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Hellbourne

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Warning: This book contains sexually explicit content, which is only suitable for mature readers. This story has been rated *Total-e-burning*.

HELLBOURNE

Amber Kell

Dedication

To everyone who writes me notes about how much they enjoy my writing.
I always appreciate positive feedback in a negative world.

Chapter One

It was amazing that the body could still move while the heart was shattering into millions of microscopic pieces. Luc Hellbourne kicked the empty soda can on the street, idly watching it tumble across the asphalt.

All other sensations dimmed next to the pain in his chest.

A bitter laugh burst past his lips.

Homeless.

Why in his father's hell did he ever start a relationship with an alpha werewolf? It wasn't as if he didn't know the man wanted to have a successor, yearned to have children of his own.

It was for the best. He gave another sad laugh at his new mantra, whispered it to the breeze, stomped it out with each step, desperately trying to believe his own words.

He didn't know which hurt worse, losing his lover to a woman, or losing the comfort and caring of the pack. Cutting himself away from his pack friends after twenty years of belonging ripped away a huge chunk of his soul.

Remembering the love in Betsy's eyes when she claimed Bran as her own eased a small portion of Luc's frozen heart. However, during the mating ceremony, Bran had looked away from his new wife and the longing in his expression as he watched Luc, hit him as if he were struck by a body blow.

He knew in that moment that the werewolf would never accept his fate as long as Luc was near. It wasn't fair to the pack to have a conflicted alpha. One of them had to leave.

The one who wasn't pack.

"Get it together." Tears prickling his eyes, Luc continued his determined march to nowhere.

His guitar case banged painfully against his side as he walked, all the hard edges finding his most sensitive places. He ignored it with the same indifference he coated over his soul to keep moving. His guitar was custom made by his uncle, one of his most prized possessions, and the only thing he'd grabbed on the way out. The rest of his things he'd

shoved through a portal to his childhood bedroom. He'd retrieve them when he found a place to stay.

A quick glance around proved he was in unfamiliar territory. An area of town never visited, at least not in recent memory, but then he'd never travelled around the city without companions before. Loneliness formed a hard knot in his stomach.

This was a day for new things.

So far, none of them had been good.

Loud, pounding music caught his attention. It thrummed through his body like a moving heartbeat. As a half fae, Luc felt the notes deep in his soul. Matching his steps to the beat, he turned the corner seeking the source of the sound. A music club stood before him, pulsing notes sliding through the doors each time the bouncers opened them.

The club's ridiculously overdone stone façade had grinning gargoyles carved over the corners. Words written in bright red paint to resemble dripping blood proclaimed this building *The River Styx*.

Luc had visited, played around and once damn near drowned in the River Styx as a child, and this wasn't it. The river that granted immunity from death never had a line of goth kids wrapped around the block and there wasn't one creepy ferryman in sight.

Tempted, Luc decided now was the time to slack his thirst. He hadn't had a drink in hours. His stomach rolled queasily at the memory of the wedding champagne.

Decision made, he walked straight up the stairs towards the bouncers guarding the door.

"Good evening, gentlemen."

Damn, the men were impossibly big close up. Luc liked a large man. He let his eyes roam up and down them both. There was the off chance he'd get the crap beat out of him, but he knew how to run if things went badly.

"Good evening," they replied in unison. The man on the left gave him a small smile, while the one on the right looked at him as if he were a chocoholic finding the world's last chocolate truffle.

He flashed them both his best smile. "I'd like to go into your fine establishment, what's the cover charge?"

It didn't occur to him to stand in line. People who looked like him weren't meant for lines. It wasn't vanity. It was a fact. He was a perfect creation by the devil himself and blessed by thirty-six gods and goddesses. There was only one creature as perfectly formed as him.

And father was scary as fuck so he didn't count.

"No cost for you, sweetheart," the bouncer on the left announced with a hitch in his voice as the other one nodded mutely.

Flashing another smile, Luc let the man open the door for him.

As he passed he saw the bouncers sniffing at him.

Weird.

He shrugged before banishing the event out of his mind. Having lived with werewolves, he was used to sniffing, but these couldn't be weres. Bran would never let another pack in his territory.

* * * *

The music was something wild and electric. Not a band he recognised, but it had a good beat and the gyrating kids convulsing on the dance floor were entertaining.

What really caught his attention was the incredibly ugly picture of the devil painted two stories high behind the stage. It grinned evilly at the dancers below, baring razor sharp teeth with two large horns bisecting its ridged forehead.

Luc felt a reluctant smile grace his lips as he walked towards the horrible caricature of the Lord of the Underworld. The temptation to send a photo of it to his father struck him hard. He whipped out his cell phone, took a picture, and with a wicked grin, beamed it to his father's phone.

Strange, how his father could receive messages in hell when Luc could barely keep his reception a block away from the cell tower. Maybe giving in to satanic powers gave a person magic cell phone vibes. Shaking his head at his whimsical thoughts, Luc put his phone back in his pocket and headed for the long bar dominating the far side of the room. The pain in his chest eased a bit with his amusement.

Before he could raise his hand, the bartender appeared before him. Luc blinked. He could've sworn the man was on the other side of the long counter not two seconds before.

The bartender's hair matched the shiny bar, both a lustrous brown. Luc received a smile with white, white teeth and sparkling sea blue eyes. He reminded Luc of a selkie he'd known once upon a time.

"What can I get for you, sir? Would you like me to tuck your case behind the bar?" the bartender asked, his smooth baritone cutting through the loud music.

Sir? Wow, his boss must be really strict.

"Yes, thank you." Luc handed his case over.

"I'll take the darkest beer you have on tap. Just keep them coming." It took a lot of beer to get him drunk. Tonight, he felt properly motivated.

He ignored the sympathetic, probing gaze that came with the beer. The bartender obviously knew a heartbroken sap when he saw one.

The cool liquor soothed Luc's throat. Sipping his drink, he turned to watch the dancers as the yeasty brew hit his tongue.

Poor kids, they really lack rhythm. He had a brief thought of showing them how to dance, but a particularly enthusiastic frenzy made him rethink the idea.

They were beyond help. With a sigh, Luc took another sip of beer.

After a while he decided to go sit closer to the band, the people on either side of him were getting too close for comfort and he didn't feel like being squished between hard, sweaty bodies.

How unlike him.

It took little effort to find a table. He just sent mental *go away* vibes to a group and had them vacate.

He wasn't in the mood for subtle.

Once seated at the table a cute blond waiter, all blue eyes and scatterly curls, rushed forwards to take his order. His nametag said *Jerrod*.

"Do you have any food here?"

The waiter swallowed. "You're fae."

"Only half," he said, hoping the short answer would encourage the kid to take his order.

"Wow. I—I've never met a fae before." The waiter stared at him with a kind of wondrous awe as if he'd run across a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow.

Damn, he forgot how his fae vibes affected those who weren't wolf breed. Werewolves were immune to glamour. One of the many reasons he'd stayed inside the pack for so long. There was only so much fawning a man could take on a day-to-day basis, despite what father said.

"Does that mean you don't have food?"

"Oh, sorry. Here you go." The blond blushed brightly as he whipped out a menu from his apron pocket.

Folded accordion style it listed a miniscule amount of bar food, most of it fried.

Luc sighed. "I don't suppose there's a chance of getting a salad?"

"Absolutely. I'll go get you one right now." The waiter snatched the menu back and scurried through the crowd, making impressive speed considering the number of bodies crammed into the club.

Luc idly wondered if the blond would have to leave the building to get his food. With a shrug, he leant back in his chair to watch the crowds.

Seeing others having fun twisted the pain in Luc's heart. Years of partying with the pack flashed through his head.

Good memories to pull out in the upcoming lonely nights. The previous years with Bran were wonderful in many ways, but he would mostly miss the daily touches, soft morning kisses and slow just-woke-up fucks.

Bran wasn't meant to be his permanent mate. His lover wanted a ton of pups and an alpha bitch at his side. It was the suddenness of it all that hurt Luc. One day it was 'good morning, lover' the next it was 'I'm going to start wooing females to find a mate'.

Luc took another sip of his beer.

Bastard.

The worst part was that despite everything, Bran still watched him with those damned needy eyes. Luc was no one's sidepiece of ass. Besides, he wouldn't do that to Bran's new mate.

Staying around would only lead to pack dissention...and big ass fights.

Setting his elbows on the table, he rested his face on his hands, rubbing his damp eyes with the heels of his palms.

Damned watering holes.

"You all right, baby?" A dark, velvety voice spoke beside him. The sound of the other man's voice rippled down his spine and made him catch his breath. His body hardened in response to the sexy tone.

"No, I don't think I am," Luc said, taking his hands away from his eyes to look up at the speaker. He almost swallowed his tongue. A huge man dressed in black leather pants and a white silk shirt towered over him.

The man's black hair, cut brutally short, exposed a strong, harsh profile like a warrior of old. There was nothing pretty or even handsome about the man. His features were too masculine, the scar on the right side of his face too prominent. However, the power oozing from him went straight to Luc's balls, finishing the job that had started with his voice.

Always a sucker for a big man, a big man with power was like a super aphrodisiac. One more reason he stayed with that asshole alpha for so long.

"Anything I can do to help you?"

Luc gave the man a slow look over from the top of his short dark hair to the bottom of his polished black boots, pausing to admire every gorgeous, muscled point in between. "Want to be my rebound fuck?"

Nikkolai Remondi looked at the man sitting before him. In his five hundred years as a vampire, he had never seen a more beautiful creature.

The man was sleekly built with amazing autumn gold hair that cascaded down to the base of his neck in riotous curls. His features were symmetrically perfect and his sorrow-filled eyes were like brilliant emeralds shot with silver.

Fae.

In a bar with hundreds of bodies, Nikkolai had scented him from the catwalk above.

His.

The master vampire could almost taste the sadness emanating from the sweet boy. He slid into the chair next to the gorgeous fae.

"I'm Nikkolai Remondi," he said, holding out his hand, "but my friends call me Nikko."

"Luc Hellbourne." The fae gave his hand a shake. The contact felt as if an electric current went directly to his balls. Hot, sizzling and not altogether comfortable.

He took back his hand still trying to decide if he liked the sensation when a soft voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Here's your salad." Jerrod, one of the new wait staff, placed an enormous green salad in front of Luc. Nikko could smell the need pouring from the boy.

When did they start serving salad?

"Thank you." Luc gave the server a smile that transformed him from a sad beauty to an incandescent star.

Jerrod shivered, the smell of spunk filling the air. "L-let me know if you need anything else."

"I will," Luc said with a nod, taking a big bite out of the greens.

Nikkolai growled at Jerrod, letting the younger vamp know he was out of his league. The kid wasn't even one of his tribe, just a loaner from a master who wanted him out of sight for a time.

Mine. He sent a mental message to the kid, making sure to stake his claim.

The waiter fled, but not before sending a pitiful look at the delicious fae.

Luc's words ran through his head. "What are you rebounding from?"

"My ex dumped me for a girl."

"That's tough." Nikkolai rubbed a hand over Luc's shoulder. A motion meant to be soothing. Hell, he touched people every day without meaning anything by it, but as soon as he made contact with Luc, he felt that same jolt run down his spine and directly to his balls.

The fae continued to eat his salad as if he didn't feel anything.

Shit, maybe he didn't.

"Were you with him very long?"

Luc's odd green eyes sparkled with tears giving them an eerie shine. "Yeah. I love him, you know, but I want him to be happy. With me around, he's just going to think 'what if'." Those sad, sad eyes entranced Nikkolai. "I can't do that to his m-wife."

How anyone could give up a man this stunning, he didn't know, but sometimes relationships didn't make sense. Even Nikkolai had had his share of bad relationships. Hell, so far they'd all been bad. Maybe this sad-eyed fae could change his luck. After all, one man's stupid decision was another man's opportunity.

"Have much fae blood?" The question blurted out before he could stop himself. Fae blood was highly desired by vampire kind. The fae rarely appeared above ground and their blood tasted like concentrated magic. If he could coax this one to his side, he could cement his position as the most powerful vampire in the state.

Luc gave a laugh. "Why don't I just wear a T-shirt? I haven't been pegged as a fae so much in years." He took another bite, distracting Nikkolai who watched the food go into that pretty, pretty mouth.

He had plans for that mouth. So many plans. He shifted in his seat, trying to find a more comfortable position in his suddenly tight pants.

"I'm half fae," Luc said after he swallowed his food. "What are you?"

"Vampire." No reason to hide his true nature, the man would know what he was as soon as he sank his teeth into that sexy neck.

He got a smile and a shrug as the beautiful creature ate his food.

"Where's your mound?" Nikko asked, nerves starting to set in. The fae didn't live well outside of their mounds. They aged quickly and died even faster. The thought of this stunning man wasting away in front of him sent alarm bells clanging through his body.

Luc shrugged. "I don't have one."

"What the fuck, you don't have one. Did they throw you out?" Panic tore through him. An emotion he wasn't certain he'd ever felt before. Was his last lover a powerful fae who dumped him and tossed him out of the mound?

As if reading his mind, the pretty fae laughed. "I'm not going to die on you. I don't need a mound. I've never had a mound. Don't worry." The gorgeous man's voice settled something deep inside Nikko, melting away the panic and concern.

"Huh. So ex-lover isn't fae?"

Luc snorted. Even disdain was beautiful on this guy. "Not hardly."

With quick delicate motions, the huge salad was polished off. "So are you interested in being my rebound guy?"

Nikko leaned over, slid one large hand through the smaller man's hair and covered Luc's mouth with his own. Lightning sizzled between them until Nikko's entire body felt tuned to the slim man pressed against him. With reluctance, he forced his hands and lips to release the fae. "Honey, I'm interested in being your anything."

If his voice was rougher than before he hoped the slim beauty didn't notice. The vampire was pretty damned sure it would take little effort for Luc to wrap him around one of his slim, elegant fingers.

Nikko had to take care of a few things before he was free to explore the gorgeous creature before him and maybe get a bite to eat so he didn't scare his little fae. "Meet me upstairs in ten minutes."

Those brilliant eyes gazed at him for a long moment. "All right."

Chapter Two

The size of the man might intimidate most people. Nothing intimidated Luc. When the devil raised you, no one else was evil enough to fear.

He used his most wheedling tone and tried for an innocent look. "But Nikko-baby said if I wasn't there in ten minutes he was going to be very angry with me." Sometimes it was fun to make crap up. Luc added a little fear in his voice just for kicks.

"Master Nikkolai said that?" the guard's voice trembled.

Wow, you could really see the whites of the guy's eyes.

"Yep. But I could tell him that you just didn't want to break protocol." Luc let that statement hang in the air for a moment. "I mean surely he'll understand. He's good that way." Now he was just messing with the guy to watch him sweat.

He took another sip of his beer waiting to see what the vamp guard would do.

The vampire stepped to one side. "He's in the lounge, second door on your left."

"Thank you." Luc placed a soft kiss on the man's cheek in way of apology, pleased when the guard's heart skipped a beat.

It was nice to know that he still had it, and if Luc's path up the stairs was a little wobbly as he drank his beer, well, there wasn't any audience. *How many beers did that make, three, four, hmm, maybe six...whatever.*

He stopped at the top of the stairs, the door the man had indicated pulsed lightly with power.

Taking a last sip of his beer, Luc opened the door and walked through to another world. A large room, with a plush black carpet—probably hid blood stains quite well—and red and black décor spread before him. It was almost as big as the dance floor below, but instead of crowds of goth dancers and hard wooden seats, this room was littered with comfy upholstered chairs, couches and people draped across them. Women, men, some vampires, some food, all dressed in fancy almost-there wear.

"Anyone have another beer?" Luc asked, waving his glass in the air.

For a moment the room fell into absolute silence, all eyes on him. He suppressed a giggle, but it was a challenge.

A low velvety purr came from the far corner. "Sheila, get the beautiful man a beer."

Bingo.

Luc turned in the direction of the voice.

Mmmm.

He gave a cursory look at the two scantily clad women draped on either side of Nikkolai, as if they were matching accessories, and felt a flash of fire burn in his belly.

"Go," he snapped.

The women jumped up and ran for the door.

Oops, maybe he put a little too much nudge into that command.

Nikkolai laughed. "Baby, you're a fierce little fae."

"Here's your beer." The sultry blonde, Nikko called Sheila, approached in a skimpy black dress and handed him a glass of dark beer with a come hither smile, while taking the empty one out of his hand.

"Thanks, darlin'." He smiled back at her, sliding a friendly hand down her arm as he accepted the drink. After all he didn't hate women, he just didn't want one in his bed.

A growl came from the corner.

Luc hid his smile as he took a sip.

Someone was a little jealous.

Luc walked over to Nikko and straddled the vampire's lap by placing one knee on either side of the deliciously broad body. Tilting his beer, he took a nice long drink, taunting the vamp with a clear view of his neck. He swallowed the beer, licking his lips to remove the foam he could feel bubbling against his upper lip.

"Hi, sugar, I'm here just as you requested."

Lust burned in Nikko's eyes like twin flames. Two huge hands curved around Luc's ass, holding him firmly in place. "You listen well, little fae."

"Master Nikkolai, can I get you something?" Sheila spoke to Nikkolai, but Luc could feel her eyes on the back of his head.

Master? Why did he always go for the alphas? "Master vampire?"

Nikkolai nodded.

Luc tried to stand up but those strong hands held him fast.

"Going somewhere?" Nikko's tone implied *yes* wasn't the proper answer.

He decided to try honesty. "Look, I don't mind you being a vampire, but a vampire master is a little more than I'm willing to cope with right now. I've had enough alpha types to last me a while."

"Deal," said Nikkolai before possessing Luc's lips in a take-no-prisoners kiss.

Heat. Mmmm. It poured through him like an inferno, burning away some of his liquor-induced haze. Luc couldn't stop the moan that rolled through his chest even if he'd wanted to. He could feel his will melting beneath the passionate fire of Nikko's touch.

Reluctantly, he broke away to get oxygen. "Fine, but only for one night."

Luc could claim drunkenness in the morning. One night could be excused. Two nights was just stupidity. No way was he getting involved with another alpha male who would break his heart. On the plus side, vampires couldn't have babies, so he wouldn't be dumped for some werebitch.

"Let's go to my room," Nikko growled, breaking into Luc's beer-slushed thoughts.

He slid off of the vampire and watched that long, long body stand.

Oh, yeah.

Luc allowed the vamp to lead him out of the room to a stairway at the opposite end of the hall where a huge guard stood blocking access.

Wow, what did they feed these guys? They must be on super blood or something. Maybe they had a vampire cloning machine in the back that created six-foot-five blood-sucking clones by the dozen.

In addition to being huge, the guard had mahogany hair and melting brown eyes.

Totally his type.

He must have made some noise because his new buddy gave him a glare. "He's not for you," Nikko growled.

Luc returned the vamp's glare with an innocent look. "Of course not, I'm obviously busy."

At least tonight. Tomorrow, who knew?

The guard gave him a wink as they passed.

Luc let the large, alpha vamp drag him upstairs. After all, he really only wanted a nice quiet space to check out Mr. Sex-on-two-legs. Curiosity was his downfall. His father always told him it was one of his sins. Luc hoped to work on a few of the other sins tonight, starting on lust. Maybe moving through greed, gluttony and ending in sloth.

Yep, it was important for a man to have goals.

That fine ass kept moving up the stairs. Luc followed, mesmerised by the strong muscles flexing before his eyes. A smile flashed over Nikko's shoulder told him the vampire knew the impact of that ass.

They passed a few other people but Nikko didn't greet them, acknowledge them or step around them as they scattered.

Wow, the vampire master had worse manners than the wolves.

Oddly, that was a turn on.

Before he knew it, there were no more people, no more music, nothing but the two of them as Nikkolai pulled him into a dark room, slamming the door behind them. It closed with a solid thud. Luc watched the vampire whisper a few words over the lock, sealing them in.

This wouldn't be a room easily escaped.

Well, for most people.

Luckily, Luc wasn't most people. He could conjure a portal in his sleep and if there was a mirror it was even easier.

Shoving him against the wall, Nikkolai lifted both of Luc's wrists above his head, stretching his body until he was pressed between the hard wall and the harder vampire. Heat from Nikkolai poured into him searing away the chill in his soul.

"I always thought vampires were cold," Luc said, the words escaping his mouth as he soaked in the heat from the body pressed against his own.

Nikko's forehead crinkled in thought. "Why?"

Luc shrugged or tried to since he couldn't wiggle that much. "In books and movies vampires are always cool. You feel hot to me."

The vampire laughed, a bit of fang peaking through his lips. "Honey, we feed on warm blood why in the hell would we be cold?" Nikko shook his head at his nonsense and kissed him. Luc could almost taste the vampire's smile.

"Mine," Nikkolai growled when he let Luc up for air.

Oooh, possessive.

Luc's toes, barely touching the floor, curled with pleasure as he gave himself up to the other man's will. He loved strong and commanding in his lovers because outside of the bedroom, life was so much damn work.

He leaned into the next kiss and let Nikko overwhelm him. The man's body was firm and hard against his. Rubbing against Luc's erection, the vampire gave him just the right amount of friction to send sparks throughout his body and shivers up his spine.

Delicious.

They weren't going to make it to the bed was Luc's thought right before he was thrown through the air, a hungry growl rising from Nikko's throat. He landed on a soft surface with a gentle bounce barely registering the luxurious comfort before two large hands descended and started ripping off his clothing. The sound of threads snapping told him he might not have all his buttons any more, but Luc couldn't find the will to care.

Once they were both naked, Nikkolai stood at the bottom of the bed and stared, his eyes glowing in the dim light.

"Come here, Nikko." Luc held out his hand to encourage the other man closer.

And was devoured.

Nikko's huge muscled body slid beside him, shadowing Luc with his tall form. Before he could catch his breath, one calloused hand grabbed his prick, pumping it up and down without warning. The contrast between the rough grip and Luc's delicate skin was intense. Too intense.

Unable to do anything more than take the pleasure forced upon him, Luc bucked under Nikko's hands. Hands that gripped, pumped, caressed and drove him out of his ever-loving mind.

Exactly what he needed.

Without warning Luc's body exploded. Cum burst from him like a geyser, draining him of both fluids and energy. Nikko's motions slowed, the kisses turning more affectionate than passionate.

The vampire's soft chuckle in the dark was low and intimate. "Will you get it up again?"

"Always."

"You're so fucking beautiful. May I have you?" The master vampire's voice was oddly hesitant considering the take-charge attitude he'd had up to that point.

"I'm all yours," Luc reassured him, placing a soft kiss on the other man's exposed throat.

"All mine." Nikko's teeth flashed white and pointy in the dark. "I like that."

Luc felt a sliver of unease try to break through his foggy thoughts.

What did he just agree to?

Then those large, hot hands were on his body giving him sweet, demanding touches while warm, soft lips melted his brain. Luc forgot the question, forgot even his own name.

There was a soft snick then a finger, oiled and slick, pushed into him. A groan tore from his throat as he sank upon that digit longing for another. "More."

"No. Not yet. You're too tight. I won't hurt you."

Luc whimpered and in the end he begged in soft, broken tones for more. More touching, more fingers, more something. "Please Nikko, please."

Two fingers.

The slow molten pleasure felt as if it were dissolving his bones, turning him into a pliable, liquidy mess. He moaned and whimpered, making encouraging noises and shifting his body to urge the vampire on, anything to get this man to hurry up. The intense need was torturing him and he'd been tortured by the best. Eventually, after minutes that felt like hours, three fingers filled his hole.

"Please, I'm ready, come inside me." He could only take so much. This was going from pleasure to torture.

"Your skin, it's glowing," Nikko said on a breath of whispered reverence.

Luc glanced down and saw that his skin was indeed glowing a soft white. "It's the fae blood," he said in needy tones. "Now fuck me."

The vampire responded by kissing him while his fingers pumped in and out of Luc's body. Nikko's motions pegged his prostrate making him whimper with need. Finally, when he was about to cry from the ache of it all, the vampire removed his fingers and pushed inside him, filling him, completing him.

Still so careful, his lover slid in and out with slow sinuous movements. Luc dug in his heels trying to speed him along. In response, Nikko hooked his hands behind Luc's knees lifting his heels from the bed and removing his leverage. "Don't rush. Savour."

He wanted to scream at the man to move. He didn't want to savour he wanted to be fucked, but the expression in the vampire's eyes trapped his words inside. Nikko wrapped a hand around Luc's prick, pumping him while moving back and forth inside with controlled bursts of power.

"Shit." Luc's hips snapped forwards when he felt the vampire's cum pump inside of him. Control shot, he spewed hot ropes of liquid across both of their stomachs. High on endorphins, it took him a minute to realise the man in bed with him wasn't just nibbling on his neck but getting sustenance from it.

The vampire was *feeding*.

Fear shot through him.

"Shh." Nikko licked his neck. Luc guessed he was sealing the wound. "You're safe. No one will ever hurt you again my sweet tasting, little fae. You're all mine."

With those words, Nikko wrapped his big body around Luc like a giant blood-sucking teddy bear. Those big ass hands rubbed up and down Luc's back in long soothing strokes. For the moment, Luc forgot his worries and slipped easily into sleep.

* * * *

The howling of his cell phone pulled Luc from his slumber. The wolf howl was a ringtone he'd recorded during a full moon and assigned to the pack house main number. The sound had Luc scrambling to free himself from his cuddling lover. Memories of limitless beers fluttered through his brain before vanishing.

Luckily, he never got hangovers.

Luc stumbled to locate his pants in the dim light and once found, fumbled to find the pocket with his phone inside, anxious to stop the noise before it woke the vampire.

His fingers found the phone in his left pocket. Luc pulled it out and flipped it open to stop the noise. "Hello."

"Luc, thank the goddess I found you." The raspy voice of Salvador, the pack's beta, came across the line. "Bran's missing. Is he with you?"

Pain stabbed through Luc's heart. "Of course he's not with me. Isn't he off on his honeymoon?" Anger gave his voice a rare edge. Trust his ex-lover to garner attention when he was supposed to be out of sight, out of mind.

"Betsy called me in tears. His wolf rejected her, then he ran off."

He'd never heard of that happening before. The line went silent while Luc waited for an explanation...and waited.

"What the fuck do you mean his wolf rejected her? Didn't they already have sex?"

Not that he wanted the details. The thought of his former lover's strong hands touching another made him ill. His attention snapped to the bed as Nikko's body shifted beneath the covers as if sensing his distress. One long arm reached out, fingers searching for him as the vampire slept.

Salvador drew his attention back to the phone. "Betsy said when they tried to mate Bran freaked. According to her, his eyes went wolf and he flew out of there. We think he'll head for you."

"Why in the ten hells would he come to me? He made it completely clear that he wanted pups. In case you didn't know, I can't give him that and I have no interest in being his piece of ass on the side."

"I know, I know and the pack appreciates all you've sacrificed," the beta's voice was heavy with sorrow, making Luc wonder for the first time how his separation affected the pack.

"Are you some place safe? I don't think Bran will harm you, but if his wolf's loose he'll hunt you down and I don't know what he'll do." There was a pause as if he were gathering his thoughts. "We know you're his true mate Luc. Betsy was a poor replacement sought for Bran's human half. Our alpha might be able to fool himself but he can't fool his animal nature."

Luc blinked back the tears filling his eyes. "I...I always knew he would cast me aside, Sal, but I didn't think it would hurt so much. I miss you guys."

"Hang in there, Luc. You'll always be part of our pack, Bran or not. Where are you?"

"At The River Styx."

"The vampire club?"

Luc laughed. "Yeah."

"What have you done?" Sal's voice took on a familiar commanding tone. As the pack beta, he was used to being obeyed by just about everyone except the alpha. With Bran gone, the beta was in charge.

Luc bristled in defence. "I drowned my sorrows. Don't fucking judge me, you didn't just lose everything."

Sal sighed, the sound weighty and sad. "Don't be so sure, my friend. Don't be so sure. Are you safe?"

Luc looked around the spell-secured room taking in the thick walls and reinforced magic. "I'm as safe as can be." He'd have to find a way to get Nikko to let him stay until whatever bug was up Bran's butt escaped.

"Good. I'll keep you updated. Call me if you see Bran. Take care." There was a pause then Sal's voice came across softer. "I mean it, Luc. I know you're hurting right now but you're important to the pack and not just because you were Bran's lover. You helped us more times than we can count. Call me if you need anything, and I mean anything."

Blinking back tears, Luc cut the connection after promising his friend that he would call if there was a problem. With mixed feelings, he put his phone back into his pocket. Part of him was concerned about Bran while the small, petty part felt a little smug that the big, bad alpha couldn't mate with the woman he insisted would be a better match than Luc.

Heart sore, Luc crawled back into bed. Nikko moved to snuggle him close as soon as he lay down.

"Is there a problem, beautiful?" Nikko rumbled against his chest as the vampire wrapped his arm and leg around Luc again.

"My ex is hunting me. Can I hang out here for a few days?"

"If you stay with me, you'll have to be my thrall." Nikko nuzzled beneath Luc's ear, derailing his thoughts for a moment as all sensation pooled to his groin.

"Thrall?" he gasped out.

Nikko nodded. "Non-vampires can only stay in a tribe if they belong to one of the vamps. Since I'm the master of this group, the others will only accept you if you're my thrall. I can't break the rules I expect others to abide by or I'll lose all respect."

"Wh-what does that involve?" Luc was starting to wonder what he'd got himself into. Was a werewolf mauling better?

"You'll have to wear my collar to signify your status as my possession and sit at my side when we're in groups with other vampires. Be my arm candy," Nikko whispered against Luc's skin, licking a sensitive spot on his neck and triggering shivers down his spine.

Luc started laughing and couldn't stop. He'd lived with werewolves for twenty years but it took going to a vampire to put a collar on him.

Nikko rubbed a soothing hand across his bare back. "I'm glad you're amused."

"Anything else?" It sounded as if he were a prized pet. He wondered if he got a comfy pillow to sit on. Maybe a chew toy.

"No giving blood to anyone but me."

"Not into sharing, huh?"

"No." There wasn't even a hint of laughter in the vampire's growl. Luc peeked up at the other man. Nikko's face wore a fierce frown.

"Ooo-kay. Do I at least get clothes?"

"Of course. I wouldn't want anyone else looking at you."

How did he get himself into these situations?

"It would only be for a few days," Luc ventured to say.

"It's a start. You might find you like being mine."

With Nikko petting him and luring him back to sleep, Luc's last thought was he might enjoy belonging to someone else for a while. It would help if he couldn't remember years of hot, loving kisses and miles of smooth mocha skin with his name tattooed across one shoulder, but that's what the beer was for.

To help him forget.

Chapter Three

Nikko woke to the most delicious scent filling his nose. Nuzzling in closer he sought to wrap himself around the smell. Warm flesh met his lips and a soft giggle vibrated the skin beneath him.

Oh, the little fae. The sweet, sweet boy with the broken heart and the most powerful blood he'd ever tasted. Energy still zinged through his body from the little sip he'd taken the night before. Remembering the taste, his mouth watered and his fangs slid forwards, eager for another burst of intoxicating flavour.

"Good evening, beautiful," he murmured, wallowing in the feel of the slender man wrapped in his arms. Skin slid against skin as he found a smooth thigh to rub against. He nipped Luc's shoulder with his fangs, lapping at the streak of blood oozing from the small wound.

"Oh, yeah. Right there," the lyrical voice whispered as the sleek fae rubbed against him.

Need surged through Nikko like a tidal wave. Wanting to have his lover come with him, the vampire wrapped his hand around both of them, pumping them in concert.

It didn't take long before he felt wet streams shoot against his stomach. The feel of Luc's release pulled Nikko into an orgasm, sparkles lighting behind his eyes.

"Wow," Nikko said, giving an awkward pat to Luc's smooth, silky back. He waved a hand and magically dissolved the mess between them before wrapping them back up in their cocoon of blankets.

"I love that spell," Luc said, contentedly curling up beside the vampire. Nikko couldn't help smiling even as he lapped at the sexy man's neck. Sometimes it was handy to have magic.

"Go back to sleep, beautiful. We'll get up in a little while." He wrapped his entire body around the smaller man, instinct driving him to want to keep the fae safe, purposely ignoring the little voice whispering that this was the first lover he hadn't kicked out of his bed right after sex.

In his mind he envisioned the collar he would put on his pretty, pretty lover. He waited until Luc's breathing was slow and easy before he slid out of the bed in slow, easy movements, careful to not wake his companion.

Nikko dressed and removed the wards covering the door, resetting them once he was on the other side. Nothing would get to his fae while he slept.

Gabriel stood guard in the hall outside their room with a gleam in his eyes, flashing a bit of fang. "How's it going boss?" he asked with a smirk. "I hear you found yourself a pretty boy to play with."

"Bring me that gold collar in the showcase," Nikko said, ignoring his lieutenant's words.

Gabriel lost his smile. "You've only had him for a few hours. How much could you know about him?" he protested.

"I know that if you don't bring me that collar, I'm going to lose my temper," Nikko growled. He watched with satisfaction as the other vampire fled down the hallway. The need to return to the sleeping fae tugged at him like an aching tooth.

"Here, Master." Gabriel bowed, presenting the thin red leather box formally.

Nikko must have sounded firmer than he thought if he was getting the full treatment.

Popping open the latch, he lifted the lid of the box and admired the sparkling rubies nestled in squares of pure gold. Each one-inch link of gold was antique and tempered with age. The elaborate piece looked as if it were something royalty might have worn in a bygone time.

To Nikko, it was perfection for his gorgeous lover.

"Master." Gabriel kneeled, his auburn head bowing before Nikko. "Please don't do this. You don't need a thrall. I can get you any number of young men."

"Gabe," Nikko interrupted. "Have you seen my lover?" It was inconceivable to the master vampire that anyone could meet Luc and not understand his new obsession.

His lieutenant looked up with puzzled eyes. "No. But I was told he came here just last night."

"Ah, come with me."

He de-spelled the door and went through, guiding Gabriel to the bed. Nothing was visible but a still lump beneath the covers. "Luc, my sweet," he said in a low voice. "Wake up and greet Gabriel, my second in command. He'll be in charge of you whenever I'm away."

There was a rustle of the sheets then a head of brilliantly coloured blond-gold hair appeared followed by a perfectly formed face. Silver-backed emerald eyes blinked blearily at him. "What's up?" Luc asked in a sleep-roughened voice.

"Wow," Gabe whispered behind him.

Nikko couldn't hide his proud smile. Yeah, he was riding a lucky star when he ran into this beauty.

He saw the moment Luc's eyes focussed. He got a sweet smile that extended to his lieutenant.

"Nice to meet you," his sweet boy said with a tentative smile before sliding out of bed and slipping into his clothes.

Nikko wasn't surprised to see his new lover had no sense of modesty. If you were flawlessly beautiful, there was no need to be ashamed of exposing yourself to others.

He could smell the hormone level rise in the other vamp.

"Mine," he growled, flashing his fangs.

"But he's so glorious," Gabriel murmured in a low voice. "I don't even like men and I'd sell my soul to be his lover. What does he taste like?" His voice was wistful like a child seeing a new toy he yearned to have.

"Nirvana," Nikko said before walking away from the other vamp and stepping closer to his lover. "I brought your collar."

Luc slipped on his shirt but didn't fasten it since most of the buttons were still scattered about the floor. He glanced at the pretty vampire that accompanied Nikko, but when the other vamp didn't come closer he turned his attention to his new lover.

Damn, but the man was adorable. Who knew a master vampire could look shy?

He flashed Nikko a reassuring smile.

Nikko dropped the box. It fell on the plush carpet with a soft thud.

Luc leaned over and picked up the jewel box, opening it to find a stunning necklace inside. *Ooh, pretty.* The sparkles in the gems glowed with the inner fire of fine quality gems.

"Put it on me." He thrust it at the vampire with eager hands. The fae part of him adored the sparkly while the part of him that was the devil's son coveted the value of the gems.

Nikko's large hands looked even larger as they fumbled with the necklace. The cool stones felt chilly against Luc's warm skin, but quickly warmed with his body heat. The weight was reassuring instead of suffocating, giving him the impression of being cherished instead of owned.

"When you mentioned a collar, I was thinking something shoddy and leather," Luc admitted.

The vampire gave him a quick kiss before stepping away to admire his neck. "Beautiful, just like you, my sweet fae."

Luc gave Gabriel a quick look. The other vamp was gorgeous but he just didn't have the same appeal as the master. Why did he always have to fall for the mega-alpha?

A banging on the bedroom door caught their attention.

"Enter," Nikko shouted.

The pretty waiter from last night rushed into the room. He stopped before them, bowing low to Nikko before speaking. "There's an enormous wolf outside trying to tear down the door."

"Bran," Luc said without thinking.

Nikko gave him a narrowed look. "Is there a reason you know this?"

"Yep. I would bet my pretty new collar that my ex-lover is at your door."

Fuck, Sal. Luc was going to have some fun. *After all, the only thing more fun than meeting your old lover with your new one, is to do it while wearing a shiny ruby collar.*

He'd teach that dumping bastard.

Luc pulled his cell phone from his pocket, pressing and holding the one key to activate speed dial.

It rang a few times.

"Talk to me," Sal's voice came across the line.

"Your missing wolf is here," Luc said. He cut the connection, not wasting time on further conversation. He looked up to see all three vamps staring at him as if he were a new, interesting species they'd just encountered.

With a sweet smile to all, he walked past them and sashayed out the door.

Luc could hear a banging noise as they reached the lower levels of the club.

Slam.

The doors groaned with the impact, the sound of shattering wood rose from the room below. Bran must've smashed the doorframe. A wolf's cry pierced the air.

He knew that howl. The hair on the back of Luc's neck rose at the sound.

Bran was in the building.

The master vampire came up next to him on the catwalk. They both looked down into the club. It was too early for a big crowd but the vampire bouncers were leading a few club babies out the door at record speeds. By the glazed look in the humans' eyes, Luc knew they wouldn't remember leaving.

Vamps lined the walls, keeping away from the growling wolf prowling the room. In a contest between a wolf the size of a small pony and a vampire, Luc would put money on the animal. He'd seen how wolves fight and nothing comes between a wolf and his target.

"Bran, stop it," Luc shouted down.

The huge animal sat on its haunches and lifted its head towards the sound of his voice.

"Let me guess, your last boyfriend was the alpha of the Evergreen Pack?"

Luc shrugged. "What can I say, I like alphas."

Nikko growled as he descended the stairs, pulling Luc behind him.

Luc could feel the tension pulsing through the air, squeezing the oxygen out of the room. Stubbornly, he stepped to the side of Nikko, letting the wolf see him.

"What do you want, Bran?" he asked, more than a little proud that his voice didn't shake under the baleful gold gaze.

There was a shimmer in the air. When it cleared, a man stood where the wolf had been. The Evergreen alpha had smooth mocha skin, lush black hair and the same gold eyes in either form. Bran stepped forwards fully clothed, his eyes fixated on Luc's slim form.

"I've come for my mate," he said in a deep, sexy voice. The same voice that used to whisper sweet words of love to Luc in the darkness of the night.

Luc ruthlessly stamped down the memories as he looked at the handsome wolf. "I'm sorry to hear you lost her already."

They stared at each other — two strong men neither willing to look away.

"Why is it that you have clothing when you shift?" Nikko asked.

"It was a gift from Luc," Sal's familiar voice rang out. "He wanted to keep us safe when we shifted."

Luc looked past the alpha wolf and saw that besides the beta a few other members of the pack had arrived.

"And out of jail," another voice spoke up.

A few laughs went through the group, an old joke shattering the tension. Luc felt the sweet pull of a shared memory. How he missed his friends.

"I love you, Luc. Come back to me."

The words were perfect, but the tension in Luc's chest told him there was more to it than the perfect words. "Why?"

Bran's handsome face crinkled in confusion. "Why, what?"

"He means. Why should he go back to you instead of having his new man suck you dry and throw your corpse into the river?" Nikko's arm came around Luc's shoulder, his embrace strong and protective. The vampire's long fingers slid across Luc's neck, drawing attention to his new jewellery. "Besides," Nikko said, tucking a finger beneath the collar, "I've already claimed him."

"Claimed? You claimed my man?" Bran's eyes shifted, gold eyes turning a burnt orange. Feral. His hands shifted into claws.

Luc slid to the side in one graceful movement as Bran leapt at Nikko, claws extended. The pair spun, slashing at each other. Hopping onto the nearest table, Luc settled into a comfortable position. Crossing his legs, he watched the alpha wolf and the alpha vamp try to tear each other apart.

He should stop them.

Soon.

Oooh, beer.

Sipping the rich brew, he watched Bran take a bite of Nikko's right leg. The vampire got even by sinking his fangs into the wolf's side.

Ouch, that had to hurt.

"Aren't you going to stop them?" Luc recognised Sheila from the night before.

He shrugged. "Why?"

"Because they're fighting over you," she said, her eyes hard and accusing.

Luc smirked. "They aren't fighting over me. They're fighting over who has the bigger balls."

"You could settle that too," she smirked, jumping up to sit on the table beside him.

"Yep." Luc swigged another sip of beer.

A chair flew over their heads, crashing into the opposite wall. "Nice throw," he yelled to the pair.

"It's like you can't help yourself," Sheila said, laughing.

"Naw." He took another sip. "More like I don't bother to try."

Clinking their beer glasses together, they watched the fight.

It ended when Bran took full wolf form and the alphas separated to flash fangs at each other.

"Very impressive boys," Luc said, clapping. "Are you finished yet?"

Two pissed off alpha males turned to glare at him. Bran shifted back to human.

"Oh, you like to live dangerously." Sheila giggled beside him.

Weres and vamps filled the room, each group surrounding their respective alpha.

"What are you doing here, Bran?"

"You're my mate. Where else would I be?"

Luc stood up on the table. "Fuck you. Maybe you should be at home with your new wife. You know, the bitch you dumped me for." Fury rode him hot and hard, power surging through him like lightning. He could feel the burn as symbols on his face and arms glowed red with the strength of his anger.

Every wolf in the place took one step back. Every vampire froze.

Sal, stepped forwards blocking Bran from Luc's view. "Easy, Luc."

"Don't you easy me, Salvador. I left the pack so that there wouldn't be any problems. Why are you all here? Why can't you leave me the hell alone? Haven't I given up enough?" Anger drained from Luc as quickly as it had come, the symbols on his skin blinking out like burnt light bulbs.

Bran stepped around his beta, lifted Luc off the table and into his arms. "Don't do this to us, pretty."

For a moment, memories flooded Luc's mind—years of breakfast in bed and twilight walks, discussing pack issues and politics. Birthdays and holidays celebrated with the pack

like a big happy family. Sweet memories quickly drowned out by the fresher ones of his former lover courting an entire cadre of bitches in heat.

"I didn't do this to us, you did."

Bran released him and stepped away, his face tight with anger. "You think this vampire can replace me? What happens when you start to fade because you aren't getting enough physical contact? Last time I checked vamps weren't big on collective touching. He's a master vampire he'll turn on you in the end. Vamps can't be trusted."

Luc closed his eyes, turning his face away from his former lover. "Neither can a man who promises me love then marries another." He tried to sound strong but even to his own ears he sounded more broken than anything.

A muscular arm wrapped around him. Luc recognised the feral smell of the beta and the feel of the other man's strong chest at his back. "Come on, Luc. Let me take you to your room."

Luc nodded. "Okay." He'd had enough drama for one night. Any more and someone would have to die.

Letting the other man lead him away, Luc was careful not to look at either of his lovers as he left. No one tried to stop them as they went to Nikko's rooms.

Sal broke their silence at the door. "I know even after all this time you still don't understand everything about weres, but vampires are even more dangerous." He stroked Luc's hair like he was petting one of the wolves. The motion was automatic and soothing. "Despite what you might think, Bran loves you and his wolf is hurting because he yearns for his mate. The human part of him may want children, but I don't know if his wolf will ever be able to take another. Be patient. He's hurting right now, but he'll come to his senses soon enough."

"So what do you want me to do? Wait around while he fucks every female on the planet? I'm not going to go through that over and over while he makes up his mind. This is my life too, and he made it more than clear that I no longer had a part in his. He might want to share that information with his wolf."

Sal pulled Luc close and kissed him on the top of his head, a familiar, loving gesture that brought tears to Luc's eyes. "Just don't give up on the whole pack, baby. Some of us still want you in our lives. Some of us still need you."

The last part, whispered against his hair, was so quiet Luc might have imagined it. He kissed Sal on both cheeks as they separated.

"Take care of him, Sal," he said, meeting the beta's eyes. "He's not perfect but he is your alpha."

"I know." Sal gave him a sad smile as he turned to leave. "I know."

The soft click of the door closing sounded final to Luc's ears.

* * * *

Luc tried to wait up. He desperately wanted to know what had happened downstairs, but the events of the day had drained him. Despite his best intentions, he was drifting towards sleep when the slam of the bedroom door jerked him awake. He blinked blearily at his lover. "What's up?"

"I am." Nikko's lips crashed down on his. "I don't care if he has a prior claim. I'm not letting you go."

Luc broke away from the kiss to get back some of the oxygen Nikko sucked out of his lungs. "I didn't ask you to. I won't have sex with a married man. I may be pitiful, but I'm not desperate."

"I don't think he's really married." Nikko stroked Luc's face. "The beta told me the mating isn't official since the pair didn't have sex."

"It's official enough," Luc said, hearing the bitterness in his own voice. Seeking to distract the vamp, he undressed his lover and pounced.

The sex was wild and rough. Afterwards, both men were panting and sweat-soaked.

"Now that he knows where you are it's better to stay here. He won't hunt you as a wolf if he senses a larger predator."

Luc nodded. He didn't bother to tell the pushy vampire he could take care of himself.

A man needed his secrets.

Besides, he wasn't feeling up to house shopping right now. He just wanted to take things easy for a while and coast on nights of hot sex and partying. Was that too much to ask?

Chapter Four

Luc lay in bed, savouring the large body wrapped around him. His blood-sucking teddy bear was back. Whether it was because Nikko was a closet snuggler or because he knew Luc needed the physical contact, the fae didn't know, but the skin-to-skin connection kept him grounded and calm.

He needed calm.

With Luc's days and nights messed up, he didn't know if the seven on the alarm clock was morning or evening. Sighing, he carefully eased from beneath Nikko's clutches.

Now what?

His stomach growled.

Well, that was one thing he could do. Pulling on his shirt and pants—he never bothered with underwear—Luc left the room. For a moment, he felt a tingle from the magical wards, but it passed once he closed the door behind him.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Luc jumped.

Gabriel stood before him, a scowl on his face.

"Aren't all good little vampires supposed to be asleep?" he asked with his most disarming smile.

The scowl didn't leave. "Not all vampires sleep through the day. Just most of the ones here do because we run a nightclub."

Luc was confused. "But doesn't the sunlight burn you?"

Laughter filled the air. Rather unkindly to Luc's thinking.

"No. The only reason that rumour exists is because it's easier to hunt in the dark. Humans only saw us at night while we were hunting because the rest of the time we look just like them. That's how it got started that we only come out at night. There's no reason that consuming blood would have any connection to sunlight."

Luc felt his face flush. "Now I feel stupid."

Gabriel wrapped a friendly arm around his shoulders. "That's okay. You still have your looks to fall back on."

Luc pinched Gabriel's side, causing the vamp to jump.

"What's going on?" Nikko's sleep creased face glared at the other vampire. "Are you touching my boy?"

Gabriel paled even for a vamp. "No, sir. Well, not the way you mean."

Nikko pinned Luc with a fierce look. "Didn't I mention you aren't to talk to other vamps without my permission?"

Luc laughed. "Nope. I'll sit at your side, but there's no way I'm not going to talk to someone if they talk to me first. If that's part of the deal, I'll go and find a new home today." He meant it too. There was no way he was going to be some automaton who didn't speak unless given permission by his master.

Nikko sighed and ran a hand through his short black hair, making it stand up in messy spikes. "How about a compromise? When it's just my tribe, you can talk to whoever speaks to you, but when we're at the club among strangers, you only address people when I give you permission." The alpha vampire played with a curl on Luc's shoulder while he waited for his response.

Luc thought about it for a moment. He didn't really want to give Nikko any problems. He just wanted a bit of peace. If the cost of that calm was sitting quietly beside his master as if he were a good little sub it was a small price to pay, and the necklace was rather spiffy.

Luc nodded. "Fair enough, but if you pet me on the head, I'll bite you."

"Deal. Now, why are you out here instead of in bed with me?" The look in the alpha's eyes should've set the building on fire.

"I'm starving." Luc gave a pout guaranteed to get him his way.

"Get my baby some breakfast, Gabe. He's got other things he needs to do."

Before Luc could protest, Nikko grabbed him and dragged him back into the room and into his arms.

It was much later before he got his promised meal but it was difficult to bitch while sporting a wide smile.

Nikko couldn't remember the last time he was this nervous. As he sat there waiting for his beautiful thrall to dress in the clothes he'd bought, he remembered the scene earlier that afternoon.

The pack beta, Sal, had come into his office accompanied by two of his bodyguards. "I brought this for you." The werewolf placed a leather bound book on his desk.

"A present for me?" Nikko couldn't help the scepticism in his voice.

The beta scowled. "No, it's for Luc."

Nikko opened the book. It had to be over two hundred pages. The first page had a handwritten title, 'The Care and Feeding of Lucifer Hellbourne'. "What kind of sick parent names their child Lucifer with a last name like Hellbourne?"

"You'll find out," Sal said before hastily continuing. "It has his food preferences, what to do if he gets the fade, his likes and dislikes and who to call in an emergency."

Flipping through the pages, Nikko was amazed at the incredible detail that went into creating the book. "You love him, don't you?"

The beta's eyes burned with a fierce fire. "If I didn't know it would upset Luc, I would've snapped Bran's neck in a second for tossing him aside. We've only been friends, Luc and I, but I would give him anything." The werewolf sighed. "However, I'm not what he needs right now. After Bran's betrayal, the pack no longer means home for Luc and there's nothing I can do to take that pain away. As it is, our alpha isn't bonding with his wife."

"You mean his mate," Nikko interrupted.

The werewolf shook his head. "I'm pretty sure that Luc is Bran's mate, which means the alpha will always live a half life as he pursues his goal of having pups. It weakens the pack, and if he doesn't do something soon, I'll have to take over alpha duties."

"Will you challenge him?"

Sal shook his head. "No, the pack will do an intervention. He can't be a good leader if his heart is torn. I'm hoping we can get him to step down. Bran's been our leader for a hundred years. We'd hate to lose him now. But a good leader listens to his wolf half."

"I'm not giving him back." Nikko felt it was important to let the beta know up front that he would fight to keep his little fae.

Shrugging, the beta gave him a challenging look. "I'm all for leaving Luc here. Bran has hurt him enough. But keep in mind, the pack will be watching and if you hurt him, I have no problems with snapping *your* neck."

The memory of his conversation with the beta wolf made Nikko smile. As a vampire, he was no lover of the wolves but the fact the beta still felt protective of the gentle fae said good things about his little love.

"Well, what do you think?" Luc's satiny voice cut through Nikko's thoughts.

He looked up and almost swallowed his tongue. Soft, buttery leather faithfully moulded Luc's thighs, showing that the man couldn't possibly have anything on underneath his pants. The silk shirt in brilliant blue brought out the fae's colouring and made his eyes even greener.

"Wow." Really, what more could be said.

Luc smiled. "Thanks. You look pretty hot too."

"Why don't you go ahead to the club and I'll catch up with you in a minute. I need to meet with my lieutenants before I go down. I'll send you down with Sheila so you won't be unprotected and Jerrod will have a plate ready for you."

"Sounds good. I feel like dancing." Luc didn't even comment about being sent down with a girl for protection. He had the impression that Sheila was much tougher than she looked.

After a hot, bone-melting kiss they parted.

Luc met Sheila at the top of the stairs. "How's it going, girlfriend," he teased, batting his eyelashes playfully.

She looked him over carefully, her eyes cool and calculating. Her gaze stopped at his neck. "Did the master give you that collar or did you knock off a museum?"

"Meow," Luc said with a taunting smile.

Sheila laughed. Linking her arm with his, they walked down the stairs arm in arm. Eyes turned towards them as they reached the landing. "I love walking in with the most beautiful person in the room," she said with a smile. "Now keep close to me. If I lose you in this crowd, Nikko will slit my throat and drain me dry."

Luc started to laugh but the expression in the vampire's eyes told him she wasn't kidding. "Oh. I'll be careful to stay close until Nikko arrives. Would you like to dance?"

"I can't dance," Sheila said, biting her lip.

"Sure you can. Everyone can dance. Besides if you're going to live for centuries, you might as well enjoy it."

See him give life advice.

With a smooth turn of his heels, Luc swept Sheila into his arms and moved her around the dance floor. As he swung her about, he mentally calculated how far she could step in her tight black dress and high heels. Luckily, it was still a little early for the hard partiers so there were pockets of emptiness on the dance floor. With fancy footwork and a little mind influence, he spun Sheila around in an intricate pattern that matched the rhythm in his soul.

Luc didn't notice other people watching until the music ended and applause thundered through the club.

He held out his arm to Sheila, giving a graceful bow while she gave a short curtsy. She wrapped her hand around his biceps as they walked regally off the dance floor and straight towards the bar.

"Thanks, Luc." Sheila's voice was subdued, bringing Luc's gaze to her.

He sat her down on a bar stool and took the one next to her. "What's wrong, pretty girl?"

"I had a lot of fun."

"That's bad, how?"

Sheila sighed. "Because it's hard to find a sweet man who dances like a dream and when I do," she looked up, pinning him with her blue eyes, "they're already taken. And even if you weren't, I wouldn't appeal to you."

Luc gave her an understanding smile. "Don't fall for me, beautiful. I'm all about heartache." He motioned for two beers from the bartender who promptly placed them on the bar and waved away the money Luc offered.

"The boss would kill me if I charged you," he said with a wink before moving on to serve another.

Sipping on their beers, the pair watched the crowds move about the dance floor. After a while, Luc noticed a few vamps sliding through a doorway in the back.

"Where does that go?" he asked, pointing at the quickly exiting vamps.

Sheila looked where he pointed. "Oh, back there are rooms for private parties."

"Yeah, what kind of parties?"

He looked over to see Sheila blushing. *Wow*, he didn't know vampires could blush.

"Ooooo, sex parties?"

She shrugged and Luc could see she was trying to regain her nonchalance. "Sometimes. Sometimes blood parties."

A tremor snapped across Luc's senses. Pain, someone was in a tremendous amount of pain. As a prince of hell, Luc could always sense when someone else was suffering. His brothers used the talent to savour the screams of the ones they tortured. Luc always used it to find and help others.

He could feel the pain emanating from the back where Sheila said the private rooms were located. "Be right back," he said with what he hoped was a charming smile.

Sliding off his stool, he took one step from the bar before Sheila's hand wrapped around his arm. "No, you don't. If I lose you, the master will be angry with me."

Luc shrugged, knowing he wasn't going to get away from her any time soon. "Then come along."

They walked through the crowds, avoiding the mass of bodies in their trek to the darkened doorway. Once they passed through the entryway, the quiet was so intense Luc thought he'd gone deaf. Magic filled the air but he could still feel the screams in his mind. Someone was suffering.

Someone he knew.

A long dark hallway spread before them with doors on both sides.

"The rooms are soundproofed for added privacy," Sheila whispered as if not wanting to disturb the unnatural quiet.

Even the feel of the air was different here. Instead of the honest odour of heat and sweaty bodies whipped about by overhead fans, the air was still, almost hushed with absolutely no scent. It was like walking into a bubble, the entire area purged of sensation.

Luc pulled Sheila behind him. If she insisted on going with him, she wasn't going to go first and there wasn't room for them to walk side by side.

As they passed each door, Luc held up his hand, sensing the occupants hidden inside.

The third door was the one. He could feel the pain rumbling through his bones.

Sheila grabbed his wrist as he reached over to open it. "No."

Luc turned to look at her. "What do you mean, no?"

"I mean, I know the guy who rented this room and he's an old vampire, deadly. You don't want to mess with this guy."

"On the contrary, my dear," Luc replied with a smile. "He doesn't want to mess with me."

As he opened the door, the first thing that hit him was the smell of blood. It soaked the air like a thick, wet fog trying to seep into his skin. The lights in the room were so dim Luc had to blink a few times for his eyes to adjust. It was a bigger room than he'd expected and the lack of light made it difficult to see.

There was a cracking sound followed by a scream of pain.

Turning towards the sound, Luc was amazed to see vampires filled the room. They draped across couches, chairs and even on the floor—more vamps than he thought belonged solely to Nikko's tribe. All eyes were turned towards the ceiling.

Luc's heart leapt into his throat. From his vantage point he could see a skinny, naked male dangling from manacles in the ceiling while a tall, muscular vampire stood with a bullwhip slashing away at the pitiful creature.

The mental feel of a room full of vampires washed over Luc like a cool wave, but over the slightly metallic feel of the vampires, was the scream of piercing pain from the body in the centre of the room. Cuts slashed the pale skin, traversing the entire body in bloody lines like a horrible street map of torture. It took him a moment to realise that the bloody mess was his favourite cute blond waiter with the puppy dog eyes. Jerrod.

That asshole was whipping *his* waiter.

None of the vamps standing around were doing one damned thing. They all wore varying expressions of disgust, horror or plain fucking indifference.

Luc used the voice of authority he'd learned from his father. "What's going on here?"

The vampire with the whip snapped his head around, baring his fangs. "Stay out of this thrall or you'll be under my whip next." The vampire's voice was breathy and his face had that skinny skull-like definition, like someone who hadn't seen a good plate of food since the dawn of time.

So, not attractive.

If Luc wasn't so pissed, it probably would've been frightening, but he was beyond angry. He'd lost his home, his former lover and now this fucker with a whip was harming his waiter.

Righteous anger shot through Luc's body, causing hellfire to crackle through his veins, burning his bones from the inside out.

The vampire continued to ignore him confident Luc was frightened away. Pulling back his whip, the sadistic bastard wound his arm up for another slash. Without conscious thought, Luc shifted through time and space to appear behind the whip wielder.

Taking advantage of the vampire's distraction, Luc grabbed the vamp's whipping arm at the wrist. Using all his weight, Luc bent back the vamp's arm and snapped it. The sound ricocheted in the room as the vampire screamed with pain.

"I'll kill you," the vamp shrieked.

Luc laughed. A sound that was scarily reminiscent of his father's laughter.

He couldn't be killed.

Beaten, yes.

Tortured, yes.

But not killed.

"Good luck with that, buddy."

Unimpressed by the vampire's struggles to be free, Luc did the only thing that would keep this asshole dead. With a soft whisper, he let the hellfire burning through his body free. In his peripheral vision, he could see the runes glowing red on his arms. Releasing the vampire's arm, Luc gripped the sadist's head with both hands and freed the flame rushing through his body, sending hellfire straight through the vampire's skull.

Screaming, the vamp wrenched out of Luc's grip and dropped to the floor with a thud. Burning alive, his inhuman cries filled the room. Within moments, the corpse disintegrated into a pile of grey ash.

Did bad vampires go down to his father or were their souls lost during conversion? A question to answer another day.

Looking up, he saw that there was finally some emotion on the onlookers' faces. Complete and total horror.

Served the fuckers right.

The dangling boy let out a whimper, drawing Luc's attention away from the others. "Hey, hey, it's all right, sugar. Shh." Jerrod was making low frightened sounds like an animal in pain.

Anger towards Nikkolai burned through him. How could the master vampire let this happen in his club? This was not the sort of man Luc was looking for as a lifemate.

Not to mention his life was a fucking long time.

With a snap of his wrist, the cuffs crumpled, releasing the waiter into his arms. Carefully, he lowered the kid to the floor, mindful of his wounds.

Luc crouched in front of the injured vamp, making soothing nonsense noises. Using both hands, he scraped the hair back from the face to get a good look at the waiter.

Wow, beautiful.

Frightened. Big blue eyes filled with tears.

"Shhh. Shhh." Luc ran a hand down Jerrod's head in a soothing gesture he'd learned while living with the weres. "It's okay, honey. I've got you."

"T-thank you, L-Luc," the damaged vamp said in a sad, shaky voice while tears dripped down his blood-soaked cheeks.

"Shhhh, it'll be all right. I want you to stay still. I'm going to heal you now. I'm not very good at this, so don't move."

"Luc, what are you doing?" Sheila asked behind him. Her voice held a tremor of fear that wasn't there a moment ago. Maybe burning vamps alive in a nightclub wasn't the best way to make a good impression.

"Make yourself useful, honey, and find the kid some clothes."

Sheila snorted. "The *kid's* much older than you are."

"Well, then get some clothes for the old man. Just go."

Sheila went while Jerrod gave a soft laugh. "Old man?"

"She left, didn't she? Now stay still. I'm going to move a little healing energy through you to encourage your speedy recovery."

Jerrod tried to be still, but Luc could still see small uncontrollable tremors shaking his skin. Obviously someone used to taking orders.

Luc had dealt with the pack omega before, so he knew all about submissives. If the whipper had been this kid's master, Luc was going to make sure he got a better one the next time around. He didn't care if he had to fucking interview them himself.

He was so going to kick Nikko's ass.

"Heal," Luc said, his voice not much louder than a whisper. He felt golden seraphim magic pour out of his fingertips. While he might be the devil's son, his soul wasn't damned and he could still call upon the magic of the angels. Wherever his magic glowed, the boy healed instantly, whip marks sealing in a flash of power.

The look of wonder in the boy's face made Luc question whether anyone had ever sent Jerrod to a healer before.

Seeing the boy start to shake harder, Luc wrapped up the healing, unbuttoned his shirt, pulled it off and settled it around the blond's shoulders. It didn't really cover much, but it stopped the worst of the tremors. The vampire was more in shock than injured at this point.

Pulling Jerrod onto his lap, Luc treated him as if he were a frightened pack member, with long soothing strokes along the head and back.

Until fire shot through his right hand, stinging like a burning brand.

"Shit," Luc screamed. Flipping over his hand, he saw there was now an imprint of a pair of golden wings glowing on his palm. "What in the ten hells is this?"

Jerrod's face took on a look of wonder and for the second time that night the smell of burning flesh filled the air. Sliding off Luc's shirt, the waiter exposed his upper arm to him. A perfect set of wings was branded there. A beauteous smile crossed Jerrod's lips. "I belong to you now."

"What?" Luc jumped up, unceremoniously dumping the vampire on the floor.

Tears filled those sad blue eyes. "D-d-don't you want me?"

Torn with indecision, but not wanting to hurt the vamp further, Luc sat back down and cradled the waiter "It's okay. We'll figure this out. Just stay calm."

It was good advice. He just hoped he could follow it. Being responsible for another person wasn't on his list of things he wanted to do. He'd have to figure out how to transfer Jerrod to someone else—preferably a vampire who didn't enjoy whipping him for fun.

Sheila returned with a stack of clothing. "We usually have stuff on hand for when things get a little rough. These should fit him."

Snapping out of his reverie, Luc helped the other man to his feet.

With the supernatural grace of a vampire, Jerrod dressed quickly.

"Where do you live?" Luc asked the vamp once he was clothed.

Jerrod's face fell and Luc could sense tears in his voice. "I was living with Mal."

Luc took from his expression that Mal was the guy he dusted.

Oops.

"Hey, don't worry, sweet." He rubbed a hand across Jerrod's back. "We'll find you another place to stay. Maybe you can stay with Nikko. It's the least he can do."

"What's the least I can do, darling?" Nikko's smooth baritone rubbed across his senses like warm cream.

Despite his anger at the vampire, Nikko's voice still sent shivers of need down his spine as memories of their night together flashed through his head like a high definition porn video.

Jerrod shook beneath Luc's hand, snapping Luc out of his thoughts and reminding him how angry he was with the master vampire.

"I came downstairs and found your club room rented by a fuckin' psychopath who was whipping your waiter. And not one of your damned vampires did a thing to stop it."

Nikko's eyes swept the crowd. "Is this true?"

A red-haired vamp came forwards. "Yes, Master, but it was Mal. He would've killed us, and since it was his boy, he was within his rights."

"Fuck rights," Luc screamed. "How about decency?"

Nikko held up his hand. "Calm down, Luc. You're new to the vampire society so you don't know all the rules. It's illegal to interfere with a vampire and his people. To do so is to invite a duel to the death and Mal's one of the strongest vampires in the state. Where's Mal now?" Nikko's gaze swept the crowd.

Luc tried his best to look innocent.

The redhead cleared her throat. "Your boy killed him."

Nikko laughed. "No, really, what happened?"

The vampires just looked at each other. They weren't prepared for complete denial.

Luc decided distraction was the way to go. "Nikko, I am very angry with you."

"Angry with me? What did I do? Even if I was here, there wouldn't be much I could do if Mal was disciplining his boy."

"He wasn't disciplining," Luc argued. "He was torturing."

Nikko shrugged. "He looks all right to me."

Luc stared at the vamp. He could feel the vein throbbing in his forehead. He wondered idly if his head could be seen from space, exploding like one of those cartoon mushroom clouds.

"Jerrod was almost beaten to death in your own club, a man who works for you, and you don't even ask how he is doing?"

"He's doing fine," Nikko said, flashing a fang at the other younger vampire, "or he wouldn't be standing there touching you."

For the first time, Luc noticed a tentative hand rubbing his back in soothing circles. He tilted his head and Jerrod gave him a shy smile.

He could get to enjoy this treatment.

What he couldn't stand was a man who'd let someone be injured under his roof and do nothing about it. He could tell by Nikko's behaviour that even if he'd witnessed the scene he still wouldn't have interfered.

"Look, Nikko. I like you a lot. I think you're really hot." Nikko had a wide smile on his face. "But I can't date a guy who allows people into his club that will abuse others just for their enjoyment. There are some things even I won't be privy to. So for now just stay away."

Luc turned to the waiter. "Coming Jerrod?"

The boy nodded. "Your will is my will, Master."

"Master?" Nikko asked.

Luc held his hand palm out. "Yeah, apparently I've adopted a vampire." He turned and walked towards the door with Jerrod close on his heels.

Nikko called after him. "Luc, my love."

Luc stopped and looked back.

"Where are you going?"

He shrugged. "I guess it's time I stood on my own two feet." He walked back and started to remove his necklace.

"Keep it," Nikko said with a sad smile. "You'll be back."

Luc took a deep breath to loosen the knot forming in his chest. Really, how many men could he break up with in a week? "Don't count on it. I've decided to give up on having a big strong man take care of me."

Nikko smirked. "You'll have to come back eventually to learn how to be a vampire master."

"I can't be a vampire master. I'm not a vampire."

"You just keep telling yourself that. Come to me when you decide you want to learn the truth."

Luc frowned at Nikko. "We'll be fine."

Maybe he could find a *Caring for Vampires for Dummies* book.

He was out the door before he realised he didn't have his cell phone or his guitar with him. Luc sighed and continued walking down the street with his vampiric sidekick.

At least he still had his wallet.

"Tomorrow, I'm sending you back for my stuff," he told Jerrod. "Tonight, we'll find a hotel room until we can rent a place."

"Yes, Master," was Jerrod's gentle reply. The kid wasn't a chatterbox that was for sure.

Luc saw the wolf detach from the shadows and follow them down the street. *Let him follow*. He still wasn't going to forgive his ex-lover for his betrayal no matter how much he stalked him.

Chapter Five

After leaving Nikkolai's club, Luc leased a small Victorian house. It was just temporary, but it was home. One of the wolves stopped by almost every day to chat, check on his welfare, ask advice and give him an update on Bran. So far, there was no change in his former lover.

The message was always the same. Bran was permanently in wolf form.

It was interesting when flowers arrived the Monday after Luc moved in. Nikko must have spies watching his every move. The writing on the card said, *Love, Nikkolai*.

Luc snorted. He didn't want Nikko's version of love.

Tuesday's delivery was a box of chocolates so heavy he could have used it for weight lifting. Wednesday was an mp3 player with a kick-ass collection of songs. Thursday, he got a new cell phone with only one number programmed into it. Today was Friday.

"I think he's sorry," Jerrod said, coming into the room, licking a dab of blood off his lips. Good thing the demon tribe of Katos owed him a shit load of favours.

Luc spent a moment admiring his vampire.

After only a few days, the shattered boy he'd taken from the club glowed with the power of demon blood rushing through him. Now that he wasn't starved, Jerrod was leaving behind his boyish frame and solidifying into the body of a man.

His vamp was coming along nicely, even if the whole ownership thing freaked Luc out.

After spending his entire life fighting with his father for independence, it scraped him raw that Jerrod called him Master.

The vampire walked up to him, sliding a hand over Luc's arm as he approached. "Are you going to forgive him?"

"He let you be whipped," Luc said from behind clenched teeth.

Jerrod shrugged. "It's our way. I was Mal's property, sold to him by my master. It was his right to do with me what he pleased."

Luc's eyes burned, and he knew from past experience that his irises were glowing like small suns. He closed them, trying to regulate his breath and calm down. With so much

anger flaring inside, it was a miracle the runes weren't shimmering on his skin. It was difficult to explain abuse to a man who didn't understand that whipping someone until they bled on the floor was not the normal behaviour of a sane being.

He knew this from personal experience.

"No master should harm those he's sworn to care for. It's wrong and I find it odd that I should have to explain this to you of all people," Luc said.

Giving him an affectionate smile, Jerrod rubbed Luc's back in slow soothing circles. "Calm down, Master. Vampires have been around for centuries. You aren't going to change an entire culture overnight."

"I don't want to change the culture. I want to change one little tribe."

"You know what they say," Jerrod handed over a gold and red envelope. "Change is best done from within."

"What's this?" Luc asked, his fingers already breaking the red wax seal.

"A personal invitation," Jerrod said with a wicked smile. "From your favourite fangy stalker."

"Don't make me punch you," Luc threatened. "It ruins my credibility."

Jerrod laughed.

"I'm invited to dine with Master Nikkolai." Luc frowned at the gilt card. "Do you think he thought about that before he sent it out? Most people don't want to dine with a vampire."

"No, he probably eats real food. The older vamps can eat."

This was news to Luc. "Really? Are you old enough? Should I be feeding you food too?"

Jerrod gave a wide smile. "No. I'm still too young to digest food. I'll suffer along with the high-grade demon blood you provide. You know that demon blood is like liquid gold for vampires, don't you?"

Luc was still staring at the invitation. "Is it? Well, it's all I've got so you'll just have to put up with the top shelf stuff. If you're good, maybe I can find you a thin-blooded wino junkie for dessert."

Jerrod laughed. "I almost hate to tell you that you can actually purchase blood from blood suppliers."

"Really?" Luc said without much interest, his attention still on the paper in his hand. "Do you think I should go?"

"Yes." Jerrod tenderly slid the paper out from Luc's hand. "I think you should go. Vampires dream of finding their mates, the older the vampire the more important it is. If Master Nikkolai thinks you're his mate, then you'll need to find out if it's true. You can't do that if you refuse to meet with him."

"I don't know if I can forgive him for his callousness, besides, do I really need another alpha deciding I'm his mate? Look where it got me with Bran."

Jerrod looked into Luc's eyes. "Bran tried to deny his needs. He got what he deserved. Master Nikkolai is all about claiming you. Vampires are a people of passion. That's something you'll need to get used to if you're a master vampire's mate." Jerrod nodded towards the invitation. "I'll come with you."

"What? No!" Luc didn't want anything to happen to his delicate vamp. "We just got you healthy."

"I'll come with you because in vampire culture to go alone means you're a lesser being. It means there's no one who will back you if there's trouble. I will go because they need to know that you're a master with a devoted follower. I may be a submissive with my masters, Luc, but I won't let you go to a vampire gathering without support."

"You're not being submissive now," Luc grumbled. "Fine, you can accept the invitation for me. Let them know we're coming. Do I need to get some of the wolves to back me up?"

Jerrod shook his head. "No. If we were expecting trouble, I'd recommend them, but Master Nikkolai wants your happiness, so there won't be any problems."

Luc didn't know what to say. That this broken man would take care of him was more than he'd ever expected. He leaned in and gave the vampire a soft kiss. "Thank you, Jerrod. I appreciate your advice. If you needed anything, you'd tell me, right?"

"Always, Master."

Satisfied that Jerrod was telling the truth, Luc nodded in agreement. Then he cleared his throat. "I have something for you."

It had taken him all day, but he finally had his gift ready.

Jerrod immediately fell to his knees, eyes to the floor. "Your will is my will, Master."

There was only so much training one could undo in a few days. Luc stood for a moment looking down at his vampire. Not that he thought of him that way. He thought of him more like a roommate, a very fragile roommate.

"Jerrod, I've been concerned about your safety."

Jerrod's wide blue eyes, filled with apprehension, looked up at him. "Ar-are you leaving me?"

"What? No, no, but sometimes you might be separated from me where I can't protect you. I want you to know that you'll always be safe." He pulled Jerrod's gift out of his pocket. "So I made you a little charm."

Luc held up the blue-green pendent, dangling from a thin silver chain, so Jerrod could see the colours swirling inside the charm. He'd painted a miniature picture of himself and pressed it between a pair of three-inch pieces of fused glass. Wrapping the piece with silver wire, he'd bound it together with metal and magic until the three pieces became one.

Luc shied away from calling it a collar, but he knew it would look as if it were one to other vampires checking for ownership. Short of decapitation, nothing could harm Jerrod while wearing the charm.

"It's on silver," Jerrod said nervously. "You know silver burns vampires."

Luc tilted his head and examined the vampire kneeling before him. "Do you trust me?"

Jerrod nodded.

"Will you allow me to put this around your neck?"

Another nod.

Luc kneeled with Jerrod and carefully connected the clasp behind the vampire's neck while chanting a short spell to seal it for eternity.

He saw Jerrod swallow as he released the chain and let the pendent settle directly on the vampire's bare skin.

Luc watched with amusement as the vampire relaxed the muscles he'd braced for the burn.

"It doesn't hurt," Jerrod whispered.

Luc took Jerrod's face between his hands. "I would never purposely harm you."

He saw relief and a look of stunned acceptance in Jerrod's eyes. A moment passed before the vampire spoke. "I can hear it singing to me." His eyes took on a wistful look. "It's you, isn't it? You're singing."

Oops.

"Sometimes whoever makes the spell leaves residual traces of its forming. I sing while I work. I can try to remake it if it bothers you." Luc reached out to take the necklace back.

"No!" Jerrod shouted, his hand clutching the pendant. "It's mine. You made it for me." His voice dipped lower as tears streaked his cheeks. "No one has ever made anything for me before."

Shit. Luc wrapped Jerrod into his arms, rubbing one palm in circles around his smooth back. The same calming gesture his vamp used on him. Jerrod was sweet, but so abused. "No one will harm you again. Not on my watch."

Jerrod leant back and looked at Luc, those beautiful eyes watching him with hot desire. "May I suck you off, Master?"

"I-I thought I was supposed to be bonded to Nikkolai?" Not that he felt loyalty to the bastard but the change in Jerrod's demeanour was confusing.

"I belong to you, Master. It's important you bond with me so that our linking is tight. If we're properly bonded, you'll know if I'm in danger."

Luc looked suspiciously at Jerrod, but his senses told him the vampire believed what he was saying. "It would be a better bond if you fucked me," Jerrod said, a lustful gleam in his eyes. "But I'll settle for sucking you off if you aren't ready."

A broken laugh burst out. "You make me sound like a skittish virgin."

Jerrod rose to his feet, placing a shy kiss on Luc's lips. There was a teasing light in his eyes when he pulled away. "Skittish maybe, but I doubt you're a virgin."

Pleased at the new confidence in his vampire, Luc rubbed his palm across Jerrod's crotch feeling him through the rough denim. Although he liked the vampire in low riding jeans, he wanted to feel more. With a twist of his hands, Luc ripped open Jerrod's button fly. The sound of fabric tearing echoed loudly in the quiet house.

Jerrod let out a soft whimper, his excitement obvious in the hardening of his cock. Luc felt his own prick lengthen in response to the other man's excitement. He might not be Bran or even Nikko, but the younger vamp was a sexy hunk of manhood.

"Please, Master. I need."

Luc laid Jerrod on the Oriental rug. The thick pad beneath the rug provided a nice cushion. The last thing he wanted to do was bruise Jerrod's body. Maybe give him rug burn, but not bruises.

As Luc continued to stroke Jerrod's cock, soft whimpering noises ushered from his long, sleek body.

Without a word, Luc stripped his clothes off before helping Jerrod out of the rest of his.

"Let me get some lube."

"No!" Jerrod shouted. "Don't leave me." The grip on Luc's arm was desperate, his eyes wild.

"Shh, baby. I just have to grab my pants." Old habits made him keep packets of lube nearby. Werewolves couldn't get a disease so condoms weren't necessary. The same was said for vampires.

Seeing that Luc wasn't going anywhere, Jerrod's body went limp beneath his hands. He knew from their conversations that no one had ever spent time getting to know Jerrod's body. His vampire's past lovers took what they wanted with little regard for this sensitive man. After making sure his packet of lube was close, Luc gave Jerrod lingering caresses, letting his hands stroke the vampire while his lips nipped at interesting and tender bits. A bite on the right nipple got a soft scream, a nip at a sensitive part of the hip caused a jerk, and lapping at the belly button produced a soft giggle.

Luc swirled his tongue over Jerrod's impressive cock, encouraging the sweet, sticky precum to bubble to the surface.

"Please, please, please." The vampire's chants accompanied the movements of his body trying to get closer to Luc's touch.

Judging that it was time to stake his claim, he snapped open the lubricant and warmed it between his palms before sliding a finger into his partner's hole.

"More."

Luc laughed. "For a submissive, you're a demanding little thing." He slid another finger in.

"Please, Master. I'll do anything, just fuck me."

"Back or hands and knees."

Jerrod's eye lit up. "I get to choose?"

"Choose quickly."

The vampire bit his lip, little fangs peaking out. "Back. I want to see you when you take me. You're so beautiful."

Luc placed his palms beneath Jerrod's hips lifting him to the perfect angle. Lining himself up, he slid the tip of his cock into a hot, tight paradise. A groan ripped from his chest as he pushed in. Using gentle motions, he got Jerrod to relax his tight ring of muscles until he was fully seated, balls to ass.

Both men moaned.

Luc stayed still until he felt Jerrod try to move him. Smiling, he pumped into the vamp, nailing his prostate over and over again.

Jerrod screamed, struggling to get closer to the sensation. Then without warning, he let it all go. Ropes of warm liquid shot against Luc's chest, propelling him into orgasm.

When his body stopped shuddering, Luc slipped out of Jerrod's body and slumped beside him on the floor. "So, do you feel claimed now?"

There was a contented sigh and a sloppy smile spread across Jerrod's cute face. "Most wonderfully claimed. Thank you."

"My pleasure. Now, let's go take a shower then you can accept my invitation."

Chapter Six

Jerrod had barely hung up on Nikko after finalising details for dinner, when the sound of howling pierced the air.

The ringtone of the Pack house.

"Hello?"

"Luc, you have to come. Bran's been shot."

The feeling of ice froze his spine as fear overtook his body. "What do you mean shot?"

"Bullets! Guns! Shot!" Salvador screamed across the line. "Come to the Pack house. We need a healer!"

"I'll be right there." Luc hung up and turned to find Jerrod standing right behind him. "Bran's been shot. I have to go to the Pack house. I want you to let Nikko know I won't be at dinner."

"Yes, Master." Jerrod's words were obedient but his tone was sullen.

"Don't challenge me on this. The Pack would tear you apart for invading their territory. Even the little pull I have won't save you from a mauling."

"I know." Jerrod looked down at his bare feet and kicked at the carpet. "I was hoping we'd spend more time together."

"Don't worry, it'll work out fine. Bran should be easy to heal. I'm surprised he hasn't healed himself by now. I need to get some things straightened out with him, so don't be surprised if I don't come back until tomorrow."

"How much longer do you think you can keep going back and forth between vampires and weres?" Jerrod's blue eyes were direct and penetrating, making Luc wish he were still looking at the floor.

Luc shrugged. "I can't leave Bran to die. He was my lover for twenty years. You don't just throw that away." Although the alpha had tossed him aside, Luc couldn't explain to his fragile vamp that there would always be only one owner of his heart. He might not be with his alpha wolf, but that didn't take away from the fact that he still loved Bran and always would.

Jerrod wrapped Luc in his arms. "I'll be waiting for you when you get back. Want me to call a cab?"

"No. I'll travel by mirror."

"Mirror?"

"Yeah. Want to watch?"

A wide smile spread across Jerrod's face. "I'd love to."

"Let's go." A sudden urgency hit Luc hard. He needed to see Bran and assure himself that he was still alive. Mirror walking was one of his few fae talents. He only used it in emergencies because it mildly freaked him out. Walking through glass was odd and left a strange sensation on his skin that took days to shake off.

With Jerrod hard on his heels, they rushed into the bedroom and approached the full-length mirror in the corner of the room.

"Ever wonder what I needed a full length mirror for?"

Jerrod smirked. "To admire yourself?"

Laughing, Luc shook his head. "To travel." Licking his index finger, he ran the wet tip along the top edge of the mirror focusing his mind on his final destination. The reflection of the room wavered, colours swirled and a perfect image of Bran's bedroom appeared.

Luc held back his tears as memories of sharing this room with his lover crowded his mind. He could see Salvador sitting in a chair by the bed and his ex-lover in human form lying still and silent on top of the covers. He was surprised to see Bran as a human, before realising the wound must have forced the shift. When injured, a werewolf converted to human form—a disadvantage that allow paranormal hunters to separate them from real wolves when they hunted.

Admiring the perfect image in the mirror, Jarrod smiled and murmured, "Cool."

"When I return, the mirror will chime to let you know I'm coming through."

Jerrod nodded. Then he leant forwards and held Luc in his arms one more time. "Good luck. I don't know Bran, but if you want him better, so do I."

Luc gave Jerrod a smile then walked through the mirror. A soft pop echoed as he went from one space to another.

A low moan filled the room.

Mate, whispered in his mind.

"He's not healing," Sal said in a low, worried tone. The werewolf stood near the alpha wolf's head and greeted Luc. Soft kisses were placed on each of Luc's cheeks, Sal brushing skin-to-skin, marking him as pack.

Mate.

Luc moved around Sal to sit next to Bran.

Blood soaked the werewolf's smooth mocha skin like a body dipped in red paint.

"Who did this?"

Sal swallowed and clenched his teeth. "Hunters."

"Where was he to be so close to hunters? Where was he, Sal?" Someone was going to die. If Luc didn't get answers soon, it was going to be his good friend Sal.

"The Pack grounds were ambushed. Three hunters got four of our wolves. The others had minor injuries but were able to heal themselves."

"But Bran is the alpha. He should've healed by now." Luc stroked his ex-lover's head. A feeling of contentment seeped through him.

"His power is fractured," Sal said in a sad tone. "If he can't control his change, I'll have to take over. I'll alert the others that you're here so they won't panic when they feel the magic coming from Bran's room."

Sal's voice sounded odd, but Luc was too concerned with the blood pumping out of his ex-lover to pay much attention. Bran whimpered softly, his pain-filled eyes watching him with complete trust as Luc spread his hands across the wound.

"Shhh. I'll take care of you, sweetheart." Closing his eyes, Luc internally focussed, drawing out power to heal. He imagined the energy flowing from the centre of his body, down his arms and into his hands. Blue flames burst from his palms, slamming into the man lying on the bed.

Luc's eyes snapped open. He directed the fire into the werewolf's skin, pushing out the bullets and healing the wounds. Bran's body shook. Flesh sprouted fur then receded. Although healed, Bran's body retained his human form as he dealt with the trauma of injury.

Luc collapsed on the small portion of bed not taken by the large were. He was tired. Between the stress of taking care of Jerrod and worrying about his love life, he was worn down.

Familiar fingers stroked his head.

"Even after everything, you came to save me." Bran's voice sounded rusty and painful.

Luc looked up to see the alpha gazing at him with a familiar loving expression. A painful knot formed in his throat. How he'd missed his lover.

"I'm sorry, my love, for everything." Gentle fingers traced his cheek. "If you'll come back to me we'll work something out. I swear."

Luc could hear the sincerity in his ex-lover's voice as a painful yearning filled him. He looked into Bran's beautiful face so dear to him, even now. "I don't think we can work out the fact you want to have sex with a woman and have her pups."

He wouldn't cry. He wouldn't. Luc blinked rapidly, looking away. He started to slip out of bed, but Bran's large hand wrapped around his wrist, stopping his exit.

"We can have a baby together. We'll find a female willing to be a surrogate. You'll be there the entire time." The alpha took a deep shaky breath. "My wolf needs its heart." He tilted Luc's chin up until he was forced to meet the alpha's eyes. "And my human half needs its soul. Come back to me, baby, and we can rule the Pack together."

Luc could feel Bran's sincerity. It shrouded him like a warm blanket. Before he could think of a response to Bran's words, the bedroom door slammed open.

"What's *he* doing here?" Betsy screamed.

"Hello, Betsy." Luc's heart hammered in his chest. He didn't want to fight an angry she-wolf. It was bad enough that he'd invaded her territory and tempted her man.

"Why can't you leave us alone? You're tearing the Pack apart." Her fangs dropped in anger, a low growl rolling up from her chest.

Shit.

Behind Betsy in the hallway, Luc saw Sal appear, but he was slower than the blur that rose from the bed and took the alpha bitch down.

A thud echoed in the room as Betsy hit the ground hard, buried beneath the large alpha's body.

"Don't ever talk to my mate like that," Bran growled, his voice low and dangerous, his hands shifting into claws.

"I'm your mate."

"You're nothing."

Luc winced. Subtle, Bran wasn't. This was not going to be good for Bran's allegiance with Betsy's pack.

Sal slipped into the room and patted Luc's shoulder in a silent message of support. A low whine filled the air. Betsy had converted to wolf. She was baring her neck and stomach to the alpha. With a low growl, Bran stood up between Betsy and Luc, in a protective stance. With a sharp bark, Betsy ran down the hall.

"You'll start a pack war if you send her back to her pack," Sal said with a sigh.

Bran shrugged. "Bring them on. She was a pain long before I learned we weren't compatible."

"I'll make sure she leaves. You'll have to talk to the Pack soon and let everyone know what's going on." Sal kissed Luc's cheek before walking out the door and shutting it behind him.

Alone with Bran, Luc was uncertain what to do next. For a long moment, he stared at the closed door not sure of what to say.

"Luc." Bran's voice held a familiar note of longing.

He reluctantly turned to face the alpha wolf. Bran's gold eyes were glowing with hunger as he took in Luc. "What do you want from me, Bran?"

The alpha walked in front of him before sliding to his knees—an eerie copy of Jerrod's actions earlier that day. "I want whatever you will give me. Any scrap of your affection. Any moment of your time. I know you might not be able to forgive me, but I thought I was doing what was best for the Pack. I thought I could give them a future leader." Bran let out a bitter laugh. "I should've known I couldn't give you up. Instead of a strong leader, I ripped out my heart and gave them a broken alpha and dissension in the pack. Do you know half of them won't even talk to me any more because of how I treated you? How can I lead my people if they won't follow?"

When Bran looked up, Luc saw tears filling those beautiful eyes. It felt wrong to have his strong, passionate lover on his knees—no matter what dreams he'd had after their breakup.

"If they want me gone, I'll leave the Pack. But I'll never let go of you again." Luc could hear Bran swallow back the tears. "If you'll have me back, I'll be yours forever."

"Oh, babe." Luc pulled Bran to his feet and into his arms, cradling him close as the werewolf broke down into sobs. "Shhh. We'll work something out."

It took Luc a long while to soothe his shattered lover, but eventually, after a magical cleansing to remove the blood, they moved to the bed. Tired from the emotional outpouring, they stripped and tossed their clothes to the floor.

Bran wrapped himself around Luc as if to prevent him from escaping. Nuzzling his neck, the alpha pulled back after a moment. "You smell odd."

"Hmmm." Luc was starting to drift.

"You smell like that kid in your house."

"He's not a kid," Luc said sleepily. "I think he's a hundred or something."

A long lick tickled his throat, making him giggle. Sniffing continued and Bran lifted Luc's hand lapping at his palm. "What's this?"

"Jerrod's mark."

"His *what?*!"

"Don't yell."

"How can I not yell? You let some baby vamp mark you?"

"I didn't let him." Luc glared at Bran in annoyance. "It was a mistake. I saved him from his master and by some funky vampire process it made me his new master."

Bran's warm hands stroked Luc's shoulders. "Sorry I yelled, baby. What do we need to do to find him a new master?"

"According to Nikko, I'm his master until one of us dies."

Bran gave him an evil grin. "I can take care of that."

Luc punched him.

"Ow." Bran said, cradling his shoulder.

"I forgot how bony you are."

"Ha! Serves you right," Bran said, placing a kiss on Luc's cheek. "You shouldn't beat your lover."

"Bran, I don't know what to do. I'd love nothing more than to come back and be your mate, but I have Jerrod I'm responsible for now. I just can't abandon the kid."

"Give him to Nikko," Bran said ruthlessly.

"I can't just give him to Nikko. His last master abused him. He needs care, protection, blood."

Bran sighed. "He can't live here. The other weres wouldn't tolerate it."

Luc nodded. "I know, but I can't leave him to fend for himself either. I think it's best if I stay where I am."

"What about your birthday? It's only three days away. You'll need preparation if you hope to survive your father's persuasion."

"I know." Luc swallowed around the ball of fear lodged in his throat.

Every birthday, his father pulled Luc down into hell to try to convince him to give up his soul and become an official Hell Lord. As the only son born with a soul, Luc was an object of personal pride to his father. Lucifer senior wanted his son's soul, but he was absurdly pleased when Luc survived his challenges each year. The devil's theory was that the longer Luc resisted, the stronger Hell Lord he would make. Each year his test was a little more difficult until it mostly consisted of Luc surviving as much torture as his brothers could dish out.

What the devil didn't know was that his older sons didn't try as hard as they could. None of them wanted the devil's favourite to join them in hell. With Luc there, they would all lose ranking, as Lucifer had vowed to make his half-fae offspring his right hand man. Even with his brothers holding back, Luc still returned bruised, bloody and burned after every challenge.

In the past, to keep sane from the torture, Luc focussed on Bran. When he concentrated on his lover, his mind and soul felt complete. He was torn in too many ways with the current situation.

Bran flicked the necklace around Luc's neck. "Still wearing his collar, love?"

The low menace in the alpha's voice made Luc shiver. "I was going to return it, but he told me to keep it for now."

"Of course he did." Bran sat up, running his hands through his shiny black hair. "He wants you to return to him. Each time you look in the mirror you see that damned jewelled collar and he knows he has you. Give it back to him. Tell him you aren't interested." The commanding tone in Bran's voice erased the tender words shared moments ago.

"I'm *not* interested," Luc protested. "But you can't just fling a priceless necklace at a vampire who thinks he's your mate."

"Mate!" Bran roared. "He's not your fucking mate!"

"I didn't say he was. Shit, maybe I should go home."

"No." Bran wrapped Luc in his arms, stopping him from leaving the bed. "I'm sorry. This whole thing has me spinning. I just got you back. I don't want to lose you so quickly."

"You're not losing me, but sometimes things aren't always so black and white. I will tell Nikko that we're back together, but I don't want to start an interspecies war. You're going to have enough on your plate with Betsy's pack. We have to approach this diplomatically."

"I'm not a diplomat," Bran said, nipping at Luc's neck. "I'm your mate and I'll protect you with every last breath in my body. Stay with me, baby. We'll discuss this tomorrow. We have some makeup sex to get to."

Suddenly breathless, Luc laughed. It felt as if it were the beginning of their relationship when everything was new. As if he were still the centre of Bran's world.

How he'd missed that look.

There wasn't much time for reflection before Bran yanked Luc to him, using his huge muscled body to pin Luc's lighter frame. His world shrank to Bran's beautiful amber eyes as the alpha dipped his head and took Luc's mouth as if he were food, water and everything necessary in life.

The months prior to Luc's departure had been filled with tension and pain after the alpha made his decision to seek a female mate. Now, it was as if those days had never happened. This was the old Bran. The one he'd loved for so long.

Nothing could beat the familiarity of a lover who knew where all the hot spots were on your body. One who knew his nipples were sensitive and how to rub that bit of skin on his hip to drive him completely insane.

Luc gave himself over to Bran's touch. He was floating. Enjoying sensations only his werewolf lover knew how to cause.

Unexpectedly, Bran slid down his body, licking and nuzzling his way until he settled between Luc's legs and swallowed his cock in one long slide. With big hands pinning him, he was at the werewolf's mercy, unable to move his hips.

Whimpering mindlessly, Luc's head whipped back and forth. "I'm coming!"

A low growl vibrated through his body, making him shoot down his lover's throat. Panting, he tried to calm his racing heart as Bran lifted his legs and exposed Luc's hole to his hungry amber gaze.

"Who do you belong to?" Bran demanded.

Luc had to unscramble the words in his sex-muddled head. "You. I'm yours, Bran."

"Remember that." He released Luc long enough to grab some lubricant from the nightstand drawer and coat his fingers. First, one finger slid inside, then another, then finally three fingers moved in and out of his hole. When the alpha was satisfied Luc was open enough, Bran removed his fingers and slid his cock inside.

"You will always be mine. I don't care what the vampires think."

Luc clamped down on Bran's body. If his lover could still speak, he wasn't doing a very good job of distracting him.

The werewolf's eyes rolled back in his head. "Fuck!"

Bran's long fingers wrapped around Luc's cock, knowing exactly where to pump and squeeze with the ease of long familiarity. A few hard pumps later had them coming together.

His lover collapsed on top of him.

"Umph."

"Sorry." Bran slid out and off of Luc, leaving him empty, but at least able to breathe.

Moments later a warm cloth wiped him clean. "Sleep, baby. We'll talk in the morning."

Chapter Seven

Luc was having the best dream. A hot wet mouth was sliding over his body, licking and nipping at his most sensitive spots and making him squirm from the sensation. It wasn't until his cock was taken in one quick swallow that he realised he wasn't dreaming.

Blinking his eyes, he tried to focus on the dark head bobbing up and down.

"Fuck Bran, that feels sooo good." He let out a low moan. His lover liked to hear his sounds when they had sex. The beauty of the man sucking him off was enough to send him over the edge.

Unfazed, the werewolf swallowed all of Luc's fluid without spilling a drop. When there was no more, that amazing mouth lifted and gold eyes blinked up at him, heavy with desire.

"You taste amazing," Bran said as he crawled up Luc's body

When Bran leant down and kissed him, Luc could taste himself on his lover's tongue, something that excited him even as he found it mildly disgusting. He loved the taste of a lover but didn't particularly like his own cum. A fact the werewolf was well aware of as he gave him a wicked smile.

"You taste better than anyone I've ever been with," Bran said.

A knock sounded on the door.

Bran rolled off Luc and yelled, "Enter!"

Sal appeared in the doorway with a covered tray. "I thought you two might be hungry."

"You're a doll," Luc said, sitting up in bed. He was starved. His stomach growled as he looked expectantly at the tray.

Unfolding the legs, Sal set the tray over Luc's lap and lifted the cover exposing fresh-squeezed orange juice and tons of food – thick slabs of ham, fried eggs, a pile of home style potatoes and a stack of buttered toast.

"I think I'm supposed to share this," Luc laughed.

"Good thing. I don't think you could fit all that into your scrawny body," Bran said.

Luc gasped in mock outrage. "Did you just call me scrawny?"

Bran scratched his heavily muscled chest and gave him a taunting smile. "Maybe I meant puny."

Sal snatched the tray up just as Luc attacked Bran, finding his sensitive spots. He plundered the werewolf's silky flesh until the alpha howled with outrage.

"All right, you win," Bran said, tears of laughter running down his face. "I should know better than to wrestle with someone who knows where I'm ticklish."

"Yes, you should," Luc agreed. He settled back against the pillows and Sal returned the tray with an odd look in his eyes.

Luc tilted his head as he examined his old friend. "Are you all right, Salvador?"

Sal gave him a half-hearted smile. "It's good to have you back, Luc. We all missed you."

"It's good to be back." Maybe he was being paranoid, but there was a little voice in the back of his head telling him something was wrong. Sal's smile didn't reach his eyes and the man looked nervous.

Luc shook his head at his stupidity. This was Sal, one of his closest friends; he would talk about what was bothering him when he was ready.

Smiling at Sal, Luc took a long sip of his orange juice. He savoured the rich fruity tang, letting the flavour soak into his mouth before swallowing. After eating some eggs and ham, he took another sip of juice. A strange taste coated his tongue.

"This juice has an odd aftertaste. Different brand?" Who knew what the wolves were buying now? Wolves in general weren't known for their love of fruit.

The werewolf nodded, but Luc could see beads of sweat dotting Sal's brow.

It felt hot. No wonder the werewolf was sweating.

Luc struggled for a breath. Feeling like he couldn't pull enough oxygen into his lungs, he started to panic. Something was definitely not right.

His body began to go numb. He tried to grab at Bran as his vision greyed around the edges.

As he succumbed to darkness, Bran screamed, "Luc, no!"

* * * *

Death wasn't bad. He couldn't die—well, not permanently. When Luc died, his soul returned to his childhood bedroom while his body repaired the damage. Lucifer had taken great pains to make sure his youngest son would always survive no matter what. Why he went to so much trouble was a mystery to Luc, but it came in handy.

The only problem was that while his body rebounded from mortal death, his spirit went home—to hell.

Flames flared around Luc, but without his physical form they couldn't touch him.

"Greetings, brother."

Luc turned to see his brother, Galthine, standing in his room. There was never a positive reason for one of his brothers hunting him down. Not to mention, Galthine seemed to know he was coming.

Trap.

"Greetings."

Galthine was monstrous. He was seven feet of rippling muscle with great horns piercing his skull and a pair of red, leathery wings tucked tight against his back. He was the oldest of Luc's five brothers and the only one who could breathe fire. Something he did constantly during Luc's birthday challenges.

Luc flinched at the memory of his last birthday challenge when his skin had been charred and crispy from Galthine's flames.

"Come with me."

Luc knew better than to refuse his brother without reason. He was glad his physical form was at the Pack house. His brother couldn't harm him in this form, but it didn't stop the memories. All of Luc's previous birthdays began to surface. His brothers were not allowed to touch him outside of the challenge. If they did, it was reported to father and they were sent to the lowest hell for retribution.

Floating behind his brother, Luc followed Galthine into his private torture studio. Careful to look only at the ground, Luc didn't want to see what caused the screams coming from the walls. Last time he was here, bodies were dangling from the ceiling by meat hooks.

"Happy Birthday." Galthine's smile was pointed and wicked. He waved his hand towards a hunk of red flesh lying in the middle of the room.

Luc's vision couldn't focus. What was that?

The blob gave a small moan.

"Who is that?"

"Don't you recognise your old friend?"

The blob emitted a soft whisper, "Lucifer."

Memories bubbled to the surface. "Carn?"

Galthine sidled up to Luc. "Don't you want to heal him?" His voice was low and coaxing. He sounded sympathetic, but Luc knew pure evil lurked in his brother's heart. "Your poor friend. I bought him from his master but I'm willing to give him to you for a birthday present."

"What do you want?" His brother would rescue no one without a reason.

"I want you to use all of your energy to heal your friend and drain your reserves. In three days, you'll still be weak and I can break you like I've always wanted to."

Startled, Luc turned to face his brother. "I thought you didn't want me to stay down here? Stilne said you and the others wanted to keep me out."

"Father changed the rules," Galthine growled. "He grows impatient to have you as his right hand. He offered us an incentive. The one who breaks you gets to be the Third Lord of Hell. The ones who don't will fall under his hand for punishment. I won't go back under father's hand." Smoke poured out of Galthine's mouth, but Luc could see the panic in his brother's eyes.

It was a good plan. Luc had to admire the strategy behind it. He couldn't leave his childhood friend bruised and battered on his brother's dungeon floor, even if it meant his own downfall.

As soon as he made his decision, Luc could feel his body pulling him back. He must be healed already.

"Deliver him to the Pack house," Luc said.

It looked as if his reconciliation with Bran wasn't going to be long lasting.

* * * *

Luc's spirit floated through the levels of hell following the call of his body. He didn't run into any of his other siblings but he knew Galthine was only the first to approach him.

Three days before his birthday and Luc was now in the possession of a needy vampire, an injured demon and a soon to be angry werewolf.

He became aware of his surroundings slowly—air filled his lungs, sheets brushed against his bare skin and a pleasant soreness ached in his backside that oddly wasn't taken away by the healing...but the crying had to go.

Whoever was wailing was really getting on his nerves. Even though he couldn't die, being poisoned was really uncomfortable and it took a while for his system to fully regenerate. He hoped the crier wasn't going to carry on the entire time.

"Shhh. No crying." Luc struggled to open his eyes but his lids felt like they weighed a hundred pounds.

"He spoke. Master Nikkolai, he's not dead."

What was Jerrod doing at the Pack house? Surely, Bran wouldn't let him stay.

Luc opened his eyes to see a tear-stained Jerrod kneeling by his bed and a hollow-eyed Nikko sitting close by.

Where is Bran? He tried to speak but the only thing that came out was, "What happened?"

Nikko's face fell into hard lines. "Sal poisoned you, Bran killed him, and combined with tossing out Betsy, there was an uproar in the pack. He thought it best if you stayed some place protected while you were healing." He continued in the same hard voice, "If you'd come here for dinner, instead of staying over to have breakfast with your ex-lover, you wouldn't be in this position."

"No one likes an *I told you so*," Luc commented as he thought over what Nikko had said.

It made sense. As an alpha, Bran would only be comfortable if Luc was watched over by another alpha.

Nikko stared at him. "I didn't believe him when he said you'd be fine. But then, I also didn't know you were the son of the devil." A sarcastic laugh burst from him. "I should have known you were too beautiful to *not* be an agent of hell."

"I'm not an agent of hell," Luc snarled. "My father just happens to be the devil."

"Who's going to try to pull you under in three days."

Wow, Bran really did feel like sharing. Wait. "Did you say Sal poisoned me?" Luc tried to sit up but his body was too heavy. Merging the soul to the physical was difficult. "Why would Sal poison me? He knows it won't kill me." He'd had many conversations with Sal over the years. The werewolf knew that nothing would kill Luc.

Nikko's voice was cold. "He was hoping to kill Bran. Now that you've bonded, he thought your temporary death would send him over the edge. It appears that one of your brothers told him if he killed Bran, Sal could be the leader of the pack with you at his side."

"Me? I thought he was straight."

"Bi. Don't tell me you never saw him looking. I saw him staring at your ass at the club."

Luc shrugged. "Everyone looks. It doesn't mean they'll kill my lover to have me."

Jerrod broke into sobs. "You're the best Master ever. I'm going to taste your food for you every night."

Luc smiled. "Then *you* would be sick and I'd have to cry at your bedside."

Sniffing, Jerrod climbed up on the bed and hugged Luc, rubbing one tear-streaked cheek against Luc's shoulder. "You would too."

Luc patted the sobbing vamp on the head before asking Nikko. "What's he doing here?"

"When you weren't home in the morning, he came to check on you. Bran told him he brought you here so he came over." Nikko's eyes indicated that there was more to the story, but Luc was tired and frankly didn't give a shit. He was relieved when Nikko said, "Come, Jerrod. Why don't you go down to the kitchen and find your master some nice broth? It will do wonders for him."

The slim vampire jumped up eager to be of use. "I'll be right back." He gave a small tearful smile to Luc before running out of the room.

"Thank you. I don't think I could handle any more waterworks." Now that Jerrod was gone, he felt a little self-conscious without the smaller vampire as a buffer.

Nikko pulled his chair closer to the bed. "How are you feeling? All better?"

Luc nodded. "I'm fine. Did Bran tell you I can't die?"

"He told me he still felt your link even while your body grew cold. Sal didn't count on that."

"What happened to him?"

Nikko gave a smile almost as evil as Galthine's, his fangs peeking out. "Bran sent him to chat with your father. The Pack is cleaning up the mess as we speak."

Luc fought back tears. Sal had been a friend for years. The loss of his friendship cut him like a knife. How long had they wanted him in silence?

Luc felt the poison easing out of his system and stayed lying down until he was certain he was toxin free. When he finally started to sit, Nikko leaned over and pinned him down.

"You will stay right here and rest." Nikko's eyes glowed bright when he was pissed.

"I'll stay right here and rest," Luc agreed meekly. He tucked the blankets around himself and played possum.

He felt the scrape of Nikko's stubble as the vampire whispered in his ear, "I'll know if you leave this room, my love. I've put a guard outside your door and he has instructions to only let me and your servant inside, and no one out."

"Sneaky bastard," Luc whispered, not bothering to open his eyes.

"Your sneaky bastard."

He felt the soft brush of lips on his cheek before he heard the door close.

More tired than he wanted to acknowledge, Luc was in the middle of falling asleep when a harsh ringing sound filled the air.

A hole opened in the air beside the bed and Carn's bloody body was tossed through the portal. The demon landed on the floor, leaving a long streak of fresh blood across the carpet.

Galthine's head popped through the portal. "I followed your spirit signature, brother. Sneaky of you to try to escape me. Maybe you'll make a good Hell Lord yet!"

Luc didn't have a chance to contradict him before the portal vanished and he was left with an oozing bloody body on Nikko's fancy carpet.

Nikko was going to kill him.

Sliding out of bed, Luc approached Carn's battered body. At close glance, he looked worse. How was that even possible?

The demon was encrusted with blood from multiple whip marks. A pair of handcuffs had cut into his wrists and they were leaking blood over his broken hands.

Jerrod entered the room with a bowl of soup balanced in his hand. It fell to the floor when he saw Carn lying on the carpet. The fabric muffled the sound of soup splashing.

Jerrod crouched down beside Luc and asked in a whisper. "What is that?"

"A childhood friend."

"What are you going to do?"

"Heal him." Luc would stay in hell should his brothers break him, but he couldn't let his friend die. Unlike Luc, the demon wouldn't come back.

Carn's breathing was slow. He wouldn't last much longer. His remaining demon blood was the only thing keeping him alive.

"Thank you. Thank you," Carn whispered as Luc came closer. The demon's eyes were glazed with pain, but he focussed on Luc as if he were a saviour. "I kept hoping you'd come. I knew if you found out, you'd save me. Thank you. Thank you." His neck was bruised and his voice was a raspy whisper.

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" Jerrod asked. "Nikko isn't going to be happy if you heal a demon in his club."

"I can't leave him like this. I won't leave a friend to bleed to death on the floor because it might make Nikko unhappy."

With determination, Luc held his hand over the centre of Carn's body. He jerked as power pulsed from his hands and into the demon. Silver glowed across the demon's body, magic filling the cracks in his skin. It was like watching a movie in reverse. The wounds sucked the blood back into the demon, sealing the skin over them. For a few moments, Luc lost all sense of self.

This was why he wasn't a healer. He used too much power and didn't know his limitations. Luckily, he never healed humans. They were too fragile.

"Enough, Master!" Jerrod's voice snapped Luc back into the present. Carn lay before him, glowing with Luc's power, convulsing lightly.

"Fuck me." At the current rate of Luc's incompetence, Carn would die from power poisoning. Luc placed his hand on the demon's stomach. The power welcomed his touch and poured back up his arm.

The demon's eyes snapped open.

Carn no longer glowed, but Luc knew the small amount of power he absorbed back wouldn't be enough to save him from his father's hands.

"Feeling better?" he asked his friend.

Carn's nod was more of a convulsion than a motion of agreement. "Please don't send me back, Luc. Please."

"Carn, I can't keep you. You know the laws. I will have to return you to your master."

"You're my master. Galthine gave me to you for your birthday, remember? That makes me yours. If you return me there, everyone will use me as a way to get to you. I'll never have a moment of peace." Carn gave him a sly smile. "However, if I'm yours, no one will touch me. I will serve you."

"What would I do with a demon servant?"

"Please. I must be able to be of some service to you." Carn's face was desperate.

Luc looked away from the sight. "Can you feed my vampire?"

"Luc, you don't have to do this," Jerrod said. His wide eyes looked back and forth from Luc to the demon.

"Yes. I can feed your vampire," Carn said quickly, as if sensing his opportunity was slipping away. "I'd be happy to feed him, fuck him, be his pet. Whatever."

There was no way Luc would send a friend back into hell, not without a master to protect him. "Fine. I'll be your master."

The pain on the palm of his right hand was familiar now. A demonic symbol glowed gold next to the small set of wings.

Great. Now he was a vampire *and* a demon master.

Bran and Nikko were going to be pissed, Luc thought, before he passed out on the floor.

Chapter Eight

Luc was limp, tired and in bed again. It felt like he spent all his time these days resting or sleeping. His body felt weighty as if the earth's gravity had increased five times its usual strength while he'd slept. His throat was dry and his eyes crusted over. He could almost count his muscles from the sheer pain each and every one was causing him. Coming back from hell was...hell.

A scream from the other room jolted him. He recognised that sound.

That was his vamp.

Fighting his weariness, Luc pulled himself out of bed, stumbling on his way to the door. A quick check proved he was in sleep pants, but shirtless.

Good enough for company.

Forcing his body forwards, Luc tore open the door and stepped into the other room.

Surprisingly, the guard Nikko had mentioned was missing.

The scene that met his eyes wasn't what he expected. Jerrod wasn't cowering on the floor. Instead three of Nikko's vamps were trembling on the ground. Each was pinned by a growling hellhound with flaming eyes and jowls dripping acid. The vamps were screaming as the corrosive liquid burned through their clothing and onto their skin.

"Where did the hellhounds come from?" Nikko demanded.

Luc spoke up as he leaned against the doorjamb. "One of the protections that Jerrod's necklace provides is hellhounds to hold his enemies until he can escape." He looked over at his vamp. "Are you okay?"

Jerrod gave him a smirk and stood taller than he ever had before. "Of course, you promised I would always be safe."

Luc nodded, not thinking much about the statement. It was true. He took care of his own. He turned his head to look at the master vampire. "Perhaps you need to teach your boys some manners."

"They're new." Nikko tilted his head. "Do you think you can call off your hellhounds?"

"Sure, which do you think they should eat?"

"What?" Nikko asked a stunned expression on his handsome face.

"Hellhounds need to be satisfied with blood before they will return to their resting place. In this case, hell. So who do you think they should eat?"

Nikko chuckled. "Well, I guess it will depend on who started this fight. Jerrod?"

Luc's servant wrung his hands. "I was sitting there," he pointed at the chaise, "staying out of trouble, waiting for my Master to wake, when these three started coming on to me. I didn't want them touching me." He shifted from foot to foot. "Only you can touch me," he added fiercely, looking at Luc.

"And how are you touching him?" Nikko grabbed his arm.

"Can we focus here?" Luc asked, yanking out of Nikko's hold.

"I told them to let me go but then that one..." He pointed to the largest of the three vampires pinned beneath the hellhounds. "He said he was going to make me his boy and the others grabbed me and pulled me down."

The first one Jerrod pointed to started to scream. "Fuck, man. I didn't know he was yours. Let me go. It burns. I'll never touch him again, I swear!"

Luc walked over and gripped Jerrod's amulet in one hand before chanting the basic hellhound incantation. "Return from where you came."

The dogs looked up from the vamps they were torturing.

"And tell the hound master to give you those special rations I set aside."

Happy yips followed this announcement. The stench of sulphur and smoke filled the room. A cloud of blackness wrapped around the three dogs right before they vanished. As the room cleared, the vampires waited patiently for permission to get up.

Nikko looked at Luc with amusement. "Guess they didn't need blood after all."

Luc shrugged. He enjoyed keeping them guessing.

"You may rise," Nikko said.

Ohhh. Nikko's voice had that commanding tone. It made Luc tremble as he became hard. All of his energy, used up from his march into the room, escaped and he fell into the closest chair. Jerrod knelt at his feet while Luc absently stroked his hair.

"Where's Carn?" Luc whispered.

"Getting you food," Jerrod responded in an equally quiet voice. "Bran called to say he'd be by later."

He missed Bran, but maybe it was better to be away from him before he was pulled below. He knew Bran would suffer the most when Luc didn't return from hell. With a motion from Nikko, the three vampires leapt to their feet, shifting their eyes between Nikko and Luc, giving them equally nervous glances.

"In general, touching is permitted as long as it's consensual," Nikko said to the vamps. "However, Jerrod doesn't belong to the tribe and he wasn't willing. He belongs to Luc. Luc is very protective and doesn't allow touching of his servant. Is that understood?"

The vamp in the middle with the most acid burns on his shirt raised his hand.

"Yes, Laurence."

"Why does he have a servant, he's not a vampire?" The vamp was polite, although shaking a little.

"He killed a master vampire and the mark was transferred. He is also my mate. Luc has special status, harming him is harming me. Are we understood?"

Luc wanted to scream and stamp his foot to let Nikko know he wasn't his mate, but now wasn't the time. He belonged to Bran even if it was only for a few more days.

"Yes, Master," the trio responded as if coming from one mouth.

"Excellent."

Laurence raised his hand again.

Nikko sighed. "What now?"

"Can I belong to Luc? I've never had a hellhound to protect me."

Jerrod's grip on Luc's legs became numbing.

"No," Luc said. "One is enough for me."

Jerrod rubbed his head against Luc's thigh, earning a glare from Nikko.

"Yes," Nikko agreed. "One is more than enough."

After dismissing the vampires, Nikko turned his attention to Luc. "You don't look so well, love. Why don't you go back to bed?"

Luc knew his time was fading but Nikko was right. He needed sleep or he'd never be able to put up a fight when his brothers came for him.

* * * *

"Good morning, Master. I have your food."

"Hmm." Luc opened his eyes. The warmth was gone. Jerrod had already risen. He must've been sleeping hard.

"Hungry?"

Luc rubbed his eyes until Carn came into view. "Evening, Carn. You brought me some food?"

The demon beamed, his eyes glowing with fervour. A tray was placed over Luc's lap. It held a plate of Eggs Benedict with hash browns, surrounded by an assortment of fruit.

"Wow, this looks great."

"It is my pleasure to serve." Carn knelt beside the bed.

"You made this?"

The demon nodded. "I've been training as a chef under Doem."

Luc was certain his father didn't know Carn was training to be a chef. If Lucifer or Luc's brothers knew this, they would have never harmed the demon. Father loved his food.

Cool.

The first bite was like eating paradise. Luc let out a low groan. "That is the best damned Eggs Benedict I've ever had." He was about to continue when he felt a coldness seep into the house. An unnatural stillness took over. Ice crystallised his cup and his orange juice solidified.

It was a familiar feeling.

Pithel Demons.

"Where's Nikko?"

"He had a meeting."

"Here?"

Carn shook his head. "He said it was across town."

Convenient for someone. By the time he returned, Nikko could lose everything. He might not agree with the vampire's methods but Luc couldn't let the man's house fall apart while he was gone. Pithel demons were ruthless and took whatever they liked. Luc was almost certain that the Pithels had received a tip by someone on the inside.

Great, just what he needed. Another confrontation.

Luc slipped out of bed, quickly dressing as he went. "Stay out of sight," he whispered to Carn.

"I'm going with you," the demon stated proudly.

"Then stay behind me so I'm not worried about your safety." Luc left his room, went through the outer lounge and slipped down the stairs, keeping his steps quiet. Once he got to the bottom he saw he didn't need to bother.

A dozen Pithel demons were standing in the foyer facing down a group of Nikko's vamps. Neither group was moving but Luc could feel the hatred in the air. Nikko would be crushed if any of his vamps were killed by demons while he was away. Pithel demons were nasty and unremorseful. A group of vamps would be no problem for them. They could kill the entire household then take the time to pick their teeth with the bones.

Centring himself, Luc let in and out a deep breath before walking closer. His energy was still low. If they challenged him, he would be visiting his father sooner than he planned. There was no hope, but to bluster it out.

"Well, look who has come to play." Luc was pleased he sounded more confident than he felt.

The demons stared at Luc as he approached. He could feel Nikko's vamps trying to decide if they should get in the way or not. After all, if the demons didn't kill them, Nikko would for letting Luc get hurt.

"Baby Luc, is that you?" The leader of the Pithel demons turned towards him.

Lady luck was smiling on him today. He didn't try to hide his laughter as he faced down the biggest of the Pithel demons and a good friend. It was like visiting memory lane this week. "Turell, how in the hell are you and what are you doing here?"

"I could ask the same of you." The large, white demon stepped forwards; his wings scraped the floor as he spread his arms for a hug.

It was lethal to be scratched or bitten by a Pithel, for both their fangs and wingtips were tipped with acid. To everyone in the room besides the two hugging, it looked like an act of courage.

Only Turell and Luc knew he was completely immune.

Luc stepped back, patting his friend's feathery white shoulder. "I'm staying here now. Nikko is my friend."

"No!" Turell shouted. His pale face turned red with anger. "I was supposed to get a vampire tribe. They were going to be mine!"

"Not this one." He might not be there for long but Nikko had treated Luc decently and the very least he could do was keep this pack off Nikko's property. Besides the vampire's territory was too close to Bran's. Pithel demons didn't stay in one spot and they tended to kill anything in their way.

Turell's black eyes burned, turning red like overheated coals. "But I was promised."

Shit, Pithel demons are scary.

Luc stood his ground. "Well, whoever promised you, lied. Maybe you should take it up with them." Keeping his cool, he flicked a piece of lint off his shirt, glad he'd got dressed before coming downstairs.

"I say we take it anyway." The Pithel demon closest to Turell sent Luc a leer. "Then we eat his soul."

It was amazing what little effort it took to rip out a demon's heart. It was much harder to get it off your hands. Luc flicked the organ on the ground before meeting Turell's gaze with a cold one of his own. "I hope you have a backup plan."

The sound of the demon's dead body falling to the ground echoed loudly in the still room.

Luc wiped his hand on the demon leader's chest.

For a moment, Turell watched Luc's hand as he smeared the blood on his clean white skin, then he threw back his head and laughed. "Dylan was a stupid second, I'm glad to see him gone." He gave a quick sweep of the room with his eyes. "What should we do? I want a vampire enclave and obviously I can't have this one."

Luc scanned the room and spotted Gabriel, Nikko's lieutenant. "Gabe, who's Nikko's biggest enemy?"

Might as well get rid of two birds with one stone.

"Thomas," Gabe said without hesitation.

"Where does he live?" asked Luc.

"In the memorial cemetery on Queen Anne hill."

Luc waved his hand. "Well, there you go. Obviously a bastard that needs to die. Help yourself."

Turell gave a short nod of his head. "Thank you, friend. I'll send you a token once we get settled."

"Agreed."

The demons turned and left.

Luc spun around to see Nikko's vampires shifting stares between him and the demon on the ground. "Jerrod."

"Yes, Master." The vampire stood slightly behind the crowd, but stepped forwards at the sound of Luc's voice.

"Have you any interest in trying Pithel blood? I hear it's a delicacy."

Jerrod's headshake was definite. "No, Master. I have enough demon blood."

"Gabe, please do with this what you will as long as it's cleaned up." His gaze swept the entire group. "I don't think we need to mention this little incident to Nikko. He worries." Luc flashed a smile. "I'm so fragile you know."

Chapter Nine

The Pack house ring howled as Luc walked back into the bedroom. Tired, Luc sighed as he grabbed his phone from his pocket and pressed the answer button. He was going to have to change that ring tone until the wolves started calling with good news.

"Are you leaving me to Nikko these days?" he greeted the caller.

Bran growled. "He better not have touched you."

"Well, he's not here right now, but I'm wondering how much longer I'll have to stay. I've only got two more days before father calls me back and I was hoping to spend them with you."

Bran cleared his throat. "I'm trying to settle things with the Pack. Betsy's alpha already sent a note about his disapproval and the Pack is upset about Sal."

Luc sighed. "I'm worried about Sal too, but I used most of my power to heal Carn and I need you to recharge."

"Who's Carn?"

"Demon friend," Luc said breathless. "I don't know how to tell you this Bran, but I don't have any reserves. I'm not going to make it this year," he said softly. "I'm going to ask Uncle Michael to dissolve our bond."

"Don't you fucking dare," Bran said in a low, menacing voice. "I didn't go through all of this to have you ruin it. You leave your uncle out of this and keep your beautiful self right there. Get some rest and I'll think of something, but whatever you do, don't call your uncle. Promise me that, Luc. Promise me you won't ask to have our bond dissolved. You're the only thing I have to live for."

"Fine." He didn't want his mate to lose all hope in life. "I won't ask him to dissolve our bond."

"Thank you. Now, sit tight at Nikko's and I'll come for you tomorrow."

"When did you and Nikko become so close?"

"We share a common goal...to keep you safe."

"Love you."

"Love you, too. Behave." With that final warning, Bran hung up.

The door opened and Jerrod and Carn appeared.

"Hello, boys."

"Hello, Master," they said in stereo.

"I need you two to stand guard outside my door while I talk to my relative."

Carn's head snapped up. Luc could tell he was dying to ask which relative, but as a well-trained lower demon he knew better than to ask questions. "Yes, sir." He bowed.

Jerrod looked from one to the other, questions flying from his expression.

Luc waited, careful not to offer any information.

"I'll wait outside," Jerrod said.

The look Jerrod gave Carn told Luc the vamp liked his new companion.

"Don't forget to feed."

They both shot him identical smiles as they left the room.

At least someone was happy.

Sitting on the floor on folded legs, Luc closed his eyes and focussed. After only a few moments, he got a response. Michael was always at hand this time of year.

Lucifer, my sweet boy, what do you need?

A favour.

I'm coming.

Luc opened his eyes as the pressure in the room changed and his skin sparked with electricity. In a showy display of power, white wisps danced through the air amid streaks of lightening, forming the shape of angel. Powerful shoulders crowded the room and enormous white wings brushed the ceiling.

Standing, Luc waited to approach the white creature until it dimmed its light.

"Michael," he greeted the angel as the glowing light faded.

A gorgeous angel with dark hair and silvery eyes looked down at him. "Luc."

He shivered as power rolled over him. Standing next to an angel was never a comfortable feeling and Michael had more power than most.

He looked into the angel's silver eyes. "I'm not going to make it this time, Uncle. I don't have it in me. When I don't come back, I want you to remove me from Bran's memory."

Technically, this wasn't asking for removal of the bond. After all, you can't bond with someone you don't remember.

The angry rustle of wings brought his attention back to the angel. Michael's expression wasn't encouraging. "What do you mean you aren't going to make it? You've fought your father for two hundred years. Why is this year any different?"

"Because this year my brothers are really going to try to torture me and I already used most of my energy healing Carn. I'm tired, Michael. I'm really tired." Luc tried to hold back his tears, but he started sobbing uncontrollably.

Before he could say anything else, he was wrapped in a pair of warm feathery wings like a baby chick. A feeling of tremendous well-being filled him.

"I've watched over you since you were born. I'm not going to let you lose your soul."

They stayed intertwined while Luc absorbed what comfort he could from Michael's embrace.

After a moment, Michael stepped back and pinned Luc with his powerful gaze. "There *is* one way to bring you back to full power. You need to perform the vitality ritual."

Shaking his head, Luc sat down on his bed. "I don't think sex with Bran will be enough, and he would feel the need to kill any other wolf touching me."

"Then you will need another non-wolf. What about Nikko?"

"What about Nikko?"

Michael's gaze entranced Luc until he couldn't look away, couldn't blink.

"A combination of Nikko and Bran would give you enough power." The angel looked away. "I foresee it."

"Do you foresee them ripping each other's throat out? Because I can see that without any powers at all."

Michael laughed. A buzzing sound that rocked Luc's body. Not a comfortable feeling. "For you, they would put aside their differences."

Luc closed his eyes. "I don't know about Nikko. My bond with him is a shallow thing next to what I feel for Bran. I can't ruin my fragile relationship with the wolf."

Michael's expression was filled with pity. "A torpedo couldn't hurt that relationship. Your wolf has learned what's important to his heart. His pack will soon fall in line. Sal is sitting with your father, learning the error of his ways."

It was painful to hear of his ex-friend's punishment. Despite his methods, Sal had been a good friend for many years before the madness crept in. Living with his father would be a new form of torture, because that was what Lucifer excelled at—knowing what would hurt his denizens the most.

"Focus on one thing at a time," Michael said, reading Luc's mind. "If you survive this, I'll help you help your friend. If you mess this up and let your father have you, I'll burn your body and keep you from becoming one of your father's minions."

Luc's fear faded as the angel renewed his vow. Every year, Michael made the same promise. Only this year Luc knew it was a real concern. There was a good chance he wouldn't survive. Even if he could convince Nikko and Bran to play nicely together, it might not work.

"Now, you have to get your men together and make them cooperate."

Luc laughed. "You have obviously never met Nikko. He's not the cooperative type."

Michael flicked his necklace. "He will be if he wants to keep his pretty pet alive."

* * * *

They moved the party to his rental house, neutral territory, for this discussion. Luc sat in a high-backed chair on one side of the room while the alphas sat on opposing loveseats so they could glare at each other properly.

With only five people, the large living room shouldn't feel so full. Luc looked at the two alphas glaring at each other across the room and leaned his head back in his chair. This was never going to work. They would kill each other before any clothes came off.

A hand patting each of his legs had Luc looking down. His demon and vampire sat on either side, stroking him like they were soothing a wild beast.

"You two can sit on chairs and everything," he offered.

They shook their head in unison. *Creepy*.

Closing his eyes, Luc decided he could just sleep until his birthday. Would it be less painful if he just gave up as soon as he reached hell? His brothers couldn't torture him if he readily agreed to be a Hell Lord. How much could it really hurt to have his soul ripped out? It was twenty-four hours until his birthday. He could sit here until then.

"I'll do it." Nikko's voice was low and angry.

"Don't put yourself out," Bran said. "I'd hate for it to be too much trouble to fuck Luc and save his life when you could be sucking an unsuspecting vagrant dry in the streets."

"At least I didn't toss my lover out of the house so I could fuck women," Nikko taunted.

"Enough." Luc jumped to his feet. The room spun a bit and he swayed only to have Jerrod and Carn catch him on either side.

Handy.

"I won't have you two fighting over me. You," he pointed at Nikko, "only want me as a trophy. And you," he pointed at the smirking alpha wolf, "would not even be here if your wolf hadn't refused Betsy. So don't bother whitewashing our relationship."

Both men growled.

Long fingers plunged into his hair and cinnamon-flavoured lips captured his. Instinctively, Luc wrapped himself around the taller form. Jerrod's familiar scent filled his nose as he gave in to the vampire's embrace. Power flowed from the young vamp into his body. When Jerrod released him, he felt strong enough to stand on his own.

"Thank you," he whispered, placing a kiss on Jerrod's cheek. If the vampire were older, or more powerful, Luc could've used him to recover.

Carn turned to him, and for the first time, Luc took a good look at the demon who had changed a great deal since he saw him last. The demon's skin was a deep sensual red with gold-coloured designs swirling across his skin. His nails were gold tipped and there was a bony ridge across his forehead. A sign of beauty for his kind. His eyes were a deep gold, matching his long, straight, silky hair. He was dressed in a pair of jeans and a white shirt that contrasted well with his richly coloured skin.

He was a beautiful demon.

His eyes fixated on Luc as he cupped Luc's cheeks with his long red fingers. "You saved my life, Baby Lucifer. If you choose to return to the home of your father, I will accompany you. You gave up your life essence so that I would survive and that is not a debt I can ever repay. My life is your life to do with as you will, but I implore you to try to get these men to do what is right because there is nothing right about what will happen to you if you go back to hell."

It was the most he'd ever heard the demon speak, maybe collectively over their entire relationship. Carn placed a soft kiss on Luc's lips before stepping back and giving Luc a sad smile. "I know we will never be lovers as we are too much like brothers under the skin, but know that I will do whatever is necessary to help you through this."

Luc hugged Carn close even when the ridges of bone on his back dug into his arms. "Thank you."

Feeling stronger, Luc stepped away from the pair and turned towards the alphas now standing in the middle of the room, staring at him as if he'd grown a pair of wings.

Or horns.

"What do you think, gentlemen? Can you put aside your differences long enough to save my life?"

"I can," Nikko growled, taking a step closer to Luc.

"So can I," Bran responded, also stepping closer. The wolf leant forwards and pressed his cheek to Luc's. "Even if my wolf hadn't wanted you and I'd gone ahead and mated with Betsy, never think I wouldn't have missed my beautiful boy. I feel lost whenever you leave my side." He placed a soft kiss on Luc's cheek. "You are my heart and soul, and if you let your father have you, I will live the rest of my days empty inside."

That snapped Luc out of his funk. He realised for the first time that he was feeling abnormally passive about the whole thing. Where were his spark and the will to combat his father's control? Ever since leaving hell, he'd been preparing to lose.

"Nikko, can you search for spells?"

The large vampire nodded. "What am I looking for?"

"A suppressor or something that would take away my will."

Nikko muttered some words Luc couldn't hear as he waved his hands over Luc's body. A green glow flared around him like a shield.

"Fuck," Nikko growled. "It's an incubus spell. This one is set to drain you of all feeling."

"Galthine must've put it on me when I left hell."

"Can you remove it?" Bran asked

Nikko nodded. "Come here, babe, and take my hands." When Bran stepped up behind Luc, Nikko shook his head. "Go to the other side of the room I don't want it clinging to someone else when the spell disperses."

Bran hesitated, but did as Nikko asked. His gaze examined every motion the vampire made. Luc had no doubt that if Nikko made a wrong move, Bran would take him down.

Nikko placed his hands on Luc's shoulders. "Just relax and clear your mind. You can close your eyes if you want to."

Deciding it was best to block everyone out, Luc closed his eyes and practiced the meditation Michael was always harping on him about, breathing in slowly and letting the air out with equal measure.

"Good." Nikko's voice was low and soothing. "Now I'm going to count back from ten. Ten...nine...eight...seven..."

A blast of power shook Luc from head to heel. He opened his eyes just in time to see Nikko go down under the large alpha wolf.

Luc felt amazing. For the first time in days, his mind felt clear and focussed.

"Stop it!" Luc shouted. Fists started to fly. "I said, stop!"

Balls of lightning rolled across the pair, jolting them apart. Luc fell to the ground. The little power from the exchange with Nikko flashed away.

"Shit," Luc cursed.

"Why did you attack me?" Nikko asked Bran as he picked himself off the floor.

"You didn't give him until zero."

"He was tensing up. He wasn't going to make it to zero."

Luc didn't intervene, the two men were communicating at least. Even if he didn't think he'd been tensing.

"Do you feel better?" Nikko asked.

Luc nodded. "Yes, I do."

"We have less than twenty-four hours until Luc's birthday. We need to decide how we're going to do this."

"I was planning on being on top," Nikko said with a flash of fang.

Instead of taking the bait, Bran gave the vampire a smug smile. "That's because you've never felt Luc inside you."

Nikko snorted. "You've never bottomed."

"I was with Luc for over twenty years. You think it was all one way? We were mates in the deepest sense. I'd be more than happy to be the bottom of a Luc sandwich."

Luc shared a smile with his wolf.

"What do you want us to do?" Jerrod asked

"Stand guard," Luc responded. "According to Michael, I need the two strongest to bond with me, but I won't be entirely comfortable if someone isn't keeping watch. My brothers can't come to this realm, but as we've seen it doesn't stop them from affecting it. I'd like you both watching the door."

"Did you want to move this to the bedroom?" Nikko asked, scanning the living room with a critical eye.

Luc shook his head. "That is the first place they'd look and my bed isn't large enough to accommodate all three of us."

"We could go back to my place. My bed still smells like you," Nikko said with a leer.

The vampire had a death wish. Luc watched impassively as Bran bashed Nikko's head against the wall. "Bran, we still need him." Luc's voice was quiet but the effect was immediate.

The wolf released Nikko and the vampire shook his head like a wet dog.

"Enough." This was never going to work. Even with his new resolution to beat his father, he had his doubts.

Distracted, Luc pulled the cushions off the three couches and threw them around the room, making a nest in the event the three of them ever got together. He didn't hear the pair approaching until his shirt was flying over his head and clawed hands ripped off his pants.

"He really is beautiful!" Nikko said, stroking Luc's back.

"And all mine." Bran unfastened Luc's pants and pulled them down. In minutes, Luc was standing stark naked between two fully clothed men.

"This really won't work when I'm the only one naked."

"Maybe I spoke too early about brotherhood," Carn said, his eyes greedily examining Luc.

"Go outside. Guard!" Nikko said, before taking Luc's mouth in a hot, smouldering kiss.

Luc lost track of everything as Nikko kissed him. A warm, clothed body covered his back. The familiar feel of Bran's mouth on his neck sent shivers down his spine while Nikko's kisses hardened his body.

Ripping his mouth away from the vampire, Luc gasped, "Strip."

He felt a moment's chill as the alphas stepped away to remove their clothing but just as he was feeling cold they returned. Both naked bodies towered over his, creating a cocoon around Luc with their combined heat.

The smell of hot male flesh filled the air.

"Let's lie down," Luc said. It took all his effort to remain standing and not lunge at one of the pair.

Nikko lifted Luc off of his feet and walked him over to the pillows.

"He loves being carried," Bran said in his rough, lust-filled voice.

Luc turned his head to see Bran watching him, gold eyes flashing with desire. It was true he loved it when a strong man cradled him in his arms. He'd die before admitting it out loud though. It was too girly.

Nikko smirked. "I know." With care, the vampire gently placed Luc on the cushions and kissed his forehead. "I'll grab the lube."

As soon as he stepped away, Bran spread his body alongside Luc's. "How are you feeling, baby?"

"Nervous." Although he liked the idea of having both men, all three of them together was frankly terrifying, his best and worst dream.

Bran leant forwards and brushed his cheek against Luc's. The familiar motion soothed him in ways he couldn't explain. "This is a one time thing, my beautiful boy. After this you will be all mine."

"You keep telling yourself that." Nikko returned with a tube of lube clutched in his hand. "I'm glad you think this is a one time thing, but helping Luc comes with a price. He will be half mine from now on."

"What?" Bran jolted up from the cushions, a low growl pouring from his throat.

"You heard me. I'm not saving Luc for you. I'm saving him for me." Nikko leant down and stroked a finger across Luc's collar. "You will belong to me. I may have to share with

wolf-boy but I'm not doing this unless you agree that I get at least half of your time. Otherwise, you might as well be in hell because I will be if I can't have you."

Luc locked eyes with Bran.

Bran turned on Nikko with a snarl. "I hope you can enjoy your time knowing he's thinking of me."

The vampire smiled, full fangs exposed. "Trust me. I'll give him something else to concentrate on."

"Enough. You win, Nikko. I'll be yours too. But I'm keeping my own residence." Luc could figure out what to do later. He had to survive his birthday before he worried about anything else. Only one crisis at a time, he'd learned that much from his father.

With Nikko lying down on Luc's other side he was sandwiched between the alphas. They took turns kissing Luc until he couldn't think straight. Bran slid down Luc's body as Nikko focussed on keeping his mouth occupied.

It took Luc a moment to focus on the wet suction covering his cock. He arched away from Nikko's mouth. "Bran," he moaned.

Nikko plunged his fangs into Luc's neck. Cum burst out of his cock into Bran's willing mouth. When both men released him, he relaxed into a happy pile. Energy pooled in his chest. Although small, it was a stronger spark than the one Jerrod had given him.

"I think this will work if I can retain the energy."

"You'll retain it," Nikko said, licking Luc's shoulder, "because we're not going to let you go until they come and drag you down to hell."

"Oh, shit."

"Hands and knees, baby," Bran said, crawling up to Luc's body before rolling onto his back beside him.

Luc positioned himself over Bran with his legs on either side of Bran's hips. Kissing the wolf, he savoured the taste of himself on his lover's lips. He almost jumped when he felt a finger rubbing across his hole.

"Relax, gorgeous." Nikko's voice was dark and seductive as he carefully prepared Luc for penetration.

The combination of Bran's body beneath him and Nikko's touch brought Luc back to full hardness.

"Mmmm. Fuck me," Bran purred.

"My pleasure. Lube, Nikko." The tube was slapped into the hand he held out.

"Hurry up, because as soon as you take him, I will be inside you."

Luc knew where and how to rub to get Bran's best reaction. Soon he had the werewolf thrashing beneath him. "Easy, love," he soothed. "I want to make sure you're ready." He was the only one the alpha ever allowed inside and it generally took a great deal of preparation.

"Fuck me," Bran growled.

Pressing his lubed cock to Bran's tight hole, he entered in one long stroke.

Bran howled.

"Oh, this is going to be fun," Nikko said, licking Luc's neck. "Ready."

Luc nodded. "Go ahead."

The vampire slid inside, pushing deep. Luc moaned. He may have complaints about Nikko but the vamp fucked like a god.

"Yes, fuck me." Luc pushed himself into Bran then slid back onto Nikko's cock. He enjoyed the experience of fucking and being fucked. He'd seen it done, but he'd never been the boy in the middle before. While he was part of the Pack, Bran kept him out of any orgies. His possessiveness didn't allow others to touch Luc sexually. It was a miracle that he wasn't trying to kill the vampire right now.

As the three of them moved together, Luc could feel the power building up. The sexual energy added a new dimension to his lovemaking.

"I can't wait until I have you to myself," Nikko whispered in his ear. "Oh, the things I want to do to you." A fang scraped his throat sending Luc over the edge. He clamped down on Nikko's cock, as the master vampire screamed his release. Without touching Bran, he felt the were's thick and sticky fluid shoot between them.

Collapsing on the hard surface of his lover's body, Luc kissed Bran's sweaty chest. "I love you," he whispered.

A large hand stroked his head. "I know," Bran said.

"Did it work?" Nikko pulled his cock out of Luc and stroked his cheek with the back of his hand.

Luc looked up to see the vampire's expression. Nikko didn't have his usual cold expression gracing his face. The vamp looked sad and confused.

"I have some energy, but I think it will take a lot more to fill me completely."

"Oh, we want to fill you completely," Bran said beneath him.

All three men broke out laughing.

Luc knew it would be okay. He didn't know if he would survive his birthday challenge, but the two men whose arms he was wrapped in would make his last day on this earth a happy one.

Chapter Ten

Luc's sweat-slicked skin dripped on the cushions. He needed a shower, badly. Careful not to disturb his lovers, he eased himself from Bran's hold and climbed off their makeshift bed.

As he got to his feet, he could feel his body pulsing from their evening of sex. Sex magic was one of the most powerful ways of recharging. From the energy coursing through his body like an electric current, Luc knew the ceremony had worked, but at what price? Looking back at the men lying on the cushions reminded him why he felt a little ill. How could he enjoy himself when he'd traded his relationship with Bran to lay with Nikko?

In all the years they were together, he had never brought another into their relationship and Nikko didn't want this as a one-time thing. To the vampire, Luc was partly his and Luc couldn't in good conscience deny him, but he knew there was no way the alpha wolf would share his mate, no matter what he claimed before the ceremony.

Bran wasn't the type to share and trying would only fracture the already tenuous relationship they'd rebuilt after the wolf dumped him for a female. Their relationship had some patching up to do and Luc had a feeling Nikko wouldn't do anything to help the relationship along. The vampire master made no bones about how much he wanted Luc for himself.

With a soft kiss on Bran's cheek, Luc went to take a shower.

He stripped and turned on the faucet, waiting for the water to reach a scalding temperature. Pleased with the steam level, he climbed in and stood under the shower to soak his hair, closing his eyes to protect them from the water. His head hit the tile when a pair of strong arms enveloped him.

"Oops. Sorry, love," Bran's deep voice eased Luc's tension. "I wanted to give you one last power boost."

Looking at his lover's expression, Luc saw that the alpha wolf's eyes didn't match the jovial tone he was projecting. Bran was scared.

Luc stretched up and kissed his lover. "No matter what happens to me, my love, I will always return to you."

"I know," Bran whispered. "But I can't stand that they torture you every year and there's nothing I can do about it. I'm the alpha wolf. I should be able to protect my mate. You're in a league of your own, my sweet, and I'm not powerful enough to protect you from the bad guys in your life."

Luc stroked Bran's cheek. A tender gesture that always made his wolf's eyes shine with adoration. "Show me how much you love me and I'll take your love down with me to the depths of hell."

Bran lifted Luc from the tub, forcing him to wrap his legs around his lover in order not to fall. "No matter what they do, remember me and I'll help you through."

Luc knew that Bran believed that. His lover didn't know the trials he survived. If he even had a hunch, Bran would've found a way to lock Luc up, away from his relatives.

Their lovemaking was slow and easy, not their usual hot claiming. It was as if Bran was trying to soak up the moment. Slow kisses and sensual touches eased Luc's tension. When Bran finally entered him, Luc felt immersed in his lover's spirit as if they could never separate their two auras again.

With slow measured strokes, Bran pumped inside Luc, the werewolf's cock sending him into ecstasy.

Bran whispered in Luc's ear, "You are mine. And no matter what they do, they can never take that away from us."

Luc could feel the desperation in Bran's voice. On some level, he knew his lover was saying goodbye in case this was their last time together.

Twenty minutes later, Luc was clean and dressed, wearing a pair of jeans and a T-shirt he'd got as a gift from the pack years ago. It was blood red with the words *The Devil Made Me Do It* in bright white letters. Somehow it seemed appropriate for his upcoming day.

Bran had gone to the kitchen to get some food, and Luc was too anxious to sit. He idly paced across the antique rug, wondering how long it would take to wear a path in it.

Luc's skin sizzled and the smell of marshmallows alerted him that he was no longer alone.

"Hello, Uncle Michael," Luc said without turning around. He wondered if anyone ever had the gall to tell the alpha angel that he smelt like marshmallows.

"Hello, Baby Luc." Michael's deep voice vibrated up Luc's spine. It was always nerve-racking to be so close to that much power.

Slowly, he turned around to face the archangel. The man towered over Luc, his white wings on full display. In his hands, he held Luc's guitar.

"My guitar!" Luc shouted, reaching for the instrument. "I knew Jerrod retrieved it from Nikko's club but I've been too busy to play."

Michael lifted it out of reach. "It is imperative that you take this with you when you go and don't let them part you from it."

"Why?"

"Your father won't be easily persuaded to return you to this realm. From what you tell me, he is eager to have you stay. Keep the guitar as close to you as possible at all times, it could be your salvation."

Luc shrugged and took the guitar. It glowed brightly in the lamplight. The instrument was a gift to Luc on his eighteenth birthday by the angel Gabriel. Every year he took it to hell and every year he brought it back. Luc smiled when he stroked the golden instrument. The guitar was made from some extinct tree that Luc had long forgotten the name of.

"Promise me," Michael's deep voice demanded.

"I promise." Luc slid the strap over his head. "They'll be coming for me soon. Don't forget *your* promise."

Michael's large hands clasped Luc's shoulders. "I promise to sever your link to Bran if it looks as if you won't be coming back."

"And if I come back tainted?"

The chill in Michael's eyes was both reassuring and frightening. "I will destroy you so completely that even your father can't bring you back."

Luc let out a breath he hadn't realised he was holding. "Thank you."

Michael placed a kiss on Luc's forehead. "For luck." He glanced over to where Nikko was still sleeping. "What do you want me to do about the vampire?"

Luc shrugged as he stepped back from Michael's embrace. "Nothing. I think he'll be fine without me."

"You don't believe the two of you are mates?"

Luc's gazed at the master vampire. Nikko's gorgeous body was only partially covered by the sheets, leaving a great deal of smooth, silky skin exposed. "I think he wants a mate so badly that he'll take the first person he feels a connection to. But no, I don't think we're mates."

"Then you're wrong." Michael's eyes glowed as if he was looking into Luc's soul. "You are mates but not in this time. The three of you are joined souls, but souls only properly linked in twos. Now is the time for you and Bran. Once Bran's place on this earth is through, your soul will link with Nikko's until Bran's soul is reincarnated."

Luc held back his tears. "So I'm going to continually lose my lovers and have to find them again?"

Michael placed a finger beneath Luc's chin and lifted until they were eye-to-eye. "No relationship can last centuries without change. You are lucky enough to have the two mates of your heart forever. You were never meant to meet Nikko during Bran's lifetime so it makes me wonder whose hand is dabbling in your life."

Luc sighed. "It doesn't matter because we met and now he thinks he should have part of me."

"Get through your punishment in hell, and I'll see what I can do on this end. Make sure you come back whole."

Luc nodded. "I'll do the best I can."

With a final kiss on his forehead, Michael vanished in a cloud of dust.

"He always knew how to make an exit," a deep voice said from behind Luc. He spun around to see Bran standing in the doorway with a tray of food.

"You could've come in instead of lurking by the door."

Bran shrugged. He brought the tray to the living room table before giving Luc a light kiss on the lips. "I didn't want to interrupt in case he came to give you information to help with your ordeal. Interesting thing about the vamp."

Luc nodded but he could feel sadness choking him, a ball of tears clogging his throat. He didn't know if he wanted to survive incarnation after incarnation of his beloved wolf. He was greedy and wanted to keep the one he had.

Bran took Luc into his arms, holding his lover close. Luc inhaled. The scent of his lover filled his lungs. Even in the depths of hell, he knew he would remember that intoxicating combination of wildness and spice.

"He can have you in the next life. In this one, you're mine," Bran said before taking Luc's mouth in a perfect kiss. It was the kind of kiss that only appeared in dreams.

The slow slide of the werewolf's tongue sent spikes of desire through his body. They didn't have time for any more sex, but he cherished the warm flood of desire flowing through his body. When the alpha pulled back, Luc knew that if that was the last embrace he would ever have, it was perfect.

Luc knew his brother had arrived when he felt the flash and fire heating his backside.

"Greetings, Galthine." He didn't need to turn around to know which of his brothers came to fetch him. Galthine was the only one of his brothers powerful enough to punch a hole through dimensions.

Luc could do it at the age of five. Another reason his brothers hated him.

Bran's chest vibrated, a deep growl growing inside.

"Down, puppy," Galthine taunted.

Luc placed a tender kiss on his lover's cheek. "I'll see you later."

Bran gripped Luc's upper arms, giving him a gentle shake until Luc met the were's eyes. "*I will* see you later," he demanded.

Breaking away from his lover's embrace, Luc turned towards Galthine. The demon stood before an open doorway awash in flames. Giving one last longing look at his lover, Luc walked through the portal.

He emerged in his father's throne room. Four of his five brothers stood around Lucifer—Stiln, Tavo, Lain and Freen stood two on each side of the devil's chair of bones. Some people thought the chair was made from the bones of humans who annoyed Lucifer, but Luc knew the horrible truth. They were the bones of the other angels who'd fallen with him.

The only way to ensure you were king of hell was to get rid of the competition.

So Lucifer had killed his brethren and magically enchanted them into the throne so they could never reassemble and challenge him for hell. If you looked closely on the back of the chair you could see the bones of their wings.

Luc was careful to never look at it directly when his father wasn't sitting in it.

"Greetings, Lucifer," the devil said with an evil grin.

Luc looked up at his father. Despite the pleasant smile on his stunning face, Lucifer's eyes told the real story. His father was determined to keep him here. Leaving this time would take a lot more effort.

"Greetings, father." Luc gave a low elegant bow. One always bowed to the devil especially if you didn't want to.

Lucifer kept a jar of ashes by his throne. They were the remains of those who refused to bow before him. Their screams often filled the throne room until it drove petitioners mad.

One of Luc's goals in life was to never give his father a reason to add him to the ash jar.

"I'm giving you one more chance to voluntarily agree to join my ranks as my right hand man."

Luc kept his head down and his eyes on the black marble floor. He could feel the glares of his brothers searing into him. They slaved for their father to gain the attention and respect Luc got just by being alive.

"I respectfully decline."

Lucifer's laugh was enough to chill Luc's blood. "Respectfully?" The devil laughed again. "You are such a sweet boy. It's a shame we have to break you before you can be my top hell lord."

The devil's voice was filled with remorse. Luc would've believed him if he didn't know the blackness of his father's heart.

"Let's see." Lucifer tapped his chin as if he were thinking things over. "Let's go by age, youngest to oldest. Stiln first, then Tavo and Lain, I know how much they enjoy torturing together, then Freen and we'll save Galthine for last. You each have one hour to persuade him. That good for you, boys?"

The five agreed. Luc rolled his eyes. It wasn't as if any of them would dare to disagree. Stiln headed down the marble stairs, his one eye flickered with an unnatural light as if there

were fireflies trapped in his pupil. Luc shivered with unease. Stiln was usually the easiest on him, but he didn't think it would happen this time.

"Let's go," the demon said, reaching Luc's side. Of all his brothers, Stiln looked the most like Luc and Lucifer, but his brother's hair was more white than gold and his skin was bronze.

Rumour was that when he was born, Lucifer was annoyed with his imperfections and said that if he was going to have a bad copy he wanted it to be completely ruined. It was a miracle that he wasn't killed at birth. Luc knew that his own looks were a source of anger for his brother.

Sighing, Luc turned to follow Stiln.

"Just a moment, Luc."

Shit. Reluctantly, he turned to face his father again.

"Just to make things interesting this year I'm removing your healing powers. Your brothers won't have to work so hard if they don't have to redo everything their predecessor did before."

Luc paled. The only thing that kept him surviving each year was his ability to heal all the damage done to him from brother to brother.

Before he could say a word, Lucifer waved a hand and Luc felt something drift away from his body. Feeling increasingly vulnerable, Luc turned to see his brother's wide smile.

"Come, baby brother, and let's have some fun."

"I have a feeling my idea of fun and yours are not the same," Luc said.

"Luc." His father's voice stopped him right in the entryway. He didn't bother to turn.

"I really like your shirt."

"Thanks."

Luc followed his brother through unfamiliar hallways with stone walls and marble floors. "Redecorated since I left?"

"Hell hasn't reformed for you yet," Stiln said as they continued their trek.

Luc stumbled on a jutting rock. "What do you mean?"

"It reforms every year when you come." Stiln stopped and looked back at his brother. "How could you not know that?"

"I thought it liked that shape. I didn't think it had anything to do with me."

Stiln gave a bitter laugh. "Didn't you know everything has to do with you?"

"Stiln," Luc started.

"Forget it, Luc. Let's get this over with. I have other things I want to do today, but if I don't give my best effort, Father will hear of it and take my other eye."

His brother lived under the devil's threat to blind him at any time. Luc would've felt more sympathy for him, had his brother avoided torturing him every year. When they were children, they had played together, but Lucifer never let Stiln forget he was an imperfect copy. Eventually his brother's anger drove a wedge between them.

They ended their walk in a cool, white chamber. It was completely empty with a white concrete floor and blinding white walls. It was as if he was in the middle of nothing.

"So shiny," Luc smirked.

"Just for you, baby brother, just for you," Stiln muttered an incantation. A platform rose from the floor and a pair of manacles descended from the ceiling.

For a moment, Luc thought of bolting, but he knew the repercussions of not taking his punishment. Holding back his sigh, Luc headed for the platform.

"Strip first."

Nodding, Luc propped the guitar against one white wall before stripping off his clothing.

"What is it about you and that guitar? Is it a weapon?"

Luc shook his head. "It's just a guitar."

"Hmm." Stiln gave it one more look, but didn't mention it again. He waited until Luc stripped and stood on the dais. "Nice necklace. I'll let you keep it on, it gives you a slave boy air that I find quite enchanting." He quickly fastened the manacles on each of Luc's wrists before stepping off the dais.

Walking over to one wall, he pressed a button Luc had missed in his first scanning of the room. The wall rotated. On the other side was a large assortment of torture devices. Covering the wall in a tidy array were whips, knives and blunt instruments.

Luc swallowed his fear, closing his eyes to try to centre himself. He could do this. He had to return to his lovers. Unfortunately, one of the rules was he had to keep conscious or he would forfeit. This was the first year where that was a real possibility.

"Father banned me from marking your face, so your eyes are safe."

Over the years, Stiln's favourite taunt was that he was going to take Luc's eyes so that the devil could see a marred image of himself, but Lucifer always was careful to tell his sons that Luc's face was sacred and any damage would be reflected permanently on the offender. It kept his face from total destruction, however the rest of his body was free for mutilation.

"Father told me you if I don't punish you properly, he'll kill my lover."

Luc was surprised that his cold brother had taken a lover, but in hell you didn't have to be a nice guy to get someone to fuck you.

"We both know you will come out of this just fine one way or another. Father won't let you get killed, but he has no such problem with my lover," Stiln said, snapping a metal tipped whip through the air. "It doesn't mean I'm not looking forward to this."

Luc fought his instinctive cringe when his brother slid the whip across the floor. The scrape of metal against the marble reminded Luc of all the other times he'd been the recipient of that whip.

He closed his eyes. Sometimes it was better not to see what was coming. That didn't stop him from listening though. A whistling in the air warned him seconds before his skin was flayed. He felt the warm, wet trickle of his blood flowing down his back.

Luc screamed as the whip fell again and again. He hoped Michael remembered his promise because the chances of him surviving this time weren't favourable.

"Don't worry, brother. This will hurt me much more than it will hurt you."

Luc hissed as the whip ripped into his flesh again. "Somehow I doubt that," he gasped.

* * * *

"He'll never love you, you know," Bran said casually.

Nikko flashed him a fanged smile. "I don't need his love as long as I get everything else."

"You just keep telling yourself that," Bran growled. "I know you were listening to Michael. You weren't even supposed to meet Luc yet."

Nikko shrugged to hide his annoyance. He didn't like the fact that Luc was supposedly Bran's this time. He went to the bar and poured himself a glass of red wine. He saw Carn

standing in the doorway listening to them, but he didn't care. The demon would stand by whomever Luc chose. "What's to say an accident won't befall you, and poor Luc will be all alone and have to cry on my shoulder."

Bran growled deeply. "Because if anything happens to me, Luc will kill you. He might look like a fragile boy but he can crush you if he chooses. And trust me, if I'm dead he'll be very angry."

Nikko laughed. "Luc wouldn't hurt a fly. The most he could do would be to drown me with his tears." The vampire held up his hands. "I adore the man but he's not exactly butch."

"What part of potential hell lord don't you understand?" Bran asked, flashing his fangs.

"He killed those demons for you," Carn said, stepping into the room.

"What demons?" Nikko asked.

"The Pithel that came while you were gone."

Nikko walked over to the red-skinned creature. "Why didn't I hear about this?"

Carn shrugged. "Luc asked your people to keep it quiet."

"What happened?"

"They came demanding your territory and Luc informed them they had the wrong place. One of them objected so Luc tore out his heart. End of discussion."

"Huh?" Nikko took a drink of wine. "Looks as if me and the pretty boy are going to have a little chat when he gets back."

* * * *

A punch to the back had Luc arching to avoid the strike. It was difficult to do when a punch from the front jerked him back. The twins were double teaming him. After Stiln whipped the skin off his body, he dragged Luc and his guitar over to the twins' chambers.

The dual demons liked to use their fists. They said it added a more personal touch.

Tavo punched him again from behind and Lain in front. Each time they let out a grunt like prizefighters making a particularly good hit. He was certain some internal bleeding was involved.

"How are you doing, Luc?" Tavo asked, placing his punch right in the base of Luc's spine. "Ready to give up yet and tell Father you'll join us."

"No," Luc said through gritted teeth. He was certain there would be a solid black bruise across his entire body.

The pair looked at Luc with merciless eyes. Identical twins were rare in the demon world, so they were considered quite a catch by the other demons in hell. With their black hair, yellow eyes and golden skin they were handsome to demon kind, but Lucifer never let them forget that they didn't favour him. Their mother had been a demon concubine that he'd killed after she gave birth to the twins. According to Lucifer, she'd outlived her usefulness.

"We don't want you to join us anyway," Tavo said.

"We'd rather kill you," Lain agreed, flashing a pointy-toothed smile. "But father won't let you die so it's rather pointless."

"But it doesn't matter because this time he's not letting you go."

"Wh-what?" Luc gasped out between hits.

Tavo stopped punching to stand next to his twin. "Awww, didn't you know? Father has decided to keep you this time so you might as well give in. He's not going to let you go back to your handsome wolf. But I bet he'd let you have all the demons you'd like."

"The best part about this, is that you aren't even competition because you'll only want the males." Lain looked quite pleased that he'd figured that out on his own.

For the first time, Luc couldn't see any light at the end of the tunnel. Misery wrapped Luc in its dark embrace. He would be truly trapped.

"I think we've lost his attention," Tavo said.

"No problem," Lain lifted his foot and slammed his heel into Luc's upper thigh, smiling when he heard a loud crack.

Luc screamed.

"See, now we have his attention," Lain smiled.

Freen was waiting in his torture chamber when Luc was carried in.

"What's with the guitar?"

Tavo shrugged as Lain put Luc on the torture seat. It was a reclining leather chair that Freen had custom designed for his victims. As a chair it was remarkably comfortable with good back support and padding. If you didn't notice the arm and leg shackles, it appeared like a luxurious piece of furniture.

Freen positioned Luc so he could strap Luc to the arms of the chair, shackling his wrists.

There was nothing remarkable about Freen's appearance. He looked more like an accountant than a hell lord. Freen's mother had been human and he'd inherited none of Lucifer's amazing looks or powers. He made up for his ordinariness by being the best torturer the devil had. His plain face hid the soul of a true sadist.

He shook his head sadly at the twins when he saw Luc's condition. "You didn't leave me much to work with. He's already so damaged a lot of my artistry will be lost." Freen prided himself on creating carved designs on his victims. Some of them were quite beautiful if you overlooked the hours of torture used to create them.

"Not our problem," Lain said. The twins walked out the door before Freen could complain any further.

Freen gave Luc a scowl. "What's up with the guitar?"

"It soothes me." He was hoping his brother wouldn't try to destroy it. Luc was pretty certain Gabriel bespelled it so it couldn't be damaged, but he wasn't positive and he didn't want Michael angry if it was destroyed.

Freen laughed. "Well, by all means, let's make sure you're soothed while I torture you." He picked the guitar up and set it on the table next to his assortment of torture implements. "There, now you'll feel all better."

He chuckled while he picked up his favourite flesh-slicing knife. "Do you know that our father had a new set of knives made for me just for this event? I want you to know how very grateful I am to you for that. These will never dull and magically clean themselves after a torture. Best quality around."

His plain brown eyes lit with an unnatural glee. "I hope that you appreciate my technique. I'd love to be your chief torturer when you become Lucifer's right hand man. There's a lot of competition in hell, you know, and a little nepotism never hurts." Freen chuckled at his own joke. "Well, it will hurt *you*."

Luc felt the cold blade slicing into his stomach followed by indescribable pain. To keep his sanity he concentrated on Bran, remembering his lover's kiss, reliving his touch, absorbing the memory of the werewolf's scent. He trusted his love to get him through.

Chapter Eleven

"He's not worthy of you, you know." Galthine smiled.

Luc could see the pleasure in his brother's eyes as he looked at him hanging by manacles in the middle of Galthine torture room. His body was a mass of bloody cuts, bruises and bits of hanging flesh. There was very little that didn't hurt and he was hanging on to his sanity with the last thread in his arsenal, his devotion to Bran.

He didn't want to disappoint his lover. The alpha would be heartbroken if Luc didn't return, not to mention what would happen to Jerrod and Carn. He still had hope the two of them would get together, but that would never happen if they were pulled into the depths of hell after him.

Luc gritted his teeth as Galthine jabbed at one of his open wounds.

"That must really hurt especially since you can't heal." His brother's face had the first smile Luc could ever remember seeing. It sent tremors of fear down his spine.

Luc could feel each cut and bruise on his body but he didn't need to wonder how he looked because there was an enormous mirror opposite him, an added dimension to his torture. He wondered idly what would happen if he never healed. Would Bran still love him and his scarred body?

I can survive. I can survive. Luc replayed the words over and over again in his head. It was his mantra for getting out of hell. If he showed any weakness to any of his brothers at any time, they would move in for the kill.

He wasn't going to be stuck here. He'd promised Bran.

His attention snapped back to Galthine when the demon placed a hot brand onto his leg.

Luc screamed. It wasn't just hot; Galthine had laced the brand with poison so that when he stuck it to his leg it seared into his skin along with the brand. He could already feel his leg going numb. He tried to stay awake.

"Pay attention!" Galthine snapped.

The demon calmly placed the brand back against the wall like a gentleman would his walking stick.

"I can't believe you would go through all this with a wolf that would toss you aside so easily." Galthine laughed bitterly. "After all those years together, he didn't even wonder about his sudden yearning for a litter of pups." The demon picked up a spear with his right hand and pierced Luc's left leg with one powerful thrust.

Luc's mouth gushed with blood as he bit his tongue, holding back his screams.

Galthine's words suddenly sunk into his pain-fogged brain. "You entranced Bran," he forced through his cracked, puffy lips.

His brother laughed. "Yes, and you didn't even stay and fight for him. It wasn't that much of a compulsion. I was testing you to see how strong your love was." The demon shook his head sadly. "You didn't even put up a resistance. You fought harder for that damned vampire with the Pithel demons than your soul mate."

"You sent the Pithel demons?" It was all starting to make sense. He had to survive this if only to tell Bran how very sorry he was.

"Don't worry about your little puppy. He won't have time to mourn you. After I get done here, I'm taking a few of my men and wiping out everyone in that little house of yours. I've learned that your misery has a fabulous energy. I'm going to live off of that for a long, long time."

Anger surged through Luc, stronger than any that came before. There was no way he was going to let *anyone* touch his lover.

Bran had to survive.

Galthine leant forwards and whispered in Luc's ear, "Before I kill him, I'm going to fuck him and find out why you've been so loyal all of these years. He must be a great piece of ass since you could have any male on the planet, and don't bother going to Father. He encouraged me to help you break your earthly ties. I will have so much fun."

The ember of anger flared until Luc could only see a glow of white before his eyes. Images of his brother touching Bran filled him with fury until he wanted to kill something. To slash anything between him and what was his.

"That's it." Galthine laughed. "Think of me and your pretty wolf. I could use a new pet since the last one killed himself to be free of me."

Luc's brain went primal and memories of his brother's last pet, a pretty blue-skinned demon, played in the back of his mind, like a film.

"Maybe I'll make him shift then skin him for a new rug."

Luc felt something in his brain snap.

Must protect Bran. Must protect Bran.

He pinned his brother with a fiery look of hate. For the first time in his life, Luc saw a new expression in his brother's eyes. Unadulterated fear.

"No one touches my wolf."

The manacles hissed and fell to the ground like shards of glass. Luc fell three feet and walked across the sharp pieces barefoot towards his brother.

"No one!" he said, his powerful voice echoing throughout the room. The floor shifted and the walls shook with his fury. "You will never touch my wolf or anyone else who is mine."

As he walked, Luc's vision cleared along with the brands, cuts and whip marks from his body. Unaware of his impromptu healing, he marched up to his brother. "And if you ever do, I will banish you to the void forever."

The void was the ultimate threat. Few things ever reappeared from the corridor between heaven and hell and the ones that did generally killed themselves within the first few minutes.

In the void there was nothing except your own mind, and some people's minds were a frightening place.

Galthine's laugh was more nervous than mocking. "You don't have the power to access the void."

Luc was caught off guard. Galthine was right. Only his father and the angels had the ability to open the void, but in that moment, he knew he also could open the place that even angels feared to tread.

"Don't bet on it," Luc said. "Now, I think it's time to find Father and tell him that you all failed." He knew that his smile was miles from nice. "I wonder what he has in mind for punishment."

Galthine paled.

After grabbing his guitar and waving to his brother, Luc walked out the door. How did he heal? Did Father take pity on him after all?

It didn't take long to reach Lucifer. The halls of hell repositioned themselves to give him the most direct route. Obviously, he wasn't the only one who wanted him gone.

His father was in his usual perch on his throne of bones.

Lucifer eyed his offspring as Luc walked to the bottom of the stairs leading to the devil's throne. He gave his father a low bow.

"I see they failed once again."

"Yes," Luc said simply.

"I'll have to think of suitable punishments for them," Lucifer said. The smile he gave Luc had more teeth than usual. "Now, my dear son, I suppose you think I'm going to let you go now that you've survived your brothers once again."

Luc frowned. "That is the agreement."

"It was." Lucifer gave another disconcerting smile. "But did you verify the rules before you came through the portal?"

Shit. The number one rule of hell was to verify the rules before entering. Since they did the same routine each year, Luc had grown lax and hadn't verified the rules before going through the portal. There was no way this was going to end well.

"So, instead of sending you back into the bosom of your lovers and friends, they are going to have to come here to claim you."

Because there was no way his lovers could retrieve him, Luc knew he would spend an eternity trapped in hell.

* * * *

"He's taking too long," Bran said, pacing the floor. He bit a nail as he looked once again at the clock. *Step, step, check the time, step, step.*

Nikko looked up from his book, his eyes following the pacing werewolf. "What do you mean?"

"He means it's almost two in the morning. Every other time Luc was back by midnight." The deep, familiar voice of the Archangel Michael filled the room.

Bran turned around to meet the fathomless eyes of the angel. Over the years he'd had occasional contact with Michael, but it never got any easier. He always felt like an ant beneath a magnifying glass. The energy that rolled off the angel burned his skin and caused Bran to growl in anger. It was easier to show rage towards the archangel than admit he was scared shitless that his lover was trapped in hell.

Nikko came to stand beside him in an unusual show of solidarity.

"I think Lucifer has decided to keep our baby Luc. Someone will have to go get him."

"I will," Bran said.

Nikko was silent.

Michael pinned his cold gaze on the vampire. "Are you not also going to volunteer?"

Nikko shook his head. "I've done some horrific things in my life. If I were to step a foot in hell, Lucifer would keep me for eternity. I love Luc, but I can't chance it."

Michael nodded as if he already knew the answer. Bran decided that the all-seeing angel probably did. "We need someone to stay here anyway to help pull Bran and Luc back over."

"I'll go." Jerrod peeked around the corner, his eyes wide with apprehension. "I can't leave my master in hell."

"I'd prefer to stay here." Carn stood slightly behind Jerrod looking frightened. "Galthine might decide to keep me if I show up in hell. I can't take the chance." The demon shivered, his body shaking with fear. "If Luc stays there I have to return, but I can't go any sooner. I just can't." Carn started to sob.

Jerrod wrapped his arms around the shaking demon. "Shhh. It's all right. Bran and I will go after Luc. You stay here and keep Nikko company. Shhh."

After much stroking, Carn settled down. "I told Luc I would return to be with him if he stayed in hell. If it turns out he's staying on purpose, have him send for me. I might not be brave, but I owe Luc my life."

Jerrod stroked Carn's rich red skin, tracing the swirls of gold across one cheek. "I don't think my master would've left us voluntarily. Something is keeping him there."

Bran watched the two interact and wondered how close Luc's new pets had grown in such a short space of time. Jerrod's touching was intimate as if the pair was a bit more than friends.

Holding back his tears, Bran knew Luc would love to hear about it. His lover had a romantic streak three miles wide, and if he guessed correctly, Luc had hoped Carn and Jerrod would get together when he assigned the demon to the vampire. He would be excited to learn that his plan had worked.

Straightening his spine, Bran looked at the archangel. "What do I have to do?"

Michael looked the group over. "I can only send one. Bran will be the one to go."

"I can't go also?" Jerrod asked, his eyes wide with worry.

"No. Only one."

Nikko glared. "Then why ask me?"

"I wanted to know the level of your devotion to Luc. If you were more dedicated, then I would send you instead of Bran."

"It's not a matter of devotion to not want to be trapped in hell."

Michael shrugged, raising his wings an inch off the floor. "That's a matter of perception."

* * * *

Luc looked at the bars on his cave cell and knew there was no way out. Those weren't the usual metal bars. These held the spirits of dead men's souls. If you listened close enough, you could still hear them screaming. To break them, meant Luc would be dragged into the void for eternity. Something Lucifer knew his youngest son wouldn't chance.

"Nice touch, Father," Luc mumbled. He knew that Lucifer wasn't far. The devil would let his son sweat it out before turning up the torture. Maybe he'd send Galthine to try again, but he doubted it. His father wasn't one for repeating his past mistakes. Since Galthine failed to persuade Luc the first time, he probably wouldn't get a second chance.

"Luc."

Luc turned around.

Salvador walked up to the bars, his eyes shining with tears. "Looks as if I came just in time."

Luc frowned. "What are you doing here?"

Sal's clothes were torn, showing more than one bite mark through the tattered cloth. It looked as if the three days he'd spent in hell were rough ones. "I came to save you."

"B-but didn't you try to send me here only a few days ago?"

Sal shook his head. "I knew that by poisoning you, you would be restored, but Bran would kill me, sending me here. Now that I'm here, I can rescue you from your father."

"So let me get this right. You tried to kill me so that you could get here before me to save me."

Sal nodded.

"What kind of whacked out plan is that?"

Sal smiled. "Ask your angel. He's the one who came up with it. Michael had a premonition you'd need help."

The pieces of the puzzle fell into place for Luc. No wonder Salvador's sudden wish to become pack leader and take Luc hadn't made sense. It wasn't his plan. "You have no desire to be pack leader, do you?"

Sal shook his head. "I told Michael you'd figure it out, but he still sees you as a kid who can't handle the truth." He stepped closer to the bars. "I wanted to tell you but now isn't the time to chat. Let's free you."

Luc could see the longing in his former pack mate's eyes. "I don't see how you can get me out of here."

Sal produced a ring of keys from his pocket. "I didn't spend the last few days kicking my heels. I've been trying to devise a plan to get you out of here once you were trapped. Luckily, there's no such thing as discretion in hell. I heard two demons talking about your father's plan to trap you and figured out how to help. I lifted these off the dungeon master so we'd best get out of here as soon as we can."

Luc warned, "Be careful not to touch the bars. They're made out of souls of the dead and will suck you into the void if you make contact."

"Good to know." Sal cautiously approached the jail cell, careful not to touch the bars as he placed one key after another into the lock. The fifth one fit and the doors swung open. Luc jumped back as the door screamed past him. Not taking a chance with having the cell close again, he rushed out, holding his breath until the door resealed behind him. He was glad that he'd hurried.

"What now?" he asked, hoping Sal had a follow up plan.

"Can't you just make a portal and get out of here?"

Luc shook his head. "I have to do it from my childhood bedroom and if I'm not mistaken, it's two floors up from here."

Sal swallowed. "You can make it. When you get back, please tell Bran that I'm sorry for everything."

Wrapping his arms around Sal, Luc squeezed him tight. "You can tell him yourself," he said as he stepped back.

"What?"

"If Michael sent you here to help me, then you aren't meant to stay. Come with me and I'll get us out of here together."

Sal cupped Luc's cheek. "I'm sorry, Luc, for everything. I've always loved you and I hated to die with you thinking I wanted you dead. If I don't get out of here, I want you to know that I was always your friend."

"I know, Salvador." He pressed a kiss on each of the wolf's cheeks. "Now, let's get our asses out of hell."

Sal laughed and grabbed Luc's hand. "Do you know how to get to your bedroom from here?"

"No. If you haven't noticed, hell moves at my father's will."

"That explains why I got so lost yesterday. I thought I'd taken a wrong turn."

Luc squeezed Sal's hand. "I'm surprised that you were able to get to me."

Shrugging, the wolf tugged Luc through the iron doorway and over the fallen guard.

"Did you kill him?" Luc asked curiously.

"Just knocked him out. I wasn't sure what the penalty was for killing someone in hell. I didn't want to have a reason to stay here, in case Michael ever remembered me and tried to get me out."

"Good thinking." Luc knew that it didn't matter if you killed someone in hell. They always came back. After all, they were in hell because they were dead souls or demons and neither could be permanently killed.

The pair turned the corner and Luc caught his breath. Galthine stood blocking their way, his large body making it impossible to get around him unnoticed.

"What's wrong?" Sal asked as Luc pulled him back around the corner.

"My brother is out there," Luc whispered.

"Will he help us?"

Luc shook his head. He didn't want the demon to hear him speaking.

"Come out, come out, baby Lucifer," Galthine growled. "I know you're close. I can smell you."

Luc's body started shaking. He didn't know how he'd healed the first time, but he doubted he would be able to heal from whatever his brother planned for him this time.

"Come on, baby brother. Ripping your head off will only hurt a little." The demon's voice was low and persuasive.

If Luc were any less powerful, the lure of Galthine's magic would have him running into his arms. That was how Galthine got his prey despite his sinister appearance.

Sal leant forwards to whisper in Luc's ear. "What do we do?"

Luc pressed his hand to the wall and imagined his room. For a second, he thought he felt the wall shift but it stopped before anything formed. Since hell usually allowed him a path, his father must be controlling the structure.

"I'll go distract him," Sal said.

"No." Luc grabbed the wolf before he could do anything. "I've got an idea."

He whistled in a low tune. Seconds later, a trio of hounds appeared. They panted while sparks shot from their mouths.

"Get Galthine," he commanded in a low voice.

The fiery hounds looked at him with soulless black eyes before giving a ringing bark and racing down the halls. From around the corner, he could hear his brother curse.

"That's cheating!" Galthine shouted.

Peeking around the corner, Luc saw his brother go down beneath the pile of hellhounds and quickly pulled Sal down the hall behind him. There was just enough room to squeeze by, but Luc knew Galthine wouldn't stay down and that he would come after them as soon as he was free.

"Run, Sal!" Luc shouted, picking up speed. He felt the wolf running behind him, his breath hot on Luc's neck.

Luc followed the familiar path to his room and luckily, it was still the way he remembered. Hell hadn't reformed into different pathways.

It struck him then that Lucifer wasn't trying to stop him. Something else was going on.

Unfortunately, he didn't figure it out until he crossed the portal to his bedroom and into the arms of his brothers, Tavo and Lain.

"Gotcha," Tavo said with a wide smile. "Father thought you would come back here."

Lain gave an equally chilling smile. "Too bad you're so predictable." He looked at Sal standing in the doorway and smirked. "What is it about the wolves that has you so enthralled?" Lain examined Sal like a choice piece of meat. "Maybe we should try one out and see what we're missing."

"Yeah, we don't usually get a chance to play with the shifters," Tavo agreed, setting Luc to one side.

"Now boys, you know Father told you to leave this one alone." Stiln walked into the room, looking the twins over with disfavour. "If you touch him, I'll tell."

The twins stood around Stiln like matching bookends. "Don't make us hurt you, brother."

Stiln flipped back his white-blond hair. "Father will make you suffer if you harm me."

Tavo shrugged. "Maybe, but not if we bring him Luc."

With blindingly fast motions, Stiln whipped out a pair of swords and separated both twins from their heads. Warm blood squirted across Luc's bare chest. He held back the bile surging up his throat like an upcoming tide.

"Stiln," Sal said disgusted. "I can't believe you did that."

Before Luc's surprised gaze, his brother walked forwards and kissed Sal with a passion that should've set his bedroom on fire.

"I may be a substitute for Luc, but I'd never let them harm a hair on your beautiful head," Stiln said to Sal. He turned to Luc, his eyes colder than a hellhound's heart. "Take him with you when you go, and I will owe you a favour for eternity."

"I would've taken him with me anyway," Luc confessed. He didn't know what had got into his brother, but he wasn't going to shove aside some help. Scanning the room, he grabbed some of the clothes he'd left there and his guitar. He didn't know who had returned it to his room, but it was time to get the *hell* out of hell.

A loud pop filled the air and Bran appeared in the room.

"Bran!" Luc threw himself into his lover's arms. Joy filled him until he thought he'd burst, but it was quickly followed by stark terror. "What are you doing here?" he shouted. "My father will kill you."

Bran gripped Luc's arms and gave him a good shake. "There is no power in heaven or hell that could stop me from coming for you." He took Luc's lips in a brutal kiss that conveyed need, love and fear. All the emotions they were normally kept bottled inside poured from his body and into Luc's.

When they finally broke apart, Stiln was clapping. "I'm beginning to see why he's stayed with you all these years. Too bad you aren't loyal."

Bran glared at Stiln.

Luc turned Bran's face towards him. "I found out that wasn't your fault."

"What?"

"Galthine planted the idea into your head and placed a spell so it would consume you. He didn't count on your wolf denying the claiming."

Bran smiled. "I wondered why it had become so important to me. Even while I was pursuing the females, I longed for you but I couldn't seem to stop myself."

Brushing the tears from his wolf's eyes, Luc gave his lover a gentle kiss. "I'm glad. Now let's get out of here."

For the first time, Bran noticed Sal. He growled and flashed a set of suddenly sharp teeth at the other man.

Luc smacked him in the chest. "Stop that. He did it all for me. Michael put him up to it."

"What?" Bran stared at Luc as if waiting for him to say he was kidding. "Is there anything in our life that wasn't orchestrated by someone else?" he asked disgustedly.

"Us. We might be soul mates but no one can predict love."

Bran gave Luc a sappy smile and interlaced his right hand with Luc's left. "Let's get out of here, beautiful."

Luc nodded. "Let's."

Before Luc could start his chant, the room dissolved.

Chapter Twelve

When Luc's vision cleared, he was standing in his father's throne room, looking up at the chair of bones.

Crap.

"Luc, my son. How kind of you to bring me visitors. I've always wanted to meet this wolf of yours, but you know, I'm not allowed to visit the earthly plane."

There were many moments in Luc's life where he felt scared, but they were all eclipsed by the sight of his father smiling at the love of his life.

"It's a shame that Galthine was so easily able to influence you."

Bran bowed his head but not before Luc saw his disgruntled expression. He knew the werewolf felt bad enough, it didn't help that everyone kept throwing it back into his face.

"I almost killed you when you broke my son's heart, but I decided it was more punishment to let you live without him." Lucifer turned his frightening gaze onto Luc. "But then you forgave him. Why is that, son? Why would you forgive someone who hurt you?"

"The same reason I forgive you each year, Father. I love him."

Despite being the king of evil, there were moments in his life that Luc cherished—moments that involved his father. Like when he was five and his father made it snow in hell because Luc had read a story about snow and wanted to see it, or the litter of hellhound puppies he got for his tenth birthday. Not to mention freeing Luc from hell so he could explore the earthly plane. Yes, Lucifer did many things to help his son, but that didn't make him a good guy.

"What do you think I should do, Luc? You escaped from your prison and got your brother to kill the twins. It will take a great deal of energy to bring them back. What do you think is a suitable punishment?"

"Letting him go." Freen appeared out from behind Lucifer's throne, his dark eyes gleaming with malice.

"Let him go?" Lucifer frowned at his son. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Because I'm certain Michael sent the wolf after Luc, and if he doesn't show up soon, the angel will be very angry. We don't need a holy war because you're peeved."

Lucifer waved a hand and Freen was thrown across the room. His slim body slammed into the rock wall and he tumbled to the ground in a graceless heap.

Luc tried to feel sympathetic, but since the man had just spent a gleeful hour torturing him, it was difficult to drudge up a proper amount of sympathy for his brother.

When he looked up, his father was stroking the beard on his chin, his malicious eyes luminous. "He does have a point as much as I hate to say it. Did you want to go spend your life with this wolf of yours?"

Luc nodded. "Yes, Father."

"Very well. Then you can both stay here," Lucifer said it as if he were conferring a great favour.

Luc felt his heart stutter. "Bran is not going to stay in hell."

"Why? Doesn't he love you enough?" His tone was perfect, almost fatherly. "I'm sure Michael wouldn't object if you were with the love of your life."

Luc knew that Michael wouldn't be able to do a damned thing if Lucifer kept him.

"I love him enough," Bran said, stepping forwards. "I'll stay with him if that's what I need to do to be by his side."

"I wasn't talking to you," Lucifer said, his eyes glowing red.

There had to be a way out of this. Luc couldn't think, couldn't function. Images of his beloved wolf trapped in hell for eternity spun his thoughts like a hamster on a wheel.

No.

Remembering Michael's words, Luc pulled the guitar around the front of his body and started playing. His fingers strummed a tune, a forgotten melody that floated through his brain and flowed through his fingers.

Before he knew it, Bran was grabbing his arm and pulling him backwards.

Luc looked up and his fingers froze on the strings.

"Keep playing."

Swallowing the lump of fear in his throat, Luc backed away slowly, letting Bran guide his steps. The chair was dissolving. Bones set in the chair for centuries were rising from their

place and reforming into their former shapes. By the end of Luc's song, six angels had regained their skeletal structure and flesh was starting to grow and cover the bones.

Luc wanted to stop and run out screaming, but if he stopped now, they would only be partially formed. He let Bran lead him away step by step. When the last angel formed, the six turned on Lucifer. Screams followed them as they ran out of the room.

It felt as if an eternity had passed since Luc last saw the welcoming doorway of his room. Grabbing a pillowcase, he snatched bits and pieces of his life in hell and stuffed them inside. He wouldn't be returning here, ever.

"Ready to go?" Bran asked, taking the pillowcase to carry for his lover.

With a final glance around the room, Luc nodded. "Yeah, I'm done here."

"Take me with you," Stiln said.

Luc looked at his brother in surprise. "Why would I want to do that?"

"Because Sal is my lover and I don't want us to be parted."

Luc looked at Sal and his brother.

"Forget it," Bran said. "You tortured Luc for years."

"I had to." Stiln turned his one eye to Luc. "I won't say that I wasn't jealous, but I never wanted to hurt you. Father always had the upper hand and would make threats if I became reluctant. You know I always took it easy on you."

Luc nodded. That was true. As easy as a person could who was supposed to be torturing you.

"Please, Bran," Sal begged the alpha. "I have never asked for anything, but I am asking for this."

Knowing Bran would make the right decision in the end, Luc closed his eyes and formed a portal in his mind. When his eyes opened, he could see into the living room of his house.

"Fine, come with us," Bran growled. "But if you do anything to hurt Luc, I'll rip your head off of your shoulders."

"Fair enough," Stiln said.

Only a demon would think that.

"Everyone through, I have to go last."

One by one, everyone walked through the portal. Luc took one last look around. "Goodbye, Father," he said sadly before exiting hell for the last time.

He left hell and walked into the arms of his vampire.

"Are you all right?" Nikko clutched Luc as if they had been separated for centuries.

"Air," he gasped.

"Oh, sorry." Nikko relaxed his hold but he still didn't let go of Luc entirely.

"Master."

Luc looked over the vampire's shoulder to see Jerrod and Carn looking at him with astonishment. "Hello, boys." He wiggled out of Nikko's embrace, escaping with just a few bruises from the vampire's tight grip.

Jerrod ran across the room and wrapped himself around Luc. Sobbing, his body shook. "I-I was s-so worried," he wheezed, clutching Luc tight. He placed soft kisses all over Luc's face.

Luc pulled Jerrod away so he could look at him. Tears raced down the vampire's face. "It's okay, honey. I'm all right."

"Did they hurt you?"

Luc nodded. He couldn't lie to the vamp. "But I'm fine now, and I won't have to go back again." He didn't want to think about what would happen if Lucifer overpowered the angels again. His father wasn't the forgiving type.

"He couldn't even if he wanted to." Michael's voice boomed through the room. "It's nice to see you've chosen your side."

Releasing Jerrod, Luc turned to confront the angel. "What happened back there?"

Michael threw back his head and laughed. "What do you think happened?"

Bran growled. "How did Luc make those angels reform?"

"The song was an unbinding spell. It destroyed the spell your father created to set the angels in his chair. When you played it, you freed them from their confinement and they were able to overtake Lucifer," Michael said.

"Will he be all right?" Luc hated himself for asking, but Lucifer was still his father.

Michael nodded. "But he probably won't be in any condition to run hell for quite some time."

Bran stepped forwards to wrap an arm around Luc in a show of support.

Luc smiled. "Thank you, Michael, for everything and for sending Sal and Bran to help me."

"Thank you for getting me out of there," Sal said from the shelter of Stiln's arms. "But I don't know what I'll do now. I can't return to the pack after Bran killed me in front of them."

He had a point. The pack wouldn't accept him after everything he'd done, even if he did it for Luc's benefit.

"You and Stiln can stay here with me," Luc said.

"Really?" Stiln's face lit with joy, an expression Luc couldn't remember ever seeing before. "Thanks, Luc. I won't be here forever, just until I can figure out what to do with myself." He nuzzled Sal's cheek with his nose like an affectionate cat. "And my lover."

Luc watched as Sal glowed. Who knew that his psychotic one-eyed brother was a closet romantic?

He turned to his own lover. "Bran, we still have the problem of where you're going to live. You can't just leave your pack. And Jerrod and Carn can't go and live with the wolves."

Bran held Luc's face between his two large hands, forcing him to look into his eyes. "Despite my past behaviour, I know where my future lies. I will come and live with you. I want to sleep beside you, wake up beside you and fight over who gets the first cup of coffee in the morning. I've missed your skin next to mine, and if one day you decide you wish to be a demon lord, I'll murder a basketful of kittens in a playground full of kindergarteners if it will send me to hell to be by your side."

Luc stroked Bran's hands with his own. "I don't know if that is the most romantic thing I've ever heard or the most disturbing," he said, leaning up and placing a soft kiss on his lover's lips.

"I give up, I can't compete." The pair turned to see Nikkolai looking at them with disgust. The vampire had his hands on his hips as he regarded them. "You win, Bran. I release any claims I have on Luc. Sorry, Luc, but Bran's your man, and from that display, I can see I don't have the devotion to even be in the running. But I guess you knew that."

The vampire gave a self-effacing grin. "Jerrod would give his life for you, your demon would let you take him back to hell to be your servant, the wolf let himself be killed so he could help you and this one," he waved his hand towards Bran, "would do anything for you."

I love you, but I don't think that I'm ready for the amount of commitment you require, and according to Michael, I'm not supposed to for several years any way."

He gave an evil glare to the werewolf who glared back. "Luckily, werewolves don't live forever and by the time your devoted pet is gone, I'll be ready to be yours. Until then, consider me your mate in waiting."

Luc stepped away from Bran and walked over to the vampire. Looking into Nikkolai's eyes, he removed his necklace and placed it in the vampire's hands, closing his fingers over it. "Then why don't you hold onto this until we're ready."

Nikko nodded and slipped the priceless necklace into his pocket. He put his hands on Luc's shoulders. "If you ever need anything, anything," he said with a little shake, "I will be here." He leant forwards and whispered in Luc's ear, "I know what you did for me with the demons and I owe you one."

Luc smiled and gave Nikkolai a soft kiss on the lips, barely brushing them. "Maybe you should look for another mate instead of waiting for me."

Nikkolai laughed. "You're kind of a hard man to replace. No, you can live happily ever after with your wolf, and when that part of your life has run its course, I'll be here waiting."

"Make sure you have hot sex with a lot of hot guys while you're pining." Luc laughed.

Nikko placed a kiss on each of Luc's cheeks. "Will do, but know that all of them will wear your face."

Luc nodded, but couldn't keep the sadness from his expression as he watched Nikko leave. He gave a smile to his lover when Bran walked up behind him and gave him a hug.

"He'll be fine," Bran whispered in his ear.

"I know," Luc said, turning to kiss his lover. "I know."

* * * *

Nikko left Luc's house, fingering the necklace in his pocket. When he got to his room above the club, he went to the sideboard and poured himself a glass of aged brandy. "I will have you one day, my love," Nikko said, sipping. "One day, we will be together."

Nikko knew he had done the right thing. He couldn't stand the thought of Luc torn between the two of them for the next few decades. Letting the beautiful half fae off the hook

was the biggest sacrifice he could make for his lover. He knew something was lacking when he was the only one not willing to go to hell for Luc. Did that make him weak or just practical, he didn't know, but he knew he wanted his lover to be happy. A conflicted lover wasn't going to be a contented one.

Although it was tempting to take out the werewolf sooner than later, he'd rather have a sad-eyed beauty leaning on him for support than an angry hell lord sending him down under. Sitting in an elegant upholstered chair in his beautiful empty suite, the powerful vampire leader leant his head back and dreamt of the day when he could call Luc his own.

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Amber Kell is one of those quiet people they always tell you to watch out for. She lives in Dallas with her husband, two sons, two cats and one extremely stupid dog.

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