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WHEN THE HUNTED BECOME THE HUNTERS

Honors Thesis

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in English**

In the College of Arts and Sciences
at Salem State University

By

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Contextual Information

This story was heavily influenced by three particular authors and their works. Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series got me into writing in the first place, but also provided one of the major ideas I wanted to change about vampires. I liked how the vampires in her stories had a more human side to them with their personalities. However, I did not want the vampires in my story to sparkle in the sun like they do in her books. I wanted to bring in some of the more "traditional" vampire traits, like those in *Dracula* by Bram Stoker. While my vampires do have more emotions, they do drink blood and have a more vicious side to them (i.e., they will kill if necessary or for fun). A heavy influence on how I created my characters came from Cassandra Clare's novels, specifically her *The Mortal Instruments* series. Her characters were relatable while still having a slight disconnect, since they were mostly in the realm of the supernatural.

Process Information

The main goal was to create a story that combined different aspects of vampires to create a new version that appealed to the young adult readers. I wanted the writing itself to flow easily and mimic how people actually talk so that anyone that read this would, hopefully, be able to relate to at least one of them. I started the process by writing a majority of the rough draft over the summer. My idea was to have as much done of it as possible so that I could focus my time during the semester on revisions. Once I met with my advisor Kevin Carey, we settled on having ten to twelve pages (which ended up being around one chapter) done every other week. I would send my draft to him by the end of the week before a scheduled meeting so that he could comment on it beforehand.

Towards the end of our time together, we began to have our meetings online (i.e., Carey would send me his comments and tell me to email back if I had any questions). I spent a lot of time revising what I had already written to slow down the pace and explain certain things more (like the setting and the relationships between the characters). Carey and I had many talks about how best to go about making what I had better. I tried to take all of his comments into consideration while creating my revisions.

Acknowledgements

I want to say a huge thank you to my advisor, Kevin Carey. Without you, and your Craft of Fiction course, this story would not exist. You have motivated me to make this the best I possibly can and I am beyond appreciative of that.

Thank you also to all of the other teachers and professors I have had. All of you inspired me in different ways to follow my dreams and to never give up. I am so extremely thankful for everything that you have done to help me during my schooling and in life in general. Teachers do not get enough credit and I hope that changes because you all definitely deserve all the credit in the world.

Thank you to all of my friends for keeping me sane and for telling me that I actually can write on the days I felt like I could not. You guys are always there for me no matter what and I am incredibly thankful for that.

An especially large thank you goes to Andrew (he knows who he is). Without you, the cover for the chap book would most likely have been a lot plainer than it is now. Thank you also for being my go-to betta reader and for not holding back when you have comments. I really do appreciate it all.

And lastly, the biggest thank you goes to my mom and dad. You guys never let me give up and you always pushed me to do what I love. You were also there for all the tears when I hated everything I wrote or procrastinated way too much. Without you, I would not be where I am today and I cannot thank you enough for all you have done.

“All the stories are true.”
~ Cassandra Clare, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* ~

Chapter 1

Let me introduce myself. My name’s Riley Johnston, but people tend to call me Ri. I’m currently twenty years old and a junior at SU (Southbrooke University) in Southbrooke, Massachusetts. I like to read, listen to music, sing, write, hang out with my friends, and that’s pretty much it. I know that probably sounds boring, but it works for me. Let’s see, what else is there to tell you? My favorite color is purple, I like dogs and cats, I’m an English major, and am an only child. Mostly I just hang out with my best friend, Zoe Gardner. She came to town for college and we had a few classes together first semester. Neither of us was sure about the other at first, but our Shakespeare professor paired us together for an assignment and we just clicked. Since then, we try to hang out at least once a week and give each other a break from school.

Zoe and I were walking around the mall in town after classes let out for the day. There wasn’t that large of a selection of stores, but the quality of the products was the best I’ve ever seen...which isn’t really saying much, since I don’t get out of town often. There was a food court with a bunch of fast food places (McDonald’s and Chick-fil-A were the main attractions), along with a sushi place that I could never remember the name for, Orange Leaf FroYo, and Twisty Pretzels. Around the mall, there were a bunch of clothing stores: JC Penny, Marshals, Victoria Secret, Pink, and Forever 21. We also had Sephora, MAC Cosmetics, and Famous Footwear. There was also a store in the back corner that I never really saw people go into that has blackout curtains over the windows.

This mall was the only place the kids could go to get away from their parents for a few hours, so it was especially packed today since school had just let out.

Southbrooke has always been sort of quiet. Not many people know it even exists so we don't get many visitors and anyone around my age can't wait to get out. The biggest thing in town, the university, has a few classroom buildings, two dorms, and is filled mainly with people from our town, along with a select few outsiders. The closest movie theater is in the next town over and there's a small park by the elementary school. My parents' house is close to the edge of town, but the amount of times I was forced to go to "town events" as a child made it seem like I didn't live fifteen minutes away from the center. The town hosted an annual Fourth of July barbeque, a Thanksgiving Day football game, Christmas Yankee Swaps, and anniversary celebrations every five or ten years. Everyone knows everyone around here, which is both a blessing and a curse. When something goes wrong, everyone is there to help, but if you slip up, everyone knows about it.

"I can't believe you didn't tell me," Zoe said, taking the last bite of her frozen yogurt.

We were sitting at one of the tables in the food court and I had subtly mentioned that I had been talking to someone, not expecting her to make a big deal out of it.

"I didn't think it was that important. Besides, we're not serious at all; just friends."

"Not important? Ri, you're insane."

"How am I insane?" I asked, turning to cast a quizzical glance at Zoe after I threw my cup out.

“You thought that you talking to a guy that you obviously like isn’t important,” she answered, glaring at me as we started walking back into the main part of the mall.

“Damn, okay, sorry. Didn’t think you’d get this invested after one mention of it.”

That made her stop short and I rolled my eyes before gently pulling her out of the way of the group of guys in football jerseys behind us. I smiled as they passed by before my attention was caught by a guy walking into the store with the blackout curtains. I didn’t recognize him, but there had just been a group of people who moved here from overseas, or at least that’s what people around town were saying. They weren’t that different from everyone else, but they definitely created a buzz since people aren’t exactly lining up to come here. They mostly kept to themselves, taking over an abandoned hotel on the outskirts of town and remodeling it seemingly in the span of a week. When they did venture into town, I could always see people trying their best to stay away from them. They were new, and new always scared everyone in town. All of them I had seen looked no different than anyone else, so I didn’t see what the big fuss was.

Zoe pulled on my arm and my eyes flicked up to see what store we had stopped in front of. I internally groaned before letting her lead me in. This was one of the few clothing stores I never went to, mainly because it was girly and expensive. They had a lot of frilly shirts and dresses and there were a lot of pastels with only a few splashes of darker colors. However, I knew Zoe liked it and I hoped distracting her with clothes would deter her from asking too many more questions.

“You’re my best friend. It’s my job to get invested in these things.”

“I know and I would’ve told you when I thought it was important.”

I held back a laugh as she glared at me before looking through the closest rack of clothes. Even though Zoe and I hadn't been friends for that long, we knew almost everything there was to know about each other. We always joked about how we were definitely sisters in another lifetime. We weren't completely polar opposites, but we were different enough that we balanced each other out. She had short black hair, brown eyes, was almost always wearing at least one form of makeup, and tended to go for the more girly things (i.e., the stuff with frills on it, or that was pink or another pastel color). I, on the other hand, had long blonde hair, blue eyes, only wore makeup when Zoe made me, and would much rather be in jeans and a t-shirt.

"This would look cute on you," she said, holding a shirt out to me. "And I'm sure your guy would love to see you in it."

She had actually picked out something that I didn't hate: long-sleeved, off the shoulder, black with purple lace on the edges.

"Does this mean –"

"That this conversation is over? Not a chance, but it can be put on pause while you go try that on."

Why'd I think it'd be that easy? I asked myself before heading back to the fitting rooms. As I was looking down at the tag to make sure it was the right size, I didn't realize there was a girl walking out of the room closest to me. I registered that fact too late and slammed into her, making both of us drop what we were holding.

"Oh my God, I am so sorry." I crouched down to pick up both my shirt and her clothes. "That was totally my fault, I'm so oblivious sometimes. Are you okay?"

When the girl didn't respond, I looked up and saw her glaring down at me. I straightened up and held out her clothes. She reached out slowly before snatching her things back. Before she stormed away, I caught her shoot a death glare my way. Someone's pissy today, I thought to myself, shaking my head and continuing to walk towards an open stall. As I turned to walk in, I caught the girl talking to Zoe and, from what I could tell, it looked like it was about something pretty serious.

I made a mental note to talk to her about it later before closing the door and hanging the shirt up. I quickly changed into it and was surprised at how good it looked.

A knock on the door made me jump. "You good in there?"

"Damn it, Zoe. Don't do that," I said, opening the door.

"Sorry, but you look absolutely gorgeous!"

"Thank you." I turned around to look in the mirror again and smiled.

"You still have the jeggings and heels from my birthday?"

"Of course I do. Pretty sure you wouldn't have let me get rid of them even if I wanted to."

"Not wrong, but if you are going to wear this top with anything, it has to be those."

"Noted," I laughed, turning back around to face her. "So, now what do you wanna do?"

"Well, I'm buying that shirt for you and then we're continuing the conversation from before."

I was about to argue, but she simply held up a hand and I sighed, closing the door and changing back into my original shirt. When I walked back into the main part of the

store, I saw Zoe looking at a rack of dresses and heavily debated going back to hide in the dressing room. She knows I don't like wearing dresses, but that never stops her from trying to get me to try multiple on whenever she finds them.

“Find something you like?” I asked as I came to a stop next to her.

“Yes, actually,” she said, holding up a sparkly red dress. “You okay if I go try this on?”

“Go for it,” I said, holding back a sigh of relief until she was out of earshot.

When I saw her close the door, I took the opportunity to actually look around the store. It hadn't changed since the last time I was here and still didn't have a lot of things that were close to my style. A section off to the side that had a bunch of sweatshirts caught my attention and I walked over to see if I could find something. I was humming along to the music, so I didn't even notice that someone had come up behind me until they spoke.

“Be careful. They're watching you.”

I whipped my head around and came face to face with a guy. He had a hoodie on so I wasn't able to see much of his face, but he was much taller than me and had a very muscular build.

“What are you talking about? Who are you?”

“Doesn't matter. There are people watching you. Be careful and don't trust anyone.”

I opened my mouth to say something, but he was already walking away. “What the actual hell just happened?” I whispered to myself, as I watched him walk out of the store.

“What’re you talking about?”

I jumped and had to stop myself from punching Zoe. “Don’t sneak up on me like that.”

“I didn’t sneak up on you. Are you okay?”

I looked back at the door before shaking my head. “I’m fine. Just some guy trying to prank me, I guess. You like the dress?”

“Nah, didn’t look good on me.”

“Everything looks good on you, Z.”

She laughed and held her hand out for the shirt. I gave it to her and let her lead the way back to the front of the store. As she talked to the cashier behind the counter (who I’m pretty sure was in at least one of my classes), I couldn’t help but think about what that guy had said. Who’s watching me? And why would anyone care about me? I took a deep breath before smiling at the cashier and following Zoe out of the store.

“You sure you’re okay? What’d that guy say to you?”

“That there’s someone watching me and I should be careful.”

“You have any idea what he was talking about?”

I looked over at her to find her staring straight ahead. “No idea. Do you?”

“Not a clue.”

“You sure about that?”

That comment made her look at me. “Of course I am. Why? Do you think I know something?”

“I mean I saw you talking to a girl I literally ran into on my way to the dressing rooms.”

I could've sworn I saw a look of panic cross her face before she laughed. "I think you're imagining things, Riley. Now, I didn't forget about that conversation from before. I have questions about your guy."

She linked our arms together as we continued to walk around the mall. I was still confused as to why she would lie to me about talking to that girl, and what that guy said would definitely keep me up tonight.

After what felt like hours, we finally left the mall. The sun had already started to set and everything had an orangey-red tint to it. Times like this were one of my favorite things about living here. The sunsets were always magnificent and there were never tall buildings to hide it.

"Back to the dorm now?" I asked, turning to look at Zoe.

She nodded her head and we started walking in the direction of the campus. Since the town was small, it was easy to walk pretty much anywhere. It might just be because I grew up here, but I didn't mind all the walking. Gave me time to enjoy the nice weather and we didn't have to deal with a lot of traffic.

"So, when am I gonna get to meet this guy of yours?"

"You'll meet him eventually," I responded, rolling my eyes. "He's from that group that just moved into town."

"I better; he has to get the best friend talk. Those guys are weird though."

"Not Christian, he's different. Like he genuinely cares about what I talk about and wants to listen to my stupid rants."

"Aww, look at you. I can practically see the heart eyes."

We both laughed and continued walking until Zoe's phone dinged. She stopped walking to look at the text, smirking before sending a quick response back.

"Well," she started, turning to look at me. "I gotta get going."

"Who is it this time?"

"Someone new," she replied, winking before giving me a hug. "You good to walk back yourself?"

"Yeah, I'll be good."

"Okay, text me when you get there."

"Same to you."

She saluted before turning around and walking back the way we had come. After a few moments, I started walking again, smiling at the few people I passed. I had grown used to walking places by myself, so this didn't bother me at all. It gave me time to think about the things I still needed to do for the week...and more about what that guy had said to me.

After a few minutes of walking, I reached an alley between the pharmacy and one of the two actual restaurants we had. There were no people around, so it was quiet enough that I heard a muffled scream. I jumped and came to a stop before turning to try to see if I could make anything out. From where I was standing, it was hard to see anything too far ahead other than a dumpster. I had just about convinced myself I was hearing things when I heard what sounded like a bottle being smashed against the brick wall.

I'm so gonna regret this, I thought before I took a few steps forward. "Is anyone there?"

I heard a soft, "Help," followed by a shadow slumping to the ground. I gasped, putting a hand over my mouth after I realized what I had done. Two of the other shadows in front of me moved and I took a few steps back...right into someone. I was about to scream when a guy put a hand over my mouth and wrapped his arm around my waist, holding me tightly to him. As the shadows moved closer to us, the copper smell of blood filled the space in front of me. I tried to squirm away, but his grip on me tightened.

"You're not getting away that easily," he snarled in my ear, causing me to flinch.

"Well, well. What do we have here?" one of the other guys said, stopping a few steps in front of us. He had blonde hair, blue eyes, and was covered in tattoos.

The guy holding me took his hand away from my mouth. "Don't scream or you'll regret it."

I took a very shaky breath. "What did you do?"

"She got in our way so we killed her," the third guy said, leaning against the wall. This one stayed in the shadows, so I couldn't see his hair or his face very well, but I could make out piercing green eyes.

"What do you want from me?"

"Well," the blonde-haired guy started, closing the distance between us. "You do know what we did and what we look like. Can't have you running around town."

"I won't tell, I swear. Just please let me go."

All three guys laughed. "Do you believe her, Jared?" Green-Eyes asked.

"Not in the least. What about you, Brian?" the guy holding me said.

"Can't say I do," Blond-Hair responded, reaching into his pocket.

"Is no one gonna ask me what I think?"

All three guys turned to look behind me. The guy holding me basically dragged me with him as he slowly turned around.

“Let the girl go,” a voice said from the entrance to the alley.

“And if we don’t?” Green-Eyes asked, moving to stand next to me.

“You don’t wanna know.”

This new guy had been standing in the shadow of the buildings, but now took a step forward. It took a few moments for my eyes to adjust, but, when they did, I gasped, recognizing him as the guy from the store. He looked up at the sound and made eye contact with me. Looking away and towards the guy that had me, I saw his eyes turn red. The next few seconds felt like they went by in slow motion. The guy moved forward until he was directly in front of me. I watched as he lifted his hand to grab the guy’s arm, dragging it away from me and twisting. I heard a single crack and a cry of pain before he was pushed away from me. I was snapped back to reality by the new guy putting his hands on my shoulders.

“I’m gonna need you to go wait on the sidewalk where you can’t see anything going on here,” he said, never once breaking eye contact with me.

I nodded my head quickly, in a very large hurry to get away from these guys, and ran out of the alley. I stopped by the door to the pharmacy and crouched down, trying to catch my breath. My mind was spinning and I had so many questions.

A pair of shoes came to a stop in front of me and I jumped back.

“Hey, it’s okay. It’s just me.”

Looking up, I saw concerned blue eyes looking down at me. I couldn't help but think they looked really familiar, but I didn't have the mental capacity to focus on that.

The guy knelt down so that he was at eye level with me before speaking again.

“Are you okay?”

“What do you think?” I blurted out.

He let out a soft laugh. “Right, stupid question. Let me rephrase: are you physically okay? Did they hurt you?”

I shook my head. “I don't think so.”

“Good. You think you can stand up?”

I nodded and used the wall to push myself up. “Who are you?”

“Christian Peters.”

“Do I know you?”

Christian smirked. “How'd that test go yesterday?”

My eyes widened. “Wait...you're the Christian? The one I've been talking to?”

“Nice to meet you in person, Ri. Even though I wish it was under different circumstances.”

“Same here. Speaking of, what did you do to those guys?”

“You don't want to know.”

My breath caught in my throat. “Are they dead?” When he just looked at me, I took a deep breath before asking a different question. “Why were your eyes red?”

“What?”

“Why were your eyes red?”

“They weren't.”

“Yeah they were. Just before you broke that guy’s arm.”

He took a step towards me before speaking again. “My eyes are blue. They were never red.”

I was silent for a moment before breaking eye contact with him. “I saw them; they were red.”

When I looked back at him, he wore an expression of pure confusion. Suddenly, he raised his hands, placing one on my shoulder and the other on the wall by my head. I looked up at him and finally registered how close we were. Before I could say anything, he spoke again.

“You will forget what happened here.”

“What? No. How could I forget what just happened?”

“How is this not working on you?”

“What?”

“You’re a human. My compulsion should be working...” Christian finally backed away and pulled the hood on his sweatshirt down to run his hand through his brown hair.

“Compulsion? Are you on something? Did you get hit too hard by those guys?”

He let out a bark of laughter. “They didn’t even land one punch and no, I’m not ‘on something.’”

“There has to be something wrong with you then. How did you even know where to find me? Were you following me?”

“Could you please calm down so I can think?”

“You want me to calm down? After all of that just happened? Seriously?”

“I need to figure out what to do, so if you could please stop talking for a minute—”

“Just tell me what’s going on and maybe I can he—”

“You can’t help with this because you’re a human.”

“And you’re not?”

“No, actually, I’m not.”

Chapter 2

“What do you mean?”

“I’m a vampire.”

“Ha ha, very funny. Vampires don’t really exist. They’re fictional. I should know; I’ve read all the books with vampires in them that the library has.”

When he turned back around to face me, I saw that his expression had grown serious. “I’m not joking, Riley.”

I started to laugh, anxiety and pure confusion overwhelming me. As I was about to tell this guy how insane he sounded, a car screeched by, distracting me. When I looked back at him, his eyes were red again. He opened his mouth slightly and I could see fangs.

“No, no way. Those are fake. It’s easy to buy vampire costumes and contacts.”

“They’re not fake,” he said, eyes changing back to blue.

“Wh...”

“Please don’t scream,” Christian said, closing his eyes. “I don’t think I have the energy in me to deal with that right...”

He started to slump forward. Instinct kicking in, I moved to catch him before he could fall and half dragged him back towards the alley. When we were far enough in I was sure no one would see, I helped him sit down.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, kneeling down next to him.

“Haven’t eaten in a bit,” he mumbled, not looking at me.

“You need blood.” When I saw him nod his head slightly, I looked around to try to find one of the guys from before. Not finding anything, I turned back to look at him.

“Can you feed on me?”

“Shouldn’t…”

“Why not?”

“Might not be able to stop.”

“But you technically can feed on me?”

“Yes.”

So many thoughts were swirling through my head: No way should I help this guy; this dude just saved my life; I don’t even know him that well; he seems decent; he still thinks he’s a vampire; I won’t get any answers out of him if he dies. That last thought was the one to make my decision for me. “Damn it,” I mumbled, rolling up my right shirt sleeve.

“No…”

“You need blood and there’s nothing else around here that has blood in it. I owe you for saving my life anyways.”

He looked up at me and I could tell he was conflicted. Taking a deep breath, I simply nodded my head and held my arm out towards him. His eyes flicked down and, when he looked back at me, they were red. He slowly moved his hands up to hold my arm steady. I looked away, not wanting to see what was about to happen. I let out a hiss of pain as he bit down and had to force myself not to rip my arm away. The more he

drank, the more light headed I started to feel. The last thing I remembered was seeing my blood around Christian's mouth before I blacked out.

"I can't believe you brought a human here."

"We have humans around here all the time."

"Yeah, but they're blood bags and they know about us."

I could feel myself starting to come to. Two voices cut through the fog I was still in and I tried to focus on them as best as I could.

"She knows about me. She helped me."

"And that's supposed to magically make this okay?"

I could tell one of the voices was Christian's, but the other one didn't sound familiar.

"I'm the head of this clan and I say she stays here as long as she wants to."

"When this royally blows up, and it will, it's all on you."

A door slammed and there was a long sigh before footsteps coming towards me. I felt someone brush hair out of my face before moving to take my hand.

"What am I going to do with you?" I heard Christian mumble, giving my hand a light squeeze before letting go.

When I heard the door close again, I very slowly opened my eyes, squinting against the bright lights. I'm definitely not at home, I thought to myself as my eyes adjusted. The ceiling was white and the walls were an off-white color. There was a faint beeping coming from somewhere close to me. Hospital? As I took a deep breath, I noticed that there wasn't the disinfectant smell that was typical of doctor's offices and

hospitals. I also couldn't hear the normal squeaking of wheels and shoes in the hallway. Okay, so not a hospital.

A pain in my right arm distracted me. I looked down, taking a moment to register the fact that there was a needle connected to a tinted tube. Why do I have an IV? I followed the tube up until it connected with the bag, realizing that the tube wasn't really tinted at all. Why is it red? Is that...blood? My eyes flew open and everything that had happened came rushing back. I sat bolt upright in the bed, the faint beeping from before increasing as my heart rate skyrocketed. The door slammed open and I whipped my head towards the sound.

“What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“Does it look like I’m fucking okay?! Where the fuck am I?! How did I get here?! How long have I been out?!”

“Riley, please calm down.”

“Not until you start answering my questions!”

“I can’t answer them if you keep screaming at me,” Christian said, coming to a stop at the foot of the bed.

I glared at him, taking a deep breath to calm down. Once the beeping slowed, he moved to sit in a chair on my left. Looking behind him, I saw a few paintings of flowers in vases on the wall. There was also a table next to the bed with a folder, notepad, and pens on it.

“Alright, what’s your first question?”

“How long have I been out?”

“About a day.”

“Where am I?”

“The clan house.”

“The clan?” I looked down and saw the white sheets typical of hospital rooms, but with a really soft purple blanket on top.

“I wasn’t lying when I said I was a vampire.”

I scooted back to lean against the wall, careful not to move my arm too much.

“Still finding that really hard to believe.”

“Even after I fed on you?” Christian asked, leaning back and crossing his arms, a small smirk plastered on his face.

“All of that is kinda fuzzy right now and I was more focused on what had happened before.”

“Fair,” he said, laughing softly. “How about now?”

I felt a slight breeze and jumped when he held out a bottle of water. “How did...”

“Like I said, vampire.”

I looked up at him before slowly reaching out to take the water. I took a drink as he sat back down, not taking my eyes off of him.

“What happened? Why am I here?”

Christian hesitated before responding. “When I met you, I had been on a trip for a few days. I brought blood bags with me, but ran out a day before. I stopped myself from drinking from those guys that threatened you.” He paused, tightly clenching his hands into fists. “Really wish I didn’t,” he growled before looking back at me. “Then you let me feed on you and I got carried away. I didn’t want to take you to the hospital; they would

ask too many questions. Figured the next best option was to bring you back here where we're very well equipped to deal with situations like this."

"Is that because you use humans as blood bags?" I asked, putting the bottle on the table and drawing my knees up to my chest.

I saw Christian tense up. "Where did you hear that?"

"You and someone were talking about it like five minutes ago."

"You heard that conversation?" When I nodded my head, he sighed before leaning forward, his elbows on his knees and his hands clasped on the edge of the bed.

"I'm sorry you heard that."

I shrugged. "That doesn't answer my question though."

The ghost of a smile appeared on his face, but quickly faded. "Yes, us being prepared for this is because we use humans as blood bags."

"Is that why you said I could stay as long as I wanted to? Because you wanna use me as a blood bag?"

Before I had finished my question, Christian was already shaking his head. "No, I said that because I want it to be your decision. You can either stay or go on your own terms. Any of the humans here were given the choice to become a...blood bag, or to leave. No one is forced to be here."

"What would you do if I said I wanted to leave?" I asked, turning my head to look at him.

"We'd have to wipe your memory of us, but after that, you'd be free to go if that was what you really wanted."

“Why would you have to wipe my memory? It’s not like anyone would believe me if I told them you were a vampire.”

Christian let out a soft laugh. “True, but it’s protocol.”

I was silent for a minute, letting everything sink in. As much as I didn’t want to believe that Christian, and apparently a lot of the others here, were vampires, I had seen some pretty convincing evidence in the past...however long it had been. “If I do decide to stay,” I started slowly, not looking over at him. “What would happen?”

“You’d be informed of the rules every human who knows of us has to follow. We’d get you your own room, in case you ever wanted to stay here. You’d have the full protection of the clan. You would, in essence, be signing up to be a blood bag, but I’d make sure you were my personal one. I would be the only one that could feed on you and we’d set up a schedule for that.”

“What are the rules?”

“Keep the drinking and doing drugs to a minimum, if you choose to do either. Don’t leave town without telling us so we can make other arrangements. Stick to the schedule we set up. Follow the rules. Lastly, even though we do allow you go about your life as normal, do not, under any circumstances, tell anyone about us. While you do have our protection, we are not responsible for the town if word of our existence reaches dangerous ears.”

I nodded my head slightly before taking a deep breath. As much as this all seemed crazy, I was somehow leaning towards saying yes to him. It might have been because I was hyped up on pain meds or the fact that I still didn’t have the normal level of blood back in my system. Whatever the reason, my mind kept going back to thinking about how

he saved me. He also had made it clear that I actually had a choice on the matter, and I knew he wouldn't keep me here against my will if I wanted to back out at some point.

“Is there any way we could make a trial run?” I asked quietly.

“What do you mean?”

“I'll follow the rules and you can...feed on me. But I don't fully commit until I can see how this process will work.”

He was silent for a minute and I was just about to tell him to forget it when he spoke up. “If that's what you want, then yes. We can make a 'trial run' for a few weeks so you can see how everything works here. Then you can decide.”

After Christian got the doctor to check to see if I was all good to go, he took me on a tour of the house. There were wood floors and the walls were light-blue painted brick. We passed by a few portraits of old and young men, and a few women scattered throughout, and other paintings that had a lot of red in them. Christian explained the portraits were of past leaders of the clan and the other paintings were “historical moments,” which just looked like battle scenes when I actually looked at them. There were a lot of guys in old-school armor with swords and some others that looked more recent with men in “ordinary” clothes (i.e., shirts, pants, shoes) with crossbows. He took me to see the common area, which was huge. There was what looked like a really fluffy carpet by the couch in front of the television, which looked like a movie theater screen. There was a pool table and a foosball table off to the left and a bar on the right that took up the whole wall.

I also got to see the kitchen, which actually had a lot of stuff for humans. Christian mentioned that they had a human cook so the vamps didn't have to worry about learning what humans can and can't eat, unless they wanted to. There were a few windows scattered here and there throughout the hallways, but the curtains were drawn. The only room that had a full glass wall also happened to be where the pool was. I was more mesmerized by the view than the room itself; it overlooked the whole town and I could just imagine how beautiful it looked at night.

Eventually we passed by a hallway that looked different than the rest. The wood floor was the same, but the walls were unpainted brick. What caught my eyes was the intricately carved door at the end.

“What's down there?” I asked, coming to a stop by the entrance to the hallway.

“The elders' office. Don't go there unless you're called.”

“Why not?”

“They might not be there.”

I turned to look at Christian and saw a blank expression on his face. I didn't believe for one second that what he said was the answer, but he started walking again before I could ask about it. Taking one last look down the hallway, I hurried to catch up with him.

After a few more minutes of walking, we reached a set of double doors. He stopped in front of them and turned to face me.

“And this is my room. You'll be here a lot during this trial run and you'll have to sleep here if you stay the night. Since you haven't fully decided if you want to be a part of this yet, you won't have your own room.”

I nodded my head and watched as he opened one of the doors, stepping aside to let me walk in. My eyes were immediately drawn to the window, which provided the main source of light. The wooden floors continued into the room, but the walls weren't brick and were painted a really pretty teal color. There was a black couch in front of a TV, much smaller than the one from the common area. A few different bookcases were scattered around the room, some of them filled with books and the others with CDs. As I walked further into the room, I noticed there was another room off to the left, separated from this one by a sliding door.

“What's in there?” I asked, turning to look at him.

“Go look.”

Curious, I walked over and slid the door open. I was greeted by the sight of a large bed with a black comforter placed neatly on top and teal rugs on either side. There was a nightstand on the right with a lamp and a few books on it. A mini-fridge occupied the back left corner and there was another doorway I could see led to the bathroom.

“This place is amazing,” I said, walking back out into the main area.

“Thanks. It took a little bit to remodel, but I like how it turned out.”

I nodded my head and made my way over to one of the book-filled bookcases. “There's so many of my favorites,” I mumbled, tracing a finger along the bindings. Smiling, I turned around to find Christian leaning against the doorframe, arms crossed and a smile on his face. “What're you smiling about?”

Laughing, he replied, “Just watching you,” before shutting the door and walking over to the window. “So, I'm assuming you probably have a few questions.”

“I definitely do,” I said, making my way over to the couch and sitting down.

“About this whole situation and vampires in general.”

“Ask away.”

“How do you know about me? Why did you decide to come to Southbrooke? How long are you going to be staying? How long does it take for the humans’ blood to replenish after you’ve fed? How long have vampires existed? How can you be out in the day? Doesn’t the sun burn vampires? Do wooden stakes work? Can you eat actual food? Do you have special powers? How do you become a vampire?”

“Okay, slow down Riley. One question at a time please.”

“Fine,” I said, moving so that I was sitting cross legged. “How do you know about me?”

“We have been tracking hunters, the people that want to kill vampires, and saw that you were on their list of humans to target.”

“Why are they targeting humans if they want vampires?”

“From what I can tell, they think it’s an easy way to get to us. If they’re killing humans, it’s going to draw our attention and we’ll come out of hiding. What they don’t realize is that we’ve figured that out and have found ways to warn those people, like I did with you. Or there’s the other option of killing humans a vamp is close with to send them on a revenge hunt. Hunters will kill them easily that way.”

“Why am I on that list though?”

“We looked into you and don’t know the answer yet, but we figured you must be important if they’re coming after you. Hence why I wanted to get close to you and why I warned you in the store.”

“So you were talking to me to get close to me so that you could protect me?”

He was silent for a moment. “When you put it that way, it sounds bad. Yes, I wanted to get close to you so I could protect you, but I also really like talking to you. Guess it’s a combination of both of those things.”

I smiled before clearing my throat. “Why did you decide to come to Southbrooke? Was it just because of me or was it something else?”

“That’s technically two questions,” he started, raising an eyebrow as he turned his head to look at me. When I glared at him, he laughed before saying, “But I guess I’ll make an exception. It wasn’t originally about you. We needed a place to go that we thought the hunters wouldn’t suspect so we could regroup. It’s worked so far, but I’m not holding my breath, especially with you being on their list.”

“So how long are you going to be staying?”

“As long as we think it’s safe,” he said, turning back to look out the window.

“How long does it take for the humans’ blood to replenish after you’ve fed?”

“That depends on the human and how much the vampire has drunk. With you, I drank too much so you had to have a transfusion. Sometimes we only need a little and it normally doesn’t take too long for the humans to be back on their feet. They’re mostly just groggy for a few days, but we try our best to not have to overfeed.”

“How long have vampires existed?”

“I’d guess since the beginning of time. It was probably easier for them to hide back then than it is now with all the vampire books out there.”

“Hey, some of those vampire books are really good.”

“Of course you’d think that.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Nothing,” he said, smiling and shaking his head a little. “Next question.”

“Doesn’t the sun burn vampires?”

“Technically, yes it does.”

“Then how can you be in the sun?”

“All of us here, and a few of the other clans out there, got witches to protect us.

Don’t ask me to go into detail about that because I have no idea what was involved other than a spell and pieces of jewelry. All I know is that, as long as we’re wearing those things,” he held up his right hand to show me the ring on his ring finger, “we can go out in the sun and not worry about it.”

“Do wooden stakes work?”

“Yes.”

“Can you eat actual food?”

“Yes, but we do have to drink blood to survive.”

“Do you have any special powers?”

“Compulsion and mind reading. Both only work if we’re touching the person though.”

“How do you become a vampire?”

“You have to die with vampire blood or venom from a bite in your system. And before you ask, a neck snap is the quickest and easiest way. The transition is only completed if you feed on human blood from an actual, live human, though. We call the vamps that haven’t completed the transition unborns. They have the healing capacity and some of the strength of vampires, but none of the weaknesses yet.”

“What happens if you don’t feed?” I asked, pretty sure I already knew the answer, but still a little anxious to hear Christian say it.

“Unless you can get the vampire blood or venom out, you’re most likely only going to have about a week to live.”

“Are there ways to do that?”

“There are, but they’re also not the most comfortable for the human.”

“Oh.” I shivered at the implication behind that statement, drawing Christian’s attention. He walked over and kneeled down in front of me, taking my hands.

“I promise I will do my very best to protect you and make sure that does not happen. Even if you don’t say yes to our agreement at the end of these next few weeks.”

I smiled at him before a realization dawned on me. “How long did you say I was out?”

“About a day, why?”

“Where’s my phone?”

I could tell he was confused, but I felt a breeze again before he was handing me my phone a few seconds later. I took it from him, hoping someone had charged it. It came on when I turned it on and I was immediately bombarded with what seemed like a thousand messages from Zoe. “Shit,” I mumbled, opening the phone and scrolling through them.

“What’s wrong?”

“My best friend, Zoe. Didn’t tell her I got back to my dorm safely, because it never happened, and then I didn’t respond for a whole day. Do you mind if I give her a call?”

“Go for it. I’m gonna go brief the rest of the clan. Stay here and I’ll be back soon.”

I nodded my head and watched as he walked out the door before pulling up Zoe’s contact. Taking a deep breath, I clicked on her number and leaned back on the couch, mentally preparing myself for the rant I knew I was going to get.

Chapter 3

4 months later – Present Day

“Come on, Ri.”

“You know I hate dresses, Z.”

“But that one is so pretty! Please just let me see. Please, please, please, please, please—”

“Fine! Fine, okay. Give me a minute.”

I heard her squeal and shook my head before zipping the dress the rest of the way up. Zoe had texted me after class and told me that she, “had something for me to wear the next time we went out.” I should’ve figured it would be something like this, but I guess I still had hope that she’d stop trying to get me in dresses.

Once I got it fully zipped, I turned around to look in the mirror. The dress was red and stopped just above the knees. It had a cinched waist and tank-top sleeves. As I resituated the left sleeve, I caught a glimpse of the punctured skin on my shoulder. I ran my finger over the marks, the past few months running through my mind.

After the “trial run” with Christian had ended, I did agree to stick around for the long term. It wasn’t really the whole “being a vampire’s blood bag” thing that drew me

in. I had stayed at the clan house Friday afternoon to Monday morning that week and got to see how they got along. Everyone seemed really close and acted like a very large, kind of dysfunctional family. Almost everyone welcomed me right away, especially Lucas Beckett. He was one of the newest vampires and very eccentric, automatically nominating himself my “UVB, Unofficial Vampire Bestie.”

A loud knock on the door startled me back to the present. I took a deep breath before replacing the sleeve, thankful that it covered the bite marks. Smoothing out the dress, I took one last look in the mirror before opening the door.

“Happy?”

“Oh! My! God! You look amazing!”

Laughing, I twirled around. “Yeah, I know I do.”

“Damn, force a girl into a really pretty dress and she magically starts to think she’s hot shit,” Zoe said, bumping my arm as she walked into my dorm room.

“I would say that it’s all your fault because you’re just really good at picking out clothes, but I don’t think you need more of an ego boost.”

“True, but I’m still gonna take it as an ego boosting compliment.”

I laughed, shaking my head before closing the door and walking over to lean against my desk. “So, is there a reason why you brought me this dress?”

“You remember the text I sent you, right?” she asked, sitting on the edge of my bed.

“Yeah, but what does that...” I trailed off as the realization dawned on me. “No.”

“You don’t even know what I was going to say.”

“You said that you got this for me to wear the next time we go out. You have something planned, most likely for tonight, and were somehow going to end up guilt tripping me into agreeing to go.”

Zoe was silent for a few moments. “Okay, maybe.”

“We’ve been best friends for the past two years. I should think I know you enough to know when you have a devious plan in place.”

“I don’t think the plan is devious, Ri. But fine, yes I do have a plan to take you out tonight. You need to have fun and celebrate.”

“I can do both when finals week is over,” I replied, letting out a shaky laugh.

“Come on, Riley. It’s Saturday and you don’t have any homework to do. Please come out with me.”

I groaned, thankful when my phone buzzed. Picking it up, I saw a text from Christian that simply said: “Go out tonight.”

“Did you talk to Christian?”

“Mayyybbbeeee.”

“I knew it was a bad idea telling you about him,” I mumbled, earning a pillow to the face.

Riley: So Zoe already got to you

Christian: Lol yeah she did, but it’s not a bad idea. You need the time to let go and have some fun

Riley: 2 against 1 I guess lol

Cristian: I mean...I guess lol. Don’t consider this a request, more like a favor to me. It’s your birthday, go have fun

Riley: What about the whole not drinking thing?

Christian: The rule says not drinking too much too often, which I know you won't do.

Now go

“You two working together is insanely annoying,” I said, looking up at Zoe.

“But effective.”

I hesitated for a minute before sighing. “Yes, it's very effective and I hate you both for it.”

“No you don't,” she said, jumping up. “It'll be so much fun and we'll get to have a girls' night and celebrate your birthday and you joining the world of being 21.”

“Zoe, breathe.”

She took a deep breath and I laughed. Zoe had turned 21 about a month ago and never let me forget that I was younger than her. She had consistently been more excited about my birthday than I ever was. It wouldn't shock me at this point if she had planned a whole surprise party for me, most likely with Christian's help.

The first few weeks after the agreement were difficult. I had to get used to the schedule and the whole feeding thing in general. There was a lot of trial and error when it came to finding places on my body Christian could feed from. We had settled on a few options, but the one on my shoulder was the one he used the most since it was the easiest to hide. It also took a least a month to figure out a way to incorporate all of that into my everyday life. After talking with Christian, we figured that the best option would be to keep things going as they did before. He and I would keep talking like we did before, which provided me with an excuse for why I was with him a lot. So far, it had worked

out, other than the fact that Zoe refused to stop teasing me about it, and I hadn't told her anything about the more unusual parts of our relationship.

“Speaking of Christian, how're things going with him?” Zoe asked, winking at me.

Rolling my eyes, I stood up to go look in the mirror. “Things are going good.”

“He's being good, right? I don't have to kill him?”

I caught a glimpse of Zoe's face in the mirror when she said that. For a brief moment, I could've sworn I saw a surprisingly intense look on her face. There was legitimate concern, mixed with real anger. The moment passed as she caught my eye and stuck her tongue out at me.

“Why would you have to kill him?”

“If he did something to hurt you. You're my bestie, I gotta look out for you.”

If you only knew, I thought to myself. “No, he hasn't done anything to hurt me, but you'll be the first to know if he does.”

“Good. Now, how about we finish getting ready so we can have some fun?”

“Why did I agree to this again?”

We were currently standing in line to get into the club. Zoe had picked out some black booties that had a small heel and a zipper on the side for me to wear, thankfully remembering I didn't like wearing heels. She had picked out leather pants, a loose white top with long sleeves and a deep V-neck, and thigh-high boots. We both had our hair up in ponytails and simple makeup (mascara, blush, and bright red lipstick).

“Because you love me and want to have fun.”

I groaned before following Zoe up to the bouncer and showing him my ID. He wished me a happy birthday before letting us in. As soon as the door opened, I was hit with the pounding sound of the bass. I hesitated, but she turned around and grabbed my hand, pulling me along with her. Once we got in, she found a relatively non-crowded corner of the dance floor and stopped.

“I want you having fun tonight! No thinking about finals or school!”

“Kinda hard to not do that when I have –”

“No! No school talk! Dance!”

She started dancing and I had to laugh at how excited she was. After a few minutes, and a lot of glares from Zoe, I started dancing too. As the time went by, I loosened up and actually started to have fun.

After what felt like hours, Zoe finally let me take a break. We both walked over to the bar and took a seat on the end by the door.

“You having fun?” Zoe asked, motioning for the bartender.

“Yeah I actually am.”

“Told you this would be worth it,” she said, smirking at me.

“Yeah, yeah.”

She hit my shoulder and we both laughed before the bartender came over. We ordered our drinks and turned around to watch people dance.

After what felt like ten hours later, we both finally left the club.

“You going back to the dorm or to Christian’s house?” Zoe asked, linking our arms together as she stumbled slightly.

“Probably to Christian’s. I think we had planned to hang out this weekend.”

“Might wanna check with him.”

I nodded my head and pulled out my phone, coming to a stop on a street corner by a streetlamp.

Riley: Hey, just checking to see if I’m coming over this weekend

Christian: If you want to, I know you’re with your friend

Riley: She’s actually the one that asked what I was doing. Wanted to check with you

Christian: Come here, I have a hangover cure that works wonders you’re probably gonna need tomorrow

Riley: Lol thank you

Christian: No problem, let me know when you’re here

Riley: Will do, see you soon

“I am going to see Christian,” I said, putting my phone back into my pocket.

“Sounds good. You gotta go that way, right?” Zoe asked, pointing down the road we were standing in front of.

“Yep. You heading back to the dorm?”

“Yes, ya girl needs some sleep.”

“Okay,” I laughed. “Let me know when you get back please.”

“Same to you. Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do.”

“That isn’t a lot of things Z.” She glared at me and I laughed, holding my hands up in mock surrender. “Just stating facts.”

“You’re lucky we’re best friends,” she said, hugging me before starting to walk away. “Have fun with your man friend.”

I laughed before turning to walk in the direction of the clan house. Thankfully, I had the route memorized from the amounts of times I had walked it after class. I pulled my phone out to let Christian know I was on my way. Right after I hit send, I heard a pair of footsteps behind me. I automatically straightened up, staying at the same pace but paying more attention to everything around me. Much to my disappointment, the places I passed were all dark and there weren't any people around. I tried to focus on getting from streetlamp to streetlamp, hoping that staying in even a little bit of light would deter whoever was following me from doing anything.

After a few minutes of walking, I heard the footsteps behind me quicken. I tried to match the pace, but eventually felt a rush of wind before finding myself pinned against the nearest wall.

“Well, well. What do we have here?”

Why do I know that voice? I asked myself, looking up at the person. He was taller than me, but not by much and wasn't that muscular. He had cropped blonde hair and blue eyes.

“Nick?”

“Wait...Riley?”

“What are you doing?” I asked, trying to get away from him.

“Who is this?” I heard another voice say from behind him.

“Christian's blood bag, Riley,” Nick answered.

“Oh, a blood bag. This'll be fun.”

“What's going on?” I asked, pushing against Nick. “Let me go.”

“Now why would we do that?” the other voice asked.

As the person took a few steps forward, I was able to see more. He was basically the exact opposite of Nick: black hair, brown eyes, significantly taller than me, and muscular with tattoos.

“Who are you? Why are you with him?”

“You haven’t heard about me before? Wow, I’m insulted they don’t talk about me.” I could practically feel the sarcasm dripping from every word he said.

“What do you mean?”

“I’m Jake Williams. Former member of Christian’s clan. Left probably a few months before you got there because he’s way too controlling.”

I stopped moving and felt my eyes go wide before I could control it. I had heard that name a few times around the house, but no one had ever actually talked about what he did.

“Oh, so they do talk about me?” Jake said, smirking and moving so that he was standing next to Nick. “Good, I’m glad I made some form of an impact. ‘Bout the only good thing to come from being in the clan.”

“Stop,” I whispered.

“What was that, sweetheart?”

“I said stop. Christian is a great leader and you were just too stubborn to accept that someone other than you was in control.”

Both of the guys laughed and I felt myself shiver.

“It’s always all about Christian and the clan with you blood bags, isn’t it? Does he take away your ability to think for yourselves or something?”

“No, Jake, he doesn’t. We all respect him because —”

“Because he’s a good leader. Yeah, yeah, I hear that on a daily from you guys,” Nick said, letting me go and taking a step back. “Gets annoying.”

“Why are you with him, Nick? What did Christian do to you?”

“He’s overly controlling with all the rules he expects us to follow. Can’t respect a guy that doesn’t trust his vamps.”

I opened my mouth to respond, but closed it and shook my head. “Know what? It’s not even worth it. Christian’s expecting me at the house, so if you don’t want him mad at both of you, I suggest you let me go.”

I started to walk away, but, in what seemed like the blink of an eye, Jake was behind me with one hand around my throat and the other on my waist. My immediate reaction was to start fighting back. I jabbed my elbow back as hard as I could, connecting with Jake’s side. He grunted before laughing and tightening his grip.

“What’re you gonna do? Kill me?” I asked.

“Now, why on earth would we do that? We’re more interested in seeing what happens when we turn you.”

“What?” My breath caught in my throat, both from the massive amount of anxiety I currently felt and the tight grip Jake had on me.

“Christian’s personal blood bag getting turned...yeah, I like the sound of that,” Nick said, making his way to stand in front of me.

“She seems feisty, too. I think I’ll like seeing her as a vamp.”

“She definitely is,” Nick replied. “Might take a little bit to get her to feed on people, but I’m sure we can get there eventually.”

“Can you not talk about me like I’m not right here?” I asked when I could actually breathe again.

“She’s definitely feisty,” Jake laughed.

“Christian –”

“I don’t care about Christian,” Nick said, rolling his sleeve up.

I glared at him, but he simply laughed before bringing his wrist up to his mouth. I saw a flash of his fangs before he bit down. Jake brought his hand from my throat to my mouth, forcing it open. I tried to fight again, but gave up when his hand didn’t budge.

“It’ll be a whole lot easier for you if you just swallow,” Nick said before raising his wrist to my mouth.

I wanted desperately to spit it back in his face, but he placed his other hand over my mouth and nose. Jake tilted my head back until I had no choice but to swallow.

“Good girl,” Nick said before taking a step backwards.

When Jake let go of me, I moved away from both of them. “Fuck you.”

I heard Jake chuckle and looked up to see them whispering about something. I wiped my mouth before slowly moving to get my phone out.

“I wouldn’t do that.”

I froze mid-movement, watching as Jake moved towards me. “Why not? He’s already gonna know something’s up.”

“There’s still one more thing we have to do,” he said, a wicked grin plastered on his face.

“Wh...” I trailed off as I remembered what Christian told me at the beginning of all of this: “You have to die with vampire blood in your system.” I automatically started backing away, but Jake easily kept pace with me.

“You’d make this a whole lot easier if you just cooperated.”

“Why the fuck would I do that?”

Jake tilted his head to the side before smiling. “Good point.” Before I could move, he had his hands on either side of my head. “Sweet dreams,” he snarled before twisting my head very hard and fast to the side.

I heard both of them laughing before everything went dark.

Chapter 4

“Ri? Riley! Oh god, please wake up!”

My eyes slowly started to crack open. When I could finally make out the surroundings, I realized that I was still on the street from earlier.

“Riley?”

Turning my head slightly, I waited until the figure wasn’t blurry before speaking.

“Zoe?”

“Hey, how are you feeling?”

“Like someone just snapped my neck,” I replied, attempting to sit up.

“I don’t think you should be doing that,” she said, putting a hand on my back to steady me.

As soon as she said that, my head started pounding and things started spinning. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath to try to stop it, but was bombarded with everything that had just happened. “He’s going to kill them,” I mumbled.

“Kill who? Ri, do you know who did this to you?”

Damn it. “It’s a very long story that I’d much rather tell you when we’re not sitting outside.”

“Do you think you can stand?”

“Not sure,” I said, letting out a shaky laugh. “What’re you doing here though? I thought you were going back to the dorm.”

“I was, but then one of my friends texted me and asked if I wanted to hang. I was just on my way to her house.”

“Makes sense,” I said, rubbing my neck.

“You wanna try to stand?”

I nodded my head. Zoe got up first and held out a hand, which I gladly took as I slowly started to stand up. When I was vertical, I took a deep breath and attempted to steady myself.

“You good?” she asked, a very concerned expression on her face.

“I think so.”

“Did you drink anything after what we had at the bar?”

“What?”

“Please just answer the question, Riley.”

Confused, but also not wanting her to know about the blood thing, I shook my head. “No, I didn’t.”

Zoe looked relieved when I said that. “Good.”

“What does that have to do with anything?”

She hesitated for a second before saying, “You could’ve been drugged. Just want to cover all the bases.”

“Well, I wasn’t.”

“What did happen?”

“Two guys came out of nowhere and must have knocked me out.” Technically true, just not the whole truth.

“Did they take anything?”

“Not that I know of,” I replied, checking my pockets even though I already knew the answer.

“That’s weird. So two guys attacked you, but didn’t take anything?”

“Yeah.”

“That doesn’t seem weird to you?”

“Yeah, of course it does. I don’t know what happened or why it did, but I kinda just want to get to Christian’s house and sleep.”

“Shit, right, sorry. I’ll walk you.”

“You don’t have –”

“I know, but I’m going to. I wanna make sure you’re safe.”

“Thank you.”

She nodded her head and we were just about to start walking when I heard a male voice say my name. I turned my head slowly, trying not to give myself more of a headache. At first I couldn’t make out much other than the fact that he was tall. When he

got closer, I got to see more of him: tall, muscular, chocolate brown hair, blue eyes, and a very concerned expression on his face.

“Christian? What are you doing here?”

“I could ask you the same question,” he replied, closing the distance between us in a few easy strides. “Hey Zoe. What happened?”

“We had left the club. She was heading to your house and I was going back to the dorm, but I got a text from one of my friends saying she wanted to hang out so I came back and found her on the ground. She said two guys attacked her.”

“Are you okay?” Christian asked me.

I nodded my head. “Two guys came out of nowhere, kinda like they just appeared,” I replied, trying to get him to understand what I was talking about without giving it away in front of Zoe.

“That’s weird.”

“That’s what I said,” Zoe replied, drawing Christian’s attention.

“Great minds think alike,” he joked, placing his hand on her shoulder. “Why don’t you go get Riley some water? Looks like she could use it.”

I watched as Zoe’s expression changed from one of concern to one of compliance. She nodded and shot me a smile before walking away.

When she was out of earshot, Christian came back to stand in front of me. “What happened?”

“Nick showed up, with Jake Williams.”

“Jake’s in town?” he asked, stiffening up.

“Apparently.”

“What did they do to you?”

“Made me drink Nick’s blood then snapped my neck.”

“Shit,” he hissed.

“Yeah. Apparently both of them hate you and think you’re controlling. Guess they thought turning me would get back at you somehow.”

“Well, they’re not wrong.” He turned away from me and ran a hand through his hair. “Did they do anything else to you?”

“No, but I know why you never talk about why Jake isn’t around anymore. I don’t know how he got to Nick though.”

“He’s always been an outsider. Been the one I’ve had to work the hardest on to get to follow the rules.”

I was silent for a minute before whispering, “What’s gonna happen now?”

Christian turned towards me. “We’ll figure this out, but I need to get you back to the house. We shouldn’t be talking about this out in the open anyways.”

“No, you really shouldn’t.”

I jumped at the sound of a female’s voice behind me. Spinning around, my eyes widened at the sight of Zoe standing there with a wooden stake in her hand.

“How did you resist my compulsion?” he asked.

“Vervain. Crazy how a plant can make you resistant to compulsion. Have some in my cup of coffee in the morning every day.”

“What do you think you’re doing?” Christian demanded, moving to step in front of me.

“My job.”

“Wait...you’re a hunter?” I took a small step sideways so I could actually see her.

“Yeah, I am.”

There were so many different emotions fighting for dominance, ranging from confusion to anxiety to anger. Eventually, I ended up spewing all of the questions I was thinking. “Why didn’t you tell me? How could I have been so stupid? Is that why you’ve been weird asking if Christian had hurt me? Were you just using me to get to him?”

“Riley, please. This may have started as a way to get closer to Christian, but our whole friendship wasn’t a lie. I really loved hanging out with you and we got along so much better than I expected. Actually becoming friends with you wasn’t in the game plan, so all of that has been real.”

“How can I believe that now?” I asked, turning away from her.

“I really am sorry, but I have a job to do. I hope you can understand.”

I shook my head and closed my eyes, trying to stop myself from crying. First I get turned and now this happens. Great way to spend my birthday. I felt someone take my hand and opened my eyes to see Christian looking at me. Squeezing his hand briefly, I nodded my head, letting him know that I understood what he had to do. Hunters posed a threat to his family so they had to be dealt with. I knew Christian would never kill a human, so I wasn’t worried about that happening. There may also be a tiny part of me that thought she had whatever happened coming.

“You hunters should know by now what happens when you threaten my clan,” he said, turning his full attention back to Zoe.

“Oh I am, got a taste of it years ago. Shocked you don’t remember me. Shall I refresh your memory?”

I turned around at that to see her walking towards Christian. She caught my eye and I saw a smile start to spread on her face.

“Oh, wait. Riley here doesn’t know that we actually have a history. I think I should enlighten her.”

“Stop,” Christian said.

“What’s she talking about, Christian?” I asked, looking between the both of them.

“I believe it was London,” Zoe started, obviously enjoying what was going on. “We met at the coffee shop by Big Ben. You didn’t figure it out until you had already taken me back to your place. It wasn’t your fault, though; I was pretty convincing in my role as ‘girl who got lost on her way to her friend’s house and just happened to walk into a really hot guy.’” She looked him up and down once. “Apparently wasn’t convincing enough for you to remember my name. It’s actually pretty similar to the one I use now.”

Christian was far enough in front of me that I couldn’t see his face, but I could see him straighten up.

“Zoelle?” he breathed out.

“Bingo. Sure took you long enough.”

I had been looking between the two, trying to figure out why she wanted Christian to remember who she was. The only reasoning I had come up with was that she wanted to get under his skin, and so far it was working.

“I thought you stayed in Europe,” Christian said, taking an almost imperceptible step back.

She let out a bark of laughter. “I did, but then I decided to come back here. The vamps are easier to track down. They don’t tend to hide their tracks as much.”

“How long have you known where we were?”

“Not long actually. Riley was very good at hiding it. Never let me walk her to your house. Never told me where it was so I couldn’t go searching for it on my own. Good job, by the way.”

At this point, she had taken a step to the right and was looking directly at me. I automatically straightened up, trying not to look as scared and anxious as I now felt.

“She’s a pretty good liar, too,” Zoe continued, moving towards me. “Had me convinced for a while that there wasn’t actually anything going on. Then you’ve never wear shirts with spaghetti straps or off-the-shoulder ones. Always had a set schedule when you would tell me you were leaving to hang out with Christian. Sometimes came back to the dorm looking really tired and drained. You’re good, but not good enough to completely fool me.”

Never one to back down, I held my ground as she closed the distance between us. She brought the stake up and grazed the tip across my cheek, causing me to flinch slightly.

Zoe smirked before winking at me and turning to face Christian again. “Anyways, catching up with you has been fun and all, but duty calls. No hard feelings. That goes for you too, Riley. You’re gonna turn into a vamp now, and newborns are the most dangerous, so I gotta take care of you now,” she said, turning her head slightly to look at me.

In a flash, Christian had her pinned against the wall. “You will not lay a hand on her.”

She smirked before replying, “Who said anything about that?”

Moving more quickly than I thought possible for a human, she threw the stake in my direction. At the last second, I shifted so that it hit my arm and not my heart. I let out a pained whine, moving until my back hit the lamppost.

“You’ll pay for that,” I heard Christian growl.

The way he said it made me twist my head to look at him. Sure he had gotten mad at some of the clan members before, but I had never seen him this angry. It was honestly terrifying and I made a mental note to never piss him off if I survived all of this.

“And what are you going to do to me? We all know you wouldn’t kill a human, especially not one that’s friends with your girl,” Zoe sneered.

“We’re not friends anymore,” I said, causing her to look in my direction.

“Fine, but he still won’t kill a human. I know that’s in his moral code,” she replied, chuckling.

“Maybe not, but I can still make sure you’ll regret ever coming back here and hurting Riley.”

In one swift motion, Christian bent Zoe’s throwing arm and even my human hearing picked up on the snap. She almost let out a scream, but he placed his other hand over her mouth.

“You should have never left England,” he growled, grabbing the hair on the top of her head. He pulled her forward slightly before smashing her head into the wall behind her.

I let out a soft whimper, because of both the pain in my arm and what had happened to who I thought was my best friend. Christian automatically turned towards me, the expression on his face changing from one of violent anger to one of unconcealed

concern. He let Zoe slump to the ground as he covered the distance between us in less than a second.

“I’m so sorry you had to get involved in this.”

“You can apologize after we get the stake out of my arm and I stop bleeding.”

“Right. This is going to hurt.”

I just nodded my head and turned away as he pulled the stake out. I held back a scream, biting my bottom lip and involuntarily grabbing onto Christian’s arm.

“Just try to not dig those nails in,” he said, and I could tell there was a smirk plastered on his face.

“Shut up,” I replied through gritted teeth.

He laughed before making sure there weren’t any splinters. When he was satisfied, he leaned back a little before bringing his wrist to his mouth and biting. “Not technically a full vampire yet, so you’ll need my blood to heal that quickly.”

He let me move his wrist to my mouth and drink until I felt better. “Much easier when it’s not getting forced down your throat,” I said, wiping my mouth and giving him a little smile.

“There’s the Riley I’m used to. You think you can stand?”

I nodded my head, taking his hand when he offered it to me and letting him pull me up. I took a minute to stabilize myself before letting go. “What’re we doing with her?” I asked. “It’s not like we can just leave her here.”

“I’ll text one of my guys to come get her. Right now, my focus is on you and getting you home so we can start looking into what options you have.”

As I nodded my head, he took his phone out to send a text to whoever he had in mind. I looked back towards Zoe, still wondering why all of this had happened. The past months had been a whirlwind of emotions, both about Christian and the vamps and school in general, and she had been there for me throughout all of it. I wanted to believe her when she said that our friendship wasn't a lie, but now I was questioning everything she had ever said to me.

“Hey, are you okay?”

I jumped when I felt Christian's hand on my arm. “Sorry, just got lost in thought.”

“I really am sorry this happened. I should've been able to tell something was up.”

Looking up at him, I said, “How? She didn't let anything slip around you. Yeah, she made some comments to me, but I just brushed them off as Zoe being Zoe. Guess I should've taken the hint when I could've.”

“Don't blame yourself. You haven't been around long enough to know that much about hunters.”

“I know, but she is...was my best friend.”

He pulled me into a hug, turning me away from her. I buried my face in his chest and let his slow breathing calm me down.

“Why didn't you tell me about knowing her?” I asked, slightly muffled by his shirt.

“What?” Christian asked, pulling back to look at me.

“Why didn't you tell me that you knew her?”

He hesitated. “The truth? The time that I knew her was a really bad year for me, so I had pushed it to the very back of my mind to try to forget it. I only knew who she was when she told that story. I haven’t been back to England since.”

“What happened?”

Looking around, he took my hand. “I’ll tell you as we walk, okay? I would really like to get you back to the house before people start showing up.”

“Someone’s coming to get Zoe, right?”

He nodded his head. “Got that taken care of. No one will know we were here.”

“Okay,” I said, taking one last look at her before letting Christian lead me away.

“So, when I had gone to England, I went to get away from everything that was happening here. It was shortly after the Jake situation had escalated and I needed to get away. I told the clan I was going there to see if the elders had any advice on what I could do to make us strong enough to fight the hunters. When I got there, I had no intentions of meeting anyone. I wanted to stick to the shadows and just enjoy being in a calmer place.”

“Guess that lasted long,” I mumbled.

Christian laughed. “Yeah, it lasted for a day or two and then I literally ran into Zoelle. Even back then I didn’t know anything was off about her until it was too late. I was staying at a small clan house the regional clan had set up for visiting vampires. We were walking past it and I made the mistake of telling her I was staying there. It went up in flames the next day. I’ve never forgiven myself for that, but it served as a reminder that vampires and hunters can never get along.”

“I’m so sorry.”

“Don’t be. It’s in the past.”

“Guess your past likes to haunt you. First Jake, now Zoe.”

“Yeah, I guess it does. But right now, I’m focused on my present and making sure that you’re safe.”

I smiled up at him and we walked the rest of the way back to the house in a comfortable silence. Once we actually got back, Christian opened the door for me and we started walking back to where his room was. After I had agreed to be his blood bag, he had ordered a room be made up that was next door to his. He created a doorway connecting the two rooms, probably so he could keep an eye on me. We were about halfway down the hallway when a voice called out to Christian.

“Christian! There’s a message for you.”

He held up a finger before turning to look at me. “You okay if I go deal with that?”

Nodding my head, I replied, “Of course. Go be clan leader. I’m gonna head to my room and probably pass out.”

He smiled and gave my hand a quick squeeze before turning and vanishing back down the hallway. My mind was still spinning with everything that had happened, and it honestly felt like that first day again. Only this time I actually knew where everything was. When I got back to my room, I quickly changed into my pajamas and went into the bathroom to try to wash up. Thankfully the makeup came off easily with a makeup wipe and a brush through my hair was all that was needed to take it back to normal. Once I was done, I went back into my room and literally collapsed onto my bed, welcoming the comfort of the sheets, and fell asleep.

Chapter 4.2

“Riley.”

I opened my eyes and found myself on a grassy field. There was a figure standing in front of me, wearing all white.

“Who are you?”

“I am someone that has been watching over you for years. My name does not matter. What does matter is that you are in grave danger.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean what I say. There are some very bad people that are coming after you.”

“Who? Why? What do I have to do with anything?”

“You are more special than anyone knows. You will be the one to unite the two sides and stop the war.”

“War? What war?”

“The one that’s gonna start because of you.”

Turning around, I was met with another figure, this time dressed all in black.

“Who are you?”

“I’m assuming he didn’t tell you what we are, so I guess that’s my job. We’re the two versions of your future. I’m the one where the war happens and he’s the one where it doesn’t.”

“How can I stop it?” I asked, turning back around.

“You must figure that out by yourself, but the choice will be very clear when the time comes.”

“Well, that helps a lot,” I mumbled, causing the figure behind me to laugh.

“Yeah, he likes to be cryptic. Me, on the other hand, I’m bluntly honest. In my version of things, the war happens and you embrace your hidden powers. You’re one of the most feared vampires to ever live and you love every second of it.”

“In my future,” the white figure started. “The war does not occur because you are there to stop it. A choice must be made and you make the right one. Your powers are never used for evil. Instead, you save those closest to you.”

“But, with your power you can save everyone,” the black figure said, taking a step towards me. “Don’t you wanna be able to do that?”

“Of course I do.”

“But stopping a war will save your family, both human and vampire,” the white figure said, following the lead of the other one and taking a step closer to me.

“How will I know what to do?” I asked, fear and anxiety overwhelming me.

“You will when the time comes,” they both said.

“When will that be? How long do I have? Do I need to prepare?”

“Every day you are preparing and the choices you make along the way will lead you down either of our paths.”

“When the time comes, we know you’ll make the right choice.”

“That seriously doesn’t help me at all,” I said, putting my hands over my face.

“Just listen to me,” I heard the black figure say. “We can’t tell you much because we risk messing with Fate if we do. We’re not gonna tell you when or what or why, but you will be the deciding factor. Keep the ones you trust close because those will be the people to help you when you need it the most.”

“Now,” the white figure said, backing away from me. “It is time to wake up.”

Reflection

The main thing that this process taught me was how to be more open when letting people read my work. I tend to be more reserved and guarded with my fiction writing. Receiving the comments that I did from my advisor and working closely with him made me much more comfortable with this. I hope that I contributed a new view of vampires to the world of supernatural writing. Looking back on what I did, if I could change anything I would have changed how much I procrastinated. It would have been more beneficial for me (and those around me) if I had found a better balance between my classes and working on this story. I do plan on continuing (and hopefully completing) this story in the future. I hope that it can give others the idea to try to do something along the same lines with other characters/creatures.

Appendix A

Link to video of reading of first few pages: https://youtu.be/TsAC_rxnOa0