



Bloodcharm Witchlock Series – Book 4 By Cyrese Covelli

FROM THE ANNOYINGLY ANGUISHED MIND OF ASCHER

Top fifteen reasons it sucks to be me:

15. My ex-boyfriend is still lost in the fabric of time
14. The son of the werewolf alpha isn't returning my calls
13. My only magic tutor is a witchy little miss-perfect
12. My best friend is in love with a vampire servant
11. I set things on fire when I'm mad, or scared, or surprised

10. The Council of Magical Beings thinks I'm dangerous
9. So does my sister, and the witches... and the werewolves
8. When the moon is full, I cause explosions
7. I'm the new "it" girl for all things scary
6. My mom has no memory of being a witch
5. My grandma's memory returned just in time to tell me I should never have been born
4. I am mentioned in prophecies-not the huggy-happy kind
3. I owe the Warlock prince big-time... and he wants to collect
2. Everyone and everything odd I come in contact with thinks I'm a freak of preternature
1. Just when I think I'm getting the hang of things, something creepy crawly comes to visit

CHAPTER ONE

ET TU WOLFIE?

* * * *

The stench of burning hair tickled my nostrils. Glaring at the werewolf's half-shifted hand on the small on my wrist, I concentrated on breathing to keep the fire from engulfing him fully. It's not as though I'm any good at controlling my powers. Over two months had passed since my sister and I got bewitched and it just got harder and harder to hide the random scorch marks from my mom.

"Would you just stop pouting for two seconds and listen to me?" The fire flared a brilliant blue, forcing Quillan to let go. I sucked my lower lip into my mouth to keep from smiling at the wary look on his face. Werewolves didn't scare too easily and Quillan was the son of Chicago's Alpha-a leader of the wolf pack. "You are taking this whole thing way out of context."

"What context? Your sister said that I was a dangerous freak and you agreed." Granted, his twin Ruby had said this after I'd set their backyard on fire, but that wasn't the point.

"I didn't agree with her, I just..."

"Agreed not to 'have any interactions with the warlock until such time as she can control her magic.'" I quoted, lowering my voice to sound more like Quillan's father. Quillan's jaw set, the muscles in his neck straining.

"I didn't want you to hear that."

"No kidding. I also heard the part where you agreed to keep tabs on me." Enhanced senses were just one of many fun new tricks I'd discovered during the past full moon. Quillan's bite may not have resulted in sudden-furriness, but it sure packed a smack. "Is that why you've been spending time with me? To score points with your daddy?" I bit down on the inside of my cheek, knowing by the sharp flash in his eyes and the three weeks we'd spent nearly inseparable since the full moon, that I'd hit a sore spot.

"I'm my father's second, I need to do what's best for the pack."

"Well, you have. Who knows what kind of trouble I could have caused if you hadn't been there to keep your lips on me?" Victorious in my spur-of-the-moment sarcasm, I reached chilled hands into my pockets for the warmth provided and the stun-spells hidden there.

"You know that's not why." His voice was choked with roughness and I felt my cheeks color. We'd been seeing each other almost every night for three weeks and in that time I'd grown closer to him than I'd ever been to anyone outside of my family. With my only other experience with a boy, ending in the guy ditching me by fleeing through a mirror and into the fabric of time, I guess I had issues. "I didn't want to do it Ascher."

"Is that it?" I asked, voice weaker than I'd hoped from thoughts of Elliot churning through my head.

"I said I'm sorry." A step backwards and closer to my front door, I felt his hand close around my shoulder. "Get your hand off me, Quillan." His grip tightened making me curl my fingers around the small cotton sachet containing Cyd's illegal potions. He let out a growl so guttural, I froze in place long enough to get me killed if it was another werewolf. His breath hot on my neck earned an involuntary shiver, followed by the low sound of his laugh.

Angry at myself for more than my panic, I kicked backwards, earning a sharp yelp accompanied by some French language my French teacher had yet to include in her lesson plan. Wanting to get away from dog-boy was more important than how childish and scared I looked as my red ballet flats banged against the pavement. Getting the key in the lock proved harder than I'd remembered, and it gave Quillan the seconds he needed to recover. A startled whimper made me turn my head, wary of some ploy of Quillan's to get my attention.

"Ascher?" Anise Curry stood, fingers spelling magic in intricate patterns through the air. Cyd, her younger cousin, less skilled in spell casting, but great at kicking butt had her right leg in the air, bent at an angle beyond me and poised to strike. Quillan growled again. "Are you okay, Asch?" Cyd asked, her eyes not leaving Quillan for a second.

"He didn't hurt me." I said. At least not physically I silently amended.

"We need to talk to Ascher," Anise said. Quillan snapped towards her, immobilized by her magic.

“Ascher and I aren't done!” Cyd made a twirling motion with her index finger and Quillan began to lurch away from the sidewalk, his gait that of Frankenstein's monster. Cyd laughed, a sound like chandelier crystals swaying in the wind. “Asch-errr!”

“Chalcedony Bergamot!” Anise grabbed her younger cousin by the wrist.

“I suppose this is your idea of being diplomatic?” Cyd lifted her shoulders, letting them fall as she turned to wink at me. I smiled.

“He was harassing Ascher.”

“You made your point, Cyd. Now undo it before he walks into oncoming traffic or the lake.” Cyd made the face of a little kid caught playing with something they knew they shouldn't.

“Didn't learn that part, yet.”

“Of course, you didn't. Will you be okay for a skipping the weekly coven meeting, I nodded. I'd determined that spending two Tuesday nights in a row overhearing people talking about how dangerous I was and that my powers should be bound was enough for awhile.

Sure of my compliance, Anise tugged at Cyd's arm, hurrying down the street after Quillan who was peppering the sunset with curses. Sighing, I unlocked the front door, cold fingers of dread choking off my inhalation. It was dark inside; no one had been home since this morning. I didn't expect my older sister Gemma to be here, she'd been taking nightly jogs through downtown Lake Parrish for hours everyday, saying it helped stop her from shape-shifting at random. Thinking she couldn't fool her cat with that excuse, I'd noticed the faint scent of cologne on her wool coat-familiar in some back of your mind sort of way.

It was obvious she'd been spending more time with her boyfriend, Matt. Every morning, I caught her layering concealer on the bruises on her neck-hickeys. Whoever thought it was sexy to burst blood vessels on your neck in the first place? Whatever was going on, she definitely needed more sleep. I'd made one lame joke about her sun-lighting with the vamps while me were getting ready for school and she'd sprouted whiskers, blue toothpaste on the corner of her lips.

Switching on the kitchen light, I looked for the familiar note on the kitty print stationary that mom used to let us know she'd be home late. It kept Gem from claiming that she'd never received the text saying to be home before nine. My arms felt heavy. Quillan and I were supposed to go his were pack meetings on Wednesday nights, but my overhearing his conversation with his dad last night had put the kibosh on that.

I dropped my bags on the table, letting my mind go blank as I stared at the gold 70s style tile blanketing the kitchen floor. Slumping forward, I rested my forehead on the back of my arm, and noticed a pink smiley face sticker stuck to the area above my right elbow. Wanting to ask the little freak just what he was so happy about made me my lips quirk-as much of a smile as I'd managed since last night, but in only seconds before that all washed away.

The sweet musky smell of Quillan's hoodie, wafted up to my nostrils making my eyes tear from the sting of salt. I took a deep breath, holding it until my vision grew cloudy to keep the hiccup of crying from leaving my chest. I could feel the pain there, coiled like a snake and too ingrained in me to do anything but bide its time until the next time it happened. What I needed was a distraction, something to kill the heaviness that lingered and jumpstart the rest of the night. I needed what any girl in my size 10 leather boots would--a hot bath and some target practice.

CHAPTER TWO

THAT ANNOYING GIRL IN VAMPIRE BOOKS

The pale green wall of my bedroom looked very empty as I ran cold fingers through my damp hair. I hadn't replaced the Dracula poster I'd torn up after I'd actually met my first vampire and my Buffy DVDs remained unwatched. Supernatural stuff is supposed to be fun, mysterious, sexy-the stuff of dreams and desires, but being volleyed around from one supernatural throng to the other was taking its toll. It was never like this in the movies. Vamp meets girl, girl kisses vamp, eternal love ensues. I've always been the one wanting to thwack that annoying girl in the vampire books. You know the one, always weighing the pros and cons of dating a bloodsucker or werewolf. Why was she always dragging her feet? What more could she ask for? Eternal love, midnight kisses.

Flipping my hair over, I bent forward, squeezing as much water out as I could before I went to the little woodland by my house to set strips of bark on fire. I'm not a pyro, or anything, it just helps me practice pulling my magic back inside of me without setting any more of the house on fire. Cocking my head to let water drip from my ear, I noticed a balled-up pair of bat print socks under my dresser and longed for the days when I thought those guys were ishy, squishy romantics.

Of course, in books, the undead dude or wily werewolf were always charmingly romantic and completely dedicated to the girl of their dreams. They never wanted to use her for her magical abilities. They cared about every aspect of her; that she liked to watch old movies, that her favorite color was forest green. They gave anything and everything to know what filled her heart and what dreams tickled through her mind. They didn't fake-date her or disappear into time portals to get away. "You should have thought about that before getting all mush-eieieieie!"

Cadence repeated the knock on my second-story window, and I choked on an incoming breath. Dark orange streaks on the glass let me know it was just moments after sunset. The tips of her fangs indenting her pale lip like two white daggers. Dirt streaked the pale gold of her hair and chalky skin, bits of leaves and twigs clinging to her jacket. Beautiful, sweet and eternally young, she looked to be about as ancient as I did, which is to say not very.

A rush of fire hurled from my hand, snaking its way towards the windowsill where my cat Nicky

was conducting his nightly neighborhood watch. My other hand flew towards him, fingers gripping to save him from the blast even as the heat swept my hair back from my shoulders. The fire twisted mid-air, reversing into my left palm and away from Nicky.

“Ohmigod! Nix, I'm so sorry.” Ignoring the vampire's polite smile, I reached toward Nicky, who cowered from me, letting out a muted hiss at our visitor who was drumming her fingers against the glass. “You almost made me burn my cat!” Cadence just watched her eyes free of any emotion.

“I've come at Master Radbourne's request to act as guard this night.”

“Well, go guard then.”

“This is why I have come to your home.” I knew this, but I was in the mood to mess with someone before they could be the cause of any more grief.

“I'm going to do this. I have enough bodyguards and if they did any good I wouldn't be in this mess to begin with! “

In less than two months, I'd found out I was a witch and a warlock, my mom was bewitched and my dad was the other. Before you could say fricking cool, I was controlling fire, my big sis Gemma was shapeshifting, and all the big scaries of Chicago's wanted to eat me up. I grabbed an old sweatshirt from the back of my desk chair, yanking it over my still-drying curls.

“Master Radbourne is very certain of the danger your in, Ascher.” I snorted.

“So am I. Hence the staying away from vampire ground zero.”

“He thought it was important to let you know.”

“And now you have. Thanks! ‘Kay, bye now.” Rushing over to my window, I pulled the cord to release the blinds before yanking the curtains closed with a whoosh. My cell phone began to ring, making my heart rattle like the tale of a snake. Reaching for the phone, I paused a moment to take a deep, shaky breath.

“Hello?”

“Please don't hang up!” It was strange, but hearing Daray's voice right then didn't make me want to dash my phone into a million tiny magenta pieces. Maybe I was just too tired to care.

“What is it?” The sound of him releasing his breath was followed by a nervous throat clearing. The Warlock Prince felt guilty. This was not surprising considering he had fooled me into following him through a portal under the guise of rescuing my once-sweetie, Elliot. What I got instead was a big eyeful of my vampire servant boyfriend, sucking major face with some undead girl who had a very uncomfortable resemblance to yours truly. The only reason Elliot wasn't well-done was because the portal had taken us to the past. Five-hundred years, give or

take a decade.

"I have it on very good authority that someone came through the time portal with us." I chewed the inside of my cheek, rolling my eyes.

"Is it a dinosaur, because that would suck?" Daray let out a put-upon sign.

"This is not a joke, Ascher. We know at least one powerful vampire came through the portal because we've had barrier alarms going off in the city." Ignoring the fact that I had no clue what he was talking about, I started for the stairs, to check the fridge stock for making dinner.

"Well, I doubt I'll notice one more fanged fiend."

"No, this is..."

"And anyways, Savian's crush on Gemma should keep us safe enough." At least something useful came from the Master vampire of Chicago pining away for my big sis.

"Just listen!" Daray bit off the words, like he'd been holding them back for a while.

"Real nice." I pressed end, holding down the key to set it on vibrate. A mewling protest sounded from my sister's cat. "Hey Angel." The phone buzzed violently making the gray tabby turn tail and run. Frowning, I flipped my phone open, cradling it between my shoulder and ear.

"This better not be who I think it is."

"Asch... Asch... Ascher, it's Savannah." The snakeshifting witch sounded out-of-breath. Her voice was smaller than usual and without the seductive cockiness that usually coated her words.

"Lord Blackthorne is coming... he's here!"

"Get out of there!" I cried, memories of the vampire's cold, balmy hands on my arms.

"He's coming to..." static claimed the last of her words.

"Do you want me to call Ian? What should..."

"Hello, my lovely." Slowly, I craned my neck towards the speaker, swallowing the scream at the back of my throat. Lord Linsey Blackthorne's arms curled around me tightly, forcing me to drop the phone. Gripping my arm to turn me, he gazed at me, lips parting and the heat of his breath tickling my cheeks.

He was a born vampire, and breathed and ate like a human. One of many differences was, drinking blood made him very powerful and strong. He was the leader of the clan of the most ruthless and terrifying vampire covens the world had ever known- The Blackthornes. He was ancient, he was deadly and he was standing here, in my living room, pressing me into his chest

and smelling my neck with a look of primal hunger in his eyes.

“What... do you want?” He pressed me closer, his fingernails softly scraping the top of my head. I let out a squeak. He leaned closer, brushing lips over my cheek.

Interlude

Pennsylvania, the United States of America September, 1761.

Dear Diary,

Mother came home from father's shop late today. I spent the day with Oliver and the little ones and was glad when they finally went to sleep. The house was cold and I couldn't find Nora or Henry so I decided to gather some scraps for firewood.

When I'd gathered all I could, I noticed a young man watching me from the shadows. Emboldened, by some force I could not name, I asked him what business he had on my father's property. He said he used to own this land and that he'd come to pay a visit to the family who'd bought it. He asked if he could speak to the man of the house and I said that father was quite busy in the parlor, polishing his collection of weapons. I do not know why I made up such a lie, just that this man gave me a chill. There was something not right in his eyes and a coldness about him that made me feel very small and vulnerable. I told him that, perhaps, if he left his name, I could tell father of his visit and they could arrange a meeting

He said his name was Linsey and that I needn't worry myself with giving a message with father because he would return. His words further froze my blood and I began to adjust my velvet cape to better block the cold which was a difficult task with an armload of wood. I unclasped the gold pin from the neck of the cape, but when my eyes returned to the spot where Linsey was standing just a moment before, he was gone

This startled me so much that I stabbed myself twice on the throat with my pin. I assume this is what transpired as I have no memory of latter events

All I recall is that I awoke some time later, in bed and that mother told me, she'd found me asleep in the snow. I suppose I fainted from the sight of blood as my stomach has never been very strong in its constitution.

That strange man, Linsey must have had the same affliction for mother didn't mention having seen him upon her return. I am going to rest now as I haven't been feeling at all well this morning.

Elizabeth

Chapter Three

CRIMSON AND COPPER

“What are you offering, mon etoile de nuit?” He pressed me closer, his fingernails softly scraping the top of my head. I let out a squeak. He leaned closer, brushing lips over my cheek.

Rubbing his cheek against mine, his eyebrows piqued in interest, his fingers playing over my collarbone. I swallowed the acidic sting of bile at the back of my throat. “When we last spoke, you confessed that you yearn for eternal love. I have come to gift you with this love.”

Compelled to speak the truth by his strange power that worked like a truth serum, I had told him of my need to be in love, of my fear that it I'd be alone because it would all go away. He pressed his lips against the hollow of my throat making me swallow. I was shaking uncontrollably.

“What are you thinking, beautiful one?” I bit my lip to keep the words from escaping, but his magic worked as it had the last time, forcing the truth from me.

“This is what I've always wanted.” Lord Blackthorne kissed the tip of my nose.

“Of course it is, sweet. Of course it is.”

“I just...”

“Yes, my Phoenix.”

“I just... I don't”

“Tell me!” His eyes were wide, their stormy color swirling with rip tides of gray and sapphire.

“Not with you.” He made a tscking sound, patting the back of my hand.

“You are very young. You do not yet know what you want, but I will show it to you. I will give you the world by introducing you to mine. Come, now.” His grip was painful, making his magic more potent.

“You must be completely psychotic if you think I'm going to let you take me anywhere.” Linsey's arm jerked, his grip loosening as the knowledge that I was telling the complete truth hit him.

“You think me mad? What will you do if I take you?”

“I'll fight you the whole freaking way.” Linsey's eyes left mine, his cool fingers ticking over the small dip in the middle of my collarbone.

“And how long would it be your intent for this to go on?”

“Every minute.”

“How do you think you could manage to fight a being such as myself?”

“I would... hurt you. If I had to.”

“You would become violent to my person?” My brow furrowed at his odd grasp of English.

“I would set you on fire. Bite you, scratch, punch, kick you in your... ”

“Enough!” Linsey let go off my hand and I lifted it to my other, cradling the one that still had the warm feel of his skin. I swallowed, my eyes automatically scanning the living room for something I could use to bash against his face. “You would fight me.” He seemed surprised by my reaction. “You are a strange girl.” I choked back a laugh, still clutching my hand. “Why would you fight me, Ascher?” I don't think he meant for me to answer, but I did anyway.

“I don't want to leave. I like it where I am.”

“Alone?” He seemed to take in our surroundings for the first time. “I think not.”

“I care not.” I closed my mouth so quickly at my words, that I bit my tongue, tasting the coppery flavor of blood coating my tongue. Linsey's eyes grew dark, his nostrils flaring, but whether in anger or hunger I couldn't tell.

“You will change your mind.”

“Like hell I... ” I flew backwards, landing so hard against the sofa, it left a dent in the wall. Cadence was gripping Linsey's neck, her arms and legs curled around him like a vampire backpack. His form blurred and I saw her slam onto the carpet, her head twisting to the side with a sharp snap.

Arms encircled me and I felt the hot press of lips on mine, making my mouth open in a surprised scream. Linsey was holding my face with the tips of his fingers, but I couldn't move at all. I began to feel a heady, light feeling and tasted something spiced, like cider. Cider and copper and something... else.

Linsey pulled away, smiling in a way that would have made him look almost angelic if it wasn't for the blood smeared around his mouth. When he licked his lips clean, the angelic image became clearer. Blood welled up from two small cuts on his bottom lip, pooling in the full sweep his skin. I knew it wasn't just my blood that I'd tasted.

Chapter Four

LITTLE MISS FANGY

At that realization, my hand flew out to slap him, but met with air. He was simply gone. Drying wisps of hair brushed my forehead, curling about my temples in his wake. While still registering Linsey's quick exit, I felt myself being spun in a circle, ending with most of my left side being slammed against the faux palm tree that sat next to our TV. Something sharp stabbed my lower arm, forcing my teeth together to keep from shouting out.

"You still breathe." I squinted my eyes and saw the shape of Cadence's face hovering over me, silky threads of spider-web silvery hair tumbling down her narrow shoulders.

"Ow." Cadence brushed her chilled fingers down either side of my neck.

"Lord Blackthorne sought you. And yet you breathe."

"Yeah. I'm really quite fond of it." Cadence lifted me under the arms, leaving my feet dangling for a moment as she held me in the air, the toes of my socks touching the floor even as I looked down at least two feet to her face. Setting me down on the carpet, she began to check my neck, my wrists and inner arms. Too exhausted to care and knowing she was only making sure I was okay, I waited until she'd given me a thorough once over before sagging back into the couch.

"WTF? Seriously, WTF."

Cadence cocked her head to the side, blinking her oddly large grey-blue eyes at me, her head jerking in tight little motions reminding me of an owl.

"I do not understand this," she said.

"I'm just... freaking out here... just a little."

"Lord Blackthorne is an imposing being. He stops for no one and nothing, clearing a path of emptiness to eternity, and yet... you breathe."

"How did he... how could he get in here. I never invited him, I... hey!" I grabbed a hardcover copy of *The Stand* by Stephen King from the side table next to the recliner. "I never invited you, either." Cadence sucked in a great breath of air, puffing her cheeks out so that she looked even younger than the years frozen on her face.

"I thought none of you guys could come in unless you were invited in."

"Did you not hold interludes with one Elliot Ambrose in the very mirrors of this house." Elliot had come to my house fairly often when things were going well.

"So?"

"He was the servant of my master as I am and thus, those invitations garnered by he are partook by all who serve the master." My head rattled from side to side as I shook it. I was a lover of books, and had read more than my share of Shakespeare, but Little Miss Fangy's old-

timey language was giving me a head ache.

“You're saying every vampire who serves Savian can come into my house now.”

“I suppose that's true, but none would dare because his orders very clearly state that none should come within several miles of the sisters Rafferty.” A long silence formed between us. I wanted to tell her to hit the dirt, and go the way Linsey had, but part of me wanted her to stay. I knew I was safer with Cadence here and feeling that way was a luxury I couldn't afford much lately.

“The Master is in a private meeting, but I will contact him when he is through. I'm afraid you will have to allow me to guard you until he advises me on the matter.” I reached towards the tiffany-style lamp on our side-table and pulled the chain to switch on the living room light. Feeling too awkward to exist, I switched on the TV, flipping through the channels. Cadence glanced around, her hands fluttering from being clasped to her hips as she tried to decide what to do with them. When the doorbell chimed moments later she bounded up and I heard two screams stifled at the front door.

“Holy crap-oly!” Slipping on the porcelain tile in the entry way, Cyd came at me, her eyes glinting with mischief. “You're friends with the Lost Maiden?” Cadence stalked past with as much grace as a prima ballerina, her eyes downcast in politeness, though I noticed her jaw clenched at Cyd's nickname for her.

“I swear to Goddess, Ascher.” Anise had her arms crossed over her dark purple corduroy trench coat, a look of disgust as plain as it had been on my grandma's face, twisting her mouth.

“Perhaps we should speak of the night's events before we begin flinging the proverbial mud, Anise, daughter of Bruer coven.” Anise's cheeks flushed, as she was reminded of her rank and level of responsibility as diplomat among the supernaturals. Cadence pinched her lips together and sat, using her black leather gloves to smooth down the material of her long, dark red skirt that looked as though it were sewn from giant rose petals.

“What are we drinking?” Cadence asked. Cyd's eyes grew round.

“They've got ginger ale, Pepsi, orange juice, water and...” catching herself in fan girl mode, Cyd cast her gaze my way. “It's cool if we get stuff, right?” Sure, please help the vampire to some non-neck dispensed drinkables. “That's fine.” Cyd bounded up from the couch, her hair cast backwards like a red flag of victory. As she turned the corner through the empty dining room, I slumped back into the recliner, Anise narrowing her eyes at me as I switched on the TV.

“I thought we were going to talk about you buddying up to vampira,” Anise said.

“Yeah, well. I thought I was going to spend the evening ducking come-ons from various werewolves so, things change. And stop reading my fricking mind!” I doubted she'd come up with the vampire comment herself, and the pink hue of her cheeks after my words, assured me that I'd been right.

"It doesn't seem right that he retreated so quickly. He never seemed one to back down from anyone."

"Maybe he got enough of getting his butt bruised?" Cyd guessed. Cadence blinked slowly, making her look owl-like with the huge, empty predatory gaze. The four of us fell into silence, Cyd alternating between chewing her bottom lip and blowing pink bubbles with her gum.

I channel-surfed a bit, feeling that almost every selection was wrong somehow. With only a few weeks until Halloween, most of the stations had begun airing scary movies. Cadence carried out various sodas, pausing to hand a glass of orange juice to me, her eyes pausing on the small cut on my lip. Mumbling my thanks more out of ingrained politeness than anything else, I paused for a moment on Bram Stoker's Dracula, a once-favorite of mine, before switching onto the next station where an over-bleached lady shrieked on some game-show.

Anise was still fuming, her eyes glued to Cadence who pressed black-gloved fingers against her neck, wincing and making me feel guilt punch through my stomach. When she lowered her hand, I could see blood the dark shine of blood coating her fingers.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

"I am immortal."

"Not really what I asked. Do you need a band-aid or something?" I felt silly asking, but my mother had raised me better than to let a guest bleed on the couch.

"In the guest bath with the hydrogen peroxide, right?" Cyd asked. I nodded, remembering her patching me up last night after a failed spell had knocked me flat on my butt, scraping a good amount of skin from my elbows. After passing over a few more channels, I settled on the History Channel which was hosting a "Timeline of the Vampire Legend." Smirking to myself, I upped the volume as Cyd handed Cadence a large Hello Kitty bandage. The vampire blinked at the offering, confusion marring her pretty features. Cyd rolled her eyes, smiling as she took the backing off and gently tilting the vampires head to the side to press the bandage there.

I heard a mewling noise and turned to see Nicky hurrying towards Cadence. He let out a plaintive mawl, pacing at her feet like he did when he wanted me to feed him. I looked from Nicky to Cadence who was sitting rigidly, her hands folded into her lap, and her eyes looking at the drying cloy of blood sticking to her gloves. Cyd flopped down next to me on the recliner, thought there was hardly room, and I smiled as the lavender scent of her protection charm swirled around me.

We sat there for a while in mutual discomfort as the television droned on, flashing images of a young woman being chased by bats. The tension was making my right eyelid twitch; I flipped on some reality show and watched pretty girls being yelled at by a once-famous model.

"You guys move so fast that I didn't even see him bite you," I remarked.

"I was taken down while standing guard and awoke in the bushes with this." As she touched her neck, I could see the two pinpricks were only faint pink shadows, barely visible.

"I'm just thankful that he wasn't the only one to draw blood. I succeeded at the very least in wounding him, I can smell his blood on you."

"Who's blood?" Cyd asked. Anise was agape in horror, two vials of pink liquid grasped in her shaking fingers.

"Where did it go? Where is it?"

"Geez, Anise. I know it's gross, but..."

"You're going to die, Ascher," Anise said. She released the potions.

Interlude

Diary of Elizabeth Farence, 1761.

Father went to fetch Doctor Bishop this morning. I have been in bed for six days now and show no signs of getting better. The stew and broths cook brought me to sip remain untouched as I cannot bring myself to drink them, though I am thirsty and feel an odd hunger like I have never felt before in my life.

I am weak and cannot sleep but for a few moments which are full of dreams spun in horror. I dream of bats and mists and blood. And of that strange man Linsey

His eyes haunt me, glinting wickedly at me from the shadows of my mind as if they know something that I cannot. Last night, I awoke from fright, screaming to the heavens that I'd been bitten, that Linsey had flown into my bedroom from the window like a bird and had fed on my blood. It terrified poor Catherine and Benjamin who wouldn't stop screaming until Nan fed them each a teaspoon of whiskey.

Father slapped me to bring me to myself, but was shocked when he saw the pin wounds on my neck had been opened again by some kind of animal bite and there was blood on my bed clothes. He thinks I'm resting now, but I had to write all of this down to try and make sense of it for I am more scared than I have ever been. I feel an evil has come to my home and that this man, Linsey, may be the reason for it.

Dr.Bishop and father talk softly in the parlor. The sound of their voices is muffled by the armoire. I used to climb inside the armoire as a child, certain that monsters hid beneath my canopy, and it comforts me still, the licking light from the candle flame casting eerie shadows over the dressing gowns I've pushed to either side of me

Linsey will find me in here, of that I have no doubt. He found his way to me through my dreams and now visits me in the night. He whispers things to me. He makes obscene promises of

eternal life if only I will follow him, but I know him for what he is- a demon

Father Christensen tells of such creatures that work against God and try to corrupt His children. I don't know why he has chosen me, only that he will not stop in his quest for my soul. He has some strange power that makes me still in his presence. Though I tried to scream when he seized me in his arms and kissed my neck, I could not. The last thing I recall is the sharp pain of his teeth as they grazed my skin and then I awoke, alone, in my bed.

Elizabeth

Chapter Five

WITCHSICLE

Nothing happened. Anise frowned, her arm cocked back, suspended through the air. My hand was zapped with vibration, and I felt the cool pressure of my magic being released. I had a vague thought that I was going to have to buy a new phone, felt my hair rush backwards and then I was staring into an empty palm, a waiting ball of fire, spreading to twist and curl around my fingers.

“Ascher Rafferty's phone.” My arm jerked in surprise and I reached up to block Cadence from coming closer before I realized she was just reaching out to me. “I took the liberty of taking it from you before it could be melted.” Still gaping at her cheetah-shaming quickness, I took the phone, checking the caller-id.

“Hi Mommy.”

“Is everything okay, Asch?” My mom's voice had that small, quiet quality it took on when she was sad. Not able to tell her there was a vampire a witch and a... witchsicle in our house, I tried for Partial truth.

“Yeah, I'm just... some friends and I are watching some TV.” Grimacing at the unnatural rhythm of my words, I bit my lip.

“Okay, sweetie.” My mom sounded exhausted. “Is Gemma there? I tried her phone, but she didn't answer.”

“No. Not yet,” I amended. What happened, Mom?” There was a pause. “She's okay, but Grandma had a stroke this morning. The police brought her from the airport to Methodist General.”

“Is she okay? I mean, it's not bad, is it?”

“She's stable. They won't know until she wakes up, though, what the extent of the... damage is.”

“Oh, Mommy. I'm so sorry. Did they say what she was doing there-at the airport, I mean.”

“I was going to discuss that with you. She had a ticket to Pennsylvania on her. I think she was going to visit her family.” I cleared my throat, eyes blinking to keep the tears back. “I've called aunt Lucy. She's bringing Angelica down to Chicago tomorrow.” The muffled sound of someone in the background talking to my mom was lost in a loud snuffle. “I'm going to stay here until Aunt Lucy comes down in case... they need something. Do you think you can get to school okay?”

“Yes, mom, I... ” More muffled talking.

“I've got to go, sweetie. I left a message with Gemma, but tell her when she gets home in case she didn't get it. I love you.”

“I love you, too.” The screen light on the phone died, and I knew she had hung up.

“Lord Blackthorne's blood.” I placed the phone on top of the hardback, arms wrapping around my middle as I shivered from a chill. “When I smelled his blood... ”

“Hmm?” I felt my forehead wrinkle, as I tried to concentrate on what Cadence was saying. “... you. I can smell it on your breath.” My stomach lurched. “How much did you drink?”

“There wasn't... ” I shook my head, trying to clear my thoughts. “I didn't... ”

“What's the matter?” Cyd asked, but I could tell from the worry in her eyes, she'd already read my mind. Not being as miffed as was warranted, I shrugged.

“My grandma had a stroke, I... ” Cadence pulled me into her arm, her eyes flashing.

“There will be bad consequences if you are not bound. I feel it would be unwise to bring you to the master, but I cannot let you venture out unbound?”

“What are you talking about?” Cyd was on her feet, her arm ready to launch the pink vials of mystery potion at me.

“You took the blood of a vampire without a blood exchange,” Cadence said.

“I did not! Look, when he kissed me, there was something-I think he bit his lip is all.”

“I need to bring you to the Master.” A pink liquid pooled over the side of Cadence's face. Cadence paused, licking the liquid off her lip, pupils dilating.

“Get away from her.” Anise's words sounded more like a question than a demand.

Cadence had one arm around my waist and was carrying me like a blonde football though the living room. To angry to appreciate the image we must have made, I gritted my teeth until I felt my jaw creak.

“Put me down.”

“Put her down!” Cyd yelled.

“I’m afraid I cannot.”

“No. I’m not going anywhere, I... hey!” Anise had caught the both of us in a binding spell.

“We must see to it that you’re not taken advantage of in this state.” Cadence whispered something, her fingers making artistic motions as she broke the binding spell.

“Put me down, Cadence.”

“You need more practice, child,” Cadence said. A twisting motion from her pinkie and Anise was airborne, and immobile.

“The binding incantation will last until we are safely away. No worries.” The last was added in an awkward gesture of friendliness ill-fitting on the diminutive vampire.

“If I can find someone powerful enough to hold you we will be back before sun...” Cadence ended her sentence in a shriek as her arms and torso began to smoke.

I fell onto the tile of the doorway, my elbow striking the porcelain, and ripping the days old scabs from them. A quick thought of wanting to be up was followed with the whoosh of air I remembered and my levitating about two inches above ground. The look of surprise on Cadence’s face allowed for the split seconds needed to shove her backwards through the door. Two steps more and I kicked the door shut, locking both deadbolts. Ten steps more and I was in the guest bathroom, inspecting the pale skin of my elbow to see my arm already displaying the bruised purple from my fall. Reaching back, I felt a small knot blossoming on the back of my head, but I couldn’t place it in the night’s timeline. I felt a strange, far away feeling, like I was being dipped in a liquid pool of fire. My hearing quieted until I heard a faint buzzing at the same time I began to see black.

CHAPTER SIX

WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

* * * *

The next time I was conscious, I was not in my bathroom and I was not alone. It was either the freezing cold of the dark room or my body slamming into the concrete that finally woke me from the shadows. I could hear glass breaking and the muted sounds of someone’s scream choked from their throat.

“And why would you bring her here?”

“She needs to be bound to a Master, or the blood will tow her to her death.”

“Do you think that I am not aware of the intricacies of our kind?”

“Master Radbourne turned us away. His plans are coming along and he said he couldn't jeopardize them by binding her before...”

“The child is awake.” Two pairs of dress heels clattered on the cold stone. Bracing myself, I lifted my eyes from the shiny stiletto to Cadence's wide-eyed stare.

“And what's to keep me from taking all the tasty little tart has to off... ahhh!” Sharing surprise with the auburn-haired vamp, I backed away from the blue fire that was happily licking the fuzz from his emerald green jacket.

“There is that.” Cadence said matter-of-factly. “And though Master Radbourne refused to risk... his plans, he still has the girl under a protective order.

“I'm quite flattered that you chose to bring her to me, but it's not as if she won't raise a few questions to my guests.

“I have something she can wear.”

“What the hell is going on?” I shook back the adrenaline that was making my body sway slightly with each heartbeat. I only realized I'd said it allowed when I received an answer.

“Call it a debutant ball. And if I do this for you, what'll you give me?” Ryland asked.

“Truly undying gratitude.” Ryland raised a coppery eyebrow in question, flicking his sparkling green eyes to my face. His gaze fell to my throat and I stopped breathing as pupils dilated. “And I'll accompany you this evening.”

“No matter. I have your oath that I will receive no... repercussions for my interference?”

“She needs the blood.” Ryland shrugged, scratching his wrist with a creepy-long nail until blood droplets began to splatter the concrete.

“Well, I'll need some privacy.”

“Ryland.”

“You'll leave, now. If you'd like the girl to still have a pulse.”

“The girl is under an...”

“Order of protection, I heard you the first time, Cadie.” Cadence met my eyes one last time before opening a rusted door with a circular pull, and disappearing through the other side. I flexed my power into my palm and out, fresh adrenaline washing through me. The vampire

took several slow steps towards me.

“I suppose I can see it a bit... here,” before I could say WTF, his cold fingertips were pressing into my cheek. Leaning in, he rested his chin on my shoulder and I released my magic, feeling it turn back on me, giving my veins an electric zing. “They will not work when I am touching you.” Ryland said, his voice carrying the rhythm of the “*Na- Na- Na- Boo- Boo*” song. Humming something I remembered from Music Appreciation week in eighth grade. “Well, I hardly see and marks at all. I would have thought the dolt was newly risen from what Cadie said.”

Ryland shrugged, scratching his wrist with a creepy-long nail until blood droplets began to splatter the concrete.

“Come, little one. Waste not, want not.” I spat in his face. It was the first time I'd ever done such a thing and it was gross, wet and necessary. From the look on Ryland's face, it was also very effective.

Chapter Seven

RUDE AWAKENINGS

* * * *

“Do you always scream so much in your sleep? It's kinda freaky, kiddo.” Not one decent back-crack into my morning stretch and I was already being annoyed by unwanted guests. I felt a very tiny surge of magic zing my fingertips, and saw I was wearing the two mis-matched potholders from my kitchen. Savannah Sarke, snakeshifter and stalker-extraordinaire frowned at my CD collection, tossing the one she'd been looking at on my dresser.

Plucking the smoking potholders from my hands, I sighed, not wanting to begin my day like this.

“Idea. You leave my house now.” The rest of a tirade of nastiness stilled, swirling on my tongue as I remembered Linsey and Ryland, in that respective bitey-order. “Oh, God.”

“You look like you're going to puke. I signed up for guard duty, but if you're going to spew, get a move on, we're running late as it is. Ian grabbed some coffee and donuts. He's downstairs looking through you're freshman year book and drooling.”

“The Bergamot kid and her bee-yotch cousin tapped out at about two in the morning, so Ian and I have had the pleasure of listening to you scream since they left. Do you have meds you need to take, or something?”

“If any of my so-called bodyguards were worth a crap, I wouldn't have had to cuddle up to Lord Blackthorne last night and spend the night having creepy-ass dreams about another of the fanged, so coffee, food, and backing off would be super right now.” I blinked a few times as my little monologue repeated in my head, cheeks flushing at my rudeness before I remembered

what was nagging at me. “Did I go anywhere last night?”

“No, also Ian had to break the doorknob to get you out of the bathroom downstairs. You passed out after you locked yourself in.” Savannah's bluish eyes held a wary cast now, little crinkles forming at the edges as she frowned at me. “I was trying to make with the funny, Ascher. I know you had a crappy night. Just get dressed and meet us in the car. If you're not down in twenty, I'm sending Ian up to see your jammies which are precious by the way.” I was wearing flannel kitten print pajamas in bright pink. Glancing down at myself, I wasn't sure which was more disturbing. That I was wearing these in front of someone I didn't know, or that there were several drops of blood on the collar.

* * * *

Splashing cold water over my soapy face — check. Brushing the vomit-inducing coppery taste out of my mouth — check. Dressed for combat in a green sweater, dark jeans and newly acquired steel-toed boots, high ponytail, and a chunky costume ring good for punching, check. A quick stop in Gemma's bedroom showed she'd already left. I tucked a loose strand of hair behind my ear, a slowly growing pissed-mist filling the room around me at the confirmation that my big sister was too busy sucking face to give a flying crap about me. The doorframe creaked under the pressure from my fingertips, making me grimace as my nails scraped the walls.

What is wrong with me?

“Cyd called your home-phone. She said they'll pick you and Gemma up for magic lessons after school and that their grandmother is calling an emergency coven meeting.”

I turned to see Ian Sarke smiling at me, a picture of me in the bathtub at age seven clutched in his hands. I raised an eyebrow and his face became stoic. “Just taking a look around.” I extended my hand for the picture which he turned over to me with a smile, with pointed fangs. I didn't know the guy all that well, but he was funny and had a tendency to make me forget he could shapeshift into a snake at any time. Feeling creepy, I took a few steps down the stairs, but felt his arms press against my back, bunching my sweater to stop me.

“I'm sorry we were too late to help with the vampire last night.” Yanking free of his press, I took the stairs two at a time.

“Yeah, well I had a super-fun time handling it myself, which, by the way, I'd prefer to do this morning.” I bit my lip, feeling stupid for letting me fear make me try to send the Sarke twins away. They were annoying and they never showed up on time, but they were here now, and I had a feeling I could use their company today.

“You're going to have to make it up to me.” Ian produced a small grease-stained paper bag that smelled on doughnuts, a peek inside revealed two chocolate sprinkled doughnuts. The day was looking good.

Chapter Eight

JEKYLL AND HIGH SCHOOL

Savannah Sarke leaned towards the desk of the high school registrar.

“My brother Ian and I sent all the paperwork in triplicate over two weeks ago, you misplaced it and are going to spend the rest of the day trying to find it, but until then, we should pick up our student IDs and go to class. We have the same schedule as Ascher Rafferty, here's a copy.” I felt bad for the heavy woman who was staring with wide-eyed confusion at our trio. She kept mumbling she was sorry and rifling through the papers on her desk.

She was visibly sweating under the strain of the spell, making her pulse stand out against her throat as it rumbad it's way into overtime. My stomach growled and I sighed. I was beginning to worry. I'd eaten four doughnuts and drank two coffees in the last half hour and I was starving. I was too much of a realist to hope that I was just hitting another growth spurt and not naive enough to push aside the fact that I'd tasted Linsey's blood.

“Mini-Gemma!” I rolled my eyes and turned to see my sister arriving with what can only be described as a cavalcade of worshippers. She sneered at the sight of Ian and Savannah, though I couldn't be sure because she was wearing sunglasses so big and dark, I thought she was channeling Jack Nicholson. Before I could say, “Ow, Gemma, you're hurting my arm,” my sister had my butt planted in one of the stained gray chair's that aligned the outside of the offices.

“Can't I leave you alone for two seconds?” My blood boiled, magic piping hot underneath my fingertips. I was troubled by the fact that I was making eye contact with her neck and had to close my eyes for a few moments to collect myself.

“You left me alone for longer than that. Newsflash, emergency coven meeting tonight, a vampire broke into our house last night, and grandma is in the hospital or are you too busy lately to know any of this?” I felt mean at the look on her face as she searched mine to make sure I wasn't just saying mean things to one-up her.

“I know about Grandma, mommy called me when I was at... out... last night. What vampire broke into the house?” She asked it like she wanted to know what I needed from the store or if I'd be out of the bathroom soon.

“Just you friendly neighborhood bloodsucker, one that followed me through the time portal and thinks I need to become undead and spoon him,” I narrowed my eyes at her throng of people who had already begun to scurry away like good little mean-big-sister-worshipping peons.

“Always with the drama, Ascher. Honestly, it's getting old.” I blinked up at my big sister, sure she would crack a smile and say she was just busting my proverbial balls and we could hug this out like a couple of sisters. She didn't. “I am working very hard to make sure this doesn't go any

further than it has to. I will not be going to any coven meetings, emergency or otherwise. This is where all this crap started up and I'm pulling the both of us out of this whether you like it or not. This is all wrong, I'm sorry if this ruins your loser-plans to finally have a friend to call your own, but this ends tonight, Ascher."

I didn't realize Gemma's had was wrapped around my throat until I felt Ian pulling me towards him, his free hand working to free me from my sister's fingers which were currently throttling me. When he fingers released me, I sank against the wall, watching Ian cast a privacy spell and Savannah and Gemma circle each other and hiss. I think things may have ended differently if I hadn't done what I did next, but I was hollow from her words and bleeding on my lip where the tiny tips of fangs had curved into the flesh. I picked up my bag and walked towards the exit.

Chapter Nine

HEX-O-GRAM

* * * *

I listened to the happy music from the "Price is Right" as another contestant ambled down the staircase and up to a podium. I hadn't heard from Ian or Savannah which was a good thing. Gemma was still at school which was even better. I was cuddling my cat Nicky with one hand and a channel changer with the other which was a cathartic thing. I tried calling the hospital, but there was no answer in my grandmother's room. The messages started trickling in after that. Daray left at least a dozen messages which I got quite good at erasing one word into his message. The last message was from Daray's five year old sister Lily.

"The big kitty is sick. She tries to help with bad things. There is going to be a big boom tonight." Unsure if Daray had coached her and this was all nonsense, I stared at the phone a long time to determine whether or not I should call him. Of course, that was when I remembered why some vampire nut-bucket was chasing me, so I hit end and closed my eyes, just for a minute.

Interlude

Diary of Elizabeth Farence, 1761

I know now that death is close. Father is asleep now, in a chair next to the bed and I am so weak, I can barely lift the quill to paper. I went to see Father Christensen and confess what evils I have been witness to, but I believe that he thought my confession the confused ramblings of a sick and dying girl and nothing more

My heart barely beats in my chest and breathing has become difficult. The hunger is worse, and my throat and lips are parched

Linsey will come for me tonight, I know. He told me he would take me to a place where we could be together forever and I do not know how I can escape him. Mother's crucifix is beside

me on the bed- it is my last chance to get away and I will leave tonight when I am sure the house is asleep.

I fled into the woods, and hid deep in the shadows of a bank of trees, but Linsey found me somehow. When I refused to go with him willingly, he seized me by the throat and told me that I was his. He tore at my neck with his teeth and then forced me to drink his blood from a wound on his neck. I screamed as the blood filled my mouth, but choked on its thick warmth and swallowed

He pulled my diary out of the inside of his cloak and pressed it into my face. He asked why I thought he was evil; why he was beyond both good and evil and not a pawn to either. I began to cry and he gathered me in his arms and brought me back to my home. He left me in the snow, cold and alone.

Three days later I awoke in my family's crypt, surrounded by the scent of death and decay. Linsey was there, waiting for me. Telling me I was now a creature like him, he grabbed a rat from the floor and slit its throat with a nail. God help me! The blood caused such a thirst in me. I grabbed the rat from him and tore into the poor little creature with the pointed tips of fangs that had grown from my own mouth

He handed me this diary and told me to consider it his bridal gift to me before he looked into my eyes and I was lost.

Elizabeth

Chapter Ten

HARMED, I'M SURE

I awoke to the fact that I was being thrown across the room. I heard Linsey cry out as he reached for me, but Cadence was working over time at windshifting me through my house and away from him. At some point upon waking, I had launched a fireball towards Cadence thinking I was being attacked, and I was now watching as the flames spread to her torso.

Reaching forward to pull the magic back, I heard the door slammed against the wall, letting in an alarming gale of wind that made my head strike the entryway table. Leaves swirled through the doorway, raining over me the darkened figure of Linsey as I shoved myself up from where I had fallen, my torn elbows protesting. My magic was pouring out; the wind Cadence controlled seeming to pull every bit of it from me.

Cadence swirled her pinky through the air, and I felt the back of my head dip back, coming too close to striking the ceramic cat my grandma had painted for me when I was seven. Realizing my magic resulted in sparkler-like fire falling to the ground and I made an involuntary squeak of terror. Someone was lifting me as swirls of smoke disappeared, my fire having poured out again

when I fell backwards. The pointed toe of Linsey's shoe was pinning Cadence to the tile. He slammed her back, and the ceramic cat shattered, bisque dust making an unholy halo around the red blood soaking into her hair.

"Do you see why you need me? She could have destroyed your form." His eyes had bled fully black and the tips of his fangs dipped over his lip as he scanned me for damage. "I would've found a healer, but..." he made a tsking sound. "I rather appreciate this physique of yours. Gritting my teeth until my jaw clicked, I breathed deeply to get enough oxygen in to say something snide, but my head was swirling.

"I... can't," I was hyperventilating.

"Shhhh. I suppose it would be uncomfortable to feel the death pull. You need some fresh blood." Death pull?

"You're... dead," I panted. He laughed, leaning forward to press his lips into my forehead. I hissed in anger, his mimicking of the way Elliot had kissed me perverting it.

"Not quite." Something hot and wet touched my fingertips as I searched for a weapon. I knew I really shouldn't look to my right — that I would see a growing lake of blood coming in like a deadly tide as the small blonde vampire lost more and more blood.

"Perhaps we should adjourn to somewhere less... sticky?" Linsey cradled me, curling my face into the ridiculous lacey cravat that reminded me of powdered wigs and French aristocracy. I had become obsessed with the vampire Lestat after a babysitter let me watch Interview with the Vampire when I was five. I could tell from the incline of steps that Linsey was taking me upstairs which meant he was bringing me to one of the bedrooms or 2 of the bathrooms and I somehow felt he wouldn't leave me there alone. I screamed, trying to raise my nails to his face and heard Cyd speaking that weird language that the Bruer cousins always spoke during circles.

The familiar squeak of my bedroom door made my heart pause and then beat double. My thoughts turned to the panties I had drying on the knobs of my dresser and I felt a moment of self-hate that I could even care at a time like this. I couldn't help it though. No boy had ever seen my panties on me or otherwise since preschool when a classmate had lifted my dress while I washed my hands. My bed, solid and comforting, fell beneath me. Linsey's arms let go and I elbowed myself into a sitting position for a whole two seconds before I fell back onto the bed.

"Do not be frightened, Etoile. I will not claim you this night. I have... other details to tend to."

"You will not be claiming me any night, dingleberry, and I'm not your damn star!" Linsey's smirked, his fingers crept across my cheek like a spider, touching on my lips. I snapped at his fingers hoping to bite one, but my teeth clashed together, only meeting air.

"She speaks francais! My, my, you a far more charming than I could have hoped for." I knew it was a bad idea, but I used the last of my tapped strength to spit in his face. "Of course, there is

the matter of manners that leaves quite a bit to be desired.”

“I hate you.” Linsey's smile melted into his pore less face, replacing it with surprise. He stepped away from the bed, glancing at my bedroom and stopping for a moment to stare at the framed picture of my sister and I dressed as an angel and a devil for Halloween last year.

“What would you require from me to go with me willingly?” His fingers played over the collection of vampire movies, books and memorabilia I had stockpiled before learning these creatures existed and they were about as romantic as a junior high dance.

“I would never go with you by choice.”

“Perhaps, you will tell me what you want from a love, then?” He was grasping my hand, in his, the tips of his nails pressing into my wrist. I winced, and he loosened his grip, his eyes flashing something very much like regret. “I can be a patient man, Ascher, but it wears thin. I am not one to wait forever even if that option remains open to me. I will give you exactly twenty-four hours to decide to come with me willingly or to accept the consequences of refusing to do so. You will sleep now.” His lips pressed into mine as I sunk into my dreams.

Interlude

The Diary of Elizabeth Farence, 1761

After a week of living in my family's crypt, feeding off of the rats and small animals Linsey brought me, he decided it was time for me to learn how to hunt

We went into the woods near the cemetery. I watched him bring down a deer with a speed and grace that only a predator can possess. I fed off of the deer, drinking its blood, feeling the small amount of guilt for its death

As we rested in the shadows of the trees, Linsey told me about his family. His mother, father, older brother and two little sisters. He said that we'd be going to stay with them soon and that he knows I'll be happy there.

I asked him how I could be happy living with a creature like him and he grabbed me by the arms, wrapping me tightly in a hug and kissing my cheek. He said I'd learn to love him, and tried to kiss my lips, but I pushed away from him and ran into the woods

He found me- he always seems to know where I am, no matter how many times I try to escape. I miss my family so very much and want to call on them, but I fear bringing any more evil to my house. For now, I sleep on the hard stone floor of the crypt, wrapped in the arms of a demon.

Elizabeth

Chapter Eleven

UP WITCH CREEK WITHOUT A WAND

Consciousness lapped at my temples, pulling me closer and closer to waking with each rush of memory. I knew something bad was waiting for me to wake up, its shadow coming closer as I felt my hand strike something hard and cold and the press of warm lips against my palm. I was somewhere dark and soft, Lord Blackthorne was holding me on his lap, his fingers gently petting my hair. Jerking up, I pulled away from him, his eyes watching me with amusement and the knowledge that I wasn't going anywhere if he didn't allow it. The tips of his fangs appeared and disappeared as I fell back, recognizing that we were in a large backseat of a nice car that was grinding over gravel. His pupils grew wider and he leaned towards me.

"Will you kiss me?" He smiled at his request, looking devilishly imp-like and making the primal part of my brain twist with want. Narrowing my eyes, I searched for the door's handle.

"Why are you asking? Why don't you just steal one like you did at my house." He settled back on the seat, making sucking noises on his teeth."

"No. I think it would be more fun if you took one from me? Don't you?" I felt my lip sneer at him and prepared a cutting remark when I heard Nicky meow. My eyes shot to the small dark cage resting against the middle console, gritting my teeth so hard, my jaw cracked.

"Nicky?" I bent forward, reaching my fingers through the cage where he was panting, eyes wide and frightened like when he went to the vet. There was a drop of red on the white bib of fur dividing his black fur from his neck and shoulders." Gaping at Linsey, I crouched to cover the cage with my body, feeling a rage begin to rekindle my spent magic.

"I assumed you'd want something familiar to comfort you during the process."

"Process this. You touch either one of us..."

"I would have preferred a person, of course. They're much better to use in motivating ones guests, but witches are such a bother, the little vampire's skull is fractured and I understand Savian is keeping your sister otherwise occupied. Now, come you'll need a few more sips so you won't be uncomfortable. The death pull can cause some pain from what I've been told by those I've made."

"Then I'll be in pain until I find a way to get us out of here." I stood, hunched over, making my way towards the front of the vehicle where a full crystal decanter was screaming for me to use it to smash Lord Blackthorne's face. Two feet away from the sparkly weapon, I doubled-over feeling a ripping, vicious pain tear through me. The press of black heralding my going unconscious began at my eyes. "No." I said to myself. Crawling towards the decanter, another excruciating split made me curl into myself, a soft noise coming from somewhere in the back.

Heat soothed me, the silky touch of Linsey's jacket and pants like a balm to me as I reached for anything to pull me away from the pain. His teeth grazed over his wrist, tiny beads of darkness growing into a line on the skin.

"You will drink this because it will not turn you in such a small draught. You will drink this because if you do not you will experience pain and this is not something I wish to see."

Something heavy and dark began to build in the back of my mind as I stared, transfixed by the droplets of blood. I opened my mouth to speak, to tell Linsey the truth of why I felt alright- that I had already had the blood of a Master.

"Ryland made me drink."

His compulsion slid over my skin and I told him what I remembered of the night before. The heavy push of Linsey's hand cradled me at his wrist, his grip immovable and the rush of hot blood so sudden, I swallowed convulsively. My pain evaporated even as I pushed at Linsey to try to pull backwards.

"The blood of this person is not worthy of you nor as powerful as mine or you would not feel such pain. Stop that foolishness, Ascher. There is no cause or need for you to strain yourself, why is it that you cannot see that?"

"I don't want to die. Please let me go." Angry for the position I was in and even more that he'd forced me to beg for my life, my head swelled with the calming pool of magic filling the empty space left behind when Cadence's power had pulled on mine.

"It is in my power to grant one of these requests, but not both."

"Let me go home, Linsey." I was gathering as much va-va-voom in my voice as I could muster, imitating how I'd seen the bad girl talk on that show about rich kids from New York whose parents were never around. It came out whinier than I'd wanted.

"If I were to grant this request, then you would die. I will not allow this." His thumb played over my bottom lip, brushing back and forth while his eyes weighed on me. "It is not befitting my status to apologize for any actions I take are correct in and of the fact that I am Lord of the Blackthornes."

"Linsey, I don't need an apology. Just get me back to my house and we'll be even, okay?"

"My only intent was to kiss my intended..."

"Kidnap victim?"

"... bride."

"Oh, Lord!" A flame large enough to light a candle wick swayed over my index finger, then

pulled back. Had he seen it? My best bet was to flex my magic until it built enough that I could try to book. “I don't know how much better I can put this. I don't like you...” Linsey grabbed my wrist and it was too hard for me to continue with the lie.

“I want you... it would be very exciting to go with you. It's the stuff of dreams, to have you want me. It's just scary. You're like, my great, great, great, great, great grandfather's age and undead. You're a vampire. You want to kill me. These are not the makings of a happy relationship!”

“You've never had an objection to things that frighten you, Ascher. What is the true reason for your dismissal of me?”

“It's just wrong; it's bad and... wicked. I can't do this. I won't. What would the Bruer Coven say? They already think I'm bad, that I can't be trusted with my powers.”

“And why would you seek the approval of those who know so little of you? So little of everything you are?”

“I don't want to leave my family.”

“There would be a loss felt at your radiance not lighting there lives, but your absence would save them from jeopardy.” Linsey's eyes flashed in victory.

“Threatening my family is not building your case, here.”

“It is not, I nor the vampires, who pose a threat to your kin. Does it not strike you as strange that so many of the supernatural peoples have wanted a claim on you? It is impossible to please everyone, and this displeasure will breed contempt and this contempt will garner fear. There can only be two results of this fear, Ascher. They can run from that which pulls this reaction or to destroy it. Werewolves and warlocks are not known to be cowards.”

“I can protect my family.”

“And if the house is consumed by flames by your protection?”

“Well, then, Gemma can protect her.”

“Gemma has given herself over to Savian as his new servant.”

“Bull...” Linsey shushed the rest with the cool press of a sharp fingernail.

“I've never been fond of ladies using words of curse unless in the middle of a spell.”

“I've never been fond of dead guys kidnapping me, you asinine, bloodsucker.” My words made my heart thud hard, as adrenaline built while I watched Linsey's rage begin to percolate. If he was angry, then he would be distracted and my powers felt stronger.

“Such language on such delicious lips.”

Say that ten times fast

“You'll never know.”

“Lest we forget, mon etoile de nuit. I've already sampled you.”

“Is there a point to this whole conversation, or are you just going for distance and levels of annoyance reached?” My breath caught as I found myself on his lap.

When I pushed backwards, his grip kept me prone, making my knees go to either side of him and pressing me closer than I'd ever want to be with him. Shock held me still and when this wore off a moment later, it was the look in his eyes that had me too frightened to move. Thoughts of “if he does this or that” then I'll push away, I'll fight back twisted through me, but he didn't move, didn't breath, didn't blink. The soft chirping meow from Nicky snapped me awake, and I shoved hard, falling onto the seat across from Linsey who still had that same wondering look on his face.

A whirring noise alerted me to the divider lowering behind me.

“You will stop at the Crimson before returning to the hotel.”

“Um, still not going anywhere with you.”

“Am I mistaken, or are you not in my possession awaiting whatever whim I have to do with you what I please.” His fingers tickled over my cheek and I closed my eyes to seem complacent before grabbing his forearm with my fingers and letting my magic own him.

“Try enjoying our time with first degree burns.”

Chapter Twelve

SIBLING RIVALRY

* * * *

Simple and predictable seem pretty darn tantalizing when you're a witch. Lately, I've wished for a lot of things to be the way they were. Gone are my lust for the macabre and the sweetly sinful fantasies of meeting a vampire. Something about unconscious people slumped against the dark leather of the booths at crimson made it less sexy.

Distracted from picking at the bright red gem that I'd awoken, tearing through the air in Linsey's arms, wearing, I doubled-back to keep from tumbling over the prone form of Dax Harris, vampire servant and all around asshat. Somewhere too near Jimmy Buffet's Margaritaville was testing the patience of some unlucky speakers, not to mention my gag reflex.

Feeling Linsey's fingers curl around my waist in a hot press, I ground my teeth together and winced as another vampire floated by with a "Woo, mar-gar-ita night!" His face said he was 17 years old, the flash of predatory hunger in his eyes said he was much older and inhuman. His head snapped back as he reached towards me, blood pouring from his nose from out of nowhere.

"How prosaic," Linsey said, already tucking the white handkerchief he'd used to clean off the blood-spouting vampire's. "It's a... a... themed party of some sort." Sneering, Linsey balked at the too-pale face of a server, whose hand shook as she extended a clear glass, filled with blood to him, complete with a pink cocktail umbrella.

"You're Margarita, sir." When he didn't respond she shrugged, planting the unused glass on her serving tray. "The master also procured some Scott, but we are out of Brandy." I followed her gesture to the red-haired woman whose eyes stared at nothing and saw the same.

"Savian." Linsey said. The girl's eyes widened and I thought I caught the faintest pulse of her jugular two-step before shaking my head to clear the confusion. "I should have known he was the Master to whom you were referring. The little thorn."

Linsey's eyes flicked over me again, making me wish my entire wardrobe were made of thick, woolen cloaks. The touch of his thumb on the pulse of my wrist was the only warning I received before his aura and magic swirled around me to coat mine in a thick and suffocating jelly.

"He has a penchant for catering to the masses this... type of atmosphere... he thinks it portrays the true form of the vampire while I prefer a more subtle ambiance and... Ascher!" He snapped his fingers in front of my face, making me jump and take a step backwards.

Giving me a wary look, he bit the fat of his bottom lip reminding me of the blood we'd shared and making my stomach twist in pain. His hands found my hips and pulled me towards him, his smile widening at the look on my face.

"I promised to show you the truth of my words, did I not?"

We began to spin as the music swelled around us, my eyes heavy with the blood I'd taken.

"Look above you at the balcony, Ascher." I turned to see Gemma laughing as Savian nuzzled against her. There was a fleeting moment of surprise and then anger, and then the heavy velvet drapes caught fire and Gemma screamed. I reached towards the balcony, pulling the fire into me and felt Linsey laughing softly to himself a moment before his teeth sank into my neck and I was gone.

Epilogue

Diary of Elizabeth Farence, 1761

Linsey tied a cloth over my eyes so I could not see where he was taking me. After a long time walking, I felt cobblestones under my feet. He picked me up in his arms and I felt the sting of air rushing past me before he set me down

When he took off the cloth, I saw I was in an ornately decorated bedroom with velvets, silk and tapestries everywhere. He said that this room and the adjoining sitting room and guest suite was our new home. Then, he told me that I must be quiet because he'd taken me without the permission of an elder and if they found out they would kill me and my family to erase any trace of their existence.

I still haven't had anything to drink besides the blood of a few unfortunate animals. This angers Linsey who tells me I must change my ways or I will never survive. I sleep in the guest suite in a polished, carved oak canopy bed most nights, but still awake curled in Linsey's arms more often than not

I wonder what I am to him? What I know is that I'm stronger now than I've ever been before. I move and run quickly like any other predator, but the question is... is that what I truly am?

-The End-