

Arianne??

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Submitted: April 19, 2009

Updated: June 28, 2009

First, she finds that her guardians aren't human. Then she finds that she isn't human. Then she finds that the boy she likes/hates isn't human. Then she finds that her biological father wants her for her powers. Then he kidnaps them all.

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0 - Prologue

In a forest, there was a clearing. In the clearing, there was a man and a wolf. The wolf was circling around the clearing while the man stood in the middle of it, tensed up into a crouch.

"I should have known you'd be here," the man muttered under his breath, his red eyes glinting with hatred so that they glowed and sparked. He had hair so black that it shone blue when under light, and was quite young, probably in his late teenage years. He had extremely well-proportioned features, which made him handsome in a flawless, perfect kind of way.

The wolf snarled its reply, and pounced onto the man. They rolled about on the ground, all but strangling each other; when a woman stepped into the clearing, holding a basket.

Both the man and the wolf relaxed immediately and the man pushed the wolf off him with a flick of his hand.

"Laura," he said, smiling and pulling her into an embrace while the wolf growled in pain as it hit the ground.

The woman gave him a quick smile. "Hello, Jaxon. I'm afraid I can't stay long. Kieran, can you phase back? This is something we're going to need to discuss."

The wolf stepped back, and closed its eyes. A gush of wind blew up the leaves on the forest floor so that they were swirling around the wolf. A few seconds later, the wind died down, and as the leaves began to fall back lifelessly on the ground, it was plain for all to see that a handsome man about the same age as the other had taken the wolf's place.

Unlike the other, this man bore a rugged quality about him. He had auburn hair that had a gold tint, and the gold shone brightly against the dark red in the sun. He had a small scar over his left eyebrow, which was so light in colour that it shone silver against his dark, tanned skin. His eyes were of the same silvery grey colour, and he had a straight nose and full lips with a square jaw.

"Thank you Kieran," she said, giving him a quick hug. She sat down on the ground next to the basket, and Jaxon and Kieran joined her after glaring briefly at each other.

Laura ignored the looks. She was, after all, quite used to them. She reached into her basket and gently lifted out a sleeping baby girl. "This," she said after taking a big breath, "is Arianne."

Kieran exhaled and reached over to stroke the baby's face. "She's beautiful," he breathed. He wanted to add "just like you", but thought better of it.

Laura gave Kieran and Jaxon a few minutes to fawn over the baby, before she looked at them both. "I want both of you to have her."

Jaxon and Kieran took a look at each other, and then looked back at Laura

"Are you insane?" Kieran asked her just as Jaxon said "You can't possibly be serious."

Laura sighed. "Look, I can't keep Arianne. Elliot must never know that this child exists."

Kieran raised an eyebrow. “Why?” He asked. He narrowed his eyes and added, “It is his baby...right?” Jaxon rolled his eyes while Laura glared at him. “Of course it’s his,” she snapped. “It’s not like it’s yours, is it?”

“If only,” Kieran muttered wistfully under his breath.

“But I don’t understand,” Jaxon said, ignoring Kieran’s comment. “Why can’t he know?”

Laura frowned and said, “Well...I don’t know whether I’ve told you before, but Elliot is half werewolf, half human, and I’m a pure witch. So basically...Arianne is...half witch, a quarter werewolf, and a quarter human.” She smiled weakly.

Jaxon and Kieran stared at her. “What exactly are you trying to tell us?” Kieran asked after a moment.

“That Arianne may have some kind of mystical or magical power—the kind Elliot craves—due to the fact that she’s a bit of everything. If Elliot were to know that she even existed, he would hunt her down and somehow—I don’t know how he’s going to do it, but trust me, he will—find a way to extract that power from her,” she paused, “Killing her in the process.”

Jaxon gave a low whistle. “That’s...harsh. And very uh, un-fatherly. But I have another question for you. Of all the people you could have chosen, why us?”

Laura shrugged. “Because you two are my best friends, and if she stays with you, she’s probably in the safest hands.”

Kieran snorted and said, “Oh, so it’s not safe for a mother to look after her own baby, but it’s totally reasonable for a teenage boy slash vampire—who by the way, just in case you’ve forgotten, drinks human blood—to look after one?” Jaxon snorted. “You’re one to talk. You’re even younger than I am. And if memory serves, wolves are carnivorous.” “Whatever. At least I don’t look like I just bounced out from I-reached-puberty playground.” Jaxon pursed his lips. “Laura, are you sure that a dog can take care of a baby?” Kieran bristled at the insult, and snapped, “Way much better than a leech.” Laura’s eyes glowed furiously, and as she held her hands up, Kieran and Jaxon could see a green orb of light glowing in each of her hands. They shut up immediately. It was never a good thing when the orbs of light were green. “You two are acting like you haven’t even graduated from kindergarten. What is wrong with you two? Can’t you even try to get along?” asked Laura, her eyes narrowing. “But that’s not fair, werewolves and vampires have always been sworn enemies!” Kieran cried, “It’s...a natural instinct to hate each other. It’s like some kind of classic movie thing.” Laura laughed wryly. “Kieran, in case you didn’t know, life’s not fair. Jaxon, I want you to keep Ari for a month, and then let Kieran keep her for another, and then he’ll give her back to you for another and so on and so on.” “You’re making it like we’re divorced?” Jaxon asked incredulously.

Kieran snorted, “It’s not like I’d even marry you in the first place.”

Jaxon rolled his eyes. “This is so like one of those twisted movie plots.” He leant down and scooped up the baby gently from Laura’s arms and was about to say something when she stood up.

“I have to go. Elliot will be wondering where I am.” She paused and looked at them pleadingly.

“Please...take good care of her.”

She gave them one last sad smile, and faded into the darkness behind the trees, leaving Kieran and Jaxon staring at each other, then finally, down at the baby, still in Jaxon’s arms.

1 - Chapter One

“Arienne! Get a move on will you? We’re going to be late, and Jaxon’s going to give me hell!” Kieran shouted, mentally adding the word “again” to the sentence.

He watched as Arienne dragged her bags to the top of the stairs. He wondered how she came to grow up so quickly. Fifteen years had passed too quickly to his liking. No that time mattered to him, but still. She had grown from a baby into a teenager with straight jet-black hair and glittering emerald eyes.

“Jax won’t give you hell, he’s too nice!” Arienne protested, kicking her bags down the stairs, then half-tripping over them.

“Yeah, that’s why for the past fifteen years I’ve had you, he’s been giving me hell every other month,” Kieran muttered. “Here sweetie, let me take those.” He reached for her bags.

“Thanks, Ki.” Arienne piped, climbing into the passenger seat of Kieran’s car.

Kieran loaded her luggage into the back trunk, and then sat himself in the driver’s seat. He started the engine, and pulled out of the garage. When they were on the highway, Arienne spoke for the first time since she had gotten into the car.

“Ki, can I ask you a question?”

“Of course. What is it?”

“Ki...how old are you?”

Silence. “I’m nineteen.”

“But you and Jax have always been nineteen.”

“Ari...didn’t we promise not to have this conversation anymore?”

“But—”

“I don’t want to talk about this. End of conversation.”

“But—”

“I said I don’t want to talk about it. And don’t you dare going around and asking Jaxon about it, okay?”

There was a long silence, and then came a sulky reply, “fine.”

She cheered up immediately when they picked Shari up at her house. Shari had dyed her hair so that streaks of honey and gold decorated her wavy chestnut hair. Ari thought she looked amazing. She was

going to have to ask Jaxon for permission to dye her hair, too.

The smile, however, dropped from her face when she saw Shari's older stepbrother, Luca standing behind her. Luca was seventeen years old, around six foot three and, quite undeniably, hot. He had midnight blue eyes that seemed to pierce right through you. Ari shuddered when he lifted his gaze from the ground and looked at her. He had a head of inky black hair that was a bit on the long side and partially shaded his eyes, which, in Ari's opinion, gave him a mysterious, moody air (which, also in her opinion, made him even hotter—that is, if that were even possible). She also hated him and thought of him as an arrogant idiot. She knew that the idiot part was quite untrue, but somehow, it gave her some kind of satisfaction.

At school, he was one of the elite and popular, and he came first in his class. Hell, he even came first in his whole year. Being fairly pleasant and sociable, he had managed to befriend people ranging from cool to nerdy, tall to short and fat to skinny. Of course, he also had a truckload of girls fawning over him. Not that she cared.

What not many other people knew, however, was Luca's background. His Italian mother had abandoned him with his father once he'd been born and had taken off with another man. Heartbroken, Luca's father had moved back to America, where he had met Shari's mother, and later on married her.

After Shari was born, Luca was pushed aside. In fact, Luca's father saw Luca as a reminder of his horrible past, and ignored him and blocked him out as often as possible.

"Did you have to bring Luca?" Ari hissed to her best friend as she got into the car.

"Well, it's not exactly like I had a choice. You don't argue with mothers. At least, not mine. She wanted him to come, you know, to make him feel a bit more welcome and all that shoot."

Meanwhile, Luca had slipped into the car so that he was seated next to her. He shifted his gaze onto her. "Hey."

Ari shot him a glare, but it softened as she momentarily forgot why she hated him so much.

"How's school? Are you failing anything yet?" He asked, his grin turning into a smirk.

Ari gritted her teeth. Maybe it was because he annoyed her to no end, and was always rude and unbelievably arrogant. She glared at him again before turning her back on him and engaging Shari in a conversation.

Fifteen minutes later, Kieran pulled into Jaxon's driveway, where Jaxon was sitting on the porch. Arianne jumped out of the car and into Jaxon's arms while Shari and Luca remained sitting in the car, looking the house up and down.

"Jax, I've missed you so much!"

"Hey Ari," Jaxon hugged her tightly. "You're late again." He narrowed his eyes at Kieran.

“No, I’m not. I can’t help it if your watch is fast.” Kieran snapped, taking Ari’s bags and dumping them onto the porch. He motioned for Jaxon to come over. Jaxon untangled himself from Ari’s arms and walked over.

“Ari, you want to go in first?” called Kieran.

“No.” She glared at him.

“Ari,” said Jaxon, smiling at her. “I need to talk to Kieran for a minute...can you go into the house? There’re milk and cookies on the table if you want them.”

Ari grinned. “Okay,” she said, running into the house. “Come on, Shari!”

Shari went after Ariane into Jaxon’s house, with Luca following silently behind.

Kieran sighed, lifting his eyes heavenward.

Jaxon chuckled. “Still not listening to you, eh?”

“Fifteen years, and still as stubborn as a mule.”

“So...what did you want to talk to me about?”

“It’s Ari...she’s been wondering why we don’t age. Again.”

“She’s asked me about it the month before, actually. I said I didn’t want to talk about it. Do you want to come inside? It’s freezing.”

“Only to say goodbye to Ari.” Kieran followed Jaxon into the house and went into the living room. Ari was sitting next to Shari, who was sprawled across the sofa, eating cookies and watching the telly. Luca was sitting on the floor, flipping cookies with his thumb up into the air and catching them.

“Hey, I came to say goodbye,” said Kieran softly.

All he got in reply was a noncommittal “Mmm.”

Kieran sighed inwardly, leant down to plant a kiss on her forehead, and left after giving Jaxon a curt nod.

On the way home, Kieran wondered what he did wrong to make Ari so sad and sulky.

Once he got home, he slipped into the shower, and could feel himself relax almost immediately under the hot water.

He stood under the water for a long, long time, letting it soak through his hair and run down his face, enjoying the heat, and how it chased away all its troubles and worries.

He looked at his waterproof watch. He had better get out now unless he wanted to be permanently

wrinkled up like a prune.

Just as he was towelling his hair dry, the phone rang. Kieran raised his eyebrows, wrapped the towel around his waist, shook the water from his ears and picked up the phone.

“Ki?” a sobbing voice came down the phone.

“...Ari? What’s the matter? Are you okay? Did you forget to bring your teddy?”

“My ‘teddy’ has a name, and no, nothing’s okay. It’s all gone wrong...” Her sobbing escalated.

“Ari...calm down. Tell me what happened.” In the background, Kieran could hear something crashing to the ground and Jaxon yelling “Tell him! Tell him now!”

“Just after you left, this woman came running up the driveway, and said that we n-n-needed to leave, she also said something else b-b-but she spoke s-s-so quickly I couldn’t understand her. Then she l-l-left and Jax told me to pack and said he would pick you up on the way and-and-and then I saw a man walking up the driveway,” Arianne sobbed.

“So I told Jax and-and-and he got r-r-really worried and he told me to phone you right away and ...and then the door just exploded and a wolf came in and it-it-it...tried to take me but Jax knocked it out of the way and they’re fighting n-n-now...”

Kieran swore. “Where are Luca and Shari?”

“Shari’s hiding in the kitchen cupboard...next to the cheese, and Luca...I don’t know where Luca is.”

“Ari, get all your bags and slip out the back door. Try to get Shari and Luca to come with you once they’re not so freaked out. Bring their bags as well. Make sure that the man doesn’t see you. I’ll be there in five minutes.” He hung up the phone and pulled on his jeans and t-shirt, jammed his feet into his shoes and flung the towel on the bed. Stumbling on his shoelaces, he ran to the car and pulled out of the garage so quickly he left tire marks on the driveway.

He was there in three minutes.

Kieran saw Ari sitting on the steps in front of the back door, still crying and sobbing. Luca was sitting next to her, looking awkward and totally at loss. He was used to girls fawning over him, flirting and bantering. Crying? Not so much.

Kieran leapt out of the car and pulled Ari into a tight embrace, whispering “It’s going to be okay” over and over again. He knelt down so that he was face to face with the crying girl.

“Where’s Shari?” He asked.

Ari sobbed even more loudly, burying her head into Kieran’s neck. Kieran looked at Luca questioningly.

“She...ran off,” Luca said shortly and looking away.

Kieran cringed, and put his hands on her shoulders. This was worse than he thought. "Get your bags and wait in the car, okay? I have to help Jaxon. Luca, can you help Ari?" Luca nodded.

"Oh, and bring your things as well," Kieran said after pausing momentarily. "You're coming with us."

Luca looked surprised, but he nodded wordlessly, and with his arm still around Ari, picked up the bags with his other hand and gently led her towards the car.

Kieran crouched into position, leaping towards the house, being very careful to phase only after he'd gone into the house so as not to let them see.

He followed the noises and discovered a weak Jaxon dodging a wolf's huge and powerful bites, as he was so tired he could no longer attack.

Kieran growled and pounced onto the wolf, knocking him onto his back. He lifted one paw and slammed it on to the wolf's chest. He could hear the sound of breaking bones, and the wolf bellowed out in pain.

Kieran looked up for a brief moment to see where Jaxon was.

And in that brief moment, the wolf tensed up, and lashed out at Kieran's throat.

Kieran was thrown back against the wall, but he was quick to crouch into position, panting heavily. He could feel the blood trickle down from his throat and drip to the floor

Oh hell. The searing pain roaring in his throat was almost unbearable. Each breath hurt like torture. He growled. Pain sliced through him. Stupid, Kieran silently chastised himself.

The wolf rammed Kieran to the wall once more. Kieran gasped in pain. He couldn't move. All he could do was watch in horror as the wolf came closer and closer to strike again. Kieran closed his eyes and waited for the blow. But all he heard was a crash.

He opened his eyes, and saw Jaxon in a crouch snarling and baring his teeth.

The wolf, which was lying on a heap of broken furniture, phased back to human and slowly stood up. He seemed to have no more energy to fight. Too weak to maintain his wolf form as well, Kieran phased back to human.

"Kill him," he rasped to Jaxon, his throat sore.

Jaxon hesitated. Kieran rolled his eyes. He already knew what Jaxon would say.

"I can't." Jaxon spat bitterly.

"Not even when he's trying to kill you?" Kieran challenged.

Jaxon gritted his teeth, and shook his head. Then he faced the man. "Leave before I scratch your eyes out," he snarled, his voice wavering.

Kieran rolled his eyes. Way to go, Jaxon. You just told a man that you couldn't kill him, but there you go, "threatening"—double emphasis on the quotation marks—to scratch his eyes out. He really needed to learn the art of threatening people.

The man although visible with relief, glared at Kieran and Jaxon.

"I will come back for her. She is mine," he snarled.

Kieran was furious. "Hey, listen, you ungrateful piece of—"

But before he could finish his sentence, the man had slammed his foot onto his arm, crushing it. Kieran yelled out in pain, while the man dived out the door.

Jaxon glanced at Kieran, still sprawled with his back on the floor.

"Looks like you're going to have to drive," said Kieran, giving Jaxon a weak smile before he fainted.

Jaxon rolled his eyes, and then leant down to carry Kieran out to the car.

2 - Chapter Two

“Jax,” Arianne asked him from the backseat. “Where are we going?”

Jaxon hesitated. “I don’t know,” he finally admitted. “How’s Kieran’s throat?”

Arianne glanced at Kieran beside her and lifted the bag of ice she had been gently pressing on to his’ throat.

“It’s bruised,” she announced.

Kieran groaned.

“Shut up. You’ll hurt your throat again,” admonished Arianne softly, stroking Kieran’s face. She hesitated, and then she asked him, “Does it hurt?”

“Like hell,” Kieran rasped.

“How’s your arm, Kieran?” Jaxon asked, looking at him from the rear view mirror.

Kieran tried to lift his right arm. Kieran said a bad word. “I think it’s broken.”

Jaxon swore. “Luca, are you okay?”

Luca, who had been silent the whole time, looked up from his arm, which lay forgotten, around Ari’s waist. “Uh, yeah, I’m fine.”

Kieran laughed softly, “If you say so.” Then he winced, and held his hand out for the bag of ice.

Ari handed him the bag of ice, and feeling her eyes droop, lay down, putting her head on his lap and yawning. Just before she succumbed into sleep, she felt Luca reach down and lift her legs into his lap, and she considered kicking him, but she gave up on the idea as she was too sleepy.

Kieran stroked her hair and watched her sleep. She looked so peaceful, like an innocent angel.

“When we stop for gas I’ll have a look at your arm.” Jaxon said suddenly, interrupting Kieran’s thoughts.

Kieran, annoyed at being cut from his train of thought, said “what, you’re a doctor now?”

Jaxon smirked at him, “I happen to have studied medicine for quite some time.”

“Yeah, like five hundred years ago.” “A hundred and seventeen ago, actually.” “Well, let me tell you something. A lot has changed in a hundred and seventeen years.” “But the basics are still the same.

They may be more old-fashioned, but they are just as effective.

Luca cleared his throat. "I'm sorry, but I can't help overhearing a part of the conversation. Did you just say a hundred and seventeen years ago?"

Kieran exchanged a look with Jaxon and swore silently. Cover blown. Jaxon shifted his gaze onto Luca on the rear view mirror. "Ah, it's...difficult to explain," he said.

Luca leaned forward to take a good look at Jaxon's reflection in the rear view mirror. Jaxon flashed him a smile. Luca took note of the red eyes, and slid his gaze down to Jaxon's slightly pointed teeth. Then he smiled. "A vampire, huh."

Jaxon and Kieran looked at him, open-mouthed.

Luca sat back and smirked. "Now that wasn't so hard, was it?" Then he turned to Kieran and sniffed, and then frowned. "I never could get used to the smell of werewolves."

Jaxon smirked. "Me neither."

Kieran rolled his eyes. "Ah, you—how...how do you know what we are?"

"His eyes," Luca explained. "They're red, and his teeth are a bit sharper than normal human teeth. And you...you just smell bad."

Jaxon laughed while Kieran protested. "But these things don't exist!"

Luca raised an eyebrow. "If you say so."

Nobody said anything for a while. "Thank you," Kieran said, breaking the silence. "For helping her."

Luca smiled briefly. "No problem." He paused. "You know, you need tell her some time."

"Tell her what?" Kieran asked.

"That you're not human."

"How do you know that she doesn't already know?" Jaxon asked, looking at him from the rear view mirror.

"Because you looked at her to see whether she was asleep before you started talking about what you did a hundred and seventeen years ago."

Kieran raised an eyebrow. This was one observant kid.

"I don't want to scare Arianne," Jaxon said, shifting his gaze back onto the road.

"What, do you reckon she won't know one way or the other?" Kieran challenged. "She should know about us. How else is she supposed to trust us?"

Silence. "I don't know," Jaxon admitted. "But she'll be terrified of us."

Kieran snorted. "If she's going to be terrified of us, what she will think when she knows what she herself is, I don't want to know. She still thinks she's human, you know."

Luca looked at Kieran again.

"She's...not exactly human, either."

"I see."

"We'll tell her when the time is right," Jaxon said.

"For you, there never is a right time," Kieran snapped.

"Well, that's probably because you only do stuff at the wrong time and leave all kinds of shoot for me to clean up," Jaxon said bitterly.

Kieran tried to come up with an exception, but couldn't. He rolled his eyes. "Whatever. All I'm saying is, if we wait for the right time, or at least, your definition of the right time, we might just as well wait for another five years, when she finds out herself."

"Then what are you suggesting?"

"That we tell her as soon as we find a place to stay."

"No. It'd be too big a shock for her. First Elliot comes looking for her and then she finds out we're not human?"

Silence. "That was Elliot?" Kieran asked through gritted teeth.

"Yeah." Jaxon replied, his expression grim. "Did you not recognise him?"

"Oh crap." Kieran groaned.

"As I said, it would be too big a shock for her."

"But how can we protect her without letting her know what we are?"

Jaxon didn't reply.

"So we're going to tell her when we find a place to stay," Kieran concluded. Jaxon offered no comment.

"Ari told me that a woman came to talk to you before Elliot came...was that Laura?" Kieran asked, finding it uncomfortable when Jaxon shuts up and goes all weird.

"Yeah," Jaxon finally said, much to Kieran's relief. "Turns out Elliot found her a week ago, and had somehow kept her in his house and wouldn't let her go until she told him where Ari was. She never told, of course. But one of Elliot's friends saw Ari with one of us—I assume that would be you—and told him

where we were. “Laura worked out that I would be keeping her this month and she escaped and came to warn us before Elliot could come. You know, so we could be prepared or make a head start or something.” Kieran snorted. “Yeah, a head start of two seconds does help quite a lot.” He closed his eyes and leaned back onto the seat. God, he was tired. He felt like he hadn’t slept in days. “You should get some sleep kid,” he told Luca, who was looking at Arianne. “We’re going to be in this car for a long time.

Luca nodded and looked out the window.

3 - Chapter Three

After what seemed hours later, Jaxon pulled into a gas station. The gas tank was almost empty, and they probably still had a long way to go. He reached for his wallet, then realised he had left it at home. Or what was left of his home, anyway.

Jaxon scowled at his carelessness and looked at Arianne from the rear view mirror, his face softening immediately. She was so beautiful, like a sleeping angel. He didn't know whether he could bear for her to be heartbroken when she knew the real truth of what they were. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Kieran's wallet sticking out from his jeans pocket. He glanced at Kieran, who he saw was still asleep.

At least someone had the common sense to bring a wallet, Jaxon thought. Sorry Kieran, but it's for Arianne. Surely he wouldn't mind? Jaxon reached for Kieran's wallet, but found Kieran's hand suddenly grabbing his.

"Just what the hell do you think you're doing?" Kieran asked.

Jaxon smiled sheepishly and looked at Kieran, who raised an eyebrow, expecting an answer.

"I forgot to bring my wallet."

"You could have asked me first."

"Well, you were asleep...and I didn't want to wake you."

"Do you know what I thought when I saw you reaching for my jeans? You scared the hell out of me for a moment."

Jaxon snorted. "As if. And no, I don't want to know what you were thinking in that twisted mind of yours. Now give me the wallet. I need to pay for the gas."

Kieran rolled his eyes and tossed Jaxon his wallet, which he caught in one hand.

Jaxon raised his eyebrows. "This is one heavy wallet. Haven't you heard of a bank?"

Kieran smirked. "There's not enough space in the bank."

Jaxon rolled his eyes while Luca, still looking out the window, bit back a smile.

"I need to stretch my legs," he said, stretching out his arms and stepping out of the car.

"Me too. Should I wake them? I don't want them to be in the car all alone." "Sure. Why not, they've been asleep for quite a while now."

"Hey kiddo, time to wake up." Kieran said, gently shaking Luca's shoulder.

Luca stretched and yawned while Kieran woke Ari.

“Huh. Mmm. Five more minutes...” she mumbled.

“Come on, you’ve been sleeping for hours now. You wouldn’t be able to sleep tonight. Besides, Luca needs to get up and stretch his legs.”

Ari jerked awake at the sound of Luca’s name, and looked at her feet, still propped on his lap. She withdrew them quickly, casting him a disgusted look before practically hurtling herself out the car.

Kieran shrugged at Luca and rolled his eyes. “Girls.”

Luca bit back a smile before walking over with him to join Jaxon and Arianne.

“Ki?” Ari asked, her eyes narrowing with suspicion as soon he got close.

“Hmm?”

“Why isn’t your throat bruised anymore?”

Both Kieran and Jaxon froze.

“Em, well, Ari, I actually have to tell you something.” Kieran said, ignoring Jaxon’s frantic headshaking.

“You see, Ari, I—”

“Kieran uses make up,” Jaxon cut in.

Kieran shot him a look that said “what the hell?” while Luca snorted.

“Yeah. Kieran uses make up, and he covered the bruise up with....” Jaxon trailed off, trying to think of a kind of product, but could only come up with eye shadow. “...Kieran, what is it that you use?”

Now it was Kieran’s turn to panic. “Erm, I...” he stuttered, trying to think of something other than lipstick.

“Foundation?” Luca offered, grinning.

“Yeah, that.”

Ari and Jaxon spluttered in laughter.

“You use make up!” howled Ari, tears streaming down her cheeks.

Kieran shot Jaxon a murderous look. “You are so not getting away with this one,” he muttered with a voice so low only Jaxon could hear.

“We should go now; the gas tank’s filled up.” Jaxon said after successfully containing his laughter and his relief from having to tell Ari the truth.

“Yes, lets.” Kieran said quickly, eager to change the topic. “Come on guys. Time to go.”

"Where are we going?" Ari asked, slipping one hand into Kieran's and the other into Jaxon's.

"I still don't know," admitted Jaxon.

"I have an apartment not far from here; we could stay there for a while." suggested Kieran.

"Why didn't you say so before?" Jaxon demanded.

"I just remembered." Kieran said, defending himself.

Jaxon rolled his eyes and lead the way to the car, with the others following behind him. "Do you want to drive, Kieran? I don't know the way."

Kieran was just about to accept the offer when Arianne broke in.

"He can't do that, silly. He broke his arm, remember?"

"Yes, Jaxon, how could you possibly forget something so important?" Kieran mocked him as they got into the car.

Jaxon pursed his lips, started up the engine, pulled out of the gas station and headed for Kieran's apartment.

"Make a right here," Kieran said. "Another right. Go straight. Another right. Make a left. In there."

"Okay, and then?" asked Jaxon, eager to get out of this part of town. The alleyways were dark, the walls scattered with graffiti, and people gathered around in groups to smoke all sorts of drugs.

"We're here." Kieran said.

"Are you serious?" asked an incredulous Jaxon.

"So it's not a flashy apartment. Come on." Kieran said impatiently, yanking the car door open.

"You have got to be shooting me." Luca and Jaxon said at the same time, refusing to move.

"Hey, I said I had an apartment, I didn't say I had an apartment that cost me more than my savings." snapped Kieran.

"If this is the kind of apartment you would buy, I doubt that you have any kind of savings at all." Jaxon shot back.

Kieran gritted his teeth, carried Ari's luggage with his "good" arm, hauled them up the stairs and tossed Luca the keys. Luca slotted the keys inside, and turned the handle. He pushed the door open, only to find that it had jammed. He grimaced and kicked the door open. Plumes of dust burst out of the apartment, causing them to choke and cough.

Ari peered inside, horrified. "You expect me to live here?"

Jaxon had the exact same expression on his face, and he asked the same question, but emphasised on another word. "You expect me to live here?"

Luca just looked at the flat in horror.

"It is a little dusty," admitted Kieran.

"Understatement of the century!" cried Arianne.

"We'll tidy it right up in no time." said Kieran brightly.

"I don't think so, Ki. This place is pretty screwed up," Ari piped.

"Language!" He admonished her before going into the apartment.

"Okay. Ari and I'll go to the supermarket—that is, if there is one—and buy a mop, a broom—" started Jaxon.

"And a gallon of detergent?" suggested Arianne.

Jaxon chuckled. "Maybe two."

"Okay, okay. Enough with the jokes. So you two go to the supermarket. And what will we do?"

"Erm, look for light switches, check if there's electricity, open the windows and all that other stuff?" suggested Jaxon.

"There better be hot water for my shower," Arianne said, raising her eyebrows.

"Enough of the cheek, girl. Go on then, we'll just so sort ourselves through this...stuff." Kieran said, mentally replacing the word "stuff" with "pile of shoot".

Luca raised an eyebrow. "We?" He asked. "I don't think so, buddy. You're alone on this one."

Kieran shot him a look before going into the so called living room and as he stepped onto the mangy carpet a plume of dust swirled up around him. He sneezed three times. He tripped over a piece of floorboard that stuck up from the floor and landed on the floor. He felt something scuttle up from his leg, his back, his neck, and finally drop on to the floor. He turned his head around and saw it was a cockroach. He yelped and rubbed his neck, screwing his face up in disgust.

Luca looked into the living room, and made a face. "I hate cockroaches," he said before turning away. "You okay?"

"Never been better."

4 - Chapter Four

“See, it’s not so bad once it’s all cleaned up,” declared Kieran proudly.

“Yeah, well, thanks to me. I practically did everything.” scowled Jaxon.

“Well, you can’t possibly expect me to do anything with a broken arm, can you?” Kieran smirked.

Jaxon gritted his teeth, lowered his voice and muttered dire threats so that only Kieran could hear.

Kieran ignored him. “Dinner, anyone?” He called out cheerfully.

Luca hopped off the couch and into the kitchen. “That depends. What are we having?” He asked.

Kieran looked at what he prepared. “Erm, cheese on toast,” he said.

“...Are you serious?”

“Well, you can have plain toast if you want,” Kieran snapped, annoyed.

Luca rolled his eyes and reached for two pieces of toast. “One’s for Arianne,” He said when Kieran was about to stop him. He ambled back to the couch, where Ari was sitting. “Here you go.” He handed her a piece of toast.

“Thanks,” Ari said, lifting it to her mouth and taking a bite. Luca sat down on the other side of the couch and silently ate his dinner.

Ari sneaked a look at him. He had a foot on the couch, his arm draped over the knee. With his other hand, he popped the last of his toast into his mouth. He turned his head to look at her when he had finished chewing, and for a second, Ari considered looking away, but it was no use, he had already caught her. Luca raised an eyebrow.

Ari racked her brain for something to say. “You eat fast,” she said lamely, mentally kicking herself for saying something stupid.

He grinned, and Ari looked down at her half-eaten toast, feeling the heat creeping up her cheeks. Luca shifted down to her side of the couch. He lifted her chin and grinned again. She looked adorable when she blushed.

“You have something on your face,” he said, looking for some kind of excuse. He reached over and stroked the side of her face with his thumb, brushing away an imaginary toast crumb.

“Thanks.” She licked her lips, and looked away again. She was aware that his hand was still under her chin.

Kieran walked over, standing in front of them. He cocked one eyebrow and smirked. "As much as I'm enjoying the young love, I'm afraid it's time for bed."

Arienne glared at him before slamming the door on the way into her room.

Kieran and Luca exchanged a look. They shrugged. Then Kieran remembered something. He went over to Jaxon. "Aren't we supposed to tell her tonight?"

"Tell her what?" Jaxon asked, just a bit too quickly.

"Don't you dare back out on this." Kieran's eyes narrowed.

"But...I...okay, fine. Let's go tell her."

Kieran knocked on Ari's door and peeked in.

"Ari, Jaxon and I need to tell you something. Can you come to the living room for a while? "

Ari glared at him before stomping back into the living room and plopping back onto the sofa.

Kieran looked at Jaxon.

Jaxon sighed. "Ari, we're...not who or what you think we are." He took a deep breath. "Ari, we're...not human."

The girl looked at them for a minute and burst out laughing.

"Arienne, we're serious." Kieran said.

Ari stopped laughing, and looked at Kieran. He never called her Arienne unless it was something important. "Well, if you're not human, or should I say, if you don't think you're human, what do you think you are?"

Kieran bit his bottom lip nervously. "I'm a werewolf."

Ari looked at him incredulously. "You think you're a werewolf?"

"I know I'm a werewolf," Kieran said softly. "I would ...phase into a wolf just to show you, but it would freak you out."

Ari sat back and folded her legs beneath her. "Phase."

"What?" came a surprised reply.

"You heard me," Arienne said. "Phase."

“But...” Kieran looked to Jaxon for help. Jaxon shrugged.

“Okay, I’ll phase. But don’t say I didn’t warn you.” Kieran said, raising his eyebrows.

Arienne settled herself down on the sofa. “Go on.”

Kieran took a deep breath and walked over where there was a lot of space. He closed his eyes to let the transformation take place. He could feel himself dropping lower to the ground, his nose stretching longer, fur sprouting out, and he could feel the swishing of his tail behind his legs.

He whimpered and slowly walked over to the girl. She had frozen into place, her eyes wide. He cocked his furry head and looked at her, whining softly from the back of his throat.

“Ki...is that...you?” She asked, holding out her hand.

Kieran nodded, and licked the hand that had been held out to him. She was surprised, but quickly recovered, and began stroking his head and scratching behind his ears. Kieran let out a deep, soft growl of satisfaction from the back of his throat.

“That’s...amazing!” Arienne exclaimed.

Kieran looked expectantly at Jaxon.

“I guess it’s my turn,” Jaxon said, sighing heavily. “Ari, I’m not human, but I’m not a werewolf, either.”

The girl raised her eyes, running her fingers through Kieran’s fur.

“I’m...a vampire.”

Ari’s eyes grew wide. “So...do you like, drinking human blood?”

Jaxon winced. “Yeah.”

Arienne bit her lip. “You’re not going to...drink my blood or anything, are you?”

Jaxon’s eyes widened. “No, no, I won’t...hurt you.”

Ari smiled. “I know you won’t. I’m just...trying to get used to the facts.” She narrowed her eyes mockingly. “You don’t have to prove to me you’re a vampire, by the way. Just in case you were wondering. I believe you.”

Jaxon rolled his eyes.

Kieran looked at Luca. “How are you taking it?”

Luca shot him a look. "How do you think I'm taking it? I already know."

Ari turned to Luca. "You already know?" She asked, her eyes narrowing.

Kieran pursed his lips, annoyed. "It's called acting, Luca. You should try it sometime."

Luca glared at him. "How the hell was I supposed to know that you were acting and not suffering from memory lapse?"

"Okay, Q and A time." Jaxon announced, interrupting them. "Anything you want to ask us?"

"Er, yeah," Arianne said. She turned to Luca. "You already know?"

Luca shrugged and gave her a weak smile. Arianne glared at him and turned to Kieran. "Why did you tell him before you told me?" She demanded.

"We didn't tell him," Kieran defended himself. "He just sort of...knew."

Arianne turned to Luca again and opened her mouth to ask him something, but Luca quickly shook his head and mouthed the word "later".

Ari looked suspiciously at him, but asked a different question. "Another question: Kieran doesn't really use make up, does he?"

Jaxon chuckled while Kieran gave a low growl.

"No, no he doesn't." Jaxon said quickly.

"So werewolves heal really quickly?"

"Not as fast as vampires do."

"Cool! So are you like really strong and fast?"

"Yeah," Jaxon said. Then he smirked. "Can't say the same for Kieran, though."

Kieran growled. Then he remembered something. He phased back to human form and exchanged a look with Jaxon. "Ari, we still have one more thing we have to tell you, but don't freak out, okay?"

"If I can accept the fact that you're a werewolf and that Jax is a vampire, I don't think there's anything I can't take." Ari said, raising her eyebrows.

Jaxon bit his lower lip. "Uh, well..."

"Erm, you're not human." Kieran said quickly.

The girl stared at them, shock registering in her eyes.

“Well, you’re partially human, if that helps.” Kieran offered, smiling weakly.

“Partially?! That makes it even worse!” The girl cried.

Kieran and Jaxon looked at each other, but didn’t say anything.

“So what am I?” Arianne asked.

There was no reply.

“What am I?” The girl shouted suddenly, scaring Luca. He was used to girls simpering and batting their eyelashes. Shouting? Not so much. “Tell me. I have a right to know.”

Kieran cleared his throat. “Well, basically, you’re er...you’re a quarter human...” He looked at Jaxon. “A quarter werewolf and half witch.” Jaxon finished off quickly.

“Oh my God,” Arianne exclaimed. “I’m a freak.”

“Of course you’re not!” Both Kieran and Jaxon hurried to say. “You’re anything but that.”

“And you don’t get old, so you don’t get wrinkles or anything,” Kieran added.

Jaxon looked at him as if he had grown another head.

“What?” Kieran defended himself. “I’m trying to look at this from a girl’s perspective.”

Jaxon rolled his eyes while Luca tried not to laugh. His laughing mood however, disappeared as quickly as it came when Arianne started shouting again.

“Is that why the man was after me? To put me into a circus, or something?” She screamed.

“Don’t answer that,” Kieran muttered to Jaxon, who had opened his mouth to reply.

There was a long silence.

Just when Kieran started to open his mouth to say something, Arianne spoke.

“I’ll be in my room,” she spat out before hurtling out of the room.

5 - Chapter Five

"I can't believe it," Arianne thought. "I'm not human. I mean, it was totally okay accepting the fact that Ki and Jax aren't human, but accepting the fact that I'm not human. Oh my God, I'm a freak. No, wait. I'm not—uh, what's the word? Oh right—'pure-bred', so I'm like...the freak of the freaks."

She looked at herself in the mirror, knowing she'll never look at herself the same way she did before ever again.

"I knew Jax and Ki couldn't possibly be human," she thought. "They're just too...hot. And they're nice, and clever. No one, or should I say no human could possibly be that perfect. But I never saw this coming. What did they say I was? A quarter human, a quarter werewolf, and half...witch? Maybe I can cast spells or something."

A knock on the door interrupted her train of thought.

"Ari, are you...okay?" It was Ki.

"How can I be okay? How can I ever be okay, knowing who, I mean, what I am?" She said, sitting down on her bed and fitting her legs beneath her.

Kieran sighed, and sat down on the bed next to her. "I know it's hard to take in. But you'll get over it. I promise."

It was weird, how although Ki was the one who always pissed her off, he was also the one who always seemed to care about her more, being unnecessarily overprotective. It's not that Jax wasn't. He just didn't show it as much, and as a result she always thought Ki was more like a parent, or a brother, but she thought of Jax as a best friend. It was always Ki she opened up to, yet it was always Jax she preferred.

Ari climbed into Kieran's lap and threw her arms around his neck, where she cried for quite some time, and eventually fell asleep.

Kieran laid her down and drew the blankets up to her chest. He bent down to kiss her forehead and smiled softly at himself before leaving the room.

6 - Chapter Six

Kieran yawned, and stretched out his arms. “Why do we have to get up so early this morning?” Kieran grumbled.

“We have to plan so as to be prepared. We should leave as soon as possible. It’s never a good idea to stay in one place for too long. Besides, it was one in the afternoon when I woke you up.”

“One in the afternoon, seven in the morning. What’s the difference?”

Jaxon snorted. “The difference is six hours.”

“Whatever. You go plan, and I’ll go...check if the couch is comfortable enough for a nap.” Kieran stood up, yawning, and headed for the living room.

Jaxon rolled his eyes.

“Go away, man. I was here first,” Jaxon heard Luca moan to Kieran.

“You know, someone really should teach you to respect your elders,” Kieran snapped.

“Too bad they didn’t, huh?” Luca shot back, shifting on the couch.

“What’s your problem? Last night, you kept complaining about sleeping on the couch, now you won’t get out of it.”

“You’re lucky I’m not suing you for making me sleep on the couch,” Luca said, stifling a yawn. “Especially this couch. It’s practically child abuse.”

“Get off the couch!” Kieran complained, dragging Luca by his legs.

“I’m taking Arianne for a walk,” Jaxon told them.

Kieran mumbled a non-committal reply, still trying—trying being the key word—to haul Luca off the couch.

Meanwhile on the street, Ari slipped her hand into Jaxon’s as they walked. “Where are we going?”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Can we go have lunch? I’m starving.”

They stopped next to a restaurant that looked decent enough, and Arianne ordered pasta.

“Aren’t you going to eat anything?” Ari asked.

Jaxon raised an eyebrow.

She blushed. "Sorry. It's a question I used to ask you whenever I'm eating and you're not."

Jaxon smiled. "It's okay." The smile weakened instantly as he thought of something.

"Are you okay? You look...pale."

"I'm always pale," Jaxon said.

"You look paler than usual," Ari argued. "Tell me what's wrong."

Jaxon sighed. "It's just that you reminded me I haven't eaten in...quite a while. I've been spending every day with you and didn't get any time to eat."

"So...you're hungry?"

"Starving."

Ari looked down at her pasta, twirled a bit of it onto her fork and stuck it into her mouth. She swallowed.

Just then, a woman walked past them, tossing her hair as she did so. The smell of her perfume wafted to their table. Jaxon clenched the arms of his seat, fighting the dizziness and trying to rid the thoughts of going after her.

"Ah...you should...go feed now," Ari said nervously.

"Good idea," Jaxon managed to choke out before reaching for the door to the restaurant and practically flying out of it.

He came back a few minutes later and sat down in his chair. Arianne was looking at him. "Are you feeling better now?" She asked.

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Was it a girl? A boy? A man? A woman?"

Jaxon shifted uncomfortably in his seat. "Let's not do this here."

"Why? You're allowed to talk about my food but I'm not allowed to talk about yours?"

Jaxon sighed. "A woman."

“Where did you put her body?”

Jaxon stared at her. She looked straight into his eyes. “Well?”

Jaxon bit his lower lip. “I have...a gift, a power of some sort. After I finish...feeding, I don't have to clean up after myself. The body just...disappears.”

“Whoa. Does that happen to all vampires?”

“I don't know. I've never seen another vampire before.”

“How do you know whether the person you see is a vampire or not?”

“Do we really have to talk about this now?”

“We can talk about it while going back to the flat.”

“Fine,” Jaxon gave up, obviously frustrated. He paid the bill after Ari finished her lunch and they left.

“So? Answer my question,” Ari pushed, slipping her hand into his.

Jaxon sighed. “A vampire is supposed to look...bright, or...more vibrant in colour, if that makes sense to you. You see, I'm sort of...stuck in this world when I'm not supposed to be here. I'm not alive, yet I'm breathing, blinking, talking. So when I look at this world, it's like...there's a thin veil in front of me, somehow shielding me from the real world and the colours I see are...not as...vivid as you see them. But if I see a vampire, it's like he's on my side of the veil, and I can see him the way you see other people. Do you know what I mean?”

“Yeah. I find it really interesting, actually.”

He snorted. “Believe me, you'll get bored of it soon enough.”

“I don't know about that. Oh, look at that!” Arianne broke free from Jaxon and crouched down. It was a kitten.

“Isn't it cute?”

“Very. Put it down now, Ari, it might have fleas, or something.”

“But I can't just leave it here! The poor thing's homeless! He—no wait, it's a she—has no where to go! Can we take it with us, pretty please?”

“Ari...”

“Please?” Ari looked pleadingly at him.

Jaxon could feel himself weakening instantly. “I don’t know...”

Ariane, sensing Jaxon had weakened, begged one more time. “Please, Jax? Please?”

Jaxon bit his lower lip and sighed in frustration. “Okay, okay.”

The girl squealed with glee, and hugged him. “Thank you, thank you, thank you! I love you!”
“I love you too,” Jaxon said softly, planting a kiss on the top of her head.

“I’m going to name her...Willow.” Ariane said, scooping the kitten up in her arms and scratching its chin.

“Come on, let’s go home. Kieran will be wondering where we are.”

They went back, climbing up the stairs, and knocking on the door.

Kieran opened the door. “Ah, there you are. I was wondering where—Crap! What the hell is that?”

“It’s a kitten, Ki.” Ari said, holding up Willow.

Kieran backed away from the door, tensing.

“What’s the matter, Ki, are you afraid of an innocent kitty?” Ari asked, teasingly.

“No,” Kieran said, through gritted teeth. “I just want to tear its head off.”

Ari’s eyes widened, and she held the kitten protectively against her.

Jaxon exclaimed in comprehension. “Oh no. I’m sorry, Kieran, I should have thought of that.”

Kieran growled. Ari turned to Jaxon. “Why doesn’t Ki like cats?”

“Well, Kieran’s a werewolf, which means, basically, he’s a wolf. That means he’s...sort of related to dogs. And—in case you don’t know—dogs hate cats.” Jaxon explained.

“Oh.”

“Ari, maybe you shouldn’t keep the kitten.”

“No! I can’t just leave it out on the streets.”

Kieran gritted his teeth. “Please, Ari. I can’t live together with that...thing.”

Ari glared at him.

Kieran scowled and slammed the door on his way back to his room.

Ari looked at Jaxon, who sighed and pulled her into a quick hug. “Should I let her go?” She asked.

“I think it’d be best for everyone,” Jaxon said. “It’s going to drive Kieran insane.”

Ari agreed reluctantly, and they went back downstairs to put Willow back on the street.

“Ari?”

“Hmm?”

“We—Kieran and I—were thinking that tonight, maybe you should share a room with Luca.”

Silence. “WHAT??!!”

“Well, there are only two rooms and one couch, and I don’t fancy sharing a bed with Kieran again.” He made a face. “He snores.”

“But—”

“We are not letting Luca sleep on the couch again tonight. That’s no way to treat a guest.”

Arienne gritted her teeth. “Where is he?”

“I don’t know, I think I saw him in the kitchen. But anyway, don’t worry; we’re letting you guys sleep on the bigger bed.”

Ari snorted. “Yeah, that helps,” she muttered as she stomped her way back to the flat, with Jaxon following behind her, looking slightly confused and slightly amused.

Luca came into the living room where Jaxon and Ari were. “Hey.”

“Hey,” Jaxon said while Ari glared at Luca wordlessly.

Jaxon nudged her gently.

Ari sighed exasperatedly. “Hi,” she said grudgingly before turning and slamming the door to her room.

7 - Chapter Seven

Ariane spent the rest of her afternoon in her room until it was time of dinner.

As she ate, she wondered how on earth Kieran and Jaxon managed to cook something so good. They couldn't boil an egg without making a mess. She was enjoying her meal when Kieran told her Luca had cooked dinner. She choked and spat what was in her mouth onto her plate.

"Ari!" Jaxon looked at her warningly.

"Sorry," she mumbled and reaching for her glass of milk. She took a long sip of milk, avoiding Luca's gaze.

"Is there something wrong with the food?" Luca asked her, his voice smooth.

"No," Ari said, putting down her milk. "It's...very delicious," she added, meaning it.

Luca smiled. "Good."

For the rest of dinner, she could feel his intense gaze boring into her as she finished her meal. When she could take it no longer, she stood up abruptly.

"Can I be excused? I'm...full. And very tired."

Kieran looked up from his plate. "Oh, okay. Goodnight," he said, holding his arms out for a hug. She leant down, wrapped her arms around him, pulled away, and disappeared into her room, where they could hear her scream into her pillow.

Jaxon spun Ari's empty glass on the table while Kieran focused on what was left on his dinner and Luca stifled a smile.

Kieran yawned. "I don't know about you, but I'm gonna crash early tonight."

Jaxon looked at him in disdain. "You slept till one in the afternoon and then had a three-hour nap afterwards and you're already tired at nine in the evening. I haven't slept in more than a hundred years."

"Well, need I say that you're not human? Or have you figured that out already?" Kieran snapped.

Luca stood up. "I'll leave you two to your...uh, bickering. I'm going to sleep now."

Kieran and Jaxon looked at each other as Luca walked out of the room. "Bickering?" Kieran exclaimed. "We need to teach this boy some manners."

Luca opened the door to Ari's—well, his and Ari's for the time being—room. He went inside and saw Arianne sitting on the bed. She was hugging her knees and staring into blank space.

“Ari?”

“Arianne. Only my friends call me Ari,” she said, snapping out of her reverie.

“Sorry,” Luca said, sounding genuinely sincere. He walked over and sat down on the bed beside her. She shifted away from him.

“Arianne, are you okay?”

She didn't answer him; she was too busy thinking about how good her name sounded when he said it. Arianne. It was like an angel singing.

“Arianne?”

“Uh, yeah.”

“Are you—”

“I'm going to brush my teeth,” she announced, interrupting him. She jumped off the bed and stalked into the bathroom. When she came back, Luca opened his mouth to say something, but Ari beat him to it.

“I'm really tired. I want to sleep now,” she said, not wanting to hear his voice. She climbed under the covers.

“Right. Sweet dreams, then.” He sat on the floor, watching her.

Arianne felt a twang of annoyance. “What are you doing on the floor?”

“Letting you sleep,” he said simply.

“But where are you going to sleep?”

“On the floor.”

“But...” she shook her head, frustrated. “Don't be silly.”

“How is it silly?”

“It's freezing. You'll have turned into an ice statue by the morning.”

“So?”

She was getting seriously annoyed now. “Get in here,” she said.

He stood up. "Only if you don't mind."

She pursed her lips. As much as she hated him, she didn't want to wake up and see him dead by morning. "I don't mind."

One side of his mouth pulled up into a half-smile. "I must remark on how sincere that sounded."

"Then you don't have much to remark on, do you?" She shot back.

He chuckled and slipped under the covers next to her.

Ari shifted uncomfortably. The bed suddenly seemed too small. She could feel the heat, the warmth radiating from his body. She was freezing. She shivered.

Luca looked at her. "Are you cold?" He asked, shifting closer to her.

"No, I'm fine," she said, budging up the furthest end of the bed so that she was pressed against the wall. The ice-cold, freezing wall.

He grabbed her hand. "But you're shivering," he protested, frowning. "Are you sure—"

She pulled her hand away. "So," she said, interrupting him (again). "What do you think of Ki and Jax?"

Luca looked at her, still frowning slightly, but he answered her question after a moment. "They're really nice about me being here, unlike some people."

Ari, who didn't like where the conversation was going, looked for a way to change the subject. "No, I mean about them not being human."

"Well, I'm not having any trouble getting over it. I mean, they're so nice and hospitable and everything. Just because they're not human doesn't mean they're evil or bad or anything like that."

"Mm."

He paused. "How are you taking it?"

"I'm taking it just fine. I've known them for fifteen years. They brought me up. They're like, my best friends and my family."

"No, I mean about you not being human."

She looked up at him then, and found herself unable to look away from his gaze. He looked into her eyes, his midnight blue eyes probing. She suddenly felt extremely vulnerable and extremely bare, as if he could see right through her.

"Arianne, you may want to breathe," he reminded her after a few seconds.

"Uh, yeah, right." She dragged air into her lungs and forced it out again. "I was...I don't know what

came over me.”

His eyes darkened in colour—if that was possible—capturing her gaze even more intensely. “Do you really not know?”

She retreated as close as possible to the wall. “No, I don’t,” she managed to choke out.

He cocked his head sideways. “Well,” he said at last. “If you say so.”

“I do say so.”

Suddenly, she was very aware that he was very close to her. Close as in, move-even-the-teeniest-bit-and-she’d-touch-him close. He reached up and tucked a strand of black hair that had fallen over her face behind her ear. She shuddered at his touch and looked down, feeling the heat in her cheeks.

“You still haven’t answered my question yet. How are you taking it?”

“Just fine,” Arianne breathed.

She felt his fingers find her chin and gently tilt it upward so that he was looking straight into her eyes. “Would you like me to tell you something?”

Arianne, with some difficulty, dragged another lungful of air in. “Be my guest.”

“I’m not human, either.”

Arianne froze. “What?”

“I’m...not a vampire, or a werewolf. I’m...a mixture of different things. Just like you.”

“Oh. And uh, what are you a mixture of?”

“I’m half human, half dragon.”

“You’re a dragon?” She asked him, frowning.

“Well...half of it.”

Arianne snorted. “If you say so.”

“I do say so.”

She looked up. “You have to stop copying everything I’m saying.”

He looked into her eyes. “I’m not.”

She looked away. “Is that why you know they’re not human?”

“Yeah. We can always tell whether other people are human or not.”

“No wonder Ki and Jax always looked a bit...different.”

“How about me? Do I look different?”

Ari gritted her teeth. “I don’t know. I don’t look at you much.” She turned onto her side so that he was behind her. “I’m going to sleep now. Good night.”

He leant close to her. “Sweet dreams,” he whispered, his breath tickling her neck. Arianne felt her stomach flip, but she tried her best to ignore it as she stared at the wall, because somehow, Luca’s presence made it impossible to sleep.

After a few hours, Arianne was completely nerve-wracked. She had been telling, no, begging, for herself to fall asleep, to no avail. She turned around and found herself face to face with Luca.

“Oh,” she exclaimed. “Sorry. Did I wake you?”

“No. Why are you still awake? It’s almost one in the morning.”

“I can’t sleep,” she moaned, rubbing her hands over her eyes. “I’m so tired.”

“What’s on your mind?” He asked her.

She looked at him, surprised. “Nothing.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Nothing?”

She gritted her teeth. “Nothing,” she repeated forcefully.

He sighed. “Fine, now we have to find a way to get this...‘nothing’ out of your mind,” he said.

She shot him a look. “And how will we do that?”

“Oh, I have a few ideas,” he said, smiling that half-smile of his.

She rolled her eyes. “Keep your hands to yourself.”

Luca laughed softly and tilted her chin up again. Arianne was extremely aware to the fact that she was heating up. Not only her cheeks, but her entire body was heating up. She shivered. Luca laughed again.

“What?”

“It’s just that you do that whenever I touch you,” Luca explained. “I find that amusing.”

“Amusing?”

“Yes. Amusing.”

Arienne pursed her lips and fought the urge to punch him.

“How long has it been since you’ve hugged someone?” Luca asked suddenly.

She looked at him as if he had just told her he showered ten times a day. “Uh well, I don’t know. I hug Ki and Jax everyday.”

“No, not one of those I-put-my-arms-around-you-and-then-let-go hugs. I mean the deep, long, meaningful ones. The ones that chase away all your problems and make you temporarily forget everything, and the only thing you remember and know is that you’re in the arms of someone else.”

Arienne realised that this must have been the longest sentence she had ever hear him say. She thought about mocking him about it, but decided against it. “Well, then I guess I haven’t had one in a long time.”

“Neither have I.” He slipped his arms around her waist and pulled her away from the wall and towards him.

“Hey! What the hell are you doing?” She protested, trying ineffectively to push him away.

Luca ignored her. “I’m guessing one of the reasons you can’t sleep is because you were practically lying against that stone cold wall.”

“That may have been a reason,” Arienne said, gasping for breath as he drew her close.

He looked at her. After some hesitation, she slid her arms around him and hugged him for about a second. Just when she was about to pull away, he spoke.

“Cara,” he said softly. “That was not a hug.” Arienne looked at him, surprised at the term of endearment that had just been used on her.

He smiled and tightened his arms around her. As he pulled her even closer to him, Arienne could smell the scent of his shampoo. His hair was still slightly damp from his shower. She breathed in, and almost instantly, she forgot everything. She lost herself into an imaginary world where nothing was wrong. She closed her eyes and before she knew it, her exhaustion overcame her, and she fell into a deep sleep.

8 - Chapter Eight

Arienne woke up and found out that she was still in Luca's arms. She looked at Luca. He was still sleeping. She grinned. He looked peaceful. When Luca was awake, he looked mysterious, dark and somehow brooding. When he was asleep, it was like he let go of those traits and relaxed himself.

Arienne sighed. He looked hot both ways. She tried to remove his arms from around her waist.

Luca stirred and woke up, groaning, his eyes still closed. "What time is it?"

"A little after ten."

His eyes flew open at the sound of Ari's voice, and he pulled one side of his lips into that half-smile she found irresistible. "Sorry. I thought I was still at home."

Arienne grinned. "So that's how you speak to your family."

Still smiling, he rolled his eyes at her and yawned, stretching his arms above him, gazing at her sleepily as he did so.

She waited till he was in mid-stretch. Then she pushed him off the bed.

"Wha—? Hey! What was that for?"

"For not keeping your hands to yourself," she said, swinging herself off the bed and heading into the bathroom.

She locked the bathroom door behind her, and as she brushed her teeth vigorously, she thought about last night. Why on earth had she let him hug her? This was insane. She hated his guts. She was sure even he knew that. She spat into the sink, rinsed her mouth with water and washed her face. She felt more alert immediately when the cold water splashed onto her face. She dried her face off with a towel and threw open the door. And almost walked into Luca.

"What the hell?" She complained, pushing him aside and heading to the dining table.

Luca watched her go. He was used to girls slipping their arms through his, finding random opportunities to hang onto his arm. Pushing him away? Not so much. He shook his head and went into the bathroom.

Meanwhile, Ari sat down at the table, banged her head on the kitchen table three times and leaned against the table with her head, groaning.

"Headache, sweetie?" Kieran asked, chuckling at his joke.

"Funny," Ari replied, finding it anything but.

“Here you go.” Jaxon put a bowl of cereal in front of her.

“Thanks.” She slid the bowl towards her and stirred the cereal with her spoon, staring into blank space.

When Luca came into the living room, Arianne was staring into her cereal, Jaxon was staring into his newspaper and Kieran was staring into his coffee.

“Not morning people?” Luca asked as he poured himself a glass of orange juice.

“Nope,” they replied.

Luca sat down at the table and stared into his orange juice. “Thank God.”

After breakfast, Kieran stumbled back into his room, mumbling something about getting changed while Jaxon sat down on the couch, turned on the telly and aimlessly flicked over the channels. Arianne walked to her room, with Luca following her. Just when Luca was about to walk into the room, she turned around.

“I have to change,” she said shortly, slamming the door in his face.

Luca stared at the door for a moment. He was used to girls practically pulling him through the door and into their rooms. Rejection and door slamming? Not so much.

Arianne rummaged through her bags, looking for a nice top she had brought with her. For some reason, she felt like dressing up a little today. She found a black coloured long-sleeved top that was slightly low cut and had dark purple lace around the edges. She shrugged. Good enough.

She pulled on her blue jeans and combed her hair. She stopped in front of the mirror to put on some mascara and lip gloss. Then she smiled. She was going to knock Luca’s socks off.

When Arianne opened the door, Luca stared at her for a minute, stunned. She looked...amazing. He licked his lips and opened his mouth. “Are you done?” He managed to choke out.

“Yeah,” Arianne said, walking past him, a smirk forming on her face for the look on Luca’s face when he saw her.

The smirk got knocked out of her when he came out wearing loose-fitting dark blue jeans, a plain white long-sleeved shirt and a forest green cashmere sweater. He looked good enough to eat.

Arianne reluctantly dragged her eyes way from him and sat onto the couch next to Jaxon, staring at the telly.

After watching what seemed like countless hours of television she turned to Jaxon.

“What are we doing today?” She asked him.

“Nothing, as far as I know. Is there anything that you want to do?”

“Yeah, there is, actually,” Luca said suddenly. “I want to take Arianne out to have a look around the neighbourhood.”

Ari gritted her teeth. “No, you don’t.”

Luca ignored her and waited patiently for Jaxon’s answer.

“It’s really dangerous out there,” Jaxon said. “You could get mugged or raped or killed or...” he trailed off.

Luca snorted. “I don’t think so. I come here fairly often. It’s quite safe. Besides, it’s two in the afternoon. Muggers, rapists and killers don’t come out at this time of the day.”

Jaxon frowned. “I don’t know...”

Luca grabbed Arianne’s wrist and opened the door, with Arianne protesting hopelessly. “We’ll be back in a few hours,” he called before slamming the door behind them.

9 - Chapter Nine

“Where are you taking me?” Arianne asked him while Luca dragged her along.

“To a park nearby.”

Ari gaped at him. “Why?”

“Well...” He stopped. “Where do you want to go?”

Ari looked at him like he was crazy. “I don’t know. I’ve never been here before.”

“Well then, we’ll just have to make do with the park then, won’t we?”

Ari sighed in frustration but gave in and fell into step beside him. Luca slipped his hand down from her wrist to her hand to lace his fingers with hers. Ari looked down at her hand, and frowned at him. He ignored it and continued walking down the street, swinging their clasped hands back and forth gently.

Luca led her into another street and into an old, abandoned park, with only a set of swings in it.

Ari raised her eyebrows. “Of all the parks you could have taken me to, you chose this one?”

Luca shrugged. “It’s quiet here. Very peaceful.”

He led her to the swings, and letting go of her hand, put both of his own on her waist, one on each side so that he was standing behind her. He sat down on one of the swings, pulling her down with him, and started swinging gently.

Ari laughed in surprise, protesting. “No, don’t! I’m afraid of heights!” she shrieked, but Luca gave her a grin and as they soared higher and higher into the air, Luca’s arms tightened around her so that she wouldn’t fall off. She leaned against his chest, trying to relax and closing her eyes, and at that moment, she felt safe.

Luca Rayners, brother of best friend—ex-best friend?—model student, head prefect, basically every girl’s dream guy...was sharing a swing with her in the park. She was almost dizzy with joy. Or maybe it must be because she was afraid of heights.

Yeah, it must be the heights.

After an immeasurable period of time—at least, that’s what it felt like to Ari—Luca slowed the swing into a stop.

“Do you want something to eat?” He asked her.

She frowned. “Didn’t we just eat breakfast like, four hours ago?”

Luca raised an eyebrow. “No, I ate breakfast four hours ago. You stared at your breakfast four hours ago and tipped it down the sink when you thought no one was watching.”

Ari pursed her lips, annoyed. “And I thought I was being subtle,” she admitted.

Luca smirked. “Oh, you were. I’m just a really observant person.”

Ari rolled her eyes. “I’m never hungry in the mornings.”

“Come on,” Luca said, “let’s go get something to eat. I don’t like anorexic girls.”

Ari shot him a glare. “I am not anorexic,” she declared, giving him the evils.

“Whatever you say,” He said, grinning at her and taking her hand. “Let’s go. I know a nice place somewhere nearby.”

They were walking past a dark alley when suddenly a boy and a girl leapt out behind them and dragged them into the valley. The girl had locked Arianne’s wrists behind her, and had held a knife to her neck.

“Give us your money, or your lady friend here dies,” she hissed to Luca.

“You heard her,” snapped the boy, who was holding Luca in the same position. “Hurry up, we don’t have all day.”

Luca calmly reached up, and twisted the boy’s arm so that the knife was no longer held against his neck, but against the boy’s neck. He was about to land a punch on the boy’s stomach, when he frowned and straightened up. “Colin?” He asked, letting go of the boy’s arm.

The boy—well, Colin—dropped the knife when his eyes’ widened in recognition. “Luca...sir...I’m sorry, I didn’t recognise you. I—I wasn’t thinking...”

Luca’s eyes narrowed. “Damn straight you weren’t thinking,” he growled. “Are you going to let go of my friend?” He asked, nodding his head in Arianne’s direction.

Colin turned to the girl who was still holding Arianne. “Drop her, you twit!” He hissed. He turned to Luca again. “Sir, I...I’m so sorry. Please...please don’t k-kill me.”

Luca regarded him with coldly, his midnight blue eyes piercing. “Right now, I can’t even be bothered to do such a thing. You’re fired. Both of you.”

Colin dropped down to the ground on his knees, tears forming in his eyes. “Please sir, have mercy. I was...I was only following orders...”

Luca raised an eyebrow. “Did I order you to try to mug me and my friend?”

“No...” Colin looked up at him beseechingly. “We were following Dace’s orders.”

Luca's eyes narrowed. "So you follow Dace's orders now, do you?"

Colin began to tremble. "No, sir, no..." he hastened to explain, stumbling over his words. "He threatened to kill us all..."

Luca gritted his teeth. "I should have known. Very well, take a week off work, but before you do that, arrange a meeting with Dace and me...in an hour, right here." He narrowed his eyes. "My orders. I'm assuming that Dace will be standing here in an hour, since you carry out orders so well."

Colin stood up, visibly relieved. "Thank you sir, thank you...I'll do as you say right away. Thank you, thank you..." he turned and hurtled himself out off the alley and down the street.

Luca turned to the girl, who had turned ghostly pale. "Leyla, right?" He asked the girl. She nodded, her face getting more ashen by the second.

"Make sure he does his job, Leyla. Then take a week off work as well," he said. Then he paused. "But if he doesn't get the job done, you're to blame as well." He narrowed his eyes.

Leyla all but curtsied and after gushing her thanks, ran off after Colin.

Luca turned to Arianne, who was staring at him open-mouthed. He smiled weakly and held his hands up in the air. "I promise I won't kill you."

Arianne managed to stop gaping at him like a fish. "Is there anything else you'd like to tell me? You know, other than being the leader of some underground mob?"

"Erm...no?"

"Why...wha—how? How did you manage to form an underground mob when you don't even live here?"

"Well," Luca grinned. "I told you that I came here fairly often, didn't I?"

Arianne shot him a look. "Define 'fairly often'."

Luca bit his lip. "Every day after school, and on weekends?"

"Is that why I never see you at school on Friday after lunch?"

Luca raised an eyebrow. "Well, it's always Maths on Friday afternoons, and I'm good at math, so I can skip it." Then he smirked. "So you look for me every day then? Do you long to see me every Friday afternoon?"

Ari rolled his eyes and gave a frustrated sigh. "I'm hungry," she said, abruptly changing the subject.

Luca chuckled. "Come on then, there's a restaurant around a few streets away."

He led her into a formal-looking restaurant.

“We can’t go in there,” Ari protested. “We don’t have a reservation. Besides, I’m not dressed for it.”

Luca raised an eyebrow. “Me neither, but when you’re Luca Rayners,” he said, wagging his eyebrows at his name, “it doesn’t matter.”

Ari rolled her eyes, but let herself be dragged into the dim-lit restaurant.

“Mr. Rayners!” A waitress appeared instantly. “It’s so nice to have you here at Deliciously Divine again,” she gushed.

“Tell me something, Loraine. Does it matter that we’re underdressed?”

“Of course not,” Loraine said, simpering sweetly. “In fact, Mr. Rayners, I think you’re dressed just fine.”

Arienne stifled a giggle. So much for being subtle, then. Apparently, Luca shared her amusement, and he turned to give her a wink. Then he turned back to Loraine. “And does it matter that we don’t have a reservation?”

“Oh no, Mr. Rayners. You’re welcome here any time.”

Luca smiled. “Good. Table for two, please, Loraine.” He leant close to her, and lowered his voice, as if telling her a secret. “May I request for the corner table?” He asked Loraine.

Loraine looked down at her seating chart. “I’m...I’m sure I can arrange it, Mr. Rayners,” she said. “Please wait for a minute.” She turned and fled to the reception, and after a while, she came back smiling. “This way, please.”

She led them to the corner table of the restaurant, where it was almost empty, except for another couple who seemed like they were more interested in each other’s tonsils than their food.

Luca winked at Loraine and flashed a smile at her. “Thanks, Loraine. I knew you’d manage it.”

Loraine all but melted onto the floor. She handed them their menus before disappearing into the kitchen.

Arienne and Luca were looking through their menus and shooting snarky comments at each other (for example, “you shouldn’t eat the boiled squid, because you’re not supposed to eat your own kind.”) when they heard a pompous man arguing at the front desk.

“What do you mean, my table has been taken?” He was bellowing. “Do you know who I am?”

“Yes, of course, Mr. Garrett,” Loraine was gushing. I’m terribly sorry; it’s just that Mr. Rayners turned up suddenly, and he requested that—”

“Mr. Rayners? You mean that insufferable boy? You let that boy take my seat? I demand to see him now!”

Arienne raised her eyebrows and frowned in worry as Loraine was walking towards them. “Who’s Mr. Garrett? Should we move?”

Luca waved away her suggestion. “He’s just the boss of this really big bank...The Garrett Brothers? I’ve met him once or twice. Not a very nice guy.”

Ari’s eyes widened. “You took away the boss of The Garrett Brothers’ table?”

Luca smirked. “I can do even better,” he said as Loraine came to stand at their table.

“Mr. Rayners, I’m sorry, but Mr. Garrett wishes to speak to you.”

Luca raised his eyebrows at Loraine. “I’m sorry, Loraine. I’m on a date, a date which I will not ruin just to bicker with Mr. Garrett. In fact, he is disturbing us and your other customers. I suggest that you remove him from this restaurant before he attracts any bad attention and gives Deliciously Divine a bad reputation.” He smiled sympathetically. “You wouldn’t want that now, would you? It would be horrible if that happened, a lot of people would stop coming,” he said smoothly, his tone suggesting that he would be one of those people.

Loraine opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again. Luca grinned. She knew it was no use arguing with Luca Rayners. There was no point. He always won. Always. “I’m sorry to interrupt your meal, Mr. Rayners,” she said.

Luca nodded his head graciously, and Loraine took it as her cue to leave.

Ari stared at him, her eyes wide. “You ordered her to send away the boss of The Garrett Brothers?”

Luca smirked and was about to say something, but he was interrupted by an outraged squawk.

“Are you sending me away? You fool! I’ll have you fired like a sack of potatoes!”

Ari stifled giggles. “Poor Loraine.”

Luca grinned. “You mean poor me.”

“What do you mean, poor you?”

Luca raised an eyebrow. “Guess who’s going to come to have a little tête-à-tête with me in two minutes along with his favourite pals Body Odour and Stinky Breath.”

Ari collapsed into another fit of giggles.

“I demand to talk that boy right now! Right now!” Mr. Garrett was screaming.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Garrett, but—”

"You useless fool! Get out of my way," he fumed, pushing Loraine away and heading towards Luca and Ari. Luca grinned and shot Ari a look that said I-told-you-so.

Ari bit her lip. "You'll be fine, right?" She asked him. "We won't get into trouble?"

Luca grinned. "Of course I'm going to be fine. In fact, this is going to be fun. Don't worry about it."

Ari was about to say something along the lines of "I really don't think so" when Mr. Garrett stomped over to their table.

"Rayners," he fumed. "What are you doing at my table?"

"Bertie!" Luca grinned cheerfully. "How nice to see you again. How are you doing these days? Still having fun sucking the money out of people?"

"Rayners, I'm not in the mood. I want an answer."

Luca continued to smile cheerfully at him. "So we're skipping pleasantries now, are we? I had no idea we were that close, Bertie. I'm glad."

"It's Mr. Garrett, if you please," Garrett fumed.

"Ah, but you see, Bertie, the thing is...well, I don't please. In fact, the only person I do please is myself, which I believe I'm going so right now. I mean, I'm certainly having fun. Aren't you?"

Ari tried not to laugh out loud as smoke practically poured out of Garrett's ears.

"Rayners, I have a very important lunch date with a very important client."

"Well, Bertie, what a coincidence. I have a lunch date, too."

"Go sit somewhere else, Rayners. I reserved this table."

"Go sit somewhere else, Bertie. I came here first."

Garrett's eyes narrowed. "Rayners, my client is coming in five minutes. I can't afford to lose this deal."
"Huh, but you can afford everything else."

Ari tried to muffle her giggles, but Garrett heard and he whipped around and rounded on her. "Listen, dog," he hissed. "This is none of your business. Stay out of the way or you'll regret it, you hear me?"

Ari heard Luca snarl. "Garrett, when you talk to my date, you're to go through me first," he said calmly in an ominous voice. Garrett took a look at Luca and backed off a bit from Ari immediately. Ari looked at Luca and understood why. Luca's midnight blue eyes had darkened so that they had turned almost black, and they sparked. She wouldn't want to have him glare at her now.

Luca leaned in close to Garrett. "Apologise to my friend," he hissed.

Garrett puffed up and stood next to Ari. "I will do no such thing, Rayners. Give me back my table."

Luca seemed to look behind Garrett for a second, but he quickly looked back. He smirked. "Fine. I asked you nicely, but since you wouldn't know manners even if it slapped you in the face, I don't think I have a choice." He looked at Ari. "Are you okay?"

Ari nodded.

"Okay, can you please scream?"

Ari looked at him. "What?"

Luca look slightly irritated. "Ari, scream."

Ari looked at him like he had grown another head, but she obliged.

Luca suddenly sprang to action. He started shouting. "Mr. Garrett? Mr. Garret, stop! Get off her! Stop! Somebody help me get this paedophile off of my girlfriend!"

Quick as a flash, Garrett backed away from Ari, his face darkening to a deep beetroot red as Loraine and other waiters came to Luca's rescue.

Luca smirked, and nodded his head in the direction of the door. "Garrett, I believe that your client is suddenly leaving in a hurry?"

Garrett looked at his client's quickly retreating back and turned back to Luca in fury. "I'll remember this, Rayners," he hissed.

Luca waved away the threat. "Take a picture, write it down, videotape it, I don't care. Stop interrupting my meal."

Garrett cursed the waiters with every name under the sun as they escorted him away. Luca sat calmly down at the table and began to order as if nothing had happened.

"What would you like?" He asked Ari.

"Er...spaghetti bolognese, please," she uttered, naming the first food that popped into her head.

"I'll have the same. Thank you, Loraine." Loraine took their menus and left.

"Firstly, I can't believe you did that to him. Secondly, I'm not your date, nor am I your girlfriend. Thirdly...I can't believe you did that to him!"

"Well, he was being an @\$\$.

"But still, you have to show some kind of respect."

“I show respect to those who deserve my respect. Well, I don’t mean my respect specifically. I mean any kind of respect. If people keep showing him respect even though he doesn’t deserve it, well, he’s going to take it for granted. And right now, he is. So I’m just trying to remind him that he’s human, like the rest of us, and he’ll get our respect when he earns it.”

“Thanks...for helping me just now.” Ari blushed.

Luca grinned. “Don’t worry about it. I quite enjoy being the knight in shining armour saving the damsel in distress.”

Ari rolled her eyes at the cliché just as Loraine set down their food in front of them.

“Do you mind if we eat a little quicker? I have to meet Dace in half an hour.” Luca looked at her apologetically. “You don’t have to come, but I just want to make sure you’re going to be okay.” He smirked. “Besides, someone’s got to make sure you stop laughing at bosses of important companies, right?”

Ari glared mockingly at him before grinning and eating a mouthful of spaghetti. “I’ll come with you. We’ll be okay, right? I mean, we’re not going to get hurt or anything, right? I don’t know why, but Dace seems...dangerous.”

Luca smiled reassuringly at her. “I’m not going to let him hurt you,” he said, sounding less sure than he had when she asked him about Garrett.

Ari also noticed he didn’t say anything for his own safety, but she didn’t ask. She had a feeling that the more she got to know Luca, the more dangerous she realised he was—which sadly, didn’t make him any less unattractive.

She turned her attention back to Luca, who was looking at her apologetically again. “I’m sorry,” he said. “This wasn’t the ideal first date I had in mind for us.”

Ari raised her eyebrows at the word date, but she didn’t comment on it. “Well, think of it this way. At least I’m not going to forget it in a hurry.” She looked at him. “I’m curious, though. What was the ideal first date you had in mind for us?”

Luca grinned. “I thought you’d never ask.” He ate another mouthful of spaghetti, as if thinking it over. Which he wasn’t, because he’d been thinking—and dreaming—about it a lot. Which of course, he wasn’t going to admit any time soon.

“Well, I guess it would be something like this one. I would have taken you to the park, and then to this restaurant. I don’t think nearly getting mugged and getting into a fight with Garrett would be on the schedule, though. Then I would have brought you to some typical romantic yet sappy place people go on dates.” He raised an eyebrow and smirked at the word sappy. “For example, the beach. There are very few people there at night, which is surprising, because it really is beautiful then. We could do that after I take care of Dace, if you want.”

Ari blushed and concentrated on her lunch. “What do you mean by taking care of Dace?” She asked,

trying to change the subject.

Luca didn't answer her at first, twirling spaghetti around his fork. "I don't know. It depends."

Ari's mind flashed back to the moment when Colin had recognised Luca. "Please...please don't k-kill me," the boy had begged him, terrified. Ari shuddered at the realisation of how easily Luca could kill her right now if he wanted to.

Luca, sensing her discomfort, reached across the table and lifted her chin gently. "Arianne, I'm not going to hurt you. And I'm not going to let anybody else hurt you, either. I can swear on my life on that. But I understand it if you're afraid of me. If you want, I can take you home, and I'll leave. You'll never have to talk to me again." His voice was genuine.

Ari looked up from her food and found herself lost once more in his midnight blue eyes, his gaze as sincere as his tone. "No, I'm fine," she found herself saying. "I'm coming with you."

Luca smiled and leaned back against his seat. "Then we better finish our lunch."

They ate in silence, and after Luca paid the bill, they headed towards the alley.

Luca stopped suddenly about a street away from the alley, looking worried.

Ari looked at him. "Are you okay?" Luca nodded wordlessly, still standing there. "Luca, you'll be okay, right?"

"You're going to be okay." Luca grinned at her, but Ari noticed something different in his smile. It was tensed up. She also noticed that he had once more neglected to say anything for his own safety. "Let's go," she said, taking his hand. "We'll be late."

Luca looked down at their clasped hands, surprised, but he didn't pull away.

Out of the corner of her eye, Ari saw Luca smile softly down at her.

A quick, sweet, gentle, blink-and-you'll-miss-it smile.

A smile that he hadn't intended on letting her see, but she saw it anyway.

She pretended that she hadn't.

10 - Chapter Ten

Just before they went into the alley, Luca let go of Ari's hand and stopped her. "Let me go in first," he said quietly. "Only come in when I say you can, okay?"

Ari nodded silently, feeling scared and hopeless. Why did he have to let go of her hand? She was feeling more vulnerable than ever. Luca smiled reassuringly at her, and after hesitating for a bit, leaned in to kiss her forehead. "You're going to be fine," he promised.

"But are you?" Ari thought. She nodded and Luca smiled at her once more before turning to step into the alley.

"Dace," she heard him say, his tone icy and bitter.

"Luca, you wanted to see me?" A deeper voice.

"Yes, I did, actually. I hope you don't mind me bringing a friend along."

The other voice hesitated before saying that he didn't.

"Ariane, you can come in now," Luca said, his voice softer and gentler, so much more different than when he was talking to Dace.

Ari stepped in uncertainly and put her hand in Luca's offered one. She looked at the only other person in the alley. A boy around the age of nineteen looked mockingly back at her. He was very well built, but not too stocky. He was tall, but not as tall as Luca.

The tension in the alley was almost tangible.

Then Dace snorted. "A girl? You brought a girl?" He smirked. "Well, at least she's pretty."

Ari heard Luca snarl softly. "She happened to be with me when the accident happened," he said calmly, slightly emphasising on the word "accident". He narrowed his eyes. "Let's settle this. I don't have all day." He closed the distance between him and Dace in three long-legged strides and leaned in towards Dace so that they were face to face.

"I call the shots around here," he growled quietly. "And if you don't like it, you can leave. I'm willing to put this all behind me and forget about it, but if under any circumstances do I see you trying to give orders instead of taking them without my permission again, then getting fired is the last thing you should be worrying about. Are we clear?"

Dace tensed up, clenching his hands into tight fists, and slipping slightly into a crouch.

Ari stood at the opening of the alley, looking at the two boys. Dace, with his well built body, was

obviously menacing, but Luca, in his tall and somewhat lean and lanky form was intimidating in a deep, dark, dangerous way. Ari gulped inwardly. Right now, she felt short and totally powerless.

“Are we clear?” Luca repeated his question a bit more forcefully.

Then suddenly, Dace grinned. “Crystal,” he said. “I’m sorry, Luca.” Then he turned to Ari. “And I’m sorry you had to see this...Arianne, right?” he asked, flashing her a smile.

“It’s—I...um, don’t worry about it.”

Luca however, seemed to tense up even more. “Dace, when you speak to my date, you’re to go through me first.”

The exact words he had said to Garrett, Ari noticed. Why?

Dace grinned. He was pushing Luca’s buttons on purpose, Ari knew. Luca squared his jaw, and his fists tightened slightly, but Ari placed her hand on his tensed up arm.

“Let’s go,” she said softly. “He’s not worth it.”

Luca relaxed eventually and straightened up. “I’m not going to be here for the next few weeks or so,” he said. “I want you and Chris to work together to take my place.” He narrowed his eyes. “Consider this as probation.”

Dace nodded and left through the other side of the alley. Luca was walking out of the alley when suddenly he sat down on the floor and put his head in his hands, groaning in pain.

“Luca? Are you okay? Luca?” Ari knelt in front of him. “Luca?”

He looked up at her. “Pain,” he managed to whisper. “Headache. Wait. Will...stop...in a few...minutes.” So she waited next to him until the pain subsided. At one point, Luca was in such agony that silent tears ran down his face and when Ari took his hand, he squeezed it so hard till it hurt.

After what seemed like hours later, Luca relaxed completely and leant back with his head against the wall. “Thanks,” he said.

Ari reached over and brushed away the tears that were resting on his cheeks. “Are you okay? What was that?”

Luca had closed his eyes. He was focusing on breathing straight as Ari’s cool fingers brushed away the tears on his hot cheeks. “Uh...what?”

“What was that headache about? Did you catch a cold?”

“I don’t think so...I get it every once in a while, I think it’s because...well, you know how I told you I was half dragon? Well, I think that dragon part of me is finally maturing or trying to become a more dominant part of me or something like that and my brain is trying to fight it. But that’s just one theory.”

Ari grinned. "That means I'm going to be getting a hell lot more headaches than you are. I'm part human, werewolf and witch, right?" She withdrew her hand from Luca's face. "Can you walk?"

"Yeah." Luca stood up and brushed away the dirt from his jeans. "Let's go to the beach." He took Ari's hand and they headed out of the alley.

They twisted their way across the city until Ari had no idea where they were and how they were supposed to get back to Kieran's flat.

"Uh...Luca? Where are you taking me?"

Luca grinned. "To a faraway place where nobody can hear your hopeless screams and your pathetic attempts to fend me off while I rob and rape you before I kill you." He leered at her and waggled his eyebrows.

Ari didn't know whether to believe him or not. He was that good an actor. She wrinkled her nose and tried pull away from him, but he suddenly grabbed her and sprinted down the streets with her in his arms, laughing.

Ari shrieked at the suddenness of it and clung to him tightly; closing her eyes and burying her head against his neck until she felt him slow down.

"We're here." He gently untangled her arms from his neck and set her down on the sand.

Ari exhaled. "Wow...uh...that was some ride." She looked at Luca, who was grinning. He wasn't even out of breath.

Luca took her hand and pointed out to the beach with his other hand. "I told you it was beautiful here, especially during the sunset. Come on, let's take a walk around, and then head back."

11 - Chapter Eleven

The word worried was an enormous understatement to what Kieran and Jaxon were when Luca and Ari got back.

“WHERE THE HELL HAVE YOU BEEN?” Kieran was yelling.

“DIDN'T IT EVEN OCCUR FOR YOU TO CALL?” Jaxon was shouting. “HOW HARD IS IT FOR YOU TO PICK UP THE PHONE AND DIAL?”

“Relax,” Luca soothed. “I told you I knew this town well, didn't I? She was in safe hands, and look, I got her back in one piece.”

“YOU COULD HAVE STILL CALLED! DO YOU KNOW HOW FREAKING WORRIED WE WERE? YOU COULD HAVE BEEN MUGGED, OR RAPED, OR ROBBED, OR KILLED, OR...HARMED IN ANY OTHER WAY!” Kieran paused. “Did I mention you could have gotten raped?”

Luca winced. “Can you stop shouting? You're hurting my ears. Besides, I'm pretty sure the chances of me getting raped is pretty slim. And as for getting robbed or mugged, I don't think we'll be having any trouble like that for a while.” He exchanged a look with Ari.

“I'm not sure I even want to know what that means,” Kieran said, groaning and collapsing onto the sofa.

“You are grounded. Both of you. And no, I don't care if you don't actually live with us, Luca. Now eat your dinner—that is, if you haven't already had it—and go into your room, and stay there.” Jaxon slammed the door to his room.

Ari looked at Jaxon's door, her mouth open. She turned to Kieran, confused. “Why is he so worried about it?”

“Because you could have been taken by Elli—that man and he could have killed you! We thought we'd lost your forever! And Luca, what the hell are we supposed to tell your parents if that happened? ‘Oh, I'm sorry, but he took off with our daughter and we think he's been killed. If it helps, we think that's what happened to our daughter as well?!’” Kieran walked over to Ari and gave her a hug. “Jaxon's just really stressed right now. So am I, actually. So don't pull any stunts until all this is over, okay?”

Ari sighed. “Okay. I'm sorry. We just...lost track of time.” She pulled away and frowned. “Did you just call me your daughter?”

Kieran bit his lip. “That's what you are to me, and that's what you are to Jaxon.”

Ari snorted. “Do you know how impossibly ridiculous you'd look? Two nineteen year olds showing up and saying exactly what you just said to a bunch of forty year olds.”

Kieran sighed. "It's not even funny, Ari. Promise me this won't happen again."

"I promise."

"And you, Luca?"

Luca raised an eyebrow. "I promise."

"Good. Have you two had dinner?"

"No."

Kieran handed them pieces of toast smothered with baked beans. "Now go into your room, and stay there. Maybe you guys should start packing. We're leaving tomorrow." Kieran smiled ruefully at them before disappearing into Jaxon's room.

Fifteen minutes later, and Ari and Luca were in their room, Luca tickling Ari, grinning as she burst out into fits of laughter.

"Stop, don't, stop, please," she begged him through tears of laughter.

Luca grinned. "Beg."

"I'm begging, I'm begging. Please, stop." She rolled onto her side, hunched up, trying to escape from his fingers. He stopped tickling her for a moment, and she turned onto her back. He was suddenly leaning over her, his face only inches away from hers.

"Give me a good reason why I should stop," he said in a low voice.

"Because..." Ari trailed off, desperately avoiding his gaze. "Because we should be packing." She tried to inch herself out from under him, but his hand wrapped around her waist stopped her. "Let go of me," she breathed.

Luca leaned in even closer. "And why should I do that?" he whispered, grinning, his breath hot on her lips. "I'm extremely comfortable."

Ari smirked. "Let's hold this a position for a few more minutes and hear you say that again." She slapped the hand that was resting on her waist and pushed him away. "Go away. I have to pack."

Luca was staring at his hand. "Did you just hit me?"

She rolled her eyes. "No, I didn't, you were hallucinating." She turned away from him and started taking out her clothes and folding them into neat piles. Luca appeared at her side wordlessly and started helping her.

“You know how to fold clothes?” Ari asked him, amazed.

Luca cocked an eyebrow. “I’m a boy, not a racoon.”

“Exactly. Boys don’t know how to fold clothes.”

“Well, you’re obviously wrong, aren’t you?” He didn’t tell her that he was the one that had to do the house chores when he was at home, and he knew everything from folding clothes to washing dishes to mopping the floor.

They finished packing in less than an hour, since they didn’t have that much belongings. “Well,” Ari breathed out a sigh of relief and collapsing onto the bed. “That’s finally done.”

Luca grinned. “Great. Now we can move on to other things.”

She sat up, frowning. “What other things?” she had barely got the words out of her mouth when he suddenly leapt onto the bed on top of her.

“What do you think?” He grinned.

She sat up. “Why are boys such...perverts?” she snapped.

Luca smiled lazily. “There’s a difference between being a pervert and being passionate.”

“Well, personally, I can’t see the difference.”

“That’s because you don’t try to. If you paid more attention, you’d see the difference. You’d see that I’m not a pervert.”

“How is it any of my business?”

“I want it to be your business,” Luca told her, leaning down close to her, and heat crept up to her cheeks. “I want you to care.”

Ari, with her back to the wall, looked at him and held his gaze. Just this once, she wasn’t going to surrender. She wasn’t going to lose track of herself. She wasn’t going to be hypnotised by those beautiful blue eyes. At least, she hoped not.

Luca tilted his head so that their lips were almost touching. Then after wavering for a moment, still holding her gaze, he gently pressed his lips against hers.

Heat burst through her, as she tried to keep herself controlled, but she could feel herself slipping away. Her breathing became erratic and she gasped for air, breathing against his lips, which stretched into a smile. He pulled away. “Was that...okay?” he asked hesitantly.

“Yes,” she breathed. “Yes, it was. Come back here.” Luca chuckled as Arienne pulled him closer, and

he kissed her gently, with her head back against the wall. His lips lightly brushed hers, and he didn't move. Arianne leant forward impatiently, and Luca laughed.

"Haven't you heard of taking it slow before?" he asked her.

"I really don't think that's an option for me now that you've done that," she breathed again.

He grinned. "As much as I'd like to uh, take it further along, I think you should calm down before you have an asthma attack." He kissed her lightly on the cheek. "I'm going to brush my teeth."

"But I'm not even asthmatic," she called after him, and he replied with one of his half smiles before disappearing out of the room.

How irritating was that? She sighed in frustration and followed him into the bathroom to brush her teeth and wash her face.

"Jax?" Ari crept into Jaxon's room. "I'm sorry."

Jaxon was reading, and when he saw Ari, he put his book down and hugged her. "Promise me you won't do that ever again," he said to her after pulling away.

"I promise."

"God, we were so worried. We thought you'd been taken by...that man again."

"I'm sorry. We just lost track of time."

"You have to be careful of things like time, especially when it doesn't matter in your case anymore."

Ari didn't really know what he meant, but she nodded anyway. "Goodnight, Jax."

"Sweet dreams." She left his room after he kissed her forehead.

When she returned to her room, she found—to her horror or delight, she didn't know which—that Luca was shirtless.

"Where's your shirt?" she asked him, dragging her eyes reluctantly away from his body. The room suddenly felt too small.

"I only packed enough shirts to last me for two or three days. It's now, what, the fifth day? I've just washed them, and they'll have dried by tomorrow. But for now..."

"Oh."

He smirked. "Why, does the fact that I'm shirtless excite you?"

Arienne snorted. “Bother me, yes; make me uncomfortable, yes; excite me, hm, let me think. Uh, No.” Or maybe yes, she added silently. She turned away from him. “Is it me, or is it getting hotter in here?” she thought to herself.

“Turn around,” she commanded. “I have to change.”

“You tell me to turn around, and then you tell me have to change? Now I’m never going to turn around.”

Arienne pursed her lips and playfully thwacked him on the head. He ducked, grinning and grabbed her from behind, making her shriek and collapse into giggles.

He dropped her onto the bed. “Go on, then. Change.” He turned around. “I won’t peek. I promise. Scout’s honour.”

Arienne wrinkled her nose. “You were a scout?”

“No.”

Arienne grinned before undressing and pulling on a t-shirt of Ki’s that was way too big for her and came down to just above her knees. She loved that shirt. It smelled like Ki and she’d make him wear it after he washed it so it’d always smell like him. And he looked funny and very gay wearing a tight shirt.

“Done?” Luca asked her, turning around.

“Hey, I didn’t say I was done,” she protested.

“But you are.”

“But...oh shut up.” Her eyes widened as Luca stripped down to his boxers. “What the hell are you doing?”

Luca raised an eyebrow. “I usually sleep like this. Besides, it’s not like you have pyjamas for me to wear, do you?”

Arienne dragged her gaze away. The room had suddenly risen a few degrees above the normal temperature. “You can’t wear that,” she mumbled. “I’m going to ask Kieran to get you something.” She rushed out of her room.

She came back with a pair of cotton sweat pants and flung them at Luca. “Wear this,” she said, still not looking at him.

“What, you’re just going to not look at me until I wear these?”

“Yep.” She turned off the light in the room, causing Luca to yelp and stumble around the room, and climbed into the bed.

After a minute or two, she felt him crawl into bed beside her. “Damn, it is dark in here,” he complained. “I nearly walked straight into a wall.”

She snorted. “Too bad you didn’t.”

“Oh, you wouldn’t want that.”

“Why not?”

“Because if I did, I wouldn’t be able to do this.” He kissed a line down her throat and back up to her ear. She shivered, making him chuckle.

She pushed him away. “Not here.”

“Why not?”

“Because Ki and Jax are going to check up on us and if they find us...you know...we’ll get into trouble.”

Right on cue, the bedroom door opened and Kieran walked in. “Kids?”

“Yes?” Ari asked him, shooting Luca a look that said I told you so.

“I would say that it’s time for bed, but you guys are already in bed.” He gave her a hug and kissed her forehead. “Goodnight, Ari.”

“Goodnight, Ki.”

Kieran nodded awkwardly at Luca. “Goodnight.”

“Night.”

Kieran paused. “You don’t need a hug, right?”

“Please no.”

“Thank God.” Kieran left after giving Ari another quick kiss.

“See?” Arianne said as soon as their door was closed. “I told you.”

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” Luca muttered, pulling her close to him.

She muffled a shriek. “Stop that,” she said, putting on a stern face but breaking into a smile despite herself. He was so gorgeous. And he liked her. Her. I mean, he was two, almost three years older than her, and there were truckloads of beautiful girls fawning over him, but she was the one he went after.

Which really wasn't fair. To the girls, or her. It wasn't fair for the girls because they were trying their very best, sidling up to his side and linking his arms with theirs, wearing their shortest skirts possible, and slathering on makeup as if their lives depended on it. It wasn't fair for her because she was supposed to hate him, and he was dissolving that hate into...well, something else. Which really wasn't fair, because she had been building up that hate for a long, long time, and he was making that disappear in less than a month.

"What are you thinking?" he murmured.

"A lot of things."

"About?"

She shrugged. "Mostly you," she said, smiling a smile she never knew she could smile.

He grinned right back at her. "Really. All good things, I hope." He slid his arms around her.

Her eyes widened when he bent down to kiss her collarbone. "No, no," she breathed. "Bad things. Definitely bad things."

His grin got bigger. "Even better."

She rolled her eyes, laughing as he pulled her in for a kiss.