll be able to do it. I'm gonna need a crash course in what the hell I can do and can't do. Can you help me?"

I was relieved when Ian grinned and answered, "You helped me when I went through my first change. Of course I'll help, bro."

Between Sarah and Sloan they were able to finish cleaning up the mess of Sarah's spilled drink as the waitress came back for more drink orders. We were all doing okay except for Sarah, but she declined another one.

"Vivian didn't seem to like me much," she said quietly to me when Peta was asking Sloan something. She suddenly seemed unsure of herself for the first time.

"She was just provin' she was here, darlin'," I reassured her, knowing that Sarah had probably already pegged what my relationship with the dead woman had been. "I'm sorry," I said in a low voice as I took her hand and squeezed it a little.

She smiled then, trying to tell me without saying anything that she was fine, then she glanced around the table. "Would you all rather go up to my room? It's a big one. We might be more comfortable there."

It seemed like a better idea to me. I looked at Ian and he nodded.

"I'd rather discuss family matters in private," he stated.

Sloan looked as if he wanted to go as well, but he seemed to assume that he wasn't invited. I didn't like the fact that he singled himself out of our group considering the bonding that had been going on. I made sure that he was aware of the fact that he was wanted as I herded everyone out of the lounge while Sarah had the drinks signed off to her room.

Sarah wasn't kidding when she had said that the room was big.

If this was how the high rollers live count me in, I thought to myself as she closed the double doors of the suite behind us.

It was obvious that Sarah was the only one of us who was used to these kinds of surroundings, but I grinned at my brother anyhow who was making a better effort than the rest of us at hiding his awe over the sheer grandeur of the place. Peta began slowly moving around the room, checking out the expensive furniture and borderline over the top decorations, all the while trailed by Sloan, who was only able to resist opening drawers and doors because my sister was doing it for him. Sarah moved after them to show them around, giving Ian and myself an opportunity to talk without involving the others.

"Are you sure you're okay?" he asked once we were alone. "Allison said somethin' about you being hurt."

I removed my jacket, then turned slightly as I lifted my shirtsleeve so that I could show him the scabbed over slashes on my arm. Then I showed him the two puncture holes in my head, the whole while telling him about the dream I had where I pulled out the 2x4 with silver spikes out of my head. "Sarah said that the silver was why I didn't heal 'em on my own, but I'm not sure. I don't remember how to do anythin', Ian," I told him, trying not to sound too poor me-ish. "I was able to figure out how to shift this mornin', before we had to leave the hotel, but I'm not sure if I can do it again if I needed to."

"You will," he assured me calmly. "You may not remember how in here," he said, tapping my forehead with a finger, "but you'll remember here." This time he moved his hand so at that he was touching my chest, right over my heart. "Bein' what you are has nothin' to do with your mind and everythin' to do with your heart."

I hope that he is right, I thought to myself as I smiled at him, feeling so much better just having him here. "I know that there is so much that I should be askin' you, but I have no idea where to start," I confessed. "How long have I been able to... you know, change?"

"Since you were sixteen."

I quickly calculated the time and came to the conclusion that I had been this way for over ten years. "You said that I helped you with your first change," I said, needing to know a little more about the family before anything else. "Does that mean that I'm older?"

Ian smiled. "Yeah, by a few years. Allison is the oldest; she's 32, and not a werecat. I'm 25, and Peta is 17. She first shifted last year."

"What about our parents?"

A sad look crossed his face and I knew the news wouldn't be good. "I'm afraid they passed away when we were teenagers," he told me sadly.

I was very glad that I had my siblings to talk to so that I could regain some knowledge of the person I had been, but the fact that my parents were gone hit me harder than I had thought it might and I knew that my loss showed on my face. "How?" I asked Ian quietly.

"It was a fire," he explained, sadness penetrating his voice as well. "Dad was trapped and Mom went back in after him. Neither one came out." Rehashing all this was visibly painful for him, too, and I appreciated the fact that he understood that I no longer had those memories and that I needed to know what happened. "You were 18, almost 19," he went on. "And you and Allison raised Peta and I."

That wasn't too long after my first shift, I thought to myself, wondering if I had been there or if there was something I could have done to save them. I was quiet for a few minutes as I tried to pull a memory of the fire from my empty mind, but there was nothing there for me except frustration and vacant blackness as I felt tears starting to form in my eyes.

"I'm sorry, I know it has to be hard for you to hear all this again," Ian said softly as he put a hand on my shoulder for comfort. "We had wonderful parents, and while you and Allison couldn't replace them, you did a fine job of raisin' us. You left home a few years back when the wanderlust got too much, but we kept in touch."

Hearing of the death of our parents was very upsetting, but I knew that there were more important things that I needed to know about my life. Things that I would probably need if I was going to be able to follow Vivian's wishes and help make peace in the city. Then I could go back and fill in the holes of my life and

grieve again. There were still questions that I wanted to ask Ian about our parents, but I knew that they would have to wait for now. I kept telling myself this over and over for a little while to control my tears before they spilled over, then I said, "Allison said somethin' about wanderlust, too. What is it exactly?"

Ian seemed to take my cue and he did his best to let his sadness drain away as well as he smiled wryly. "Once those of our kind hit a certain age, we hear the road callin' to us. We spend years travelin' from place to place, until we find somewhere we want to settle down, or someone we want to settle down with. It's hit me too, but I tend to stay closer to home than you did. Peta's a bit young for it yet, but I see signs that it won't be far off."

I glanced over at Sarah and thought about Vivian for a moment. "Does it make you just pick up and leave without sayin' anythin' to anyone?" I asked him, hoping to find that as a reason why I just left Sarah like she claimed.

"Sometimes it does hit that hard," he explained, his eyes following mine to Sarah. "Sometimes we don't have a good reason to leave, but we leave just the same. I'm sorry to say I've done that myself upon occasion."

"I've hurt her before," I told him, not taking my gaze from Sarah. "I don't wanna do it again." I then looked at Ian so that I could tell him what I knew of my relationship with Sarah. "I left her before and I don't know why. Should I stop what's developin' between us again before it's too late?" I was getting a doomed feeling in my gut that I wasn't supposed to be with anyone.

Ian shot one more look at Sarah, then turned back to me. "From what you said the last time I talked to you, you were about done with the wanderin' part of your life, Kiran. You talked about a woman, but you didn't give us any details." He paused a moment, then asked, "Was it Sarah?"

I looked at her as well and couldn't help but smile at the way she moved as she led Peta and Sloan over to the bar to get them a drink. "She's a witch, Ian." My eyes returned to his face and I asked, "When was the last time we talked? What did I say about the woman I was with?"

"It was about four months ago," he said, thinking back. "You said that you had found someone special, and hinted that you might be bringin' her home if things worked out the way you wanted them to." He shook his head a little, and then said, "You didn't say anythin' about her bein' a witch, though."

"Did I say where I was?" I asked him, trying to speak quietly so that the others didn't overhear us. I was really leaning toward the fact that Vivian was the woman I was involved with and I didn't want Sarah to hear anything and become upset. I felt very torn about continuing my involvement with Sarah, but at the same time I knew that we might need her help in making the peace I had promised to aide Mia with.

Ian was speaking softly, too, and I glanced over to see that Sarah was sharing stories of her exploits with Sloan and Peta. "Indiana, I think," he said. "When you didn't call back, I tracked you through Ohio, found out you were with a woman in a pick-up. I got a description, but I'm not sure Sarah matches it. From what I heard, the woman you were with was a bit less... flamboyant than Sarah."

I gave him a brief description of Vivian and asked him if that was the woman he had heard of. Ian shrugged in replied, then said, "I never saw her, but it sounds more like who I heard you were with than Sarah. What happened to her?"

I then told him about finding Vivian in the warehouse dead and the fact that I had been dreaming about her ever since I woke up. "She's the one I was talkin' to downstairs," I explained.

He gestured toward my hand to where I was wearing the wedding rings. "Are you sure you didn't marry the girl?" he asked.

I shook my head, not looking at him. "No. I found these among her things in her hotel room. She was wearin' an engagement ring, though." I fell silent then, wondering if the rings had been a charade or what. If we were engaged, then why was Vivian holding onto the rings and not me? Why would she have even brought them with her here from Indiana... unless... I began to wonder if we hadn't planned on marrying here in Montreal after all the trouble was over. That would explain things a little.

I began to wonder if Vaughn knew what our plans were and if Vivian and I were in fact together and in a serious relationship. I didn't want to talk to the man about his dead sister, but I was beginning to think he was my only alternative since I hadn't told my own family any of the details about what was going on in my life.

"Is it normal for me to not tell you guys what's goin' on with me?" I asked Ian, meeting his gaze.

"Sometimes," Ian replied with a shrug as if it was no big deal. "I mean, we're close, but we don't live in each other's pockets."

From his response I got the impression that I wasn't acting too out of character and I assumed that there was no major reason why I didn't tell them about Vivian to begin with. It just didn't make sense, though.

"What is it like to be like us?" I asked him then, deciding that it would be better to concentrate on the things I could learn instead of the things I couldn't. "How do we live? Is it close to how the wolves do?"

Ian shook his head. "Not really. They run in packs, we're loners, for the most part. Our tribe tends to be closer, stayin' in contact with each other and the other members of our families that can't shift, but we don't run in packs."

He then spent some time going over the basics of what being a shifter was like for us as werecats. His explanation seemed familiar to me, but I didn't actually remember any of it until Ian said it, kind of like when someone asked if you knew a particular song but you didn't recognize it until you actually heard it. He also told me about the different forms that we could change in to and some of the things that I could do while in them. It all seemed to match what little Sarah had told me so I felt like I was getting a small part of myself back finally. It felt good.

By the time Ian finished with his explanations it was nearly seven. He had talked about many things that I still didn't understand, but promised he would continue my re-education later. Things like these special gifts we could perform that would basically do things sort of like magic, but were actually a favor from the goddess. The results of one of the gifts sounded familiar to me. Gwen had agreed pretty easily to letting Sloan go with us tonight and I wondered if I had inadvertently used this gift on her and it had worked.

I asked Ian some specific questions about some things, but he glanced at the others across the room and said, "I'd rather not go over it here. Maybe later the three of us can go for a drive? Maybe find some open ground?"

I nodded, looking over to where Peta and the others were as well. "Sure. I'm not sure where we can go, but we can find somethin'."

Sarah and the others had left Ian and me alone to talk, Sarah keeping Sloan and Peta busy by regaling them with stories of her travels by what I was picking up. I watched the three of them for a moment, knowing that there was still a lot of questions I needed answers to, but I also felt the need to spend some time just getting to know my family again. Then I thought about Sloan and the fact that Gwen wanted him back by eight. "The people back at the house where I had to take Sarah are witches. What do you know about them?" I asked my brother. I was beginning to form a plan concerning my new friend because I knew that I didn't want to take him back there.

"I know you don't want to fuck with them," Ian said after a moment. "They have ways of messin' up your whole life if you cross them. Of course from what I understand if you have one as a friend, you can breathe easy."

I figured that they wouldn't be a cakewalk if you pissed them off, but then again I felt a certain amount of loyalty to Sloan as well. I told Ian what I knew about Sloan's situation and about how Gwen had told me to have him back to the house by eight. "I don't want to take him back, but then again I don't want to bring the wrath of an entire group of them down on us, either," I explained.

"No, that's not a good idea," Ian agreed as he thought for a moment. "Have you thought about what your relationship with Vivian was? I mean, you were travelin' with her, from what I can tell, and given the rings, I'd think the two of you were engaged. Seems like you were here to help her sort out some things, and she wants you to keep on with it even though she's dead. Best way to do that would be from Sky House, wouldn't it?"

His quick change of topic took me by surprise, as did his choice of subject matter. "I have thought about what my relationship was with Vivian and everythin' seems to be pointin' to the fact that we may have had a relationship of some kind." I took a breath and again saw her lifeless body lying in that warehouse. "Unfortunately, I can't verify what that relationship actually was. I really wish that I would have told one of you guys somethin' instead of just hintin' around about it."

I then looked over at Sloan and the others again and said, "I don't want to go back to Sky House, Ian. There's somethin' about that place that just doesn't sit right. Maybe if I remembered how to do everythin' that I am capable of... but there's no use whinin' about it, is there? I just don't want Sloan to be treated the way he has been anymore. It's bullshit."

"I don't think there's anythin' you can do about that. He's a big boy, if he wanted to leave, he would." Ian then brought the conversation back to Vivian. "Have you thought about how to do what Vivian wants you to if you don't go back to Sky House? We can work on your trainin', you know."

It was beginning to get confusing, the way that Ian was switching topics back and forth and while I was concerned over the situation between the witches and the werewolves, I was more apprehensive over what happened to Sloan. He was a person that I felt I knew, unlike the situation that had led me to Montreal that I now remembered nothing of.

"He doesn't leave because he thinks he's got no where to go," I told Ian. "I hope that I can relearn what I knew, but in the meantime I'm just not sure what I can do. Mia thinks that there is a third group that's egg'in' on the hostilities. Maybe if she can figure out who they are, then we could expose them to both groups."

Ian put his hand on my shoulder reassuringly. "We'll help you, Kiran. Together I'm sure we can work things out." He glanced over at Sloan and asked, "What time is he supposed to be back to Sky House?"

"Eight."

"Maybe if we get him back in time, they'll be more willin' to let him leave with you next time. It would give us a chance to find somewhere for him to go." He smiled and added, "Then we can take that drive."

That wasn't what I wanted to do but I didn't see another alternative. "You're probably right," I relented with a sigh. "I want him out of there, though. As soon as possible."

Ian nodded. "We'll see what we can do." He stood then and went over to where the others were standing and said to Peta, "We're goin' to take Sloan home, then go for a drive. You want to stay here with Sarah, or come with us?"

Peta grinned up at him from the bar stool where she was sitting next to Sloan. "Go, of course."

I approached the bar as well and found Sarah's suddenly worried gaze on me. "Are you coming back?" she asked, concern dancing in her eyes. "I could get another room for Ian and Peta, one close to this one."

"I'll be back," I assured her with a smile, looking to Ian for a time because I wasn't sure how long he wanted to be gone.

"By midnight," Ian said. "And that room would be appreciated."

Sarah smiled then in relief and came over to give me a hug and kiss that I returned, but I couldn't help but feel guilty doing so after all the revelations I had received throughout the course of the evening. But I couldn't help thinking that I didn't remember Vivian, so I wasn't sure what I should do about Sarah.

Everyone said their goodbyes, as we got ready to leave, Sloan thanking Sarah for her tales as we neared the door. I noticed that he was quiet while we went down to Ian's old Ford Bronco that had tires almost as big as I was. Peta got in the back with Sloan while I sat up front with Ian, who commented on the fact that he thought Sarah was very nice as he pulled the car on the road, then asked for directions to Sky House.

Between Sloan and myself we managed to give my brother a proper set of directions that would get us there. I tried to keep up a constant flow of conversation with everyone while we drove, wishing like hell that I didn't have to take Sloan back to that house. For his part, Sloan was quiet and I hoped that he understood how much I wished that we weren't taking him back to Sky House. But I understood that we needed to maintain our positions for now and I silently promised him that someday soon he wouldn't have to be there anymore.

When Ian pulled into the driveway, Sloan put his hand on my shoulder. "You know, it's all right, Kiran. I know you don't like it, but I belong here."

I couldn't bring myself to look at him. "No, you don't, Sloan, and one day you'll understand that, too," I told him quietly. "I'll talk to you tomorrow, okay?"

"Sure," he said with a shrug. "I'm glad you got back with your family." He then glanced at the others. "It was good to meet you." After exchanging good nights with Ian and Peta, Sloan got out of the Bronco then took a deep breath before going into the house. As he opened the door, I could see Gwen in the foyer, waiting for him and I felt my gut twist because we were leaving him here.

"I see what you mean about not wantin' to leave him there," Ian said as he drove away.

"We've got to get him away from here," I commented, thinking again about our sister in Mississippi. "What about Allison? Do you think she would take him in? Help him get a job or somethin'?"

"I don't know," he said. "We'll call her and find out, but she's got enough on her plate already. Isn't there a werewolf pack in town that could take him in?"

I shook my head, looking out the windshield and thinking as I said, "I don't know. He said somethin' about not havin' anywhere else to go. He doesn't know much about what he is, and what he does know he keeps secret from Gwen. I need to find Vaughn and talk to him, maybe I'll ask. I can't leave him there, that's all I know."

"If he doesn't know much about werewolves, maybe he just doesn't know he has other places to go," Peta suggested from the back.

"You could be right," Ian agreed as he drove out of the city. "We'll try to find some werewolves and see what they say about takin' him in."

CHAPTER 13 – IS IT SUPPOSED TO WORK THAT WAY?

"These wounds won't seem to heal
This pain is just too real
There's just too much that time cannot erase"
"My Immortal"
Evanescence

Ian told me how he had seen a place on their way into town that looked like a good one where we could do what needed doing and not be seen by anyone. As we drove I told him and Peta how I had managed to shift in the hotel room earlier that day and I asked how close I had been to what shifting was supposed to be.

Ian was pleased that I managed to hit all five forms when I first tried. He asked me a few questions about what I noticed about the different shapes, and told me that he would walk me back through them when we got to where we were going.

"We'll both help you," Peta corrected.

I smiled as I looked at both of them. "I'm glad you're both here," I said, relief apparent in my voice. "Really glad."

They both grinned back at me, but none of us said anything further. Soon we arrived at the park that Ian found and it was easy to see why he thought it was perfect. It was a large park with lots of trees and no one around. Ian parked the car and the three of us piled out.

After we had grouped around the back of the Bronco I was surprised when Ian and Peta started to undress in front of me as if they had done it a thousand times before. Then I remembered how I had removed my clothing earlier that day before shifting in the hotel room. The thought of seeing my siblings naked left me a whole lot unsettled and it must have been apparent on my face because Peta took on look at me and started to laugh.

"Ah, Ian... maybe you should explain about clothes changing with us," she said as she folded her shirt and placed it on the bumper. "I think Kiran is under the impression he's gonna have to count the dimples on your butt."

I gave Peta a dirty look as Ian chuckled and kicked off his cowboy boots. My brother explained how there was a way to make pieces of clothing bond to us so that they changed in all our forms along with us so that we were never left showing our more unmentionable parts if we didn't want to. He told me that he would make sure to teach me how to do it soon so that I wouldn't have to worry about it.

With a great deal of regret I realized that when I shifted in the warehouse that night the jeans I had left in the parking lot must have been ones that were bound to me like Ian had described and I was sorry to have left them behind. But I hadn't known at the time and Ian assured me that it wouldn't be a big deal to do the same with another pair.

In the end Ian stripped down to his jeans while Peta wore this full-length body suit that hid perfectly under her street clothes. Ian pulled a large beach towel out of the back of the Bronco for me to wrap around my waist for the time being and we all went to work.

For the next three hours we went over how to shift to each of our various forms, one at a time. We also covered some basic fighting maneuvers in each form and while I was able to hold my own in most of them, it was obvious that I had a great

deal to learn still. By the end of the session I felt that I could shift to any form I wanted with ease and I felt a hell of a lot better in the idea that I could defend myself if I needed to.

It was close to midnight when we headed back to the hotel. We found Sarah in the main room of the casino where she was playing poker and winning. She informed us that she was able to procure a room right next door to hers for Peta and Ian and I was glad that they would be so close. She hadn't really asked me if I would stay with her and I think we were both just assuming that I was.

I made sure that my siblings got into their room okay and told them that I wanted to try to find Vivian's brother the next day so that I could talk to him. I didn't know how I would do it, but I needed to try. I needed to find out about my relationship with Vivian and I had a hunch he would know. I hoped that maybe Mia would contact me and I could ask her.

Once the two of us were alone back in Sarah's room she asked me how everything went with my family.

"Really good," I told her with a smile. "I think I have a better handle on some things. We'll see, though. What did you do while we were out?" I was still a little unsure with her. I couldn't help thinking of Vivian again and I was worried that I wasn't mourning her the way that I should be, but then again I didn't know anything for sure so I pushed those feelings aside and concentrated on Sarah for the moment. She was here and she had helped me out a lot. She deserved to be treated fairly... even though I wasn't sure what that meant right now.

Sarah grinned as she put her purse on the coffee table and turned to face me. "I lost a little money, and won a lot more," she replied off handedly as she crossed to where I was standing next to the bar and put her arms around my neck, getting really close to me. "You smell sweaty. You didn't wear yourself out playing with your brother, did you?" she asked playfully as she put her nose close to my neck.

I put my hands lightly on either side of her waist and looked down at her. "I should probably shower," I said with a smile as I studied her for a while, wondering again why I had left her like I did.

She moved even closer to me, pressing her body along the entire length of mine. "You could... but you don't have to. I like the way you smell," she breathed as she kissed my neck.

I chuckled at her obvious seduction, inwardly torn because it was clear that she wanted me here with her, but I just wasn't sure that I wouldn't hurt her again. I lifted a hand so that I could touch her face. "Sarah," I said quietly, then moved my fingers into her hair, using my hold to bring her face closer to mine so that I could kiss her lightly, brushing my lips against hers in an almost teasing way.

A low 'mmmm' sound vibrated in the back of her throat as her long fingers wound their way into the hair at the base of my neck. I pulled my head back slightly to look down at her again and nearly groaned out loud when she slowly ran her tongue along my bottom lip, leaving a hot, wet trail before bringing her mouth back to mine for a lingering kiss.

I returned the kiss, wrapping my arms around her waist and pulling her slight frame still closer to mine so that our bodies were almost one. My mind was in conflict even as my body warmed to having Sarah's so near. Part of me knew that I had been basing my reactions toward her off the fact that she knew me and that I

felt a bond with her because of that. I was troubled because I had hurt her before and I sure as hell didn't want to do it again.

As her tongue played along side mine I wondered how I felt about her. Was it just lust? I knew that I felt protective of her and there was no question that I wanted her physically. The most comforting part was that there was this sense of familiarity with Sarah. Almost as if I had dreamed of her, something like *déjà vu*. I seemed to know how to please her, my mind grasping onto a single thought of a certain sensitive spot behind her knee that I wanted to try out.

I definitely couldn't say that I loved her, hell, I didn't even KNOW her, but I liked her well enough, and I would go so far as to say that I had become fond of her in the hours that I had spent with her. I didn't know where those feelings came from, but I knew that I had to trust my instincts. I still wasn't sure that I was doing the right thing by being with her, but until I got some solid proof that I shouldn't be, I decided to stay where I was and risk the chance that I would probably beat myself up for it every step of the way.

Sarah's hands had found their way under my shirt while we kissed and as she pushed it up my chest to remove it I knew that now wasn't the best time for deep, philosophical debates with myself. Not when I had a beautiful woman in my arms who was begging for me to take our kiss... and everything else... to the next level. I quickly pulled the shirt over my head, then drew Sarah close again for another long kiss, using my hands to roam carelessly over her back, bottom and hips, keeping her close to me.

Her fingers were in my hair again as our tongues mingled together in a heated sparring that left both of us breathless and wanting more. I tore my mouth from hers so that I could kiss my way along her jawline and up to her ear where I playfully tugged on it with my teeth.

"I like the way you smell, too," I told her, breathing in her scent deeply. She smelled like flowers and sunshine. All Sarah. I was pulling her shirt out of the waistband of the skirt she was wearing in search of warm skin I knew was underneath as her hands gripped my shoulders tightly.

"Kiran," she said breathlessly.

"Yeah, darlin'," I replied teasingly, my fingers slipping inside to encompass her ribcage as I continued to hold her close to me.

"Shut up and kiss me," she all but growled, maneuvering her mouth to mine again for a hot kiss that made me forget all words so I could concentrate only on feeling.

We pulled at each others clothing roughly until we were both naked, then I lifted her in my arms and headed for the bedroom, once again remembering that 'sensitive spot' behind her knee that had come to mind earlier and thinking that I would have to test that notion once we got to the king-size bed.

Amazingly we knew what each other liked without asking. Of course for Sarah it wasn't as big a deal because she still remembered our time together, but I was constantly marveled by how well I knew how to please her, especially when the whole knee thing turned out to be not only a good thing, but nearly had her climaxing before I even got inside her.

Once I was buried deep inside her it was almost like I went on autopilot. Everything was so right in our rhythm. How she touched me. How I touched her. It was like a synchronized dance that neither of us had to think about. A dance that

only came from being with the other person for an extended period of time. It was amazing. Sarah was amazing.

Somewhere along the way though it all changed. I was so close. Release was a few thrusts away when I felt something shift subtly in her kiss, just enough for me to notice, but it wasn't enough to sound any alarm bells or anything. Her hands moved a little differently on my back where she was clutching at me, and her body started meeting my movements just a little differently. It was almost as if I was making love to a different woman... and man, it made all the difference in the fucking world. Suddenly everything I was feeling just got a whole hell of a lot better.

I couldn't stop what I was doing; I was too far gone for that. But I did manage to pull back enough to look down at Sarah in astonishment, wondering what was going on as I gasped out her name questioningly. Looking down at her, I watched Sarah as her features reflected the height of passion that she was experiencing. What was shocking was that Sarah's face wasn't the only one I was looking down into. It was Vivian's. Her features translucent over Sarah's, making it so that I could see both of their faces at the same time.

Either I faltered in our rhythm or Sarah must have known I was looking at her because she opened her eyes and looked at me with a smile that Vivian's lips echoed, even though the other woman's eyes remained closed, as if she needed to concentrate to stay where she was. "Kiran," they both said breathlessly in Sarah's voice as they pulled me down for a kiss that was just a bit different than what I was used to from Sarah.

To say that I was a little freaked out by what was happening was an understatement, but my body was crying out for release, as I was sure so was Sarah's... or was it Vivian's?

On top of everything was the notion floating around in the back of my mind was that Vivian had to have been my other half. That was the only explanation for how my body responded to Vivian's presence in Sarah's body. How everything was different. Somehow better. It was a brief thought and one that I couldn't hold onto at the moment because of what I was feeling. It was all I could do to not blurt out Vivian's name.

Sarah/Vivian broke off the kiss and buried her face in my neck, clutching me tightly as the beginnings of her orgasm hit. It was Vivian's voice I heard this time when she spoke the words, "I love you, Kiran."

I buried my face in Sarah's hair, guilt nearly consuming me as my orgasm started to take over. "Honey," I choked out, feeling like part of my heart was being ripped from my chest. The orgasm hit full force even as I felt tears in my eyes and heard Sarah/Vivian crying out in release as well.

Once the orgasm was over I quickly blinked the tears away as both of us struggled to get our breathing back under control. I wanted so badly to talk to Vivian again, but how could I do that without alerting Sarah to the dead woman's presence? I was hurt when I realized that Vivian was fading away.

Sarah laughed softly as she kissed my shoulder. "That was absolutely amazing, Kiran," she breathed, her voice sounding almost like purr from a sated cat. It was obvious that she had no idea that anything strange had happened and for that I was eternally grateful.

"It was all you," I said as I watched that last of Vivian's features fade, silently willing her to stay so that I could talk to her. I was completely stunned by what had

just happened and I wasn't sure how to continue. I was still lying on top of Sarah, holding myself up on my elbows so that I didn't crush her.

She reached up and brushed my hair away from my face. "What's wrong?" she asked, her brow creasing slightly.

I blinked, knowing that Vivian was totally gone now, and attempted to smile at Sarah. "Sorry. That was just really incredible, darlin'." I leaned down to kiss her, still remembering how Vivian looked and the intense pleasure her presence had brought me. "You might be too good for me," I joked, knowing that I couldn't let Sarah know how shaken I was by what had just occurred.

Sarah returned my kiss lazily. "Maybe that's why you left," she teased with a smile, even though I could see that underneath it all she still wanted an explanation that I could no longer give her.

I dropped my head to nuzzle her neck, that way she couldn't read my face and most importantly so she couldn't see how freaked I was by what had just happened. "I talked to Ian about that," I said, remembering my earlier conversation with my brother. "He said that sometimes the wanderlust can do that... make it so we just pick up and leave."

I didn't know if that was the real reason why I had left her in Minneapolis or not, but for now it was the only reason I had to offer. Having collected myself as much as I could for the moment, I lifted my head so that I once again looked down at her. "It's not a great excuse, but it might be the only explanation I can ever give you."

"It's okay," she replied easily as she played with a lock of my hair that hung over my forehead. "I've had a little wanderlust myself in the last year or so, coming across Canada."

I dropped my head again and held her for a while, not saying much as I tried to listen to see if Vivian was still around. After a minute of nothing I eased off of Sarah and said, "I think I'm goin' to have a shower, okay?"

She smiled and blinked at me sleepily. "'Kay," she murmured sleepily as I entered the bathroom. I was pretty sure that she was asleep before I even turned the water on.

CHAPTER 14 - TALKING TO VIVIAN

"In my head there's only you now
This world falls on me"

"Let Me Go"

3 Doors Down

The bathroom was very luxurious with lots of plush towels and expensive soaps and shampoos that I barely took notice of because my mind was still fucked up after what had just happened. I tried to feel Vivian, not sure what the hell I was doing, but she didn't seem to be anywhere around me so I finally climbed in the shower in defeat. I took my time, wanting to be alone for as long as possible to give her an opportunity to talk to me. Too bad I never felt her.

Finally when I stepped out of the shower and was drying off when my gaze fell on the mirror where steam had collected and left the surface covered in a fine mist. It was there that I saw that the word '*amante*' had been written in a woman's delicate hand on the glass. The word meant nothing to me, except that it was the French word for 'lover'. I was sure Vivian was the one responsible for it being there.

Keeping my voice low so I didn't wake Sarah, I said, "Vivian. If you're here please talk to me." I waited for a response and when I didn't get one I added, "The least you can do is talk to me after the stunt you just pulled."

Still no answer.

"Dammit, Vivian, talk to me," I said through clenched teeth to the empty room, my voice getting a little louder. "Don't play games. It's too fuckin' hard."

All of a sudden I felt an overwhelming feeling of sadness that threatened to suffocate me. Sadness and the scent of vanilla in the air. It had to be her. Frustrated, I pushed my fingers through my still wet hair, sighed in desperation and continued, "Look, I'm sorry. This is a lot to deal with, okay, and nobody can tell me what we were."

I was still looking in the mirror and watched as she slowly drew a heart in the condensation that was still there with a finger that I couldn't see. It wasn't as clear as the word she had written, but it was there and I could see it.

That one little shape, drawn by a woman I couldn't remember, a woman that I had found dead only the day before, confirmed what my mind had only hinted about until that moment. I felt completely defeated. Thinking of the ring on her finger, I realized with certainty that Vivian had been my fiancée, the woman I loved enough to ask her marry me and now she was dead. I had no memories of her. Nothing of our life together. "We were in love then," I said quietly, my eyes dropping to the floor dejectedly.

Sadness emanated in the air around me. Sadness that was tinged with love. It is warm, like she was wrapping me up in it.

I stepped over to the mirror and lifted a hand to touch the heart with my fingertips. "I don't remember. I don't remember any of it," I whispered, sadness filling me.

A very brief picture flashed in my head of a wooden 2x4 with silver spikes coming at my head and I nodded, knowing she was telling me how I had lost my memories. "Who killed you?" I asked, trying in vain to recall any kind of memory of her whatsoever and getting nothing. When I got no reply I added, "Darlin', I have to make sure that whoever did this to you doesn't do this to anyone else."

At that point I got another flash, this one was of the scene that I woke up to in the warehouse the day before. It was hard for me to see it again, knowing that I was responsible for all the blood and death that surrounded me. But I pushed those thoughts aside with the knowledge that the man I had killed was the one responsible for Vivian's death. That had to have been why I ripped him apart, because he had shot her. Killed her.

"Then I already did take care of it," I said to no one in particular. The warmth I felt intensified and I also felt love and protection, as if Vivian was wrapping herself around me. And I drank it in because I now knew that this was the woman that I had intended to marry. And even though I could no longer remember her, I had loved her and now she was gone. Would I ever get those feelings back? Would I ever know what she had been like, what we had been like together? God, I hoped so.

"Fuck," I cursed in frustration, slamming my hands down on the countertop in front of me. This was all too much to deal with. "I'm sorry about Sarah," I told Vivian. "I didn't know."

There was no change in the love and warmth I felt from Vivian, but she didn't say anything and I was desperate to talk to her if I could. Then I realized what this newfound knowledge would mean to Sarah. "Dammit, I'm gonna fuckin' hurt her again," I voiced, thinking to myself that there was no way that I could be with Sarah after this.

Thankfully there was no condemnation from Vivian at all. It was as if she understood that I didn't remember anything about our life together and didn't hold my recent actions against me. I knew that Vivian didn't like Sarah after the drink incident in the bar, but I understood that now. I was just glad that Vivian wasn't mad at me. Now I knew the truth and I knew that I couldn't just jump into another relationship right away. Maybe never.

I stood there for a long time, soaking in what I could feel from Vivian. I tried to remember anything about her, even the smallest detail, but there was nothing. Just a blank slate. After a few minutes I asked Vivian, "Who were those people? There had to be more than one. Who were they?"

I got a flash of a piece of paper with a name and number on it and I recognized it as the one that I had found in my pocket after I woke. I still had it as a matter of fact. Jean Larue. "That's who we were supposed to meet?"

No answer.

The name connected with me at that moment because I remembered that he had been the one who was working with Mia and the one whose clothes I now had. "Jean is Mia's friend," I said out loud. "We were supposed to meet him there?"

There was still no answer and I could feel that Vivian was frustrated because she couldn't get her point across.

"It's okay, honey," I soothed, then remembered that when I dreamt of her it was easier to talk to her. "We were able to talk in the dream," I said. "Should I go to sleep?"

I felt relief emanate from her and I quickly finished drying off with the towel I still held in my hand. I didn't feel that I should sleep with Sarah when I was going to contact my dead fiancée so I wrapped a dry towel around my waist and quietly crept out to the living room. My suitcase was still there and all the lights were still on so I closed bedroom door before pulling out my comb and a clean pair of boxers.

I found a pillow and a blanket in a cabinet and after shutting off the lights I laid down on the couch. I was asleep as soon as I closed my eyes.

I awoke in my dream and found Vivian sitting on the chair that was near my feet in the room. I was still on the couch and I sat up to look at her, the silence heavy between us as we just looked at each other for a long moment. She was wearing the same suit she had been when I found her in the warehouse and thankfully there wasn't a bullet hole visible.

Hesitantly, I got to my feet and as I did I saw that I was wearing the same jeans that I had been wearing when I woke up in the warehouse, sans all the blood. Vivian stood as well and took a couple tentative steps toward me. Before I knew it I had pulled her into my arms tightly and she dropped her head on my shoulder, her arms around my waist. I felt tears stinging my eyes and fought to keep them from falling.

She was only a few inches shorter than me and I couldn't get over how good it felt to have her in my arms. So right. I tilted my head slightly so that I could kiss her forehead and I felt her arms tighten around me. Neither of us had yet to speak and for the time being I was content to just be with her. Silently I hoped that her presence would help my memories return, but in the back of my mind I knew that it wouldn't work that way. It was like she was my lifeline that I was clinging to, just as Sarah had been the night before.

It was hard for me to admit how freaked out I was at not knowing anything about my life outside the past twenty-four hours. It was in this moment, with Vivian in my arms that I began to come to terms with the situation. In that moment I realized that this was the closest I would ever come to her again. I recognized my love for her in my heart and mind that was there even though I didn't know her. I vowed that I would do whatever I could to finish what I had started here with her, no matter what disadvantages I happened to have. I would do it to honor her.

With that resolution in mind I gently took her face in my hands and immediately saw that she was crying. I used my thumbs to wipe away the tears from her face and my heart tugged when her eyes met mine. Without thinking, I leaned down and placed a tender kiss on her lips and was thrilled when she kissed me back. Vivian was clinging to me and it was obvious from her response that she never expected to see me again. Even if it was just a dream. I could tell that she loved me and I never wanted to leave her again.

Having her there cemented the idea for me that she was my other half. Ian and explained that part of the wanderlust was that we were looking for a place or a person to settle down with. If I had given Vivian a ring then that meant she was the person I wanted to have a family and grow old with. Now that would never happen.

I poured all the frustration and longing that I felt into that kiss and it went on for what seemed like an eternity. I knew that there was so much that I should be asking her, but the emotions are too intense. Too intense for both of us I think. Too raw. I wanted to drink in what I was feeling and savor what was taken from me because I knew that I couldn't have this, have her, when I woke up.

When the kiss finally did end, I held her tightly again and it was another long while before I could speak. "Who were they?" I asked, her face once again cradled in my hands. "Who was there that night?"

"I didn't want to leave you," Vivian sobbed, tears forming in her eyes again as she put her hands over mine. "I wanted to stay."

"It's not your fault," I soothed, determined to use my time better as I leaned in to kiss her forehead. "Were they members of this other group Mia found out about?"

She shook her head. "I don't know. I don't think they were witches because there wasn't any magic used and they weren't shifters." She paused before adding, "But they felt wrong. It all happened so fast."

I used one hand to wrap around her shoulder to hold her tighter. "Honey, can you shift, too?" I asked, suddenly realizing that the thought had never occurred to me.

She nodded. "I could."

"Like your brother."

"Yes. We were twins."

"Does he know about our relationship?" I asked, suddenly wondering if Vaughn blamed me for his sister's death and knowing there was no way for me to prove to him that I wasn't.

She sniffled. "We met with him earlier that day. We had just gotten into town. I wanted you to meet him before we went to Sky House."

"Why didn't I tell my family?" I asked her; suddenly needing any kind of information she could give me about my life.

Vivian shrugged and lifted her hand to touch my cheek. "I don't know. Maybe you thought that they would be angry."

"Why would they be angry?" I couldn't imagine a reason.

"I was a werewolf, you're not," she stated simply, as if that should be explanation enough. "Both of us were shifters."

I frowned slightly, not getting what she meant. "What difference does that make?"

She looked at me as if I should have understood, then realization crossed her features and she replied, "Ask Ian."

But I wanted answers now. I had to know why I would hold something back from my family. From the reception that Ian and Peta had given me I knew that our family was close. "I'm askin' you, Vivian," I insisted. "What the hell?"

She reached up and tucked a lock of hair behind my ear and put her thumb across my lips to stop me from speaking again. "We don't have a lot of time. Let's not waste it."

All the fight suddenly left me and I nodded, accepting what she said since she would be the one to know her limitations. That and the fact that I knew I didn't want waste any of my time with her. "I don't know what I should be doin'," I confessed.

"When my father died he charged Vaughn and I, along with the rest of the family to find out the truth about what was happening," she told me. "Vaughn was working on it, but he was getting nowhere so I came to help just before Mia got into trouble. Then we both came to help." She paused for a moment and had to clear her throat before she spoke again. "I can't finish this now. I need you to do it for me."

Since I had already made that decision for myself I nodded. "I have every intention to help all I can. I guess I just need to wait for Mia, or Vaughn to get a hold of me. I don't know how to contact of them. Unless I go through Sloan."

Vivian paused as if she were remembering the other man I mentioned even though she wasn't there in the flesh to see him. "Did you see the mark on his arm?" she asked.

I had to think about it, but I did remember seeing some kind of birthmark on the upper part of his arm during the course of the day that looked like a wolf and I told her that I did. "That's the solution to Sloan," she said.

I didn't get where she was going. "What do you mean?"

She pulled back her sleeve and in roughly the same place I saw that she had the same mark. "He's family," she explained.

"I want him out of there tomorrow then," I replied, my voice firm. I had wanted a reason to get him away from Gwen and was relieved to now have one.

"You should talk to Vaughn first," she said with a sigh as if she wanted Sloan as far away from Sky House as well, but knowing that he was in a position to be of assistance, especially with Mia still there. "If he can help us..."

"Sloan's already been through enough," I insisted. The guy had spent most of his life living like a virtual slave. That wasn't cool in my book and I was determined to get him out as soon as I could.

Vivian nodded, but said nothing, her eyes carefully studying my chest.

I lifted her chin until her eyes met mine again. "Can Sloan get me in touch with Vaughn?"

"I think so. It seemed like it."

"How can I find him without Sloan?"

Panic filled her green eyes and I knew that she was frightened for me. "I don't know. You can't go to Red Moon Pack."

I took her face in my hands again to sooth her. "Why not?" I asked.

She had to swallow before she answered. "Somebody knew I was a werewolf..."

I frowned. "Someone at Red Moon?"

Vivian shook her head. "Who ever did this," she replied, indicating the fact that she was no longer alive. "I don't know if it was someone at Red Moon or not. I don't want you to go there until we know for sure."

I nodded in understanding and tried to smile at her reassuringly. "All right. I'll get in touch with Sloan and have him get a message to Vaughn that I need to talk to him."

Vivian smiled slightly in return as she agreed. I noticed that she was starting to fade a little and her face softened as if she knew that her time here was limited. "Can I come to you here again?" I asked, not wanting her to leave me.

"Yes," she answered with a slight nod of her head. "It's hard, but not as hard as other things."

I gave her a wry look. "About those other things..."

She covered my mouth with her thumb again. "It was good for me, too."

I kissed her again, but I knew that I had to talk to her about what happened with Sarah before she was gone. "For my peace of mind, please don't do that again. It was incredible, but I can't risk Sarah being hurt and finding out." Vivian's expression turned sad again at my request and I had to admit, "I can't guarantee that I won't call out your name instead of hers."

Something inside of me was dieing because I knew in my gut that Vivian was the one for me and now any shot of a future with her was gone. "It probably doesn't matter anyhow because I won't ever sleep with her again," I confessed, knowing I couldn't be in any kind of a relationship with Sarah now that I knew about Vivian.

"I don't want you to give up your life for me because I'm not coming back," she said, half choking on her words as her hands tightened on me again.

I felt the tears in my eyes, but I blinked them back, needing to be the strong one. "I know," I choked. "But I can't... I don't know."

She kissed me and I held her until she faded away. Just before she was completely gone I heard her whisper, "I love you, amante."

CHAPTER 15 - THE NEXT MORNING

"The more you see the less you know
The less you find out as you grow
I knew much more then than I do now"
"City of Blinding Light"
U2

The rest of my night consisted of regular dreams that I didn't really recall when I awoke around seven. I quietly crept to the door to the bedroom to check in on Sarah and found that she was still sleeping peacefully, which left me feeling glad that she hadn't come out to find me sleeping on the couch during the night. I started coffee in the small kitchenette and put away the blanket and pillow while it brewed, wondering as I did what I was going to do about Sarah.

I continued to wonder about it for the next two hours as I sat and drank coffee, smoking one cigarette after another until my throat was raw. Part of me didn't understand my hesitancy when it came to Sarah. That was the part that liked having her around and the part that liked the familiarity I found in her.

Another part, however, chided myself for not being more cautious in what I was doing. I didn't really know her, not as I was now anyhow. Should I trust the things that she had told me about my past when I couldn't remember it myself?

Finally around nine o'clock, after I still hadn't come up with any solid solution I decided to call next door to see if Ian and Peta were awake. Peta answered, her voice sounding chipper so I knew I hadn't woke her. "Good mornin', babygirl," I said.

"Mornin', Kiran," she replied brightly. "Did you sleep well?" Her tone was slightly teasing as if she was hinting to the fact that she knew Sarah and I hadn't been just sleeping in the same bed.

You don't know the half of it, I thought to myself as I silently prayed that Sarah never found out what Vivian had done. Out loud I replied, "I slept just fine, babygirl. How about you?"

"I slept fine," she answered and I could hear the smile she must have been wearing. It felt good knowing that she and Ian was only a door away.

"Ian up?"

Her tone shifted to annoyance in a heartbeat. "No."

I glanced at the clock again to check the time. "What?"

"I was just about to wake him."

In the short amount of time that I had been exposed to my baby sister I knew that Peta could hold her own against Ian... hell, probably against myself as well, and I couldn't help but chuckle at her. "Which method?" I asked, knowing she had something cooked up.

"Cold water," she replied, not skipping a beat.

I laughed out right at that. "Yeah?" I asked, wondering if she would live through such a wake up call.

I could hear her laughing a little on the other end. "Wanna come help? Sometimes he gets angry and shifts."

There was no way in hell I was getting involved in that situation. "Oh, no. But I will unlock the door and you can come in here if you need to," I offered.

"Okay," she replied slowly, as if I were giving up the opportunity of a lifetime.

"Besides, I'm not dressed for wakin' people up," I said, looking down at my boxers.

"I didn't figure you would be," she retorted saucily. "Sarah's probably not either."

"She's still asleep," I confirmed before telling her 'happy splashing' and hung up. I then unlocked the door to the hallway and stood there a moment to listen for any disturbances. When I didn't hear anything right away I figured she was either too late and Ian was awake or she had changed her mind about her choice of wake up call, so I went in search of another cigarette.

About five minutes later there was a knock on the door. I opened it and found a slightly wet little sister with a huge grin on her face. "He's up," she announced proudly as she walked in.

I shut the door behind her and didn't bother to hide the grin that was on my face as well. "How much of a beatin' did you take in the process?" I asked as I looked at her clothes.

"Oh, I just got a little wet," she declared as she flounced down on the couch. "I'm faster than he is."

I grabbed the towel I had worn into the living room the night before that was now dry and tossed it to her. She caught it with ease and used it to dry her hair and the part of her shirt was wet.

It was then that I was able to really take in what she was wearing. She was dressed, sort of, wearing a tight skirt that barely went to the middle of her thighs and a low cut tank top that barely went to the top of the skirt. "Shouldn't you have gotten dressed before leavin' the room?" I asked as I went to pour her a cup of coffee.

"Now you sound like Ian," she retorted with a dramatic sigh. "You're gonna have to get over it."

Even with my back to her I knew she was rolling her eyes at me. "I only have to do two things, breathe and die, and well, that's optional," I told her as I turned to face her, tapping my head where the spikes went in to prove my point.

She laughed and asked where Sarah was.

"She's sleepin' so keep it down."

She huffed. "Does everyone have to sleep the day away? There's things to do. I don't know what, but there's things to do."

I'll chuckle. "Was Ian comin' over?"

My question put the grin back on her face as she watched me grab a cigarette and light it. "Yeah, after a shower," she said before she took a sip of her coffee. "He says he's a bear before he takes a shower. But I don't think so. He's a lion."

We laughed together, even though there was no way for me to confirm or deny her claims. The phone rang then and I moved to answer it.

"Kiran," a hesitant voice said that I quickly recognized.

"Sloan. What's goin' on?"

He cleared his throat and I could almost see him looking around for someone who might be eavesdropping before answering, "Well, I got a message through the grapevine for you last night."

"Really?" I asked, knowing that the possibilities made up a pretty short list right now.

"From--"

"Don't say it," I interrupted him, wanting his end of the conversation to be as vague as possible. "Let me guess, Mia?"

"Close."

"Vaughn?"

"Yes."

I nodded. "All right," I said, wondering what Vaughn wanted. "Where's Gwen, is she home?"

"She's somewhere around here." He then gave me an address and I quickly grabbed a piece of paper to write it down. I had to go there between ten and twelve.

"What are the chances of you getting' out today?" I asked him, remembering my suspicions that my new friend may be a lost member of the Waitt's family. That, paired with the idea that I would feel a whole lot better with another person I trusted at my back. I didn't know what the address was for and it was obvious that Sloan didn't either or he would have told me. But I did know that I wanted the two men to meet to see if Vivian's suspicions were right. I didn't like his answer.

"Probably not good."

"Is there any errands or anythin' you need to run?" Yeah, I was grasping at straws, but if it got him out then who cared.

"I don't do errands," he replied in his typical deadpan voice.

Fuck. "Any fabrication? I'd kind of like you there."

Sloan sighed on the other end of the line. "You would have to talk to Gwen. You seemed to charm her pretty well yesterday."

I stood and crushed out the cigarette butt before crossing the room to the coffee pot again. "I'll stop by. Probably close to ten, okay?"

"Okay."

Peta looked at me questioningly as I hung up the phone and I asked her to take a cup of coffee over to Ian, saying that I wanted to talk to the both of them as soon as possible. I told her that I had a meeting with Vaughn between ten and noon and I wanted Sloan there, too.

"Why?" she asked as she came over to take the cup from my hand that I had just poured.

"Sloan may be related to him."

Her brows lifted in surprise, as well as an interest that I was pretty sure had something to do with the fact that she thought he was good looking. "Really? Hmm. Okay, I'll go take him the coffee." She crossed to the door and stopped to look over her shoulder. "So is he coming for sure?"

I shrugged. "I'm gonna have to talk Gwen into it, which means I'm goin' to have to come up with a fuckin' story." I realized that I just swore to my baby sister and quickly added, "Sorry."

She gave me an odd look. "Why?"

"I didn't mean to cuss at you."

"Shit," she replied, an evil gleam in her eye as she saucily watched me roll my eyes.

"Nice. Do as I say, not as I do."

She grinned as she shook her head and walked out the door. No sooner had she left then the door to the bedroom opened and Sarah walked out, wearing only a robe that was barely tied, and nothing underneath. I felt my dick twitch as I poured her a cup of coffee and tried to not look at all the skin she was showing. "Mornin', darlin'."

"I thought I heard the phone," she said as she assessed the room.

"You did. I was just about to come wake you." I took her coffee over to her and she put her arm around my neck as she pressed her body close to mine, causing my dick to twitch yet again as I leaned in to kiss her cheek, feeling guilty once again about my dream from the night before. "It was Sloan."

"Was it?" she asked, lifting the cup to her lips for a sip. "Did she get him one of those dog collars where he can only go certain ways before he gets shocked?"

I cleared my throat, not knowing how to answer. She knew them better than I did so I thought it best to disregard her question. "I'm hopin' to get him to come out with us today. I need to come up with a story, I've got a meetin'."

Sarah looked up at me. "With?"

"A guy named Vaughn."

"You better not tell Gwen that," Sarah warned as she stepped away from me then took another sip of the coffee.

"I know, but I have a meetin' with him anyhow. Did you want to go with?"

Sarah looked at me indignantly. "You realize he's a werewolf?" she asked, as if that were a bad thing.

"Yeah, and I'm a werecat," I pointed out.

"Yeah, well the werewolves from Red Moon and the people from Sky House are in the middle of a very... intense, blood thirsty war."

I figured this was a good a time as any to see where her loyalties lied. "Really? And how do you feel about that?" I could see where she would side with the other mages, but something told me that Sarah was way too much of a free spirit for that.

"I'd rather stay alive, thank you," she said as she moved to the couch to sit down, barely making sure the robe continued to cover her.

That meant that she might be willing to help me figure out what was going on around here. "All right. Do you want me to meet you back here then?"

She thought a moment before answering. "Well, if you're taking Sloan I can just meet you back at Sky House. I'll stay there while you're gone."

"All right." I hesitated, then asked, "You won't tell anyone that I'm goin' to meet Vaughn, will you?"

She smiled at me and tucked one of her feet underneath her. "No, darlin'," she said, imitating me again as she batted her eyelashes playfully. "I wouldn't tell them."

I grinned at her and moved to kiss the tip of her nose. Last night I was convinced that I needed to stay away from Sarah, but the harsh light of day had be remembering her more and Vivian a little less. I was still a little unsure about what I was doing with Sarah so I didn't want to kiss her on the mouth because that felt like I was crossing the line for the moment. "I'm gonna go jump in the shower."

Sarah moved to stand and her reply set me instantly on edge. "Oh, I'll come with you."

"Ian and Peta will be comin' over," I quickly said, hoping she would get the hint and stay out here.

"We'll leave the door unlocked," she said with a smile that started to fade as she looked at me. "Oh, you probably don't want you sister to catch you in the shower with..."

"I do have to maintain a sense of propriety," I said, grasping the excuse she gave me. "She is my baby sister. I've already been cussin' at her this mornin'."

"She doesn't look much like a baby to me," she said. "And she wasn't looking at Sloan like a baby."

I visibly shuttered at that one. "You know what... don't need to know that. I won't be long."

"I'll be here," she said as she crossed to the chair where Vivian had been in my dream and sat, letting her robe fall open teasingly so that I could see a great deal of skin.

Before I let my body do my thinking for me, I grabbed my case and the tote of clothes I got from Sky House the day before and made a beeline for the bathroom for a quick shower. Afterward, when I stepped out to shave I saw that Vivian's writing was once again visible with the new steam on the mirror, sending another wave of guilt through me. I wiped her message away, feeling bittersweet memories of woman I couldn't remember loving.

CHAPTER 16 – BROTHERLY DISCUSSIONS

"I analyze everything, I know what you mean
I answer by questioning all that I need"
"Lost in a Portrait"
TRAPT

Sarah was still sitting in the same chair when I came out. Her robe was draped even wider open now and it was completely obvious that she was naked underneath. I tried not to look at all her exposed skin as I crossed to retrieve my cigarettes from where I had left them next to the coffee pot. But it was a big goddamn temptation and a very hard thing to do to not go to her and touch...

"Any word from next door?" I asked as I lit up.

Sarah shook her head as she seemed to watch me with amusement. "No. But you took a really fast shower."

"Well, I was pretty much clean," I told her, pouring myself a fresh cup of coffee. "I took a shower last night."

"That's right," she practically purred offhandedly as she stood. "I'll go take a shower then." She virtually slithered her way over to kiss me and I found myself kissing her back without thinking. So much for taking a step back. She was such a sensual creature that it was amazing how she could bring me in just by looking at me or kissing me. Before I knew it the kiss was over and she had left the room, leaving me to silently berate myself for not being stronger when a knock sounded on the door.

"I thought you were going to get a sweater or something?" I asked Peta, once again considering her lack of outfit. She brushed past me with a 'whatever' look and grabbed a magazine off the coffee table before flopping down and skimming through it. "You know what, little girl; you're not too big for me to put over my knee still," I warned as Ian entered behind the youngest of the Michaels clan.

Peta snorted as her eyes met mine. "Try it. I remember beatin' your ass last night," she retorted, letting her accent permeate through her words.

"Yeah, I had some licks in myself, so humor me," I replied. "Or I won't tell you my big secret."

"I'm not changing," she insisted, going back to the magazine. "We're seeing Sloan."

"No, that's not the secret."

"That's why I'm not changing."

I looked at Ian for backup. "Oh, now you're definitely changin'."

"She's just as stubborn as Allison," Ian told me with a resigned shake of his head as he settled his hands in the pockets of his jeans. "There ain't no way she's gonna to change."

I took a step closer to him and dropped my voice slightly. Not so much that Peta couldn't hear what I was saying, but enough to sound conspiratorial. "I think between the two of us we can change her ourselves."

Ian looked at me, then at Peta, then back at me, a shit eating grin growing on his face as he did. "You got a shirt for her?" he asked.

"Oh, I got a whole bunch of 'em," I said as I looked at her, too. "I'll be right back."

The look on Peta's face said that she clearly didn't believe that we were going to try, much less be successful. I went into the bedroom where I had left the tub of clothes Sloan had given me and pulled out a t-shirt that was bright and colorful, then walked back out to the living room, throwing the shirt over my shoulder.

"What'll it be, missy?" I asked her when I was about six feet away from her. I smiled as I noted that Ian had moved in as well.

Peta looked between the two of us, still not sure if we would actually attempt to put the shirt on her. After a moment she rolled her eyes and said in a huff, "Fine." She got up and flounced toward the door.

"Somethin' that goes to the waist," I called out as the door to the suite slammed shut behind her. I then looked at Ian and asked, "Does she have anythin' like that?"

He shrugged, a wry smile in his lips. "She might. I think its see through, but it might tuck." I rolled my eyes as I dropped my shirt on the couch and he added, "At least there's two of us to gang up on her. She's really unmanageable."

"Not for much longer," I vowed, knowing for some reason that I was responsible for making sure my little sister turned out to be a good person.

Ian took a seat as I went to grab him a fresh cup of coffee. "Well maybe between the two of us we can keep an eye on her," he said. "It's hell keepin' the boys off of her."

"Jesus Christ," I muttered under my breath. That was that last thing I wanted to hear.

"That's why she's with me and not Allison."

I turned to look at him as I grabbed a cup. "What does Allison do anyhow?"

"She is a secretary at a law firm."

I nodded. At least one of us seemed to be holding down a solid job. I poured the coffee and brought it over to him as well as one for myself. "Had some revelations last night," I said as I took a seat as well.

"You didn't get her pregnant already, did you?" he asked, half joking.

I choked on the sip of coffee I had been taking. "Oh, fuck," I mumbled, reaching for a cigarette.

"So I take it you hadn't thought of that one?" Ian asked in surprise.

I lit the cigarette. "Shit."

"That's a no," he laughed as he settled back with his cup. "So what's the big revelation, brother?"

I listened a moment to make sure the shower is still running. "Had a little visitor last night when Sarah and I were..." I hesitated, not sure how to say it. "You know... in the form of... yes, you guessed it right, my fiancée."

Ian looked at me in surprise. "We are talkin' about Vivian, right?" he asked.

I took a hit of the cigarette and exhaled loudly. "Yeah."

Now he was looked at me in confusion. "And Vivian is..."

"A ghost," I finished for him.

"And she decided that she wanted to join in on the fun?"

I nodded. "Yep."

"My..." he breathed. "What did Sarah say?"

I looked at the closed door to the bedroom again. "She doesn't have any idea."

Ian's brow creased a little as he looked at the door as well. "She didn't realize..." he whispered.

"That her body had been possessed by another woman?" I asked as I brought the cigarette to my lips again.

He grimaced. "God, it sounds so bad."

I thought back to how intense the entire experience had been and how, through Sarah, Vivian had managed to tip the scales of what sex meant as I remembered it. "It was incredible, but it was incredibly..." A shutter passed through me.

Ian sighed heavily then seemed to remember something else I had mentioned. "Holy shit. So how did you find out she was your fiancée?"

"I talked to her in my dreams..."

"Oookay," he said slowly, obviously needing more of an explanation.

"...which was incredibly weird," I went on, still not completely understanding how it had been possible to talk to a dead woman in my dreams. "Is that somethin' normal that we can do?"

Ian shook his head. "I've talked to spirits before, but not in my dreams. But then again I've never had a fiancée."

I flicked the ashes from my cigarette and noticed that my brother was eye balling my pack. In the short amount of time I remembered him I had already picked up that Ian was a social smoker and he took one from pack I offered now him.

"What did she say?" he asked after he had lit the cigarette.

I sighed, remembering how it had felt to have my fears about Vivian confirmed. "She was able to confirm that we were in love," I told him, shaking my head at how fucked up my current situation was. "I don't know what to do about Sarah," I admitted, looking down into the coffee cup.

"What did she say about her?"

"She told me that I shouldn't put my life on hold for her," I said, still looking into the dark liquid in my cup.

"Does she understand that you can't remember her?"

"Yeah. I think that's part of why she's as okay as she is." I looked up at him again. "I don't know how often I'm gonna get to communicate with her." I knew that I sounded like I wanted to communicate with Vivian again and I hoped that Ian didn't ask me about it because I wasn't sure if I could explain it to him.

Ian adjusted in his seat so that he could reach the ashtray. "Well, from what I saw at the table last night she was puttin' forth a lot of energy. I'm surprised she had any left to talk to you."

"That's why we had to go into dreams," I explained. "She said that she needed less energy in dreams than in real life."

"So why didn't you - " he started, then seemed to recall how I had woke up with no memories. "You don't remember," he finished in frustration.

I understood what he had been starting to ask and said, "I asked her why I didn't tell you guys about her and she said that you probably would have been pissed about our relationship."

Ian frowned. "You found a woman you were happy with and we would have been pissed because..."

"... Because she was a werewolf," I finished for him.

"Oh," he replied in surprise as he scratched his head. "Well..."

"So what's so wrong with that?" I asked him, still unsure why it was so taboo.

"Shifters aren't supposed to mate," he explained. "Let alone two shifters of two different species. No one would know that could happen if you had kids. Usually couples who do get together end up getting' turned away from other shifters." He paused a second, then added, "I can see where you might think that we would be upset. And we might have, but we would have gotten over it."

"She was my other half, Ian," I told my brother sadly. "I can feel it."

The look in his eyes mirrored my misery. "I'm really sorry," he said softly. "I wished I could have met her."

I knew now wasn't the time for sadness. There was too much shit that I had to do if I wanted to get to the bottom of the mess that got me to where I was now sitting. I couldn't think about what losing Vivian meant right now. I quickly told Ian about the call from Sloan and that I needed to be at the address he had given me at ten.

"Any idea what's at the address?" he asked.

I shook my head. "I don't know. I'd like to have Sloan with us. Vivian seems to think that he is related to her family. Oh, by the way... Vaughn... he's Vivian's twin brother."

Ian groaned. "Oh, nice," he said.

I nodded in agreement. It was understandable that Vaughn would be upset by Vivian's death because she had been his sister, but everyone knew that there was a special bond that occurred in twins that made the potential for making the other man even harder to deal with. "Oh, yeah, just the fuckin' person I want to talk to right now," I said.

Ian frowned. "Why are you so negative about it?"

"He's probably gonna blame me for his sister's death," I pointed out.

"But you didn't do it," my brother insisted.

"That's not gonna stop him from thinkin' it," I countered. It didn't matter what Ian said. There was nothing he could say that would take away the guilt I felt knowing that Vivian was dead. I couldn't prove that it wasn't my fault, but I couldn't say that there wasn't something I could have done to stop her death from happening either.

"I do have one bit of self satisfaction, though," I told him.

"Yeah?"

"The body that was there in the warehouse? The one that was in pieces?" I reminded him. "That was the one that killed her."

"There you go," he insisted again. "I knew there was a reason you were covered in blood. That's a perfect reason." It must have been apparent that I was bothered by the thought, but Ian wasn't. "Shit happens. Somethin' like that would throw you into a frenzy and you would be rippin' shit apart before you even knew what was goin' on."

I wasn't convinced and I must have showed because Ian sat forward in his seat and added, "It happens. It doesn't happen a lot, but it happens. You should feel lucky that was all you tore apart. You could have torn up the whole warehouse and then gone on to tear apart other things."

He was talking about things that I didn't remember anymore so he stopped abruptly and added, "That probably didn't help you feel better, did it?"

I sighed, not in much of a mood for more werecat reliving. "We need to meet Vaughn today," I said, changing the subject. "Sarah's gonna stay at Sky House and we need to figure out a way to get Sloan out. Maybe no one knows the city and we need him as I guide."

"Why wouldn't Sarah go with us then?" he asked.

"She wanted to spend some time studyin'."

Ian nodded. "We could try that, but he might not know the city," he was quick to point out.

I paused a moment, realizing he had a point there. "We need another story then."

Peta knocked at the door then and I went to let her in. She was now wearing a t-shirt that almost went down to her pants. It wasn't as tight as what she had on before and there wasn't any cleavage so I decided she would do.

"Better," I told her as she came in and I closed the door behind her. "We'll have to take you shoppin'." She rolled her eyes again, but said nothing as she went back to her cup of coffee.

I was beginning to realize that Sarah was taking forever in the bathroom. I looked at the time and saw that it was now quarter to ten and I could still hear the shower running. There was no way that we were going to make it to the address by ten if we waited for her. "That woman," I said as I looked between Ian and Peta. "I was in there for 15 minutes. And I shaved."

Peta shrugged as she sat down. "She's got more to shave."

I gave her a heated look and headed into the bathroom to try to prod Sarah along. The door to the bathroom was partially opened and I knocked on it before poking my head in. "Sarah?"

"Yeah."

"How much longer are you gonna be, darlin'?"

She shut off the water and opened the door, naked and dripping wet. "Not much longer."

My dick twitched at the sight of her and I averted my gaze in an effort to calm it back down again. "I need to meet with Vaughn between ten and noon."

"So. It's not even ten yet," she said as she reached for a towel and started to dry her hair. "You've got plenty of time."

"I've got to convince Gwen to let Sloan come out with me, too," I reminded her.

"Why don't you go ahead and head over there?" she suggested. "I can go over later. Your brother has a car, right?"

I nodded. "Yeah. Are you sure?"

She smiled. "Yeah. There's no way I can be ready in ten or fifteen minutes. It takes time to look this beautiful, honey." There went that purring thing she did again. How did she do that?

"Yes, I know," I said, lifting my gaze to meet hers.

She was now drying off the rest of her body and it was hell to stand there and watch her. Her amazing red hair hung in springy curls down her back and shoulders and her legs seemed to go on forever and a day as she bent over to run the towel

over them. I had to clear my throat and quickly turn away to stop from going over to her and saying to hell with meeting Vaughn.

I told her I would meet her at Sky House later and before I could leave the room she crossed to me, slipping her arms around me and puckering her lips slightly for a kiss. I felt guilty, but I kissed her. "Be careful out there," I told her gruffly.

She smiled widely, her eyes dancing with mischief. "You be careful. Make sure your brother watches your back."

I reached up and smoothed her hair back off her forehead. "Make sure you're careful because there's no one there to watch yours." I hesitated a second before adding, "Maybe you shouldn't go over there."

She rolled those sparkling eyes and kissed my mouth again. "I'll be fine. I've been going over there for some time."

"But you haven't been associated with me for some time," I pointed out.

"I'll be fine," she insisted before reaching up to kiss me a third time and I knew I had to get out of here now before I did something I had promised myself I wouldn't.

"Be careful."

She twisted away from me long enough to toss the towel she had been using on the counter, then turned on me again. "I will. I didn't like being shot anymore that you liked me getting shot."

I tapped the end of her nose. "If you get shot again we're gonna have some serious issues."

"I'll be okay," she insisted quietly, taking my hand in hers.

I nodded. "All right."

She put her hand on the side of my face briefly, then after another quick kiss and shooed me out of the room. I grabbed a jean jacket from the tub of Jean's things that Sloan had given me then my siblings and I headed out.

CHAPTER 17 – COLD REALITY

"'Cause I'm broken when I'm open
And I don't feel like I am strong enough"
"Broken"
Seether – Featuring Amy Lee

Once in the Bronco I gave Ian directions to Sky House and we were there fifteen minutes later. Shea answered the door and all my hopes of having Sloan go with us were crushed when she informed us that he and Gwen left about a half and hour before hand.

I was disappointed by the fact that we wouldn't be able to confirm that Sloan was a member of the Waits family just yet, but there was nothing else I could do about it for the moment. Our next stop was the first gas station we came across so that we could get directions to the address Sloan had given me. Peta offered to go inside and when she was gone for almost twenty minutes I was about to go in after her when she ambled out, carrying a hand drawn map.

"This is it," she said proudly, but her face turned serious as she looked to me and her next words sent a chill down my spine. "But Bobby is pretty sure it's a funeral home."

I barely felt Ian's on my shoulder as the weight of my sister's words hit me. Funeral home. Vivian. "You okay, man?" he asked, but I didn't really hear him.

I couldn't breathe, like a vise had suddenly clamped down around my chest. I knew what funeral home meant. It was Vivian's funeral. Vaughn had sent me a message so that I could attend my dead fiancé's funereal. I almost didn't hear my brother as he spoke again.

"Kiran, you okay?"

I exhaled loudly and spoke in a barely audible voice. "Shit, this has got to be for Vivian."

Ian squeezed my shoulder and glanced in the back seat to where Peta was sitting. "Looks that way," he replied, his voice full of sadness for me.

For her part, Peta was quiet and I knew that it was because she was afraid of saying the wrong thing. I took a deep breath to prepare myself for what was to come and I suddenly felt a warm, protective feeling that signaled Vivian's presence surrounding me as the scent of vanilla filled my senses. I closed my eyes and soaked in her presence.

"We should probably get goin'," I said, my tone lacking any type of enthusiasm as I pulled out another cigarette.

"Are you sure, man?" Ian asked, casting his gaze out around the parking lot where we still sat and back over to me. "We can find another way to talk to Vaughn."

I shook my head, knowing that wasn't an option. "I have to do this," I told him. How could I explain not attending my fiancé's funeral? Just because I didn't remember her didn't mean that I was excused.

I could tell that my brother wanted to spare me the pain I was about to go through, but Ian didn't utter another word as he started the car and pulled out of the parking lot. Twenty minutes later we pulled into another one, the only talk in that amount of time having been Peta telling Ian where to go.

There were at least a dozen cars in the lot and people milling around outside the building, smoking and talking. I was sure that I had at least attended our parent's funeral before, but I didn't recall anything about what to expect. I was momentarily worried about the clothes I had on, not knowing what would be considered appropriate. I was relieved to see that others were dressed in jeans as well so I was glad to have one less thing to stress over.

As Ian parked the car I noticed a young woman with long dark hair who was crying pretty hard on the shoulder of a pretty blonde, who was visibly upset as well. An older woman approached the two and helped the blonde get the dark haired girl into the car.

Ian shut off the engine and looked at me, waiting for my cue as to what to do next. I pulled out the cigarette I had been smoking and looked between he and Peta. I wasn't sure I wanted them to go in, but then again I didn't want to do it alone either.

"I can go in and find Vaughn," Ian offered.

"I need to go in there," I said, my gaze locking on the double glass door to the building as if it were the very entrance into hell.

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah."

Ian glanced back at Peta again. "Do you want us to come with you or stay in the car?"

I cleared my throat nervously, not sure I could speak again without my voice cracking. "Why don't you guys come with me, just in case?"

Ian took a deep breath and we all exited the vehicle. I led the way inside, wondering if I had met any of these people and how I was supposed to greet them. I remembered Ian's words about the taboo that my relationship with Vivian could have caused and I wondered if any of them would blame me for her death as well.

We entered the building and I saw that there were more people milling around here as well and not one of them was familiar to me, nor did they seem to recognize me.

There was a woman at a desk just inside the door who was dressed in a conservative suit who stood quickly and looked at my expectantly.

"Vivian Wiatts," I said, my voice low and hushed, almost catching in the back of my throat. I could still feel Vivian's warmth around me, but she had dropped back a little so she wasn't as strong as before.

The woman nodded and led us down a hallway, past some restrooms, to two small rooms that had been opened up when the retractable wall was pushed to one side. There were about a dozen people there. I didn't really pay much attention to them, however, since I only had eyes for the casket. It was open, but I couldn't see much from where I was currently standing. I could feel Ian put his hand on my shoulder on one side of me while Peta move to my other side.

There was a large piece of poster board near the casket with pictures tacked on that made my heart lurch a little. I made a grab for Peta's hand and she held mine tightly. I was glad she was there.

Ian asked if I was okay and I nodded, unable to speak but otherwise holding my composure relatively well in a room full of strangers. I moved toward the casket and Ian's hand fell away, but I continued to feel his presence at my side and I was still holding Peta's hand tightly.

As I got closer I could see that the casket was a nice one. It was white and had lots of flowers and plants around it on stands of varying height so that it was pleasing to the eye. There was a big rose bouquet on top of the casket with a red ribbon in it that said 'daughter'. At the head of the casket was another bouquet with an identical colored ribbon that said 'sister'.

When I was close enough to look inside I closed my eyes, unable to take the final step that would reveal to me what I already knew was the truth. Peta squeezed my hand in support and I felt Ian step closer in case I needed his support. I took a deep breath for fortification and opened my eyes and looked at the body. It was the same girl that I had found in the warehouse the night I woke up. Could that have only been two nights ago?

She was wearing a dark blue button up blouse and black pants, looking pretty much looked the way she had when I found her behind that pile of pallets. Her hair down and loose and her face was void of any emotion or pain, but she looked peaceful just as she had on the cold cement floor.

Somehow I knew that whoever had prepared the body had put too much make up on her. This wasn't how I remembered seeing her in my dreams or from the warehouse that night. Her hands were folded on her abdomen, left over right, and I saw that she was still wearing her engagement ring. I looked down at the other two from the matching set that I still wore.

There were a number of pictures tucked in a row in the back of the casket. One of Vivian and a man that looked a great deal like her. Probably Vaughn. Another of Vivian and a girl with long, dark hair that may have been the girl who was so upset in the parking lot before we came in. Then one of Vivian with the older woman we had seen in the parking lot. There was also of her with an older man that had to be her father. She was young in all of them and I found myself wishing that I had been present when each had been taken and could remember the events surrounding them. Anything to know more about the woman that I was told I loved.

There was also a drawing, obviously done by a child, of a group of people that equaled the number of those pictured with Vivian. In a bold, child-like script in the bottom corner were three little words that summed everything up so perfectly, 'we love you'.

I took that last remaining steps that brought me right next to the casket and reached out to put my hand over hers. When I touched her, I could see her face animate like she had done the night before with Sarah. She turned her gaze to look at me and I heard her say, "I love you, amante. Help them."

The second after she spoke she was gone again and I lost it. Tears formed in my eyes and were escaping down my cheeks before I knew what was happening. I let them fall; hoping that by doing so some of the things I was feeling would go with them. Ian once again put his hand on my shoulder and Peta squeezed my hand. I lifted my hand to touch Vivian's face with the back of my fingers and tried not to realize how cold she was. "I love you," I whispered.

I could feel her around me and her presence got stronger for a moment so I was able to take a little comfort from the idea that I had a small part of her with me still. I looked away from the casket to compose myself and my eyes fell once again on the poster board full of pictures. I was surprised to see that toward the bottom was a picture of the two of us together. She was standing in front of me and I had my arms around her waist, my head resting on her shoulder. We were both smiling

and looked really happy. My gut shifted as if in warning that I was about to lose my breakfast and I had to pull my gaze from the picture.

I bent over into the casket and placed a light kiss her forehead, once again trying not to notice how cold she was and how she didn't smell like she did in my dreams. Then, like a robot, I turned to the board and, oblivious to anyone else around me, I took the picture off and held it tightly in my hand, careful not to bend it.

Behind me I heard a deep, masculine sounding person clear their throat, then say, "Kiran." The one word was full of a sadness that I recognized all too well and I tucked the picture in my pocket as I turned to find a man who had to be Vaughn standing there in front of me.

I wiped the tears from my face. "Vaughn."

He glanced at Ian, back at me and then to Peta, noticing the fact that I was holding her hand as if he didn't approve, obviously not getting the fact that she was my sister.

There was a great deal of emotion in the air between the two of us. He looked at my pocket where I had put the picture and said, "I have a few more."

I nodded and glance over at the casket for a moment. "I'd appreciate them if you wouldn't mind," I replied, my voice hollow.

"I don't mind." He cleared his throat again and added, "Maybe we could go into the back room."

I nodded and we followed him back the way we had come. There was a room across the hall from the bathrooms that I hadn't noticed earlier and as we entered I saw that there were a couple of people already inside. Vaughn asked them to leave and they agreed without a word.

Once they were gone Vaughn shut the door and stood facing it, staring at the wooden panel for a moment as if all the answers he sought might somehow suddenly appear there. Then he took a deep breath and turned around. Ian and Peta pulled back to give us some space, while continuing to be a presence. I pulled out a cigarette as I introduced them to Vaughn, who nodded in greeting to each of them before returning his gaze to me again.

"Mia said you were hurt. Are you okay?"

"I'll be fine in a few days."

He nodded, thinking. "She said you don't remember anything."

I shook my head quickly, hating to admit my weakness. "But I've talked to her," I told him.

"To Mia?"

I shook my head again and Vaughn looked at me in confusion. "I talked to Vivian last night," I clarified.

He looked at me as if I was insane and I took a long drag, hoping that I could get him to believe me before he threw me out. "Honey, if you can, go to him," I said quietly, not wanting to lose the presence of her around me, but knowing that her showing her presence was going to be the fastest way to get Vaughn to believe what I said.

Now he was really looking at me like I was insane, but I felt Vivian leave me and a second later Vaughn took a quick breath and closed his eyes. "Has she been with you all along?" he asked.

"I'm not sure," I told him. "Most of the time. I've dreamt about her."

He took another deep breath, obviously very upset and when he didn't say anything for a moment I let him take comfort in his sister's presence as she soothed him like she had been doing for me.

I continued to smoke, even though I saw a 'no smoking' sign on one wall. The room was quiet.

"What do you know about what you came to Montreal for?" he asked eventually.

I briefly outlined what I had been told by Vivian, Sloan and Mia since I had woke up about the feud between the Red Moon Pack and Sky House. I told him of Mia's suspicions of a third party involvement and what she was trying to find out about them.

Vaughn agreed, saying that she had been trying to find out who they were. He told me that she called them ITM, which sounded familiar to me from my conversation with her and I told him that she had mentioned the name to me as well. Vaughn informed me that she had some information on them, but so far there hadn't been time to look at it.

He was acting as if Mia was with him and not at Sky House, but I didn't really think about it for the moment. The weight of it all was starting to make me feel antsy being inside the building and I wanted to be out in the sunshine and not think about what I was supposed to be helping with for a moment. I was still trying to process what was going on and I knew that I just had to hold on for a few more minutes and then I could get out.

"I told her that I would help her," I said to Vaughn.

"Mia's not going back to Sky House," he informed me. "It's too dangerous. They almost killed her once."

I didn't know what to say about that. I knew that it was a dangerous situation I found myself in, that was obvious given the attacks on Mia and myself in the last few days that had left both of us with no memories of our pasts. Not to mention Vivian's death. For the first time I really started to wonder what the hell I could do to stop all of this.

I was only half listening as Vaughn told me that Mia's sister, Susie, knew how to get to Sloan. "He will help you," he said. "We're trying to find someone else to go over there to help you. Someone from out of town."

"Well, I have Ian and Peta with me," I said, knowing that I could trust them over anyone that Vaughn might bring in from out of town. "And Sarah is trustworthy as well."

He glanced over at my siblings, then back at me and in a choked voice he said, "You may want to send you sister home. This is dangerous."

"I just sparred with her last night and I know that she can take care of herself," I informed him, looking back at my sister to gauge her reaction. She was quiet, and even though I only had a couple of day's experience, I recognized the stubborn look on her face that said 'I'm not going anywhere'. "We can take care of each other," I told Vaughn, not willing just yet to think about the fact that I had been starting to have the same doubts about Peta being here.

"I hope so," he said, his tone hardening. "But then again I thought you'd take care of Vivian, too."

That was the wrong fucking thing to say to me. My body instantly tensed, my hands clenching into fists and ready to strike. I knew that he just lost his sister, a

woman that he at least remembered, and I knew that he deserved a little leeway, that's why I didn't deck him right away. "I'm sorry, but that wasn't fair," I heard Vaughn say as I tried to remember to breathe and stay calm.

It didn't work. The rage had built up too quickly and the intensity was too much to handle. I took a step away from Vaughn so it wasn't him that I lashed out at and turned to the wall, putting my fist through it before I had time to think about my actions.

Peta gasped, but no one said anything. I was sure that I had broken a couple of fingers and it hurt like a bitch, but I didn't care. Better the wall than Vaughn Waits.

I felt a little more in control then and was trying to pull myself together to speak so I could tell Vaughn what an asshole he was when I heard Vivian in my head say, "Kiran, no." Her pleading stopped me.

"I promised her I would help finish this and I will see it through to the end," I ground out. "I took care of the man responsible for killin' her and I am the one who is gonna have to live with it." I shook my head, not believing the other man's audacity to accuse me like he had. "And she thought you were gonna blame yourself," I told him, my voice dripping with irony.

"I do," he replied, some of the heat leaving his voice.

I couldn't stand to be around him anymore because I wasn't sure I could stop myself again from popping him so I started to head for the door, but Vaughn was in my way and he didn't move. "I do blame myself. I should have never brought her back to Montreal and I am sorry, I shouldn't have said that. But goddammit, that was my sister and I wasn't there to stop what happened."

We were face-to-face now and neither one of us were backing down. "Well I was there and I couldn't fuckin' stop it," I yelled. "And I don't know why."

"It really doesn't matter why. She's gone," he said, looking down at my chest. "At least you still have a part of her." He then stepped aside and I left the room. Peta wasn't far behind me but was smart enough to not say anything as we exited the building.

"Are you okay?" she asked when we were both sitting in the Bronco.

"That was the wrong fuckin' thing to say to me," I repeated, still really pissed off. My hand was killing me and I wondered if I was going to have to go to the hospital. Then I remembered that Gwen could heal with her magic, but I would have to come up with a story as to what had happened.

"He was really upset," she replied quietly.

"And I'm not!" I exploded, looking back at her. The steam immediately left my sails when I saw her flinch.

"Look, I don't want you to get mad at me, but you don't remember Vivian and he does."

"That doesn't matter," I said, facing front again. Peta didn't say anything and after a minute I added, "Just because I don't fuckin' remember her doesn't mean that I don't know." Then I remembered that I hadn't told Peta about the dream and even though it would help her to understand how I was feeling I didn't feel comfortable telling her.

I was starting to wonder what happened to Ian when he finally came out five minutes later and by then I had pulled out a new cigarette and was half way through it. We left the funeral home silently and after going through a drive thru for

lunch, Ian headed to the park where we had run the day before. I was glad that he sensed what I needed and that I didn't have to ask for it.

After thinking on it I understood that Vaughn was upset about Vivian's death and was just lashing out with what he said. I had walked into the situation knowing he was going to blame me and when he did it hit me really wrong. It was his words that had really done me in.

Running with Ian and Peta after we ate helped to clear my head and I was surprised when my hand quit hurting after I had shifted into my cat form. Later Ian explained that we could heal most wounds when we were in one of our other forms. Unfortunately, the wounds that I had received when Vivian and I were attacked were the kind that I couldn't heal in that way. He said that that if silver or most other shifters claws were used, we couldn't heal quickly. We had to wait and let them do so naturally. That made sense to me.

CHAPTER 18 – LEARNING MORE ABOUT THE FEUD

"I see the girls walk by dressed in their summer clothes
I have to turn my head until my darkness goes"
"Paint It Black"
The Rolling Stones

We headed back to Sky House about two o'clock and by then I was feeling more solid, more sure of being able to hold my emotions together. There was still a lot of grief that I needed to process as well as figure out how to deal with the stuff I felt but couldn't remember. For now I wasn't going to be shadow boxing with any more walls and that was a good thing.

When we got to the mansion, Shea once again greeted us at the door and we got the opportunity to meet more of the people who lived/hung out there. Sarah was sitting on a couch in the living room talking with Camden, a young male witch that looked to be in his mid-twenties, who was sitting in a chair across from her. They seemed to be discussing something about magic when we came in and Sarah smiled when she saw me, but after one look at my face, her smile faltered a bit.

I had been worried about Sarah being on her own after being shot the day before so I was glad to see that she was still in one piece as I went go over to sit next to her. My thoughts were still filled with Vivian and the fact that I would never know her, even though I could feel the love that we had for each other.

As the others chatted and got to know my brother and sister a little, I came to the decision that I had to tell Sarah about Vivian, but I wasn't going to do it here. She deserved to know what was happening, but I wasn't going to tell her the whole truth about what I had agreed to help with yet. I wasn't sure she would help anyhow.

I was pretty quiet as the others talked, reaching over to take Sarah's hand as I tried to smile at her and make some kind of conversation for the benefit of Camden and Shea. Ian and Peta were taking up the slack, talking about our growing up in Mississippi and how they liked Montreal so far. Gwen and Sloan came back about twenty minutes later, but they disappeared together upstairs and Shea commented that it was hard to say when they would be back down.

I decided that I had to make the best of my time while I was around these people and that I needed to try to learn what I could from them. I asked if Mia was around, saying that she was one of the people I met the day before and I hadn't seen her. I remembered Vaughn saying that she wasn't going back to Sky House because it was too dangerous so I thought I could determine what they thought happened to her.

When I brought up Mia's name Shea glanced at Camden a little nervously. "We don't know where she is. She went to work with Burt yesterday, but she was supposed to meet him for lunch and never showed."

"She left a note in her apartment though," Camden added. "She said she had to get away for a while."

"Burt's really worried," Shea continued. "Gwen thinks the werewolves did something to her."

"What makes you think the werewolves did somethin' to her?" I asked, hoping that I sounded concerned as well. "That is, if she didn't actually go away for a while. Wasn't she sick?"

"She was poisoned," Shea told me in a serious, sad voice. "She very nearly died. Jean did."

"They hate us," Camden interjected bitterly. "Every time we turn around they're doing something to us, or blaming all their troubles on us. I wouldn't be surprised if they did kill her and fake the note."

"Why would they want to kill her?" Peta asked.

Camden shrugged. "She's a witch and studied here, why else?"

"Sarah mentioned before that there was a problem between the werewolves and the people here, but what exactly started it?" I asked.

"We're not really sure," Shea answered. "Gwen might know since it started with her father and Owen Rawlins' father. The elder Rawlins killed her father and she killed him. That was like ten... fifteen years ago."

They went on to explain that there was bad blood between the two men for some reason, but for a long time there were no deaths. Apparently part of the mansion burned in 1976 and that's when things really started to escalate. The elder Rawlins name was Kier and Gwen's father's name was Boden so I locked those names away so I didn't forget them. Hopefully, I wouldn't forget them.

I thought about the story they were telling us and wondered how it all pieced together. "So has anyone ever thought about tryin' to get over it?" I asked. "That was a long time ago and I don't know about ya'll, but-"

"Jean died two weeks ago," Shea interrupted, obviously still very effected by his death. "That's not a long time ago."

I shook my head and leaned forward. "I'm talkin' about when all this shit happened all those years ago."

"But it's continued since then," Camden said.

"But ya'll don't know why all this shit started," I pointed out the lack of motivation in what they had been telling us.

"It's kill or be killed." That was from Shea.

"But you know what, there aren't that many of us around," I said, hoping to make a point and not fuck up the facts since I didn't remember all of them. "You would think that we would need to defend each other to just stay alive."

Shea shook her head. "Not with them. They would rather kill us then talk to us."

"We have sent people over to talk peace to them and the werewolves have killed all of them," Camden explained. "They sent one guy's hands back."

I frowned. "That just doesn't make sense, man. I know that I am new around here and I don't know shit, but..."

I was distracted because half my brain was still on Vivian and the funeral home so I knew I wasn't making an effective argument. I was glad when Camden suggested, "Stick around and you will see that we can't make peace with them. We can't."

Sarah must have sensed my distraction and said, "You know, I promised Peta yesterday that we would go shopping. Would you guys mind taking us?"

"Oh, we'd love to spend an afternoon in the mall," Ian replied sarcastically, but teasingly as he eyed me carefully at the same time.

"Yeah, you were going to take me to that one store and show me that dress that you were looking at," Peta piped in.

Sarah turned her attention to me. "Kiran, why don't you ride back with me to the casino and we can all go from there."

I nodded, really wanting to get the hell out of there, as Sarah stood, thanking Shea and Camden for lunch and suggesting that they meet up with us at the casino later. I stood as well and told Camden that it was nice to meet him.

"Likewise."

Once we were alone in the Aztec and I was smoking, Sarah and I were silent for a long time. I was thinking about Vivian and the fact that I needed to tell Sarah about some of what I now knew. I could tell that she is waiting for me to say something first, but I didn't want to bring it up in the car and upset her when she needed to concentrate on driving.

Once we were well away from the mansion she said, "Casino de Montreal," then released the wheel and turned to face me and asked, "What's wrong?"

I took one last puff then dropped the cigarette butt out my window, my movements slow, trying to draw this out as long as possible. "There's some things that I have to tell you that I found out," I said finally, not looking at her.

"Not good things, I take it."

I shook my head. "Do you remember the woman that I told you about that was in the warehouse when I woke up?"

"I remember," she replied with a nod.

"The one that I talked to last night at the casino."

She nodded again, this time not saying anything.

I took a deep breath, then said, "The address that I got today was for a funeral home where her funeral was bein' held."

I glanced over at her and was unsettled by the look of concern and shock I found there. She was watching me carefully and I dreaded that I was going to hurt her again. That was the last thing I wanted.

I cast my gaze down to the wedding rings on my left hand and unconsciously start spinning the one that I now knew was mine on my finger. With the exception of last night when Vivian faded out of my arms in my dream, I knew that this is the worst thing I could remember having to do. "Vivian was my fiancée," I told Sarah, aware of the fact that I still couldn't feel her and mourning the loss of her presence.

Sarah was quiet for several minutes and I was silent as well, giving her some time to digest the situation. I hoped that she never found out the circumstances under which Vivian and I got together because even though I was sure my inklings were correct, I wasn't proud of the thought that I had left Sarah in Minneapolis with Vivian, regardless of how much I had loved the other woman. When I finally brought myself to look at her, I was relieved slightly to see her look of sympathy and sadness. "I figured it was something like that," she said, looking pointedly at my hands. "What with the rings and her hanging around."

"I don't have any memories of our time together," I said, turning my head to watch as the Aztec wove in and out of traffic. "But I still feel the love that I felt for her."

I saw Sarah nod in my peripheral vision and I continued, "I wanted to be honest with you about what I had found out because I know that I have already hurt you once and I don't wanna do it again."

She gave me a sad smile. "I appreciate your honesty. I won't say that I'm excited to hear this, but it's not something that I didn't expect."

I cleared my throat, the sadness of Vivian's loss and the frustration that I couldn't remember her was starting to get to me again and I really didn't want to break down again. "This is a really confusin' time for me because I want to do right by both of you," I told her.

She reached out to cover my hand with hers. "I think that you will," she said, attempting to smile.

I put my other hand over hers. "There is somethin' there with you, too," I said and she looked away. "And I don't know if you feel anythin' for me anymore or not."

She looked up quickly, like I had surprised her. "When we were in Minneapolis I was in love with you, Kiran. I can't say that now because it's been a year. But I do care about you and I don't want to see you hurt by jumping into a relationship when you're not ready."

I nodded, glad for her honesty and knowing that I needed to be just as honest with her about how I felt. "That is what I'm thinking', too. I don't want to hurt you." I looked down at our joined hands. "Then again I enjoy your company. I enjoy bein' with you."

She smiled. "You better."

I grinned at her briefly. "But most importantly you know me. Better than I know myself right now. Better than I might ever know myself ever again. And even though it's been a year, you can probably tell me things about myself that I'll never know without you."

Her green eyes were full of remorse. "I can tell you about things that happened, but everything you need to know about yourself is still in here," she replied quietly as she put her hand over my heart with her free hand.

I wasn't sure how to respond, so I was silent as I looked at her hand in mine and thanked whoever was responsible for bringing her to my hotel room door that night.

"Why don't we just take things one day at time and not push each other into for anything that we're not ready to give," she said after a time.

I nodded; relieved at the suggestion even though I wasn't sure I would ever be ready again. "Thank you for your understandin'."

Sarah shrugged. "It would be very easy for me to be upset and hateful. Jealous. But I understand you situation, I've never been in it, but I can empathize and I'm sorry that this had to happen to you." She sighed and dropped her hand from my chest. "You must have loved her very much," she commented and I could hear the sorrow in her voice as the tears threatened again.

I knew that if I said anymore I might say something that I didn't mean or worse, something that would lead to me telling her about things that I wasn't ready to share or that she didn't want to know, like how Vivian had taken over her body the night before.

Sarah squeezed my hand, then pulled away to turned back to face the road. She put one hand on the wheel and hit a button on the dash with the other, effectively taking over the driving again.

I needed some time to once again pull my shit together so we didn't talk anymore for the rest of the drive to the casino.

Even though that hadn't been the plan in the first place, Sarah said that she didn't really mind taking Peta out shopping, which left my little sister practically salivating at the thought of spending some of my hard earned money. Sarah said that Ian and I were welcome to accompany them as well, but one look at my brother's face at the thought of shopping was enough for me to suggest the girls go on without us.

After the women took off on their expedition, I asked Ian what he wanted to do and before we came to a decision I suddenly realized that I could feel Vivian again. We were still standing in the parking lot of the hotel as Sarah and Peta were taking off and as soon as they pulled away I said, "You're back."

Ian looked at me questioningly and there is no response from my fiancée.

"Vivian's back," I commented and he frowned.

"She was gone?"

I nodded, feeling the sadness return again. "Since..."

"...You were about to hit her brother?" Ian offered, still sounding a little surprised by what had happened.

"I wasn't gonna hit her brother," I countered, remembering how I had hit the wall so I wouldn't hit Vaughn. We headed inside and as we did Vivian's presence faded back a little but I was still aware that she was there, reminded by the scent of vanilla that continued to linger.

We went up to Ian and Peta's room since I didn't have a key to Sarah's with me. It had been cleaned while we were gone and even though it wasn't as big as Sarah's because there were two bedrooms instead of one, there was still plenty of space for them.

I sat down in a chair and leaned back, lighting a cigarette once I was settled and thinking of Vivian again. Ian brought an ashtray over and I offered him the pack. As he took one he said, "I don't like to smoke around Peta. She tends to pick up my habits," he said as he dropped on to the couch.

"She better not start smokin'. That's the last thing I need to deal with."

Ian proceeded to tell me about catching Peta smoking when she was twelve. Apparently a huge argument ensued and Allison had gotten involved. He said that I was gone by then and even though I was glad to hear about the incident, to have the 'memory' of sorts, it was hard to concentrate knowing that Vivian was back.

"I'm gonna try talkin' to her," I said abruptly, standing nervously. "Is that okay with you?"

Ian nodded. "Do you want some privacy? There's a balcony off my room, I can go hang out there."

I shook my head, not wanting to banish him from his own room. "I'll go out there. "

He nodded again and point to which room was his before reaching for the remote to turn the TV on. I slapped him on his shoulder lightly as I passed and I saw the worry in his gaze, but I was glad when he didn't say anything.

CHAPTER 19 – GETTING MY MIND OFF THINGS

"You used to captivate me
By your resonating mind
But now I'm bound
By the life you left behind"
"My Immortal"
Evanescence

The balcony had two whicker chairs and a gorgeous view that looked out over the water. I could clearly see half a dozen ships, both commercial and personal, that were out enjoying the day as I leaned against the railing and lit another cigarette.

I looked out over the water for a few minutes to collect myself before I spoke. "Is Vaughn still angry?"

A brief, stiff breeze came up that blew my hair back from my face that I was sure came from Vivian, but I wasn't sure what to make of it. I had no idea what she was trying to tell me, so lamely I offered, "I missed you while you were gone."

I felt her sadness then, just a little, not the overwhelming stuff that I had felt before. Then I felt her love and my throat tightened.

"I want you to know that I talked to Sarah and I told her most of what's goin' on," I said next. "Not everything."

I felt a hand running up my spine in a playfully sensual manner that sent goosebumps along my skin and I wondered if she was thinking about entering Sarah's body while I was making love to her the night before.

"I don't know what I can do to help Mia," I went on, not wanting to think about how intense the experience had been for me. "So I guess I'm just gona wait until someone gets a hold of me. They know where to find me."

More wind through my hair. It was warm. She wasn't coming through very strong so I figured that she didn't want to overtax herself. I felt the tears rise again and this time I didn't try to stop them.

"I just wanna go to sleep and be with you forever," I sobbed as I bent over the rail, my face in my hands. "Then I don't have to worry about any of the other bullshit."

A surge of sadness hit me, this time it was tinged with anger. I knew I was feeling sorry for myself but I didn't give a fuck. Didn't I deserve a little self pity, if even for a moment? The woman I loved was dead and I had no memories of her. Nothing that I could claim as ours. Nothing that I could hold on to in the dark days to come.

I was pissed. Who the fuck had attacked us that night? What in the hell happened? I was vaguely aware of the fact that I was still crying with earnest and I knew that this was my first big break down since waking up in that warehouse so I wasn't about to try to hold back.

I knew I was being pathetic. I was only vaguely aware of saying things like, "I can't do this... I don't want to be here without you... I know that I don't remember you, but you're all I can think about..."

As this was happening I felt Vivian's anger fade and the sadness became stronger again, along with the love. I could feel her crying and it started to rain. Not a downpour. A misty rain that was centered just over me.

So there I was. Standing here at the railing, crying like an idiot. Vivian was wrapping me in her love and sadness, mourning what we had lost as well. I knew I loved her, even though I couldn't remember her.

After a while I was able to finally gather myself enough to stand again. It was still raining and I felt pull back a little.

"I'm sorry," I said, wiping my face and dropping the cigarette that had burnt itself out. "That wasn't a very fair thing to do to you. And I didn't mean to react to Vaughn the way I did."

I stayed there until she wasn't crying anymore. The rain stopped eventually and the feeling of her started to fade. She was still there, but no longer communicating with me.

I figured that she talked with Vaughn in some form and that she couldn't have much energy left. I went back inside and stepped into Ian's bathroom to make myself presentable before going to the living room of the suite. I splashed some cold water on my face and blew my nose. As I did so, I realized that there was a moment there where I was heading down the road of self-pity and that wasn't a good thing. I wouldn't do anyone any good if I were a simpering pile of stupidity.

Ian shut the TV off when I entered and before he could ask how I was doing I suggested, "Let's go downstairs and do somethin'. Do you gamble?"

He grinned. "I've been known to from time to time."

"Unless there's somethin' else you want to do..."

He shrugged. "Well, I could use a drink, but I think we can do that down there."

Luckily I somehow remembered all the rules of poker, like driving a car and knowing the rules of the road. I suggested that Ian and I tried our hands at playing the game and I asked him if he knew if I was any good.

He thought about it, then replied, "You would bring home some extra cash from time to time."

"Did I have a job?" I asked as we headed downstairs to the casino.

"You were in a band. Couple different ones."

A band, huh? That was interesting. "Was I good at that?"

He nodded quickly. "Yeah."

"There was a guitar with my suitcase," I told him, wondering if I would still be able to play it. That led me to wonder if I had stuff somewhere else. The suitcase in the truck only had a couple of changes of clothes in it so I wondered if I had more stuff at Vivian's house in Indiana. Or maybe at home in Mississippi. I would have to remember to ask Vaughn about it when I talked to him again. That is, if we didn't end up fighting again.

Ian told me that I taught him to play a guitar when he was younger and that I was a singer, too, as we found a poker table and sat down. Soon a waitress passed by and we ordered drinks. "Jack Daniels... a bottle, darlin'," I requested with an easy grin that she returned. She soon returned and a short time after that I was beginning to forget my troubles.

We played poker and I kept my bets pretty conservative to start out with, gauging how I was doing closely. The game came real easy to me and I had no problem keeping a straight face, regardless if I had a great hand or a shitty one.

There were a couple other guys at the table, but Ian and I pretty much ignored them as we talked while we played. Mostly the conversation consisted of him telling me about our childhood and other stuff. My brother wasn't as good a poker player as I was. He was being a lot more conservative in his betting than I was and I think it was because he didn't have a lot of money to begin with.

That knowledge left me with the realization that I needed to provide for the rest of our family. The Jack was flowing quickly between us and we ended up playing for a couple of hours before heading back upstairs to Ian's room. The night had been profitable and we had reason to celebrate. I had ended up winning over nine thousand dollars so we ordered a couple more bottles of Jack and cigarettes to be brought up to the room. Once there, Ian started telling stories again, but this time since it was just the two of us they were more personal stories about me.

We proceeded to get shit faced, which was exactly what I needed to do. I was so relieved that I was falling into an easy relationship with my brother. We bantered easily back and forth and teased each other mercilessly as the Jack continued to flow and the cigarettes were smoked away.

He kept telling me story after story, but no matter how many he told, none of them triggered any memories in me. I did get a sense of déjà vu that I had sat with him before like this before, getting drunk and shooting the shit, but I didn't recall a specific time. It was a comforting thing for me so I didn't discount it... I just drank more.

Conversation turned to other members of the family and he told me more about Peta. How much of a handful she was and how he was glad that he wasn't the only one around to look after her. She was a good kid for the most part, but willful and stubborn.

"Like her brothers," he said with an evil grin that made me laugh.

"Speak for yourself," I rebuffed, throwing an empty cigarette pack at him and laughing more.

I asked about Allison so Ian gladly told me about her. He also assured me that he talked to her after he and Peta got back to their room the night before so she had been assured that all was well.

We hadn't eaten anything since the take out after leaving the funeral home and for a split second I thought about the fact that we were going to feel like shit tomorrow if we kept this up. We were both really drunk by then. Not falling down or anything. But we were feeling pretty good. The morning and how I would feel then melted away.

Ian pulled out a card from the funeral home that announced the actual memorial service was scheduled for four o'clock the next day. He pointed out that Vaughn had written his number on the back in case we needed to contact him.

My brother's thoughtfulness led to a round of the whole 'I love you, man' crap that only brothers or really good male friends could get away with without getting beaten up. Our emotions were really running the gambit by that point so it was natural when I got weepy and moopy again and it was equally natural when Ian did, too.

"Man, you must of have really loved that girl because you were going to get married," he said after downing the last of the Jack that was in his glass. "She was so pretty."

I pulled out the picture that I had taken from the funeral home of her and me and looked at it for some time. As I sat there staring, Ian started cooking up this

story as to how Vivian and I met. I was aware of her in the room because I could smell vanilla and I could also tell that she was really amused by the story.

Ian revealed that he had a guitar with him as well, but it was in the back of the bronco. We thought that we could jam or something, but neither of us wanted to go down to get his and mine was still in Sarah's room where I couldn't get to it.

I wasn't sure when the girls got back. All I remember was Peta suddenly opening the door where she promptly stopped, looking at us in surprise. Then she rolled her eyes and came in, shutting the door loudly behind her and dropping her shopping bags in an empty chair.

"Peta, I'm so glad to see you," Ian and I both slurred in an alcohol-induced haze.

"Have you guys been drinking the entire time we were gone?" she asked in disgust, putting her hands on her hips as she looked at us disapprovingly.

"Nope," I replied, pouring another round for Ian and myself, thinking how nice I was to have served Ian first.

"Well, there was the five minutes before we went downstairs," Ian pointed out as he picked up his glass and silently toasted me.

"But I won us some money," I informed my sister. I thought about getting up to pull the cash from my pocket, but I was pretty sure I would fall on my ass if I tried. Not a picture I wanted my sister to see.

"Did ya?" she asked brightly, looking between us. "Can I have it?"

I instantly sobered enough to comment, "I'm not that drunk, darlin'."

She pouted just as quickly and I changed the subject. "What'd ya buy?" I asked her, pointing at the bags.

"Clothes."

"Let me see."

She rolled her eyes. Man, I hated it when she did that. "Maybe when you're sober. Cuz you'll over react."

"No, I won't."

She hesitated a moment, then said, "Tell you what, let me have a drink and I'll show you my clothes."

Ian and I laughed hysterically at the very idea and I answered, "No. Where's Sarah?"

"Putting her things away," she replied as she gathered her bags again and put them in her room. Then she came back over by us and picked up one of the empty bottles that had ended up on its side on the floor and looked at it, then put it down and went over to a window to open it. "It smells like a brewery in here."

"No, not a brewery. A distillery. Get it right," I said, thinking I was hilarious when Ian laughed.

I chanced getting up then and stumbled over to Peta, who was eyeing me warily. I put my arms around her from behind and gave her a brotherly squeeze with my arm around her neck.

"What?" she asked, huffily.

"I just love you, darlin'," I told her. "You're my baby sister."

She started to squirm. "I love you, too, Kiran. Can you get off me now?"

"What, I can't hug ya?"

"Hug me, yes, drag me down to the ground, no," she scoffed, continuing to attempt to push me off her.

"I'm not..." I hiccupped, "...draggin' ya down."

There was a knock on the door just then and Peta said, "Why don't you get that?" as she peeled my arms off her.

"You can get it," I replied, not sure I could make it to the door. It had tested all my dexterity to make to Peta in the first place.

"You get it," she insisted. "It's Sarah."

"Come in," I called out.

"It's locked," Peta grumbled threateningly. "Go open it."

I didn't want her to get rough because I knew I was too drunk to take her at the moment so I stumble over to the door. "I can't believe you're makin' me open this door," I slurred as I tugged it open and turned to see Sarah standing there. She was looking at me with wide eyes and waved her hand in front of her face.

"Have you been drinking the entire time we were gone?" she asked.

"You sound like Peta," I protested. "Of course not."

She put her hand on my chest and pushed me back so that she could enter the room, almost pushing me over at the same time. She glanced at the window and saw that it was already open and gave Peta a pleased look. I slipped my arms around Sarah lovingly and she wrapped hers around me as well. I was weaving a little and needed all the support I could get. Here's hoping I didn't fuck it up.

"Did you girls have a nice time," I slurred as I leaned down enough to drop a really wet kiss on Sarah's cheek.

"Mmmhmm," she replied as she maneuvered me over to the couch, which I promptly dropped down on, taking her with me. She glanced at Ian for help and seemed to notice for the first time that he was drunk, too.

"Oh, my god, he's as drunk as you are," she proclaimed as she looked down at me.

Ian's face showed his outrage. "I'm not drunk, darlin'," he pronounced, bringing his glass up quickly to point in Sarah's direction, spilling Jack in the process.

Sarah dropped her head so that her haired covered her face, but I could feel her body convulsing with laughter. When she raised her head again she had herself under control. "Did you guys happen to eat this afternoon?"

"We had McDonalds," I announced proudly.

"That was at eleven o'clock," Peta injected, outraged.

I thought about it and nodded, not having any idea what time it was now. Couldn't have been past three, right? Sure, the three of us had gone for a run after leaving the funeral home, but the girls hadn't been gone that long right? I was lost in my thoughts of the space-time continuum and didn't really notice Sarah leaving my arms to stand.

I heard Peta on the phone, ordering food I thought, but I didn't know what kind. Sarah gathered the empty bottles of Jack and disposed of them, much to mine and Ian's displeasure. I must have brought up Vivian's name at some point as we were waiting for food. Something about how she had been laughing at us the whole time we had been sitting here

"Who?" Peta asked.

"Vivian," Ian repeated, looking around the room as if he could somehow see her. "She's here somewhere. I could smell her."

The girls blew off what Ian was saying, thinking that it was only part of our big drunk. The food finally arrived they made us eat every bite before putting us to bed. I was vaguely aware that they put me in Peta's room to bed down and that my sister had used the wad of cash I had won early to get me there. How did that even get out of my pocket? Hopefully I would remember to get it back from her the next day...

CHAPTER 20 - DRUNKEN MEMORIES

"The worst is over now and we can breathe again
I wanna hold you high, you steal my pain away"

"Broken"

Seether – Featuring Amy Lee

Dreaming again. I was in Minneapolis, but I didn't know how I knew that. I was sitting at a nickel slot machine, a bucket of coins in my left hand so that I could feed them in and pull the lever with my right. I looked down at the bucket to see how many coins were in it and was shocked to see that I was wearing a dress!

I felt a great deal shorter than I normally was and if the dress wasn't weird enough I also had breasts! Nice ones from what I could tell as I looked at them closely for a moment. I also had long, dark hair that I could see the ends of when I was looking at the breasts.

There were quite a few people around me and I was somehow aware that I wasn't far from the poker tables, which were to my left. I looked over at them and at one of the tables I could see... well, me, the 'male' version of me, sitting with Sarah at one of them, playing poker. I went back to feeding nickels into the slot machine, aware that I wasn't pleased because I wasn't winning. I looked back at Sarah and the real me again and saw that we seemed to be having a great time. We were winning a lot of money and we were flirting openly with each other.

The whole experience was really weird for me. I mean, I was aware of the fact that I was this woman in this dream, Vivian I was supposing, but I was also aware of who I actually was and it was slightly perplexing. Talk about confused identity.

Finally the Vivian version of me gave up playing the machine where I was loosing and moved to another one that was close to the bathrooms. After playing that one for about ten minutes I noticed that the 'male'-me was headed toward the men's room, but he didn't seem to notice me. Now that he was closer I realized for the first time that he was clean-shaven and that his hair was a little shorter than what mine was now. I decided right then that I preferred the facial hair. A lot. What a baby face!

I still wasn't winning a few minutes later when I heard a male voice say, "Darlin', you look like you're losin'."

I turned around and saw the 'male'-me standing there smiling and wondering if my grin had always looked that cocky?

I felt myself smile, then I replied, "Seems to be my luck tonight."

The 'male'-me winked back. "How 'bout we see 'bout changing your luck?"

The dream changed to a street near the Nicolet Mall in downtown Minneapolis, which was only accessible to buses and had stores lining both sides of the wide sidewalks. It was dark, but there were quite a few stores still open. I was still seeing through Vivian's eyes and I was walking next to the real me. We were holding hands as we strolled and window shopped, stopping at the corner Starbucks for coffee. I wondered where Sarah was, but for some reason the thought was fleeting. She simply didn't matter to me.

The dream changed again to a different day, but I was still in Vivian's body. She was out walking by herself and it was really late. I had memories of her being at a

bar and having a few drinks with friends, but she wasn't drunk. From the looks of things, she definitely wasn't in the best part of town, but she wasn't bothered by it.

There was a low wall ahead of her and a couple of guys were sitting there, smoking and drinking. They start to catcall in her direction, but she didn't pay attention as she kept walking past them and wasn't at all surprised when they started to follow. Again, I could feel that she wasn't worried. She was being smart and paying attention to where they all were even as they spread out behind her.

They made their move suddenly to grab her and without warning she wasn't this small female anymore. She was this seven foot tall, hairy half-wolf with razor sharp teeth, big ass claws and a tail that I wasn't familiar with feeling since it wasn't the feline tail I was used to.

She turned around to face the guys and they completely freaked out, turning tail and running away, screaming. I felt and heard Vivian as she laughed and just as quickly turned back to a girl in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt again.

I then heard male laughter from behind me and Vivian whipped around to look across the street and I saw the 'male'-me chuckling as he leaned against a burnt out lamppost.

"Darlin', I hope that's not how you get rid of all your suitors," he said, causing Vivian to laugh too as she crossed the street toward him. The dream faded and changed rapidly in a quick succession of images.

Vivian having sex with me, but I was aware that we were no longer in Minneapolis. Us packing a U-Haul. Cooking a romantic dinner.

I realized that Vivian was showing me what our life together was like and how we met, which was interesting because it was nothing like what Ian and I had come up with. The myriad of images faded to black, leaving me with a slight head rush but relieved because I finally had some kind of an idea of what I was like before waking up in that warehouse. The whole experience left a lonely ache in my chest for the woman I would never have again.

Eventually I came back to myself and I found that I was sitting at a table in a café. It was late afternoon and Vivian was sitting across from me with a beautiful, self-satisfied smile on her face. She was sipping on a milkshake while I had a cup of coffee in front of me and a cigarette in my hand. I looked around in confusion, not knowing where I was, and I took me a minute to realize that it was still a dream.

Most importantly, I was a guy again. I wiped my hand over my mouth, a gesture that I was quickly finding to be one that I unconsciously did whenever I was unsure of the situation or thinking.

"I like you with the goatee much better," Vivian said, bringing my attention back to her.

"Thank you," I told her quietly as I met her gaze. "I needed that."

She shrugged as she grinned and brought the straw back to her mouth for a quick sip. "You guys were just so totally wrong," she offered with a shrug.

I found myself desperately needing to touch her so I reached over to take her hand as I looked at her intently, causing her to blush and hide her face with her hair as she looked away. "What?" she asked.

"No, don't hide from me," I'll say, tilting her chin so I could see all of her face again. "Let me look at you while I can."

She met my gaze with sad eyes, but happy at the same time. I brought her hand to my mouth to kiss the back of it and she ran her fingers against the side of my face softly. She was drinking me in just as much as I was drinking her in.

"Whoever did this will fuckin' pay," I vowed. "More than they ev-"

She silenced me by putting her thumb over my mouth. "Don't waste the time we have," she said, her eyes pleading.

I took her hand in mine again and studied her fingers that were so small in mine. "Did we live together in Indiana?" I asked.

"Yes."

I met her gaze again. "Do we have a place there?"

She shook her head and cleared her throat. "No. We did, but we were moving here."

I frowned. "So where's our stuff?"

"Vaughn's?" she suggested, not sounding sure. "It was," she added sadly, clearly not knowing any more than I did.

The mention of her brother's name reminded me of what had happened earlier that afternoon and the guilt that I now felt over how I reacted. "I didn't mean to blow up at him like I did."

Her fingers held mine strongly. "He didn't mean to say what he did. He was just very upset," she explained, clearly worried that I would hate her brother. "Really, he's a nice guy."

I snarked. "I'm sure he is. Don't worry. We'll figure it out," I assured her.

Vivian sighed and looked down, studying the remains of her milkshake. "I wish I could help you."

"You do help me, darlin'," I insisted, then thought a moment about what I had just said. "Did I call you 'darlin'' all the time?"

She smiled. "Honey, you call everyone 'darlin'". "

I returned her smile. "That's what I'm beginnin' to figure out. Was there somethin' that I called you though?" A word was coming to the back of my mind, but I didn't know if it was linked to her or not. She didn't say anything, but her sad look spoke volumes on how much she disliked the situation. "Was it 'chere'?" I asked quietly.

Her smile this time was a sad one, as if she were having a bittersweet memory, which she probably was. "You haven't forgotten everything."

I ran my thumb over her knuckles. "Do you have other siblin's? Besides Vaughn?"

She nodded slightly. "Lily," she replied, her voice catching a little as she looked down again.

"None of us are havin' a very good time of this, chere," I assured her, squeezing her hand a little.

"She thinks she should have been the one sent in, but Vaughn wouldn't let her go."

"Is she like you?" I asked, meaning the werewolf part.

She shook her head quickly. "No."

"Well then it was probably a good thing she wasn't," I said, thinking how Vivian's abilities hadn't helped keep her alive.

She smiled wryly, sadness still clearly visible in her gaze. "She wouldn't have been killed because she isn't like me."

Her comment struck me oddly, leading me to believe that whoever attacked us knew before hand what we were, or at least knew that Vivian was a shifter.

"Did they know you were a werewolf?" I asked her and she nodded.

"They knew. They had silver."

"Then they probably knew what I am, too."

She reached up to touch my head where the spikes had gone in, but didn't say anything. She didn't really need to. It became all too clear to me that the amnesia I was now experiencing could have only been caused by something that could really do harm to creatures like Vivian and I. Silver. Sarah had already said as much.

Suddenly a thought struck me. If whoever had attacked us knew what we were, then they had to have known that there was two of us. "There was more than one, wasn't there?" I asked. There had to have been to take both of us down.

"There were two," she confirmed.

I felt my gaze harden as I looked at her. "Did the other one get away?"

"No."

I thought about the body that was in pieces around me when I woke and said, "I don't remember seeing another one."

Vivian hesitated, looking as if she wanted to say something then finally she asked, "Did you count the body parts?"

I paused. "I didn't take a whole lot of time to..."

She tried to smile but it didn't quite reach her eyes. "I know. It was an ambush, Kiran. There was nothing neither one of us could do. It happened too fast."

I could hear the tears in her voice and I squeezed her hand, offering what comfort I still could. "I'll make it right," I vowed.

Her reply was quiet. "You did."

"No, there's more behind this," I insisted, my answer starting to rise. "It's got to have somethin' to do with that third group that Mia is lookin' in to."

"ITM," Vivian offered quietly, looking down at the table.

"Yeah. Did you spend anytime talkin' with Vaughn?"

"A little before you came to town."

I shook my head. "No, I mean... today..."

"Not about that."

We were silent for a moment, neither of us fully able to deal with the situation we now found ourselves in. I knew that there were things I needed to think about but it was hard because I found myself wanting to know more about this woman. Who she was. What we were together.

But then that was too much to think about and I had to push those thoughts away as well. "Is there anythin' else that I need to take care of?" I asked her. "Anythin' that I don't know about that I should?"

"We have to resolve this before someone else is killed," she said.

"That is my intention if at all possible. But I'm not exactly in the loop right now and I'm not exactly sure what I need to be doin'." Suddenly a detail that had been bothering me came to mind and I asked, "Why is my license expired?"

Vivian frowned. "Your license is expired?"

"From Mississippi," I confirmed. "And there was no credit cards."

"You didn't have credit cards," she said.

"No bank account stuff?"

She smiled slightly. "No, that was all in my name... because you loose stuff."

I smiled back at her. "Sorry," I said, remembering that I took all her cash and left the credit cards and checkbook. Guess I'm not a thief, I thought to myself since it was our money and not hers alone.

"You said that you didn't want to be tied down in paperwork," she explained. Then she reached out and touched the side of my face again. "My free spirit," she said wistfully.

I smiled and put my hand over hers. "Didn't I get an Indiana one?" I asked, not wanting to see that look in her eyes anymore.

She thought a moment. "You know, now that I think about it, you didn't, did you?" She smiled. "I believe you said something about bureaucratic bullshit."

"So I'm not one to really care for the law, is that what you're sayin'," I teased a little and laughed.

Vivian giggled a little as well and it was music to my ears. "Well, you don't go around stealing and shooting people or whatever. But, we were outside of society because of what we were and you didn't think that you needed to play by the rules."

Her tone suggested that she didn't approve with my viewpoints, but I could see that she loved me for it at the same time. "And, ah... how many times did we argue about those viewpoints?" I teased.

"We never argued," she was quick to say, half joking.

I highly doubted that was the case so I just looked at her and sure enough she started to squirm. "Everything was perfect always," she insisted. I continued to just look at her and finally she broke. "Okay, a couple."

"About?"

She grinned and rolled her eyes like I had seen Peta do in the last few days. Must have been a female thing. "Bureaucratic bullshit," she conceded and we both laughed. "But it was okay. I didn't mind, really."

She paused and in a quiet voice continued, "We only really argued about whether you would come to Montreal with me, because I didn't want you to."

"Why wouldn't I?" I asked. I doubted I was willing to let her walk in this situation up here without me.

"Because I didn't want you to get hurt."

I looked at her in amazement, listening to her words and knowing that she was the one who was killed. "Well it looks like my comin' wasn't really helpful, now was it?" I said, pulling away from her and leaning back in my chair defensively.

"Because you got hurt and you don't remember anything," she pointed out, as if the fact should have been apparent all along. "That's exactly why - I didn't want you to get hurt."

"I'm sure that I didn't want you to get hurt, either." My voice was probably a little too calm and I knew I had gone too far as I reached for a cigarette even though I knew there would be no satisfaction. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. There's no use arguin' about it now."

"I didn't want to leave you," she insisted, then she started to chuckle. "And I really didn't, did I?"

Suddenly her being across the table from me was too far. I pulled my chair around the side of the table so that I was next to her and Vivian moved to sit on my lap, putting her arms around my neck as I put mine around her waist. Her head rested on my shoulder and I wanted to stay right there forever. I remembered being on the balcony of Ian's room just a handful of hours before and thinking the same thing and I wondered if it was possible to just not wake up and stay right where I was.

"Am I the only one you can talk to in this way?" I asked her, settling one hand on her back to keep her where she was while the other rested on her thigh.

"I talked a little to Vaughn, but he's used to talking to spirits. I haven't really tried anybody else." Her head was still on my shoulder so I couldn't tell if her next words were serious or not as she played with the hair on the back of my neck. "Of course, maybe if I went into someone... maybe I could talk."

I thought about what she had just suggested and I began to wonder if the thought was a sick and wrong one. Then I remembered how I hadn't liked the idea of Vivian entering into Sarah's body because it wasn't fair to the other woman. I kissed Vivian's cheek, and wondered if there was an alternative person she might act through. As I thought about it she started to fade. "Not yet," I begged, holding her tighter. I could feel her tears against my neck.

"I can't do this for this long," she sobbed. "It's too hard."

The tighter I held her the more she slipped away. "I love you, amante," she whispered.

"I love you, chere."

CHAPTER 21 - HANGOVER

"Woke up to the sound of pouring rain
Washed away a dream of you"
"I Remember You"
Skid Row

I was crying uncontrollably when I woke up. The light in the room was way too fucking bright and I thought my head was going to explode. For a half a second I welcomed the idea. It was too much of an effort to shield my eyes in anyway so I simply prayed to any goddess available to make the pain go away.

I tried to get a hold of myself, to stop crying, get my head to stop hurting... and on top of all that I had to pee like crazy. Somehow I stumbled blindly to the bathroom and found the toilet without killing myself from tripping over anything since it hurt to even open my eyes.

Soon I had one problem checked off my list and after flushing the toilet I started to look around the vanity for some aspirin. I found that even though she had only been there a day, Peta had managed to spread her stuff all over place as if she had always lived here. I didn't see any aspirin anywhere.

Then I remembered the conversation I had with Ian the other day concerning healing and I wondered if the hangover/headache... whatever it was would go away if I shifted. I carefully stripped off my clothes and turned on the shower so that I could jump in as soon as I had shifted.

I took a moment try to clear my head then concentrated, trying like hell to change form, but my head hurt too much and I couldn't shift. Moaning the entire time, I finally gave up and walked into the shower stall, letting the hot water pour on my head and back while I braced myself with my hands on the wall.

The hot water was like heaven to my tormented head. After a moment I tried again to shift and this time it worked, thankfully the stall was big enough for me to shift in, I only had to dodge my head a little so I didn't smack it on the faucet. As soon as I shifted, the headache was gone. Ah, bliss.

I had to use Peta's fruity scented shampoo and conditioner as well as her almost too flowery shower gel. Much of what happened the night before was a blur, but I did recall enough of what happened to know what I did, including kissing Sarah, holding onto Peta in order to stand upright, flashing my greedy baby sister the money I had won the night before and bringing up Vivian in front of Sarah.

I also remembered that Vivian's the funeral was today and I hurried up to finish getting ready. There wasn't a clock in the bathroom so I had no idea what time it was, but thankfully there was an extra hotel toothbrush on the counter that allowed me to brush my teeth and get rid of the stale alcohol and smoke taste that had taken up residence in my mouth.

There was a fresh set of clothes in the bedroom that I hadn't noticed before and a note with Peta's handwriting that said, 'Try shifting'. I chuckled at the note and dressed, hanging the towel in the bathroom to be a good example for my messy younger sibling and prepared to leave the room.

More memories of the previous evening came flooding back when I remembered the story that Ian and I cooked up concerning how I met Vivian and I smiled at how far off it was from what had really happened. I was glad that Vivian had been able

to give me back that memory, even if it had been from her perspective and not mine.

I noticed the money I had won the night before was on the table next to the bed, stacked neatly and in denomination order as if someone had counted it. I picked it up to put it in my wallet. It barely fit. There was a fresh pack of cigarettes and a bottle of aspirin next to it. Sometimes sisters were great.

I pulled out a cigarette as I went out into the living room and found that it was 7:30 in the morning. Ian was sitting at the table having breakfast and he was checking me out to see how I was doing. I must have met with his approval because after one glance over he smiled.

"Thank God I broke those fingers yesterday afternoon so I knew that little trick," I told him as I lit the cigarette.

He laughed. "Yeah, really. I was wondering if I was going to have to come in there and walk you through it again. My head was killin' me when I woke up so I wasn't sure if I could do it."

"Where are the girls at?" I asked, moving toward the coffee pot.

"Next door. Peta stayed with Sarah. She said we were snorin' too loud."

"Oh well," I said, pouring a cup.

"They went downstairs after we passed out last night," he reported. "Some people from Sky House showed up."

"Really?" I said, glancing over at him. "Was Sloan with them?"

"He was actually."

I smiled as I crossed to the table. "You know, I like that guy, but he better not be makin' no moves on our sister."

"I'd hate to see him in the big ole size," Ian said, then he looked at me and smiled. "But we could probably take him."

"Oh, hell yeah."

I took a sip of the coffee and it was like heaven. "Oh, you know the story we were makin' up last night?" I said, sitting down across from him.

Ian had to think for a minute, then recognition hit and he said, "Oh, yeah. About how you met Vivian?"

I nodded. "Totally wrong."

"I figured that when you said she was laughin' at us," he said with a grin.

"She showed me."

"Yeah?" Ian asked, surprised. "So how'd you meet her?"

I told him about the dream and he teased me a little about having breasts. "Have you talked to them this mornin'?" I asked, meaning the girls.

"Yeah, Peta wouldn't tell me about what she talked to Sloan about last night. She said she wanted to talk to you about it. That there was no use tellin' it twice."

"All right," I sighed, polishing off the cup in a couple, hot chugs. "Let's head over there."

Ian stood with his coffee in one hand and a donut from the plate that I hadn't noticed before in the other. I refilled my cup, grabbed the plate and we were on our way.

Peta opened the door, wearing an outfit that was similar to what Sarah would wear, but not as provocative and I felt my eyes nearly jump out of my head. I gave her the once over, twice and she did a spin in the doorway.

"Do I meet your approval?" she asked with a shitty grin.

"For the moment, but that's only because I'm starvin' and need to sit down," I retorted gruffly as we walked in. I knew that if I wanted her to change I was going to have to fight her and I wasn't sure I was up for that kind of exercise at the moment.

Sarah was sitting at the table, wearing a more provocative in style dress and I knew she wouldn't be of any help with Peta. She sure was beautiful, though. She smiled up at me and I smiled back.

"Good mornin', darlin'. How are you feelin' today?" I asked, putting the plate of donuts down and drinking her in.

"I'm fine, but I didn't drink two bottles of whiskey," she observed.

"I didn't drink it by myself," I replied with an easy grin.

She laughed. "I take it there are no bad effects from your encounter with the demon alcohol?"

I sipped the coffee. "Not at all. I'm just fine."

Ian took a seat at the table and Peta moved over to the couch with some kind of a fruity drink in hand. Sarah had a huge breakfast in front of her that was way too much food for her to eat by herself. I drew closer to her to snatch a sausage from her plate and she gestured for me to take what I wanted.

"There was more, but you guys took so long to wake up that we just couldn't wait to eat."

On the way over from Ian and Peta's room I decided that the best route would be to pretend that I didn't remember anything that happened the night before. I didn't want Sarah to feel uncomfortable about anything that she may have heard.

"Sorry," I apologized sheepishly as I sat next to her.

"Gwen says hi," she replied, then put a forkful of eggs in her mouth. I nodded and sipped more coffee, not sure I could or should eat anything just yet. "Everyone was sorry to miss you," she continued.

"You didn't tell them..."

"That you were stone drunk and passed out?" Peta inputted and I glared at her, which didn't scare the little shit in the slightest. She just grinned bigger and sipped her fruity drink without a care in the world. Ian grinned.

"We told them you had unexpected business pop up and were called away," Sarah said, distracting me from the many ways that were forming in my head to lynch the baby of the Michaels' family. It was too bad, too, because some of them might have worked.

"We didn't mention the porcelain goddess," Peta added.

That earned her another look. "I didn't puke," I replied indignantly.

In what could only be construed as a peace offering, Peta pulled a handful of change from her pocket and came over to the table put it next to me elbow "I bought you cigarettes this mornin' because you smoked them all," she said, giving me this half disapproving, half 'I-think-you-are-so-stupidly-funny' look. All rolled together with just enough of her accent coming through to sound genteel. What a joke.

The peace offering worked though because all my previous lynching plans left my head as I pulled her down onto my lap and kissed her cheek at her thoughtfulness. "And I appreciate it," I told her sincerely. "Thank you, darlin'."

She grinned, knowing exactly how to play me. "I'll remember that the next time I ask you for money."

"You can keep the change," I told her and before I had a chance to rethink the offer she had the money scooped back off the table and back into her pocket.

"What are you doin' today?" I asked Sarah.

She wiped her mouth gracefully, then said, "Well, I am not going to a funeral."

I nodded in understanding. "Are you goin' to Sky House?"

"Actually Gwen wanted me to go down to her clinic because one of the gadgets that she bought from me isn't working right and I need to talk to it."

"Gadgets?" I asked, not understanding what she meant.

"Yes. I make medical devices that Gwen uses with magic to heal and diagnose illnesses."

The idea didn't seem too far fetch because of the devices I had seen in Sarah's purse. "Is that like the stuff you carry with you?" I asked.

"Kind of," she said, clearly not sure how to explain. "One of them is. She buys medical ones because she is a doctor."

"Cool." I still wasn't sure how I felt about Gwen and the others at Sky House but it was good that she was a doctor. At least I could be reassured that she was doing some good for some people.

"I sell a few here and there," Sarah was saying. "There are witches out there that are doctors."

"When are you goin' to go over there?"

"Whenever you guys take off. She's going to be there all day."

"That will be later on this afternoon." I had already decided that I didn't want to go to the morning viewing. Yesterday was too much to deal with and I needed to gather myself for the actual funeral service this afternoon. Then I remembered how I couldn't get in Sarah's suite the night before and I asked if I could have a key.

"Oh, yeah, there's one over there," she replied with a smile as she pointed to a table near the door. "You said something last night about not being able to get to your guitar."

I nodded. "We were gonna jam, weren't we?" I asked Ian.

He nodded. "Yeah. Maybe later."

CHAPTER 22 - VIVIAN'S FUNERAL

"I see a line of cars and they're all painted black
With flowers and my love both never to come back"
"Paint It Black"
The Rolling Stones

We spent the morning just hanging out in Sarah's suite. I was feeling a hundred percent better now that I had shifted and the hangover was gone, but Vivian's funeral was still looming in my mind and it left me rather quiet and reserved. Ian and Peta were regaling us with more stories of our childhood, mostly stories about me, and even though I was fascinated to learn more about the past I no longer remembered, I was only half listening.

Peta told one story in particular about Alison catching me in a 'compromising situation' in the garage with the head cheerleader that was so outrageous it was obvious that it wasn't true. The little shit swore up and down it was though, even when Ian called her out on it. "Call Alison and find out for yourself," she huffed, almost hiding a grin that I was sure meant she was lying her ass off, which made me laugh.

Amazingly enough we didn't end up calling the eldest Michaels' sibling and eventually the conversation moved on. A little while later Ian shared another story that was so bizarre that there was no way that it could not be true and I began to wonder if I was a magnet of some kind for weird happenings. His tale involved another werecreature, whose name sounded like it came from some Native American tribe, which he explained was a shape changing coyote that I met while I was on the road. The guy was in trouble and I somehow managed to help him out of it. The story was an interesting one and I wondered how many other kinds of shifters there were.

Around noon we went downstairs to have lunch together at the Via Fortuna Restaurant and I was surprised when Peta slipped in the seat next to me after Sarah excused herself to go to the bathroom.

"I have a message from Sloan," she whispered. "I talked to him last night."

I quickly looked in the direction that Sarah had just went then returned my gaze to my sister. "Wait until we leave for the funeral," I told her. There was no telling how long Sarah would be in the bathroom and I wanted Peta safely back in her seat before the other woman returned.

Peta understood what I was thinking and merely nodded and returned to her seat. Ian had overheard what she had whispered to me and lifted a brow questioningly. I shook my head and mouthed, "Later." It was a gimme that Sarah wouldn't be accompanying us to the funeral so I knew that would give us the opportunity to discuss whatever Sloan had told Peta when we were alone.

Lunch continued uneventfully after Sarah's return and as we were finishing up Ian and I realized that neither of us had anything nice to wear to the funeral. That meant shopping, which I somehow knew I was going to hate. Because of the time constraints we decided to visit the men's clothing store at the casino and luckily my brother and I managed to get the girls in and out of the place in less than an hour.

We had agreed over lunch earlier that we wanted to be at the funeral home by three o'clock. After the shopping excursion we all went back to our rooms to change and while I waited for Ian and Peta to meet back up with me at Sarah's suite I

decided that I wanted to stop and get something special that I could leave in the casket with Vivian.

We stopped at a floral shop on the way, but when I walked inside the number of different choices there were bombarded me. I couldn't remember what Vivian's favorite flowers were so I looked at all of them, hoping that some recognition would spark.

It wasn't until I saw the orchids in the very back of a cooler that I realized that Vivian was there with me, like she had been all afternoon, but at that moment the heady smell of vanilla that I now connect with her appeared in the air. I smiled silently, knowing that this was her way of telling me what she had liked and I quickly called the saleswoman over to wrap the flowers up. Less than five minutes later I was walking out with a stem of the delicate flowers wrapped in cellophane and carefully tucked in my arm.

Once I was back in the Bronco and we were on our way again I asked Peta to tell us about Sloan's message.

"He gave me an e-mail address that we can use to contact Vaughn," she explained from where she was sitting in the backseat. "I guess someone named Susie set it up for him. Sloan said that Vaughn checks it several times a day."

I had heard the name Susie before, but I didn't know who she was. I didn't think she was with the Red Moon Pack and she wasn't affiliated with Sky House in any way either. I was trying to figure out where I had heard the name before when I realized that Peta was explaining how she had snuck into the men's bathroom to talk to Sloan the night before. I was about to tell her that probably wasn't the best place to have a conversation with him when she started in on this rant about how badly he was being treated and how she really had to bite her tongue not to say anything to anyone from Sky House.

I didn't stop her rant because I knew that I felt the same way. I didn't like Sloan being there anymore than Peta did, but for now there was nothing I could do. I waited until she lost steam and said, "It's bein' worked on to get him out. Vivian thinks that he might be a long lost member of her family that they thought was dead."

"But Kiran, did you know that he didn't even get to finish school and can't drive?" she cried.

"We need someone on the inside for now and that's why he's still there. At first opportunity he'll be out," I assured her. She fell silent after that and the rest of the ride to the funeral home was a blessedly quiet one.

We pulled into the parking lot with about fifteen minutes to spare. There were more cars than there were yesterday, mostly dark colored SUV's and a few motorcycles. Some of the mourners that were making their way inside were dressed in black jeans and button down shirts, but I was still glad that we had taken the time to find something nice to wear.

I was aware of Ian finally shutting off the Bronco, but no one made a move to exit the vehicle. My mind was hazy and all I could think of was that I didn't want to see Vivian lying in that casket again. In my silence I once again tried to force my mind to come up with something, any detail that would make what I was about to do any easier. If I could just remember her face and what it looked like when she smiled that wasn't a memory from my recent dreams. Maybe then I wouldn't feel so blank, so devoid of knowing what had happened to me. To us.

Next thing I knew, Peta was opening my door and taking my hand to pull me out. Once inside the building I suggested that we just go in and sit in the back to see what happened. Thankfully Ian and Peta were okay with that.

The chairs were set up in rows that started about six feet away from the casket and stretched back to the end of the long room. The three of us sat and in the last row and as we did I got this strange feeling in the base of my spine. I looked around and somehow knew from that feeling that there quite a few other shifters in attendance. Given that it was Vivian and Vaughn's family in attendance, the idea didn't surprise me, but being in an enclosed space with so many of them left me a little uneasy. I still didn't remember how to do everything that I had been able to just a few short days ago and those uncertainties made me feel exposed to an extent.

I glanced around me and was able to pick out some of the supernaturals in the crowd. I filed away their faces for possible use later and then scanned the room for Vaughn or Mia, but I didn't see either.

I allowed my gaze to move toward the front of the room, where Vivian's casket lay and as I did, my eyes fell on the dark haired girl who had been so distraught in the parking lot the day before. She was sitting in the front row, flanked by the same two women who had held her up when I last saw her. She wasn't crying now. She was sitting quietly with her head bowed so that I could barely see her face because her hair was covering most of it.

I couldn't help but wonder who the young woman was or the other two women who sat next to her for that matter. They were sitting in the front row so that meant that they had to be members of the immediate family of some sort, but I could tell that none of them were like Vaughn or the other werewolves in attendance. There seemed to be something like a family resemblance between the young girl and the older woman. Were they mother and daughter?

I wondered how they knew Vivian. Were they her mother and sister? Vivian had said that she had a sister. Lily. Had I met either of the women? Did any of the three sitting there know me? There were so many questions and so few answers that my head was beginning to throb just thinking of them. I had to pull my eyes away from the little group before any more questions came to mind.

As I did I saw that many people in the crowd were staring at my siblings and me and I knew they were wondering who we were. Some of the werewolves were looking at us as if they recognized us as weresomething but none of them approached us. I hoped they stayed away. I couldn't answer any of their questions and I couldn't be sure that I hadn't talked to any of them before. From what I had been told so far, I now found myself in the middle of a tricky deception, but there was no way that I couldn't be here today.

It was getting close to four o'clock and my gaze was quickly brought back to Peta as she slipped out of her chair long enough to move over to a table where she grabbed a bunch of tissues from the box there that she then stuffed in her purse hastily. She then returned to her seat and put her handbag between her and me so that I could get to the tissues if I needed them. I was grateful for her thoughtfulness and reached over to give her hand a gentle squeeze.

Just before the service was supposed to start Vaughn entered the room with a woman I hadn't seen before. She had long, dark hair and a slight build. Her presence made me curious as to who she was because I had expected Mia to be with him. She still hadn't returned or made contact with anyone from Sky House so

I thought for sure I would see her today. Vaughn's gaze met mine briefly as he looked around the room before he moved further inside, but there was nothing in his eyes that told me anything.

There was a little girl with the couple as well. Without a word to anyone the trio moved to the front row and little girl climbed into another blonde woman's lap that was sitting two seats away from the dark haired girl. Vaughn stopped at the empty chair next to older woman, again making me wonder if she was Vivian's mother. Vaughn's gaze met mine again for a brief moment and I was a bit relieved to see that he seemed pleased that I was in attendance.

Low, depressing music filtered into the room from speakers that were mounted discreetly in the walls and the crowd quieted as the service started. A tall man with shaggy blonde hair and a goatee stood and moved to the podium that had been placed to one side of the casket. I looked down at the program that Peta had put into my hand when we had come in and saw that Owen Rawlins was the man listed as the person who would delivery the eulogy.

"Good afternoon," he began in a low, authoritative voice as he laid his hands on top of the podium and gazed out over the crowd. "As most of you know, my name is Owen Rawlins and I am a close, personal friend of the Waits' family. I was honored when Josephine and Vaughn asked me to speak today about Vivian and her life. She was a wonderful young woman, whose spirit and vivacity for life will be sorely missed."

The man's name struck a note of familiarity to my mind and I remembered that he was the one Shea had talked about at Sky House the day I had asked about the feud. It was his father that had kill Gwen's father that she in turned killed for doing so. What a mess all the way around. So much death.

A lump was forming in the back of my throat that was making it difficult for me to breathe as I thought about the feud's most recent victim. I wasn't the only one because I could see that the dark haired girl in the front row was crying again, as was the older woman beside her.

"My first memories of Vivian was as a young girl, trailing after her twin, Vaughn, when they were nine," Owen continued, his voice calm and steady as he regarded those who were seated in the front row respectfully. "Vaughn was always the more thoughtful and cautious of the two. He always looked after Vivian and Lily without being told. His foundation gave Vivian the opportunity to branch out into the world without fear, as the Creator would have wanted her to."

Vaughn slipped his arm around the woman who had to be his mother as the older woman did the same to the dark haired girl beside her. I wondered again if that was Lily as Owen went on, "We are all shocked and deeply disturbed by how Vivian was taken from us, but we must remember that the Creator always has a higher purpose in mind. And even though we may not understand the reasons behind why Vivian's life was cut so short, there will be more opportunities for her spirit to soar in her coming lives."

Many of the people in attendance seemed to agree with what Owen was saying given their reactions to his words. Even I was moved by what he was saying, making me realize that my beliefs had to have mingled well with Vivian's if the man was speaking at her funeral.

Even though he never used the word 'pack' or made any other references to the fact that Vivian was a werewolf, there was something about the man that left me with the impression that he was in fact the leader of the Red Moon Pack. I knew

that I should be observing him closely if I hoped to be of any help in continuing Vivian's work in making peace, but all I could think about was the woman who was lying in that casket and what she had been to me.

The dark haired girl was really sobbing now and had to be led out of the room by the blonde woman who had been sitting next to her. I had tears in my eyes as well, but I managed to hold them back, taking comfort in the warmth I felt when Peta reached out to take my hand strongly in hers and Ian put his hand on my shoulder.

Owen spoke for about twenty minutes total, sharing stories and recollections of Vivian from not only his perspective, but from her family and friends as well. He never mentioned me, which was probably a good thing since I'm sure all the werewolves in attendance wouldn't have taken too kindly to my relationship with her. Hell, we might not have made it out of the room alive if any of them knew the truth.

CHAPTER 23 – LAST TO LEAVE

"Maybe then I'll fade away and not have to face the facts
It's not easy facin' up when your whole world is black"
"Paint It Black"
The Rolling Stones

Finally it was over. Owen was done speaking and had taken his seat after stopping long enough to shake Vaughn's hand and kiss the cheek of the older woman sitting next to him, making me think once again that she had to be Vivian's mother. Another man, probably someone who worked at the funeral home, came forward to tell everyone that there would be no graveside ceremony because it was Vivian's wish to be cremated and her ashes spread by her family.

I couldn't help but wonder if that was true or if it was what Vaughn and the family had decided for Vivian. I was lost again because here I was, without even the most basic knowledge of what the woman I had loved wanted. I didn't know whether to be angry or sad for not knowing.

The funeral home representative was now releasing the rows to make a final pass in front of the casket before exiting, starting with the first row. The woman who had to be Vaughn's mother led the way, stoically walking by herself, her face composed but sad and I couldn't help but wonder if Vivian had her mother's strength in life. Next came Vaughn and the woman I didn't know, their hands clasped firmly and both of their eyes red rimmed from tears.

I still hadn't forgotten nor forgiven Vaughn's accusations from the day before, but I also couldn't stop myself from echoing his sadness and wishing there was something I could do to remedy it. They both nodded to me as they passed and the woman winked as if she were trying to tell me something. I knew that Mia could do magic so I wondered if she had changed her looks for some reason to attend the funeral.

The remaining blonde woman followed Vaughn and his companion. She was holding the little girl's hand and I could see that the child looked quite a bit like Vaughn. The child had to be Vaughn and Mia's daughter and since the blonde woman bore slight resemblance to Mia I guessed she was the woman's sister.

It just so happened that Ian, Peta and myself would be the last ones to pass by the casket. Part of me didn't know if I could handle it, but there was no way that I could pass up one last opportunity to say goodbye. I unwrapped the orchid I had bought and Peta quickly removed the cellophane from my hand, stowing it away in her bottomless purse.

We moved forward and I felt the fog of the unknown envelope me again as I went into autopilot. Peta remained at my side and I could feel Ian a step behind me on the other side. They were like a guard of sorts, allowing me to have the time I needed to grieve while they made sure I stayed safe. I loved them so much for that.

The room was empty now and we had all the time we wanted. I took the orchid in one hand and lifted Vivian's top hand with my other hand so that I could slip the flower underneath hers. Then I put a hand on her forehead and used my thumb to gently caress her brow gently. I could feel her strongly around me as I stood there for a few minutes in completely silence. Peta stepped away to give me some space as she looked at the poster board of pictures, but Ian stayed where he was.

Tears threatened to spill again and I sniffed them back, wiping my eyes roughly with the back of my hand. Peta was then right there, handing me a tissue, and I knew that I was really close to losing it, but I couldn't allow myself to get lost in my emotions. Not here. I turned abruptly to leave and Peta wrapped her arms around my waist to hug me tightly. I kissed the top of her head and returned the hug, thinking again for the millionth time in just a few days how glad I was that she and Ian were here.

When I could, we started toward the door and I felt Vivian drop back again. I stopped halfway to the door and looked back to the casket and saw that her hand was now holding the orchid instead of just lying on top of it.

We exited the room then and I saw that the receiving line was starting to dissipate. Vaughn was still standing next to the woman who had sat next to him. The one that I was suspecting was Mia, the little girl standing in front of them. They were all watching me and my siblings as we came out into the hallway and the woman bent to whisper something to the girl, who then moved away to find Vaughn's mother and the other blonde woman.

I reached out my hand to Vaughn and he took it firmly in his, covertly passing what felt like a key to me in the process. "I'm sorry about what happened yesterday," I told him quietly, cupping my hand to hide what he had passed to me.

"I'm sorry," he replied, clearing his throat and glancing at the woman beside him. "Thank you for coming. I didn't know if you would be here."

I looked back in the room where Vivian's body lay. "Nothing would have kept me away."

I turned back to him and found that Vaughn was looking back into the room as well. It seemed as if he was going to say something but he stopped himself. I took the opportunity to glance at what was in my hand and saw that what he had given me was in fact a locker key of some kind. I closed my hand again, sure that I would learn what to do with the key in the next few minutes.

The woman put her hand on my arm and in Mia's voice she said, "I'm very sorry."

I had assumed that the woman was Mia, but hearing a voice that I had connected with another face startled me. I covered well and placed my hand over hers and said, "Thank you."

Even though we were all speaking lowly, I again reminded myself that we couldn't talk freely here and hoped that Vaughn would suggest meeting somewhere else to discuss what had to be done next.

"Go to the train station," he instructed, looking around to see if anyone was trying to listen in on what we were talking about. I nodded in understanding.

"She said that you had our things," I started and Vaughn nodded.

"I do. We can get together sometime this week."

I cleared my throat nervously then admitted, "I wanted my things in the hopes that somethin' will spark a memory."

Vaughn nodded again and we fell into an uncomfortable silence before he quickly added, "We're spreading the ashes tomorrow." He paused, then said, "I understand if you don't come..."

I frowned slightly, really wanting to be there, but sure it wouldn't be a good idea. "Is it safe for me to come?"

He shook his head. "Probably not, but if you want to be there..."

I shook my head and held up a hand to stop him. There would be way too many questions and I was already causing a stir just by being here now. "I would like some of them," I said. This was a hard thing for both of us to deal with and I knew I needed to get out of here soon. First I had some questions I needed answers to. "Who knows who I am here, besides you?"

"Susie. Mom. Lily."

"Did I meet them?" I asked.

"Mom and Lily, yes."

"And they know that I'm..."

"Yes," he replied, his voice dropping even lower as he glanced around nervously. "We can't do this here."

I nodded, understanding that we had to be careful. "I got your number and the e-mail. Is it safe to call?"

"Yeah," he replied with a relieved nod. "It's a cell phone."

"I'll call you later tonight, is that okay?"

"No, that's fine." We quickly set up a time then say our goodbyes.

Mia put her hand on my arm again comfortingly and I put my hand on her shoulder to give her a gentle squeeze of thanks. Then I turned blindly and Peta took my hand.

The next thing I knew I was in the back seat of the Bronco and we were pulling away from the funeral home.

CHAPTER 24 - INFORMATION AT THE STATION

"I want you to find some comfort
In the spaces between the lines"
"Lost in a Portrait"
TRAPT

Ian was watching me closely in the rearview mirror as the three of us discussed finding the train station and what Vaughn had left for us there. I was okay. For the moment anyhow. I had to keep my mind busy or I was going to lose it again and that was something I just didn't want to do. I lit a cigarette to help in the meantime.

We had to stop for directions to the train station so Ian pulled into the first gas station we came across and went inside. Peta was quiet. I was sure she didn't know what to say and for now the silence was okay with me.

Twenty minutes later we were there. It was about five-thirty and the station was busy with people heading home from work. I didn't look around too much because I was focused on finding the locker and getting out of there as quickly as possible. Luckily the key had the name of the station on one side and the locker number on the other and we found the locker in question without incident.

The locker was a small one, only about twelve wide by twenty-four inches deep. I opened the door to find a soft briefcase and a Verizon bag that contained a cell phone and all the stuff that went along with it. We gathered the contents then headed back to the Bronco to get a better look at everything.

Peta seemed the most capable of the three of us concerning techy gadgets so I handed the bag with the phone paraphernalia to her so she could figure out how to work it. She practically squealed with excitement, gushing about how she had a friend back home who had a cell phone really similar to this one. It was hard to believe that none of us had ever owned a cell phone before, but it made sense that if we did it would have probably been lost when we were on a run. No pockets in feline form.

I opened the briefcase and found that it held a laptop, complete with all the cords and instruction manual. The case also had a large pocket in the front and there were two envelopes inside it. I had no idea what kind of computer skills I had, but I wasn't going to hold my breath that I would know what the hell to do with the device. Looks like Peta would be checking out the laptop as well.

I pulled out the envelopes and considered which one to look in first. One was five by seven inches and seemed to contain more than the second that was eight by ten in size. I decided to go with the smaller one first.

I dumped the contents out on my lap and found myself looking at a stack of pictures and other personal things. The picture on top of the stack was Vivian by herself, looking how I saw her in my dreams. It was a professional portrait and she looked absolutely beautiful. Beautiful and happy. I flipped it over and on the back was a lab number and a date, July 2004. Two months ago.

The second photo was an engagement photo of her and me. She was wearing the same outfit from the first photo and I was wearing a charcoal gray button down dress shirt. I was sitting behind her and we both looked really happy, bright smiles for the camera. The knowledge of it was like a kick in the gut.

I quickly shuffled to the next picture and found that it was another of Vivian and me. This one was a candid that appeared to be the two of us at some bar on the dance floor. I was dipping her deeply and we eyes only for each other. Vivian was laughing and it looked as if I was joking with her.

On the back, in a woman's handwriting, were the words,

'Kiran and Vivian

Maloney's Alley

May 2004'

Then words that sent me reeling...

'The night he proposed.'

I turned the picture back over and stared at it for a really long time.

The night I proposed? Seeing the image was like getting a small insight into our world. How we were together. Vivian had shown me things in my dream, but those snippets were all in my head. This picture was something where could see our happiness in something that was tangent. Something I could hold. It was like a miracle and a kick in the gut at the same time.

The next picture in the stack was of Vivian sitting in a park with playground equipment behind her. I recognized the scene from my dream I had that first night after waking up in the warehouse where Vivian had said something about 'its days like these' in the same scene. She was wearing the same clothing as what I remembered from the dream and she was throwing breadcrumbs at whoever was taking the picture. Maybe me. On the back I recognized my handwriting as the one who wrote Vivian's name along with the name of the park and October 2003. I had also written the words,

'Days we live for'

The last picture was of the two of us together at Halloween that same year. I was dressed like wolfman and Vivian was dressed like a big cat. Her handwriting pointed out,

'Vivian and Kiran

Changing Roles

Halloween 2003'

I was aware of Peta looking back at me from the front seat. The lump was back in my throat and I knew if I tried to speak I would loose it. Without a word I passed the pictures up to her and wasn't surprised when she started to cry and I couldn't watch as she shared the pictures with Ian when he stopped at a red light.

But the pictures weren't the only things the envelope contained. Next was a thick white envelope with a simple white invitation inside that read,

BECAUSE THEIR LOVE IS ETERNAL

Vivian Julianna Waits

AND

Kiran Edward Michaels

REQUEST THE HONOR OF YOUR PRESENCE
AT THEIR MARRIAGE
ON SATURDAY, THE TWENTY-THIRD OF NOVEMBER
TWO THOUSAND AND FOUR
AT ONE O'CLOCK IN THE AFTERNOON

GOOD SHEPARDS MUNICIPAL PARK
222 NORTH EAST AVENUE
MONTREAL, QUEBEC

Again, I handed the invitation to Peta without a word and her sniffles started again. I leaned forward and put my hand on her head and said, "Don't hold it back, babygirl." She turned toward me, took my hand and together we cried for the woman neither of us knew, but was supposed to have been a member of our family.

When we were both finished with our tears I looked back down at my lap at the things that still remained from the envelope. I didn't remember any of them, but they appeared to be sentimental items that I was sure Vaughn thought important enough to include. One thing that stood out was a key that was attached to a business card for a realtor. There was an address written on the back of the card in an unfamiliar man's hand.

"I wonder what this is for?" I asked, showing the key and card to Peta and Ian.

"You'll have to ask Vaughn next time you talk to him," Ian suggested and I nodded, not saying anything as I studied the key in my hand, wondering what it would unlock. Maybe it was a storage locker that held our things from Minneapolis. I had asked Vaughn for our stuff in the hopes that our belongings would stir up some memories.

"What's in the other envelope?" Peta asked, pulling my thoughts back to the present.

"Hmm?" I asked, blinking before looking at her. "Oh, yeah. Sorry." I reached for the eight by eleven envelop that was thinner than first one.

Inside was a stack of printouts with the ITM information that Mia had been putting together before her 'accident'. Listed were names of people and locations that meant nothing to me for the moment. All the locations seemed to be in the Montreal area so that helped keep things in perspective. As I continued through the stack I found sheets with information on everyone at Sky House as well.

There were pictures of people in the stack too, but none of whom I knew. Thankfully there were names on back of each so we would be able to put the face with what we had later. I shared what the information was with Ian and Peta as I passed the stack up to my baby sister so she could look through the pages as well.

"We can go over it in more detail when we get back to the hotel," I said and Ian agreed.

"There's a laptop, too," I added, causing Peta to look back at the contraption as if she knew how to work it. "I don't know if I know shit about computers so if you know somethin', darlin', we'll put that in your hands." She nodded quickly with a sweet smile that I was sure was her innocent one. I asked if she got the phone figured out.

She nodded again and we spent the next few minutes with her showing me how to work the infernal thing. Some numbers were already programmed in the address book, but of course I didn't recognize any of the names. There were a few listings that were simply called out as 'V', 'M' and 'S'. I figured that they had to be numbers for Vaughn, Mia and Susie respectively. There was also a number for Bar Deco and I remembered that I had a matchbook for that place when I woke up. I didn't know what the connection was, but I noted in my head that I would have to figure out what the connection was. And soon.

I wondered where the bar was located when I remembered there being some maps for Montreal in the truck that we had left at the hotel where Sarah had found me. I then realized that the truck had been Vivian's and by rights should now be mine. I asked Ian to swing by the hotel to see if it was still there and he agreed.

We were only a few minutes away and amazingly enough it was there. I even had the keys on me. It must have been a habit for me to carry them with me so I was able to follow Ian and Peta back to the hotel.

CHAPTER 25 – GETTING OUR BEARINGS

"And I miss you when you're not around
I'm getting ready to leave the ground"
"City of Blinding Light"
U2

Once back at the hotel, the three of us holed up in Ian and Peta's room where we spread out the maps I brought up from the truck and Peta turn on the computer. We spent the rest of the afternoon going over the information that Vaughn had provided and found where all the places were located. I was itching to find out more about the people and places and wanted to go find a few, but Ian stopped me with a hand on my shoulder.

"It's been an emotional day and we should be careful," he cautioned. "Figure out where we go from here."

He was right. I knew that, but part of me felt like I had to do everything possible to stop this feud between the people at Sky House and the werewolves. To do it right away. But I knew it wouldn't hurt to be wary so I nodded in agreement with Ian and started looking through the printouts again to see if there was anything we missed.

I saw that there was a notation next to one of the people that said 'vampire' and realized I needed to know more about them if we were going to have to deal with them. I asked Ian and Peta if they knew anything about the blood suckers and Ian said that he knew they existed and that he thought he saw one once, but he wasn't sure.

I called Vaughn at the appointed time, using the cell phone the other man had provided. He answered on the third ring, but there was a lot of noise in the background so it was hard to hear him.

"Vaughn, it's Kiran."

"All right, just a second." He was on the move, hopefully going to someplace that was quieter so we could talk then I heard a door shut and the background noise went away. "Sorry, I wasn't watching the clock," he said, slurring slightly. He didn't sound drunk, but it was apparent that he'd had a couple. I wondered what kind of an after funeral gathering werewolves usually had, but I wasn't going to ask him about it.

"It's all right," I assured him.

"You got the package?" he asked.

"Yeah, I did. Thanks a lot."

He cleared his throat, then said, "That's everything we know."

"We've been goin' through it," I told him, moving over to the table again and shifting through some of the pictures again. "Found out where each of the locations are and gone over the information. So you think that these people are the ones who are actually behind all this?"

"That's what we think, but we can't prove it," was his reply.

"Okay," I said, trying to find an angle as to where to go from here. "So what have you done to try to prove it? Are you just getting' close to these people or what? I don't see them just volunteerin' information."

"Mia's gonna work on Altitude 737 and the Redpath Museum," Vaughn informed me. "It wouldn't hurt to double up efforts in case she can't get anywhere."

"So you want me to visit these places and talk to these people?"

"See what you can find out. I know that it won't be easy. We haven't had much luck."

I shrugged. "I can be persuasive when I need to be," I told him, remembering how I managed to get Gwen to let Sloan come with me the other day.

"Just don't be so persuasive that they remember you in a bad way," Vaughn cautioned. "We don't need any more funerals."

"I have a bit of retribution to take care of. I'm not goin' anywhere." I knew that my voice had an edge to it, but I didn't care.

I could hear the same harshness in his voice when he spoke. "Just leave some for me. We'll keep you up to date on what we find out. There are instructions with the laptop on an Internet account and e-mail that Susie set up for you. That's about it for now."

"I'll keep you posted on anythin' that I find as well. I'm gonna try to work it as much as possible from the inside at Sky House."

"That's a good idea because it was somebody with access to their inner sanctum that poisoned Mia and Jean. So someone is working with ITM, whether they know it or not. There's information there on the people at Sky House. Did you see that?"

"Yeah, I did. Listen, do you think that there's a possibility that we're dealin' with vampires?"

"Well, we think that Carmella Cain is one. She's never been seen in the daylight and there have been some instances in nightclubs that lead us to believe that she is."

"None of us have any experience in dealin' with them," I informed him. "I don't know how to kill them. There's a lot of stereotypes as far as the movies go."

"Beheading usually works. Sunlight. Fire. If you put a stake in the heart, don't pull it out. Cut the head off."

"I'm assumin' that dismemberment will do the trick, too."

"As long as you take the head off."

I know how to do that, I thought to myself, remembering the person who was laying in pieces around me when I woke. "I'll start at Club Vatican," I told him. "Tomorrow night. We'll start from there. Any information I get I will forward to you."

Vaughn said that the e-mail addresses were in the paperwork with the computer and I told him that Peta already found it. I then asked him about mine and Vivian's stuff and he said that it was at his house. "But it isn't a good idea to come there because another pack member lives next door. I'll get it to Mia's in the next few days and let you know when it's there." He gives me an address that I quickly wrote down. "She isn't going back to Sky House," he added after a moment. "She's happy to be back with Grace."

"Is that your daughter?" I asked, remembering the little girl from the funeral and wondering if it was safe for the child to be in the city.

"Yes."

"Okay. I'll keep you posted."

"Yeah. Take care."

"You, too." I ended the call and looked down at the papers, starting to put together a plan as to how to proceed with information gathering.

Peta was still messing around on the laptop, surfing the internet to gather anymore information she could find on any of the people and places that were included in Mia's original file. Ian had moved over to the couch while I was on the phone was checking out what looked like CNN.

I started to think about Sarah and how much of an asset she would be to us in what we were doing. She could be another set of eyes in Sky House and of course it went without saying that her magical abilities could definitely come in handy at times.

But would she want to help?

I moved over to the couch and plopped down next to Ian, thinking that I would ask his opinion on bringing Sarah in on what we were doing.

"Everythin' all right with Vaughn?" he asked, looking over at me.

I nodded. "Yeah. I told him we'd start with Club Vatican."

"Sounds good," he replied, turning his gaze back to the television.

"Ian," I'll start. "What do you think about Sarah? Do you think we can trust her?" I shifted so that I was facing him better. "What I mean is, do you think she's been truthful about what she's told us so far? I think we can trust her and I'd like to bring her into this, but I'm too close to the situation, what do you think?"

He was quiet for a long moment and before he could say anything more Peta piped up. "I think she's great," she said firmly. Then she turned a narrowed gaze in my direction and added, "And she still wants to be with you, even though..."

I caught the warning look Ian gave her and had to hold back the grin that wanted out. "She's a bit of a free spirit," my brother admitted, turning back to me. "But I think that just makes her more honest than most," he added thoughtfully. "She doesn't give a damn what anybody thinks of her, she does what she feels to be the right thing. If we can get her to help us, I think she'd do everythin' in her power to help you solve what's going on."

He hesitated another moment, then went on, "Problem is, I'm not sure you'll be able to talk her into it. She doesn't seem to care about the feud here in Montreal, and she sure as hell doesn't want to die for it."

"I have to see this through," I told them both. "I promised Vivian that I would work with her brother to get this resolved." I paused, remembering the conversation I had with Sarah in her car when I told her about Vivian. "I don't know if I can make it worth her while to help or not. She's not sure of her feelin's for me and I don't think that I should expect her to be involved after everythin' that I've put her through."

Then I remembered finding Vivian dead in the warehouse and I knew that my worst fear was that something would happen to Sarah as well. "Maybe I should keep her out of it. I couldn't handle it if..."

Peta had crossed to Ian and I while I was talking and I felt her hand cover mine on the back of the couch. "Kiran, ya can't think like that. Just because that happened once, doesn't mean it would again."

"Besides," Ian added. "There are three of us now, and we're ready for it. We'll take care of her."

I smiled at my siblings, glad that they were so sure that everything would be okay, but I wasn't yet and I was pretty sure it showed. "Thanks for bein' so supportive," I told them honestly. "I want her help. In fact we may need it, but if she won't give it, then we'll have to deal with it. I won't hurt her any more than I have already and I will respect her wishes."

I turned my hand over under Peta's and squeeze her fingers. "Thank you, darlin'," I told her, giving her a crooked half smile.

She smiled back and even though it looked like she was trying to be laid back I could tell she was concerned about how I was doing. I knew that I got stoned drunk yesterday after the viewing and now that the funeral was over I was planning how to go about finishing my dead fiancé's work. She was probably scared that I would do something half cocked, but that was the furthest from the truth. I wanted to make sure everything was done properly. I wanted the people responsible for this feud to be exposed and I wanted the pack and the witches at Sky House on friendly terms. What better way to make a lasting memory for Vivian?

I leaned over and kissed Peta's cheek. "I'm okay, darlin'," I assured her. "Don't get me wrong, I'm not over losin' Vi- her, but I promised her that I would help her brother resolve this mess and I'm gonna. It's the least I can do." I then stood and went back to the table to look over the maps again. I needed to keep my mind occupied or I would get lost in my grief and I that I couldn't afford to do.

CHAPTER 26 – WILL SARAH HELP?

"Call the past for help
Touch me with your love
And reveal to me my true name"
"Nemo"
Nightwish

There was a knock on the door about a half an hour later. Peta had gone to her room soon after I started looking over the maps again and Ian had joined me at the table so we could discuss the area around Club Vatican since that was where we were starting our investigation. Investigation. It felt odd to consider what we were doing an investigation, but that was what it was.

Ian opened the door to reveal Sarah on the other side. He and I had briefly talked about how I should approach her with what was happening, but in the end I knew that I was just going to wing it. I looked up from the table to see that they were exchanging a few words near that door that I wasn't meant to hear and I figured it had to do with the funeral and how I was doing.

I was fine. As long as I didn't think about it. Concentrating on what to do next was helping.

"How are you doing?" Sarah asked as she came over to sit next to me.

I was still wearing the pants and shirt that I had worn to the funeral, minus the tie that had been ditched a long time ago. I smiled at her and shrugged, unable to say the words, 'I'm fine' out loud again. Ian and Peta had asked plenty of times throughout the course of the evening and I just didn't think I could say it again and even remotely mean it.

Suddenly I remembered the pictures of Vivian and I that Vaughn had included with the laptop and I quickly glanced across the table to make sure that they weren't visible. I was pretty sure that I had put them away after Ian and Peta looked at them, but I wanted to be sure there was no chance of Sarah seeing them. I didn't want to hurt her anymore, much less have her start putting two and two together and figure out that I left her for Vivian.

I brought my gaze back to Sarah and leaned back in my chair to look at her. "I'm okay," I replied in a quiet voice, not sure I believed it myself, but determined to hold myself together as thoughts of the woman who was mourned today threatened to come back. "What did you do today?"

"I was at Sky House most of the day," she replied, looking down at papers and maps that covered the table. "I talked to Sloan for a little while, until Kyna chased him away," she added as she looked back at me with a sad look in her eyes. "She's really had a hard time of it the last few months. I heard her story today."

I felt my features harden a little when Sarah brought up the other woman's name. "I understand that she's upset that her boyfriend died, but that doesn't mean she gets to treat Sloan like shit. He didn't have anything to do with it."

"No, that's not what I'm saying," Sarah assured me as she put her purse on the table then sat in another chair close by me. "She's wrong to treat him like that, they all are. I'm just saying she has good reason to hate werewolves." She sighed before continuing, "I tried to talk to Gwen about him today, but she just—" She sighed again in annoyance and I sat up straighter in my chair.

Sarah's attempt to stand up to Gwen alarmed me. We needed to be a presence at Sky House so that we could find the person who was working with ITM. If there was in fact someone on the inside working with them. Sarah had to be careful. I couldn't help but think that maybe she would help us since she was already doing so without really knowing it, but that didn't do anything to hold back the alarm I felt at her sticking her neck out with Gwen.

I turned in the chair to face her and took a hold of her upper arms so that she had to look at me. "I don't want you to endanger yourself with them," I told her, my tone very serious. "What did you say to her? Tell me word for word."

Sarah looked up at me in surprise, her eyes wide and confused by how worried my tone was. "I asked her how she ended up with him," she explained as her hands flattened on my chest to balance herself. "I guess her father had brought him home one day when she was nine and had 'given' him to her. I tactfully asked her if she thought that was normal, but she said that because his father was a werewolf, Bowden thought Sloan might be, too. It was either kill him or train him to be her... bodyguard."

She shook her head slowly as she looked at me, clearly thinking the idea was a ridiculous one. "Like him being a werewolf has anything to do with the way they treat him. I guess I didn't really think about it before you said something. He didn't really want to talk to me at all, but I cornered him." Her eyes met mine and she confessed, "I don't think he wants to be there, but he told me he didn't want to leave."

I took her face in my hands gently. "He doesn't want to leave because he thinks there's no place for him to go, but that's bein' taken care of," I assured her as I watched her for a moment, my eyes softening. "Sarah, you have to be careful," I said. "The people at Sky House can be very dangerous and I won't be able to live with myself if anythin' happens to you."

I released her face and reached for her hands as I continued to speak, "I'm in the middle of somethin' that I would like your help with, but I want you to understand that I want you to make your decision based on what you want, not what I want. I will understand if you say no, but before I tell you anything about it, I want you to know that this is a delicate situation and there are many lives involved. Secrecy is key here and I need to know that you can work with us."

This was the first time I had ever seen a serious expression on her face and she cupped my cheek before saying, "You can trust me, Kiran. I wouldn't do anything to put you in danger."

I hesitated another moment, looking to see if there was anything in her eyes that would make me not believe her and I was relieved when I found nothing. I also glanced at Ian for his input, hoping that if he sensed anything he would voice it to me either way. I wanted to believe in Sarah, but I didn't know if I could trust myself where she was concerned.

My brother nodded and I turned to Sarah again. "As you may have guessed from some of the things you've heard, I came to Montreal for a purpose and that was to help end the feud between the people of Sky House and those of Red Moon Pack."

She looked at me questioningly, but said nothing, waiting for me to continue, which I did. "I have been in contact with some people here who I'm supposed to be helpin'. They believe that there is a third group in the city that has been eggin' on

the hostilities between the two groups for years. They've been workin' to end the animosities between the other two groups and I'm helpin' them."

Sarah's gaze said that she understood, but she remained quiet, waiting for me to finish my explanation. "I was thinkin' that we seem to be of like minds as far as not understandin' why they are behavin' like they are and I think that you could be of use to what we're doin' here. I was hopin' that you would agree to help us."

She blinked, glancing at Ian for a second, then back to me. "You're trying to bring peace between Sky House and Red Moon Pack and you want me to help you?" I nodded, then she asked, "Why do you think there is a third group involved?"

"There has been some information uncovered that has led them to believe this. The process of findin' the information is slow, but the people who've been workin' on this are findin' information on this third group."

I moved away from her long enough to pick up one of the printouts from Vaughn and held it out to her as I pointed to it. "Here is a person who wants to take over Burt's store for instance. There have been some ulterior motives discovered that I'm thinkin' are meant to keep people of both groups on their toes. They are lookin' for a reason why this group would want to keep them at odds, but like I said, the information is slow in comin'."

Sarah was intrigued and it showed. "What kind of information to you have?" she asked, taking the page from my hand and looking it over.

"Not a whole lot. We have some names and locations that we're lookin' into. We are basically tryin' to infiltrate at various places. I think that most people at Sky House don't have any idea about what's been goin' on underneath all the animosity. I don't think they know they are bein' manipulated. We do think that there is someone in Sky House that is workin' with the third group because of the way Mia was attacked."

Sarah looked up at me and nodded in understanding. "Poison," she commented as if she was putting everything I was saying together. "Any idea who it might be?"

I shrugged. "There is at least one person in this third group that we're looking at who might be a vampire. As far as who the person is in Sky House... we're not sure. There's another person whose name comes up on a document of some kind in the twenties so I wonder if she isn't a vampire, too. What do you know about the blood suckers?"

Sarah shuddered a little and said, "Enough to stay away from them." She then started to rattle off ways to kill them. "Sunlight... fire... decapitation..."

I nodded, remembering that they were some of the same ways that Vaughn had suggested as well. "Someone knew that Vivian and I were comin' and they knew that we were goin' to be at that warehouse that night," I told Sarah, reaching out to take her hand. "We were ambushed."

She dropped the page on the table and covered her mouth in horror as my words sunk in. Her eyes were so sad and she swallowed slowly before asking, "Do you have any idea who was there?"

"There were two men that were there and attacked us," I said, hesitating slightly before adding, "I killed them both."

"Do you know if the police have identified them?"

"I don't know that yet," I replied. "I'm hopin' to find out." I gestured toward the table. "This is all we have. Ian and Peta and I have been goin' through it all afternoon. Ever since... the funeral. We're been workin' on gettin' to know the city

better since none of us are very familiar with the layout yet. We're formulatin' questions and lookin' for answers."

Sarah spent the next few minutes looking over all the information we had. She asked who put it together after pointing out that some of the information was written in first person. I hesitated, again watching at her for a moment and wondering if I should disclose the author of the documents. But I knew that Mia wasn't planning on going back to Sky House so I said, "Mia. She was workin' from the inside, but she's already been attacked once..."

"Is that why she left?" Sarah asked.

I shrugged. "I don't know. I've only talked to her twice."

She went back to looking at everything, including the original files that contained the same information on the computer. During the course of the afternoon we had been able to locate addresses and phone numbers for all the businesses that Mia had suggested in her research as well as finding where they were located on the map for when we decided to go to each and Sarah poured over everything just as my siblings and I had.

I watched Sarah carefully as she reviewed everything, attempting to detect anything about her that might come off as negative or harmful about what we knew about the situation, but she was completely calm and methodic as she studied the information. She wasn't giving much away at the moment.

There were numerous people and varying businesses that were listed in the documents, including King Engineering and Delarosa Investments, which had more information than others. Of course Club Vatican was on the list and the place I intended to visit first, but there was another club called Altitude 737. Sarah said that she had been to Altitude 737 and that she had met Angelina, a woman listed as working at the club and a frequent companion of a 'Caesar Ash'.

Sarah told us that Angelina had seemed nice when she met her, but she hadn't really become good friends with the other woman or spent any amount of time with her. I asked if she had noticed anything different about her, if she was a supernatural of any kind and Sarah said no.

"I can sense if someone is supernatural, but she didn't do anything that made me think to check," Sarah explained with a slight shrug.

"Well, now we have a reason, so we can check into her," I replied, glancing at Ian as Sarah nodded in approval. She still hadn't agreed to help us, but I was still hoping she would so I wasn't against her brainstorming with us.

We spent the next twenty minutes discussing what Sarah knew about the other businesses that had been listed. She had been to quite a few of them, including another club in town called Funkytown as well as the business that was owned by Burt Walters, The Feather. Justine Callisto was the person named in the documents as the one who was interested in buying the New Age store from Burt so I asked Sarah if she knew of any financial problems that Burt might be having.

"None that I know of," she replied. "Not that I'm really that close with him or anything, but as far as I know it's pretty successful."

I also showed her the pictures we were given and she recognized Caesar Ash and Justine Callisto from when she had been to Funkytown. She thought she had seen Church at the club as well, but she couldn't be sure. From the picture he looked like a kid and I questioned what role he might have in the whole mess.

I asked Sarah if she knew of any other supernaturals in town that weren't in the information and she told Ian and me about another group of witches in town whose coven name was Black Thorne Night. She said she had met a woman at The Feather named Julia D'Angelo, who was a member of the group. Apparently the woman's son was in a class that Mia had been teaching at The Feather before she was poisoned and that's how the two met. Sarah was in the store for supplies at the same time as Julia was there to get her son.

"I really don't think they would have anything to with keeping the animosity going between the two," Sarah advised. "From what I've heard they just don't seem the type."

Since Mia's name had been brought into the conversation again, I made the decision right then to not tell Sarah that Mia was involved with Vaughn in any way or that she had a daughter with the man. I figured if something ever happened and Sarah was in a position where she needed to lie she couldn't tell anyone what she didn't know. I also knew that I needed to protect Vivian's family as much as I could because they had almost become my family as well.

Our conversation then turned to the people at Sky House. Sarah didn't know much more about any of them than what the documents contained, but she was able to fill us in about how Kyna's mate had been killed. She explained how six months ago the two were traveling on the outskirts of Montreal. They were on their way into town and stopped at a roadside diner for a quick bite before continuing their journey.

They were ambushed as they were leaving, their attackers using silver chains to tie Kyna up so that she couldn't escape them. They then proceeded to slowly kill her mate in front of her, at least one of them shifting into a werewolf during the act. Kyna was then raped repeatedly before she was able to get away from them.

I could tell from Sarah's expression that there was a lot more to the story that she wasn't voicing, but I wasn't about to ask for more details. I did ask if Kyna knew any of the attackers and Sarah said no. "She only saw the face of the werewolf."

I felt bad for the female werewolf. I was pretty sure that I had witnessed Vivian die and I knew the emptiness I felt over her loss. I guess a part of me was glad that I didn't remember the details of that night because I was sure they would be too disturbing to deal with if I did.

Still, it was too bad that we had no way of knowing who Kyna's attackers were. I decided that if we were going to be looking into this situation we would need to pick up one of those digital cameras so we could take pictures of the people we were investigating. I would really like to be able to have Kyna recognize the person she saw that night, but I would need picture evidence to show her.

Sarah brought me back to the conversation when she said, "I see you picked up a laptop."

I look at the thing that sat in front of her as if it were a monster. "Peta has been playin' around on it. Ian and I have been concentratin' on-"

"Because you still haven't taken that windows class, have you?" she teased with a wide smile as she winked at me.

I grinned back at her. "Well, if I had, it's not doin' me any good right now," I replied dryly.

She smiled wider, and then asked as she gestured toward the device. "Do you mind?" I motioned for her to go ahead and she turned the computer toward her

again. She hit a few keys and smiled at whatever she found, apparently impressed with the contraption. She eventually pulled out one of her gadgets from her purse and in moments I could smell that new electronics scent in the air as she pounded away on the keys. I circled around the table to see what she was doing and found that had logged on to the internet and appeared to be looking for more information to add to what we already had.

About a half an hour later we had more information to ponder. Unfortunately, some of it only opened up more questions we needed to find answers for, but there were some interesting tidbits as well. Like the fact that Angelina's last name was Ash, leading us to believe that she and Caesar were either married or siblings.

Sarah also found some interesting information about The Feather. It seems that Burt had come close to losing the business three times in the last ten years, barely holding onto it each time. I asked Sarah about the nature of the near losses and she said that the first time was because of poor profits when business fell off. The second time was poor financial management, in other words Burt barely had enough money to stay open. The last time there was a problem concerning the building where the store was located when it came really close to being demolished. In fact the third time was just recently.

I couldn't help but wonder if this Justine who wanted the business had anything to do with the situations that led to Burt almost losing it.

CHAPTER 27 - CONFIDING

"We've had our share of hard times
But that's the price we paid"
"I Remember You"
Skid Row

While Sarah continued her search on the net for more information I went in search of Peta. She had been in her room for a while and from the little time I had with her I knew it wasn't like her to be so absent.

I knocked on the door to her room, but got no answer. I called out her name and still no answer. Finally I opened the door and saw that the light was on, but no one was in the room. I moved over to the balcony door that was slightly ajar and called out her name again. I heard her clear her throat before she said, "Yeah."

By the sounds of it she was probably crying so I ducked in the bathroom long enough to grab some tissues before returning going out onto the balcony. She was standing with her hands on the rail, looking out over the water. I came up behind her and put my arms around her waist loosely. She placed a hand on my arm as she leaned back against me and I kissed the top of her head.

"How you doin', baby girl?" I asked in a low voice.

She cleared her throat again before speaking. "I'm fine. How about you?"

I didn't answer right away, not sure how too. I hadn't done a great deal of confiding in my baby sister, leaving most of my deepest thoughts with Ian instead. Maybe it was because she was still so young. Granted at seventeen she wasn't a baby any longer, so I knew she could handle at least a small portion of the thoughts that were going through my head and I decided to be open with her.

"As long as I don't let myself get lost in everythin' I can keep my head long enough to get this done," I told her. "I can think about everythin' else later."

I felt her chest raise and fall slowly as she took a deep breath and pushed herself closer to me. "I know what you mean."

"Are you okay with all this?" I asked, leaning to one side so that I could see her face better.

She was looking out over the water, not meeting my gaze. "I'll be all right," she said after a minute.

"Not that I don't think you can handle this, but if you want to go back to Allison in Mississippi I'll understand," I said, wondering if she was worried about getting hurt herself. If she were I would understand if she wanted to leave.

"I am not leaving the two of you here," she huffed, half turning in my arms to glare at me. "Imagine the trouble you can get into. Someone has to look after you."

I smiled at her. "I'll be busy watchin' out for you, baby girl," I told her honestly.

"You don't need to watch out for me," she scolded as she settled back against me and I squeezed her a little.

"Is there anythin' you want to ask me?" I asked, getting serious once more.

She shook her head slowly. "Nothing you can answer," she sighed.

"I might be able to get one for you."

"No, you've got enough to worry about."

"I don't have so much that I won't worry about you," I told her, looking down to look in her blue eyes.

"I'll be fine," she assured me. "I'm not the on-"

"What?" I prodded when she broke off.

"I'm fine," she repeated.

"Any questions you have I probably need to ask as well," I told her as I started to rock the both of us back and forth slightly and look out over the water.

"I don't understand why you didn't tell us," she whispered.

Her thoughts echoed mine so precisely that I sighed. "I don't know that myself. I guess Vivian was right that I was worried about what ya'll would think since she was a werewolf."

"Like we would have cared," Peta scoffed.

"I'm sure that I would have told ya'll eventually. I mean the weddin' was only a couple of months away."

When she didn't say anything right away I felt her body shaking slightly and I knew she was crying. I turned her in my arms and held her against my chest tightly as the sniffles became a full-blown cry. I don't know how, but I managed to hold it together as I comforted her and told her everything would be all right. When she was all cried out I wiped her face with the tissues. "You and Ian and Allison are my family," I told her. "There is no way that I wouldn't have had you involved."

"But you didn't," she pointed out, hiccupping slightly.

"Well, I would have eventually," I assured her. "I may not know the exact reasons why, but I get the sense that we're close enough that I would have told you."

Peta sniffled again and wiped her eyes with her fingertips before laying her head on my chest. "She had to have been somebody really special."

I nodded and held her close. "That's the feeling I get, too."

We fell silent for several minutes. I wanted a cigarette pretty bad, but I was enjoying having Peta this close so I pushed the cravings away for a bit. "Sarah is back," I said finally.

Peta moved her head enough to look up at me. "What are you going to do about her?"

"My first concern is to get this mess taken care of because that's what Vivian wants. Everythin' else can come after." I knew that I needed to really deal with Sarah because I now knew what Vivian was to me, but I guess I wanted to put off the inevitable as long as I could.

Peta nodded in understanding, still upset about the situation and trying to pull it back. She was still so young and she didn't have the years of experience needed to hide her feelings that Ian and I did. She was so transparent about what she was feeling.

"What do you think I should do?" I asked her, pushing her hair back from her face.

"What does Vivian think you should do?"

I smiled. "She doesn't think that I should put my life on hold, but I can't stop thinkin' about the way that I feel for her. I might not remember every instance, but I know what was there and there is still a part of me that says she needs to be

honored for what she was. I do remember some pieces of it and I can't just forget about that."

Peta nodded again and I could tell she was torn. She liked Sarah a great deal and even thought she didn't know Vivian, she knew from my reactions how I felt about her.

"When this is all done and over with I will tell you what I know of her," I said, meaning Vivian. "She showed me how we met."

Peta lifted her head and smiled at me, a sparkle finding its way back into her gaze. "Yeah. How did you meet?"

I laughed and reached down to brush her hair off her face. "In a casino."

She rolled her eyes. "I'm so not surprised."

I told her how I came across Vivian walking that night and about the guys who were cat calling at her.

"I told you girls could take care of themselves," she teased.

I chuckled slightly and dropped my head to rest on the top of hers, deciding to not tell her that I was with Sarah at the time. That would be bad and she would have no problem letting me know it.

"Sarah's lookin' on the computer right now for some information. Maybe we should get this show on the road so that we can get on with the rest of our lives."

Peta nodded her head in agreement and I kept my arm around her shoulders as we moved to go inside. Once there I asked her if she wanted to splash some water on her face and she said, "I'll be out in a minute."

I gave her one last hug and kiss her temple, then returned to the living room.

CHAPTER 28 - MAKING PLANS

"Some things are worth fightin' for some feelings never die
I'm not askin' for another chance I just wanna know why"
"No Easy Way Out"
Robert Tepper

"So, will you help us with this?" I asked Sarah after she shared the few more bits of information she came up with while I was gone.

She hesitated slightly as Peta quietly entered the room behind me but her gaze met mine sincerely. "I will help you as much as I can," she replied slowly. "But only because it's you. It's not my fight and it's not something I'm going to die for."

I nodded. "I respect that. And I'm okay with your decision. Whatever help you can give is fine. The only other thing I can ask is that you watch out for Peta," I added in a quiet tone. I understood that she was a werecat, just like Ian and me, and that she could hold her own, but she was only seventeen and if anything happened to Ian and I, I wanted someone who would look after her and get her home to Allison.

Sarah smiled at the girl in question. "I'll do what I can."

I gave her look that said thank you and leaned over to kiss her temple. I then circled the table to pull out the realtor's card and key from the envelope, being careful that I didn't let any of the pictures fall out of it as I did. I showed them both to Sarah said that I wanted to check the address out the next day.

"Are you thinking that's the bad guy's lair or something?" she asked.

"No. I don't know for sure, but I'm thinkin' that it might be mine."

She looked up at me in surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Vivian and I were movin' here."

I watched the reality of what I said settle into her gaze. "Oh," she replied, her gaze glued to the two items in her hands.

"I'd like to see what it is and then our plans were to go to Club Vatican in the evening." I realized that Vivian was going to be a touchy subject for Sarah, but I didn't have time to tip toe around the situation either. I vowed to keep Sarah's contact with my grief to a minimum and decided to lighten the moment by telling Peta that she couldn't go.

Her look of outrage was perfect. "What?"

"You're too young," I pointed out with a casual shrug and looked over at Ian who was smiling. "I can't get you in."

"I can get in," she assured me.

I gave Ian a look, hoping for some back up on this but he just shook his head and stood. "I gotta go to the bathroom," he said abruptly and turned to leave the room.

"How are you going to get in?" I asked her. "Do you have a fake id?"

"I don't need a fake id," she shot back, her hands firmly planted on her hips. Any sign of the crying girl that was in my arms only moments ago was completely gone.

"Ya might," I said.

"I never needed one before."

I crossed my arms over my chest and regarded her with disapproval. "How many clubs have you been to?"

"Quite a few," she retorted with a cock of her head.

"With who?"

"My friends." She then proceeded to tell me all about a club in Hattiesburg she had gone to several times and another that she went to in Pittsburgh after Ian tried to forbid her to go to, but she showed up anyhow.

I uncrossed my arms and ran my hand down my goatee, trying like hell to not notice Sarah smiling from her seat at the table. I then gave Peta the hardest big brother look I could come up with. "And what to you do in these clubs, little girl?"

"Dance," she answered matter of factly.

I lifted a brow. "Is that it?"

She shrugged her shoulders sassily, then replied, "Well, in Pittsburgh we were lookin' for your ass."

I gave her a look that should have shut her up while saying, 'don't blame this on me' at the same time. "All right, I'll let you go." Her face started to light up, then I dropped my condition, "but you are to stay with one of us at all times."

Her face was priceless. "How am I supposed to learn anything if I'm stuck with a bunch of old fogies?" she raved, then quickly added, "No offense, Sarah."

"No, that's fair. We're all much older than you are," Sarah replied with an easy smile.

I turned my gaze to her and said, "You're not helpin'."

It was then that Sarah had to use the restroom and quickly moved toward Peta's.

"You stay with us or you're not goin'," I told my sister.

"I'll stay with you as long as we're getting information. If we start not coming up with information we'll renegotiate."

Now the teasing was over as I grabbed one of the pages from the table and point at the word vampire. "Do you see what this says?"

Peta wasn't moved at all. "If I stay away from that chick I'll be fine. Besides, if they try to bite, I'm thinking they wouldn't last very long."

"We've never come up against them," I pointed out. "I want you to be careful."

"I am always careful," she assured me with a quick grin. "Well... sometimes."

"You'll be careful or you're not goin'."

"I'll be careful and I'll stay with you unless we don't get any information and then we'll renegotiate."

"All right." I knew I was setting myself up for problems but I figured she would have showed up anyway so I agreed, wondering if I was going to be distracted from what we would be here for while trying to keep the boys away from Peta.

So we had a game plan for at least the next couple of days. Eventually Ian and Sarah returned from their respective trips to the bathroom and I kept going over the information we had, thinking that somehow I would come up with an angle we hadn't thought of yet. In time it started to get late and my thoughts then turned to

sleeping arrangements and knew that staying with Sarah was something that I didn't want to do now that I knew part of the truth concerning Vivian and me.

Around ten Peta yawned and said that she needed her beauty sleep. I told her good night, still not sure how to deal with Sarah.

"I can't sleep if you guys are up," Peta said as she looked around at us.

"What?" I asked, only half hearing her.

"I'm a light sleeper. That's why I had to sleep next door last night, because you guys were snoring so loudly."

"All right, fine," I said, stacking the papers and maps neatly. "I think we've gone over what we can for now anyhow." I planned on leaving the stuff here so I was only straightening as a stall tactic.

Sarah shut down the computer, waiting expectantly for me to finish what I was doing. When I was done I stood and asked her if she was ready. We entered the suite next door and after she put her key and purse down on a table she walked over to the bar and asked if I wanted a drink.

"Yeah, sure," I answered, moving to sit in what I now considered to be Vivian's chair and lit a cigarette. "Whatever you're havin' is fine."

She was at my side in no time, handing me a glass of wine before slipping off her shoes and moving over to the couch where she sat on her feet. She watched me closely as she settled back into the cushions. I could almost feel the heat coming off her gaze

I took a sip from the glass. It wasn't bad, but wine wasn't my favorite. "Are you sure you're okay with all this?" I asked.

Sarah smiled. "Well, I've been in better situations, but yeah, I'm okay. I understand your need to get this resolved."

I took another sip, feeling the un-comfortableness between us and not sure what to do about it. I couldn't remember how to read Sarah and I knew that I would have to take the next few minutes very carefully. "I appreciate your help," I said.

"You're welcome."

I hit the cigarette not meeting her eyes but I could feel the weight of her watching me. Damn, I didn't think I had ever felt this uncomfortable before, not that I remembered anyhow.

After what felt like ten minutes of silence that was actually only about two, Sarah sighed as she pulled her feet out from underneath her. "Look, I'm going to bed. You can join me, or sleep on the couch," she said before putting her glass on the table and standing. She came over and kissed my cheek, then without another word she went to the bedroom, closing the door behind her. I knew she was silently telling me that she wasn't going to push me into something I was no longer sure of, but at the same time it was more than apparent that she wanted me to sleep with her.

I told myself I wasn't going to follow her, even though I could hear her moving around in the room and I was remembering how her body felt under mine. I really wanted to go in there, even though I wanted to honor Vivian and what we had. I was so close to joining Sarah that I found myself standing and at the door, my hand on the knob and about to turn it. I stopped myself, though, and went back to the couch where I stripped down to my boxers and pulled out the pillow and blanket once again from the closet.

CHAPTER 29 – LOOKING AHEAD

"You're here in my dreams
A desert place
I'm not alone"

"The Ghost Woman and the Hunter"
Lacuna Coil

I had a really hard time falling asleep. All I could think about was how I missed Vivian and how Sarah was just in the next room. I tossed and turned for a long time. I wanted to dream so that I could see Vivian since I was in a sense denying myself of Sarah, but sleep just wasn't coming.

Mia's information was churning through my head so that didn't help either. After a while I got up and chain smoked as I paced the darkened room and drank a beer. It was around 1:30 when I finally fell asleep and I had really terrible dreams of dying and vampires and werewolves and silver. They were incredibly strange and involved a great deal of death.

Finally I ended up in this empty house. I walked through it slowly, looking for anyone else who might be inside. I entered the living room found a woman standing with her back to me. She was looking up at a picture on the wall and as I got closer I saw that the picture was the engagement photo of Vivian and I that Vaughn had given me and the woman turned to face me and I saw that it was Vivian. She smiled at me sadly and I pulled her into my arms. We held each other tightly, but neither of us said anything.

I just wanted to be there with her. I pulled her down so that we were sitting on the floor, my back to the wall under the picture. Somehow I knew that she would fade soon and that I needed to say something to her before she was gone again.

"Is this the address on the back of the card?" I asked in a quiet voice as I looked around the empty room.

Vivian nodded against my chest, still not saying anything. The silence between us seemed incredibly heavy so I started talking, telling her about the information we had and what we planned to do the next day. I was sure that she knew this already, but I was talking to fill the void and Vivian didn't stop me.

"Sarah agreed to help," I said finally, not knowing what else to say about the other woman.

"Why didn't you go with her?" Vivian whispered, her hand tightening as she clenched onto my shirt.

Guilt washed over me again. How could she ask me this? My gut tightened as I dreaded having this conversation with Vivian. "I can't," I said finally.

Vivian laughed a little, because we both knew that I already had been with Sarah and I was pretty sure that Vivian knew that part of me still wanted to be with the other woman.

"This isn't funny," I said, maybe a little too harsh because Vivian's laughter stopped abruptly.

"I know."

I ran my hand down my face in frustration. "Maybe after all this shit is done, but not now. I can't deal with it right now."

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"It's not your fault."

"Maybe it would have been easier if I didn't come to you like this."

My arms tightened around her. "No," I replied quickly, worried that she might indeed pull away from me. "I need you. Don't go away."

She didn't answer and I pulled her away from me by her upper arms so that she had to look at me. "Promise me that you aren't goin' anywhere," I demanded.

Vivian was crying again and I hated to see the tear tracks on her cheeks. "It makes it harder for you," she choked out. "I don't want to make things hard for you."

"It's not harder," I insist. "I need you."

She hesitated, wiping her face as she nodded slightly. "But you have to promise me that if you ever want me to go away that you'll tell me."

I slipped my hands to her face so that I was sure she was looking at me. "I won't want you to go away."

"You don't know that."

I pulled her to me again and used my hand to smooth her hair back. I knew that there were things that I wanted to ask her, but I just couldn't stop thinking about what I felt for her. All my logic had gone out the window.

I tried to get myself in the correct mind frame. Get her to talk about the feud to that she couldn't think about leaving me. I could explain it, but the thought of not having her with me, even the little bit that I still had her, made me panic. It wasn't something I was proud of, but there it was.

"Are you able to tell if someone is a vampire or mage?" I asked.

"I've never really tried."

"Is there anyway you could try? Anything would be helpful, especially going into that place tomorrow."

She nodded. "I'll try, but I don't know if I can help you."

I kissed her forehead lightly, leaving my lips against her skin as I spoke. "If you can, you can. If you can't, that's fine."

She nodded, not saying anything. I pulled her back against my chest and rested my chin on the top of her head, much like I had done to Peta out on the balcony. "Tell me about your mom," I said, just wanting to hear her speak.

And she did. I could tell that it was upsetting for her to do so, but she did. Josephine Waits lived in the same house that Vivian and Vaughn had grown up in here in Montreal. Vivian explained that her dad had died just over a year ago, leaving her mom on her own, but she had come to terms with living alone.

The baby of the family, Lily, lived in Montreal as well and worked as an elementary teacher. Neither of the remaining Waits women were shifters like Vivian and Vaughn.

"Lily is the dark haired one, right?" I asked.

Vivian nodded silently. It was obvious how much she loved and missed her family so I asked, "Can you go to them? Maybe it would make them feel better."

"I don't know if any of them could see me."

"Is there anythin' you want me to tell them?" I asked, willing to do anything for her.

"I don't know," she replied as she started to cry again. I felt like a first class asshole for causing her tears will hold her.

"I'm sorry," I said in an attempt to sooth her. "I just want everyone to have a chance..."

She pushed away from me a little and kept her gaze on her lap. "I know. I feel like I should be giving them these profound messages, but I just don't know what to say." She looked up at me then and asked, "What do you say? I love you, but I'm dead? Maybe I'll see you later?"

Her tone made it obvious that she was angry about her current situation and really who could blame her? As far as I knew she hadn't been able to vent her anger and frustration to anyone and I was pretty sure that she hadn't wanted to put any of it on me.

"I know that you're feeling a lot," I said, reaching out to touch her face with the backs of my fingers. "Just let it out. I'm here." Tears spilled down her face and she turned her head away from me. "I can handle it," I told her.

She only shook her head though and fiercely wiped the tears off her face, essentially forcing herself to calm down. "No it's okay."

"No, it's not okay."

She started to reply, but we both realized at the same time that she was starting to fade and she swore in French. "It's not fair. We never have enough time."

"It's okay," I reassured her. "We make due with what we have." I leaned in to kiss her face and she put her arms around me, kissing my lips as she continued to fade away. When she was gone I whispered, "I love you."

I continued to dream for a while and was aware that I was doing so. I was still in the house so I walked around the inside, getting a sense of how it was laid out as I wondered what it had been like to pick it out with Vivian.

I realized as I walked around that I was about to embark on what could be a really extraordinary journey and even though I hoped it would end quickly, I really doubted that it would. As well as finding out who was responsible for keeping the feud alive, I wanted to find a way to get back the memories of my life that had been taken away from me.

I wanted to be able to remember my childhood as well as all the time that I had spent away from home during my wanderlust period. I really wanted to remember Vivian most of all. She was the woman I had wanted to spend the rest of my life with and I didn't know anything about her outside of what she had told me in dreams and the snippets I had gotten from the pictures Vaughn had given me.

I awoke to a very brightly lit room since I had forgotten to close the shades the night before. It was seven on the dot and I was starting to wonder if I had an internal clock that woke me up at that same time every morning. I hadn't gotten much sleep, but I would be okay. There was work to do and I needed to get started.

Let the game begin...