

# BLOOD MEMORY

Rosalind Hartmann

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*Cover artwork & interior design by Kat Snell*



## *Dedication*

*This book would not be possible without a lot of candy corn.*

*Well ok, I'd really have to add to that. This book would not be possible without the creative genius found at [www.sanguineaffliction.com](http://www.sanguineaffliction.com) and my #1 fan for years, Kat Snell. Or my husband who refused to read this book until he could hold it in his hands. And for my Navy dad and little Filipina mom who uprooted me to parts unknown, successfully throwing a 16 year old into some serious teenage angst, and making me turn to an old Brother electric typewriter to deal with said angst.*

*Without the encouragement, none of this would be possible... even though I am pretty awesome. I kid.*

*Enjoy, yo!*



## *Author's Note*

The Genetic Metamorphic Virus (GMV) is a gift, for some. For those, history has only one name for them. Werewolf.

GMV has the capacity to hold memories that can pass from one werewolf to another, going back multiple generations. These memories are generally thought to be physical and chemical in nature, buried below the level of conscious thought. They may invoke emotions in given situations, and in some cases déjà vu. Werewolves may find that learning skills their ancestors knew comes more naturally to them. There are also certain social and cultural mores that are ingrained into a werewolf from these inherited memories.

Some Blood Memories are cultural, subtle in its influence over the being that possessed it. It nurtures the individual, helps it honor its family, and in most cases is harmless.

Then there are some blood memories that are born out of vicious nightmares of monsters, controlling with blind focus, and would have the blood of thousands on the bearer's hands.

This story is about the latter.



# *Prologue*

Vivienne hit the floor of the cave as the mountain shook beneath her feet. The jagged rocks of the cold, icy ground bit into her hands as she gritted with anger and righted herself only to be propelled forward by an inhuman speed that made her sense of balance scream out in terror.

“Run, Viv. Run, run,” the man with her said as he grabbed her arm and pulled her toward the slowly fading light at the end of the tunnel.

Her head split at the thunderous sound around her, but she still managed to yell back, “Don’t call me ‘Viv’!”

Spilling out into the slippery slope of snow at the end of the tunnel, she grabbed onto the man next to her and looked at what was happening to the mountain. The man next to her had warm hazel eyes with flecks of gold, blondish brown hair that framed his angular face and dusted into his eyes as he held her close, covering her from the falling debris.

“You run and don’t stop, don’t look back. You run.”

Viv pulled away, trying to steady herself on her feet as she rushed out into the avalanching mountain slope as huge sheets

of ice broke off near the summit of the Baikal Mountains. Tearing off her jacket, Viv launched herself into the air and felt the swift pain of change hit her like a ton of bricks as she landed on all fours, sinking up to her chocolate brown chest in the snow. Hopping through it, she raced off to the edge of the cascading snow before getting caught in the landslide of it when the howl of another wolf pierced the thunderous sound around her.

A red wolf, large and massive, was on the opposite side, two miles across, running parallel with her.

“Viv, NO!” The man with the hazel eyes yelled out, as her instinct could not refuse what it was commanding her to do. That was her mate, the big red, and she turned toward him as the rush of ice hit the three of them, covering her in pure, soft, painfully cold snow.



# *Chapter 1*

## *Three days earlier*

Pulling her cream-colored cashmere wrap off, Vivienne angrily threw it across the living room as she stormed into her bedroom. Long chocolate brown hair whipped furiously around her petite frame. Warm, brown skin was flushed with anger and humiliation as she tried not to think about the fierce discussion she just had with two important men in her life: one, a superior and quasi-adopted brother, the other, her lover in a position of power over her.

Viv didn't think Brig would show his face after that, but she wasn't going to wait around to see. She wasn't even sure which would make her angrier – him showing up or not at all.

The evenings were no longer warm as the winter breezes began dropping the late night, early morning temperatures below forty degrees on the east coast, so Viv opened her closet and pulled on her light-weight wool trench with long sleeves. It was a ¾ length black pea coat style that she's had for years. Soft and worn, she pulled her hair out of her jacket, grabbed her bag, and made haste off the property.

The building she exited out of was an enormous three winged two-story log and stone cabin that was in no small part the center of the Greater Pack members' universe. Affectionately and aptly named The Den, it was a self contained small city and located across the newly built Academy of Sciences, an accredited four year university originally based out of Canberra, Australia. In between the two massive areas were acres of forests, natural lakes, and trails used for leisure as well as training. Over a thousand acres was dedicated to the newly established pack and Vivienne was merely a permitted guest, which said more than her previous years at the home base in Canberra.

She called a cab on her walk off the property and toward the front gates. The cab was there to meet her within fifteen minutes, and within another five, she was halfway downtown with the light traffic.

"Where to, miss?" The cabbie looked up at her in the rear view mirror as she crossed her legs, still angry.

"Uh," where was she going, she wondered? She had escaped the Den without running into Brig or Hammer, but now she was just wanted to relax, the adrenaline having left her body, making her tired. "Grand Piazza, I suppose, please."

The crown jewel of the hotel district located uptown, the Grand Piazza was a 5-star hotel made of marble, glass, and steel. The hotel itself was the very first of its kind in its Eastern Seaboard city. Its architecture reflected the elite rich that founded the original city.



Pulling up to the front of the ornate structure, Viv stepped out as the doorman opened her door. The front desk clerk did not question as to why she was without her luggage, but instead informed her that her original suite from two months prior was still available for her.

“It is? For how much longer?”

“Says November 30th, ma’am.”

Viv tried not to imagine the room bill. “Fine, can I get another card key?”

With key in hand, Viv made her way to the private elevators and inserted her card into the unmarked slot to take her to the penthouse suite. It was easier going to the gigantic apartment than using her credit card to get a smaller room. Leaning back against the mirrored walls of the elevator, she considered what she was doing.

It’s not running if you don’t have luggage, she decided.

*Just needed a break*, she said to herself. She had been feeling weird the past couple of weeks – her emotions on a roller coaster with Brig; being so in love with him that she didn’t know what to do with herself, but now being so pissed off that she wanted to put her fist through a wall. And then there was Hammer.

Viv crossed her arms angrily, glaring at her reflection just thinking about the one-eyed pig. The elevator came to a slow stop and opened its doors for her. Right was the opposite side suite, left was hers. Turning to the left, she briskly walked to

her door and again used the key to unlock it.

Nothing had changed. Why would it, actually, it was a hotel, wasn't it? Throwing her card key and bag onto the foyer marble table built into the wall, Viv unbuttoned her pea coat and walked down into the living room area of the suite, easily throwing her legs over the couch and landing in the middle. The lights were subtly dimmed and the twenty foot high wall window in front of her had its curtains partially opened. She could see part of the skyline of the metropolis and its harbor. A manmade atoll was just past the harbor, used as a recreational resort. She left the curtains the way they were and just sat in the dark. Leaning her head back, she closed her eyes and tried deep breathing since willing the anger out of her would probably result in something being broken.

Quietly, and quickly, she slept.



## *Chapter 2*

It was quiet in the penthouse suite he shared with Ellis Duban. Currently his recently reunited lover was somewhere out in the city doing whatever it was she had been busying herself with lately. The quiver of her aura was still and her voice had been quiet for some time. Whatever she was doing, she did it far enough away so that they could both have their privacy. He fully expected jealousy to snap its jaws, but instead Simon Huntington just took a deep breath and listened to the sounds of the hotel beneath him.

The lone heartbeat came into range quite suddenly. It sounded healthy and strong, if not pacing a little faster than what he'd consider normal. It was familiar, as well. Closing his eyes, Simon sat on the living room couch in front of his windowed wall with the outstanding view and listened carefully to the beating heart.

It fluttered weirdly and quickly, or maybe that was just another heartbeat nearby. He focused in on the strong heartbeat and tried to recall its familiar beat. After a moment he smiled. Now what were the odds of that, he wondered. Standing slowly, he wiped at his worn jeans and looked for his

shoes.

When in the suite he dressed casually; no tailored suits, Italian leather dress shoes or minimalist adornments. He wore a pair of comfortable jeans and either t-shirts or button-ups. That night it was a soft striped button up that was just barely entering the last leg of its journey – the edges of his rolled up cuffs beginning to wear through and shirt tails untucked. He found a pair of soft, canvas boat shoes and exited the suite.

He had long ago procured a manager's key that opened any door in the hotel; maybe out of habit, but probably curiosity, seeing if he actually could. He flicked the card with his fingers as he walked slowly down the hall, past the elevator, and toward the other end of the penthouse floor. Stopping in front of the neighboring suite's front door, he listened quietly to the heartbeat as it slowed to a rhythmic, steady beat that suggested sleep. If he didn't recognize the heartbeat before, he certainly did now. Simon slipped the card key in and the door softly opened, as if sighing. He pushed the door with his fingertips, but stayed just outside the threshold. It wasn't like he needed permission; he just didn't want the occupant shooting his face off.

The hallway was identical to his, but he could see the design of the space was completely different. Beyond that his eyes focused in on Vivienne Sena's head laid back on the couch, his vampire eyes not even needing the barest hint of light that there was in the space. Closing the door silently behind him, he walked down the hallway till it opened up, showing an

identical space as large as his own, and Vivienne in the same exact spot he was in on his side of the penthouse. He wondered now if she knew he and Ellis were next door to her that one day they saw her rushing out of the elevator, almost bumping Ellis, which in turn garnered his lover's attention. It wasn't smart of him to be there now; a good hiding place wasn't easy to find and one with room service was exceptional. He wouldn't allow Ellis back on clan property – it was bad enough he was back with her in the first place. Simon unfocused his eyes as he listened to Vivienne's long and relaxed breathing below his vantage point behind her couch.

He had wondered what it was like, having your sense of smell color everything you come in contact with; a room must've been a confusing mess of sensations. What did it tell them? Rather, what did it show Vivienne about him?

“You have a very distinct scent,” she had said after speaking to him for only the second time. He had meant to ask her about it then, but admittedly the snipers she had covertly positioned around their meet had distracted him.

Simon walked closer to Vivienne, employing all his abilities so not to stir her sleep in the slightest. The air around her barely moved as he leaned forward and put his hands on either side of her shoulders, and then he lowered his face down to hers. Vivienne had laid her head back and it rolled to her left side slightly, exposing the side of her jaw line and creamy brown skin along her neck. Temptation to taste beneath her skin was conflicting – Ellis' reaction to werewolf

blood had been disgusting, throwing up violently what she had taken from them. Still, he lowered his face to within an inch of hers and inhaled deeply, smelling the coppery sweetness of her blood.

Simon looked over at her face as her eyes began to flutter and he watched as they rolled beneath the darkened lids with vivacious REM activity. She was already dreaming. Pulling his stare away, he slowly burned a trail down her throat and beyond her collarbone. Her blouse beneath her wool pea coat was an unbuttoned striped shirt, opened down to her cleavage and showing off more than he knew she'd want him to see. The urge to run his hands down the soft skin of her breasts and into her shirt was suddenly overwhelming. His fangs pulsed achingly, despite himself.

Vivienne's eyes continued fluttering and she sighed, licking her lips in her sleep. Simon swallowed and smiled. Parting his lips, he let his hot breath bathe her skin, wondering if it was affecting her dream at all.

Simon knew she would not taste as good as she smelled, but he could not resist the lure of what lay beneath her bronzed skin. His fangs ached painfully in his mouth as he gripped the couch with his hands, balling the material up into his fists. The curve of her collarbones, the slope of her neck – feeding should always be like this, he thought to himself. The ache of want not purely sexual but instinctual, Simon stupidly ran his lips gently over the swell of her cheek where he knew her dimples to be and he felt his lip quiver over his fangs. Werewolves

should not smell so good if they weren't palatable. What a magnificent defense mechanism, he thought.

Vivienne's body never pulled away from his scent; in fact, she reacted to it more than he thought she should. What was she dreaming about, he wondered as his eyes kept returning to the slope of her neck? He'd give anything for dream walking right then. Licking his lips, Simon shut his eyes tight and resisted the urge to sink his teeth into her flesh. Willing his body to move away, he slowly released his grip on the couch, pulling his hands back, accidentally brushing his fingers against her arms. Vivienne rolled her head to the right, brushing up against his stubble, moving her lips in line with his...and kissed him.

He froze. His heart began to race as he waited for her to wake up and things to undoubtedly get ugly. Leaving right then was the prudent idea, to slip away with his innate speed and be out before she even opened her eyes. But a kiss was a kiss and who was he to miss out on an opportunity like this with someone who smelled so delicious?

Besides,she kissed him.

Simon parted his lips and pushed his tongue gently into her mouth, encouraging the kiss while deepening it at the same time. From his vantage point, it was an upside down kiss; its positioning was slightly awkward and it only made the kiss more unique. Vivienne's heart rate began to race and her breathing was shallow – indicators, at least to him, that she was enjoying the kiss. She reached up with her hand and dug

deep into his hair, scratching his scalp with her nails. Just what the hell was she dreaming about?

His right hand came up and touched her throat, pressing his thumb along her jaw while his other gripped the couch again. One hand on her he could control, but not both. He teased her tongue with his; scraping his teeth along her lips as his hand began to travel down her throat, into the opening of her shirt. She still hadn't woken up and the handful of hair she was grabbing sent a shivering tingle down his spine, so he pushed the kiss deeper, feeling her cleavage with his fingertips when she ran her tongue over his fang. The sensation never failed to send an electric bolt through his body and her reaction was instantaneous and unexpected, to say the least.



Brig's kiss was different, as was his touch. Her mind was trying to comprehend the difference she was feeling when he kissed her so hard and deep that Viv felt it down into her core. His breath, his taste...it was so different. So different...

*Wake up.*

Brig's fingers ran down her throat, leaving his scent that was both pleasing but wrong. Their kiss deepened and her arms felt like lead weight against the couch, but she managed to lift her right hand and dig her fingers into his thick, soft hair.

*Wake up.*

Again the textures perplexed her, the length of his hair was longer than she remembered and his scent. His kiss was so



penetrating and erotic, doing things to her tongue and lips that made her toes curl inside her shoes and thighs squeeze together with intense desire. Her tongue touched his and she felt his teeth graze her lips, pulling at them, biting them softly, making her hand ball up and grab a fistful of his hair. Viv ran her tongue along his and touched his teeth, when suddenly she realized what was so different.

Viv's tongue touched the tip of a very distinct, very sharp point, and the owner of it was not Brig, because he didn't have fangs.

*WAKE UP! WAKE UP WAKE UP WAKE UP!!!!*

Viv opened her eyes and let go of her handful of hair, pushing the face away from her as she slid down the couch to the ground in terror. Her mind was screaming at her – this wasn't a dream and this sure as shit was not Brig.

“What the-,” Viv half yelled as she backed up on the living room floor, her dreamy blurred vision looking directly at Simon Huntington. Immediately her shoulders tightened and she felt the awakened ache of her transformation at the sight of the vampire who she just finished kissing.

“Wait, Vivienne. Wait!”

Simon held his hands up as she pulled away from their kiss and scurried across the floor, putting as much distance between them as possible. Her eyes were wide and her irises nonexistent. He climbed over the couch, talking as fast as possible.

“This isn’t what it looks like.”

Suddenly she sprang forward, hunched over he could see her transformation begin as her mouth became abnormally large and long. Digging into the pockets of his jeans, he reached for something he had kept on him since seeing Ellis make use of her silver brass knuckles. Luck favored the prepared and he immediately slipped the small, pure silver ring over his middle finger and held his ground as Vivienne, half transformed now, ripped her pea coat off and lurched at him with her fangs bared.

Immediately Simon held out the hand with the silver ring and grappled with Vivienne as she tried to snap at him with her now horribly deformed mandibles. If he didn’t do something right that second, he would have to hurt her and that wasn’t the point of him coming to see her, despite what just happened. She snapped her jaws at his face, just missing him, when he reached for her throat and touched her with the silver.

He saw an immediate reaction, her jaws returning to its normal human shape and her painful wail pierced his ears as she tried to pull away from him. Instead, he grabbed her one arm tightly with his other still on her throat and pushed her back against the windowed-wall. The sizzle of the silver against her skin had a disgustingly burnt smell and he grimaced.

“Stop, STOP!” Vivienne yelled and he lifted his ringed finger off her neck and grabbed her arms, the cloth protecting her from the silver.

“Are you going to calm down?”

Apparently not because just then Vivienne kned him as hard as humanly possible, right in the groin. His entire body stiffened with a swift pain, but his grip remained painfully tight. Simon pushed up against her body, pinning her to the window and sneered into her face, revealing his fangs.

“I can take a gunshot to the chest and barely feel it, but it still hurts getting kned in the nuts.” Her eyes were dark circles, the gold a thin ring around her huge pupils, and he could see the sweat running down the sides of her face. “Are you going to calm down?”

Vivienne took a deep breath and attempted one more push against his body, but his vampire strength overpowered her easily. He could see the intense hate in her eyes, but he admired her tenacity.

“I’m going to let you go. All right?” He loosened his grip on her arms and her eyes flicked down, watching his hands before looking back up at him, hate still intact. It took him a full ten seconds to release her. He took one step back, their eye contact never wavering. He took another full step back and he lowered his hands slowly.

“What do you want?” Vivienne asked slowly, her top lip sneering.

“I was about to ask you the same thing.”

“I’m not here for you,” she said maintaining as much disgust as possible. Viv watched as Simon relaxed his

shoulders and simply looked at her.

Simon Huntington was a tall drink of water. At least six foot four, he was as tall as Brig, but not quite as tall as Hammer. His body was lithe and his shoulders were wide with muscles, as well as his arms, right down to the fingertips. Looking at him now ignited that desire in her, but repulsion quickly followed suit. Everything about him was made to lure humans and the werewolf in her was disgusted by it, but the woman in her reacted to his light brown hair, angular shaped face, and hazel brown eyes. They did not make them like Simon anymore.

He returned a similarly appraising look and it made her body flush with embarrassment and anger.

“Then what are you here for?”

“Not for that!” Viv yelled back at him, unable to control the rage she was feeling. She felt completely violated and any attraction she may have had for him had dissipated at the thought of him kissing her. He shrugged at her, daring her fury with a smile.

“That was all you, Miss Sena.”

“Oh for...I was dreaming.”

“About me?”

Again that impetuous smile; she wanted to smack it off his face. “Be serious,” Viv rolled her eyes and looked around the room. If he were there, then his woman wouldn’t be far. “I don’t smell her.” She felt her nostrils flare, the hate still

bubbling in her, threatening to spill over again.

“Her? You mean Ellis? She’s not with me.”

Viv closed her eyes and shook her head slightly, “Then what were you doing coming into my suite, watching me sleep?”

“I came to talk to you, actually. I heard you come in.”

“How?” she asked incredulously. Then she realized it must have been one of his abilities. “How’d you know it was me?”

“You have a very distinct heartbeat,” he said, reminding her of what she said to him. His smile didn’t help, either. “Do you have a heart murmur?”

“No, I do not have a fucking heart murmur,” she snapped back at him. Taking a deep breath, Viv tried to regain her control, but she couldn’t help her racing heart. He had touched her with silver, no doubt leaving a mark that would take at least a couple days to fade. Viv reached up and touched her throat.

“Sorry about that.”

“No you’re not,” she mumbled as she turned away and walked to the bathroom. The living room was a sunken pit and took up a good portion of the living area. Taking three steps back up to the ground level, she entered the bathroom located off to the right of the door and flipped the light on. She peered at her throat, touching the silver burn.

“Damn it,” Viv muttered, wincing at the residual pain.



Simon could not help but grin at Vivienne's indignation. Slowly he followed her out of the sunken living room and lingered by the bathroom door as she cursed not very quietly at him. Leaning against the doorframe, he looked down at his hands and slipped the silver ring off his finger and back into his jeans. When she came out, she nearly bounced off the opposite side of the doorframe, surprised again by his presence.

"Want me to wear a bell?" he asked, entwining his fingers in front of him and touching his thumbs together.

"What did you want to talk to me about?" she asked, changing the subject, but relaxed against the door frame with her hands behind her.

Simon looked at her body as he formed his answer. She looked flushed, but more from anger than anything else. His eyes lingered on her lips, trying to remember the taste when she cleared her throat. Looking back into her eyes, he grinned and shrugged.

"You're Vivienne Sena born 1944 in Antalya, Turkey. Your father's name is Lorenzo and your mother's name is Marie. You have two younger siblings and one older sister."

"Was and had, Mr. Huntington," she corrected him quietly. "All past tense."

Simon paused, looking at the blank expression on her face. If she felt anything about her family, he couldn't see it. Even her heartbeat had slowed down.

“Sorry. I suppose that explains why there’s no record of them past nineteen fifty five.”

“I’m surprised you found anything at all.”

“Told you I had resources,” he said smugly.

“Right,” she mumbled.

Simon looked at the ground and made a face. “There’s nothing else on you until the past ten years: there are variations of your name and your likeness, especially in 2006, Johannesburg.” He pointed at her, narrowing his hazel eyes. “Now, that part wasn’t hard. It’s where I started, actually. Marthinus was in Johannesburg to talk to your Pack’s corporate entity, but weirdly enough, the building was attacked, forcing a daring escape.”

Marthinus T. Steyn. Simon’s blood relative, grandson, and new Piper recruit. Through uncontrollable circumstances, Marthinus placed his life in the hands of the werewolves and made a choice that still confused Simon to that very day. But he did not hold it against the old man for choosing life over a certain death.

“I was there after they left.” Viv glared at him with suspicious eyes. “Took a lot of work to clean up.”

“And money, I would imagine. You left a lot of key witnesses alive though. Poor job at covering tracks.”

“I fix things, Mr. Huntington. I don’t kill people. Not like you.”

Simon raised his eyebrows with mock indignation, “I haven’t killed anyone in a little while.”

“A little while, right. That’s your business, though? Hired killers? That isn’t cliché to you at all?”

“It’s a living,” Simon replied with a shrug. They remained silent for a few moments, standing in the doorway of the bathroom when finally Vivienne pushed off the frame and returned to the sunken living room. She picked up her coat and folded it neatly, setting it on the couch. His eyes watched her with raptorial delight. Quietly he moved to the steps, standing on the top he grinned down at her.

“You don’t like me, do you?” he said slowly.

Viv sat down on the couch with a huff and rested her arms along the back of it. “God, I really do not.”

Simon crossed his arms and stepped down to the living room floor. He shook his head and laughed, “That’s not nice. I like you.”

“No you don’t,” Viv said in a humored yet monotone voice. “And it’s for the same reasons. Everything about me is insulting to you – I’m beneath you on the food chain and class. You’re just curious.”

Simon tilted his head to the side, “You could dress a little better.”

Viv narrowed her eyes, appraising him. “You’re not like this. This sarcastic charm. This is probably the most talking you’ve done in months.”



Simon dropped his arms. “I don’t like it when you act like you know me.”

“I know your type, Simon. Can I call you Simon? I’m going to call you Simon.” Viv settled into the couch and crossed her legs, tucking her hands in between her thighs. “Marthinus seems to think that’s Ellis’ influence on you.”

“Does he,” he asked in a monotone voice.

Viv watched Simon with a wary eye. His body language went from friendly to rigid in a heartbeat. He really did not like people assuming anything about him, which led her to believe that the role he played before this one wasn’t by choice.

“So,” Viv started with a large sigh, “quid pro quo?”

It was Simon’s turn to look wary. “You first.”

“I need to know you can actually help me.”

“I’ve offered twice.”

And he had – the first time they met at the city’s museum and again during their first and only private meet not several days before their conversation taking place at that very moment. That meeting had been the reason Brig and Hammer had come down on her. It was an unsanctioned and unauthorized meet with the focus of their *Blood Memory*. Aside from using three off duty Pipers and artillery without authorization, Brig was jealous that she had been within a foot of Huntington. The Alpha in him had reacted accordingly and it pissed her off.

“And I will accept as soon as you give a little something,” Viv held a hand up, stopping him from replying. “I know how that sounds so don’t bother.” Simon’s hard mask softened into a sly grin. Viv took a deep breath and then motioned to the spot next to her on the couch.

The sunken living room floor had a semi-circle couch that faced the twenty-foot high windowed wall looking out at the skyline. The couch was a soft white leather made of loose cushion back pillows as well as the seats. It was at least fifteen feet long, but Simon chose to sit not two feet away from Vivienne.

“What do you want to know?” Simon asked as he sat down to the left of her, resting his right arm on the cushion pillows. Viv’s forehead crinkled in thought – for as relaxed as his pose was, it was just that – a pose. He didn’t do nonchalant as well as he’d like to think, but then Viv was going out of her way to read his body language, more than likely miscalculating his motives. Still, he didn’t look comfortable and she said so.

“You learned this from Ellis. She must do calculated nonchalance like a pro. It’s not you though, at least, it didn’t used to be.”

“Was there a question there?” His tone was just slightly insulted.

Viv pursed her lips together and nodded. “She led up until recently and that’s not a guess, that’s common knowledge with you folks.”

“Folks,” Simon repeated.

Viv bit the inside of her bottom lip, “You use this charm as a crutch and I don’t think it’s necessary.”

“You’re assuming again.”

“Yeah but am I wrong?”

Simon was quiet for a moment, looking down at his hands folded in his lap. His expression was pensive, but when he looked back up at her again, the emotion in his face was gone.

“You’re not like the others,” he said.

“Other werewolves?”

“Hammerthynn. That young kid, Lothias.”

Viv snorted, “I am nothing like them. And that’s pretty smooth, how you changed the subject there.”

“Was it? I thought maybe it was too obvious.”

“No, very impressive.”

There was another short pause in their conversation. Simon looked at her openly, his eyes searching her face and, of course, they dropped lower. You’d think she’d be used to it now. She cleared her throat and his eyes flicked back up.

“I’m from England, originally,” he said leaning forward slightly.

“You’ve lost your accent.”

“No, it’s still there.” And it was just then. It made the soft baritone of his voice even more liquid smooth. Wasn’t too high

bred, Viv decided, so she rethought her estimation of him. He continued, “I was born in Circenster, the year 570.”

“You were about forty when she turned you.”

“Forty one.”

“That’s kind old for back then, isn’t it?”

Simon looked down at himself. “I did all right for myself. Care to guess my profession?”

“Military.”

“Constable, actually. I had one son and I fell in love with Ellis the very first time I saw her.”

“Has it always been just her?”

The look that crossed Simon’s face was intriguing as well as heart wrenching. There had definitely been someone else other than Ellis, but whoever that was, she was long gone. According to Marthinus, Ellis had been presumed dead for over a year. Must have been then, Viv decided.

With his right arm still on the back of the couch, he clasped his hands together again and completely changed the subject.

“Anantya is the oldest clan we have. They might have an idea on whether implanting a memory through a dream could be sustained this long is even possible. Could give us an idea who has those abilities, as well.”

Viv nodded slowly, pushing her lips to the side. Simon was done trading; that personal damage was not completely healed, apparently. She’d reopen that wound later.

“You smell like wheat fields and tall, dry grass.”

Simon’s mouth gaped open slightly and his face colored with unashamed awe. “Really?” he asked slowly, his eyes dropping to her lips. “Anything else?”

“Yeah,” Viv said plainly. Bringing her arms forward, she reached for her jacket and then sat up. Simon’s eyes followed her as she pulled on her jacket. “Let’s go.”

“Go where?”

“To Antablahblah.”

“Anantya. And I said they probably had an idea, I didn’t say they would tell you.”

“Not me. You. You’re the Elder of your gang, right?”

“Clan. I’m leader, not Elder. There’s a difference.”

“Well in my world, Elders run specific families, minor Alphas run the group of families, and THE Alpha runs the entire pack. What’s the difference?”

“Tacharan isn’t recognized.”

Viv pulled her hair out of her jacket as she looked down at Simon still on the couch. “Doesn’t Tacharan mean orphan in Gaelic?” Simon raised his eyebrows and nodded. “So Anantya, they’re in charge. “ Simon nodded again. “They’re the ones that refuse to acknowledge your clan, right?”

“It bothered Ellis to no end.”

Viv shrugged, “So what if they don’t. Marthinus said your

clans have particular skill sets, right? Tacharan has specific abilities. Anantya doesn't need to recognize you, evolution already has and I'd say that's plenty enough."

Simon put his hands on his knees and stood to his full height. "Ok," he said raising his eyebrows. "Let me change first."

Viv held her hand out toward the door. "Go ahead."

Simon walked past her, again his scent filtering into her brain and conjured up a vision warm English summers when he stopped and pointed at her. "You're changing too, right?"

"Does it look like I brought luggage?" She looked down at her clothes. "Why? What's wrong with what I'm wearing?"

"Are those Keds?"

"Oh man, that is just snotty." Viv snorted and pushed Simon toward the door.



## *Chapter 3*

Simon pulled on his black Canali wool suit as he stepped out of the suite he shared with Ellis. The jacket had a two-button closure, flap pockets, besom chest pocket with four interior pockets and prepared sleeves with exact tailoring. It fit his long frame comfortably and with style. Pulling on white, thinly blue striped button up cuff of his right arm, he saw Vivienne standing against the wall across from the door, eating what appeared to be a tootsie roll.

“Ready?” he asked, straightening his grey and burgundy Canali tie as Vivienne tucked the tootsie roll wrapper into her jacket pocket and then lifted her chin in his direction.

“That’s like three thousand dollars you’re wearing right there,” she said chewing her piece of candy.

Simon looked down and brushed a bit of errant fluff off his sleeve. “This is how I dress.”

“Do you know how long I’ve had this jacket?”

“Yes. The cut is 18th century, as well as the odor.”

Vivienne rolled her eyes and turned toward the elevator in between their suites. “This is why we dislike you folks.”

“Folks,” he repeated.

“You flaunt your wealth. I think you looked perfectly fine in the jeans and shirt you had on before.”

Walking one step for her two, he pressed the elevator call button and leaned against the wall looking at her. “You liked me in that, did you?”

“Stop it. You’re trying too hard.”

The elevator doors slid open and he held his hand out, allowing her to step on first. “No I like your Keds. Did you want to stop by Barnes and Nobles first or just straight to the PTA meeting?”

Viv looked up at him and growled, “So nasty.”

They exited the hotel via the private garage entrance and stood on the corner waiting for his car. When his 2009 XF 4.2 V8 supercharged Jaguar, ebony with charcoal seats, charcoal facia, and soft grain leather pulled up, he could not help but snicker at Vivienne’s response.

“You should be ashamed. Seriously.” Vivienne allowed him to open her door but stopped and turned back. “Can I drive?”

“Absolutely not,” he said immediately.

“Oh come on. I’ll let you talk to my boobs.”

“I’ll do that anyway.”

Vivienne glared at him as she settled into the passenger seat. Circling the car he put his hand on the door handle and



heard a distinct click. The driver's side window came down just a smidge and Vivienne's brown eyes peered over the glass.

"Oh no, no, no no."

"Just this once. I swear." Simon opened his mouth to complain but she interrupted him. "The keys are already in it, you know."

The last time someone else drove his car, it ended up ass over teakettle in the marina, squashed like a tin can. This was the replacement of that car. He loved this car. Rolling his eyes, he pointed at her through the small opening and clenched his jaw. The corners of her eyes crinkled in happiness and she closed the window again. He didn't hear the click of the doors unlocking until he got to the passenger side.

Sliding in, he thought she looked completely out of place in the driver's seat. He considered saying something, but she looked almost a little too happy to be driving. Leaning over, Simon tried pointing out a few things only to have Vivienne slap his hand away and then gun it out of the underground parking lot.

Grabbing onto the door handle, he resisted the urge to yell at her to slow down and instead explained a little about Anantya.

"Anantya is made up of the oldest vampires alive. So old that honestly, there isn't much I even know about them. They're made up of three orders: The Rose, The Night, and The Hunt. The Rose Order are the leaders. They control everything – the strategists, rule makers – their administrative department, if

you will. The leader of this order could freeze Vodka.”

Vivienne snorted and dropped the Jag into a lower gear and let inertia naturally slide the car around a corner, then gunned it back down the strip.

“The Night Order is their actors, poets, but also, and more importantly, their spies, and diplomats. Their leader is a piece of work.” Simon sneered and then wiped his mouth. “I haven’t seen him in months, but that doesn’t mean he’s not around. Watching. Waiting.

“Then there’s The Hunt. These are the killers, the warriors, and their protectors. We all have this type of sub-class of vampires. Ours are called Mercs. Any major political killing in history has more than likely been facilitated by this group. They might be the ones to talk to, but....”

“But what?”

“If they had any hand in this, why would they tell me?” Simon shifted uncomfortably in seat, not anticipating entering Anantya territory. Still, he gave Vivienne directions to their cathedral, not that the building wasn’t visible from the main strip up in the hills of the city.

“Are you nervous?” Vivienne asked, slowing the vehicle down as they took the winding road toward the front entrance.

Perfectly manicured lawns lined the gravel road with night blooming flowers, giving the illusion of being inviting, but Simon knew better. The mansion was marble and Italian stone, brought brick by brick over from northern Europe,

flaunting old wealth. A tourist attraction, to be sure, not that Simon ever saw anyone, anyone human at least, ever traversing the landscape.

Simon raised his eyebrows and shrugged. “They don’t think much of us, even less of Ellis. Our lives are nothing compared to theirs.”

“You’re what? Fourteen hundred?”

“Yes,” Simon whispered, his forehead wrinkling with anxiety. “This is stupid.”

“Should we just forget about it?” Vivienne cut the engine and leaned back in the seat.

“It’s too late,” Simon said reaching out with his perception and listening to the silent heartbeats surround the car. “They’re already here. Switch with me. Right now.”

Simon unbuckled his seatbelt and lifted his legs over to the driver’s seat as Vivienne climbed over him. Their bodies were aching close, more than brushing up against each other as she put her hands on him, maneuvering around him, but he could not stop himself from breaking out into a nervous sweat as the heartbeats became louder in his head.

“Shit,” he muttered quietly as he rolled down the window. “Vivienne don’t say anything. I’m serious.” He felt the light touch of her fingers on his wrist as he took a deep breath and tried to look unimpressed.

A thin layer of fog filtered through the beam from the Jag’s headlights and drifted around the car until it was surrounded.

They couldn't see within ten feet of the car. He was not surprised to see fingers curl through the opened driver's side window.

"Well if it isn't the leader of Tacharan," a voice purred as the mist solidified a foot away from him. A beautiful redhead laid her arms on the car door and bent over, resting her chin on them. Her eyes were bright green and her skin a creamy peach. He didn't recognize her, but it wouldn't matter. She was from the Order of The Hunt.

"I need to speak to," Simon started as the redhead reached in and pulled on the door handle, opening it slowly. Simon half rolled his eyes as the female vampire dipped low, exposing her cleavage through her 15th century period dress and looked into the car.

"New play thing, Simon?"

Vivienne's heartbeat was strong but controlled. She may not have been afraid, but she had every reason to be. It would only take one Anantya half a heartbeat to kill Vivienne before she even knew what happened. Simon was thankful she didn't respond to the jab.

"I need to see your leader," he said with an edge, looking the female dead in her green eyes. She paused a moment, her smile faltering. There was no bad blood between Tacharan and Anantya so the female was just being catty for the hell of it. Simon blinked slowly at her and then reached out past her, pulling on the car door. She moved out of the way as he closed it.

“Follow the road, I’ll meet you there.”

“Don’t want a ride?” Simon asked with a grin. The female retreated, backing into the fog and disappeared. He restarted the engine and pulled out of the fog, watching it disperse with the thrust of the car. Grumbling, he reached down and adjusted his seat. “My god you’re short.”

“What the hell was that? Is that one of your abilities? Fucking appearing out of the fog?” Vivienne’s eyes were large as her heartbeat ramped up to three times its normal beat.

“That’s ethereal. *They were the fog.*”

Viv was quiet for a moment but then contributed, “You could have taken her, you know.”

Simon looked at her as he drove slowly up the hill. “What do you mean?”

“It’s called super-awesomeness, but yeah, you could have. Between the two of you, you were stronger.”

Simon opened his eyes wide and sighed. “Super-awesomeness. Right. How could you tell?”

Viv shrugged, looking back out the window as they drove toward the end of the road. “Little bit experience but more innate ability. We can do equally enthralling things as well, you know.”

Simon gave her a side look and grinned. “Well that’s good to know.”



Vivienne marveled at the shadowy domain of the Anantya vampires. Simon had called it the seat of their creation. Where the founders of their kind ruled with impunity and lived in infamy. Even in the darkness, it gleamed like a jewel, overlooking the city in all its glory.

“Jesus, in plain sight. This is why we hate you folks.”

“Folks,” Simon repeated again, his irritation mixed in with a snort. “You really need to let that go.”

“Could you?” Viv asked, tearing her eyes away from the building and looking at Simon. “Have you?”

“It burned Ellis to the point of self destruction.” Simon stared up at the cathedral, his eyes glowing with something akin to envy and despair. “She had -such- plans for them. It consumed her.”

“Plans?”

“Marthinus didn’t tell you?”

Viv shook her head, “He is apparently leaving out all the good parts. He’s extremely protective of you.”

Simon flexed his hand on the steering wheel with a soft smile. “That he is,” he murmured quietly. “Ellis wanted to harvest the ancients for Eternity. The older the vampire, the more potent the drug.”

Viv looked down in her lap and thought back to Marthinus’ introduction to the Greater Pack. When Hammerthynn escaped Johannesburg in ‘06 with the still human Marthinus,

but could not prevent the fatal wounds Marthinus incurred during the attack. Marthinus asked Hammer to use the dose of Eternity the old man kept on him, his heart old and weak, to keep him alive a little longer. Granted in the process Hammer transferred the dormant virus within them all, into him.

The drug was not unknown to the leaders of the Greater Pack or Vivienne's, the Outcasts. Viv had seen the effects of it on humans over the years; the aching addiction, the uncontrollable withering of their soul. The effect of it on werewolves was unknown.

"So she was willing to sell her own species out?" Viv paused and shook her head. "It wasn't for money. It was for revenge. My god, she can hold a grudge."

Simon remained quiet, pushing the car to crest the last bit of the hill.

"And she let it go all lickety split? For love?"

Simon flicked his eyes at her. They were cold, contemptuous, and seething with more hate than she thought capable of any man. Viv found that one line she shouldn't ever cross again. What he must have given up for Ellis, besides his humanity?

"Stay here," he said, turning away from her and exiting the car.

Viv opened her door and stepped out, looking at him over the roof. "Simon."

He stopped as he began to walk away from the car and up to the steps leading into the building. There were no wrought

iron gates surrounding the place. Viv imagined not very many people trespassed. The entire area oozed power and an unmistakable feeling of foreboding. Simon turned and looked at her, his face indifferent.

She laid her left arm on the roof and flicked her fingers. A byproduct of her sarcasm was an unfortunate ability to sound cruel. That really wasn't who she was, and despite what Simon might be, he didn't deserve it. "I'm sorry," she said softly. "It's a habit. The poking with a stick thing."

Simon blinked at her once and then slipped his hands into his trouser pockets. He walked up to her and stood on the opposite side of the passenger side car door. Slowly, a smile formed on his lips.

"Don't wander off."

"What? Into the dark trees and not-really-fog? You're no fun."

Simon stepped around the door and walked right up to Viv, pressing her into the car. Viv felt the pressure of the side of the car and reached behind with her hand to steady herself so she didn't fall into it. Leaning in unnecessarily close, Simon pushed a button and the window opened. He took the car door and held it open wide enough for her to get into the vehicle.

"There, I even left the window open for you. No drooling on the upholstery please."

Viv narrowed her eyes at him and pushed her lips to the side. "Rude," she murmured and settled down into the



passenger side seat. She looked up at him through the open window and raised an eyebrow. He was just standing there, staring down at her. Viv put her hands on the car door and peered out the window. "You better hurry. If you're not back in fifteen minutes, I'm calling the po-lice."

Simon reached out and touched her hands with his large one and winked at her. The gesture was not lost on Vivienne, but it did seem out of place for the vampire. She wondered if his curiosity with her wasn't more of a front and there was more to him than he let on.

Looking around a final time, Simon slipped his hands back into his pockets and walked up the slight incline to the cathedral steps. A misty fog appeared, floating around him, and Viv watched as the redhead appeared to his left. Simon never once flinched, barely even acknowledging the female.

Watching Simon disappear, Viv's eyes narrowed with concentration. Taking a deep breath, she let the scents color her mind's eye, making note of what was already there. Closing her eyes, she listened, using her sense of smell to set up a perimeter in her mind, but immediately she opened her eyes.

There was nothing. Not a sound. Not a cricket. Barely even the sound of the wind through the trees surrounding the building. Simon had been gone maybe a minute before her personal alarm went off, blaring into the silent night.

Fog had no heartbeat and that kind of complicated things.

Pushing her lips out, Vivienne leaned out the passenger side window and watched the layer of fog ease up to the road but not onto it. In fact, it filtered into the trees and hung there, despite the slight breeze. There was no such thing as safe passage, even she knew that, but she wagered her safety was limited to the confines of Simon's car, so she made no move to go traipsing through the dark trees. Instead, Viv settled into the extremely buttery smooth leather seat and laid her head back on the headrest.



## *Chapter 4*

The interior of the Jag was wide with legroom, specifically for someone as tall as Simon who was approximately six foot four, Viv wagered, making her five foot five (in her Keds) stature incredibly comfortable. Everything about the car was designed for maximum comfort with very little effort. Having driven it at as fast as humanly possible down the city's appropriately named main street called 'the Strip', she could vouch for the intense dynamic control the vehicle had.

She wanted one.

Leaning forward, with her eye still on the lingering fog outside the car, Viv popped open the glove box and was rewarded with a silver nine millimeter Sig Sauer. Lifting it, she felt the balance, testing the grip. She popped the clip out and counted – it was a modified fifteen round 9mm. Whistling softly, she checked the clip and noticed the odd smell. Taking a closer look, she popped a bullet out and dropped it into her hand. Immediately her skin sizzled and she bounced the bullet out of her hand, and for the next few moments, comically struggled with retrieving the offense ammunition without burning her fingertips. Finally she

popped the compartment between the seats and dropped the bullet into the cup holder.

“Fuck me,” she mumbled unhappily at her stupidity. Checking her fingers, she realized that it wasn’t a pure silver bullet, but just tipped with the offensive metal, otherwise her hands would have been more severely burned instead of just a variety of little burns that would clear up in a couple hours. It was enough silver to hurt, but not enough to attract unwanted attention if found. Pulling her arm into her sleeve, she picked up the bullet and loaded it back in the clip. With experienced fluid motion, she popped the clip into the Sig and placed the gun back into the glove box. It was useless to her anyway.

Viv continued opening every single compartment, touching all the buttons, and then finally crawled into the backseat, pulling on it until she managed to get into the trunk. First she inhaled deeply and could smell more silver, and then peered in with her wolf eyes and saw what she presumed as a longrange rifle case. Reaching in, she twisted it lengthwise and pulled it out of the middle section that folded down.

The case itself almost the length of the back seat and black with four clasps; snapping them open Viv lifted the lid and paused.

“Good gravy.”

It was a .338 Lapua ULR. Piston-driven semi-automatic action and effective up to 1500 yards, the rifle’s custom muzzle brake and semi-automatic action significantly suppresses recoil. With no bolt to manually work, the smooth action semi-

automatic action allows the shooter to keep his head in the scope and his eye on the target for rapid, accurate follow-up shots. There were longrange rifles and then there were ULTRA longrange rifles. The Lapua even had its own stylized .338 ammunition. As far as rifles went, it wasn't shiny or classy, but it was damn effective.

"Who carries this in their trunk?" Viv murmured to herself. The Lapua sat encased in shaped foam along with a square section for bullets. That was where she smelled the silver, so she made no move to open the box. A man of many talents Simon Huntington apparently had become in his many years. It made sense to Viv; what does a man do with nothing but time?

Werewolves lived up to one hundred and fifty years, but with recent medical technology, it was anyone's guess how long a werewolf could live now. Vigo was one hundred and forty and he showed no signs of slowing down, but then as Elder of the family, Vigo maintained his physical prowess and it was probably bred into them for strength, stamina, and longevity by now. Looking back out the windows of the Jag, Viv twisted around, again making sure the fog was not closing in. She closed the lid without touching the rifle and snapped the locks. Pushing it back into the trunk, she put everything back the way she found it, closed the seat opening, and then climbed back into the passenger seat.

The fog was still hovering within the trees, ever vigilant.

Viv sighed, bored with waiting on Simon. Slipping off her

jacket, she folded and laid it in the back seat. Once again she looked at the dashboard and pressed the button that lit the interior and soft, neon blue heads up display. Touching the GPS display, she scrolled through the memory, being extremely nosy and checking where the car had been. Marveling at the HUD's capabilities, she ran her finger across the touch screen and within moments had a lined map of the greater city area, tracking exactly when and where the car had driven and stopped. She dragged her fingers across the screen in a pinching motion and zoomed out on the map. He had only really been in two spots the most: the hotel or the outskirts of the Eastern Seaboard city. Touching the latter link, it narrowed in and displayed the abandoned slaughterhouse district. Viv dropped her hands and looked at the map.

"Is that where they're hiding?" she mumbled to no one in particular.

"Yes, it is."

Jumping, Viv grabbed the door handle and her seat as Simon stood just outside her window. His scent completely inundated her senses, but it took more than that for her not to notice him coming up on her. Clenching her jaw, she slowly released her death grip and glared at him.

"It's called 'subterfuge' and it is, as you would call it, super awesome," Simon said, peering through the opened window. Straightening, he circled the car to the driver's side. Viv watched him as he passed in front of the car, small smile in place. The car door sighed open and he sat down in the driver's

seat and looked at her.

Viv took a deep breath and raised her eyebrows. “Well?”

“Nope. Nothing.” Simon put the car in drive and circled around, heading back down the winding hill, putting the daunting cathedral behind them.

“I don’t get it.” Simon looked over at her, his eyebrows raised in question. “It would make more sense for you to say you found out something.”

“To divert attention away from me. I know,” he replied.

Viv shook her head and looked down. “All right, what did they say?”

Simon shrugged, “The one person who could do it, and has a grudge, is already dead.”

“Oh well, see, that’s different.”

“How is it different? It’s still a dead end. There’s not much else—”

The car suddenly lurched forward as something rammed it from behind. Their heads snapped back with the impact, but as the rear end lifted into the air, Vivienne almost choked herself on her seatbelt as she fell forward. It landed with a crash, the rear window cracking, but not shattering. Simon stepped on the gas before the rear tires even touched the pavement. The tires screeched as they made contact with the road and Simon gunned the engine, sending the Jaguar down the winding road at a break neck speed.

Viv's passenger side window suddenly cracked, making her lean toward Simon who fought to keep the car straight. "Wait, are these bulletproof glass windows?" she yelled.

The car lurched forward again, fishtailing it hard to the left. "Yes, they are," he said in a strangely calm voice.

"Who puts bulletproof glass on their car?! Does this shit happen to you all the time or something?"

Simon rolled his eyes as his window cracked, shoving the Jag to the right. "More than you realize." He pushed the car to beyond eighty miles per hour, peeling rubber off the tires as they took the sharp corners.

"No, let it drift!"

"I know how to drive, Vivienne." Fog began circling the car. "It's the redhead."

"Oh that's just fantas-," Viv's window broke as a hand materialized through the tempered glass and grabbed part of her hair. "That's my fucking hair, you fanged bitch!"

"Hang on, hang on," Simon said again, his voice still maintaining an almost indifferent tone as they drove threw a sharp turn and plowed through the bushes, heading straight through the woods.

The car's engine whined pitifully as it hit the uneven ground, tree branches scraped up against the sides, undoubtedly scratching the hell out of the paint.

"I swear I cannot hang onto a good car for more than two



years,” Simon moaned unhappily as they hit the stretch of road again, the tire treads gripping the asphalt and propelling the car forward, but a heavy force pushed against them, forcing the engine to whine loudly again when the redhead appeared on top of the hood.

Viv undid the buckle of her seat belt.

“What are you doing?” Simon asked not taking his eyes off the female vampire. Viv felt the adrenaline in her body begin to bubble over, the wolf in her begging to rip through her human vessel and tear the vampire female’s face off. Simon must’ve heard her heart pounding in her chest because he looked away from the redhead and at Vivienne.

“No, not now. Don’t do it, Vivienne. We just need to get off their property! Wait!”

The redhead reared back on her knees, her arms pulled back and her large fangs poked through her ugly smile. She pounded once on the front windshield, cracking it, playing with them. Viv kicked off her Keds and Simon cursed under his breath, putting the gas pedal to the ground and twisting the car to the left, sending the vampire across the hood, her nails scratching deep gouges in the metal. Viv pulled herself out of the window, almost flying out as the car did a one eighty and sped off backwards down the hill.

Viv could see the redhead now running after the Jag, her liquid speed making her look like she was floating above the asphalt. Viv let her transformation take over, destroying her clothes, as her claws dug into the roof of the car to steady

herself. She pushed the change so hard and fast that by the time the redhead made it to the front of the car, Viv was running toward her in wolf form, knocking the redhead back. The vampire pushed her up against the windshield, caving it in. With her sharp jaws, she bit at the vampire's face, tearing off skin only to see it regenerate back.

“Vivienne! VIVIENNE GET IN!” Simon finally yelled his voice now void of any calm. The vampire clawed at her, but Viv twisted, avoiding as much of the vampire's touch as she tried to force the female vampire off the car.

Simon yelled out, “WE'RE RUNNING OUT OF ROAD!”

Both Viv and the redhead looked up and over the roof of the car as it reached the end of the steep hill and the car careened into traffic, sending them both off the hood and onto the pavement.

Viv recovered quickly, but she felt the top layer of skin was torn from the pads of her feet. Hovering low on the ground, she snarled at the redhead as it righted herself and turned toward Viv. Viv heard the unmistakable rev of Simon's supercharged Jaguar as it came up behind the redhead and plowed into her. Viv jumped off the street and ran up on the side of a building wall, avoiding the cars that Simon slammed into as well as the female. Her instinct was to just run – to get back to the Greater Pack's property, but Simon stopped his car on top of the female vampire and he threw it into reverse, running back over her. The redhead was disoriented but still in one piece as she slowly stood, right in the path of Simon's

car again, running her over. Viv watched from the sidewalk with shocked brown eyes as the female vampire kept getting up. Finally Simon just stopped on top of her and the passenger side door opened. He whistled to Viv, calling her like a pet with a smile.

“Come on girl, get in.”

With a snarl, she ran toward the Jag and jumped into the front seat, her tail purposely smacking Simon in the face as he revved the Jag’s tires over the redhead again and sped off toward the main strip.

Simon took off down the semi-deserted street, driving for some distance to put between them and the Anantya property line. The redhead appeared not to follow as they made it downtown and turned into the Casablanca Gardens. Simon parked his now completely dented and scratched up Jaguar in the parking lot. With a sigh, he turned off the engine and slumped in his chair.

The gardens were centrally located in the downtown area and populated with day as well as night blooming flowers, almost 700 acres of lawns, woodlands, and water bodies. There were patrons walking in and out of the area at any given time of day along with musicians and theater groups.

Vivienne was sitting in her wolf form, her brown eyes glittering angrily at him. He looked at her for a moment, taking in her black mask and solid points. She looked different than the Pipers he had seen in wolf form. They were solid in color, their fur color matching their hair. The latter was the

same for Vivienne but the points were very distinct. She was small in size; he didn't think Hammerthynn would fit in his front seat in wolf form, and thinner – but maybe that was just because she was a female. He was staring at her he realized when she barked at him.

Simon opened his car door and stepped out, leaving it open for Vivienne. Looking around he waited till the parking lot was clear and then waved her out. She gingerly stepped over the seats and hopped out of the car.

“Are you going to change back?” he asked, looking down at her. She merely flicked her ear and looked at him. Simon raised his eyebrows and shrugged. Vivienne nudged her nose at his jacket, pulling at the front with her teeth. He slipped his jacket off and held it out to her with two fingers. Suddenly, Vivienne began to shudder.

Simon watched with enthralled eyes as she transformed back, her body painfully shifting back and straightening, her jaws were receding and fur disappeared till she was on all fours, naked in front of him. She shook her head, her long hair tangled somewhat, but was her normal, brown skinned self again.

And very, very naked.

Viv stood slowly as she ran her hands through her hair and stretched, popping her back and giving him quite the eyeful of her front. Her hips were full and round, looking curvier with her small waist. Her breasts were full, matching perfectly with her hips, giving her a very pronounced hourglass shape. When

she turned to the side, he saw the faded spine tattoo on her back and the tail end of a vicious looking scar. There were faint scratches on her arms and chest, but they were slowly fading with her hyper-regenerative abilities. She was staring at her hands and he could see her palms were covered with road rash. He reached out and touched the skin as it slowly regenerated along with the rest of her body. Pulling her hands back, and without any vestiges of shame or modesty, Viv took his jacket from his hand and slipped it on.

“Uh,” Simon said, turning his body away from Viv but not his eyes. “You didn’t want your jacket?”

“Yours is longer. I need clothes though,” Viv replied simply. His wool Canali jacket did reach down to her mid-thigh, covering most of her body but her legs.

“Did you want me to take you...uh...to your place?” Simon cleared his throat, hooking a thumb over his shoulder. Vivienne gave him a strange look consisting of pursed lips and narrowed eyes. She seemed to think that option over for a moment before shaking her head.

“Way too hard to explain. I just need some sweats or something.” Viv looked at his car and sighed. “Wow, your car is trashed.”

The Jaguar was totaled. Well, aesthetically at least. The hood and roof were crushed in, both sides of the car dented and scratched. There were long, deep gouges of ripped metal everywhere, requiring a complete replacement of the exterior.

“Yes. Yes it is,” Simon mumbled unhappily.

“So what’s the deal? Why’d chick attack us?”

Simon rolled his eyes. “Probably just to fuck with us. It’s not like the Hunt leader to order an attack without provocation. It’s not her style.”

“Oh so the redhead was just being a bitch?”

“Basically.”

“Old play thing?” Viv asked with a small grin.

“Asked the new play thing,” he replied sourly.

“I’m not your play thing.”

“Neither was she.” Simon paused. “Why do you care?”

“I don’t. Just trying to figure out a few things.” Simon raised his eyebrows, prompting her to continue. “Think she’ll follow us?”

Simon opened his perception up and let his eyes unfocus as he surveying the area. “Just you and me right now.”

Vivienne’s expression changed from humored to thoughtful. “I thought you said all Anantya was old?”

“They are, usually.”

“She wasn’t.”

“How could you tell?”

Vivienne shrugged, making a face. “Remember when I said I could tell if you could take her? Well it was the same thing

with me. She didn't register as a problem for me. Other than turning into air. That couldn't have made her that old."

He shrugged, pressing his lips together. "Some ancients make protégés. Those children are stronger than say a child of mine, but the abilities inherited aren't consistent. More fizzles, I guess you could say. Is it the same for your kind?"

"No," she simply replied. Simon watched as Vivienne seemed to mull over the information he just gave her. Finally she explained. "We pass on pack abilities, not necessarily your gifter's own abilities, but they are specific. Size, as well. Like Hammer and the Pipers. Height and body mass is a Piper trait."

"But you're so small. Is that because you're a female?"

"No, that's because I'm not from their pack. So what happened to your last car?" she said without so much as a pause.

"Ended up in the marina. Are you not going to explain what you mean? I thought you were part of their pack?"

"Yes and no."

"What does that mean?"

She cut him off, sidetracking his questions. "I read about that car crash." She winced, knowing it was caused by the Pipers chasing after him and Ellis. "Unfortunate."

"Yes," he said giving her a dirty look. "Come on." As he got back into the car, he gave up on Vivienne explaining how she

was part of their pack but not really one of them. Vivienne circled around as he leaned over and pushed it open for her. He could not help but watch as she sat down, the hem of his jacket sliding up her legs, exposing more of her thighs. Looking up at the windshield, he pushed it out completely, letting it slide down the hood to the ground. Starting the engine, he pulled out of Casablanca Gardens.

They drove along the strip, heading further uptown, passing commercial businesses that stayed open all night. The streets were just as crowded at this time of night, nearing midnight, as during its opposite. The chilled wind of November pushed through the front of the car, and although he could feel it, it didn't bother him. He looked back over at Vivienne who didn't seem to be bothered by it either.

"This is fine," she said, pointing to a shop. He pulled over and looked at the store. He made a face.

Simon looked at the store strangely. "I'm not going in there."

"Well I can't," Viv squealed.

It was a nondescript, middle ranged clothing store. When she said she needed sweats, he didn't think she was being serious. "No," he said pulling away from the curb.

Viv dropped her shoulders and glared at him. "What are you doing?"

"If I have to go into the store, I'm picking it."

"I need something to wear other than a long jacket. Sweats. I even still have my shoes."



Simon leaned forward and reached down to Vivienne's feet, grabbing the white Keds. His hand purposely touched her legs, making her jump in her seat, and as he lifted the Keds up, they dragged on the hem of his jacket, pulling it further up her legs, exposing those creamy thighs. Simon looked at the shoes and then tossed them out his window.

"Oh come on!" Vivienne roared at him, punching him on the arm. "I love those shoes!"

Smiling, Simon fended off her hits as they drove further uptown, closer to one of the smaller shopping districts. Pulling over, he turned off the engine and then gave her an appraising look. Viv narrowed her eyes and glared at him.

"Size 8, right? Your disgusting Keds were a size 7 1/2."

"Dick," she mumbled.

Simon narrowed his eyes at her chest and pushed his lips to the side. "36C?"

"Oh don't you *dare* buy me underwear. I need sweats. SWEATS," Viv growled at him.

"Be right back, then."

The store was a mix of high-end couture and ready-to-wear. He immediately walked over to the dresses and was approached by a saleswoman. After a few minutes of discussion, the saleswoman pulled out several things and showed them to Simon. He picked out a dress and let the saleswoman use her discretion for the shoes.

“Will that be everything, sir?”

Simon began to answer in the affirmative when he looked off to the right, further down into the store. He saw something that made him smile and he pointed in that direction.

“Of course, sir.”

A few minutes later, Simon exited the boutique with bag in hand. Circling around, he got back into the car and put the bag on Vivienne’s lap. She held it there for a moment, looking at him suspiciously.

“Did you want to change here or back at the hotel?”

Vivienne peered into the bag and then crumpled it. “I’m not wearing this.”

“I’m not buying you sweats.”

Vivienne pulled out the dress he bought and held it up. It was a BCBGMAXAZRIA illusion bodice ruched sheath. The ruched mesh covered the curve-hugging dress and was sheer at the jewel-neck bodice and long sleeves. It was beautiful, especially when paired with the black open toed Jimmy Choo shoes the saleswoman picked out. Vivienne dug deeper in the bag and rolled her eyes.

“At least it’s not a thong,” he said with a smile.

They drove along the strip when Simon felt his fangs ache. It had been several days since he had fed and after the adrenaline rush with the Anantya vampire, the need was starting to nag at him. He looked over at Vivienne who was

sitting with her arms crossed on top of the things he had bought her, annoyed glare still in place. He pulled over slowly and stopped.

“What are you doing?”

“Get dressed,” he said opening his door and sliding out. Vivienne gave him a long look as he circled the car and came up on her side window. Simon touched the mangled roof and peered at her. “I’ll give you a few minutes and then we’ll decide on what to do next, all right?”

“Fine,” she said in a monotone voice, her eyes still watching him.

Straightening, he flashed a quick smile and then turned back to where they had come. Looking over his shoulder, he saw her start to dress, and as much as he wanted to stop and watch, he made it to the end of the block and then rounded the corner, shooting across the street to an alleyway, disappearing into the shadows.

Viv took out the dress and felt the material. Holding it up, she whistled as she looked at the nearly see-thru garment and absolutely fell in love with it. Damn him, she thought. Hopefully she’d be able to keep it intact and she could show Brig. Then he could take it off her.

Guilt rose up into her chest as she thought of Brig. At this point he was probably wondering where she was since she was obviously not with him. Mumbling unhappily, she dug into the bag and pulled out a pair of sheer, lace underwear. She read

the tags and saw the price.

“Pickled beans.”

Simon had sprung for the good stuff. It was a shell push up Aubade bra and matching panties, made with sheer tulle and black lace. They were beyond beautiful. They were, in a word, exquisite. If Brig ever found out the co-conspirator of their *Blood Memory* bought her this type of lingerie....

Grimacing, Viv took the tags off the panties and slipped them on under Simon’s jacket. Pulling her arms out of the sleeves, she kept the jacket on her shoulders as she put the bra on next.

“Fucker,” she mumbled. He had gotten the size perfectly. Rolling her eyes, she picked up the dress and pulled down the hidden side zipper. Taking Simon’s jacket, Viv laid it neatly in the driver’s seat. Quickly she pulled on the dress and zipped it up under her left armpit. She shimmied down in the seat to straighten the material, trying to get it to go lower when she realized that just above mid-thigh was as low it was going to go.

The bag produced a final item – Jimmy Choo black peek-a-boo toe four-inch heels. The shoes alone cost more than the dress and underwear. Viv could not help but giggle as she slipped the heels on and got out of the car.

“Zoinks,” she said, looking down at her feet. She knew she shouldn’t be so thrilled, but they were Jimmy Choo shoes. To not worship these shoes would be unthinkable. Stepping out of

the Jag, Viv set her feet down onto the sidewalk and marveled at the handcrafted shoes. Moving to the rear passenger side door, Viv pulled her pea coat out and felt around for her phone. Grabbing it she checked the messages and the time. She had only been gone a couple hours – still nothing from Brig yet. Then something occurred to her.

Simon was not around.

Viv threw her jacket back in the car and closed the door, taking a step toward the corner he disappeared around. Then she stopped. Turning, she went back to the passenger side door and opened it. Leaning in, she opened the glove box and took out the silver Sig Sauer and checked the round in the chamber. Clicking the safety off, she grabbed Simon's wool jacket and folded it over the arm with the gun, hiding it.

The streets were unusually quiet. The area was a little more dilapidated than the trendier uptown area they had just left. They had crossed over to the back alleys; she recalled the area being named. Licking her bottom lip, Viv turned the corner and inhaled. There was a mixture of smells in the area: garbage, human waste and bodily fluids, as well as various cheap brands of alcohol and chemical residue. She barely caught Simon's scent mixed in with the human taint. Following it, she crossed the street and entered the shadows of another alleyway. Simon's scent was stronger now and following it was like following a colored wisp of light. He apparently moved quickly and deep into the shadows, zigzagging along more garbage filled stretches of pot holed

pavement. Her heels clicked quietly, annoying her, but she walked with a confident gait. Odds were she was more dangerous than any human she'd find lingering in the dark. It wasn't long till Simon's scent became stronger and she turned a corner, seeing his tall stature hovering over something.

Switching his jacket to her free arm, Viv took great pains to silence her heels against the pavement, but Simon never stirred – his prey, however, did. There were muffled, terrified breathing, and soft whimpering coming from what sounded like a man. Viv stopped about twenty feet behind him. Her dilemma was unique.

Did she let Simon do his necessary feeding (because he didn't seem the type to play with his food) or should she do the right thing? Whatever the right thing was? As she considered this, Viv found herself creeping close to Simon and the gun lifting level with the back of his head.

Fuck, she thought. She knew what the right thing was, despite who the individual might be. Simon suddenly pulled the man's head to the side, exposing his neck, making the man cry out in fear. Viv closed the distance and touched the back of Simon's head with the barrel of the Sig.

"Please don't," she said quietly. Simon's grip remained tight on the man's clothes, but his head slowly to the right, looking first at the tip of the barrel, then at Vivienne.

"Oddly, I'm reminded of that first cut-scene in that video game 'Resident Evil'. Do you remember that part, where the zombie turns his head slowly? Of course you're not a zombie,

but you're kinda hunched over that man there like you're going to eat him, Simon, and I sure wish you wouldn't."

Simon released his grip on the man who fell back onto the alley pavement, stunned expression firmly set in place. He began to scurry back on his butt and hands, putting as much distance between him and Simon, whose attention was redirected toward Viv. She took in his features and silently admonished herself for being so stupid.

His hazel eyes were thin circles of dark green and his pupils had dilated so large that Viv felt any and all reasoning would be lost in the dark void of his slightly bloodshot eyes. Viv was now recognizing what hunger looked like for a vampire, especially after being interrupted before feeding. She never wanted to see Simon, or any vampire for that matter, in the middle of feeding. His skin was flushed and moist with sweat, but his cheeks had become sallow. His mouth had gaped open and his top lip quivered, revealing the tips of his fangs. She didn't normally see them and wasn't sure how she missed the pointy things, but they were clearly there now, practically pulsating beneath the skin. Simon closed his mouth slowly, clenching his jaw as he rose and took a step toward Viv.

Immediately she pulled the hammer back on the gun with her thumb, but matched his step forward with one behind her.

"Please don't make me ruin this dress, Simon."

Viv heard the man get up and run away. As the pounding of his feet faded, the hunger on Simon's face intensified. Her sense of smell was inundated with intense pheromones that

Simon's sweat was emitting. It was arousing as well as terrifying. This was what made vampires so irresistible, despite being monsters. It colored Simon's scent, whipping her senses into a fury, struggling with its intoxicating affect. Viv fought against the sensation, and when he took another step toward her, her instincts immediately took over and responded to the threat.



Looking down at Vivienne, he saw the determination in her expression as she struggled. Simon knew there was something chemical about the attraction humans had to them; it's what made humans such easy prey. Her eyes dilated and her skin flushed with arousal and a little bit of fear, but when he took that second step, he was taken completely by surprise.

The noise was loud, almost deafening. The bullet pierced the material just below the knot of his tie. Thin wisps of smoke rose up from the barrel of the gun and the thrust of the bullet was counteracted by his ability to withstand extreme damage. It pushed him back, but the pain was inconsequential enough for him to be mildly humored by her response. It was probably the smartest thing she could have done. But now, with the bullet lodged in between his collarbones, his three hundred dollar tie and ruined shirt, he was just annoyed.

Reaching down, Simon lifted his tie, undid a button, and plucked the protruding bullet from his chest. The hole in his skin closed immediately and he wiped at the little bit of blood with his fingers. He flicked the bullet to the side and then



sucked the blood off his middle finger while the other hand fixed his shirt. The hunger hovered just beneath his skin and his fangs pulsed painfully in his mouth. He quivered with the need for blood as he looked at Vivienne. She had looked like Christmas, wrapped in a healthy, golden glow with her blood ripe and sweet smelling. The vagrant would have been sufficient, and Vivienne would be delicious, that was until the effects of her blood made him puke up a lung. But right then it didn't matter that her blood lacked nutrients and was unsavory.

With his liquid speed, he snatched the gun out of Vivienne's hand, grabbed her by the throat and pushed her roughly against the brick wall of the alley, lifting her onto her toes. Tucking the gun in the waistband of his trousers, he clenched his jaws and closed his eyes as he twisted her head to her right, exposing her neck. Both her hands came up and she grunted with frustration as he pinned her to the wall. Bringing his nose to her skin, he inhaled deeply.

"Why," he moaned softly, "do you werewolves smell so good, but taste so disgusting?"

Vivienne looked at him with angry eyes as she tried not to struggle against his hold. "Oh," she grunted, "I don't know. Dove deodorant?" Her fingers pulled at his right hand as he maintained his grip.

Simon smiled into her neck as his fingers pinched her jaw. "You shouldn't have done that, Vivienne."

"I'm kind of realizing that now," she said, wincing from the

pain of his hand.

“He was nothing.”

Vivienne stopped struggling and sighed, as best she could. “Only to you, Simon.”

Simon was quiet, but lowered Vivienne down to the ground. His hand remained on her and he brushed his lips along the curve of her neck, down to her collarbone. He felt his eyes roll into the back of his head and his fangs began to pulse again. Opening his mouth, Simon dragged a fang along her soft, brown skin. The point pulled at the taut skin, vibrating deep within him as he pressed his body against hers. Vivienne gasped, sucking in the air through her nose, making him look up. The look on her face wasn't arousal, but it was a clear grimace. She was not enjoying it, much to his surprise. With every ounce of will power, Simon resisted the urge to feed and released his grip on her jaw, but did not back up.

“Oh good,” Viv said clearing her throat. “For a second I thought you were going to ruin the dress.”

Simon felt himself smile, his lips pulling back over his fangs. “That would be a waste.” Lifting his head, he stood at his full height as he pressed against her. His smile relaxed as he looked down at her. She avoided his eye contact, instead focusing on his mouth. Lifting his arms, he placed his hands on either side of her head and leaned in to kiss her when she turned her face and pushed against him.

“I'd really rather you didn't try to eat me and then kiss me,

Simon.”

“You’ve already kissed me,” he whispered as his lips chased hers. “What’s one more?”

Vivienne lifted her hands and pushed firmly against his chest. “I told you. I thought I was kissing someone else.”

Simon let Vivienne push him away and he dropped his hands to his side. Looking down, he found his jacket where she had dropped it and picked it up. Dusting the dirt from the street away from it, he murmured, “Who’s the lucky guy?”

Vivienne continued putting distance between them as she pushed off the wall and backed up the way she had come. She replied in a monotone voice, “Come on, Simon. We gotta have some secrets to keep the spark alive.”

He shook his head as he slipped on his jacket. “See, all these mixed signals you’re giving me.” Vivienne turned around and began walking back to the car. The ruched material of the dress hugged her curves perfectly, accenting her hourglass shape. The heels made her legs look longer and the muscles flexed as she walked away, swaying her hips making him wonder if she knew (or cared) he was watching. They walked back to his car silently and got in.

“Well, I’m still hungry,” Simon said in a terse tone. Vivienne pursed her lips and raised her eyebrows. She wasn’t going to let him hunt anything in the city, so he had to do the next best thing. Turning the car east, he headed toward the slaughterhouse district and the Domicile.

“Where are we going?” Simon touched the HUD on the dashboard and showed her with the GPS feature. “Fantastic. You’re taking me to your lair?”

Simon snorted, “We don’t call it that.”

“What then?”

“What do you call your home? The Den?” Vivienne made a face, glaring at him. “Ha, first guess,” Simon laughed as leaned an elbow on the car door and revved the engine as they hit the highway out of town.



## *Chapter 5*

The cool air helped ease his hunger, staving it off for now as the wind blew in through the missing windshield. Vivienne's long hair floated around the car; catching his eye and making him turn and look at her. She was gazing out, ignoring him and just watching with narrowed eyes. Looking back out to the road, Simon cut the lights as they entered the deserted property and navigated in the darkness down to the underground garage hidden deep beneath the rubble. He pulled the car down to the back end of the complex and stopped in front of an elevator. Leaving the keys in the car (it would be trashed first thing tomorrow evening); he got out of the car and circled to open Vivienne's door. He opened it and waited for her to get out, but she just sat there, arms crossed.

“Are you coming?”

“I'd,” she started, looking hesitant. “I'd rather not, actually.”

Reaching down, he gently took her arm and helped her out of the car. “Consider this is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. You're the first werewolf to be down here. Just no flash photography, please.”

Vivienne rose silently out of the car. Simon closed the door and lifted his hand, pointing to the elevator.

“Going back up?”

He shook his head.

“Oh see, that’s creepy.”

Touching the small of her back, he guided her to the door as it opened for him. She looked at him as they stood at the threshold of the elevator car. Simon could see the apprehension in her eyes as well as her tense body language. Seeing that she had no intention on entering the elevator first, Simon stepped in and turned to look at her. Vivienne narrowed her eyes at him but slowly entered and faced the doors.

Leaning on the back wall, he looked at her as she began to swing her arms, back to front. “You look beautiful, by the way.”

Vivienne turned slightly and looked at him with her curious brown gold eyes. Her arms stopped swaying and she maintained the eye contact until the elevator stopped its descent. He felt a smile tug at his lips as the doors opened. Taking a step out of the elevator car, Vivienne put her hand out to stop him.

“I need you to know something,” she started. Her expression had smoothed but was still guarded.

“Ok,” he replied slipping his hands into his trouser pants and towering over her.

“This thing,” she said pointing between them, “and you taking me here? I just want you to know it’s never going to happen. I hope you know that.”

Simon’s eyebrows furrowed at her declaration. It was very clear that she wasn’t interested in him at the least, but the speech now was disappointing. She was letting him know, in no uncertain terms, that he could not have her in any fashion.

“All right, but —”

“Never,” Vivienne said cutting him off.

The humored expression on Simon’s face smoothed out as Vivienne rejected him. He wasn’t sure how to take it. Narrowing his eyes, he shrugged dismissing her and the promise.

“This way,” Simon said as he exited the elevator and moved through the long, steel hallways until they reached the center section of the Domicile. The core of the building was half a mile underground with a five hundred person capacity, but it had never been more than a tenth full. Ellis had high aspirations of their numbers, but the Domicile was always opened to local Tacharans as well as visiting international members. The entire system was state-of-the-art technology with up to date security measures rivaling most corporations and government standards. All Tacharan DNA was entered into the database and their comings and goings monitored by blood, heat and body core signatures. Everyone was given security clearances and the elevator was by voice command, refusing to even open if not cleared by the system’s security.

Vivienne was, in a word, trapped. She was there on his authority, but unless she walked out with him, she'd never leave.

He failed to mention this as they reached another elevator and it opened the moment he stepped up to it. This time he entered without speaking to Vivienne and didn't bother explaining where they were going next until he spoke the command.

"Home," he said in a monotone voice the moment Vivienne stepped into the elevator car. They descended again, this time to the bottom level of the Domicile. The entire level had been his and Ellis' apartments, but since she had been banned off clan property, allowed only into the Abattoir next door with Simon, her apartment had been sealed off from his. He didn't spend much time there anymore, but it was a safe a place as anywhere to keep Vivienne out of trouble.

The elevator doors opened again and he walked down the long hallway to one of the only two doors. It opened immediately for him so he did not have to pause in the slightest and stepped down into the main living area with Vivienne slowly trailing behind him. To his left were the stairs up to his office with a large full bathroom located underneath it; straight back were his bedroom and lounging area, and to the right was the kitchen area.

"You're welcomed to poke around in here. I need to," he paused and looked at her, a slow smile spread across his lips and he turned toward the door. "I'll be right back."





Kenley Merriweather was human and lived in the Domicile but did not fear the dark. Her blackberry chirped at her, letting her know that the Leader had come home. Getting up from the chaise lounge in her office, the natural redhead stretched her arms above her head and yawned. It had been so quiet in the Domicile lately that she had started taking naps in her office instead of staying awake just to see the security system or Mercs take care of tripped alarms from the sensors above. The Leader was spending all of his time above ground with Miss Duban, so there was nothing to report to him, even if he were around. Of course, he could be coming to the Domicile for another reason.

Kenley's cheeks burned bright red at the thought. It had been several months since the Leader took any frustrations out on her; nothing violent, of course, more of the frenzied sexual nature. She tried not to be hopeful and gathered any messages she might have for him. Suddenly her blackberry chirped at her again, this time a message from the Leader himself.

‘I need you.’

Kenley nearly dropped her phone. Immediately she turned and headed toward her apartment, which was connected to her office. She always dressed in a retro 50's style; pencil cut skirts, tight sweaters or button ups that hugged her figure. Her hair was a natural red and was pinned back in a single barrette while the length of it laid down the middle of her back and was coiffed in a perfect curl at the end. Her china doll bangs dusted

her forehead and her lips were ruby red against peaches and cream skin. Kenley dropped her blackberry on the ground in front of the bed and pulled her tight, white angora sweater over her head as she walked into her bedroom, tossing it on the floor. Shimming out of her just at the knee black skirt, she let it drop to the floor in a puddle. Just as she was sitting down on the bed to undo her open toe black strapped heels, Kenley hooked her leg out and decided to keep them on along with her black lace demi-cup bra that just barely covered her nipples. Picking up her phone, she laid back across the bed, stretching to the nightstand to throw the blackberry on it when the Leader entered silently.

He stood at the doorway with his jacket in his hand, his eyes burning a trail up her legs, her stomach, to her breasts that were already squirming to come out of her bra and had the unmistakable look of hunger on his face. Quickly he untied his tie and dropped it to the ground, his eyes never leaving her. Simon walked in front of Kenley and stared down at her as he unbuttoned his shirt. Kenley felt her knees come together out of modesty but he quickly reached down and spread them apart, falling on top of her on the bed.



Viv spun in a circle, taking in all the particular details of the apartment as soon as Simon left. He said she was welcomed to poke around and poke around she did. Kicking her heels off, Viv put her hands on her hips and walked to the bathroom first. Hey, she had to go.

Poking her head into the bathroom, she felt around for a switch when the lights flickered on automatically. If this was the guest bathroom, she was anxious to see the small condo that must be his master bathroom. It was the size of her home in Canberra, easily hitting seven hundred square feet. The design was modern with white stone and black tile with a massive shower room to the right and a double vanity on the left. Viv moved toward the shower room and looked at the double showerheads, rain heads, and body sprays. She touched one of the square body sprays and it tilted.

“Ok that’s just ridiculous.”



Simon pushed into Kenley, grinding her down into the same bed he shared with Carol. Kenley was soft, warm, and inviting. She’d let him do whatever he wanted to her. Take whatever he wanted. His need to satiate his hunger overwhelmed the painful guilt and loss he felt when he thought of Carol. Hell, he could still smell his blond ex-lover.

Kenley’s pleading bordered on painful screaming as he roughly turned her over, grabbed her hips, pulling them up and entering her again without pausing. He ran his hand down her spine, thrusting hard, trying to ignore the rock in the pit of his stomach. Kenley was nothing like Carol and that made it bearable. Where Kenley was submissive, Carol dominated, never once neglecting to take as much as she gave to Simon. He could not stop thinking of her.

Roughly Simon grabbed Kenley’s arms and pulled her to the

floor, turning away from the bed and closed his eyes as she climbed into his lap to ride him. Her red nails dug into his shoulders as he wrapped his arms around her waist. Thrusting his hips up into her, she rocked back to meet him, her moaning and gasping becoming louder and more enthusiastic. He pulled down on her hips, rocking until she came, moaning his name loudly. He felt the desire in him dissipate, not even wanting to finish.

This was the first time he had Kenley in a place that meant something personal to Carol. The first time had been on the desk in the adjoining office where, admittedly, he spent a lot of time with Carol, but Kenley had redesigned everything in there, unlike the bedroom. The bed, the fixtures...the overall design was still Carol; still smelled of her. Simon felt the grimace on his face as he tried in vain to finish, but he was just too distracted, even with someone as vivacious and incredibly submissive like Kenley naked in his lap.

Simon's life with Ellis had started with a passion that possessed him, leaving him weak and wanting. There wasn't anything he wouldn't have done for Ellis in the beginning, but as the years wore on, century after century, the love turned possessive. The more he wanted her, the more he was obsessed with Ellis, and the more she pulled away from him. She had told him, after it was too late, that she had never wanted his worship, but in his defense, she never said she didn't, either. Their love was ugly and black in the end, so trying to kill Ellis didn't hurt as much as he thought. Not when he had Carol.

Carol Hedley was the only other woman Simon had ever loved, truly and deeply loved. She was also the first person he had ever bonded with; having the ability had been a surprise to him. Simon could hear her thoughts, feel her pain and immerse himself in her love. Carol loved him more than he had ever loved Ellis, if that was possible. Twenty-five, human, and Ellis' familiar and lover, falling in love with Carol hit him out of nowhere. She made him the man he was meant to be, but when Ellis came back with promises of their rekindled love, despite him having tried to kill her, he could not ignore the love he had felt for over a thousand years. Ellis was mesmerizing that way, especially when they faced death together at the hands of Vivienne's Pipers. Their declaration of love sealed their bond and escalated it to levels he did not think possible. His bond with Ellis was one hundred times more marvelous than what he had with Carol. Ellis offered him the one thing he had wanted all those years: her love. Carol just could not compete.

Simon and Carol's love had been fleeting and burned brighter than anything he had ever felt, but it was short lived. So, Carol left him without a fight, without an attempt to win him back, but more importantly, without even giving him the chance to decide. She knew a frail human could not compete with almost fifteen hundred years of obsessive love.

Vivienne entered his mind just then. The brown skinned female werewolf waiting in his apartment; quite literally the first woman to not respond to his advances. Everything was starting to change and without provocation or understanding.

He loved Ellis, loved her with everything he had, but when Vivienne asked if there had been anyone else it started an avalanche of questions and missed opportunities that he had chosen to ignore. Carol had left him, but it wasn't as if she had a choice. Now Vivienne's promise that nothing would ever be given freely only infuriated him. If you have over a thousand years to perfect a pick-up line, you're completely dumbfounded when it doesn't work. Vivienne was a challenge he could not resist, but more importantly, it was because she had already given herself to someone else and Simon was not even a distraction. Was that Ellis rubbing off on him again? Was he playing with his food, thriving on the game, and reveling in the hunt?

"Simon!"

Kenley was beginning to squirm against him, her face tight with pain. His grip around her waist had tightened and he was close to breaking her ribs. Quickly he released her; shocked that he was doing it without even thinking. His mind had wandered, further beyond Kenley's alluring scent and willing body. He had been on autopilot during sex and that was a definite first. The disgust welled up in his stomach.

"Get off," he said, turning his face away from hers.

"I don't understand," she said, her eyes large and round with quick tears, more than likely from the sudden rejection than the pain, but he didn't really care at that moment.

"Please. Now," Simon said tersely, lifting her off his lap as he stood up. Kenley got to her feet and sat on the edge of the bed,

modesty mingling with embarrassment as she covered her breasts with her arms. Looking at her now, the desire had dried up in him, leaving him irritable, but the hunger was still there and still aching. Simon reached down to her and grabbed Kenley's shoulders and lifted her, pushing her back to the center of the bed as he fell on top of her roughly and without any pleasantries. Pushing her head to the side, Kenley let out a startled scream as he sank his fangs into the soft skin of her neck.



## *Chapter 6*

Viv washed her hands and used the white towel hanging off the satin-brushed rod. She gave the bathroom a final look and then tossed the towel onto the marble counter top. She was fairly certain she had never peed in a nicer bathroom.

Exiting the bathroom, the light shut off automatically behind her as she turned around and looked up the staircase. She padded barefoot to the foot of the stairs and looked up. Simon's scent overwhelmed the space, so much so she couldn't quite discern any other scents, but they were old, she could tell that. Clearing her throat, she took the steps two at a time and stopped at the landing.

It was an office with a large oak desk which seemed out of place in the minimalist steel décor of his lair or whatever he called it; a pair of wing-tipped leather chairs and a leather couch were along the far wall. Stepping into the large room, she saw a bathroom to her right and a single monitor on the desk.

Hopping into the desk chair, Viv swiveled once, letting Simon's strong scent engulf her again. The drawers were unlocked but yielded nothing interesting. Not even a keyboard.



Making a face, she reached out and touched the twenty-four inch monitor and it lit up.

“Ahhh, touch screen,” Viv said with a smile. She fussed with it a bit but found nothing private or even worth stealing. Pushing away from the desk, Viv went back downstairs.

Simon had been gone about ten minutes and could be back at any second, so she walked directly to the back toward the bedroom and poked around in there. A king sized bed dominated the room with a chaise lounge against the wall opposite of it; various men things like a valet stand, but no television and very little art on the wall. He spent very little time here, Viv thought to herself. No books on the nightstand, not even a clock, but it was impeccably decorated with more solid gray, black, and taupe colors.

Poking in the walk-in closet to the left of the bed only reinforced the annoying stereotype that all vampires had incredibly expensive taste and dressed it. The money they must be able to accrue over a lifetime.

Well, *their* lifetime.

This underground facility was a testament to their wealth, as well as Duibne Industries – the multi-million dollar medical research facility that dominated the city skyline along with the other buildings that scraped the heavens. Viv wondered just how much of the skyline belonged to the vampires. How much of the city itself?

Viv walked along the rows of clothes, touching the color-

coordinated trousers that hung on the bottom half of the three walls, knowingly leaving her scent behind. In the center was a rectangular island with six drawers on both sides. Opening them revealed gold trinkets, watches, cufflinks, and silk ties, folded in exact measurements to showcase their colors. She quickly lost interest in the gluttony and moved on.



Simon dressed slowly, stepping into his trousers and zipping the fly without looking at Kenley. He looked around for his shirt, scooping it off the floor along with his tie. Kenley lay on the bed, her back to him. Every time he looked at her shaking naked body, he grimaced, so he didn't look at her at all. With his shirt buttoned and tucked in, Simon found his shoes and jacket.

Kenley slowly pulled the flat sheet of her bed on top of her body, all the way up to her neck. She was silent, but he knew she was crying. He had forcibly taken what she would have freely given and Simon knew this was the last time he'd ever be with her in any sense of the word. Slipping his arms through the sleeves of his jacket, he took a step toward the door and then stopped.

"Kenley?" His secretary immediately sat up and backed against the headboard of the bed; her eyes were wide and scared. Simon was shocked at her reaction, but then he did just brutalize her. Her soft creamy skin was blotchy now with her blood. Her arms were bruised, as well as the underside of her jaw where he pushed her head back so hard he damn near

broke her neck. He looked down and sighed.

Kenley pulled her sheet up closer to her neck.

“This won’t ever happen again.” There was an unmistakable look of relief that crossed her face. She nodded and fresh tears spilled from her eyes. Simon opened his mouth to say more, but couldn’t. He left quietly, closing the door behind him.

Walking back to the elevator, he hung his tie around his neck and let it drape down. His long fingers found the bullet hole and he sighed, disappointed by the loss of a favorite tie. The shirt was a loss as well even though the bullet had almost gone through where the button was sewn on. As he approached the elevator, it opened its doors and let him in. Leaning against the back of the elevator car, he mumbled his command for his apartment and his eyes unfocused, unable to enjoy the flush of fresh feeding.



## *Chapter 7*

Viv was staring at a peculiar spot in the wall to the right of the bathroom. She tilted her head to the side and took a step back, looking at the bookcase that was oddly placed in the room, disrupting its symmetry.

“That doesn’t belong there,” Viv decided and walked back up to the bookcase and grabbed the left side, lifting it easily away from the wall, swinging it out. There was a cutout for a door behind the bookcase, and as Viv knocked on the wall, it echoed back at her. Then she pushed the cutout and it clicked in about two inches and then popped out. Pulling the door open just enough for her, Viv slipped into the darkness and walked about twenty feet until she saw another door in the darkness. Her eyes immediately adjusted to the darkness and she found the pull handle easily with her right hand. She pulled on it and a soft light penetrated the darkness. Viv stepped into the adjoining room and immediately recognized the fading soft scent of Channel No 5. The room was identical in square footage but definitely not in décor.

In the center of the room was an elevated platform. On this platform was a king sized bed. Viv slowly took the steps up and

leaned down, taking in the scent. Simon's scent mixed in with Ellis', and that's exactly who this room belonged to, or did. Viv looked around, again spinning in a slow circle. It was the mirror opposite of Simon's, but it looked more lived-in than his.

On the far wall was a crest with fixtures that looked like it held two swords, but they were missing. There were bookcases lined along the walls filled with a wide variety of subjects, mostly medical. Viv stepped slowly down to the ground level and walked toward the back, finding Ellis' eclectic taste interesting. She had items from around the world, different eras, decorating the entire space. In the back where Simon's bedroom had been was the biggest walk in closet she had ever seen. It was empty though, save for soft hangers and two islands. Turning back, Viv found herself drawn back to the bed again.

It looked as if someone had just been there; the sheets were crumpled and pillows thrown about. Viv wondered how many years it had been since Ellis and Simon had used the bed. Did he still bring her here, though? Was he ever happy with her here? She tried to imagine Simon with Ellis, there on the bed, but for some reason she couldn't. His demeanor the moment they entered the parking garage chilled. His body tensed and his face leaked resentment. This place, this gigantic beehive for vampires wasn't his doing.

It was Ellis'.

Viv reached out and touched the sheet, trying to capture the

scent, letting it color her olfactory's senses.

“What are you doing in here?”

Viv turned quickly at the sound of Simon's voice and was startled to see him on the first step behind her. The expression on his face was pained but curious. He had done that sneaky thing again. The entire room smelled of him and Chanel No 5, so he could practically move freely and undetected by her senses. Viv let the sheet drop from her hand.

“Having a look see. You said I could poke around.” Viv turned to face him fully, her hands behind her back.

Simon regarded her with a suspicious expression. Viv looked at him closely. His face was flushed and his eyes bright and white.

“I see you've fed.”

Guilt flashed across his face as he swallowed and looked away for a moment before glaring back at her. “Do you really want to know?”

“No,” Viv said slowly, his combination of expressions was curious. Stepping down from the bed she crossed back over to Simon's apartment with him right behind her in the darkness. It didn't bother her in the least, but then knowing he wasn't hungry did lend to that confidence. Simon exited the corridor and went straight for his bedroom, pulling the tie off and angrily ripping his shirt off, buttons flying as he walked. Now Viv did want to know about his feeding, especially as the soft scent of strawberries trailed after him. Definitely female in

origin along with the distinct aroma of a pheromone that piqued her arousal, although it faded the further Simon walked away from her. Unable to resist the reason of his irritation, and the lure of an interesting story, Viv followed after retrieving her heels.

Entering the bedroom, she could hear Simon opening and closing drawers and then pulling something off a hanger, breaking it as it ricocheted loudly against one of the walls. Against her better judgment, Viv walked to the doorway of the walk-in closet and leaned against it.

Simon's state of undress was more than she had planned on seeing as he stood naked, pulling underwear from one of the drawers. If he noticed her, she couldn't tell. He made no charming quip about watching him dress or hid his body from her at all. His forehead was creased with wrinkles, showing his physical age with more of a harder edge than he usually carried. Simon seemed upset.

Viv cleared her throat, getting his attention as he pulled on a pair of thin black boxer briefs. He snapped the waistband and looked at her as he grabbed a pair of trousers and stepped into them.

"Does feeding usually put you into this kind of mood?"

Zippering his fly, Simon slowed his quick and angry actions down, as if he was forcing his body to prove her wrong. He ran his fingers through his light brown hair. His eyes looked at her, appraising her appearance with a roving eye and then shrugged.

“So Anantya told me nothing of any real value.”

Oh so they were playing this game again, Viv thought to herself. Shrugging, she stepped into the closet and touched one of the dozens of expensive looking shirts on the top row of hangers. Viv tilted her head to the side and considered his statement.

“It might be of value if you tell me what they said.”

Simon remained still, his hands on his hips, as he watched Viv circle the closet. Viv found a shirt and then pulled it down, shaking it once. She held it out for Simon, waiting for him to slip his arms into the sleeves. There was already another shirt on the island, but it was a solid off blue. With the dark navy trousers he was wearing, Viv selected a light gray pinstripe instead. He gave her a guarded look and accepted the shirt, slipping his long muscular arms into the sleeves.

“I told you. The person who would have been capable of implanting that type of a long lasting memory, and had a grudge against Ellis, is already dead.”

“Who might that be?” Viv asked as she turned and opened one of the drawers that held his ties. She ran a finger over the silk material, occasionally looking up at him as she decided on which tie.

Simon began buttoning his shirt slowly as he watched her. “Ellis’ creator.”

Nodding, Viv pulled a thinly and diagonally blocked matching tie out of the drawer. “She bit the hand that fed her,



so to speak?”

“She doesn’t talk about him.” Simon shrugged and made a face. “She’s never told me about him actually.”

“But he’s dead,” she asked again.

“Sanctioned death.”

Viv could only guess what piece of work Ellis’ creator had been in life. “Why sanctioned? What does that mean?”

“Means Anantya allowed the kill.”

“Deemed him unworthy, did they?” Viv could not help but smile. Simon had made the Anantya out to be demi-gods and rulers of their kind. Noble. Graceful. Altruistic. The werewolf hierarchy had one Alpha that ruled them all and then smaller packs within The Greater Pack. The Alpha was far from the type of leader the superior sounding vampire high clan seemed to want to convey publically. Viv appreciated the humility of her kind. The vampires? Graceful heroes they were not.

Simon picked out some cufflinks and fastened them to his cuffs. “I don’t know anything about him. Other than he created Tacharan.”

“I thought Ellis did?”

“She took over after the other children he made thinned themselves out through in-fighting after his death. That was after she met me.”

“But then she built her army?”

“No, I did that.”

“So she created you and how many others?”

Viv watched as Simon’s expression faltered. A flash of jealousy seeped into the creases of his mouth and the tell tale signs of anger made the veins in his neck tense, if only for a moment.

“One other after me.”

“Huh,” Viv said, nodding. “I bet that’s an interesting story.”

Simon took the tie she had been holding and pulled it around his neck, flipping the collar of his shirt up. He merely looked at her. Apparently he didn’t feel like sharing. Viv closed her eyes and shook her head.

“Well, then it’s my turn,” Viv considered her options as Simon tied his tie, his fingers expertly twisting a Windsor knot.

Running her fingers over Simon’s cufflink box, Viv knew her choices in proceeding with their line of inquiry were limited. Hammer and Brig, quasi-adoptive brother and love of her life respectively, had already demanded that she put a stop to her inquiries regarding their family *Blood Memory*. There was the Alpha, Hammer’s biological son, but a Hammerthynn had not gifted him so the *Blood Memory* was not his burden to bear, though that could be an advantage in swaying the other two men. No Hammerthynn or Jameson that she knew of had the ability to recall the memory itself, just the intense desire to eat Ellis and Simon’s face off when they saw them. It was an

instant rage that only old age could quell – the Pipers were young and unpredictable, but both Hammer and Brig were over a century old. No, that was a dead end.

“What are you thinking?” Simon asked, tucking his shirt into his trousers.

What was she thinking? There’d be no help from any of the local family members, but there was always her father.

Elder Vigo Hammerthynn was leader of the family and co-  
led the Pipers with Brig’s father, Elder Duncan Jameson. If Hammer and Brig were frozen like arctic ice against her search, then the Elders would be fire and brimstone. But Vigo was her adoptive father and loved her like the moon loved her children; guilt had a way of tempering the Elder Hammerthynn and Viv winced as she considered using it against her father.

“There’s no help here. However, there is someone else.”

“Someone else in your family?”

“Someone else in *the* family.”

“All right, now you have to explain.”

“Hammerthynn is the Greater Pack’s Beta – second in command.”

“Yes, I know what it means.”

“But his father is the Elder of the family. The son might be the Beta, but the Beta’s father controls all Hammerthynn family members.”

Simon selected a matching jacket and pulled a face. “Will he talk to you?”

Viv grinned, nodding slowly. “Probability of that is 100%.”

She snorted at Simon’s confused expression and took the jacket from him, helping him slip it on. His long arms dipped into the sleeves as Viv guided him to the mirror and draped the jacket onto his shoulders. She smoothed out the material, running her hands down his arms and peered at him from behind his shoulder, looking at his reflection. “The Elder is also my father.”

Simon gave Viv’s reflection an odd look and remarked, “You don’t look related at all. Especially with the two eyes.”

“It’s because I’m not biologically his sister. I’m not even part of the Greater Pack.”

Simon fingered the two buttons of his jacket and stopped at her statement. “So you’re part of ‘a’ Greater Pack, just not *the* Greater Pack?”

“You’ve met the others?”

“No,” he said shaking his head. “When I met with Marthinus and Hammerthynn and accepted their peace treaty with their pack, Hammerthynn alluded to another pack. Marthinus confirmed it but that was all he could tell me.”

Viv knew what meeting Simon was talking about. When word had trickled down about the Alpha’s stance with the vampires in the United States, the Elders silently raged at the indignity of the offering. The current Alpha was everything the

old, dead Alpha was not: diplomatic, compassionate, and not a sociopath. The new Alpha was Hammer's biological son, but was not raised as a Hammerthynn thanks to his mother. The old Alpha relied on cruelty and physical oppression to thwart enemies and control his pack; Hammer's son used compassion and led by example – even going as far as welcoming humans into the pack. This was what separated the Greater Pack from their polar opposites. The Elder Hammerthynn and Jameson were cut from an old cloth, but it was not their place to go against The Alpha, even if they physically wanted.

What the Alpha decreed was law and the Jamesons and Hammerthynns carried out that law.

“Yeah, I heard about that.” Shrugging, she picked an errant piece of fluff off of Simon's shoulder and smoothed the material out again.

“I don't understand.”

“About what?” Viv said looking up into Simon's hazel eyes.

“How are you part of their family if you're not even part of their pack?”

Viv struggled with how much she wanted to tell Simon and how soon. It was her business why and she didn't see the need to explain it to him. She ignored his question and moved on.

“Hammer's father is Elder Vigo Hammerthynn. I'll get in touch with Vigo as soon as we go top side, not that you don't have a lovely hole in the ground here, and see what he can tell us.”

Simon narrowed his eyes at her but smiled. “You’re still not going to tell me?”

“Oh I’ll tell you as soon as you tell me about how you met Ellis.” Viv smoothed her dress down, checking her appearance in his full-length mirror and smiled. “Ready?”

Simon took a step back and held his hand out to the doorway of the closet. “I’m ready,” he said as Viv took a step toward the door, but he moved quickly and put his arm out to the doorframe, stopping her from exiting. “Unless you want to...?” He raised an eyebrow and let a grin play on his lips.

“No, I do not,” she said, smirking at him. He was painfully close in quicker time than she’d seen anyone manage and she had to give him props for his tenacity. Simon’s smile parted his lips and she saw his tongue touch the tip of his fang. Despite her innate disgust for vampires, she watched the action with enthralled eyes. His gaze darted from her eyes to her mouth, then back to her eyes again. Viv glared at him, breaking that god awful charming spell he had.

“You keep trying and I keep shutting you down.”

“An A for perseverance, then?” he said as he bent his elbow and drew his face closer to hers. To say that it wasn’t enticing would be a preposterous lie. Viv had to give it to him; he knew how to make it hard to say no, but she was still surprised when he leaned in and tried to kiss her again. Quickly she lifted her hand and covered his mouth, effectively blocking it. Simon raised an eyebrow and glared at her.

“No points for failing, Simon.” With her other hand, she playfully slapped him on the cheek. As she turned away, she dropped her hand covering his mouth and dipped under his arm. Exiting into the bedroom, Viv quickly walked out to the main living area. Climbing the steps to the door, she waited for it to open, but did not until Simon came up behind her. As they stepped out, Viv noticed the black panel next to the door that was chest high.

“What’s this?”

“Computer access panel. They’re everywhere.”

*‘Hub’*, she thought and then touched the black panel. It blinked on once and then shut back off again. “Yikes, did I break it?”

He reached out and touched the panel, this time the lights came on and stayed on. “It must not like you,” he said in a bland voice.

“Har,” she said walking away from the panel.

The elevator ride back up to the parking garage yielded no further propositions from Simon or snide rejections from Viv. Instead, she took the opportunity of being in a confined space to dissect the variances in Simon’s scent.

Viv could still detect notes of his original scent. The variety of dry grasses and vegetation were the foundation of the scent, but as Viv concentrated, she could smell cherry trees, and the bland woody notes of oaks. Above all that, a scent clinging to the edges of his, was a feminine, perfumed scent unlike Ellis’

Chanel No 5. This was fresh and vibrant yet soft and very alluring.

Viv ran her tongue around in her mouth, trying to taste the scent when the doors opened again and Simon immediately walked out. She turned her head, trying to catch the wash of his scent as it moved. Slowly, she stepped into his trail, following it with her eyes looking down at the ground when the new feminine scent intensified. Looking up at the direction of the smell was a rather striking redhead, not unlike the female Anantya vampire, but a deep burnt red. The girl's face was flushed, her cheeks red, as were her lips. Viv politely smiled.

The redhead's eyes darted from Simon's feet to Vivienne's face and she forced an uncomfortable smile. She was holding a cell phone.

"Mr. Huntington, your new car is ready." She held a hand out to the left and pointed at the metallic sapphire black X6 M Class BMW; her eyes never quite making it to his face.

Viv rolled her eyes at Simon who gave her a wry grin in return. He flat out ignored the redhead, but Viv looked back at her.

"Hi, I'm Viv."

The redhead politely nodded. "Kenley Merriweather. Nice to meet you. I believe this is yours?" Kenley handed Viv her phone. "Your jacket is in the car."

Viv extended her hand out, keeping her eyes on Kenley while her left hand reached up and touched Kenley's wrist, her



fingers wrapping around it softly. “Nice to meet you too, Kenley. Work for Simon long?”

And there it was. Kenley’s pulse began to trip the light fantastic, beating so fast that Viv had to concentrate to keep up with it. Her scent was floral, but now the thin layer of sweat on her neck and face was twisting the scent, making it more acidic. In addition to that, her pupils grew large, turning her green irises into tiny rings.

“A year, Miss Viv.” Kenley gently pulled her hand back but Viv held on, gauging her response.

“What’s it like? Working for a vampire?”

Simon put his hand out and touched Vivienne’s. “Let’s go,” he said quietly. “That’ll be all, Kenley.”

Viv’s smile dropped from her face as she gave Simon a long look. His expression remained neutral as Kenley walked quickly back to the elevator and left.

Walking up to the new car, Viv touched the hood and was shocked to hear the engine running. It was that quiet. Rolling her eyes, she looked back at Simon who grinned at her.

“Where to?” he asked, avoiding her look.

“She was pretty scared,” Viv said nonchalantly as she circled the car and opened the passenger side door. Simon remained silent and opened his side. “Guess she was your midnight snack?”

Simon settled into the car as Viv did. As he adjusted the

rearview mirror, he asked in a monotone voice, “Do you really want to know, Vivienne?”

“I kinda do, now.” But only because Kenley’s reaction wasn’t anywhere close to arousal. She was terrified of Simon and that irked Viv.

Simon adjusted the seat and poked at the dashboard. “Aw, Viv, jealous?”

“Don’t call me ‘Viv’,” she said with a little more anger than she realized she was feeling. Viv turned her body toward Simon. “My friends call me Viv. You are not a friend. This is a business arrangement that benefits both of us, although your reason is a little less savory than mine.”

“Oh I see. You’re better than me.”

*“We don’t eat the maid, Simon.”*

Simon’s expression was condescending, looking down his nose at her as Viv tried to reel in her anger. He merely shrugged. “Well maybe someday you’ll let me call you ‘Viv’.”

“Don’t hold your breath.”

“A man’s reach should exceed his grasp, or what’s heaven for? Robert Browning.”

Viv blushed at her uncontrolled ire raising its ugly head, but despite being handsome and charming, (and quoting poetry) she intensely disliked Simon for what he let himself become. Self-serving didn’t seem his style, but when you’re with someone for over a millennium, odds are you’re going to pick

up some bad habits. It made her physically ill to think of him feeding on his secretary, but then Kenley let it happen and that made Viv feel even worse. Being submissive wasn't in Viv's DNA, nor was using her sexuality to get what she wanted. Ellis seemed like the dominant personality in their relationship, regardless of Simon being the leader of this clan.

Simon put the car in drive and quickly left the parking garage. Viv crossed her arms and glared out the front windshield.

“Are you going to call your Elder Hammerthynn?”

Viv clenched her jaw annoyed she had made herself so irritated that she had completely forgotten. She was even still holding her phone in her hand, albeit her knuckles were white from how hard she was squeezing it. Relaxing her arms, Viv held up her phone and scrolled through her contacts when something occurred to her.

The answer wouldn't be in the City. The original event had to have happened somewhere in northern Europe, if it was as old as she thought it was. It wasn't until the past generation that they had even come within a thousand miles of the equator. If she used her phone, Brig would be able to track her and maybe try and stop her. Vigo was in Ireland.

“No. I'm not going to call him,” Viv said.

Simon turned to look at her, his expression confused. “Well then what now?”

“He's in Ireland, but he's due here soon.”

“You want to wait for him? Would that be easier?”

“No, let’s go to him.”



“You want to go to Ireland?”

“You said you had resources. I have access to a jet, but I’d rather Hammer not know where I plan on going, or with whom. Is that a problem?”

Simon was starting to get a headache from Vivienne’s mood swings. She went from friendly to indignant to readily agreeable to accepting anything from him in two seconds flat. He shook his head as he turned the car toward the dirt road that led back to the city’s highway.

“Well no, it’s not a problem. When did you want to leave?”

“Right now.”

Shrugging, Simon pulled his phone out of his inside breast pocket and used his knee to steer the wheel. He texted Kenley, letting her know their plans as Viv sent a text of her own. Kenley immediately replied with the necessary information just as the car turned onto the highway.

“Is there anything you need before we go?” he asked as they took the Merrill airfield exit.

“Just my passport but I have that coming. Twenty minutes tops.”

“All right then, wheels up for Dublin in sixty minutes.”

“Can we get to Donegal instead?”

“Uh,” Simon said texting Kenley again. Again she responded immediately. “No, we’d need Diplomatic clearance to land there.”

“That’s fine. I have that.”

Simon lowered his phone in his lap and put a hand on the wheel. “You have diplomatic status?”

“From Australia.”

“Real?”

“Real enough.”

Rolling his eyes, Simon texted Kenley back and secured the landing rights to Donegal airport in Western Ireland. Merrill Airfield came into view and Simon pulled into the private hangers amidst the other private jets until they came up to Hanger 21. Simon walked Vivienne into the hanger and they waited in an illustrious waiting room with a view out to the hanger beyond soundproof glass.

Vivienne took a seat and checked her phone repeatedly, occasionally sending texts and never once making eye contact with Simon until her phone rang. As she sat there, her legs crossed forcing the hem of the dress he bought her to slide up her thighs. With a sigh, Simon looked out the window with his arms draped behind the leather couch he was sitting on.

“My passport is here.”

He reached for his phone to let the security guard know

when Vivienne stood up and went to the door.

“I’ll meet them at the gate.”

Simon pulled his hand from inside his jacket and shrugged at her silently. Vivienne disappeared out the door. Standing, Simon went to the control office and asked the security guard to leave. Once alone, he sat down at the desk and used the cameras at the gate to watch for Vivienne.

There was a tall dark haired man standing in jeans and a t-shirt waiting at the gate. Vivienne appeared and the man held out her passport, but kept his grip on it as he said something to her. Turning to the computer, he selected a few options and the audio came on.

“He’s going to ask where you’re going. What do you want me to tell him?” The voice was a low baritone that was filled with concern.

“You don’t know where I’m going, except for out of country. Don’t tell him anything that isn’t the truth.”

“Viv, what are you doing?”

“Ask me no questions and I’ll tell you no lies, Charlie.”

The man – Charlie – let go of his grip on Vivienne’s passport and looked at her sadly. Simon leaned back in the chair and put his chin in his hand. Whoever he was, he cared for Vivienne. The way he spoke to her, his body language, and even the longing looks. Vivienne on the other hand – betrayed no personal feelings, other than friendship, for the man. She touched his face and kissed him on the cheek, leaving without

giving him a chance to say anything else. Simon shook his head. He didn't know if Vivienne knowingly sent mixed signals or was just the type to call someone 'sweetie' to gently get her way.

The man's eyes were closed longer than necessary and when he opened them, the look of utter disappointment colored his face. He watched her for a moment longer and then left.

Standing up, Simon left the control room, letting the guard back in. He was seated on the couch by the time Vivienne returned to the lobby. Her passport was in her hand along with her phone and she set them both down next to her on the couch across from Simon.

"All done?" he asked raising his eyebrows.

Vivienne nodded.

Simon considered asking Vivienne who her messenger boy was, but thought better of it. She was being agreeable for the moment and he was about to be locked up in a plane with her for the next four hours so there was no point in risking the peace. Their pilot came into the flight lobby and let them know they were fueled and ready to go. There was a five-hour difference between the east coast and Ireland, so that would put them in full daylight by the time they got to Donegal. Kenley had made arrangements for limiting Simon's sun exposure enough that it wouldn't be a problem for his age. The pilot was ready to go when they were.

Vivienne immediately stood as she popped her SIM card out

of her phone and left the device on the seat. The pilot opened the door for her and she walked out, leaving Simon seated still. Simon lifted his chin at the pilot who followed Vivienne out the door. Simon's eyes went back to her phone. Standing quickly, he smoothed out the wrinkles in his pants, walked over to the opposite couch and picked up Vivienne's phone and dropped it into his breast pocket.

Whoever would be tracking Vivienne's GPS in her phone made her cautious enough to want to leave it, but Simon was interested to see who would come after her if something went wrong. He hoped it wasn't a stupid move on his part and then exited out of the door toward the jet.





## *Chapter 8*

Charlie Hammond was a Piper. It was an honor and a pleasure to serve as a Piper, but as one, it made him privy to more secrets than he'd like.

Charlie opened his eyes and watched Vivienne walk back into the shadows of Hanger 21 at Merrill Airfield with her passport in hand. It was all she had asked for when she called him twenty minutes earlier, and without a single question as to why, he went directly to her apartment, let himself in, grabbed her passport, and was in one of the Piper's SUVs inside of five minutes. There wasn't anything he wouldn't do for Viv and he thought maybe it was making him a liability.

He wasn't related to the families, Hammerthynns or Jamesons, genetically but he was still a Piper. His adoptive father was a Jameson, and after the death of both Charlie's parents, he became completely immersed in the families' lives without hesitation. He had been part of the Jamesons since the age of nine and a Piper since he was fifteen, becoming sergeant when he was twenty two. As third in command, he was also the Pipers confidant and go-to man. Everyone had secrets and Charlie was the keeper of them.

Reluctantly Charlie returned back to the Greater Pack's home, the Den, a rustic styled timber and stone lodge made up of three massive wings, a self contained city for the Greater Pack in the northeastern United States. All Greater Pack members were welcomed on the expansive property and the Den itself was large enough to house all stateside members in its three-winged building. The Pipers had their Situation Room underneath the Den, but all the Pipers maintained a residence within.

It was quiet on the property as Charlie pulled the SUV into the parking garage area and regret was already beginning to settle at the pit of his stomach. Charlie was six foot three with short, dark brown hair, and had soft, gentle blue eyes. The Jameson strain of the werewolf virus had ensured he'd be tall enough to be a Piper and he had grown into his position since all the other Pipers were well over six foot as well. Exiting the SUV, he walked out into the open area and let the cold wind chill his body.

He was worried for Vivienne, but it wasn't like she couldn't handle whatever she was getting into. She had managed without Charlie's concern for her safety for decades – there was no reason why she would be vulnerable now, but he couldn't help it.

Vivienne had showed up on the property almost three months prior and helped diffuse the volatile situation between their Commander and Beta, although initially she did exacerbate it. She had come in place of the Elder

Hammerthynn, but with the full authority of his position. The Pipers were to be evaluated psychologically as well as the Commander and Beta. They had been short handed for over a year, twelve being their normal accompaniment, and Vivienne had come to the city to inform the Alpha the families were holding back their replacements due to the breakdown in command between the Commander and the Beta, the Alpha's biological father, which was the reason for the disagreement. And for whatever reason, the Commander took the news of the Alpha's true parentage harder than any of the Pipers thought he would; certainly the Beta. Instantaneously their Commander's personality changed and the crack in the foundation of their leadership was evident.

Since Vivienne's arrival, the issues involving the breakdown had been resolved and her stay extended to evaluate the now incoming replacements and tend to any psychological issues the Pipers might develop. All the while, Charlie slowly but surely fell in love with her; despite it coming out that she was, in fact, not part of the Greater Pack, but the outlawed faction ruled by another false Alpha. The rival werewolf pack shared a tenuous treaty with the GP, and that was putting it lightly. The Elder Hammerthynn had decimated her biological family letting her survive, raising her as his own daughter, albeit in secret. Viv fixed things, she said, and although her abilities fascinated Charlie, he could not help but appreciate the physical side of his attraction to her. It made Charlie blush just thinking of her.

Physically Charlie looked approximately twenty-six but in all

actuality he was forty and in that time, he had never fallen so hard for someone like he did for Vivienne. She would be the basis in which he judged any future woman. His luck in finding someone was unfortunate, because much to his dismay, Charlie discovered she was already in love with someone else, but you can't just turn off love like a light switch.

Entering the Den from the outside garage, Charlie slowly made his way up to his apartment. All the permanent apartments were large in square footage, but he really only needed a bed and a desk and the emptiness of his apartment reflected his need for little. Pushing through his unlocked door (there was never a need to lock it), Charlie stepped into his living room area. The space was an open concept design with his kitchen just past the living area, a spare bedroom to his left, and his bedroom to his right. It wasn't one of the larger units, but again it was enough. Shutting the door with a kick of his heel, he threw his wallet on the short stand near the door when it opened again.

"Hey, where ya been?" A freckled redhead poked his head in and lifted his chin at Charlie.

"Were you waiting up for me? It's 1 am."

"Heard you leave, yeah." The redhead was affectionately, and appropriately, named 'Red' for obvious reasons. Red was also a Piper and one of Charlie's best friends. Lifting his ginger eyebrows, he waited for Charlie to ask him in, which he did with great reluctance. "What's up?"

Charlie shook his head. "Nothing – just had to run an

errand.”

Red watched Charlie circle the couch and sit down looking concerned. Red, standing at six foot four, hopped over the couch and landed next to Charlie. “Please tell me you didn’t go see her.”

Charlie shrugged, ignoring Red’s conclusion. Relaxing back onto the couch’s arm, he leaned onto his elbow, cradling his head with his right arm. They were off duty; otherwise Red wouldn’t be attempting to delve into Charlie’s personal life or decisions, although Red was next in command after Charlie. Nodding, Charlie closed his eyes and admitted what he had done.

“Why would she need her passport?”

“Obviously she’s leaving the country.” Red leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and was silent. Charlie continued, “She was at Merrill Airfield.”

“So she’s flying out?”

“Hanger 21,” Charlie said, exhaling into a long sigh.

Red pursed his lips and gave Charlie a side look that matched it. “Lewis is on.”

“Fine,” Charlie said reluctantly as he stood quickly, Red following by jumping back over the couch and was at the door to close it behind them.



The Situation Room was located beneath the foundation of

the Den and always manned by at least one Piper. Security was quiet on the property, large though it was, but the Pipers had expanded their reach into the city, commandeering the city's surveillance via Lewis' creative infiltrating computer hacks.

"A flight log? That's it? This is your challenge to me? Me?" Lewis slouched down in his chair and glared at Charlie and Red.

Charlie sighed and Red rolled his eyes at Lewis. "Just tell us where the flight is going."

"Done," Lewis said pointing at the screen. "Again I would like to reiterate that I am insulted by this elementary challenge. You might as well have asked me to change the toilet paper in the bathroom."

"Donegal? Was she supposed to bring the replacements here?"

Charlie shrugged, as perplexed as Red. There was no reason for Vivienne to go to the Piper's facility in Ireland. The Elders would be there within a week with the replacements. She left without saying anything to the Commander and did it in the middle of the night on a private jet.

"Oh," Red said slowly, looking down at Lewis. "This might have something to do with the Commander and Beta looking for her earlier."

"About what?" Charlie asked.

"Well, I could be wrong, but this might be about us helping her with a meet."

“What meet? Who helped?” Charlie rolled his eyes. “What did you guys do?”

“Nothing, just...tri-sniper cover downtown for Vivienne to meet Huntington,” Red blurted out quickly.

“What? When?”

“Day before. It was all off-duty.”

“Jesus, what is wrong with you guys? You went, off duty, to a hostile meet? You went with sniper gear into the city? Are you trying to have the Alpha dismantle us?”

Red stood up straight, recognizing the tone of his sergeant. “No, sir.”

“Keep this to yourselves for now,” Charlie ordered with his expression clear and his voice stern. “Track her phone when they land and let me know where she goes.”

“Charlie,” Lewis said, sitting up in his chair, “we have to tell the Commander.”

Shrugging, Charlie looked at Lewis and snapped, “You tell him then.” Charlie rolled his shoulders. That would mean LT knows or will know tomorrow along with him. They would both be held accountable for the major snafu. He tried to keep his temper down, but he felt it simmering quickly. Vivienne was now walking a fine line pursuing the *Blood Memory* issue. Now that Charlie had given her the ability to leave the country, he would definitely feel the brunt of the Commander’s anger.

Lewis looked at Red and together they nodded. “This is

between us then,” Red said, his joking demeanor gone.

Turning away, Charlie called over his shoulder as he walked out. “Find out who owns that hanger space.”

“Checked already, it’s a shell company that leads back to nothing.”

That stopped Charlie and he walked back to the console. “Think it’s from Viv’s pack?”

Lewis shrugged, “Could be. We haven’t found any trace of them in the city.”

Charlie sighed. “Jesus, what did she get herself into?”







## *Chapter 9*

It was silver and red striped Lineage 1000 private jet that was sitting just outside the private hanger doors. Upon climbing into the corporate sized jet, you're instantly reminded of stepping into a luxury home with the circular seats for the crew rest section and two-sided galley able to prepare hot meals and cold beverages, the flows into five separate sections for passenger comfort. Throughout the aircraft are carefully delineated sections that feel like separate rooms and even came with a queen-sized bed in the back with a walk in closet and storage.

“Really?” Viv said her tone incredulous. Turning back she looked at Simon who came up behind her and sat down on one of the captain chairs across from the ten-foot long one-armed couch. “Really.”

“Really-really,” Simon replied with a smile. He held a hand out to the couch when the pilot came in and let them know they were ready to leave. “Let’s go then.”

Vivienne kicked off her heels and settled down onto the couch, tucking her legs up underneath her. Simon sat comfortably with his legs relaxed as he felt the plane begin to taxi out to the runway. Vivienne changed her mind and went to the captain’s chair across from Simon and buckled up. The interior of the aircraft contrasted nicely with Vivienne’s black dress and brown skin. The upholstery was a creamy tan with darker brown trim and mahogany accents. Lighting was subtle and windows with UV filtering to prevent unfortunate mishaps for the sun sensitive variety. Vivienne looked uncomfortable surrounded by the wealth.

“There’ll be a car waiting for us when we get to Donegal.”

Vivienne had been looking around the cabin, taking in all the details and rubbing her hands on the soft material of the chair. She looked at him, surprised, “Us? You plan on coming with me into the heart of the two families that hate you and want to kill you on sight? I can go by myself.”

Simon chewed his bottom lip and nodded. He had no desire to test the fine line he was walking, putting himself so close to god knows how many of them. Still, he was interested to see the area.

“Where, exactly, are you going to be?”

“Glenveagh National Park.”

Simon nodded, “That makes sense, I suppose. Somewhere close to civilization but far enough away that any missing persons can be chalked up to wild animals.”

“We don’t eat people.”

Now he was intrigued, “That’s not what werewolf lore suggests.”

Vivienne rolled her eyes and settled into the chair as the plane began gathering speed for its take off. “Don’t believe everything you read.”

“Have you ever eaten human?” The plane’s engines roared as it lifted the tip of the aircraft’s nose and pushed into the sky.

“No,” was all she said.

“How about vampire?”

Vivienne gave him a strange look, “Are you meaning that in the literal sense or is that another sexual innuendo?”

Finally, a sense of humor worth laughing at, he thought to himself. He lifted his hands off the armrest and shrugged. “Either?”

She cracked her neck as she twisted it to the side. “Why do we keep having these types of conversations?”

“What kind is that?” he said, feigning ignorance.

Closing her eyes, she let the force of their acceleration push her into the seat. “This is a long flight. I’m going to sleep now.”

“There’s a bed in the back,” Simon’s grin was deep and his quiet laughter shook his entire body.

“Of course there is,” Vivienne replied with her eyes still closed. “Once we level off I’ll take the couch.”

“You can take the bed.” Simon let the laughter subside and he took a deep breath, relaxing into the chair. “I don’t need to sleep.”

Vivienne opened her eyes and gave him a confused look. “You don’t have to sleep at all?”

Simon shook his head. “I don’t ‘have’ to, but I do. Sometimes.”

“I suppose that makes sense, being undead and all.”

Simon snorted. “I’m not dead.” Sliding out of his captain’s chair, he walked over to the couch next to her and sat on the edge. He reached out and took her hand, making Vivienne’s confused expression deepen but she reluctantly let him draw her hand up to his neck, resting her fingers on his pulse. “See. Warm skin, strong pulse. Not dead.”

Simon put his hand over hers and watched her. She looked at their hands and her expression changed to pensive, almost wistful. Her eyes were a peculiar brown, the inside irises light brown to almost gold. The slight makeup she had on was nearly

worn off, her lips void of the shiny gloss he had seen her wear the first time he had met her. Her skin was even toned and her eyelids just slightly darker. Her eyes unfocused just then as she thought about something that distracted her completely.

“What are you thinking about?” Simon asked quietly, his thumb stroking the back of her hand.

Vivienne’s eyes focused and she looked up into his face. Slowly she pulled her hand away and sighed. “Not about you, Simon,” she said sadly. Getting up from her chair, she moved to the opposite side of the couch and lay down with her back against the arm. “Night,” she murmured quietly and turned her back on him, curling up to fall asleep.

He twisted to watch her move to the opposite side of the couch; her heartbeat slow and steady. As she fell asleep, Simon turned away from her and rubbed his face, wishing he was tired enough to sleep. Standing, he walked to the back of the aircraft and stretched out on the queen-sized bed. His mind had been quiet the entire time he had been with Vivienne – not a word from Ellis at all. For the first time that night, he wondered where his reacquired lover had disappeared to since



she was not with him.

Simon looked at the perforated ceiling, counting the stitches, as he avoided trying to reach out to Ellis. He wasn't altogether sure how far apart they could communicate with their bond; a separate clan friend had told him it could be as strong anywhere in the world, but he didn't want to explain why he was returning to Europe without her or why he was even with Vivienne. Ellis wouldn't care – he knew that – that was just her way. He cared where Ellis was though, maybe almost as much as whoever Vivienne was missing just then and he wondered if that man knew how fortunate he was to have someone like Vivienne think about him above all others.



Ireland was a chilly forty-two degrees but gray and dry. The Lineage 1000 taxied into one of Donegal's private hangers and doors secured before the pilot popped the sealed door. The hanger was well lit but conveniently void of direct sunlight. Simon stepped down and turned to help Vivienne, holding his hand out.

Viv took his hand and ignored the warmth and gentleness of his touch as he helped her down. Simon had been quiet after takeoff, even after Viv woke up and they ate a meager meal as they crossed the Atlantic. She didn't know if she had upset him, and if she had, Viv was completely clueless as to how she could have.

“It's about forty five minutes to Glenveagh. South and then east of here.” Viv looked down at her clothes and sighed. “I need to change.”

Simon lifted his chin toward the opposite side of the hanger and walked toward a Madeira red Rolls Royce Ghost. Viv didn't bother to be visibly surprised this time and just went with it. The driver opened the rear door and just when Viv thought Simon was going to get in before her, he stepped to the side and waited for her. His face was void of any type of expression. Stepping into the car, she was rewarded with deep red leather, individual lounge seats, and walnut burr veneer. Viv tried not to purr.

Simon slid into the seat next to her when the pilot

approached the car and handed Simon Vivienne's jacket. Simon nodded and then gave her the jacket with zero expression. Viv smiled happily at him, but he turned away so she laid the jacket in between them.

"We'll be able to get some things in Dungloe, if not I can get anything for you from Dublin." Simon looked out of his side window and lifted his hand at the sunlight, not flinching.

Viv's eyes widened in surprise as Simon quietly played with the sunlight streaming into the car. She half expected him to burn to a crisp, but nothing happened. "Wait."

"They're UV filtered," he said not looking at her.

She should have thought of that. Viv was slowly realizing just how well the vampires had changed the world, gently coercing it to adjust for them. Even his Jag must've had the UV filtered glass, but then Duibne Industries must have had all three of its towers built to suit the light sensitive race. Simon and Ellis were apparently staying in the penthouse suite in the Grand Piazza, but that meant....

“Just how much of the city has been converted to UV filtered windows?”

“All of downtown, seventy five percent of the greater downtown area and all glass windows produced and all recent and future buildings in the city have the filter.” Simon pulled on his sleeves and looked at his hands, rather unimpressed about Viv’s revelation.

“Duibne Industries is a pure research and development facility. All its advancements benefit the vampires first and foremost, right?”

Simon looked at her and blinked slowly, “All medical R&D benefit human kind, but we are the motivation, yes.”

Viv winced and felt ill. Leaning away from Simon, she pressed her forehead against the cold glass and wondered how much longer the human race had before it realized that the

world wasn't at all what it appeared to be. It was conceptualized and modern technology developed solely for the vampires – any other benefits for mankind were a by-product. Viv hoped that the werewolves were nothing like the vampires, but as her kind slowly integrated itself into the world, it smelled of hypocrisy. They were no different than the vampires.

The vampires just had a head start.



## *Chapter 10*

Vivienne stuck her hands in her pea coat jacket pockets and silently followed two Glenveagh Pipers into Vigo's private rooms where he dealt with family business locally and spent his contemplative moments. These Pipers were carbon copies of the Alpha's Pipers – tall, rigid, yet friendly and polite. They had no idea she was not part of the Greater Pack, but not many within the family did, save for Vigo's other brothers – the Pipers who were present for Vivienne's family massacre. The two nodded politely and shut the door behind them, leaving her in her father's office.

There was very little to even denote that Vigo was staying in these quarters, save for his books and computer equipment. He kept no pictures, keepsakes or the like when he travelled. Vivienne was anxious to see her father; it had been three months and time away from him always made their reconnection that much sweeter. She loved her father, despite what he did. He spent every waking day begging her forgiveness, not that he had to by any means. Vigo raised her when he could have easily dispatched her with the rest of her family – it was their right. Blood retribution for their

murdered females by the hand of her older male cousins was more than every reason to wipe out the Sena pack; however, he did not have to spare ten year old Vivienne.

There were other children there younger than her, but something made him hold back and call off his Pipers – Hammer, Vigo’s only son, included. For that, she owed him her life and he rarely let a day pass without an email, voicemail, or face-to-face begging her forgiveness. Hammerthynns were reputed to have no conscience or compassion; they were indifferent to anything outside the pack and held the Alpha and leadership’s well being first and foremost, above and beyond their own safety, which made Vivienne realize that men who showed nothing had the most to hide.

When the door creaked open, Viv turned with a ready smile and hug but was surprised to see the other Elder, Duncan Jameson, her lover’s father.

“Elder Jameson,” Viv said respectfully.

Duncan walked in and looked at her, his hand on the door slowly closing it. He waved off her professionalism with his large, rough hand. Duncan showed very little contempt for Vivienne, though he wasn’t publicly accepting of her either. And he was a perfect, older copy of the one man she has ever loved. Looking at him now made a blush rush into her face.

“What are you doing here, Vivienne? We’ll be at the US base in less than a week.”

“I’m not here because of the replacements. I need to speak to Vigo and you. It is important.”

“So important it couldn’t wait?”

“Yes, sir. It could not.”

Viv felt the blush again as Duncan put his hands on his hips and considered her request. She could see where Brig got his authoritative presence. It was odd to her that in her lifetime with the families, she had not met Brig or his brothers once.

“Your father is in the middle of training your three replacements right now.”

“Well I,” Vivienne stopped short, slightly confused from what she heard. “I’m sorry, what?”

“I said Vigo is busy training.” Duncan crossed his arms and looked down at her with a neutral face.

Never once had Duncan, or anyone, referred to Vigo as her father. His neutrality was the basis of their professional relationship. Viv treated the Elder Jameson like the CEO of her job – impersonal, direct, and impartial in his business decisions. She had proven to Duncan that she was capable in the jobs Vigo delegated to her and their success a direct result of her influence on making bad situations disappear. Viv had never given Duncan a reason to be cruel to her, she never thought she’d hear him refer to Vigo as exactly what he was to her – her father. It made her future with his oldest son a little more promising and maybe a little less scary.

“I wouldn’t have come if it wasn’t extremely important. To



both families.” Viv licked her lips and looked down at the ground, trying to sort through her reaction, tempering it as Vigo taught her. You never say more than asked and never let your opponent know what you’re thinking. It would have been helpful if her face didn’t read like a book.

Duncan watched her carefully and she felt his scrutiny weighing down on her. “All right then.” Duncan walked to the door and she heard him whistle loudly down the hall. The sound of stomping boots came down the hall and Duncan directed the Piper to interrupt the Elder Hammerthynn and have him meet Duncan in Elder Hammerthynn’s chambers. Elder Hammerthynn had a guest that required his immediate attention, Duncan said.

Viv let her mind wander a moment as she watched the Elder Jameson at the door. His graying reddish brown hair was swept back like Brig’s, although a little longer as it brushed the nape of his neck. He was dressed in Piper BDU trousers that were a soft camo blue and black boots, his black Under Armor short sleeve was tight against the muscles of his arms and across the breadth of his shoulders. Viv gulped as she considered what the Elder looked like naked for the first time. Ever. Mentally she shivered. There had to be some sort of limit and she kicked her imagination for its insolence.

Duncan turned back to Vivienne and no doubt saw the sudden blush on her face. “Something wrong?”

“Absolutely not,” Viv said immediately and gulped.



Vigo Hammerthynn was a soft-spoken man. He inspired dedication, instilled fear, and didn't need a loud voice to command. At one hundred and forty three years old, Vigo led the Hammerthynn family, which stretched throughout the globe, and with Elder Duncan Jameson, commanded and assisted in training the Piper packs that protected their family's Alphas including *The Alpha*. He was cold, unfeeling, remorseless, and wrapped around Vivienne Sena's finger. So when he was notified of her arrival at the Glenveagh Pack, he dropped everything and greeted his adoptive daughter with all the love and adoration a father had for his daughter. However, this was done in the privacy of his office without prying eyes from the Greater Pack.

Quickly he walked to his chambers, dismissing the three Pipers for several hours; he pushed into his office and saw Vivienne talking to Duncan. She turned and looked at him, her smile wide and happy. For a moment he forgot his brother-in-law was in the room and he met Vivienne in the middle of the room, gathering her up into his bear like arms and hugging her tightly.

"Viv! It is so good to see you," he whispered as he kissed her on the cheek, making her laugh softly. He gently lowered her to the ground and she put her hands on his chest, looking at him with her large, brown eyes.

"Vigo," she whispered. With Duncan in the room Vigo didn't think she would have called him father, but the warmth of her voice was more telling than words. "I've missed you."

“I’ve missed you, too. What happened back the US? Why are you here?” Vigo inhaled deeply, tasting her scent when something struck him as odd. “Are you ok?” Her scent had changed slightly, not necessarily from outside contaminating scents that were still clinging to her, but its under notes were different. He felt his hackles rise in concern.

“No I’m fine. I left in a hurry because this couldn’t wait. I needed to see you and Elder Jameson now before your sons stopped me.”

Duncan noticeably sighed and stepped closer to them. “Stop you from doing what?”

“What are you doing that Hammer and the Commander would need to stop you? I’ve sent no word for you to do anything outside of the Alpha’s Pipers,” Vigo said, releasing his hold on Vivienne and crossing his arms.

“I’ve been looking into some inconsistencies, but let me finish before you react.”

Vigo looked down at his daughter and then flicked a look over at Duncan who was already ahead of him. Something had happened since they had talked to her last, which was less than three weeks earlier. It was serious enough for her to leave the Alpha’s Den instead of waiting seven days for Duncan and him to head stateside. So important that their sons, the Beta and Alpha’s Piper Commander, had already told her to cease and desist.

“What’s on your mind, Viv?” Vigo asked cautiously.



## *Chapter 11*

Simon elected to stay in Dungloe, not wanting to intrude on the werewolves' territory and cause an international incident. When the Ghost returned, he dismissed the driver and considered taking it to Glenveagh himself, but as the sun dipped slowly down behind the mountains in the distance, he decided to run in the darkness instead.

The wait for twilight had given him enough time for the shipment of clothes and equipment they might need to come from Dublin. Changing into dark clothing and hiking boots, Simon made his way out of Dungloe and headed northwest through the trees using his exceptional speed. He was on the border of the park within a quarter of an hour. The park stretched out for miles with deep green grass, flowering bushes and dense shrubs. The forest was thin on this part of the country, but Simon decided to use the cover for what it was worth. Slowly, he hiked across the uneven land and went deep into the forest.

The smell of lavender grew the stronger as he hiked into the forest. The trees were thick oaks of varying species, but he mostly encountered old box oak. Ireland was as familiar to him

as British soil, but then Ellis was from Scotland though she chose to stay away from this part of Europe as much as possible. He thought of Ellis more now that Vivienne wasn't around to talk to, but he hadn't said much to her since they boarded the jet. Being quiet by nature, Simon fell into the silence easily.

The brochures for the park he found in Dungloe were informative enough to give him an idea on where the werewolf compound might be. Forty one thousand acres of trails and purple moor grass filled the national park. As the night descended the creatures of the forest had come out and with camping not being permitted, Simon was able to navigate throughout the area with little concern for cover. The path took him directly east and up into the highlands, through Dunlewy Far and into the Gartan Mountains that overlooked the Glenveagh castle. The werewolves were hidden in plain sight. The fog rolled in over the lakes from the hills and Simon took a moment to listen to his surroundings since it behooved him not to cross paths with any potential werewolf patrols. He had no idea how long Vivienne would be, but he didn't want to count on her vouching for his presence if he didn't have to, so he employed his subterfuge and silently stalked through the highlands until it dipped back down into a valley and something caught his attention.



“You want to do what? With who?” Duncan was aghast. “You can't possibly be serious. Hammer and my son were right to

tell you to mind your own business, Vivienne.”

Vigo watched his daughter with a cold eye, unable to reign in the harshness of his words. “Not only did your Beta tell you to withdraw from this...ridiculous quest, but now I’m telling you, Vivienne. You do not know what you’re dealing with, nor do you have permission to look into the family history.”

“You’ll find no help from my family, Vivienne. You should be ashamed of yourself – this type of disrespect. Jesus,” Duncan snarled.

“You’re not even curious that no one can remember the actual event?”

“Why are you bothering with this? With that filth?” Vigo spit the word out as if it was bitter tasting in his mouth. “He’s using you and you’re allowing it. I raised you better than that. You can get yourself hurt.” The moment Vigo said it, he regretted it. Vivienne of all people was no damsel in distress and he had never treated her as such. Either she survived living in his world or she didn’t and he would silently mourn her death. It was always as simple as that.

Viv looked at him, her face expressionless up until he warned her. “This from the man who severed my spine to teach me a lesson? Vigo, *you* should know better. I’m well aware of the dangerous situation I’m in, but I’m not incapable of handling this or anything. *You* know this.”

Duncan turned his back to Vivienne and spoke directly to Vigo. “Don’t let her manipulate you again, Vig.”

Vigo took a step closer to his best friend and brother-in-law and sneered into his face. “You show me the respect I’m due, Duncan. I’m not about to let my daughter go traipsing across the northern hemisphere, looking into our family history. There’s nothing there,” Vigo said and all at once he was confused. Was there nothing there? He held his ground with his friend as Duncan shook his head and turned to leave.

Reaching the door, Duncan turned back and pointed at Vivienne. “I’ve never begrudged Vigo needing something to love after my sister died, but this is the first time I’ve seen you use that love for something that doesn’t benefit the families. You betray the families, Vivienne, you’ll have me to deal with. You break Vigo’s heart...that’s on you.” And with that, Duncan exited, slamming the door.

Vigo watched Vivienne’s face as Duncan threatened her for the first and last time. He knew his friend – Duncan was not a man of unnecessary violence, but he held his family closer than the air he breathed and the few true friends Duncan cared for had his back till the day he died. Vigo had no doubt that if Vivienne slipped up just once, it would be her last time doing it.

“Barguzin,” Vigo said with finality. His daughter looked at him, her eyes shocked. “In the Baikal Mountains, you’ll find the wolf.” Vigo shut his eyes, the pain in his head growing painfully.

“Ask for what?”

Vigo felt his hackles twitch, fighting the swelling ache as it

punished him. “одинокый волк. Head north and ask for him. They’ll tell you how to find him.” Vigo grabbed Vivienne’s arms, squeezing them as he struggled to tell her quickly what he needed her to know. “Diego is here, get what you need and go quietly.”

His daughter looked at him with startled eyes but nodded silently. Vigo could see his grip was hurting her as her eyes began to squeeze shut with a grimace, but he needed her to understand. “What happens from this point on – I cannot help you. It’s not that I don’t want to, I just...can’t.” Vigo felt his head begin to pound, the pain reaching up from his neck to the center of his head.

Vigo’s eye pleaded with her as she watched his body physically strain against what he was telling her. His skin paled and he seemed to grow older. “No, no, you’re right. I won’t go,” Vivienne said cautiously, her eyes on her father. “This isn’t my fight. I’m sorry,” pulling her arms slowly away from his grip and hugging him tightly.

Viv pressed her face against her father’s chest. She felt a shudder pass through his body as he sighed with relief. The more she considered Simon’s theory of the *Blood Memory*, the fact that someone might have faked it, thereby controlling generations of two powerful families within the pack, the more frightened she became. Vigo withered from the strong Alpha male in her life to a frail old man right in front of her. This wasn’t the man she knew; who raised her. If figuring out why this happened to the families meant putting herself at



considerable risk, it was worth it for her father and Brig.

Vigo's hands hovered over Vivienne as the mammoth sized migraine that was threatening to kill him began to subside. Wrapping his arms around his daughter, he hugged her tightly. "That's my girl," he whispered into her hair. "That's my girl."



Abran Diego was a Piper. He was born in 1933 as the illegitimate son of Ángel Herrera Oria, Spanish journalist and inevitably the co-founder of the Propagandists Catholic National Association in Spain. Despite his rather tumultuous conception and family, Diego's maternal heritage had been part of the Greater Pack dating back to the 1300's. His personal views were his own, but had been known to label himself as an atheist, much to his biological father's dismay.

Standing six foot three, Diego had risen in the ranks of the Pipers, and although hailing from southern Spain, recently relocated to Canberra, Australia, the previous Alpha's home base, and the Elder families research and development facility. He had shoulder length black hair, sad eyes that drooped in the corners, and old acne scarred facial features.

He was surprised to see Vivienne as she walked into the Glenveagh R&D facility with Elder Hammerthynn. They had met just recently at the Alpha's home compound when he introduced the Therian-weave body armor for the Pipers.

"Vivienne? You're here?" Diego smiled and held his hand

out to her. Vivienne took it and kissed him on the cheek. “Is there something wrong?”

Vivienne shook her head with a polite smile. “I was hoping to get outfitted with whatever Therian-weave you have here.”

Diego smiled and his eyes passed over the Elder’s pale and stoic face. Nodding to the Elder, Diego took a step back and turned toward one of the back shelves of the large room. There were steel shelves on each rectangular wall stacked high with equipment: weapons, Piper gear, and the experimental Therian-weave prototypes. He pulled one off the shelf and shook it out for Vivienne.

“This is another prototype of the Therian-weave,” he said handling the diamond weave designed one piece. It was a dull gray and the material felt tacky to the touch.

“This isn’t like the new gear you gave the Alpha’s Pipers,” Vivienne said.

“No, Canberra R&D forwarded this along to the Elders to test out on your replacements. This is camouflage....” Diego stopped as Vivienne pulled off her black jacket and began peeling off her clothes.

The Elder turned toward the door and looked nervously at it. Looking back at Vivienne, Diego was surprised to see her shimmying her blue jeans down as she kicked off her shoes. Clearing his throat, he averted his eyes as she stripped naked and took the prototype Therian-weave from him.

“Same memory mold but enhanced level V Kevlar body

armor protection. This prototype's weave naturally changes with its wearer's surroundings." Once Vivienne pulled on the outfit, its thin material molded to her shape as the blue version she had been given back at the Den. Why she didn't have it with her now was odd, but nothing Vivienne did was normal, he noticed. She was there in the presence of the Elder so Diego had no doubts about giving her the prototype.

"Come," he said, guiding her to an upright section of wall on a mounting that was covered in desert camouflage. Vivienne stood in front of it and the weave immediately shifted, duplicating the pattern.

"Shut the front door," she laughed holding her arms up and watched as the weave seemingly quivered on her body. "This will duplicate any type of surroundings?"

"It's been successful in trials. What do you need it to replicate?"

"Snow?"

"Of course. It also adjusts to temperature by controlling core body temp. Venting or retaining." Diego grabbed a pair of gloves and boots. "These are also thinner than the version you have. The boots provide traction but are whisper thin. You can wear them like socks. The gloves – same thing."

"Nicely done, Diego."

"Thank Sergeant Hammond; he helped design this new version. I was preparing to send him a shipment with the Elders or will you be taking them back?" The young sergeant

preferred that Diego call him ‘Charlie’ but the Piper deserved more respect than that, being integral in almost all R&D creations concerning Piper safety. Diego hoped to have the sergeant come onto his development team in Canberra, but once a field Piper, always a field Piper.

“No, go ahead and send them along. I’m not headed back just yet.”

“You’ll be going with the Elders then?” Diego watched as Elder Hammerthynn turned back and looked at him, his eyes cutting off the discussion as Vivienne smiled. “Of course. Let me know how this prototype works out for you. Oh, one more thing.” Diego picked up a savage looking knife and turned toward her, jabbing it toward her stomach.

Vivienne reacted and grabbed his wrist before he got within a foot of her and put Diego down on the ground. Diego felt his shoulder threaten to dislocate and his radius splinter when he called out to her.

“Wait wait-! I’m just showing you the piercing resistance. It won’t hurt you,” he said, grunting through the pain.

“Oh shit, I’m sorry Diego. Warn a girl first,” she said, immediately letting his arm go and helping him off his knees. Slowly Diego rose and held his hands up with the knife, then moved the point of the weapon toward her stomach and gently pressed until Vivienne was forced to take a step back. “Oh my,” she said. “That is sweet sauce.”

“Yes...sweet...sauce,” Diego replied, smiling. “Was there

anything else you needed?"

Elder Hammerthynn cleared his throat and Vivienne turned toward him. "I'll be outside," the Elder said.

Vivienne nodded and looked back at Diego, but waited for the Elder to leave before speaking. "Do you have anything for mountain climbing?" Her smile was sweet and her request spoken in the tone of a child asking for a treat.

Diego shrugged. "Anything you need."



Vivienne exited the door of the R&D section and shook hands with Diego. Her things would be waiting for her at Donegal airport. Her father fell in step with her as he took her arm and guided her out of the building.

"You should go now," Vigo said, pushing open the door that led out to the back end of the property. They had managed to nestle the compound up high into the mountains away from any hikers and deep into the trees. The only way in was either by wolf form or with experienced hiking abilities. They managed for decades to stay hidden in the shadow of the mountain but kept their complement of Pipers down to a minimum while being ideal to train on the vicious terrain.

Viv grabbed her father's chest and pulled him close, hugging him for what painfully felt like the last time. "I'm going home, so don't worry."

"I never worry about you, Viv," he said with a rare smile, holding her waist with his large hands.

“You should. I get into all sorts of trouble.” Viv cupped Vigo’s face and felt a mixture of fatherly love and admiration for the one constant in her life. He had been her Alpha, her father, and now her conspirator. She hoped it wasn’t in vain. “I’m going to be stopping by to pay my respects.”

Vigo’s face drained of beaming love. His eye squeezed shut and his face crumbled as he whispered quietly, “It’s not how I want to remember her, baby. I...can’t.”

Viv’s heart broke as she watched her father’s misery surface and kill him all over again. It had been some time since they had been at the Glenveagh compound together, but when they were, she asked out of respect. It wouldn’t have been right if she didn’t. Dropping her right hand off his chest, she held it up in front of her and her father did the same.

“Like father.”

Vigo smiled as his expression wavered from broken to indifferent, but he touched her hand with his left and leaned in to kiss her on the forehead. “Like daughter. Always.” Pulling back, he looked at her as she entwined his fingers with hers. “Forgive me?”

“All right, but just this once,” she said, giving him a wry grin. Stepping away from him, Vivienne slipped off her jacket and tucked it into the strapped rucksack on her back that Diego had given her. It molded around the material and then compressed it. Modern technology, she thought. Touching her lips with her fingers, she blew a kiss to her father and turned toward the edge of the clearing, shifting into her wolf form as

she launched herself into the trees with the image of her noble father on the verge of tears burned into her mind.



## *Chapter 12*

Simon moved quietly down the opposite side of the highlands and knelt down, looking at the lone tablet that jutted out of the ground overlooking the valley below. Inhaling deeply, he could smell the thick lavender that grew in-between the purple moor grass. The valley was filled with the soft scent. Reaching out, he touched the stone and wiped the front of it, revealing its true nature.

A tombstone.

Pulling his right glove off, Simon knelt closer and wiped the dirt and weeds that grew around the face of the tablet. The air swelled with lavender and it overwhelmed his senses as he read the faded engraving.

Emma Magdalene Jameson Hammerthynn

Beloved Sister, Mother, and Wife

1861 – 1890

Simon knelt on one knee and leaned forward as he cleared the caked dirt from the tablet, digging it out of the engraving. Looking around he saw no other tombstone and with great curiosity he looked back at the tablet, never hearing the wolf



behind him until its soft heartbeat startled him into turning swiftly.

He immediately recognized the dark brown mask and chocolate body. Vivienne was standing in wolf form directly behind him; her gold-brown eyes watching him curiously as her nose twitched minutely.

“Jesus, Vivienne,” Simon muttered, settling back down on his knee. Giving her a strange look, he pointed at the material covering part of her fur. “What are you wearing?”

Vivienne looked at him, flicking her ears and somewhat glaring at him.

“Right,” Simon said, clearing his throat with an embarrassed laugh. It wasn’t as if she could answer him in that form. The material stretched across her wolf body shimmered against the darkness and it made him realize why he didn’t see her coming up before when he glanced up to look for more tombstones. The colors shifted with her surroundings and successfully camouflaged her. He reached out to touch her slowly, holding his hand out under her nose as if she were really a strange dog. Vivienne nudged him with her nose and squeezed both eyes closed as she moved toward his hand and let him touch the material across her chest.

Simon ran his hand down her chest in between the straps of a small square pouch that was nestled tightly onto her, watching as the camouflage tried to mimic his skin but flickered back to the damp grass color. Enthralled, he picked at it as Vivienne opened her mouth and began to pant out of

boredom it seemed. Pulling his hand back, Vivienne settled down onto her haunches and looked at him, not a foot away. Her brown eyes squeezed shut again as he reached up and put his hand behind her ear and scratched. Smiling, Simon brought both hands up and scratched behind her ears, making her head twist to the right. Vivienne shook her fur and licked the side of his face, making him reel back and grunt at the sloppy kiss.

“Disgusting,” Simon said, wiping at the saliva on his chin as Vivienne smiled her wolf smile and flicked her ears at him. Wiping his hands on his pants, he looked back at the tombstone. “So who is this?” Shaking his head, he rephrased his question. “Is this your father’s wife?”

Vivienne barked softly at him, bobbing her head, which he took as an affirmative.

“Doesn’t look like anyone comes here.”

Vivienne barked again and then stood, moving past the tombstone and heading west. She turned and looked at him, barking three times and moving slowly. Apparently she was ready to go, so Simon cleared away the rest of the weeds in front of the tombstone and stood slowly. With a final look in the area, down at the lavender field in the valley, Simon ran to catch up with Vivienne who broke out into a speedy run and together they ran back to Dungloe.

Silently they crossed Glenveagh Park and traversed through the rocky hills until they reached the small village. Simon stepped into the small Inn they planned on staying in and saw

that everyone had called it a night. With a wave to the innkeeper who peeked from his apartment beyond the front desk, Simon waited until he retreated back to let Vivienne in, still in wolf form. Quietly they ascended the steps to their room and entered.

Simon settled onto the bed, undoing his boots as Vivienne shifted back to her human form. He paused, watching the transformation with intrigued eyes until she was knelt down on the ground, breathing deeply.

“That looks like it hurts.”

“I would have done it earlier, but it’s hard to switch back and forth so quickly, at my age, at least. I was lucky I managed it after that redheaded bitch’s attack.”

“So the older you are, the easier it is? It’s the same for us with our abilities.”

“Some of us can halt the transformation but utilize the strength of the wolf.” Simon raised his eyebrows, clearly impressed. “Yeah it’s handy,” she added as she undid the strapped pack and released the compression, pulling out her jacket and clothes.

The Inn’s rooms were not spacious; they weren’t even suites, so they had to make do with the double bed. Simon stayed on the bed and marveled at the tightness of the new gray suit she was wearing. The pattern was a small diamond weave that looked painted on, accenting the curves of her breasts, the slope of her back and even the defined muscles of her thighs.

She might as well have been naked. It didn't bother her in the least and it made him realize she didn't view him as a viable sexual partner of any type. Vivienne even stretched her body without a hint of embarrassment. Sadly, he sighed and looked away.

"We need to leave. Now," she said grabbing her clothes.

"All right," he said standing. He began to change his clothes, back to his trousers and dress shirt, when Vivienne pulled her jeans on. "Did your father tell you anything worthwhile?"

"Plenty. We need to head northeast."

Simon pulled on his trousers and gave her a strange look. "Where? To Russia?"

"Baikal Mountains."

"Siberia? We're going to Siberia? What's there?" he asked incredulously as he picked up his shirt and slipped it on.

Vivienne finished dressing quickly and then leaned up against the lone desk in the room. With her hands behind her, she watched as Simon dressed. He felt her eyes on him but ignored it.

"одинокий волк," she said easily in Russian.

Simon narrowed his eyes as he buttoned his shirt. "Lone Wolf. That's it? That's all he told you? That and somewhere in central Siberia?"

"Oh you know Russian?"

Simon dropped his arms and looked at her. "I'm over fifteen

hundred years old, Vivienne. You'd think I'd pick up a language or two?"

Shrugging, she smiled. "We need to leave now, though. Elder Jameson has undoubtedly told Hammer and the Commander of the Pipers. We need to stay ahead of them."

"Would they come all this way to try and stop you?"

"Most definitely."

Tucking in his shirt, he located his shoes and finished dressing, gathering up any loose clothing into a black bag. "I don't understand why they're so against you looking into it."

Vivienne shook her head. "I don't know, but Vigo seemed to be physically struggling with telling me just the name of the village."

If it didn't sound like a planted memory before, it definitely did now. "That sounds a little like an imprinted resistance against questioning the memory, along with the memory itself. That's extremely hard to do and definitely done by someone old."

"And my great love for you folks grows even more," Vivienne said with a bland look.

"Folks," Simon repeated with an insulted glare as he shouldered the bag and opened the door. "Let's go."



## Chapter 13

“She’s at Glenveagh,” Lewis said quietly, looking up at the other Pipers hovering over his console. Charlie, Red, and Marthinus all looked at each other.

“Is her phone on?” Charlie asked as he pulled his own phone out.

“No,” Lewis said with vague finality.

“Well then how-?”

Lewis pointed at his screen and the incoming email from the Elder Jameson to the team. “That’s from the Elders.”

“She’s looking into the *Blood Memory*,” Marthinus said, wiping his mouth with his hands. “This is bad.”

“No shit,” Red mumbled. “So very, very bad. Did you find out who owns that Hanger?”

Lewis shook his head, “No-name Company owns Hanger 21, I tried everything.”

“Hanger 21 at Merrill Airfield?” Marthinus had been brought in only by chance, but his resources were unprecedented within the city and Charlie needed more

information regarding who was providing her transportation.

Charlie and the other Pipers looked at Marthinus. “Yeah, she flew out in a corporate jet listed to that hanger.”

Marthinus sighed and leaned over Lewis, gaining access to an outside server and pulled up the flight logs. “That’s my corporate jet. She’s with Simon.”

Red’s jaw dropped. “You have a jet?”

Charlie reached out and hit Red on the arm, silencing him.

“What the fuck did you men do?”

The Pipers looked up and standing behind them was their Commander, Brig Jameson. With steely blue eyes, his hands balled into fists as he stepped up to the monitor and read the information.

Charlie spoke up first, “It was my fault, sir. I had no idea when she asked me to get her passport.”

The Commander turned to Charlie and looked down at his sergeant from his six foot four stature. “You helped her leave the country? With Huntington?” Brig grabbed Charlie’s collar and twisted the material, pulling the young man up into his face so he was hair’s breadth away. Charlie turned his face and stared past his Commander’s angry glare.

“I have Elder Jameson asking me why we let her show up in Glenveagh to speak to Elder Hammerthynn about the *Blood Memory*. My *father* wants to know what is going on here.” Pushing back on Charlie’s chest, his sergeant fell against Red,

but held his ground, his own anger flushing into his face. “Would you gentlemen care to explain before the Beta gets down here?”

Just then the door flew open and Iov ‘Hammer’ Hammerthynn, six foot five and three hundred and forty pounds, nearly took the door off its hinges. With uncharacteristic emotion, Hammer stepped into the Situation room and pulled Marthinus off his perch on top of the computer console and nearly lifted him off the ground.

“She’s with Huntington, Marthinus,” Hammer said, his voice rumbling like thunder. “Please tell me why I shouldn’t rip someone’s head off and shit down their throat for letting her walk out of here?”

“Sir, we weren’t under orders to keep her at the Den,” Charlie said, his voice on edge.

Hammer looked at Brig who looked as if he was going to explode. Everyone was aware of Charlie’s affection for Vivienne, even if she wasn’t completely aware of it herself. He waited for Brig to give the sergeant a serious dressing down, but Brig had other things in mind.

Pointing at Lewis, he barked out commands. “Get the Beta and I on a plane out within the hour.” Lewis immediately turned and called up the necessary information without being told twice. “Prep for arctic and high elevations and have it on the plane with us. Now.” The rest of the Pipers moved, save for Charlie who stood and looked at the Commander. Brig glared at his sergeant and was half a second away from breaking his



jaw off his face.

“Sergeant,” he said to Charlie who stood at attention. “Find the LT and don’t even bother trying to contact her. Do you understand me?”

“Aye, sir – “Charlie replied with hard eyes.

“Let’s go,” he said to Hammer and headed topside to the Den’s main floor.

“Where?” Hammer asked.

“Russia. She’s on her way to Baikal,” Brig called over his shoulder.

Hammer gave the sergeant a final look and then let go of Marthinus, setting him up against the console with a thud. Following his cousin, Hammer took the steps up three at a time and met Brig on the second floor level where their rooms were located.

“What’s in Baikal now?” Brig asked, turning the corners swiftly. “Is there family up there?”

“Not for decades,” Hammer replied, equally confounded. “Why Baikal?”

Brig’s anger left his face for a moment and he turned to stop his cousin. “Your father told her to go there.”

“Vigo did? Why would he help her?” Hammer’s confusion colored his face as he tried to understand what his father had done.

“There’s something else. My father said Vigo may have had

a stroke, but they're checking him out now." Hammer reached out and grabbed his cousin's shirt, his startled reaction surprising even Brig. "He's fine, Hams, he's ok. They found him outside, unconscious." Brig put his hands on Hammer's shoulders and squeezed them gently. "You know your father, he's an old dog. It'll take a lot more than that to take him out. Just get your stuff and let's go."

Hammer nodded and turned away at the end of the hall and walked to his apartment that he shared with his fiancée. Brig turned in the opposite direction and jogged quickly down the hall to his own. Walking in he was painfully aware that it didn't feel like home to him anymore, at least not since he had been spending every night with Vivienne in her guest quarters. Their meetings were always clandestine and their relationship secret. He met her the day before she had presented herself to the Alpha, coming in place of the Elder Hammerthynn to evaluate the Pipers and its direct leadership due to Brig's official complaint regarding Hammerthynn's behavior, granted it was sixty years prior. His sense of honor took precedence over his common sense when Hammer revealed, with misplaced pride, that the Alpha was, in fact, his son, not the old Alpha's. Hammer's short-lived indiscretion with the Alpha's mother produced a child, but Hammer had no idea.

As Brig gathered a few things into a small bag, he pushed the thoughts out of his mind. Vivienne had ignored a direct command from the Beta and himself, but as annoyed as he was with his Pipers helping Viv, he still missed her presence.

She had promised once that she'd never leave unless he was with her. Now not only was she gone, but out of the continental US with the main subject of his and Hammer's family's *Blood Memory*. His hackles immediately rose as he thought of Viv in close proximity with Huntington. If he touched her, Brig promised he'd kill him with his bare hands.

Shouldering his bag, he gave the apartment a final look and exited to get Hammer and head to the airfield to get Vivienne back.



Viv watched as Simon spoke to his pilot as they stood on the runway going over the equipment that they both acquired. Viv was sorting it all, laying it on the ground and repacking what was necessary when he walked back to her.

“Runway 14/32 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.”

Viv snorted. “Mongolia? That’s the quickest?”

“It’s either that or Yemelyanovo, Siberia and about 700 miles of mountainous terrain.”

Viv knelt down and secured the straps of one of the packs and nodded. “Mongolia it is. Be forewarned, I do not like their beef.”

“Neither do I,” Simon said with a quick wink to which Viv rolled her eyes. “Ready when you are then.”

“Help me with that pack then. It’s yours.” Viv pointed to the rucksack next to the one she was busy securing when he began

poking through it, pulling things out. “Aw come on, I just packed that.”

“I don’t need half the things you’ve put in here.” Simon shrugged, pulling out extra blankets and hiking equipment. He lifted a thin hose connected to a slim bladder and made a face.

“That’s an aqua lung. About an hour’s worth of air.”

He tossed it. “Don’t need it.”

Viv sighed and looked at her pack. “Ok fine, you get to carry mine then.”

Simon sorted a few things but discarded quite a bit before he wrapped the rucksack up tightly and pulled the strap over his shoulder. “What can that suit you’re wearing do for you? I mean besides accent every single curve on your body.”

“Completely unnecessary.”

“Yeah but it does give you quite a lift in all the right places,” Simon grinned reaching out to pull a bit of the Therian-weave material from under her button up shirt. Smacking his hand away, he grinned at her.

“So you’re in a better mood now?”

“As compared to when?” Simon began sorting through her pack.

“When you were all quiet-sauce after we landed.”

He gave her a strange look. “You’re not from America, correct?”

“Correct, I am not.” Viv smirked at his skilled maneuvering of subjects.

“How did you pick up the vernacular so quickly then? I don’t know what you’re saying half the time with the rather colorful slang you use.”

“Just something we were taught. Immersing ourselves into whatever culture we’re in makes the assimilation easier. Also, I thought it would be easier to understand me using American slang rather than Australian. You’re doing the same thing.”

“I only use slang when you’re irritating me.”

Viv slowly grinned at Simon, letting the chuckle in her chest roll out into a full guffaw. “I irritate you? Does this mean you’ll stop trying to have sex with me?” Simon’s only reply was to give her that smoldering look and grin again, making her feel uncomfortable. Viv pointed at him and grumbled, “I swear I will pop you in the mouth.”

“All that slang with the mixed signals? How am I supposed to know?” Simon said feigning shock.

Rolling her eyes, Viv changed the subject back to her original thought. “You were extremely quiet. I wasn’t sure if I had said something.”

“You’re checking to see if you hurt my feelings?”

“Shutting a guy down does horrible things to their ego. So I’ve heard.”

“Again, the slang you use.”

“You understand what I’m saying. I’m just curious.”

“If you’re concerned about my feelings, does this mean I can call you Viv?”

“It is seriously going to kill you to answer one question.”

“It might,” he replied. His hazel eyes narrowed at her but his grin made up for the lack of sincerity in his voice. He overtly looked at her as he knelt on the tarmac and licked his bottom lip, chewing on it absently.

Sighing dramatically, Viv pointed at her rucksack and said, “My suit and natural resistance will help with the temperature, but I do need the hiking equipment.”

“Who’s avoiding now?” he mumbled under his breath as he tossed a few things out and secured the straps of her rucksack and shouldered that along with his meager one. “All right then. We’re off.”

Vivienne rose slowly only after putting the tossed items into another sack and handed it to one of the airport employees on the tarmac. Wiping the dirt off her jeans, she walked toward the jet and climbed in quickly. Simon was already seated in the same Captain’s chair across from the couch and had stowed away their rucksacks. He settled into the chair and laid his head back.

Viv was glad to have a pair of sneakers on, although they were not quite Keds, they were practically the same style, just called Kads. She settled into the captain’s chair across from Simon and buckled her seatbelt.

“How long is this flight?”

With his eyes closed, Simon replied, “It’s twenty five hundred miles. Our pilot said approximately five hours or so though with the wind current.”

As soon as Viv buckled her seatbelt, the plane began to taxi out the single runway. “I’m hitting the hay then.” Simon pointed in the direction of the bed but kept his eyes closed. “Are you sure you don’t want it?”

“I’m happy to share it,” he said, a small grin played on his lips.

“Ok, seriously. If I let you call me Viv, will you stop with the innuendos?”

Simon rolled his head to the side and opened his eyes. “You should be flattered.”

“I’m not. You only want to sleep with me because I don’t want to sleep with you. And saying that out loud just sounds sad.”

“Now you’re flattering yourself.”

“Am I wrong?”

“Every time I say something suggestive, your heart skips a beat. Stop acting like you like it and I’ll stop.” He winked at her before finally closing his eyes, this time keeping them shut.

The plane’s engines roared as they sped down the runway, and as the nose lifted, Viv maintained her glare at Simon. They were silent until the plane leveled off, and then Viv undid

her buckle and moved past him toward the back behind another separating section of wall. The bed was queen-sized and ready made with soft contrasting light and dark silk with leaf shaped embroidery. Kicking off her shoes, she leaned back to see Simon still sitting back in his chair with his eyes closed. Moving further in, she undressed, taking her Therian-weave off and began poking around the cabinets, finding towels and a stand up shower the size of her own back in Canberra. Stepping in, Viv washed off the past two days and considered what would happen next.

She had seven days to get to Siberia and back to the United States before the Elders arrived, and even less time before Brig and Hammer took it upon themselves to come after her, if they hadn't already. Her father's reaction to giving the vaguest of information was startling and it made her wonder if the resistance to the inquiries she was making was part of the *Blood Memory* like Simon suggested. Pressing her head up against the glass, the drone of the plane made her tired and almost a little woozy. Quickly finishing her shower, she stepped out and covered herself with the towel until she could get another look to see if Simon was still napping.

Vampire in check, Viv dried off quickly and poked around some of the bags that had been deposited in the back walk in closet. There were two different sets of clothing: one for her and one for Simon. Sorting through them, she found fresh underwear and a pullover that was so soft that it distracted her from dressing. It was a deep red cashmere sweater with a boat neck cut and long sleeves. She stared at it for a few moments



before finally slipping it on. Never in her life had she felt something so decadent and luxurious. The cashmere slid over her naked skin and she let the towel drop to the ground. The pullover was long and it fit her almost like a mini dress with the sleeves extending past her hands as well.

“Oh my pickles,” she purred happily, rubbing her arms and loving every second of it. Viv found a hairbrush and sat on the bed. She ran the brush through her wet hair and was just absolutely giggly over the cashmere. The shirt fell to just above her mid thigh, but she rubbed it against her skin and thought of Brig, imagining his hands touching her. Suddenly she let out a sad sigh and surprised herself by crying. Pulling the sheets down on the bed, Viv curled up into a ball and tried not to worry about returning to the Greater Pack and Brig’s response to her leaving without saying a word to him. Instead she focused on the soft rumbling of the jet’s engines, letting them lull her to sleep.



It had been several days since Simon had actually slept, not that he needed it, but he did enjoy being able to shut down and let his mind wander. Sleep wasn’t entirely recharging as it was enjoyable, so Simon kept his eyes closed and listened to Vivienne as she undressed and showered. He tried imagining the clinging suit peeling off her body and languished in the sound of water running down her skin as the low roar of the engines relaxed him into the chair.

The rustle of bags caught his attention again as Vivienne

apparently found the fresh clothing that he had brought in for them. Her breathing was steady and her heart was strong with only subtle fluttering from what had to be an undiagnosed heart murmur, but she didn't seem concerned with it in the least and he was fairly certain her body was healthy since he was unable to discern any other problems. A slight gasp and escalating heartbeat made him listen more intently, wondering what she had found. Her rather odd exclamation made him smile slowly and the unmistakable movement of cashmere flooded his ears. Vivienne had found the red pullover and was taken with it. Cashmere was akin to a string of beautiful pearls – all women should experience the feel of it against their skin. Cashmere against the softness of a woman was painfully erotic and Simon was mesmerized by the sound of it touching Vivienne's.

Simon considered his obsession with having Vivienne. Was it because of her professed disinterest of him? Not once did she seem genuinely interested, despite what he said about her heartbeat skipping a beat when he directed his full attention at her. She was also a werewolf, the ultimate in forbidden fruit, and he was certain he had never been with one before, but the appeal of her blood, although undoubtedly putrid in taste, made his want for her grow. Vivienne smelled wonderful and his need to have her want him was undeniable. It was his ego he was trying to appease he decided when he heard the soft murmur of his name drift in from the back of the plane.

“Simon.”

Whipping his head to the side, Simon leaned toward it, wondering if it was his ego playing tricks with his mind. Looking down, he listened intently, hearing Vivienne on the bed, rustling the sheets. His curiosity piqued, he got up from the chair and moved quietly to the separating wall and poked his head into the room.

Vivienne was lying on the bed, curled up on the pillows, wearing nothing but the red cashmere that barely covered down to her mid thigh. Her brown legs were bare and her knees were pressed together but somehow were still incredibly inviting. The sleeves were too long and her fingers pulled at the material as she looked up at him, the collar dipping low on her chest, revealing the swell of her breasts. Simon opened his mouth to ask if she called him when she sat up and crawled toward him on her knees. The sweater draped seductively off her creamy and slightly bronzed shoulders. He felt his mouth literally water from wanting to taste her, but her sudden change in personality was almost off putting. Her lips glistened and were just begging to be kissed. She put her hands on his chest, running them up to his collar, mixing cashmere with the silk of his button up shirt and her fingers grabbed the material pulling him closer. Her hair smelled like the intense perfume of her scent and it wafted toward him as Vivienne parted her lips and smiled at him, confusing him even further. He could not help but look at her incredulously and it made her laugh.

The sound of it made him close his eyes, trying desperately to be always able to remember the tinkling happiness of the sound when he felt her warm breath on his neck and the firm

pressure of her lips touching him. His hands found her hips and he grabbed at her, finding the achingly soft cashmere. She brushed her hair against his chin as she kissed his neck softly, moving her lips down into his shirt, burning a trail to his collarbone.

Simon wanted her. All of her. But he especially wanted in her.

Grabbing the cashmere, he pulled her against his body and fully expected her to push away, to resist, but instead she pulled him back onto the bed and he willingly knelt onto it, crawling after her as she laid back. He hovered over her, completely confused but insanely aroused. She was lying back on her elbows, just smiling at him. He half ripped his shirt off, popping the buttons as he undressed quickly, his eyes still on her inviting smile when she did the unthinkable and leaned forward, touching the belt on his trousers. It stunned him into stillness, shocked as he watched her undo the belt and pull it out of the loops, throwing it onto the floor behind him. Her fingers undid the clasps and nimbly moved to the zipper, pulling it down. He was kneeling in front of her on the bed, completely stunned as she moved forward again and climbed up his body, her lips searching out his. The closer she moved toward him, the more stunned he was, waiting to feel her lips on his again but she stopped short and pursed her lips together.

“You can call me Viv now,” she whispered so close that he could feel her breath.

“Ok,” he said with absolutely no finesse. She dug her hands into his boxer briefs and grabbed him, making him gasp as she closed the distance with her lips and kissed him. The force of it was so strong that it shocked him awake in his chair.

Simon sat up in his chair with a strangled gasp. His hands were gripping the armrest with such strength that the material ripped. Confused, he shook his head and felt how extremely aroused he was, but realized he was still sitting in his captain’s chair. Looking around the room, his mouth gaping like a fish out of water as he tried to calm down from what was apparently an incredibly vivid dream of Vivienne. With a grimace, Simon sat forward and ran his hands over his face angrily. Taking a deep breath, he tried to calm his racing heart when Vivienne’s heartbeat began to pick up speed as well. Rising slowly, he took a step toward the back of the plane, hesitating while trying to calm every part of him down. The dream had been so vivid, but he should have realized what it was and just went at her instead of being shocked. Rolling his eyes, he walked to the back and poked his head in to see Vivienne laid out on the bed with the sheet covering her legs, but little else.

She was wearing the cashmere pullover and was curled into a ball facing away from him, sound asleep. He stood there, looking down at her with his hands on hips, angry with himself and still extremely aroused. The prudent thing would be to leave, he knew this, but as he debated the ill advised options with himself, he slowly sat down on the edge of the bed. Viv had fallen asleep without completely dressing and now with

the sheet pulled down, he was seeing more of her leg than in his dream and it did nothing for his arousal. Reaching out to pull the sheet up, his fingers grazed her skin and once again his want spiraled out of control. Gently he reached up and touched the soft cashmere, pressing it down against her hip and squeezing ever so slightly.

Vivienne stirred in her sleep but did not wake.

Simon paused, thinking about Vivienne's reaction when she woke and found him touching her, he just couldn't help himself. He moved his hand along the slope of her round hip, his lips parting as he felt his heart beating furiously just feeling her. She hummed in her sleep, much like before when they kissed, and he twisted his body closer to hers, moving up on the bed to be able to run his hand down the front of her thigh when she sighed a name.

“Brig.”

Simon stopped completely and pulled his hand back. Swallowing, he struggled with continuing to touch Vivienne, hopefully prodding her into something he'd thoroughly enjoy, but he realized she might absolutely regret. Turning away from her, Simon put his face in his hands and rubbed to the back of his neck, squeezing with his fingers.

It wasn't him she was dreaming about.

Simon rose from the bed slowly so not to wake Vivienne and went back to his chair in the main cabin.

Brig.

Whoever that was, he was someone special to Vivienne. Simon had known since their kiss there was someone else keeping her from partaking in Simon's offers, but putting a name to the phantom love was debilitating when the opportunity to finally have her, and he was fairly certain of his ability to rouse her out of sleep with his hands, arose and he just couldn't do it. Her devotion to this Brig character was familiar as well as disappointing. Love like that doesn't come around but once in a lifetime, and Simon knew what it felt like, especially how it felt when it was gone.

He had not questioned his decision to go back to Ellis and lose Carol for months. Life with Ellis was exhilarating and incredible, especially with their bond. His ability to know what she was feeling; to see the truths and the lies; to make love to her and actually be able to feel how much she loved it and him, it made their relationship stronger. But the fact that Ellis didn't care if he strayed to another woman's bed was disheartening. She knew it bothered him if she did, and as far as he knew she hadn't been with anyone else, but where was Ellis right then and why hadn't she even bothered to reach out to him?

Maybe for the same reason he hadn't reached out to her.

And Carol would have called.

He realized his incessant flirting with Vivienne wasn't out of sexual need but was done in hopes of tarnishing something she had and he squandered. Leaning forward, Simon hung his head and tried not to hate himself.



## *Chapter 14*

Her apartment in Canberra was a common locale in her dreams. She was sitting there again; the world colored with bland shades of gray and the air still. Only there was no quivering of color or scent of dry grass and oak trees. Sitting forward, Viv stood and walked across the small living room to the front door, opening it. It was a different sight than Canberra. It was the inside of her bedroom at the Den in the city, but within the shades of gray was one splash of bright color. Her bright red silk scarf was hanging out of her top dresser drawer, fluttering ever so slightly in the wake of the heater in the apartment. It was getting colder on the eastern seaboard of the US, dipping to near freezing, and the apartment adjusted itself to a comfy seventy degrees. Viv watched the piece of silk and reached out to touch it, disturbing it.

The scarf sighed, floating off the dresser and into her hands. She rarely wore the scarf, but it was such a beautiful deep shade of red, especially against the gray of her dream. Lifting it to her nose, she inhaled deeply and recognized the scent that clung to the material immediately.



Brig's scent was made up of acidic sweat, leather, and rich musk. The scarf released his scent and it radiated out, coloring her dream world, filling in the gray shades with rich and savory colors. Her entire apartment smelled like Brig, but it was her bed that held it the strongest. Standing next to it, Viv dropped the scarf onto the bed and the sheets immediately burst into color, spreading a rosy hue across the bed and up the walls. She climbed onto the king-sized bed and laid tummy down, curling up with the pillows, inhaling his scent. Her heart ached, she missed him so much. Even her subconscious needed his scent, impregnating the entire room with Brig's musky aroma.

But he wasn't there.

She had left in the wake of a heated argument with Brig and Hammer – both telling her to stop her inquiries and to mind her own business. Brig, of all people, acting oppressive and ordering her around, claimed it was for her own safety. She wondered if their immediate and angry reaction to her questions didn't affect their fathers as well; if they physically could not permit her to search into the *Blood Memory*. It made Simon's theory of mental manipulation all the more plausible, but it forced her to go with Simon without saying goodbye to Brig when she had promised she'd never leave without him.

Viv's bedroom began to quiver again, the color fading from its vibrant and lively colors, to the dismal gray that had been her life for so long. Even the red scarf faded into a sickly gray, falling to the floor in a puddle of silk. Her life without Brig

would be empty and lifeless. He wasn't there, but then neither was she.

Suddenly the scene shifted and Viv was lying on the bed in Simon's corporate jet, her cashmere red pullover sliding off her shoulder. Simon was there, running his hand up her hip, pressing the soft material onto her skin. With her back to him, Viv stared blankly at the wall, letting him touch her, his mouth on her shoulder, dragging his fangs down her back. But this wasn't what she wanted. It would never be what she wanted. She, at least, should have told Brig goodbye. Simon roughly pulled her onto her back and smiled at her, the tips of his fangs were shiny and bright as he leaned in to kiss her.

Viv shot up in the bed and pressed her back against the wall. She let out a strangled cry when Simon stepped into the back room with a concerned look.

"Wh-? Are you ok?"

Viv's face grimaced and she pushed herself back into the corner, tucking her legs underneath her.

"Yeah. I'm fine, yeah."

"Why are you crying?"

Viv touched her face and felt her stomach tense into a hard rock. Wiping at the tears, she felt another sob bubble up from her chest. "I should have told him goodbye." Fresh tears flooded her vision as Simon settled onto the bed slowly.

"Who?" Simon asked, shaking his head.

Viv covered her mouth and inhaled. She couldn't smell his scent anymore. Frantically Viv pulled at her hair and brought it up to her face, inhaling deeply but the less she smelled of Brig, the more upset she became.

“Oh god. I can't smell him anymore.”

It had only been two days, but she had spent the past three months at the Den, completely surrounded by Brig's musky, masculine scent. It had been a constant reminder of him, even when he wasn't near. Its three dimensional colors and fragrance had enthralled her from the very moment she had met him. It was the same for him – their scents were more than just alluring, they were addicted to one another.

Viv had first met Brig in the park reserve upon reaching the Greater Pack's new home-city in the United States. Their scents had crisscrossed along the park and when they met it was piss and vinegar. An outcast female and a huge Greater Pack red; both angry and claiming dominance and then something happened. His scent was as intoxicating to her as hers was to him. They came together as mates, unable to control the instant arousal. When she met Brig the next day, the very subject of her reason for being at the Alpha's Den as the Commander of the Pipers, their intense dislike over the situation culminated into a passionate, yet secret, love affair. He instantly intrigued Viv, and she knew she loved him the moment she saw him.

The core of their love was their scents and their insatiable passion for one another and now it was gone.

Viv began to cry harder, terrified of losing that scent. The despair was as painful as losing a limb, but the reality of potentially never being able to see him again was debilitating.



Simon watched as the resilient and charming Vivienne crumbled into a thousand pieces. Scents to him were distinct but not as encompassing as it must be to werewolves. It seemed to guide their lives, color their moments, and the loss of her apparent mate's scent was killing her. He honestly did not know what to say or do. Leaning forward, he reached out to Vivienne slowly. It was as if she didn't, or couldn't, see him sitting in front of her. He touched her hand and she looked at him with bloodshot eyes and her now pink nose. She came at him quickly, crawling into his lap and just...cried.

Her arms clung to him and nails dug into his shoulders. Her love for this "Brig" was so overwhelming that Simon felt his own heart ache for her pain and it surprised him. Despite her being dressed in nothing but the pullover, he felt absolutely no desire to take advantage of her turmoil. In fact, he felt disgusted for even thinking of it. Instead, he gently hugged her back as she dug her face into his neck. Turning his head, Simon inhaled deeply, tasting the scents in her hair and could only smell himself.



## *Chapter 15*

Brig was having a hard time focusing on Hammer. His cousin, best friend, and for all intents and purposes, his brother, was hurting. You'd never know it looking at Hammer, all six foot five of him, but Brig could see the pain and anguish on the other's face. Hammer's father, Vigo, was resting comfortably at the Glenveagh property, but that did not distract from the fact that Vivienne had caused Hammer's father pain. Brig loved Vivienne, but he wasn't sure if he could stop Hammer from hurting her for hurting their father; not that Hammer would ever admit that Vivienne was Vigo's adopted daughter. Hammerthynns did not have female children, certainly not outcast ones. Brig tried to be there for his cousin, but he was struggling with his own pain.

Viv had not only left without telling him, but she disobeyed a direct order after she had been forbidden to look into the families' *Blood Memory*. Something in him pierced his soul, telling him that looking into the memory would only cause pain, which ultimately it did.

Vigo Hammerthynn was Brig's uncle. Vigo had married Brig's aunt Emma, his father's youngest sister, and as far as

Brig could tell, had never gotten over her death. Hammer spoke very little, if at all, of his mother after she died when he was about eleven. Brig had been about seventeen at the time and even he saw the devastation it caused. He was certain Hammer could not bear his father dying now despite their estranged relationship.

Brig looked at Hammer from across the family's private jet cabin that had brought Vivienne to the United States. They were in the air within an hour of Brig's confrontation with the Pipers and would be in Ireland soon. Hammer wanted to go to his father instead of chasing after Vivienne; he needed to see his father. Brig would not deny his cousin that request, even if Brig's need to see Vivienne was as intense as it had ever been. Brig would drop Hammer off and then proceed to the Baikal Mountains, but he would still be almost a day behind.

Looking over at Hammer, Brig drummed his fingers once on the armrests. "Hammer?"

Hammer sat there, staring straight ahead with his forehead creased and a petrified sneer. Brig could see that his lone eye was unfocused. All Hammerthynns were missing their left eye. It was a ritualistic act done at the time of their gifting; their fathers would rip their eye out and then savagely bite their sons; the werewolf virus already present in their blood dormant until that moment. All Hammerthynns were male, as well. Hammer's son, the Alpha, was the first to not have the ritual done. He had been gifted by his mother's husband, who at the time everyone thought was the Alpha's father. The

young Alpha's most pronounced Hammerthynn trait was his eyes; gray and the exact same shade as Hammer's. It was Hammer's remaining eye that Brig looked into; he did not want to imagine what his cousin was thinking.

Brig checked his watch. They were within thirty minutes of Donegal airport. "Hammer?" he said again a little louder.

Hammer's eye focused and he looked at Brig. "What?"

"We're almost there. Thirty minutes."

Hammer blinked and looked confused. "Already?"

Brig nodded. Hammer had been sitting stoic in his chair the entire five-hour flight. "They're sending a Piper to meet us there."

"Fine." Hammer looked down at his hands and clasped them together.

Brig pursed his lips. He was as angry with Vivienne as Hammer, but for different reasons. If she was going to be allowed back on the Alpha's property, Brig had to start the smoothing out process now.

"I don't think Vivienne had anything to do with your father's condition – not directly," Brig said slowly.

Hammer looked up. "She is pretty, isn't she?"

"What?" Brig asked confused.

"Vivienne," Hammer said his voice void of emotion. "Beautiful. Charming. But above all so very patient."

Brig's mouth opened to ask Hammer what he meant, but he closed it again. Hammer was more upset than he realized.

"Fifty five years is a long time to wait, I would imagine." Hammer reached up and rubbed his scarred left eye. "Burrowing deep into the family. Twisting Vigo. Manipulating everyone. "

"Hammer."

"Even you."

Brig clenched his jaw. "Your father isn't a weak man, Hammer. If that's what Vivienne had planned, he would have seen that coming." Brig was suddenly very nervous. He questioned whether Hammer was going to be able to reason beyond the pain his father might be enduring. It was clear Hammer never trusted Vivienne. "You've known her since she was ten. You've gotten to know her as a woman. Do you really think she'd wait almost sixty years?"

"Think about the timing in all this, Brig. For a second, just think about it. Vigo and your father are contacted and an inquiry is made. Vigo sends word he's coming, but doesn't. Instead Vivienne shows up. His Fixer."

"Vigo was delayed because of Alpha Michaels."

The Elders not only led the families, they regulated them. There was one Greater Pack Alpha, but each family had their minor Alphas. In Quebec Canada there was the Michaels pack, led by Alpha Ian Michaels. His son, Ian Jr, had come to the new city as a replacement Piper, and even though his



evaluation had labeled him a misogynistic sociopath, he was still made an Alpha's Piper. A Piper could not ascend higher than protecting the Greater Pack's Alpha. Piper Michaels murdered an entire team in pursuit of *Blood Memory* vengeance, and his own death was at the hands of Ellis Duban and Simon Huntington. It later came out that the Alpha Michaels had Piper Michaels evaluation 'misplaced' and it caused an almost irreparable catastrophe. Both Vigo and Duncan had to regulate and were delayed in Canada seeing to the Alpha Michaels, resulting in Vivienne coming to the Den in Vigo's place.

Hammer knew this.

"Right. Vivienne's evaluation of Piper Michaels disappeared. I wonder how she managed that."

Brig stared at Hammer. "You think she planned that, too?"

"Why is she looking into the *Blood Memory* now? Why right now?"

Brig shook his head, his throat dry.

"You're going after her." It wasn't a question. "Instead of checking in on the Elders, you're going after *her*."

Of course Brig was going after Vivienne. She was his lover and mate. He was instantly reminded of her scent and how it affected him, and even then he could still smell her on his skin. It was as intense now as it was when they first met.



Brig double-timed it up the stairs when something made him stop at the landing of the Alpha's office floor. A warm sensation flooded his senses and he pulled his hand back from the rail of the stairs to stare at his hand. Rubbing his fingers together, he searched the scent trying to identify it. He could smell the Alpha and Hammer's scent easily, their scents musky and masculine, but something mixed with the female's scent. It stopped him completely as he tried to read the colors of the scent.

“WHAT?”

Hammer's voice jolted him out of his meditation, losing his train of thought. Wiping his hands on his BDU trousers, he quickly walked to the office door and knocked sharply twice, opening it. The smells from the room hit him like a freight train, reminding him exactly of where he smelled the faint residue of the scent on his fingers.

As the door swung open, the Alpha, Hammer, and the new female looked over at him. It took everything not to fall down to his knees as the full force of Vivienne Sena's scent hit him.

Her wolf scent was nothing compared to the slightly sweaty from the sun scent she was emitting. Brig's hand dropped from the doorknob and his eyes focused in on hers – brown with thin golden irises. Her chocolate brown fur transitioned perfectly to long, thick hair that was tied in a low ponytail. The mental image of her wolf form had been imprinted in his memory, but her human physique would forever be burned into his soul and he was fairly certain she recognized him by

the startled look that passed her face and the dilation of her pupils.

*Oh shit*, Brig thought.

Inevitably decisions were made that he did not see coming. Brig clenched his jaw angrily as the Alpha allowed Vivienne Sena to stay on the property, and worse yet, Hammer agreeing to the psych evals to be done on himself and the Pipers. It was done and there was nothing he could do about it. Swallowing his pride, he resisted the urge to curse loudly, in several languages, and let out a strained grunt.

Despite who she was, this Sena woman had managed to get under his skin, and not only question his authority, but threatened his very existence within the pack. Guarding the Alpha and running the Pipers was all he had ever known, all he was ever bred for, but now it was being called into question because he ratted out his cousin for fucking a married woman and getting her pregnant.

Brig suppressed the grimace that was itching to stretch across his face as he mentally cringed at what he just thought. This was Hammer he was talking about; at the very least he could afford him some respect and accept what was done, but he could not let it go. Not now, not for a while. Still, he stood by what he did – the families had to know to protect themselves. Little did he know that in the process, he'd be thrown under the bus.

They were scrambling to focus the pack's attention on something other than Hammer's betrayal. He saw this now

and that was what Vivienne Sena represented. She fixed things and a cover story had to be a good one.

Begrudgingly Brig took a step back and acquiesced. He glanced down at her again as the Alpha offered to find her a suite.

“I’ll be happy to show Miss Sena a place to stay.” Her head turned back to him and her eyes narrowed, no doubt suspicious of his polite tone. Brig would apologize for his outburst. Someday. Walking to the door, he opened it wide and held his hand out to Vivienne to exit.

Brig had managed to contain his intense emotional reaction toward seeing her again, but her human form was thousand times more alluring than her wolf form, so much so that it took everything not to kiss her right there in front of the Alpha and Hammer. Her scent was intoxicating, but being near her was almost painful.

Seeing her on the monitor didn’t cause any of the same bodily reactions, but he wagered it was the intensity of her scent that overwhelmed him. He was fairly certain he wouldn’t be able to even look at a photograph of her without becoming aroused.

Brig closed the door behind them as they exited. She turned back to look at him. Her eyes slowly rose and he literally felt them travel up from his chest, across his lips, up into his eyes. They held the stare for a few moments before he decided to get it over with and he moved past her, back out toward the Den. Hopefully being outside would temper the sensation of her

scent.

Instead of walking just slightly behind him, she walked even with him. Everything about her was defiant, like she was purposely trying to piss him off. Other women had been so different. Women just seemed to be drawn toward his charm and accepted the role of female to his male, but not this one. She seemed irritated with him. Their situation was awkward; he admitted that much to himself, but they both started off their professional relationship on the wrong foot, to put it lightly. Watching her with the Alpha, who might not have appreciated her kind being on his property and being told that the family Elders wished it, Vivienne was very clear with her words and body language; she feared nothing and no one. No disrespect though, not toward the Alpha, but to Hammer or himself? Brig bristled thinking about her insolence.

It was almost as if she thought she belonged in there.

Her scent intensified just then and he barely managed to quell down a gasp, turning it into a hiss through his teeth. She had shaken her low ponytail out and in the corner of his eye he could see the long tresses, soft chocolate brown with highlights of gold glinting in the warm sun, just like her eyes. Brig nearly tripped up the entrance steps just thinking of it. Opening the door for her, he held his breath as she passed him and into the Den. They moved slowly toward the elevators when he stopped her.

“No.”

“Excuse me?” There was the slight annoyance again. He felt

his eyes narrow in return.

“Quicker if we take the stairs.”

Brig held his hand out, now pleased with his choice of reaching her quarters. He didn't like her insolence, but then she seemed to only do it with him. Convincing himself he didn't care, he would at least see her shake that ass going up the stairs.

“Second floor.”

Vivienne glared at him with her almond shaped eyes and let him see her irritation with him. But she stepped in front of him, pulling up on her skirt with her right hand, her left holding the rail.

Oh and those hips did sway.

Grinning to himself, Brig followed her. His eyes watched her hips and then strayed to the hand on the rail. Slowly he reached out and touched the rail and the wake of her hand. He felt a bit of her again, something more tangible than her scent and he caught her looking to the side at his hand behind her. Once they reached the top, Brig pulled his hand away and rubbed his fingers, feeling her invisible imprint. He could not resist touching his fingers to his lips, brushing his tongue against his skin, wanting to taste her, hoping he could. Dropping his hand, he passed her again and headed off to the right and stopped at the last door in that hallway.

Opening the door, he pushed it open for her and held his hand out. Vivienne brushed up against him as she passed

through the doorframe. He didn't know if it was on purpose or because he hadn't moved completely out of the way.

It still made him smile.

Instead of leaving her alone in her quarters, he closed the door behind him, the click of the lock resonating in the room. Slowly he walked up to her as she turned and faced him. They didn't speak as they stood there in the center of the room. Brig looked down at her and she returned the glare with her golden brown eyes. Suddenly her scent wafted toward him again, sweet and palatable. It made him almost sway on his feet. He could see the swell of her breasts; her slim hourglass figure beneath her black skirt that he realized was split into three panels. Brig looked at her, starting at her feet back up into her face and made no attempt to hide it. They stood there, in the center of the room, and he wondered what she was thinking just then.

Was it the same for her when he first entered the Alpha's office? The initial shock as they recognized each other's scents, swallowing the embarrassment as they both controlled their outward reactions? Or the sudden need to touch, skin to skin, letting their scents claim the other? He felt a smile tug at the corner of his mouth when her pupils suddenly grew large and slightly unfocused.

Brig watched in utter fascination as a blush started from her neck and worked its way up to her cheeks; as tan as her skin was, it was so apparent that he wanted to reach out and touch her, letting his fingers feel the hotness of it. Her mouth opened

slightly and he felt himself sway closer, only barely stopping himself.

What was she thinking of right then? Of him? Being alone in this room and standing so close that Brig could feel the warmth of her breath? His hands twitched as he held back from touching her, but he wanted to, so badly. This was nothing he had ever felt before. This need and want being so tangible and painful at the same time.

Her brown eyes locked with his and as he opened his mouth, all ready to lean into her and let whatever happens happen, when someone knocked on the door loudly behind him.

Brig blinked slowly and turned to look at it. With a glance back over his shoulder at her, he walked up to the door and opened it. It was his sergeant who had come with her things. Brig heard her heels click up behind him and she thanked Charlie who seemed enthralled by her friendly demeanor. Irritation crept up into his shoulders again and he nodded toward the door, dismissing his Piper.

Then again they were alone. Brig's hand was on the door holding it slightly ajar and Vivienne took a step back as her hand grabbed the back of her hair and pulled it forward over her right shoulder. Again her scent sent tremors up his long body and he gripped the door to keep himself from picking her up and taking her into the bedroom, doing anything and everything to her. Instead, Brig took a breath through his mouth and opened the door wider. She moved out of his way as he opened it just enough for him to walk out.



A week later they gave in.



Vivienne was his mate and, god willing, she'd live through this stupid mistake of hers. He loved her, from balls to bones. This was no revelation to him, but as much as Brig wanted to tell Hammer, he just couldn't. Not with the threat of her betrayal hanging over not just the Piper families, but over Brig's heart. Viv was with the vampire Simon Huntington and just thinking of the *silu* put a bitter taste in his gullet. He wasn't sure if it was his rage for Huntington or his love for Viv that was pushing him to enter Siberia on his own. All he knew was right then, Hammer had already made the decision to kill Vivienne.

"Hammer. You're my cousin and I love you. You're upset. But you're wrong."

"Is that your gut telling you that, Brig? Or your heart?"

Lifting his chin, Brig sat up straight in his chair. "That's my common sense, Hammer. You need someone to blame and you're blaming her."

"What is she going to find in the Baikal Mountains, Brig? What's out there?"

"Your father sent her there. Why would he do that unless he wanted her to find out the truth?" Suddenly a piercing ache started to throb behind Brig's eyes. Grimacing, he pushed on. "Maybe they're right. Maybe the *Blood Memory* is," Brig felt his stomach tighten, threatening to revolt.

“A *Blood Memory* cannot LIE,” Hammer said, his voice growing louder.

The *Blood Memory* defined their lives as Pipers. The bitter memory of a forgotten betrayal became the central focus of two families, affecting their freedoms, breeding, and became secondary only to the Alpha himself. But it was Hammer’s son, the Greater Pack’s Alpha, who demanded their Piper families one true threat be ignored for the sake of diplomacy in a city inundated with both species. The Alpha was not his hardened, bitter old father, but sometimes Brig missed the old times.

“Vigo let her leave Glenveagh with equipment to go into the mountains. There’s something there, Hammer. Why can’t any one of us remember? Why?”

Brig reached out and lurched forward, his head splitting open with an ache he had never felt in his life. Falling to his knees, Brig grabbed his head to keep it from exploding. Hammer just looked down his nose at him.

Hammer believed, with every fiber of being, that the *Blood Memory* was real. In his long life he had never doubted the validity of the memory, the raw cruelty of its betrayal. It was a part of him from his first moments of receiving the gift and he held onto its bitterness with almost childlike enthusiasm. But looking at Brig now, suffering from his doubting the memory, something quietly spoke to him, reassuring him that he was in the right.

It was real. It had to be.

“It doesn’t matter if we can’t remember the memory,” he heard himself say, a voice far away and not his own. “The betrayal is still there. Vengeance is a powerful thing, Brig. I know that. You know that. Vivienne knows that.”

“All right. All right!” Brig pleaded as he cradled his head on the floor of the cabin, reeling from the blinding pain. “It’s real. I believe that.” Brig felt Hammer’s hands on him, helping him off the floor. Brig felt himself be roughly manhandled back into his seat. The pain began to ebb, receding back into the darkness. The urge to vomit was still strong, but he could at least open his eyes. He leaned onto the armrest and tried to focus his eyes.

“Yes. I’m going after them. Not just Vivienne, but Huntington. Half the problem is still better than nothing.”

“Are you going to bring Vivienne back to Glenveagh?”

Brig felt his head cave in, and despite the fact he knew what would happen to her if he did, he agreed. “Yes. I’ll bring her back.” Looking over at Hammer, Brig tried to read past the expressionless mask Hammer wore. “Vigo won’t let you do it, Hammer.”

Hammer clenched his hand into a fist and shrugged. “He won’t have a choice when you bring her back with no proof. Without proof, there’s nothing anyone can do for her.”

Brig wiped the sweat off his top lip and he felt it dripping down his neck, but he thought about what Hammer said. Rather, what he didn’t say. If Vivienne returned to the Elders

empty handed, then the inquiries were done, including her. Hammer would finish what Vigo couldn't do so many years ago. But if she did find something out there, in the deepest darkest mountains of Siberia, then she would have something to bargain for her life. Hammer had sat stoically as he issued his command for Vivienne's death; his face cold and unfeeling, save for the thin sheet of sweat forming on his forehead.

Hammer leaned forward, resting his elbows on his thighs. His expression was that compassionate indifference he managed so well. His voice was low and Brig could not help but push back further in his chair away from him.



The smell of sulfur, ash, and burning flesh was as fresh to him there on the plane as it was over fifty years ago. Hammer was a young wolf, breathing fire and death, lusting in the ambrosia of it, when Vigo presented his find. From the smoldering barn that the outcasts had taken refuge in, his father and Commander stepped out in human form, pulling the family tartan around his waist. Vigo Hammerthynn was pure muscle and ire, complete will and solid strength, with an unbending focus that led the Pipers with a power only matched by his counterpart, Duncan Jameson. Hammer flicked his lone eye in the direction of his uncle and saw the massive red, his breath rolling like smoke out of his opened jaws and blood matted fur. Looking back at his father, Hammer saw what followed his Commander out of the burning barn.

A little girl.

She looked no younger than the young Alpha heir, maybe ten years old. Her brown skin was smudged with ash and her bright eyes golden brown, looking up at Vigo with awe. She barely reached Vigo's hip, but stood behind Hammer's father, unaware her death was moments away.

Hammer took a step forward, his massive jaws opening, dripping with the blood of this little one's family. A snarl ripped through Hammer, making Vigo narrow his good eye at him. Vigo lifted his hand and sliced horizontally at the air.

The Pipers behind Hammer, his uncles and even Commander Jameson, turned back toward the fading sun with their mission complete. Vigo was allowing the female child to live? After the atrocities their pack had done on theirs - outcasts tainting their women and slaughtering two? Hammer waited a full second before joining the others, looking at his father and then the little girl.

Then it smiled at him.

Hammer narrowed his eye at the little thing before turning away. The hate in him grew that day and every day that female child was allowed to live, staining an otherwise illustrious legacy that Hammer was infinitely proud to be part of. As long as it lived, it would mark his father, showing a weakness that could not, would not be tolerated. Hammerthynns didn't love, they showed no compassion for those against the Alpha, and they did not spare lives during their owed Blood Retribution. Vigo should have killed Vivienne that day, but now Hammer

would have to finish what his own father could not do, and what his own cousin and Piper Commander failed to see was the only outcome of the chain of events Vivienne started now.



“These are the hard decisions we’ll have to make when we’re the Elders, *Brain*. We’re it – we step up when our fathers step down or die. Vigo did it for his father and your father did it for his.”

“We’ve been dreading that day, Hammer. It’s not what we are. Times are changing.”

*“But we cannot be anything else.* It’s our lives for the Alpha, then the families. Vigo *failed* that day. It was our right for retribution and letting Vivienne live will be my father’s biggest failure.”

“Your father showed compassion.” Brig shook his head, his eyes narrowing at Hammer with confusion and shock. “He showed everyone he had a soul. That’s not a failure.”

“It’s not what we are.”

“Is your son a failure then, Hammer? Your love for his mother? You asked for my forgiveness and I gave it to you. *You betrayed our Alpha and fell in love with his wife.* You fathered a child with her. Vigo saved Vivienne for his own reasons, but aren’t they obvious?”

“It’s not what we are.” Hammer’s face was smooth and his voice honey soft.

The Pipers were protectors of the Alpha and the Greater Pack. They were the previous Alpha's tip of the arrow. The infallible backbone. Hammerthynns procreated, were all males, and lived, died, and would most definitely kill for the Alpha, all in the name of the Greater Pack. The Jamesons were their support, their Piper Commanders, and the females bred into the Hammerthynn family to keep the source pure. Hammer's own mother had been Brig's youngest aunt, and together Vigo and his wife produced not only a direct descendant, but the Greater Pack's Beta. It had been this way for generations and Brig knew this, but it didn't make it right.

"It's not what you are, Hammer. And it's not what your son is, either. You didn't discard your soul when you were gifted. Is that what you taught your son? Is this what you want for your grandsons?"

The Alpha and his mate were pregnant with their first child, Hammer's first grandchild, and the last Hammerthynn. Despite what Hammer was saying, as the old Alpha's only friend and Piper, Hammer had been able to raise his own son and be his shadow without knowing it. Hammer was everything to the young heir, teaching him not as a cold, Hammerthynn father, but as a loving mentor and teacher. Everything the Alpha was now was because of Hammer, and when Brig looked at the two of them together, he wondered how he could have missed it.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Hammer. We're more than just our namesakes. If what you're saying is true, I would

have left you to fend for yourself as a kid instead of welcoming you into our family like a brother when your mother died and Vigo couldn't bear it. You would have raised your son to be the bitter old man the old Alpha had turned out to be. And you would have never loved one woman the way you have, all your life.

"You kill Vivienne now, you'll undo the one good thing your father did to redeem himself. It'll kill him and no one will be to blame but you."

Hammer felt the quiver of doubt wriggle itself into his solid conscience. He watched as a red droplet of blood ran from Brig's nose – his cousin and only real, true friend suffering. Those who doubted the *Blood Memory* suffered. Hammer closed his good eye, the throb behind it growing. Opening his mouth, he hesitated for a moment, letting Brig's words ring in his ears.

"Is she doing this for you, *Brain*?" Brain, the secret childhood nickname the two shared.

Brig gave him a hard look, his face twitching with a sneer. "For me. For you. For us all, Hams." Hammer's nickname – a secret between two blood brothers.

The pilot appeared behind Hammer, clearing his throat. "Beta Hammerthynn, Commander Jameson? There's a problem."





## *Chapter 16*

“Ulaanbaatar is a lot nicer than I thought it would be.”

Viv had opted to completely ignore what happened on the jet. The terrifying feeling of loss had overwhelmed her, so much so that Simon wordlessly held her without any attempt to seduce her, which said more to her about him than anything she had witnessed thus far. As they exited the plane, Simon reached up and touched the ceiling of the cabin and looked at her. His gaze was intense and questioning, but then he helped the pilot pop the door and continued on with Viv’s observation of the country. It could have been because he didn’t care or because he cared enough to let her deal with it on her own; either way, it colored Simon in a different light, which surprised her.

“Yeah modern technology is alive and well here,” he said looking around. “It’s the Province of Irkutsk, Anay that is the middle of nowhere.”

Viv shouldered her rucksack and stepped down from the jet, her breath bright and white in the cold air. The sky was a dark gray and there was absolutely no sunlight. Checking her watch, she noted the time was after four pm and the only protection

Simon used was a pair of ray ban sunglasses. Along with his cold breath, there was a slight steam coming off his skin like he had just stepped out of a hot shower.

“Are you all right?”

Simon shrugged, pushing the glasses up on the bridge of his nose as he stepped down behind her. “Stings a little, but not too bad.”

She had not been this far north in years, but if Siberia was anything like Alaska in the United States, they had maybe five to six hours of debatable sunlight and they were just catching the tail end of it. The sun had already disappeared behind the mountains and the temperature felt like it was dropping a full degree a minute.

“Well, at least we won’t be wasting any daylight. Do we have a vehicle?”

Simon turned and talked to one of the airport maintenance crewmembers on the tarmac, speaking in Russian. Viv listened closely to the man’s Russian, hearing distinct nuances in his dialect.

Simon asked, “Есть еще way further north, чтобы Анай?”

The crewmember was in his mid forties, not much taller than Vivienne, and wore a handlebar mustache that he constantly preened. His eyes were round and brown and he looked at Simon with initial distrust. As Simon began speaking fluent Russian to him, the man relaxed.

“Большинство arrive by the Trans Siberian from Mongolia

or или из Москвы или на train или на рейс из Иркутска. There is also a once a week flight from Vladivostok.”

Viv closed her eyes and let the language settle into her brain. She had learned Russian years ago, but it had since replaced by other necessary skills, but as with all things, language especially, Viv was able to relearn it quickly.

Observational learning had been a gift, among other things, and Vigo had recognized it immediately in Viv after he adopted her into his pack. This type of learning occurs as a function of observing, retaining and replicating behavior executed by others. Not only could Vivienne mimic things she observed, but could immediately learn a skill and then apply it. The words filtered into her mind and her recall of the language was instant.

The man replied, “It leaves first thing out of Vladivostok. Its eight hours driving or you can catch another flight out.”

“Thank you,” Simon said and turned back to the jet, holding his hand out to Viv. “He said —”

“I heard. Let’s get to Vladivostok.”

Within two hours the jet touched down at Vladivostok airport. It was the largest port city in Russia with a swelling population of over half a million. They waited through the evening in the jet and finally discarded the luxury plane in hopes of evading the Pipers that were undoubtedly on their trail. Catching the local plane to Buryatia at first light, they relished their last taste of civilization before heading out to

Anay via the Republic of Buryatia.

Buryatia was losing its green color to the painful cold, and tourism, their number one moneymaker, had been put on hold until the spring thaw. No one noticed their arrival and acknowledged their disappearance even less. As they climbed into a Range Rover that was waiting for them, the day thick with cold and gray darkness, Simon commented on the remoteness of their situation – figuratively and literally.

“All this way for one wolf? Why would any of your kind be out this far?”

Vivienne tilted her head and looked out the window at the slowly shrinking towns, to villages, to desolate ice. “Because this is where the Greater Pack stayed for generations because of you folks. The edge of life, while the other outcasts migrated, filtering into the small villages, and then eventually moving on. Our home was the desolate ice of the frigid north or the garbage cans of real life.”

Simon neglected to comment on her ‘folks’ usage this time. Maybe it was the stark reality of what his upper crest had inflicted on her kind or maybe because living underground in the shadows for his people wasn’t that much different than living in the darkness of poverty and bitter vengeance.

“You know,” he said slowly, “none of us knew.”

“Some of you did.”

Simon nodded but then looked at her. “I appreciate you coming out here with me. For helping.”

Viv grinned, resting her head against the door window. Forty-eight hours earlier, she would have laughed her ass off if someone told her she'd be halfway around the world, heading to the middle of nowhere, Siberia, with the bane of her mate's *Blood Memory*. Vigo never spoke about it, but it led every aspect of his life, therefore by extension, it dictated hers growing up.

"I grew up living by the standard the families instituted. Their hate for you and Ellis was never talked about, but it shaped them and their children."

Viv shook her head, looking out at the road in front of them. She considered whether she should tell him any of their history. Would it help him understand her? Probably. Did she want him to understand her? No, she really could care less. It was better than the suggestive looks or charming flirting, she decided with a sigh.

"They haven't always been this way, the Piper families. The Greater Pack's history books will paint the Pipers as loyal and valiant soldiers, the strength and backbone of the Alpha, for the Alpha. They call it a memory, but it's a curse."

The *Blood Memory* was never talked about. Never investigated, nor was it questioned. The families came together; god knows how many generations ago, and bred power, strength, leadership, and loyalty into their children. The Jamesons and Hammerthynns stayed close together, cultivating their numbers with agreeable matches, which was difficult since all Hammerthynns were male. Even God had

gotten on board with that. Pipers were chosen from the cream of the crop – all Family descendants were brought into the Greater Pack, and even those so far removed from the source but showed promise in their innate abilities were indoctrinated into the fold, and with the honor of serving was the stain of the *Blood Memory*.

“Only descendants can be Pipers. Well, except for those who showed rare abilities that would benefit the families. The Pipers are good men. Strong men. Men willing to die for their Alpha. It’s what they are. I just don’t understand why they’ve let the *Blood Memory* be such an all encompassing thing – held in such regard that to question it means a betrayal against the families.”

“So you are doing this....” Simon asked quietly.

Viv only chuckled.

“I’m not here for you. I’m here for a pack of wolves who want nothing to do with me. Who tolerate me enough to fix their messes, but not even invite me to dinner.” She sighed, closing her eyes. “I’m doing this because it’s the right thing to do and they can’t do it for themselves.”

“I recognized a potential partnership between us. Is it killing you to acknowledge that I’m not just out here for myself?”

“It would be stupid. You had a jet. I had a name. Don’t say you’re doing this so you can call me ‘Viv’, Simon. It’ll take a lot more than just letting me hitch a ride and talking to my breasts.” Viv opened an eye and looked over at him. There was

a small grin on his lips, but he remained quiet.

This was Day Three of their trek to central Siberia to travel to a small, extremely remote village to ask about a ‘Lone Wolf’. She had no idea if Vigo was even aware of what he was telling her or if he even knew what it meant, but he told her to go, so she did. There wasn’t anything she wouldn’t do for her father and no limit as to what she would do. As Simon drove west to Lake Baikal in search of the only seaplane business that crosses the thirty-two mile wide body of water, Viv wondered the last time a Hammerthynn or Jameson was even out this far north. It had to be several generations, at least.

“Want me to drive?” she asked with her head still against the glass and her eyes closed.

“No, I’m fine,” Simon mumbled. “I’ll let you know when we get to the Lake. Get some sleep.”



Brig and Hammer stood on the tarmac at Donegal airport. All alone.

“Where’s the Piper meeting us?” Brig said quietly to Hammer, the wind throwing his words but he knew they were crystal clear to Hammer. “What happened here?”

“We were in contact with the airport’s flight tower up until about an hour ago,” the pilot said as he stepped down from the private jet, Smith & Wesson .45 in his hand, “then nothing.”

“Hammer.” Brig took a step back to Hammer but his cousin was already changing. By the time Hammer’s hands hit the

ground, he was in full wolf form. He launched himself toward the airfield, cutting a straight path to Glenveagh, Therian-weave body armor molded tightly to his body. He was a red streak until he hit the fourteen-foot high fence and jumped it without missing a beat.

Taking out his phone, Brig called his father but there was nothing. No signal. Running back into the jet, Brig went directly to the cockpit and picked up the radio. Dialing into the Piper's emergency broadcast, he called out into the silence.

"10-18, 10-18, CO, 10-18 CO to Glen, do you read?" He released the send button and waited. There was nothing. No chatter, no static...nothing. "Glenveagh Priority call, this is CO dash P, Priority call, do you read?" Brig waited a moment and then backed out to the cabin where he met the pilot.

"Sat radio? Have one?"

The pilot pushed past Brig, sensing the danger in his urgency and dropped a panel cover, dialing into the satellite radio. Satellite radios have a slightly different working system from the technology used in traditional radios – large towers send radio signals from its transmitter on the ground to the radio which then converts the frequencies into audio signals. Whereas satellite radios, satellites in geostationary orbit directly send digital frequencies to stations on the ground. The pilot had it up with the flip of a switch.

"It's up," the pilot said, handing him the microphone.

"Priority call, priority call – Charlie, Omega – requiring



assistance. Glen Ops down. I repeat, Priority call, priority call – Charlie, Omega – requiring assistance.” Releasing the send button, Brig waited.

“Copy that, CO. Priority CO assistance, Glenveagh.”

Brig sighed with relief. “Lewis, is that you? Over.”

“Aye, sir. We’re all here. Over.”

“LT – get to Baikal Mountains ASAP. I don’t care how you do it, you meet me there. Sergeant – get to Glenveagh and retrieve the Beta and leadership. Do you copy?”

LT’s voice came on the line. “Aye, sir. Radio signal? Over.”

“Down. Donegal is dark. Repeat. Sat radio only. I repeat – Donegal and Glenveagh are dark. Over.”

“Aye, sir. We’re gone. Piper 1 designated, out.”

“Lewis you stay on the horn, over.”

“Roger that, sir,” Lewis replied. “Piper Home out.”

Brig dropped the radio and turned back to the pilot. “Get us up in the air and to Baikal.”

The pilot sat down in his seat and opened up his laminated maps of the area. “Uh, nearest airport is Buryatia. Still some distance to Baikal.”

“I will fucking jump out. Get me there, now.”

“Buckle up,” the pilot said, throwing his maps in the co-pilot seat and turning to bring up the steps and secure the aircraft.

“I got it. Just go.” Brig ran back and pulled up the steps and

sealed the door. Then he moved to the rear of the plane and opened up the bags he and Hammer had brought. Mountain gear, GPS tracker, and various other cold weather gear, including a small armory which he double-checked and loaded. He pulled his shirt and pants off and gathered his Therian-weave, dressing quickly, then layered it with a thermal flight suit.

The cold was nothing to a Greater Pack wolf, but jumping from the plane was another matter. Kneeling on the ground in the cabin, he tried to catch his breath and calm his nerves. He still had at least another eight to ten hour flight into central Siberia with at least one stop to fuel somewhere in Mongolia. It was going to be a long flight.



## *Chapter 17*

Hammer ran full speed heading due east, cutting through Dunlewy Far. It was over four thousand acres with a small village near the highest level of land. The snow had dusted the hills and chilled the mud on the ground, but Hammer neither noticed nor cared. Glenveagh was fifteen minutes away top speed and he streaked around the edge of the small village when he heard a long, painful howl.

Skidding to a stop, Hammer tasted the air and listened to the tail end of the echoing howl. Thick plumes of his white breath covered his face as he panted softly, trying not to overwhelm his senses with precious oxygen. His mammoth head turned to the north and slowly he followed the howl's lingering octaves of sound. Picking up speed, he kept low to the ground and began sniffing out the colors of old and fresh scents as it flooded his senses. Suddenly the howl pierced the air and he immediately recognized it.

Elder Duncan. Brig's father.

Hammer dug his claws into the caked mud and pushed his three hundred and fifty pound body to its top speed again, weaving in and out of scattered trees and running level with

the hilly ground until he reached a grassy knoll about an acre long and thick. Quietly he pushed through the foliage and immediately locked into Duncan's scent. Closing in, he could hear the soft panting of more than one wolf as he eased into a clearing.

His father looked at him, his hand covered in blood and a younger man lay at his feet, eyes wide open in death.

"Hammer? Son?" Vigo reached out to his son and Hammer immediately went to him. He sniffed his father, searching for any other source of blood and saw his bleeding hand and dripping out of his nose; the distinct stench of silver covered Vigo. Duncan appeared next in the clearing with three more wolves. Two he immediately recognized – their colors matching their bio descriptions that had been sent to the Alpha's Den – his replacement Pipers. The third he recognized was the young man lying dead in the clearing. Forcing his change, Hammer painfully pushed back to human form, along with his Therian-weave. Duncan did the same, transitioning easier as an older more experienced wolf.

Duncan knelt down in the clearing and crept up to the dead Piper. His eyes were bright blue and scared. "Where's Brig? Where is he?" he asked frantically.

Hammer shook his head and went to his father. "Brig is on his way to Baikal." His lone eye found his father's. Vigo gave him a weak smile and put his hands on his son.

"Why? He's going to her?" Duncan demanded.

“He says he’s going after Huntington and to bring Vivienne back.” Hammer looked at his father. Vigo’s eyes were blurry with pain. Hammer stayed near his father but turned and spoke directly to Duncan. “What did Vigo tell her? Why Baikal Mountains?”

“I don’t know. She asked for permission and I told her: if she went, she would go alone. Your father gave her equipment and a location. That’s all I know. She left and we found him collapsed outside. Then the attack happened.”

“What attack? Where is everyone? Did Vivienne do this? Lead them to Glenveagh to slaughter us?”

Vigo reached out and grabbed his son’s shoulder, digging his nails deep into the meat of his skin. “It wasn’t Vivienne. She didn’t do this, son.”

Hammer pulled Vigo’s hand away and put it back in his father’s lap. “You’ve been blinded by her since the moment you found her. Open the one good eye you have left, Vigo. This is her long awaited payback.”

Vigo bared his teeth and lunged after Hammer, deceptively strong. “This was an assassination attempt against leadership.” Vigo pointed at the dead Piper on the ground. “He said someone had his family before I killed him, Hammer. This can’t be Vivienne’s doing!”

“We don’t have time for this, Vig,” Duncan said, putting his hands on Vigo. “Where is it?”

Vigo’s Therian-weave body armor differed slightly from

Hammer's in that it had a flat chest pack with compression pockets. Reaching into the side, he pulled out a knife and immediately Hammer backed up, the scent of it penetrating his nostrils painfully.

It was covered in blood, but there was no mistaking the silver smell coming off the blade. "I took this out of a family member at the compound and killed your new Piper with it." Vigo threw it at the ground, the knife digging halfway into the dirt.

Hammer's eyes followed the blade and then looked down at the Piper. The other three wolves hovered near the fallen Piper. Hammer went to him and touched his face, turning it to the side. The Piper's lifeless eyes looked through Hammer.

"What happened?"



"Sir. Sir, wake up. You need to wake up right now."

Vigo threw his arm up and grabbed the figure hovering over him, immediately putting him in a tight head-lock and began suffocating him.

"Sir -" The voice gasped and grabbed at his arm. The scent was familiar but his eyes refused to focus. Inhaling deeply, Vigo tasted the voice's scent and recognized it as Piper Paulson. Vigo released the boy immediately and he fell to the ground, gasping for air.

"Paulson. What is-," Vigo tried to stand, but his head throbbed painfully. His stomach lurched and Vigo turned to

the side and vomited. The pain throbbed in his head, but it began to ebb when Paulson stood and reached for him again. “What’s going on?”

“We’re under attack,” he sputtered. “Sir, you have to get up now.”

Vigo let the Piper pull him up and hook Vigo’s arm over his shoulder. The compound was dark as they exited his quarters and began moving through the hallways. “The others? Elder Duncan?”

“Elder Jameson is with Piper Richards and Phillips. After you collapsed, you were found outside and Vivienne Sena was gone.”

“I sent her away,” he mumbled, his head beginning to throb again. “What else?”

“Patrols were sent out, but we’ve had zero contact with them.” Pushing through a door, Vigo stumbled over a body that reeked of silver. Paulson stumbled with Vigo and they pressed up against the walls, trying to move away from the overwhelming scent. “Oh Jesus,” the young man muttered.

“Wait.”

“Sir, we have to get you and Elder Jameson out right now. Diego and the others are protecting the perimeter to allow you both out.”

Vigo pulled away, steadying himself on his feet. Shaking the dizziness from his head, Vigo regained his faculties and assumed his role. Kneeling down, he rolled over a dead pack

member and began gathering weapons. “Leadership stays put and we defend our territory, Piper.” Vigo took a moment and looked at the young man. He realized he wasn’t quite a Piper yet, but a new recruit recently assigned to Glenveagh. Fresh faced, as young as he looked. Helluva time to have to prove himself.

“You’re prior military. United States?”

“Air Force, sir.”

Vigo nodded and gave him an appraising look. “How long?”

“Eight years. This isn’t my first rodeo, sir.”

Vigo waited for the knowing smile, Americans were so flagrant with their violence, but Paulson neither smiled nor even implied a hint of arrogance. The boy was tall, almost eye-to-eye with Vigo at easily six foot seven, but crouched down as if he was still getting used to the height. Thirty years old, maybe, Vigo wagered and newly gifted. Inwardly he sighed.

“Get on the com—”

“Nothing is working. We’re entirely in the dark. Maybe a localized pulse? Then it went dark.”

Vigo stopped. “They dropped an electromagnetic pulse? Here?”

Glenveagh compound was surrounded by nothing but trees. Setting off an electromagnetic pulse would not disrupt the outer edges of the park, and if it did, they were in the country and the outage could be chalked up to weather issues. Vigo



handed Paulson a Bushmaster sub machine gun with two extra 30 round clips. The boy checked the preloaded clip and then slapped it back in and flipped the mode from full auto to three round bursts. There were empty casings everywhere.

“See the casings?” Vigo asked, tucking a .45 Glock into his waistband.

“Just thinking that, sir. They didn’t know what they were shooting at.”

Vigo and Paulson armed themselves with the military issue guns and moved quietly through the compound hearing the sounds of more gunfire popping not far from them. Vigo reached back and touched Paulson, checking his gear.

“Protos, sir,” Paulson whispered quietly. The young man’s suit was the dark gray camouflaged prototype.

“I’m bare,” and Vigo was, completely. He was wearing nothing but sweat pants and a t-shirt. They had stripped him after he collapsed. “R&D, then” Vigo said. The gunfire sounded closer and the intense smell of silver wafted in their direction. Switching to silent signals, Vigo ordered Paulson up and around the opposite hallway to flush out whomever by covering their flanks, and force gunfire away from them with the confusion. The Piper nodded and moved out quietly.

Vigo moved up the opposite side and stepped over two more bodies. Looking down, he checked the dead men and pulled out a survival tantō blade that had a thin layer of silver which Vigo could smell. Its rubberized grip was tacky with blood.

Wiping the flat of the blade on his thigh, Vigo shouldered the machine gun, pulled out the .45, and held it in his left hand. Turning the corner, he kept low and followed the gunfire. He immediately saw Paulson creeping around the corner of the opposite hallway, touching the bodies as well, and gathering what he could. In his Piper's hands were two knives and weapon shouldered. They were going to go in silent and quick. Paulson looked up and saw Vigo and together they nodded. Holding up his knife hand, Vigo held up three fingers and counted down.

Three.

Paulson twisted the knives in his hands, the tips pointing back to his elbows.

Two.

Vigo knelt down on one knee, ready to launch forward and close to the ground.

One.

Together they rushed the R&D rooms under the cover of darkness.



## *Chapter 18*

“The northern tip of Baikal has the Baikal Amur Mainline. We could probably cross at that point to save time, but we have to ditch the Rover.” Viv looked down at the map of Lake Baikal and winced.

“No trestle bridges?”

She shook her head, “Not that I can see, but there has to be something here. Used to be a ferry system and there are bridges and the trans-Siberian railway to the south, but we’d lose half a day doubling back.”

“We have half a day ahead of your Pipers, at best.”

“They’re coming, no doubt of that,” Viv added.

Simon nodded but then sighed. “They’re going to want to know what you’re going for and being with me doesn’t help matters.” Simon looked at her. “You told them, right?”

She nodded.

“We don’t have a choice. We’ll hit the northern part of the lake here in a few minutes, circling around will take at least an hour or two.”

“Lake Baikal is 25 million years old – you’d think there’d be a boat.”

Just then a seaplane roared over their Range Rover, heading northeast toward the lake. “Or a plane,” Simon said smiling.

The trip across cost Simon what the pilot made in a year. Carrying that much money in a desolate region made them both nervous, but they had no choice. It got them to just outside Anay at a walk-able distance. The cold, gray darkness of the evening was settling on them again as the pilot dropped them off and returned to the Lake.

“Are you cold?” Simon asked as he buttoned his winter coat and pulled on his hood.

Viv was doing the same, buttoning up and looking cold, but they were both far from it. “Not at all. This is kind of nice, actually. You?”

“No but if we walk in there looking comfy in almost zero degree weather, it’s going to look ridiculous.” Reaching into the back of Vivienne’s rucksack, he pulled out a silver indigo Zhivago fur hat and put it on her head. “There. Couldn’t find dark brown wolf fur,” he said with a smile.

“That would have been just creepy.”

Anay was five to six miles north of Kocherikova, one of the many western lake border towns. Their story was that they were exploring north along the coast of the lake, sightseeing before winter completely settled into the region. Anay was small and nestled into the smaller hills of the growing

mountain horizon. The village was small, maybe two hundred people and only one building offering rooms; a broken down two story Inn run by an older couple. There was a bar on the ground floor that was the town's version of a watering hole, and the main business was timber to the north, fishing to the east.

They were, literally, in the middle of nowhere.

“Добрый вечер. У вас есть в номерах?” Vivienne asked, inquiring about a room.

The old woman behind the front desk looked at them both, sizing Simon up especially. He gave her a warm smile and shivered, rubbing his arms. The old woman looked back at Vivienne and gave her a firm nod and held up five fingers. Simon reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumbled ball of rubles in small denominations.

“Два вечера?” he asked the old woman, trying to procure the room for two days.

“Да. Два дня в порядке,” she replied, again nodding her head and agreeing to one room for two days. She lifted the section of counter and passed through it, waving them on to follow her. Walking down the hallway, they passed an open doorway and to the right was a sizable bar. There were maybe twenty people drinking quietly, their eyes on them as they walked by.

“Oh we are so screwed,” Vivienne mumbled in Spanish. Simon smiled and put his arm around Vivienne, pulling her

close and marking her as his.

“They’re curious. Nothing we can’t handle,” he replied back in Spanish. “We’ll stay in the room for a couple hours and let them come to us first.”

“It’s going to suck if we have to kill a few of them before asking.” Vivienne looked up at Simon. “Are you all right?”

“Oh yeah. Besides, this place is too small to start picking them off.”

“And I’d rather you didn’t.”

“I know,” he said with a drawn out sigh as they climbed a flight of stairs to the back of the inn. The old woman pushed open the door and he immediately noticed there were no locks. The room was small with a full-sized bed, questionably clean sheets and thick blankets. There was a small potbelly stove in the corner, which the old woman moved to and started a small fire, stoking it. Soon it was bright and producing minimal heat. Without another word, she walked back to the door, squeezed between the two of them and pointed down the hall to what appeared to be a bathroom, and then returned to the stairs, walking down.

There was a small, dirty window, a rickety desk with one chair, and a basin with a pitcher next to it. Vivienne threw her rucksack on the bed and sat down next to it.

“You better not hog the bed,” he said standing in front of her.

“I thought you didn’t need to sleep?” Vivienne pointed to

the chair at the desk and said, “There’s the chair.”

Simon opened his mouth to complain when he heard three very distinct heartbeats coming up the stairs. Looking in the direction, Vivienne sighed loudly. He held up three fingers to which Vivienne replied with pushing her rucksack off the bed. Simon walked silently to the door and listened. Turning back to Viv, he pointed behind him when she grabbed his collar and pulled him onto the bed with her.

“No tongue,” she said and wrapped her legs around his hips. Her lips brushed up against his neck and he gasped, startled, and then realized what she was doing.

The three heartbeats were moving quietly down the hallway, inching closer to their door. Town folk were curious as well as suspicious. Their Russian might have been fluent for the area, but that didn’t make them locals, not by a long shot. Travelling the lake and seeing its beauty was a good story but it would only get them so far without a show of something a little bit more definite and dramatic. Lifting Vivienne’s hips, he rolled over and set her down in his lap. His hands undid her heavy coat and threw it down onto the ground as she continued to kiss and lick on his neck. He ran his hands up underneath her shirt and she immediately squealed in Spanish.

“Your hands are cold!!” and laughed, trying to get up out of his lap. She pulled back and mouthed ‘where are they now?’

He nodded toward the door, which was about six feet from the bed. They were standing just outside the door. Cupping his face, Vivienne gave him a very chaste but extremely vigorous

kiss with absolutely no tongue; very lackluster but frantically given. She pushed him back across the bed and undid his jacket, pulling it off and then started on his shirt. With her back to the door and his face covered by her, he couldn't help but grin, silently laughing at the situation. Vivienne pointed at him and rolled her eyes. Bare-chested, Simon made a few attempts of complaining of the cold in Spanish and twisted to shake open one of the wool blankets on the edge of the bed. Vivienne made a disgusted face but pulled it around them as he scooped her up and stood. Turning around, he laid her down on the bed properly and climbed onto her.

Simon could hear the heartbeats pick up the pace as they undoubtedly heard Vivienne and him beginning their coupling. Rolling his eyes, he pulled the covers over them completely and pulled Vivienne's top off, showing off her bare shoulders. Her legs were squeezed tightly beneath him and he put his mouth close to her neck and whispered, "Loosen up."

Vivienne eyes narrowed and then kissed him, biting his lip hard enough to make him jump. Reluctantly she relaxed her legs and he pulled them up around his hips under the sheets, giving them a show if they were looking but he was fairly certain they weren't. Pressing his hips up against her, she glared at him and faked a ridiculously over done moan to which he almost started laughing. He pressed his lips against her neck and ran them down to her chest when she managed to pull her leg back down and used her knee liberally as a deterrent for him to go down further. He winced and climbed back up, putting his elbows on either side of her face and



began moving against her. Immediately she blushed, her eyes going wide. Shrugging, he cocked his head toward the door and pushed back in between her legs.

Vivienne lifted her lips up to his but then only grazed them as she pressed them against his ear. She whispered in English, “I am going to kill you when we’re done.”

Simon couldn’t help but laugh out loud into her neck, interrupting his rhythm. The entire bed shook with his laughter, especially when she reached down with her hands and pinched his side. Vivienne began laughing and continued pinching him, making him pull back away from her. Touching her face, he kissed her again; forcing her to stop when he heard the heartbeats began to fade as the men left their door. Breaking their kiss, he ran his lips down her neck again and resumed his fake hip thrusting.

“Are they still there?” Vivienne whispered quietly into his ear.

Simon considered telling her that he no longer heard the heartbeats on the second floor; that the town folk had left entirely, and they could stop, but her bare chest was so warm against him, he looked at her and bold faced lied. “Uh...yeah.”

Sighing unhappily, Vivienne ran her hands down his back and brought her knees up, letting him settle completely in between her legs. He winced as he pushed his hips forward. Moving his arms, he placed them under hers and pushed her deep into the bed, his eyes closing at the sensation. Her breathing changed, catching in her throat as he did it. Simon

felt his lips part as he covered her throat with his warm breath; pushing up again with more pressure. This time he could not hold back the soft moan and it made Vivienne move against him. Looking up at her, he could see her eyes closed and a slightly confused look on her face. Running his lips up her cheek, he hovered over her, grinding up into her crotch. Her lips parted as she opened her eyes and looked at him. Licking his bottom lip, he closed the distance to her lips; fully intending to thoroughly abuse her tongue with his when she pushed her hands against him, stopping his descent.

“They’re not there anymore. Are they-?” Vivienne’s voice matched the angry glare of her eyes.

“Well....”

“Oh god, get off me, you asshole.” Vivienne pushed against his chest and shoved him off the bed. “God, really? REALLY?”

Simon sat up off the ground and chuckled. “Sorry,” he mumbled with a grin.

She threw a pillow at his face and pulled her shirt on. Slowly, he stood, tossing the pillow back onto the bed and pulling at his pants. Vivienne was angrily picking up her rucksack and throwing it back up on the bed as he considered what her mood was going to be like later. With a lazy smile, he pulled on his shirt and decided it was so worth it.



Vigo and Paulson rushed into the darkness, their eyes already adjusted to the lack of light. He saw four figures – two

backing up, two advancing. Silently they moved to flank behind the advancing figures; their scents unfamiliar and foreign. Vigo looked across the room at Paulson; there was no way Vigo would have heard him as the boy came up and quietly killed the interloper on the left. A knife into the back of the head and the other into the right lung by the time Vigo got to his target and mimicked the Piper's move, plunging his knife into right lung, slicing across the back to the other. With their targets down, the two figures moving toward the back stepped forward.

Diego, the R&D technician limped forward, his arm dangling uselessly by a dislocated socket and a knife in the other. On his six was a newer pack member who stepped forward wielding knives as well.

"Elder Hammerthynn!" Diego said, stepping forward and sheathing his weapon. "Elder Jameson?"

"Last I saw he was leading a team out to secure the perimeter," Paulson answered, then looked at the Piper behind Diego.

"Samuels," the man behind Diego replied, nodding to the Elder, looking at his Piper.

Paulson stood forward and introduced himself. "J.T. Paulson. I just got in last month."

Vigo looked at Paulson curiously, trying to let his senses absorb what he could from the young man who had his six.

Diego put his good hand on Vigo and shook his head. "All is

well, Elder Hammerthynn. There were six of them in here.”

“Was that your gunfire, Samuels?” Vigo asked as he looked at Paulson and lifted his chin back to the doorway. Paulson disappeared back to the hallway and scouted ahead.

“Aye, sir.” He pulled a Glock from the back of his waistband and popped the clip. It was empty.

“Well done. Diego, I need a suit.” Diego nodded and pulled a suit from one of the shelves and handed it to Vigo. “Your arm. Broken or dislocated.”

“Both. Haven’t had time to pop it back.”

Samuels walked up to Diego and gently lifted his arm. “On three,” he said and Diego nodded. Without hesitating, Samuels popped the shoulder back in, making Diego bare his teeth. “Sorry.”

“Fuck me, Piper,” Diego sneered and then rolled his arm. “Radius is broken in three places. It’ll mend though.”

Paulson returned from scouting ahead with two more weapons and extra clips. “There’s dead leading all the way out. I count at least thirty bodies – half of the compound easily, the other half unknown. Damage everywhere, casings littering the hallway.” He handed Samuels another clip and Diego a submachine gun.

“Good job, Piper,” Diego said nodding appreciatively of the young man’s assessment of the area.

“I’m not a Piper yet, sir,” Paulson said quietly.

Vigo looked at Paulson as he stripped and put on the new prototype suit. “You are now, Piper Paulson.”

“Aye, sir,” Paulson replied looking more scared than pleased.

“What was it?” Vigo asked, moving to the two figures he and Paulson just killed and checked their bodies. They were human. “And how many were human?”

“They were shooting at something,” Paulson replied. “Two dozen came through the compound, almost like a distraction. Pipers took them out no problem, but then suddenly it was a blur. Dead everywhere.”

“Vampires, maybe? Here?” Diego said through gritted teeth as he strapped his broken arm to his chest to immobilize it until it had healed enough.

“We’ll figure it out after we find Duncan and the others.” Vigo slipped on his gloves and balled his hands into fists. “We need only one.”

The three men looked at their Elder and nodded. They’d sweep the compound killing everyone else, but one was all they’d need to answer questions. They’d offer the intruder his life for answers then kill him anyway. Together the four men moved silently through the compound, gathering what equipment they could and then made their way outside to search for Elder Jameson and the other two replacement Pipers.

Vigo reigned in the adrenaline rush, utilizing it to invigorate his body, but he still felt the weakness of whatever hit him

after Vivienne left. A grand mal seizure, massive migraine, or even a stroke – it knocked him down and kept him down, preventing him to aid his daughter further. But now it looked like her surprise appearance was a preface to the incoming attack; he knew Duncan would assume this, and as they made their way outside into the darkness, he tried to think of a more likely possibility, other than one that would definitely result in her immediate death.



Duncan Jameson moved swiftly and silently through the surrounding woods of the compound. It was hilly and treacherous terrain meant to slow any attack as well as alert the compound immediately of unauthorized presence, but whoever they were, whatever they were, had gotten in, dropped an electromagnetic pulse, and killed everyone.

He had sent Paulson to rouse the ailing Elder Hammerthynn and get him to safety. The young man had shown promise during his short stay at the compound. Duncan was confident the boy would not fail. With Piper Richards and Phillips, they ran the perimeter killing anything and everything they came across. In the darkness of the trees, Duncan came to a halt, sniffing the air.

His sons had taken after him; russet red, bright steel eyes, and massive. His fur was graying around the muzzle and the tips of his ears, but he was as strong, if not stronger than ever. Twitching his ear, he listened to the silence of the forest and took a retreating step back at the void of sound. Whatever it

was, whatever they were that had come into the forest to wipe them out, they had damn near been successful, and save for the few smattering of humans, had not seen any one or thing. A thick fog had rolled into the mountains and killed them, one by one.

Duncan heard Piper Richards coming up on his right, swiftly through the trees; his muzzle red with blood and his body quivering with adrenaline. The old Elder turned his massive head and tilted his head back toward the compound. They ran off, catching up to Piper Phillips and together the three of them returned to the darkness of the compound.

As they moved through the trees, Duncan concentrated on their surroundings, trying to detect any incoming targets ahead of them when suddenly his hackles rose with the sensation of being watched from behind. He shook his head roughly, clearing all distractions while also alerting the two Pipers. He and Vigo had run this strategy hundreds of times with the newly minted Pipers. The ability to detect your danger before encountering it was beyond valuable. Duncan swiveled his head to the left and then to the right and immediately both Pipers broke off, giving whatever was behind them three targets instead of one. Leaving Duncan by himself was never an issue – it just meant more for the Elder Jameson to kill and that was just fine. The movement behind him slowed, no doubt confused and Duncan took the opportunity to skid to a halt, kicking up dirt and then turning on a dime, running toward his enemy. The other two Pipers would double back and come up on the thing's flanks. Like

lightning Duncan pushed his legs, gaining momentum and speed for whatever it was waiting for him and he was not disappointed.

The two Pipers found the vampire first, high up in the trees, bouncing from one trunk to the next. Again they spread out covering all exits for the snake-like devil. Duncan flung himself at a tree, clawing halfway up a thirty-footer before landing back down on his legs. His two Pipers were silent, smart in not drawing any more attention to them while Duncan circled the tree and listened again to the forest. As far as he could tell, the one vampire was alone, but it couldn't have been one that had wiped out the compound. With a soft bark, Duncan turned toward the direction of the compound, suddenly worried why one vampire would need to draw the attention of three wolves.





## *Chapter 19*

Diego undid the strap that was pressing his arm against his chest and flexed his arm. The break had healed but was still a little tender. Spreading his arms, he felt the bones in his shoulder pop, but he was otherwise healthy and ready. Turning to Paulson, Vigo's new Piper, he put his once dislocated and broken arm around the boy.

"You'll make a fine Piper for the Alpha."

Vigo stopped and peered around a corner. "Just as long as he lives."

Paulson paled but maintained his attention to his surroundings, giving Diego a small smile. Diego laughed silently and hit Paulson once hard on the shoulder. "He likes you already."

"How can you tell?" Paulson whispered.

"He acknowledged your presence. That says a lot."

Paulson snorted softly and moved ahead, scouting out the next hallway without being directed. Vigo watched the man with shrewd eyes and then looked to his R&D master. "Do the others know?"

Diego shook his head. “Not yet, anyway. Can we trust him?”

“Guess we’ll find out.” Paulson returned and Vigo gave the command to move out. They separated into two groups and made their way to the exit. With his back to the side of the door, Vigo nudged the door slowly, letting it swing until it stopped short on something. Another hand was lying on the ground, lifeless and missing its body. Low to the ground they moved out into the outside perimeter and hugged the walls, making themselves smaller targets and utilizing the prototype Therian-weave camouflage.

The men darted out and searched the immediate area. Diego stood next to Vigo and knelt down, listening. “Whatever they were, they’re gone.” Diego held his hand up and everyone halted. He pointed toward the southern trees and held one finger up.

Vigo listened and then smiled just before Duncan burst quietly through the trees. His friend ran up to Vigo and immediately transformed, his face writhing in pain from it, but within moments he put his hands on Vigo’s shoulders and smiled.

“How’s the headache?” Duncan asked.

“Got some Tylenol?”

Duncan reached out and pushed on his best friend’s face happily, but then straightened, as he noticed the other men. “Are you it?”

Vigo nodded as his rare smile faded.

“We need to get out of here,” Duncan’s face colored with tense scrutiny.

Vigo nodded. “Phillips and Richards?”

“Playing with a snake up in a tree,” Duncan replied with a grim smile.

Diego’s face crinkled in confusion. “Just one? Left behind?”

Vigo and Duncan looked up into the trees and listened. Together they replied, “Decoy.”

Duncan sniffed the air and grimaced. “I don’t smell them. At all.”

Vigo’s eye narrowed as he watched the trees then up into the sky or what he could see of it. A thin layer of mist had gathered above the compound, almost as if it was slowly drifting down, not rolling by. Twisting around, Vigo could see the mist was gathering around the clearing, closing off parts of the trees.

“Move out. Now.” Holstering his weapons into the compression pack attached to his Therian-weave suit, he pushed his change, forcing the wolf in him out. Duncan did not question it and fell to the ground in wolf form a second behind Vigo. Diego pulled out the two .45’s tucked into the back of his waistband and held them out, spinning in a circle. Vigo barked at him, hurrying him up.

Diego kept looking into the trees, his eyes flickering back and forth as the Pipers followed suit and changed over. Soon it was just him in human form and the wolves backed into a

tight circle, their massive heads swinging left and right, sensing what was there but unable to see it.

“Elders, it has been a pleasure,” Diego pulled the hammers of the guns back with his thumbs and went to town.

Vigo would forever remember what Diego did that day. Remember and regret losing such a valued Piper, but truly a good man. Diego was electing to stay behind to provide cover with suppressing fire till his ammunition ran out. The fury of what was lost that night burned him.

Vigo bumped Paulson with his graying red body and pushed him east toward Dunlewy Far and open space when Diego began firing into the trees. Duncan began to growl and bumped Samuels, pushing him forward when the fog began to move against the soft breeze and twisted around Paulson as he shot forward, knocking him to the ground. Diego aimed at the quickly solidifying figure as it covered Paulson, pushing his muzzle into the ground. The Spaniard began whispering, and as Vigo threw himself at the figure and knocked it off his Piper, he knew it would be the last time he saw the Spaniard.

“Que puedo hacer todas las cosas a través de Cristo, que me fortalece.” (I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me.)

Diego was not a religious man, not like his Catholic activist father, but at that moment he felt the inevitable rage and power that only prayer could give a true Spaniard like him. It had been decades since reciting his mother’s favorite verses from the Bible – of strength, courage, and faith. Was it

hypocritical that he embraced the Lord in his final moments?

Maybe, but it sure as shit felt poetic.

Diego provided cover as Duncan, Vigo, Samuels, and Paulson took to the forest, their claws digging into the earth, pushing their top speed. Vigo could hear the ear splitting screeches of the creatures in the fog, and in his heart he knew it was the vampires, but it was an ability he had not heard of before. To be as untouchably evil and ethereal as an angel disgusted Vigo.

Diego's voice rose louder and louder. "No tengas miedo, porque yo estoy con vosotros. No desmayes, porque yo soy tu Dios. Que te esfuerzo. Sí, yo te ayudaré. Sí, siempre te sustentaré con la diestra de mi justicia." (Don't you be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of my righteousness.)

Vigo broke left from Duncan and Paulson took the right flank – together the three of them darted in and out of the trees as the howls from the fog closed in on them and Diego's voice carried curses that made even Vigo blush. He felt the anger in his muzzle, wrinkling his nose as Diego's voice carried through the trees.

"Come on, you pendejos! Ven y recibe algunos! I'm here, you putas!"

Suddenly Diego's submachine gun cut through the night and his angry grunting punctuating each shot, then there was

nothing.

The urge to turn back and avenge his Piper was overwhelming. Diego was family. He was a Piper, and sadly an atheist who knew how to turn a bible verse of strength and courage into a curse against the devil. The anger welled up in Vigo and it was just too much to bear.

Vigo broke hard right to cross Duncan's path when Samuel appeared on his six and his jaws came down on Vigo's foot, tripping the old wolf across a clearing. Quickly Vigo was on his feet when Samuel knocked him back to the ground in his young human form and grabbed the Elder, making his neck burn like it was on fire.

Vigo transformed back to human form immediately and painfully as Samuel straddled his hips and lifted a knife that stank of silver, poised over his heart. Vigo bucked and threw the Piper who quickly rebounded and came at him again, slicing Vigo's hand open. The sizzle of the burn made the old man bare his teeth and spit his words.

"Piper Samuels stand down!"

Samuel's face crumbled as he came at Vigo again. His gloves lined with silver. "Sir, I'm sorry."

Digging his hand into his pocket, Samuels threw a powdery substance at Vigo. A fine mist of silver penetrated his sinuses, making it impossible to transform back. It burned his throat and nose making Vigo just barely avoided another swipe of Samuel's knife.

“Tell me why, Samuel! Why?” Vigo choked out, twisting out of range of the knife and brought his elbow down across Samuel’s face, audibly breaking his cheekbone and disorienting the boy long enough for Vigo to rush him. He grabbed at the man’s knife hand and with his other he choked Samuels. “Tell me why Samuel and I won’t let your family know of your betrayal.”

“They have my family!” Samuel cried out in a garbled grunt. Vigo relaxed his hand on Samuel’s throat and put his face close to his.

“Who has them, Sam? Who and I’ll do my best—”

“I can’t. It’s too late. Sir, I’m so sorry,” Samuel got his knee in between them and pushed Vigo off. Samuel came at him again and landed on Vigo, his face contorted into painful surprise. Vigo shoved the silver knife he had taken off a fallen family member from the compound deep into Samuel’s heart.

Through the burning pain of silver in his nose and throat, Vigo found kind words for Samuel and made a promise, whispering it into his young Piper’s ear. “I’ll find your family, Sam. I swear it.”

Samuel clutched at Vigo, his long fingers pulling at his face, leaving burning red silver scratches. Vigo pushed against the boy and Samuel fell onto his back in the clearing; his blue eyes very bright and very dead. In the distance, Duncan howled, looking for Vigo, but he didn’t have the heart, or the ability, to respond. Vigo sat there in the clearing and looked up into the sky. The fog had not followed, not yet anyway. Suddenly he

heard the trampling of another wolf, urgent and racing, in the forest. Duncan howled again and Vigo caught his brother-in-law's scent in the wind and then his only son appeared, bursting out of the bushes and racing up to him. The pain in his head was excruciating, like he was breathing in razor blades. The silver burned his sinuses and he felt the blood drip into his mouth, the sting of silver in it.

The pain of the silver and the weakness of the disabling migraine that put him down was wearing him thin. The shimmering image of his son kneeling down next to him quivered. Was it Hammer or was he just imagining his son?

“Hammer? Son?”

As he looked at his only son, he smiled. Now if only Vivienne could manage to stay alive and get to the Baikal Mountains, his day would turn out just a little better.





## *Chapter 20*

“We’ve got to hurry this up.”

“Really? Anay is so beautiful. Let’s stay and enjoy the sights,” Viv said pulling her weapons out of her rucksack: a 45 ACP and an MA-4 fixed blade she tucked into a sheath on her forearm. “How do you want to do this?”

She was covered in the gray material that shifted colors with her background. It shimmered against her skin and he realized it was trying to mimic her skin tone. It covered her up to her neck down to her hands with tight webbing in between her thumb and index finger, to down into her shoes. It was a two-piece, presumably allowing room for her change. The tail had to go somewhere, he figured. Simon shrugged and pulled his own jacket on.

“These people are automatically suspicious and they have every right to be. Two strangers walk into town and start asking questions? We could go to the bar, start buying drinks?”

Vivienne pulled her own clothes over her suit, covering up every last bit of it. She picked up her jacket and held it for a moment. Laying it on top of her rucksack, Vivienne pressed

her lips together and shrugged.

“Fuck it, let’s just ask them,” and then walked out.

Simon caught the door. He paused for a moment and looked at Vivienne’s rucksack. Quickly he reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out Vivienne’s phone and threw it on the bed next to the bag. Checking the pockets, he found her SIM card. Swiftly, he opened the cell phone and snapped the SIM card in place but paused, his finger hovering over the power button. If he did this, the Pipers would track them down and more than likely kill the both of them. But they were in the middle of nowhere, Siberia, looking for god knows what with no way out, at least for Vivienne. Simon could take a hundred years to get back to their home base in the US, but Vivienne didn’t have that luxury. Simon pressed the power button, turning the cell phone on. He did all this and was out the door within three seconds, tucking the phone deep into his jacket again.

Following Vivienne down the stairs, they took the doorway they passed on the way up to the bar. The second they walked in, the quiet chatter faded to stark silence and every eye in the place was on them. Simon put his hands in his pockets and looked at Vivienne, surprised to see her looking at every single person in the room. About twenty men and a handful of women, the latter she barely gave a moment’s notice, but finally her eyes went to a man sitting alone at an old, dinged up wooden table near the back. With her eyes on the man, she smiled and moved toward the bar, which was actually just a

long wooden plank on what appeared to be pickle barrels.

Simon made it to the counter before Vivienne and held up two fingers. “Два пожалуйста,” he asked, taking whatever they were offering which was, of course, vodka.

It was the old woman from the front desk manning the counter and she pulled two dirty looking shot glasses, with her fingers in them, up to the counter and poured, barely getting her fingers out of the way. Simon picked up his glass and drank it in one swallow. Putting the glass back on the counter, he cleared his now burning throat and held up a finger for another. Vivienne took her glass and drank it without flinching, smiling at him with her eyes. They knocked back three more vodkas, standing close to each other, occasionally acting the part of lovers; touching, nuzzling, and the flutter of soft chatter began again. The old woman watched them openly.

“Why are you here?” she asked in the worst broken English Vivienne had ever heard.

Simon leaned on an elbow and turned to casually look out into the bar, watching the rest of the patrons listen to their conversation.

“My family used to be up in these parts,” Vivienne said in English, giving up on the ruse.

“Your family?” she replied with a contempt coloring her face. “You are looking for perhaps a family reunion?” Her Russian accent was thick, making her English almost painful to hear.

“I was sent here to look for одинокий волк, which, if you ask me, is a little unoriginal.”

The bar fell silent again and Simon was instantly reminded of a bad action movie. Any minute now the largest man in the bar would come up and demand to know why they want the одинокий волк and then the bar would erupt into a fight. With a sigh, he drank his fourth shot of vodka, the burn no longer bothering him, and then turned to look back at the bar with a rather bored expression.

Instead of the largest man approaching them, the man sitting alone stood slowly, attracting everyone’s eye and drank the last of his liquor. Everything about the town was colorless; a dying white layer of snow touched everything outside, and inside Simon could see the wear and tear of life in central Siberia on everyone’s face and clothes. The man standing was no different.

He was wearing a ushanka that had seen better days probably in the 1950’s and thick, lifeless brown clothes. His eyes were a dull brown, and despite the amount of liquor he more than likely just consumed, he focused intently on Vivienne. Without a word he pushed away from his table and left the bar. Simon leaned away from the bar and took one step toward the door.

“You don’t want to do that,” the old woman said, making him look back.

“Why? Is that him? The Wolf?” Simon asked as his voice suddenly loud in the painfully quiet bar.

One of the men sitting at a table near the bar snorted loudly. “No, he is not,” he said in Russian. His hair was long, white, and pulled back into a straggly ponytail. “You don’t want to find what you are looking for.”

*God this whole town was a cliché*, Simon thought to himself. “We need to speak to him,” Simon added. “How do we find this Wolf?”

“Go to bed,” the old woman said. “It is too late to risk cold. In the morning Able will show you.” She pointed to a younger looking man with crisp, light blue eyes. He could have been between ages of 18 to 35; Simon couldn’t tell from the dirt caked on his face.

“Yes,” Able said. “I help you.”

“Don’t bother,” the old man with the white ponytail mumbled, “he will find you.”

Simon rolled his eyes, looking up at the ceiling, then flicked an annoyed look at Vivienne. Her eyes were unfocused and her forehead crinkled in contemplation. She was staring in the direction of the door. Simon wondered if she was doing that thing again, gauging people. The clichéd attitude of the townspeople had distracted him, but Vivienne had concentrated on the man who had exited. Gently he reached out and touched her arm.

Vivienne’s eyes snapped up to his, her concentration broken. Shrugging, Vivienne put away her fifth shot of vodka and paid up without a word. Simon followed her back up to their room,

the bar patrons never once speaking. When they got back to their room, Simon closed it softly and watched Vivienne cross the small room to stoke the fire.

“You were looking at him,” Simon asked quietly.

Vivienne nodded as she poked into the potbelly stove. “Remember when I said you could have taken that redheaded cow?”

Simon nodded as he settled onto the edge of the small bed. “You said you could tell.”

“I get a feeling of a person’s strengths or weaknesses, like if that person is a safe target or not.”

“What did you read from him? Is he a werewolf?”

“Doesn’t work like that. We can’t tell if someone’s one of us or one of you.”

“Yes,” Simon said disappointed. “Same with us.”

“But out of the entire place, he was the person with whom not to fuck,” Viv said plainly.

Their abilities didn’t seem to differ from his kind. Their heightened sense of smell definitely told them more than what kind of perfume any given person was wearing. If they were anything like real wolves, everything left a specific imprint and they had the ability to recall it at a moment’s notice. Her ability to judge the worthiness of an opponent was not unlike his perception, but really it was something any trained fighter could develop on his own. It made him wonder though.

Slowly Simon asked, “What do you read from me?”

“When we first met?” Simon nodded.

The first time she laid eyes on Simon, he successfully made her feel like a piece of meat, which, in his case, was true.



The Arch Museum of Art was made of glass and granite; definitely the crown jewel in the uptown district and the chosen meeting place between the Pipers and the bane of their *Blood Memory*. Ellis Duban was tall, but then four-inch heels on a five foot nine frame will do that to you. Even with her heels on, Viv was only just barely scraping by at five foot nine. Simon Huntington though – that man was one tall drink of agua. LT’s obvious disdain was not helped by Simon kissing the inside of Viv’s wrist, letting his lips linger on her skin, but it wasn’t like Vivienne minded. She shook her head, chuckling at the move.

They were there inquiring on a recent vampire attack on leadership. At Marthinus’ suggestion, they went to what he considered a viable source.

“This is business,” Marthinus said, his clear and perfectly spoken English was almost a pleasure to hear. Viv looked over at the new Piper. New was only relative. Marthinus was sixty years old with the body of an extremely fit forty year old. His gift changed him in more ways than just making him a werewolf. His gifter had been pure from the source, the Beta Hammerthynn, and with that purity came strength, agility,

and one helluva face-lift. He was also Simon Huntington's human heir, or at least he was before choosing his new life.

"We were hoping you could identify someone for us," he asked.

Vivienne waited as Marthinus described the incident with the Alpha and his group being attacked by three vampires. Ellis listened intently asking questions about the main vampire's abilities, physical description, and ultimately – reasons.

Turning her attention away from the group, the details of the attack and the answers meant little to her at the moment, and Vivienne's eye fell on "Artillerymen" from Kirchner, 1915. Expressionism wasn't her forte, but the male dominated imagery was hard to not notice. Vivienne slowly stepped away from the small group and walked up to the painting.

With one ear tuned into the conversation, she listened with her mind as her heart paid great attention to the details of the piece in front of her.

"Do you like Kirchner?"

Vivienne felt the warm presence of Simon Huntington behind her right shoulder. Inhaling, she tasted his scent, trying to decide whether or not he was eying her up as a snack. His scent was like a full-bodied wine with notes of dusty fields, warm sun, and salty sweat. He was European if her nose was to be believed. If a person's scent had a memory, she wagered Mr. Huntington's would tell an interesting story.



“Not particularly,” she replied looking at the picture. The picture depicted an assembly of naked male soldiers, overseen by a clothed military official. Their unnaturally thin bodies were compressed into a low-ceilinged chamber.

“Well, it’s a little too distorted for me. I understand that expressionism tries to transcend the traditional, but the male dominance just says penis envy to me,” Viv added in a matter-of-fact tone.

Huntington stood beside her, shoulder to shoulder for a moment before turning to face her. Viv’s shoulder barely reached the center of his chest. He held his shoulders back, not hunching forward to match her height like some men do. Simon Huntington held himself with quiet grace and fortitude. His profile was striking; his cleft chin softly chiseled into his jaw line. Looking over her shoulder, Viv gave Ellis another look as the vampire smiled gently at Marthinus and answered his questions. She was radiant and graceful, just standing there. Her black hair glistened under the controlled lighting and her skin was flawless and warm.

“I like it,” was all that Simon said. Looking at him, she noticed his hazel brown eyes and long lashes. “A distorted view of beauty can still be beautiful.”

Viv looked at the painting again. The ARCH had detailed descriptions of each painting, explaining for the layman (much like her) the intended message of the painting. Stepping forward she read, “This says, *The naked, showering soldiers are powerless as individuals; their wills have been subjected to the*

*rigidity and anonymity of military life. The view that Artillerymen represents Kirchner's horror of the war."* Viv nodded, stepping back next to Simon.

They were silent for a moment, looking at each other, and then Vivienne narrowed her eyes slightly at the downward gaze he was giving her. She wondered if that kind of charm came naturally to him or if he used his centuries wisely and perfected it.

"I suppose," Viv started slowly, maintaining her look at him, "there is beauty in all things. The vile, the reprehensible...."



"You and Ellis are even. Which I guess says more about you than her."

"What do you mean?"

"She's older, right?"

"Not by much."

"Without seeing you fight, you both seemed dead even to me." She grinned, "No pun intended."

Simon rolled his eyes and they fell silent again. He remained on the bed as Vivienne closed the cast iron door on the stove and walked the short distance back to the bed. Together they sat on the edge of the bed staring at the floor.

"What happened on the plane?" he asked not expecting her to tell him.

Vivienne shrugged. Simon looked at her face as she pulled

her hair back and over her opposite shoulder. “Your bond with Ellis. What’s that like?” He chuckled at her avoidance but she quickly added, “No, I’m answering your question.”

“Ok,” he said. Looking up at the table with the lone chair, he stood and crossed to it. Pulling it out, he straddled it and faced Vivienne, hanging his arms off the back of the rickety chair. “It’s nothing I’ve ever felt before. It’s,” he struggled, trying to put it in words. “It’s like being empathic; one ability we do have, just not my clan. I know everything about her. The truths, the lies, her arousal, her despair. Primal emotions are so much more tangible,” he said, holding his fingers up and rubbing them together. “I can hear her thoughts, if they’re directed toward me, that is. She can hear mine. Only I can -.”

He stopped suddenly.

“You can what?”

Simon looked up into her eyes and gave her a weak smile. “Quid pro quo.”

Vivienne rolled her eyes and nodded. “I miss his scent.”

“Scents mean that much to you?”

“They mean everything.”

## *Chapter 21*

Viv swallowed hard, reminded again of that terrifying feeling of Brig's missing scent. What they shared was not common: compatible scents on both a psychological and physical level. It was comforting, exciting, all encompassing, and unbelievably erotic. Viv had come to need that scent, and now that it was gone, she felt the emptiness of his missing presence and it just about killed her.

"I fell in love with him within the first minute of meeting him. There is no other way to explain it." Viv shrugged, recalling their first meeting.



Viv possessed a demon-like speed when she wanted. Whistling her small body through the park, she cut a path straight across the length of the preserve, enjoying the new smells and prey presenting itself to her senses. She ran the length of it over and over again, never once losing an ounce of stamina.

Playfully, she ran up hills and hurled herself off the summits, sliding on the earth, and kicking up dirt everywhere.

The city's forest preserve was gloriously dense and untouched by man, hence why they called it a preserve, she thought happily.

She had yet to come across a fresh scent of other wolves in the vicinity – only older scents, at least a couple days old. A crescent moon hung high in the sky, so maybe the area was less traveled so early in the lunar phase, she thought as she stopped to look up at her mistress in the sky. Inhaling deeply, she could taste the smells in the air, each leaving a colorful trace of itself in the air only she could see when something new revealed itself. Viv paused, tasting it when suddenly her hackles rose.

Turning behind her, another wolf entered the clearing below her hill. It was rusted red and twice her size. She recognized the coloring immediately; it was a Greater Pack wolf. It carried itself with slow, deliberate movements; its body high off the ground, the red's hackles were on end as well. Snarling, he communicated that she was crossing its territory, but Viv hadn't smelled any indicators in the area.

The red was just pissed.

Viv mimicked the red's movement, slow and deliberate, refusing to submit to its dominance.

*You wanna dance, big boy, let's dance.*

Viv narrowed her eyes at the other wolf and began to growl. The other wolf was male, not that it let her get a good look at it. She could tell; the musky tones of his natural scent filtered into

her nose and its body language told her that he was on the offensive and angry. It stared directly at her, his tail horizontal with his spine, but it slowly approached her, trying to intimidate her.

Instinctively she wanted to rip this wolf's throat out and urinate in the open cavity, but she didn't think her father would call that 'staying out of trouble'. The big red was angry Viv wasn't submitting, and fuck that; she hadn't planned on it. What she needed to do was get out of there without pissing the entire pack off before she even got to meet the Alpha, which was going to be happening the next day. Still, she had fought bigger wolves and let them know she was not a female with whom to fuck.

And with clarity that could not have been clearer if Viv had said it out loud, her body language said, *Fuck you*. She lifted her paw, scratching at the dirt and lowered her head to a head butt position, egging him on.

The red lunged at her not giving her much of a choice and she returned the advance a split second after he did and met in the middle, jaws clamping down on fur, claws digging into the earth, kicking it everywhere. It was a flurry of scratching, mostly harmless, but warning of imminent danger just the same. A few moments passed and they separated again, no blood drawn, but fur definitely ruffled.

Viv could give the big red the slip, she knew this, but it was already too late. Whoever this was, they'd probably recognize her when she got to the property tomorrow. Mentally she

cursed herself, but she couldn't back down. That's not how her father taught her to fight.

They circled each other again, saliva dripping from their jaws and fur completely on end. Probably looked like a dirty cotton ball, she thought to herself. The red maintained eye contact when suddenly something hit her.

Viv shook her head and stopped in her tracks. A scent assaulted her senses and she roughly shook her head, trying to clear the daze. Taking a step back, she looked back up at the red that had stopped as well. His hackles were settling down and he just watched her.

They stood there quietly for a full minute before he took a step toward her.

Viv had no clue what was going on, but she could not help herself. She rubbed her body along the big red, leaving her scent and could not stop inhaling his. It was intoxicating. It confused her as well as pushed her closer to him. The red seemed just as confused as she was, sitting back and letting her deposit her scent.

One minute they were about to tear each other's throats out, the next they were courting? Unsure, she came up alongside his chest and stayed close to him when he finally grabbed the scruff of skin at the back of her neck, clamping down.

*Whoa whoa whoa*, she thought suddenly scared. *The red thought he was going to...?*

Startled, Viv pulled back but his weight half pushed her to

the ground as he reasserted his bite and climbed on behind her. He growled slightly, and she found herself submitting to him, lowering her body to allow him to mount her.

Not moments earlier they were fighting for dominance, now they were consummating an act that only mates had permission to do. His scent was so mesmerizing, so delicious; Viv thought, that even though her mind wanted to run, her body was eagerly submitting, waiting for him to take her. And when he did, it was magnificent.

He was twice her size, easily, and the weight of him wrapped her in a warm blanket that made her head dizzy with want. Arching her back slightly, she accepted him in her and felt his hips against her, pushing himself into her as his jaws bit at her shoulder blades and neck. His warm breath was sweet and clean, blowing by her ears and muzzle. Viv could not get enough of him as he took her, there in the clearing, in the city's park.



His wolf form was incredible, but it was his human form that absolutely captivated her. Meeting him the next day had been almost disastrous. Brig was very much the capable and intimidating Alpha male. He loomed over her, trying to intimidate her, but she gave back twice what he did, and within a week he was in her bed, and every night since then. Leaving had been easy; it was realizing what she left behind that tore her asunder.

Viv closed her eyes and felt the sob in her chest. It took



everything not to cry when she said, “I love him...so much.” Wincing, she shook her head slowly. “Do you know that type of pain, Simon? That aching loss?” She swallowed back the tears and looked at him.

Simon looked as if he was struggling with that answer. You live so long with one person, living in that person’s shadow and worshipping them for it; how could he not know that pain? Marthinus hadn’t been completely forthcoming, but the chain of events was clear to Viv as Marthinus grazed over the past five years. His grandfather had come to a decision, one that would affect their entire clan and his direct descendants. Human Marthinus lay dying and Simon had been powerless to do anything about it, per Ellis. What would make one man turn his back on his blood? Ellis must have been so alluring, so captivating to be able to treat humanity with such disdain, including her long time lover’s own mortal family.

Viv watched Simon’s face as it threatened to crumple. He knew the exquisite pain that only love could invoke. Viv wondered though – for whom was he feeling that for and was the answer tearing him up inside?

“It’s not that you’re not a decent looking man. Really, you’re easy on the eyes.”

Simon’s controlled anguish smoothed into irritation as he glared at her.

Reaching out she touched his arm gently. “There is no other. Will never be another. Could never be another. Do you understand now why I won’t?” she asked softly.

Simon stood up from his chair letting Vivienne's hand drop and went to the bed, moving the rucksacks off it. He picked up the pillows and shook them out best he could. As he pulled the top sheet back, Viv snorted.

"So, getting the bed ready is your answer or just another invitation?"

He looked up at her as he pulled the wool blanket they had used earlier from underneath her and spread it out on the bed. "I could have insisted you make the bed, but I was afraid you'd hit me."

Viv looked into Simon's face as he gently smiled back at her. He heard her and understood. Turning away from him, she looked at the stove across the room and rubbed her face. The bed sank behind her as Simon got into it. It was a small full sized bed and his long legs reached the edge of it next to her. Curiously, he still had his boots on as he shoved them under the sheets.

"You always wear your boots to bed?" She turned and looked back at him. "Are you going out?"

"No, but luck favors the prepared."

It was cold in Siberia that time of year; the temperature had dropped to below freezing already. The wind had picked up and turned the room into an ice cube, but it didn't bother either of them. The Therian-weave suit she was wearing did a magnificent job maintaining her core temperature and naturally it didn't bother the wolf in her in the least. She

wasn't sure what Simon did or did not feel, but she never once saw him breathe heavy or shiver. His body was even warm to the touch. Standing, she stripped down to her Therian-weave, keeping the newer thinner boots on and climbed into bed with him. They lay there quietly, staring up at the ceiling.

"Tired?" he asked, putting his arms behind his head so Viv could fit comfortably just below his left armpit. She ended up laying on his arm, much to his surprise, and showed no outward awkwardness. Simon lifted his head and looked at her as she unfocused her eyes. With a slight shake of his head, he lowered it down on the questionably clean pillow and sighed.

"I should be," she yawned. Viv turned her head and inhaled deeply, a plethora of scents came off his thick pullover. It was black wool, soft to the touch with a little bit of an itch as she brushed her cheek up against it. The essence of Simon's scent was a sharp contrast to their surroundings. Anay was smoke, wood with an almost stale taste in the air. The room had a multitude of other scents, having seen a varying degree of use over the years. The blankets weren't exactly clean and stank of body odor. Simon's scent was crisp, dry grass with notes of oak trees and the faint metallic taste of steel.

"Are you smelling me?" he asked, his voice vibrating in his chest.

"You smell better than the rest of this room."

Simon snorted, slightly disgusted, and turned his face toward her head. "You never finished telling me what my scent reminded you of."

Viv inhaled again, tasting the hard-edged notes. It was different than Brig's whose essence was crisp with Birchwood and arid masculinity. "I think you smell like steel. Something metallic." Viv nestled into his arm and closed her eyes. "Oak trees. Wheat fields. Maybe leather, soft leather. Definitely European." Licking her lips, Viv opened her eyes again to find Simon staring at her intently, hanging on her every word. "I've never come across anything like it. It makes you unique."

"Really?" Simon replied softly, mesmerized by her ability.

"Aren't you folks sensitive to scents?"

"Folks," he said under his breath, finally making her laugh gently. He considered her question and tried to explain. "Perception runs in my clan. I can detect changes, some smells, but overall it's just a hypersensitivity to my surroundings. I can hear the heartbeats of everyone within one hundred yards. Whispers, if I'm concentrating. If something is off, I guess you can say."

"That's perception? All of that?"

"The hearing is just being a vampire."

Viv was quiet, listening to the soft tenor of Simon's voice and the feel of his chest rising with each breath. Lying in bed with Brig and listening to the rumble of his voice always struck a chord in her, immediately arousing her. Just standing next to Brig and hearing him breathe made her skin break out in goose bumps and a deep-seeded desire. With Simon, it just wasn't there.

Curling up next to Simon had been a test, more for her resolve than for his; to see if what she felt for Brig was more than just pheromones. Simon had an undeniable draw to him, Viv admitted that; his hazel brown eyes, the curve of his smile, his amazingly lean and tight body – it was all there, but it just didn't appeal to her. Vampires had that exquisite lure of sexiness and dark pleasures and who didn't want someone as handsome as Simon close enough to bite?

Viv pulled back just then and turned over onto her elbows, looking directly at him. "Lemme see them," she said, her tone direct and somewhat demanding.

Simon flinched and pulled back with a strange look. "See what?"

Vivienne pointed at his mouth and he relaxed, lifting the arm she had been lying on and resting his head on his hand. Their closeness spoke of a familiarity that he did not think existed between them yet, but it was almost as if knowing she would never give into him made the intrusion on their personal space not even worth giving a second thought. Smiling at her, he twisted to face her.

"Why do you need to see them? You've already felt them," he said, unable to resist flirting.

"Open up," she said with the same determined voice.

Leaning in closer, he turned his face to the side and smiled, his lip pulling back over his canines. Vivienne peered into his mouth, her face barely inches away and huffed. "Where are

they?”

“We really don’t need them, you know.” Simon closed his mouth and ran his tongue over the canine closer to her and pulled his lips back in another dark smile. Viv’s reaction was hilarious; her eyes grew wide as her mouth gaped open. Simon began to laugh when she reached out and touched his mouth, silencing him to a small smile. She pulled at his lip and touched the tip of the now pronounced fang.

“Have you washed your hands?” he asked around her fingers.

Enthralled, Viv touched the tip and then twisted his head to the side none too gently to see the other as well. “They retract?”

Simon closed his lips and licked them, tasting her fingers. “You did not wash your hands.”

Vivienne made a face and smiled. “That is the weirdest thing I have ever seen.”

“Yes, I am – what would you call it? I am awesome sauce.”

They laughed as Viv leaned onto his chest and her legs bent, kicking her feet up into the air. The expression on Simon’s face was startling. No smoldering stare, no looking at her lips in anticipation of connecting with them, he just looked at her with open awe and warmth.

“You’re not even thinking about kissing me, are you?”

Simon’s eyebrows furrowed at her statement. They were lying so close to one another, her long brown hair pulled over

her shoulder in a low ponytail, touching his arm and the warmth of her body was pressed up against his chest. Their faces were mere inches apart and perfectly poised to connect and he did not once consider trying to kiss her.

“Aww, we’re just friends now,” she said, snorting softly to herself.

“I can kiss you if you want. You’ve all but said you like me chasing you.”

“I did not say that.”

Simon leaned in close and kissed her on her cheek instead, burying his face in her dark hair. Again their laughing was that of friends rather than lovers and he pulled back, giving her a dirty look.

“I greatly dislike you, now.”

Vivienne reached out and pat his face before turning onto her back and staring back up at the ceiling. Simon mimicked her position, but could not help smiling to himself.

“Get some sleep. I’ll wake you if I hear anything.” Viv nodded and turned away from him. “Want me to spoon you?” he asked with a helpful tone.

“Shut up.” Viv grinned despite her annoyed tone and closed her eyes.



Richards and Phillips returned once Elder Jameson transformed back and howled, calling them to their location.

They were covered with blood and their hackles on end. Hammer watched with an interested eye as they came upon the dead Piper's body. Richards transformed first, kneeling down next to Samuels and then Phillips who went to Elder Hammerthynn, seeing his blood.

Hammer sighed unhappily. "Piper Richards," he said, recognizing the Piper from his bio.

Richards drew his eyes away and looked at Hammer, the pain in his face evident. He stood quickly at the sight of his Pack's Beta and snapped to attention with Phillips. "Beta Hammerthynn."

"Samuels tried to kill Elder Hammerthynn. Thoughts?" Hammer asked nonchalantly, gauging the men's reactions. The Pipers looked at each other, then Vigo, completely confused.

"He has a family. His sister and her children," Richards offered.

Vigo stood slowly to his feet; no one daring to assist. You weren't Elder if you needed help. "They have them. Would you happen to know where his family is?"

"They live in Nova Scotia," Richards replied.

Vigo nodded and looked at his son. The moment they were in contact with the rest of the families, they'd send the word and their best to Nova Scotia to find them.

"Paulson," Hammer said keeping his eye on Richards and Phillips. The young man had been silent since appearing in the clearing with Duncan and the other two Pipers; almost so that



Hammer barely noticed him. He turned his eye on the young man. “I heard you got promoted.”

Paulson stepped forward. “Aye, sir.”

“You had the Elder’s back in there.”

“Aye, sir.”

“No other survivors?”

Paulson swallowed hard. “Piper Diego covered us. He stayed behind.”

Duncan looked at Hammer who nodded. Every Piper’s face was tight with controlled rage and loss. Hammer had met with Diego at the Den not two months earlier. He had brought the Therian-weave suits and introduced them to the Alpha’s Pipers, as well as drank most of them under the table. He was a good man, an excellent Piper and a hero. Hammer lowered his lone eye out of respect and then picked up where he left off.

“How is it you stayed alive?” Hammer knew what he was implying. How did a young man, gifted not even six months, manage to stay alive, get to the Elder, and make it out.

“United States Air Force.”

Hammer looked at the young man from head to toe. “You’re American?” He narrowed his eye at the young man. “What field?”

“Cross trained Tactical Air Control, Survival, Evasion, and Resistance, Pararescuman. I had eight years in before this life.”

The group of men looked at Paulson, silently sizing him up. He blinked once and then held the Beta's glare. Any trace of insecurity was gone and Hammer saw this and liked it. "You're the old Alpha Michaels' illegitimate son, correct?"

Paulson's expression hardened at the mention of his biological father. "Aye, sir. I didn't know until recently. I was raised with my mother's family. Sacramento, sir."

Hammer looked at Elder Jameson who stepped forward.

"The Elder and I facilitated your father's death. Not by our hands, but by his own. There is great shame associated with your family name. This going to be a problem?"

"My name is JT Paulson, sir. I know the honor of what my family are, not the stain." Paulson brought his eyes up to Duncan and relaxed. "It's not a problem for me, sir. I hope it's not for you or the Beta."

"You're a Jameson by blood, but by whose gift?"

"I was gifted by Alpha Michael's brother, my paternal uncle. He wasn't close to my father."

"Your choice?" Hammer asked.

"A choice, sir. Seeker Victor Jameson said it was best."

The Seeker Victor Jameson was the Elder Jameson's third and currently youngest son. His position within the family was to seek out relatives who would benefit the Piper lineage. It had been less than eight months since Victor located Paulson and presented him with the offer.

Duncan, lifting his chin at the young man.

“He’s also medically trained.”

Duncan and Hammer looked at the young man. Interesting answers to some very painful questions. Duncan was Elder of his family, so Paulson fell under his direct authority, but Hammer was Beta and everyone belonged to him. Duncan raised his eyebrows at Hammer, silently asking his nephew, and Beta’s, permission.

Hammer turned his head and looked at Paulson with his steel gray eye. There was a promise in the look he gave Paulson. Loyalty was a given, but respect would be earned. “Fall in then, Piper Paulson.”

Paulson immediately went to stand next to Phillips and Richards. The two other Pipers looked at each other and then at Paulson. Richards held his hand out to Paulson who shook it, then Phillips.

Vigo blew the blood out of his nose and cleared his throat, hacking a cough, trying to get the silver out of his sinuses. Paulson took a step forward but Vigo held a hand up. Hammer had been almost frantic looking for his father, but as they stood there within feet of each other, the normal sense of detachment settled in again. Crossing his arms, Hammer didn’t wait for his father to dislodge the rest of the tainted blood.

“As I said, Commander Jameson is on his way to Baikal now. He’s probably split up the Pipers to meet us in Donegal

and him in Siberia. Is the compound lost?”

“All dead,” Duncan said without a trace of feeling. Hammer had never seen Duncan become emotional over anything in public, but he knew how much of a good father and man his uncle was. There were many good memories in the Jameson household with Brig. Duncan had tried to be there emotionally for Hammer after his sister, Hammer’s mother, had died, but there was only so much he could do without Vigo seeing it as interfering. Hammer’s path was set. Duncan could no more sway Hammer from his duty than comfort him as his uncle.

“We’ll take it back with my Pipers. Let’s move.” Hammer pushed his change completely before his paws hit the ground. Digging his claws into the dirt, he headed east.

“Paulson,” Vigo said. He was still unable to transform into his wolf, so Vigo turned east toward Donegal through Dunlewy Far and began to run. “With me.” Paulson fell in line next to his Elder without a word. Vigo was possibly the scariest thing in the woods, but it never hurt to have someone on his six.



Viv sat up in bed and listened.

Twisting she touched the spot next to her and felt the warmth of Simon’s body, but he was gone. Dragging her bottom lip into her mouth, she chewed at the skin and inhaled deeply. Moving her tongue in her mouth, Viv tasted the smells.

Cinder and ash. Wool and dirt. Simon’s scent hung heavily around her, but there was nothing else, along with the silence.

Slipping off the bed, she kept her eyes on the door and slipped on her parka, opting not to use her pea coat. She came up alongside the single chair and desk underneath the only window in the room and lifted the desk easily, moving it silently. Fingering the window latch, she carefully looked out the window and saw nothing but the flurries of a blizzard. The room was dark and the warmth of the stove had petered out. Silently, she opened the window and crawled out of the smallest possible opening.

The traction of her Therian-weave boots added to her ability to balance on precarious surfaces, the rooftop of the Inn included. She kept low and against the siding, blending in with the shadows as best she could. Reaching the edge of the roof, Viv silently dropped to the ground and stepped back, right into a body that grabbed her from behind, covering her mouth.

Immediately her elbow hooked back and was blocked. Letting her legs buckle to offset the attacker's balance, Viv twisted again and threw them in front of her only to have the person right them and stand directly in front of her.

Simon reached out and covered her mouth again, silently shushing her. Viv sighed with relief and pulled his hand down.

'Oh for fuck sakes, Simon!' she mouthed. Pulling her close, he took her back into the shadows of the building and pressed her up against the wall.

"They're gone," he whispered. He was wearing his parka open but it was more for show.

“Who is?”

“Everyone.”

Viv’s eyes went wide and she held her hand up, stepping back out to look at the abandoned street. She inhaled, searching for scents but the flurries were turning into a whiteout, effectively blinding them both.

“Are you sure it’s not the coming storm? Maybe they’re in their basements?”

“Vivienne, there is no one here. At all. I hear *nothing*. Not a whisper, not a breath, not a heartbeat.”

Viv felt her stomach clench tightly. Checking Simon’s watch, she twisted his wrist up to her face and noted the time – she had been sleeping only three hours. Where could an entire village disappear to in that time?

“We’re not going to be able to see anything with the white out.” Viv turned back and looked at him. “What do you have on you?”

Simon shrugged and opened his parka. “Don’t need much. You?”

“My knife. That’s it.” Viv dug into her parka jacket and pulled out her Therian-weave gloves, slipping them on. “You go house to house?”

“Not yet, just the perimeter. Didn’t get a sense of anything.”

“What made you get up?”

“You snore.” She huffed, aghast. “You do. I was listening to

you, not outside. Suddenly there was nothing.”

“Split up?”

“I don’t think that’s wise.”

“Do we have a choice?”

“Yes,” Simon said, taking her arm, “we do. We get the hell out of here.”

“After coming all this way? What about these people?”

Simon licked his lips and let his shoulders drop. “We can’t watch each other’s back if we’re separated.”

“Let’s be perfectly clear here. You’re watching MY back. You’re indestructible.”

“The first step to perfection is admitting your weaknesses,” he said finding the tiniest bit of humor in an otherwise bleak situation.

Viv took a deep breath, “You search the Inn?”

“Went through it all.”

“Let’s use the whiteout and move down through the village.”

Viv turned away from Simon and edged around the corner, right into the double barrel of a twelve-gauge shotgun. It was the man who had been sitting alone in the bar. He was as nondescript then as he was holding the shotgun not two inches from Viv’s face.

“Your abilities suck, Simon.”

Viv felt Simon press up against her back slowly as she took a

step back. His touch was rigid and instinctively she reached back and grabbed him.

“Stop,” she warned softly under her breath. The man was no match for Simon, but when the Russian died (and he would without a doubt) any information he might have died with him.

The ushanka wearing man looked at her with warm brown eyes. The shotgun neither wavered or blew her head off, both of which she was terrified and pleased about. Suddenly he lowered the shotgun and looked at her, from head to toe.

“You are loud,” he said in clear English. “Come with me.” Then he walked off toward the main road of the village without looking behind him.

“How did you not hear him?” Viv whispered angrily at Simon.

“You were talking,” Simon said plainly.

Viv stalked off toward the man before he disappeared completely into the whiteout. They caught up to him as he crested the hill out of town and toward the tree line at the base of the mountain. The village pulled away quickly and Viv could see just how deep within the shadows of the mountain that the people of the village resided.

“Where is everyone?” Simon asked.

“Gone,” the man replied.

“Gone where? Dead?”



The man shrugged. Touching his chest, introducing himself. “My name is Grigoriy.”

“Vivienne. Simon.” Viv introduced them but thought it prudent to leave out last names. Simon only replied with a polite nod.

“Вы говорите очень хорошо России.” The man complimented Viv on her Russian; his shrewd eyes contemplating her.

“But you speak fluent English, too, out here?”

“Of course I do. English is the universal language.”

“You don’t seem concerned with your entire village disappearing?” Simon asked as he walked on the opposite side of Viv, putting Grigoriy in the middle.

“No,” he said simply, looking at Simon. “What do you want with the Wolf?”

“Vigo Hammerthynn sent me,” Viv replied and then added, “with his regards, of course.”

Grigoriy stopped and looked at Viv. He sized her up again, his eyes narrowing. “You are a long way from home.”

“I thought this was home for the Hammerthynns.”

“It was. Once. For some. You’re not a Hammerthynn.”

Viv narrowed her own eyes at the man. “Ok I’m wondering if being cryptic is a Russian trait or just what people did out here in Siberia to keep things interesting.”

Simon rolled his eyes at her.

“Come with me then. I will show you Baikal’s wolf,” Grigoriy said ignoring Viv’s sarcasm.

“You’re not the wolf?” Simon asked.

Grigoriy laughed. “Not even close. This way.” He began climbing the steep slope up the mountainside.

“What about your village?” Viv asked, pointing behind her. The town sat quiet and empty.

Grigoriy continued toward the forest tree line against the mountains. “It’s not my village.”



## *Chapter 22*

“I got her,” the tinny voice said over the static of the satellite radio.

Brig sat in the co-pilot’s seat and looked at the coordinates Lewis fed him old-school style on the jet’s maps. He twisted the map clockwise and then back counterclockwise. “Is that Anay? It says Anay on the map. Over.”

“Her cell phone just turned on. I had to do some seriously illegal, uh...stuff to bounce that signal. Believe me, sir, that’s where she is within a ten mile radius. Granted, ten-miles in the mountains is a lot. Over.”

“You give the cords to LT? Over.”

“He’s right behind you, Commander. Six hours maybe? He figures they’ll be able to catch up to you once you hit the ground. Over.”

Brig grunted at the thought. Turning to his pilot he held the map up. “How close can you get me in there?”

“Without killing you?”

“Preferably.”

The pilot took the map and then pointed to a small spot south of Lake Baikal. “Lake Baikal is old, but I’m pretty sure they run sea planes out there. There might be an airstrip, but if not,” the pilot said leaving his statement unfinished.

Brig nodded. He had already pulled out the plane’s emergency parachute and prepped it. Popping the seal on a jet this size was not advisable and he hoped he wouldn’t be doing the pilot any harm, but Brig saw the pilot was prepared for it as well with his parachute by his seat.

“Sir?” Lewis’ voice crackled in from their Situation Room at home base. “Getting word from Charlie. They’ve touched down in Donegal and the Beta, Elders, and our three Pipers are there. Over.”

“Good,” Brig said with a sigh of relief. “What about the compound? Is it secured? Over.”

There was a long pause and Lewis came back on, his voice strained. “No, sir. No other survivors. Glenveagh has been over run. Over.”

Brig looked down at the map and then the pilot, confused as to what Lewis had told him. “Say again, Lewis? How many survivors? Over.”

“Just five, sir. The Elders and our three Pipers. Glenveagh is lost. The sergeant and his team are en route with the Beta back to Glenveagh. They are completely dark out there still. Elder Jameson and his three Pipers are checking the area to see how far out it goes. Any orders, sir? Over.”

Brig leaned back in the seat and held in a pained sigh. “No,” he said quietly into the mic.

“Aye, sir. Piper Home over and out.”

Brig sat in the co-pilot chair and stared out the front window. The terrain below them had changed from the muddy green of Europe to Western Russia’s graying cold. They would be able to save time by cutting across due east and avoiding Mongolia altogether. Brig tried to focus on Vivienne instead of the loss of life back in Ireland, but his growing rage wouldn’t allow it. He knew in his heart Viv had nothing to do with what was happening; certainly her search for answers wasn’t starting a domino effect that was resulting in dozens of lives murdered. Duncan and Vigo were alive, but there was not enough relief to cancel out the pain.

Finding Viv was his priority, but dealing with Huntington would be a pleasure.



The dark brown wolf covered in dark blue Therian-weave flicked his blue eyes up into the trees as he lowered his nose to the ground, smelling the trail of blood that surrounded the compound. Flanking him were two more large wolves, another dark brown and a lighter buff colored. With a flick of his head, they dispersed, circling the main building in front of them, disappearing into the trees. Lifting his head, he sniffed the air and moved cautiously to the slightly ajar door in front of him, purposely avoiding the large puddle of blood that soaked the dirt. Nudging the door open further, the smell of silver

immediately hit him, making him shake his head violently and sneeze. Backing up, he stepped quietly into the courtyard when the tell tale sign of more wolves made his ears flick. Two massive wolves came into the clearing – a deep red, joined by a graying russet, and smaller buff color, then behind them the trampling of human feet.

The blue-eyed wolf turned toward the larger wolves and began to shake. Within moments Charlie Hammond returned to his human form, just as the other two wolves shifted. Elder Hammerthynn and an even taller Piper stepped into the clearing and waited. Standing up from his knees, Charlie shook his head and whistled loudly. His two wolves returned quickly and shifted back as well.

“I barely got into the door. There’s silver everywhere,” Charlie said pointing over his shoulder toward the building.

“Bodies in the tree line. Trails of blood leading deeper in,” said one of the two men that were with Charlie.

Charlie nodded to Duncan Jamesons, his adopted grandfather, and the Elder Hammerthynn. “Sirs,” he said politely. Then his eye passed over to the large Piper beside Elder Hammerthynn.

“JT Paulson,” the newcomer said with a polite nod to Charlie. Charlie’s eyes flicked back to the Beta and was given the barest of nods.

Reaching his hand out, Charlie shook hands with the new Piper. Duncan made introductions. “Richards, Phillips,

Paulson,” Duncan said, getting their attention. Pointing at the two Pipers with Charlie, “This is the Alpha’s Pipers Marko, Dougie, and Sergeant Hammond.”

“Charlie,” he said with a nod to the three new Pipers. Giving them a quick appraisal, Charlie’s eye fell on the large Piper, Paulson. Aside from the Elders and the Beta, Paulson was clearly the largest of the present Pipers, even Marko who stood at six foot six. Paulson hung back, continuously checking the tree line and ignoring Charlie and the other Pipers stare.

“Three Pipers,” Charlie asked looking at Elder Jameson. Duncan flicked his blue gray eyes at Charlie and nodded silently. “Jesus,” he mumbled quietly and nodded. “We’ll sanitize the area, secure the perimeter and sweep the buildings, above and below. Then someone can tell us what happened?” The men nodded and Charlie reached for his gun that was secured to his compression pack on his suit.

Marko reached into his compression pack and handed out functioning communication gear to the other Pipers present.

“Are we it?” Charlie asked finally now that everyone had functioning gear.

Lewis’ voice chimed into his earpiece, “*No other heat signatures in the outer area. The building is dead. No audio or visual whatsoever. More than likely an EMP pulse. I won’t be able to get into anything. It’s dark for at least fifty miles radius, but it’s mostly trees so it’s hard to tell.*”

The Beta had been silent the entire time. His eyes constantly

moving, surveying the area and his nose lifted high, tasting the scents in the air. With a final crack of his neck, he held a hand out to Paulson who immediately handed him a gun.

“Groups of three. We only need one and we wipe the rest. Understood?”

“Aye, sir,” they all replied and moved toward the building.



The temperature dropped to almost ten below zero as they moved further into the dense forest, the terrain at first rising slowly till they hit the base of a steep hill that led to the base of one of the smaller mountains.

“This would be so much easier as a wolf,” Viv muttered to herself.

“I’m sweating to death in this jacket,” Simon complained. His face showed no signs of hyperthermia with his natural, or maybe unnatural, ability to keep his core at a precise temperature.

Viv pulled at her jacket, feeling the same effects underneath with her Therian-weave adjusting against the freezing cold. They both looked so out of place it was a wonder the townsfolk didn’t kill them on sight.

Grigoriy took the incline without pausing, climbing higher and higher until the hill leveled out. He began to disappear down the slope just as they crested the peak. The short distance to the village to this point was deceiving. Viv looked down the slope and saw an open, jagged mouth of caves and



small hills. It spanned across for about a mile, but it would take a highly experienced hiker to even traverse the rocky path. There was another worn path leading down onto another level that hooked around and took them further up, above the opposite side.

Viv looked up at Simon and stepped down onto the worn path, following Grigoriy.

Somehow within the maze of paths and hills, their guide brought them a quarter of a mile to the side of the mountain that slanted upwards to a forty-five degree angle. Viv felt the burn in her knees and thighs, but it did not slow her down. The wind barraged her face, trying in vain to burn her skin, but her regenerative abilities kept the skin damage at bay, although she felt the fatigue setting in faster than usual. At Grigoriy's pace, which hadn't slowed down once, and the steepness of the mountain, it wouldn't be long before she'd have to stop for a breather.

Simon trudged just behind her silently. Occasionally Viv would look back and see Simon looking around, not even breaking a sweat or breathing fast. It annoyed her to realize that he could run up the hill and not lose his breath. Her wolf begged to come out. The added strength and speed would have cut the hike in half, easily, but it would have been stupid to risk it.

"Looks like he's headed to the north face of the mountain. Couple miles."

"I'd give a lung for a helicopter right about now."

Simon chuckled. "Getting tired?"

"Oh, well...we're currently on day three crossing the country, no wait, four countries, three airports, below freezing temperatures, really bad vodka, being dry humped by a vampire."

"It wasn't that bad," Simon muttered.

"And now we're climbing up a mountain, in zero degree weather, and I'm fairly certain an angle that only should be viewed in geometry and me without my camera."

"Think of it this way, it could be worse."

Viv stopped and looked at him. The wind was beginning to freeze her tears, but she peered up at him, raising her eyebrows. She took a moment to hold her arms out and spin in a slow circle.

"Simon, we're in Siberia. In the dead of winter. Chasing after a whisper. Really? We're on the side of a fucking mountain. All we're missing is a natural disaster."

"Well now you jinxed us."

Viv sighed and then turned back toward Grigoriy, only to find him gone. "Oh that can't be good."

Simon double-timed it to the spot where Grigoriy disappeared with Viv trailing behind him. They stood at a small clearing on the side of the mountain that overlooked a small cave. They slid carefully down the slope when Viv took note of the tracks on the ground.

“Human. Not human,” she said as she knelt down and pointed.

“Wolf tracks.”

“Yeah.” Viv rose slowly, keeping her eyes on the size of the wolf track. “That is one big fucking wolf.”

“I really do not want to go in there,” Simon sighed quietly.

“A small tight cave with insanely huge wolf tracks and a creepy Russian guy. How could this possibly not end well?”

“You have that American sarcasm down perfectly.”

“It’s a gift.”

“No, it’s not.” Simon snorted softly as he took point and entered the cave ahead of Viv.

Biting her lip, Viv turned and gave the outside perimeter a final look. Shards of frozen ice surrounded the opening of the cave; effectively camouflaging it from overhead and unable to locate on the ground unless you knew it was there. The temperature was infinitely colder as was the blistering wind that blew high up on the mountain. Perfect hiding place for a legend no one has ever heard of.

Viv chose her steps carefully, walking in Simon’s as she entered the cave. Her eyes adjusted to the darkness immediately and her nose picked up the stray scents of the other wolf, plus Grigoriy’s ; dead carcasses, sweat, blood, but curiously no smells of human or animal waste. Apparently someone did their business elsewhere. Even pets did not shit

where they ate, so why wouldn't it apply for a large wolf in a secluded mountain cave?

Viv came up behind Simon who was standing in front of a recently put out fire. It had been stamped not a half hour earlier, and as she came up on Simon's left, she noted the look on his face; tight concentration with unfocused eyes. She already knew better than to interrupt – he was concentrating with his abilities.

The only light in the cave was the soft ambient light behind them from the mouth of the tunnel. The cave itself tunneled around to the right of them, losing itself in pure, black darkness. Viv stepped over the dead campfire and moved into the darkness, letting her wolf eyes make out the features of the carved out cave.

Suddenly something was there, moving quietly along the icy floor. The distinct huff of ragged, wolf breathing clouded her senses and inspired a fear in her that Viv had not felt since she was ten and surrounded by one-eyed giant wolves the size of god. But this...this thing was bigger than Vigo and his Pipers. It radiated strength, pain, and enormous size. Its soft growl pierced the silence of the cave and it made every bone in Viv's body tremble.

Viv took a step back toward the light behind her when the thing growled loudly, its heartbeat so loud she could hear it. Her inner monologue picked that moment to comment on the stupidity of her situation. Letting her know that coming to the middle of Siberia, into the Baikal Mountains with absolutely

no back up or ability to call for backup, was probably not one of her better ideas.

“Viv.” It was Simon behind her, the awe in his voice clear and thick.

“Don’t call me Viv,” she heard herself say as the monstrous animal in front of her pierced the darkness with its bone chattering painful howl and finally, it stepped into the light.



“Ready?”

“Ready.”

Brig stood at the door of the jet, his hands on the mechanical arm to open the door in mid air. The pilot adjusted his controls and tightened his grip on the yoke. Brig popped the emergency hatch, and as the seal broke and the door opened, was sucked out with the vacuum, ten thousand feet up into an accelerated free fall. He had learned to do this type of jumping years ago, but you try hurling yourself out of a plane with nothing but a bit of nylon to keep you from hitting the ground at over two hundred and eighty five miles per hour, you tend to get a little nervous. As soon as he cleared the jet, he pulled on his parachute and it immediately opened and inertia pulled on his limbs as his parachute straps tightened across his upper thighs and shoulders.

The pain was exquisite. The cold, oxygen deprived wind whipped at Brig’s face and stole his breath, almost choking him out of the natural reaction to the temperature and

adrenaline. Craning his neck, he looked for the jet and was pleased to see it maintaining its altitude. He had no idea if a pilot could land a plane with an opened cabin, but he prayed his would make it. If not, it would be one more life lost among the dozens Viv's unauthorized and dangerous search for answers had put at risk.

There were low laying clouds covering the ground beneath him and the visibility was cut down to just feet in front of him. The parachute billowed and swayed angrily above him, swinging his body in painful, snapping motions till finally they cleared the clouds and he looked down as best he could.

“Ohhhhhh Shhhiiiiiiiit!”

Brig's descent had only slowed him to maybe half the speed necessary to hit the ground without breaking every bone in his body, but he did not factor in the tree line and the very painful branches that helped break his fall. So to speak.

His body hit the trees like a cannon ball, breaking limbs that were almost six inches in diameter with his massive body. From limb to limb, he cleared the main branches and again saw the ground rush toward his face, only to be yanked back again and kissed on the pucker by inertia as his parachute became tangled in the limbs, completely stopping him.

Brig hung there, upside down, six feet off the ground. He looked up, or rather down, and saw the massive evergreen that had stopped his descent and audibly thanked god before he heard another branch snap loudly, dropping him the rest of the way to the ground on his head.

“Ugh.” Rolling over onto his back, Brig took a deep breath and lifted his hands, looking at them. Two of his fingers were broken through the Therian-weave gloves. Taking a deep breath, he snapped them both back with very loud, very colorful expletives. Sitting up slowly, he felt along for anything else that might be broken. His ribs ached, but nothing felt completely out of place – hairline fractures at best that were already on their way to healing thanks to his regenerative abilities. It took him a few moments, but he finally pulled himself up off the ground and then bent backwards, popping his spine loudly.

He could taste blood in his mouth. Reaching for his bag, Brig pulled it off his back and dug into it. The blood was coppery and bitter in his mouth, filling him with that unique hunger that disgusted him at the same time. Brig turned his head to the side and spit out bright red blood.

“Perfect,” he mumbled and got out his GPS. He was within a thirty-mile radius of Viv’s last GPS ping from Lewis. The locator was its own tracker and Lewis should have picked up his signal the second Brig turned on the device. LT would be right behind him, giving him approximately four to six hours to traverse up to thirty miles of mountains terrain in search of one person; the proverbial needle in a haystack. Brig spat blood again and repacked his compression bag, slipping it over his shoulder and across his chest. He’d start on foot and then go wolf once he got deeper into the mountains. The locator indicated he go further north, deeper into the mountains. Securing his gear, Brig moved out of the tree line and

maintained a fifteen-mile per hour clip up the mountains.



“No. You can’t be.” Viv heard her voice fall flat against the darkness of the tunnel. The thing in the darkness moved closer, coming out into the light, and what Viv saw not only scared the hell out of her, but also confused her. It just wasn’t possible. She risked a look behind her and saw nothing. Simon had disappeared. He had to have seen it, too.

Looking back, Grigoriy stepped out from the darkness and draped something over the shoulders of a suddenly large and tall figure. Viv felt a shudder pass through her entire body as it reacted to what could only be a lie.

“Виро послал ее,” Grigoriy said as he kept his eyes on Vivienne. Vigo had sent her, he said.

Coming completely out of the darkness, a giant man covered in the fur-lined cloak towered over her. His English was thick with a Russian accent native to the area, but that was the least of her confusion.

“I know who she is,” he said slowly. His voice rumbled like thunder in her chest. His eyes were a piercing gray she had seen before. Well, one of them was, the other was missing.

“You can’t be,” Viv’s voice caught in her throat. She had only met the man once as a child. Vigo may have stayed Vivienne’s execution from his Pipers, but it was up to Vigo’s father, the Elder Hammerthynn at the time, to sanction Vigo’s gift of life. Danil Hammerthynn, the patriarch of the family, was The



Wolf she crossed half the world for on a hunch.

“You...you’d be over two hundred years old by now. You can’t be Elder Danil.” Viv’s eyes looked around at the dark tunnel. “Vigo said you left to die.”

“I left, yes, but you can’t believe everything you hear, Vivienne.” His gray eye looked past her and he smiled. His teeth were surprisingly bright and white, despite his living conditions. “Your friend, he’s nervous.”

“Doesn’t he have good reason?”

Grigoriy went to the campfire and picked up a bundle of sticks. Twisting bits of long rope, he made a torch and lit it with matches from his pocket. The light pushed the darkness back, revealing what Vivienne already knew. Viv looked back at Grigoriy as he held a hand out to Danil, facing the entrance of the tunnel.

“You’ve come a long way. Both of you. My son’s toy and the bane of our *Blood Memory*. I would not be a good host if I tried to kill you both, now would I?” Turning, Danil walked further back into the tunnel. “Huntington, you have nothing I want, not even your death. I promise you that.”

Viv watched Danil move back into the darkness. Grigoriy waited for Simon to reappear, which he did from the mouth of the cave and came up beside her.

“We came all this way for this?” Simon asked, whispering softly next to her.

“Why not go a little further, then?” Viv shrugged and

followed her adoptive grandfather into the darkness with  
Simon slowly following.



## *Chapter 23*

Danil led them deeper into the mountain-side, but Viv felt fresh air moving through the tunnel. They walked a short distance until it opened up into a bigger cavern. It was actually a little warmer and Viv immediately saw the reason – a natural hot spring located within the mountain. There were skinned furs and provisions stacked and organized around the edges of the cave. A generator and some electronic equipment blended in with the primitive collection of items. Viv passed her eyes over everything before she spoke.

“This is where you came after you left the pack?”

Danil dropped his cloak and stood naked. Apparently the lack of self-consciousness was passed down in the family. Hammer had no problem stripping in front of Vivienne either and who was she to not enjoy the show? She looked at the old Elder from head to toe. His skin hadn’t quite wrinkled, not like you’d think a two hundred year old werewolf would, but his hair was long, white and tied back. He wore a short beard as white as his hair and was surprisingly clean for the environment. And yes, he was every bit the man Hammer was naked. Danil dressed, pulling clothes from the cot on the

opposite side of the hot spring and looked at her.

“Where do elephants go to die?” Danil shrugged with a smile as he stepped into a pair of wool trousers. Viv made a face. His sense of humor was foreign for a Hammerthynn. “I see your trust is wavering.”

“I trust what you say about as much as you trust what I say.” She cut to the chase. “Your son sent me. I don’t know why, but it physically hurt him to do it. He believed me when I told him about the validity of the memory, even if he literally could not say it. But he sent me here, to you. “

“All your descendants, everyone that shares this *Blood Memory* of yours – they all want me dead,” Simon said with a suspicious tone. “If you are who you say you are, then you must not share this memory. That would make you a liar. And an old one, at that.”

Danil pulled a wool sweater over his massive chest and stepped into hiking boots. He circled the hot springs and stood in front of Viv. Danil was massive, just as she had remembered him, but at ten years old all the Hammerthynds were giants. But a missing eye did not a Hammerthynn make.

“You were ten years old when Vigo brought you to me and begged for your life.”

“That’s not a secret,” Viv replied.

“My other sons wanted you dead. Demanded I kill you. They assumed Vigo wanted you for a pet – why else bring an outcast mutt to the pack, they said. I heard this.” Danil paused, his

gray eye looking down at Vivienne, moving slowly from her feet, back up to her head. “And more.”

Viv glared at him, unashamed at her anger. She considered herself lucky Vigo’s brothers turned their back on her instead of taking an interest. But being shunned was as painful as torture and she became a prisoner in her father’s world. What was worse, she often wondered?

“He saved you because Emma would have wanted it.” Viv paled, but remained silent. Danil blinked his lone eye slowly. “You would have loved Emma.”

Viv swallowed back the tears in her eyes. Her father’s pain had been her own and Vigo’s loss of his wife was a knife in his heart till that very day. If this wasn’t Danil Hammerthynn, he was a damn good facsimile. “You aren’t burdened with the memory.”

“Oh, I am. I would have torn this silu asunder fifty years ago.” Danil nodded toward Simon. “But I think that would have been a futile fight.”

“Your grandson has given me a run for my money,” Simon said quietly. “What’s a silu?”

Viv shook her head, “You don’t want to know.”

“Hammer has my father’s ferocious tenacity.” Danil grinned, exposing his teeth and sizable canines. “How is he?”

“Our Beta and a father.”

“Ours?” Danil looked down at her. “I doubt seriously The

Ripper would accept an outcast into the Greater Pack.”

Now that was a name she had only heard said maybe twice in her lifetime. The Old Alpha was nothing short of a mad man and his private nickname had been earned with not only his severe leading style, but his sexual deviance. The Ripper was every bit the man he was named after, just short of the murderous rage. For years the Pipers turned a blind eye to the treatment of the Ripper’s wife. It was not a secret just any member would know. If Viv had any doubts about Danil, they were completely gone now.

“He wouldn’t. His boy is our Alpha.” Viv watched Danil’s face closely with what she said next. “He also happens to be your biological great-grandson.”

Danil’s humored expression cleared immediately and Viv watched as his eye narrowed. The anger seeped into his features and he leaned forward, closing the distance between them, enough to make Simon take a step forward.

“My grandson fathered a son with the Ripper’s wife?” Danil’s jaw clenched, the muscles flexing against his skin.

“There’s the Hammerthynn I know,” Viv said slowly with a smile.

Danil sniffed and stood up straight, looking down his nose at Vivienne. “Well, times have changed, haven’t they?”

“Yes. They have.”

Simon watched as Danil and Vivienne discussed old times. Danil was clearly The Wolf and a Hammerthynn. The question

was...what could he do for them?

“Now that we’ve caught up on the family history, there’s still the question of why we’re here. Why were we sent to find you? What happens now?”

Danil flicked an eye at Simon and then back at Vivienne. “He doesn’t know our kind very well, does he?”

Viv turned her head and looked at Simon. “Werewolves don’t live past 150 years. But then Hammerthynns don’t die naturally. Danil didn’t just leave...he disappeared. He should have died an honorable death decades ago. Not a whole lot of honor going out with a whimper.”

Danil chuckled.

“You came out here. Why? And why aren’t you trying to rip his throat out?”

“Because even the truth can lie.”



Brig maintained his initial clip for the first hour, but as the altitude increased, the wolf in him began to beg for its release. He stopped and knelt to the ground, slipping his bag off over his head. Already wearing his Therian-weave boots, he unzipped his thermal coveralls and folded them tightly. The Therian-weave suit he wore was not the updated version from Glenveagh, but the dark blue suit that the Research and Development Tech Diego had brought from home base in Canberra, Australia. Brig was covered from his neck to all his extremities and it kept his core temperature at optimal levels.

With the compression bag he squeezed the contents back to a manageable size and slipped it back over his head, pulling the bag around to his chest when the wind shifted.

The surrounding area was nothing but natural scents from the trees, the exposed dirt, and whatever was carried over from the nearby lake. He had already become familiar with the area with little else to do except run, but as the wind blew, something in the air had changed. He had dropped on the opposite side of the lake, parallel from Anay. Once he crested the northern tip of the lake, it put the small village on his six and he had mistakenly ignored it. Turning back, he ran back to one of the small hills of ice and stood on top. The wind was blowing in the unmistakable scent of sulfur. As he made it to the top of the hill, he could see it clearly.

Anay was on fire.

The sky was dark and the night had settled in. The flames flickered brightly in the darkness, reaching up into the sky with colors of yellow, orange, and red.

His first thought was Viv. According to Lewis her phone cut on within ten miles of the village. Was she there, trapped in the fire? Then a solitary thought made itself known.

Did she start the fire?

She was after something in the mountains, he told himself. Setting the village on fire would do nothing but attract attention. The wrong kind of attention. Viv wouldn't...she couldn't. Without a second thought, Brig followed his instinct



and turned back toward the mountains, leaving the burning village behind and pushed his change. The bag was secure on his back as his paws hit the snow and he dug in, pushing off with his massive legs, carrying his large wolf body across the snow like a shot in the dark.

## Chapter 24

Lewis' fingers flew across his keyboard, its pattern changing in a floating display of moving code, done purely by touch. His soft green eyes were moving across the three centered and large monitors directly in front of him and three smaller ones just below those had streaming content and visuals from ill-gotten satellite feeds. From his perch, he watched everything and everyone.

“LT, this is Piper Home, do you read me? Over.” Lewis' eye fell on his left, large monitor. His fingers moved swiftly again and the picture narrowed in on the Baikal Mountains, reading geological and seismic radar.

The LT's voice piped into the speakers in the Situation Room. “*Aye, I got you, Lewis. What do you see? Over.*”

“I see everything, LT, but right now I see smoke. And you're flying right toward it. The village of...Anay is emitting a lot of smoke. Over.”

“*Are we missing a barbeque, Lewis?*” Red's voice interrupted.

Lewis paused as the satellite feed magnified the area. “Oh man. It's on fire. Over.”

*“Wait, repeat that, Lewis?”* LT cut in; his voice on edge. *“Anay is on fire?”*

“Affirmative,” Lewis said as his eyes moved across the monitors. “Commander’s last known is south of village. He’s already heading up into the mountains. ETA four hours.”

Lewis’ eyes narrowed as the satellite feed zoomed in on the small village as it was inundated with smoke. Overlaying a previous screen capture image, he compared the two and was confused. Anay was nothing but a ghost town, not even registered as being a village with any type of population. There were dilapidated buildings, gray and washed out wooden structures, but it didn’t look like it could even maintain twenty people, much less a village.

“Huh,” Lewis mumbled to himself.



LT looked down at the floor of the Black Hawk they had procured and tried to figure out what the hell was going on. Red and Domingo sat across from LT in the belly of the Black Hawk and looked at each other silently. They were dressed in dark blue Therian-weave suits, layered with jump gear made of the same morphing material to accommodate their change. LT looked back up and spoke into his mic.

“Piper 1 to Beta, do you read? Over.”

*“Yes, Lieutenant.”*

Leaning forward, Red covered his mic and yelled over the thump of the rotors. “Wait a minute, wait a minute. Did Viv—”

LT looked up sharply at him and held his hand up, fist closed. Red immediately stopped. “Reconfirming orders. Bring back, not sanitize, over?”

*“You bring her back with whatever...whomever...is with her. Dead or alive, I do not care, but you bring her back.”* Red hung his head and then gave the LT a pleading look. *“Do you read, Lieutenant?”*

“Aye, sir. Piper 1, out. Piper 2, do you read? Charlie you on the horn? Over.”

Charlie’s voice crackled through the line. *“I read you, LT. Over.”*

“Status? Over.”

*“They’re all dead, Lieutenant,”* the Beta interrupted. *“The Elders and only 3 Pipers survived.”*

Domingo leaned forward and spoke into the com, “That’s it, sir? No other—”

*“Piper Diego’s body is gone. Your uncle is presumed dead, Piper Domingo,”* the Beta said slowly and not without a little feeling, even for a Hammerthynn.

Red and LT looked at each other as Domingo did the sign of the cross and leaned back with a silent sigh. Dom’s face tightened up but then relaxed as he regained his focus. “Aye, sir.”

*“We’re sweeping the compound. We got this, LT. Piper 2, over and out.”* Charlie said in a monotone voice.

LT winced and then covered his mic. “Don’t say it.”

Red pulled his com head gear off and snapped, “What the fuck is going on? Does this even seem right to you?”

LT leaned forward and snarled at him. “You’re the one that led an armed sniper team into the city to cover her meet with Huntington. *You* tell *me* what the fuck is going on, Reese. Glenveagh is gone. People are dead.”

“Viv wouldn’t do this—”

“I don’t think she did it, but who is she with?”

Red held his finger up and then stopped. Angrily handling his headgear, he put it back on and slammed back against the wall of the Hawk.

LT took a deep breath and then addressed his two Pipers. “We rendezvous with the CO, find Vivienne and take her back, along with whatever else she came out here looking for in this god forsaken fucking piece of ice.” He paused and sat back in the chair. “If Huntington is with her, then that’s just a bonus. Understood?”

“Aye, sir,” Red and Domingo replied in empty, monotone voices.

Leaning back, LT stared out the opened side door and watched the snowy tundra pass lazily by.



## Chapter 25

“What is the *Blood Memory*?” Vivienne Sena had asked that question more times in the past four months than she had her entire life. She had talked to dozens of decedents that possessed the memory and was still left with nothing but contempt for being an outsider asking about something that did not concern her. “For as something as vague as the memory, your family sure does take offense to being asked to explain what it is.”

Danil’s smile was as unnatural as it was scary. He watched her with great interest as if he was waiting for her to work it out.

“I don’t think it’s real,” Simon said stepping up to them. Danil passed his good eye at Simon and they both saw the ripple of disgust cross the old werewolf’s expression. “I’ve lived a long time, Danil, and I have a pretty decent recollection of it all – but I have never met anyone from your family. You tend to stick out.”

“What is it, Elder Danil?” Viv pressed. “Do you even know?”

“I don’t know,” Danil said slowly, “only that being close to

the pack made the *Blood Memory* raw with its power. But it didn't make sense, to either me or Elder Brian."

"Elder Duncan's father?"

"Who's that?" Simon asked Vivienne.

"Duncan is Elder Jameson now. His oldest son became Commander."

"Brig's a good boy," Danil said in a proud voice.

Simon recognized the nickname and made the connection. He looked at the ground and then back at Vivienne who barely shook her head.

Viv considered what Danil was telling her, albeit cryptically. "Closer to the pack. So you don't feel the rage from the *Blood Memory* here?"

"It's hard to say if what I know or what I feel is the truth or the lie. I hate Huntington, but not anymore than any other. Their kind," he said looking at Simon, "they are like a disease – vast and wide. Us wolves, we're nature's answer to their plague. I don't know what created them, but that fight between us...it's an old one."

"My clan had no knowledge of werewolves until recently. Not even a whisper."

"Not you, but others knew."

"The Anantya are your oldest, right? They had to have known." Viv shrugged. "Some of them, the oldest ones maybe? Would that be why they attacked us?"

“I told you, their Leader wouldn’t order it.”

“You said it yourself. Yours are the children in your world. Who watches the watchers?”

Simon closed his mouth and remained quiet.

Vivienne processed the information. “The further you are from the pack, the weaker the vengeance of the memory. Why would that be?”

“Because whoever planted the memory doesn’t know you’re still alive,” Simon said slowly. “Right?”

Danil blinked his good eye at Simon and grinned. “That was, until, you both came here.”



Lewis was watching a third of the globe with ten fingers and two eyes. Western Europe and the Elders were holding his attention a little more than Northern Siberia, but he kept an eye on the blip that was LT’s Black Hawk as it moved into position to rendezvous with the Commander. His computer was tracking any anomalies along both paths when his eye caught a secondary signal.

Lewis’ head swiveled, focusing in on it. “LT, you have company. Over.”

LT’s voice immediately replied sounding tinny and echoing with static. “*Nature?*”

“Beeline for you so it can’t be good. Over.”

“*Are we in violation of air space? Over.*”



“Well, Siberia is just cold enough to not be a vested interest in northern Europe, but so far no one’s noticed you, except for whoever this other signal is. So head’s up – due west, moving fast.”

The chatter began to filter into Lewis’ earpiece along with Charlie and his team at Glenveagh. Something was bugging Lewis as he listened to the exchange between Charlie and the Elders.

*“Whatever happened – we missed it. There’s nothing here but bodies.”* Charlie’s voice was void of emotion, but that was the sergeant. He’d grieve later. *“Still no trace of Piper Diego.”* There was the mumble of chatter in the background and then Charlie’s voice again. *“Area is secured. Patrols out in the perimeter, line of sight, and the zone is clear.”*

Zone meant the main facility building hidden in the trees of Glenveagh Park. Lewis could not gain access to any of the equipment out at the facility, nor would he ever. The entire area had its electronics fried by a localized EMP. He immediately felt relief at his efforts to secure his own emergency precautions with a faraday cage and suggestion to the other Piper IT teams to do the same, albeit privately and under the pretense of upgrades. Something was watching them and it wasn’t from the outside.

Lewis’ eyes moved across his monitors automatically when he focused in on the LT’s predicament. The bogie had altered its path, putting the mountain the Commander and LT’s hawk in its direct path. Lewis watched the feed on to monitor when

two unmistakable blips appeared in front of the bogie.

“Whoa, whoa! Piper 1 you have two incoming, ready and hot. One-two-five mikes out.” One hundred and twenty-five miles from the LT’s last position and quickly closing the distance. “You should have eyes.”

*“Say again, Lewis? Over.”* LT’s voice crackled in the static when the connection to the illegally gotten satellite flickered and went to static.

Lewis moved to another monitor to track the satellite, missing that it was so close to making its rotation to the dark side. “Craaaap,” he mumbled more to himself. “Eyes out – trying to...two seconds.”

Quickly he moved to yet another monitor, one of six set up in front of his main console, when LT’s side blew up with comments.

*“Did you see that?”*

*“What the fuck was that?”*

*“Lewis, missiles made contact. Over.”*

“I read, two seconds,” he mumbled as he tapped into another satellite, forgoing all the intricacies of using a back door and broke into the stream of digital video. The United States Air Force was not going to appreciate him doing this, but he’d cover his tracks later. LT’s contact screen lit up again, this time with a clearer image and Lewis’ mouth dropped open. “Confirm, two missiles made contact with the north range of Baikal Mountains. Bogie has turned. It wasn’t coming

for you, LT. Commander's last known was base of that mountain. Over."

Lewis rubbed his temples as the chatter began again, tense and excited from all sides. The weather conditions and the amount of snow fall on the Baikal range -Lewis knew no other reason than to fire two missiles at a mountain.

"Avalanche is imminent, LT." Lewis leaned back in his chair and watched the horror unfold.



Charlie Hammond looked down at the pattern of blood spray on the ground. He was covered in Therian-weave, from his form fitting boots, up his neck, and down to his hands. The wind was blowing a cold chill, but he couldn't feel it.

"This is where Piper Diego made his last stand."

Charlie looked up at the Elder Hammerthynn. The Elder's face was void of emotion, but tight with his normally gruff expression. The Elder wouldn't show any type of grief, not in public anyway, but Charlie suspected that the Old Hammer wouldn't show it in private, either. Charlie had grown up around the oddly emotionless family – it just wasn't their way.

Something was bothering Charlie though. Looking back at the ground, he walked the perimeter of blood splatter and did the math. The human body held six pints of blood and Charlie had seen what an exsanguinated body looked like, but this wasn't it.

"One of two things here," Charlie started, calling attention to

the Elder who looked down at the ground. “See the splatter?”

“Yes.”

“That’s it, sir. You can see the splatter.” Charlie continued, ignoring the Elder’s confusion for the moment. “Two – where is Diego’s body? Everyone else is accounted for, but not him?”

“I don’t—”

Just then Lewis and LT’s conversation cut in, alerting the rest of the Pipers on scene at Glenveagh to converge on Charlie and Elder Hammerthynn. Silently, they listened.

Charlie’s adoptive grandfather entered the area, looking silently at Vigo Hammerthynn and then back at the Beta who brought up the rear. Duncan Jameson lifted a hand and circled his finger silently in the air, dispatching the Pipers. They would sanitize the area, bag the bodies, and leave. Glenveagh was lost, but there were bigger problems now.

“Piper Kearney,” Duncan said into his throat communicator, “the other aircraft?”

*“Bugging out, sir,”* Lewis’ tinny voice replied in their ears.

“Let’s finish,” Vigo said, turning away.

Charlie watched as Piper leadership entered the main building, leaving him alone with the blood splatter. “Lewis?”

*“Aye, sergeant?”*

“You got eyes overhead?”

*“You’re standing about twenty feet from the main building*

*entrance.”*

Charlie was impressed with Lewis’ skills and more importantly the technology that was hovering overhead, provided by ‘borrowed’ satellites from some of the super powers of the world. Looking around, Charlie could not shake the feeling of something being wrong.

“Give me everything.”

*“Done and done, sir.”*

Lewis would know what Charlie meant – infrared, heat signatures, weather overlays...everything that would have been visible by any passing satellites – Charlie wanted to see it all. After a few moments, Lewis spoke up again.

*“Nothing during the hit, which is a pretty small window. Whoever they are, they got nerds, too.”*

Nodding, Charlie flicked his eyes up into the trees and sniffed the air. The scent of blood was overwhelming. Stepping back carefully to avoid the splatter, Charlie whistled, getting the attention of a Piper and pointed down to the ground. “I want samples of it all.”

The Piper’s name was Dougie, part of the Alpha’s Pipers and Charlie’s team. Dougie nodded, his green eyes watching Charlie’s every move.



## *Chapter 26*

Simon stood quietly as Vivienne and Danil Hammerthynn spoke softly to one another. The werewolf towered over Vivienne's five foot five stature. He had at least two hundred pounds on her and looked like he could eat her in one bite. Simon remarked that the old wolf was much larger than his grandson, Vivienne's Beta Iov Hammerthynn. Did they just continue growing, Simon wondered? Were they all that fucking big?

"What do you plan on doing now?"

Grigoiry had come up beside Simon as silent as a church mouse. It startled Simon, surprisingly enough, especially since it had been some time since a human had been able to do that to him. Simon narrowed his eyes.

"What are you?" he asked, ignoring Grigoiry's question.

"I am his," Grigoiry said simply, lifting his chin in the direction of his apparent master.

Simon waited for a further explanation but of course did not get it. What was it with people this far north and so removed from the 21st century? Running his tongue over his teeth,

Simon grimaced as he looked back at Danil and Vivienne.

“I plan on getting us out of here with little to no mess. There are people, more of Danil’s family, coming here.”

“So you need to leave. Not Vivienne.”

Simon turned toward Grigoiry. “Leaving her here might not be a good idea, either.”

The Russian seemed to consider that information and then let his gaze focus on his master again.

“Vivienne?” She and Danil both turned and broke off their conversation and looked at Simon. “Is Danil coming with us?”

Danil raised an eyebrow and shook his head. “I won’t be going back.”

“You’re going to stay here, now that ‘they’, whoever they are, know you’re here?”

“No, you misunderstand me. I don’t think they’ll let us leave.”

That made the three of them pause and stare at Danil. Even Grigoiry let confusion color his expression. The silence in the chasm inside the mountain was deafening. Simon figured Vivienne’s Pipers were not far behind them, so he knew they had a ride out – or at least Danil and Vivienne did. Simon would have to make his way back south on his own. He was the first to break out of their stunned silence and move toward Vivienne.

“We need to leave, right now.”

“We can’t leave him. We came all this way. He’s our proof.”

“Of what? Cryptic messages from a one eyed werewolf so far removed from this century that I don’t think he quite grasps what’s going on here? No offense.”

“None taken,” Danil replied in a monotone voice.

“But he’s right. We are fucked if we stay here.”

“Simon I’m fucked no matter how this goes down. I need Danil to back up my claim, but if he goes back..whatever is going on with the pack will affect him. But we can’t leave him here to die, either.”

“Do not mistake what I say for resignation, Mr. Huntington. I do not wish to die, I’m just not too optimistic about living beyond today. We should leave, but I cannot return to the pack.” Danil lifted his chin in Grigoiry’s direction. “Thank you for your service.”

Danil’s man servant lowered his head and nodded, adding nothing.

Simon took Vivienne’s hand and began to pull her out of the carved out chasm, back to the exterior of the mountain when it decided to cave in on them.

The hot spring located in the mountain was an unnatural anomaly as well as beneficial to survival so deep within the arctic terrain. It would also speed the destruction of that particular mountain and as it began to cave in around them, Simon made a mental note never to come to Siberia ever again.



They had walked several hundred feet into the mountain to reach the chasm; it was an easy decent, but now as the four of them began to run back up the tunnel, the vibrations of whatever hit the mountain began to send violent tremors along the slippery and icy slope.

Danil grabbed Vivienne's arm, pushing her and Simon forward toward the opening. The old wolf dropped back and Simon turned to see Danil grab a bag off the icy floor and secure it around his chest just before the massive werewolf tore out of his clothes and into his wolf form. It was, quite possibly, the scariest thing Simon had ever seen.

Shoving Vivienne up the tunnel, Simon could not look away as Danil fell forward onto all fours into such a massive sized wolf, more white than red now with the piercing single gray eye and teeth so huge and savage, that Simon felt a shiver of fear run up his spine. There wasn't much of anything that was scarier than Simon, he wagered, but that was before seeing such an old and powerful werewolf – certainly older than any in existence if what Vivienne said was true. The wolves weren't immortal like the vampires, but their aging was slowed; Danil looked maybe in his 70's, but his body was still strong and tight with muscles making him look half his age, if a day.

"Run, Viv. Run, run," Simon yelled, turning back toward the entrance of the tunnel.

"Don't call me 'Viv'!"

A crash of stone fell directly behind them. Simon twisted

back to see Danil staring at the rubble that he had just missed with Grigoiry nowhere to be seen. Light peaked out around the corner as the rumbling from the dying mountain bounced them off the floor and walls. Simon lifted her off the ground after a nasty spill, but she grunted and pulled away from him, stopping at the opening.

“You run and don’t stop, don’t look back. You run.”

Viv pulled away, trying to steady herself on her feet as she rushed out into the avalanching mountain slope as huge sheets of ice broke off near the summit of the Baikal Mountains. Tearing off her jacket, Viv launched herself into the air and felt the swift pain of change hit her like a ton of bricks as she landed on all fours, sinking up to her chest in the snow. Hopping through it, she raced off to the edge of the cascading snow before getting caught in the landslide of it when the howl of another wolf pierced the thunderous sound around her.

A red wolf, large and massive, was on the opposite side, two miles across, running parallel with her.

“Viv, NO!” But instinct could not refuse what it was commanding her to do.

The large, red wolf was her mate and she turned toward him as the rush of ice hit the three of them, covering her in pure, soft, painfully cold snow.

It was a wall of pain, colder than the dead of space with the force of one hundred mack trucks barreling down on Simon. He had the unfortunate favor of not losing consciousness as the

snow threatened to crush him with the weight of it. Tumbling forward head first, it was suddenly quiet and very dark.

The ice packed his skin and squeezed the air out of him, not that he really needed it. Barely able to blink, Simon took inventory of his position. He had managed to ball up so nothing was torn or twisted in an unnatural direction, but he was stuck in god knew how many feet of snow. As a human he knew claustrophobic conditions would have sent him into a frantic spiral, exhausting what air he had left, but as a vampire he only had to concentrate. Heightened agility, strength, but more importantly speed were the basic abilities of a vampire and it was the speed he was going to need. Wherever Vivienne, Danil, and the red wolf that called out to his partner in crime were, they would be running out of air. Simon didn't travel halfway across the world to return empty-handed or be held responsible for the death of three more werewolves. Bracing himself, Simon began to move, slowly at first, twisting as hard as he could, trying to push the packed ice away from his body, until he began to move so quickly he vibrated the snow around him, heating it up.

His limbs began to move, make more space around him and he released the tight control on them, letting the friction of his flesh create a hole large enough for him to dig himself out. It took all of forty-five seconds.

Now, which way was up?

He felt the blood rushing to his head as he eased up the vibrations. He was upside down. Kicking and scraping with his

hands, he twisted his body and turned upright, climbing out of the icy hole, poking his head up through the snow. With a deep breath, Simon pulled himself out and laid out flat on the packed snow.

“Ok. Hard part done,” he murmured to himself. Closing his eyes, he listened. Twisting to his right, further down, he could hear the faintest beat of Vivienne’s heart murmur. Getting up quickly, he moved to the spot in the snow and got down on his knees, listening again. This time her heartbeat was loud, but frantic. Simon clawed at the icy snow; digging deep he accidentally tugged on Vivienne’s brown hair, causing a muffled yelp. He dug her out quickly and pulled her up and out of the snow. She was using the aqua lung they had brought with them from Ireland.

“Where were you hiding that?” Simon said with a large smile.

Vivienne tossed the apparatus away and wiped at her face. “Well, it was either that or a gun,” she huffed out of breath.

“Good choice.”

Viv crawled up onto Simon and hugged him fiercely, her arms clawing at him as she let out a sob. “God I never thought I’d be so fucking happy to see you.” Tucking her face into Simon’s neck, she let the sobs wrack her body.

Simon turned his face into her hair and inhaled deeply. With a deep sigh he hugged her back, beyond relieved. “I do knight in shining armor like a pro.”

Suddenly Viv pushed away from him and got to her feet. “Brig...he’s here. Simon, Simon!” She pulled at him frantically to his feet.

“Alright, alright, be quiet a second.” Simon cleared his head and closed his eyes again, listening. His perception opened up and the cracking of ice further up the mountain was muffled and not an immediate danger. Trees, the wind – all the soft noises of silence filled his ears until there it was.

Turning back up toward the mountain, Simon grabbed Viv’s hand and he moved toward her man’s soft heartbeat about fifty yards away. Slowing, he pulled her back as he knelt down to dig. The ice wasn’t as packed further up, but her Brig was deep, almost parallel instead of straight down, making Simon crawl into his make shift tunnel.

Viv watched as Simon dug deep into the packed snow with nothing but the scraping of ice in her ears. The soles of Simon’s feet finally disappeared. Danil would be somewhere in the snow, she wagered. Or maybe trapped in the mountain – she didn’t see him make it out.

“OK,” Simon grunted loudly back to her. “I got – oh fuck!”

Simon’s legs began kicking as he was being pulled back into the tunnel. Reaching out quickly, Viv grabbed hold of his legs and began to yell.

“BRIG! BRIG LET HIM GO! BRIG!”

Tugging hard, Viv dug her feet deep into the snow and finally Simon’s body went slack and she half pulled him out of

the tunnel. Scurrying back and away from the tunnel, Simon twisted onto his back, his mouth bloody. Suddenly the sweet aroma of her mate filled her lungs and she turned back to see Brig climbing out of the tunnel, looking bruised and battered. Immediately she went to him and jumped into his arms.

His arms felt like granite around her as he hugged her back, inhaling her scent deeply. “You’re here. You came for me,” she said quietly, pulling back to look at him.

“Of course I did. I jumped out of a plane for you,” Brig said smiling at her, his hands cupping her face as he leaned in and kissed her deeply.

Simon watched as the two lovers reunited. Viv was clinging to the large man, both apparently ambivalent to Simon on the ground next to them. Scooting back a little more, he got to his feet, and with a roll of his eyes, turned away to let them have their moment. Their heart rates were tripping over one another and it was loud in his ears – the rush of their blood and rather intensely passionate kissing.

“So, you’re Brig?” Simon said in a monotone voice as he looked back at them. Disengaging from Vivienne’s lips, the large man’s smile smoothed into a tight scowl. “You’re welcome, by the way.”

“Simon!” Vivienne hissed at him as she pulled on Brig’s arms, keeping him from advancing. “Stop, Brig. He just saved our lives.”

“Why are you here? Why with him? You just...left.”

Viv heard the pain in Brig's voice and she touched his face softly. "It's been a weird couple of days. Vigo sent me."

"You were in Ireland. Elder Hammerthynn sent you here?"

"We're not here looking for a summer place," Simon said tersely.

Brig pointed a finger at Simon without looking at him. "You're a hair from death, Huntington." Lowering his hand, he let his expression smooth over from rage to confusion. "Hammer's got a team behind me."

"LT?"

"More than likely. The rest are back at Glenveagh, assessing the damage."

"Wait, what?" Simon asked.

"What damage? What happened at Glenveagh?"

"It's gone. Right after you left."

Viv looked at Simon who shrugged. "I saw Vigo, talked to Diego for gear, and we left. We didn't hear or see anything."

"Wait, your compound was attacked? By what?"

Viv could see Brig struggling to control his rage making what he said next undoubtedly difficult. "Our compound was overrun by vampires. Everyone, except our fathers and a couple Pipers. All dead."

"The village," Simon said quietly.

"Is on fire as we speak," Brig finished. "You do that, too?"

“We didn’t do anything, Brig.” Viv looked at Simon. “Someone was following us. Oh, that bitch from Anantya?”

“What did you find out?” Brig slowly gripped Viv’s arms. “Tell me you have something, Viv, because if you don’t... Hammer will kill you.”

“You’d kill her for looking for the truth?”

“This has nothing to do with the truth,” Brig said angrily at Simon. Turning back to Viv, “Babe, I won’t be able to stop him. People are dead. We lost an entire squad of Pipers and trainers.” He pointed behind her to the rising black smoke in the sky. “That village. You two left a wake of dead of bodies.”

“Brig, we didn’t do this.”

“I believe you, but I can’t...stop...Hammer. Did you find what you were looking for?”

Viv looked at Brig; his soft blue gray eyes and chiseled jaw line. He was beautiful in every way and she knew he believed her, but as Commander there would be nothing he could do to stop their Beta from ordering her death at this point. When they went back, if she went back, none of them could stop the inevitable.

“You can’t go back then,” Simon said softly. “Because we found nothing.”

Viv flicked her eyes at Simon. Danil would be useless to them back on pack soil in the US. Whatever was affecting the Pipers and Elders, would affect Danil. She was screwed either way, so they had to keep Danil away and that meant lying.



To everyone.

“I did what Vigo asked me to do.” Viv looked Brig in the eyes and lied. “There’s nothing here.”

“Then you’re dead, Viv.”

The soft thumping of helicopter blades pierced the stark silence of the mountainside. “Simon, you should go.” But when she turned to look at him, Viv saw he was already gone. Even his footsteps in the snow faded within five feet.

“I’ll do what I can.”

Nodding, Viv looked at the ground and grimaced as the Black Hawk came into view, stirring up snow devils around them, covering their suits in white snow. She felt his fingers close around her arm and with a deep sigh, Viv refused to look up and watch her certain death.



Simon watched from the tree line downwind as Brig and Vivienne climbed into the Black Hawk. The thumping of the helicopter distracted him until the heartbeat behind him was loud in his ears. Turning quickly, Simon readied himself for a fight when Danil stepped out from some thick branches in human form again. His bag still strapped to his chest, he watched as the helicopter rose up into the sky and headed back southeast.

“She’s taking a great risk.”

Simon made a face and glared at the werewolf.

“Did you tell them I was dead?”

“We didn’t tell them we even found you.”

Danil nodded. “Smart. My grandson will kill her. He won’t be able to help it.”

“What do you mean? Can’t your son stop it?”

“You don’t understand. My grandson is our Beta. He is our Alpha’s right hand. The Greater Pack cannot refuse an order from him. We’re bound by it.”

Simon considered going after Viv when he saw the older Hammerthynn looking at him with a strange expression. “You’re wondering why I want to help her, aren’t you?”

“Just ‘why’. Why come out here? Why join forces with an outcast, much less a werewolf? How does this benefit you? All this effort cannot be just to bed her, can it?”

Simon rolled his eyes and turned away.

Danil laughed. “She won’t have you. Does my grandson know his Commander is in love with my son’s pet?”

“I don’t think anyone knows.”

“Her death will be difficult to watch.” Danil paused. “And it is noble, but there’s nothing you can do.”

Simon waited for the Black Hawk to disappear around the mountain before he stepped out of the trees, Danil at his side. It was a long while before he spoke.

“You need to hide. Will you stay here? Hide in the

mountains?”

“No, Siberia is lost to me now. Time to move on again. Maybe somewhere warm.”

Reaching into his jacket pocket, Simon took Vivienne’s phone and popped the SIM card out and shut the power down. He handed both pieces to Danil who looked at it quizzically.

“Plug the card in and turn on the phone. I’ll be able to get to you, once you’ve settled.”

Danil smiled. “I am at your beck and call?”

Simon stopped walking and looked at Danil. “Do you care that they might kill her? Do you understand what she’s even trying to do for them? For you?”

Danil fingered the cell phone, turning the small device over in his hand. “More than you realize, Mr. Huntington. It grieves me that her life won’t be spared. Like I said before, my grandson won’t be able to help it.” Pulling his bag off his massive chest, Danil tucked the phone inside and began to strip out of his clothes. Tucking them into the bag, he secured it again over his naked body and lifted a huge hand in a polite wave.

“Take care, Mr. Huntington.”

Simon took a step back as Danil forced his change and returned to his graying red wolf form. The gnarled missing eye glared at him as the gigantic wolf turned away and ran into the hills, heading due south. Simon made his way east, back toward the village to see the damage for himself.

The fires were smoldering in the bitter cold, and as he walked back into the town center, noticed the Inn was still mostly intact. Without entering through traditional means, he climbed into the room he shared with Vivienne and saw their bag on the ground along with her jacket. Tucking everything into the bag, he threw it over his shoulder and started his slow trek back toward home.



## *Chapter 27*

Hammer and his Pipers were standing on the tarmac at Donegal not long after they received word that Brig was returning with LT's Piper team plus one. Huntington was apparently gone by the time LT's Hawk had landed. Standing just slightly behind him was Hammer's father and uncle, the Elders, along with Sergeant Hammond, the new Piper Paulson and three other Pipers. Hammer had chosen to address the situation with Vivienne the second she stepped off the Hawk – there would be no point in delaying the obvious.

The soft thumping of helicopter blades settled one hundred yards off on the private airfield, void of any other life. The entire area had its electronics fried, but Hammer still felt the tension of electricity in the air, even if it was coming off of him. As the blades spun lazily down, the whine of the Hawk's engine filled the air until it settled quietly. Hammer began walking quickly to meet his cousin and Commander, Elders and team in tow. Brig gave Hammer a blank look and blinked his eyes slowly as the other Pipers stepped off, till finally LT came out with Vivienne, her hands bound behind her back.

“Hammer,” Vigo said with an unwavering voice behind

him.

Hammer turned his head to the side, giving his father a piercing glare with his solitary gray eye. Vigo remained quiet. Vivienne looked no worse for all the trouble she had caused and his eyes narrowed on the new experimental Therian-weave suit she was wearing. Diego had given her gear and Vigo had given her his blessing, but it didn't matter. When he got within ten feet of her, Vivienne looked up and gave him a half grin.

“Brought out all the boys for me, Ham—”

Hammer reached out and hit her across the face with his right hand, making her stumble and lose balance, hitting the tarmac in a heap. The Pipers all watched in stunned silence, but no one made a move to help her. With her hands still bound behind her back, Viv shook her head and grunted unladylike from the sudden pain. Without hesitating, Hammer kicked her onto her back and used his size fifteen boot to step on her throat.

Brig watched in silent horror as Hammer proceeded to crush Vivienne's neck without a word. He kept his face neutral, as did the other Pipers, but Brig caught the Elder Hammerthynn's eye and he saw the flinch of pain cross his snout, but it was gone as quickly as it had appeared.

“Hammer,” Elder Jameson said taking a step, something Brig was surprised to see.

“If she had information...something to show us...it would be

here, Duncan.” Hammer’s face tightened as he looked down his nose at Vivienne struggling beneath his boot. “Her life was worth the information she would have, and since she has nothing, her life is worth nothing.”

Brig looked up into the sky as he listened to Vivienne slowly die on the tarmac. There was absolutely nothing he could do – no authority or power to stop Hammer from killing his mate. As the Beta, Hammer’s authority superseded everyone present including the Elders. They were family leaders, but within the Greater Pack, they held no position to question the Beta. Helplessly, they all watched silently.

For Brig there was no choice. It wasn’t Viv or the Greater Pack. It was just the pack and Hammer’s decision. So why was he stepping forward, breaking every rule he held dear as a Commander? Because Viv just wasn’t some passing fancy, some play thing for him to pass the nights away. There would never be another woman and it would always be Vivienne, alive or dead.

“Wait...Hammer.”

“Beta Hammerthynn, you don’t have authority to kill her.”

Everyone, even Hammer, turned and looked at the voice. The young LT, Brig’s nephew and the Elder Jameson’s grandson dared to speak against the Beta. Hammer turned his head and glared at the LT with such an expression that the Pipers around the LT took a step away from him. Hammer eased his boot off of Vivienne’s neck, just a hair, and waited for the LT to explain before Hammer killed him, too.

“I’m not questioning your authority, sir—”

“Is that right, Lieutenant?” Hammer interrupted softly.

“But your son could and would. Vivienne Sena has the protection of the Alpha, per his word back at the Den when she arrived, and you can’t kill her now without his say so.” LT paused and added with confidence, “And you know he’d never allow this.”

Lothias Jameson was taking a risk. One he wasn’t sure his rank could handle if the Beta decided that LT’s explanation was complete bullshit. The Alpha had given Vivienne carte blanche when she arrived on the property with the full authority of the family Elder’s backing her. The Beta had acquiesced to her review of the Pipers and acknowledged her presence, something everyone was surprised had happened. But now a heavy boot was slowly killing her and everyone stood powerless to help her – the Elders, the Commander – all silently watched. LT trusted Vivienne up until leaving with Huntington, but he had his doubts that they facilitated the attacks. He knew bullshit when he saw it. And apparently so did the Beta.

Beta Hammerthynn lifted his boot slowly off of Vivienne’s neck without looking away from the LT and took a full step back from her.

The Commander immediately looked to the redheaded Piper with the literal moniker, Red, and lifted his chin, pushing their Medic into action.



Two pairs of hands came down on the medic pack on the floor of the helicopter. JT Paulson looked up and saw blue impatient and angry eyes staring at him.

“What are you...you’ve done trauma?” Red asked as JT lifted his hands, not wanting to waste time.

“Yeah, you?” They moved together toward the woman they called Vivienne Sena, choking to death on the tarmac in front of Leadership. The Beta had just crushed her neck in a fury that JT had never seen any man possess and she was suffocating.

They both kneeled down in front of her and Red began handing him tubing and a scalpel while Red filled an entire syringe with adrenaline. JT immediately cut into her ribcage, trying to get to her lungs since a tracheotomy would be useless with her crushed neck. He reached in, separating the opening and sliced a small section of her left lung, inserting the tube within seconds.

“Start a-” Red quickly said, readying the syringe.

“Done, go,” JT said, holding one hand up but securing the tube until Red quickly explained to a blue lipped Vivienne that the adrenaline will jump start her regeneration and to hold on tight.

JT let go of the tube the second Red plunged the syringe through her ribcage and into her heart, delivering the adrenaline all in the same movement. Her body arched with a painful howl as the adrenaline shot through her, forcing the

regeneration at an incredible rate, and it had to have been excruciating.

Within a minute her windpipe was regenerating quickly and no doubt painfully from the adrenaline. As she took a labored, ragged breath through her throat, JT saw Leadership turn away, ordering the Pipers to take Vivienne back to the city.

Red and JT looked up at each other and silently fist bumped as the other Pipers helped her up.

Brig held back as the Elders accompanied Hammer back to the hanger. His nephew watched as Red and JT saved Vivienne's life and then looked up at Brig.

"Ballsy," was all Brig said.

LT raised his eyebrows as he let out a breath he had no idea he was holding, his expression uncomfortable. He knew the Beta would not forget what LT had done that day.

Brig wanted to thank LT, but remained silent as they brought up the rear and the other Pipers lifted Vivienne by her arms and dragged her back to the hanger. Instead, he put his hand on his nephew's shoulder and squeezed.

"Thanks for coming for me."

LT chuckled. "Who doesn't love a quick jaunt to below freezing conditions in Siberia?" Brig rarely saw the good-natured Jameson side of his nephew. LT was sullen, intense, and quiet like the Hammerthynn side of their family. So when Brig saw a little of his baby brother in LT, it made him proud

and sad. “Did she really not find anything?”

Brig shrugged. “Nothing, so she says. You travel thousands of miles deep into the freezing north and all she has to show for it is a boot print across her neck.”

“What about Huntington?”

Brig felt his skin tighten with the mere mention of their enemy’s name. He wanted to tear the vampire to pieces – if the Pipers had seen him, their youth would have forced them to act, regardless of their orders to stay away from Huntington and his clan. The fact that Vivienne went with Huntington would not be ignored, not by leadership, and not by Brig as her mate.

“In the wind.”

“Probably for the best.”

“Nothing that happened was for the best. She’ll be lucky Hammer doesn’t convince the Alpha to kill her.”

Brig and LT walked the rest of the way to the hanger in silence. Vivienne and Huntington travelled half way across the world and she willingly returned to a fate worse than death. Whatever was out there in the mountain, Viv lied about it. And to his face.

Brig just hoped it was worth it.



## Chapter 28

Vivienne sat with her hands still bound behind her back. It was unnecessary but insisted upon by the Beta himself. Viv involuntarily swallowed at the thought of Hammer, or rather his boot. Looking up into the one-way mirror in front of her, she could still see the faint bruise across her neck. Her eyes travelled the perimeter of the mirror, taking up three quarters of the wall itself. Leadership was back there, of that she had no doubt. Hammer, Brig, the Elders, and their Alpha...her Alpha. Oh, who was she kidding? He's not her Alpha and this wasn't her pack. She'd be lucky to just be kicked off pack property and banished completely, but that's not what Hammer would insist on. Viv knew she'd be real lucky if a Piper didn't walk in and put a bullet in her head. Well, that was more *her* pack, not the Greater Pack's temperament. Twisting at the binds at her wrist, letting them dig into her skin, she sighed and licked her chapped lips.

"We doing this or what?" she asked in a monotone voice.

She waited, her ears straining for any type of outside noise, but the rooms were sound proof and made of very-easy-to-clean stainless steel. Great, that was an awesome thought to

keep in her head as she waited for someone, anyone, to come into the room.

At this point, Viv knew better than to assume Vigo was bartering for her life and she had no expectations of Brig coming to her rescue. There were things greater than a mate; not much, but she knew hers. It was duty, honor, and that meant his life for the Alpha. She wouldn't love Brig near as much as she did if he even suggested forsaking his duty for her. Hammer would be beyond discussion, wanting to kill her himself. There was more than just the loss of Glenveagh and the mysterious deaths along the way to Siberia, not to mention the man-hours and resources used to find her. Hammer would want to right a wrong done so many years ago.

With a deep breath, Viv cracked her neck and waited.

(Six hours later)

“Alright, I NEED to go to the bathroom.”

The door hissed opened, the vacuum seal letting in various scents. A large Piper, one she recognized from the tarmac who assisted Red by cutting into her ribs, stepped into the room. He was extremely tall, taller than Marko, Viv wagered, and walked directly to her as the door closed behind him.

Circling her, he undid her binds and then moved back around to face her.

“Your name, Piper?” Viv asked in a polite tone.

He looked at her with warm brown eyes and almost jet-black hair. Raising his eyebrows, he gently smiled at her, much to

her surprise.

“JT Paulson, ma’am.” JT nodded politely.

“New? How long?”

JT only looked at her, the smile fading from his face.

“That new, huh? Ok. Bathroom, if you please?”

JT took a step to the door as it opened. Immediately he stepped back and out of the way to make room for another large body to pass through. This time it wasn’t a Piper.

“Can you hold it a minute, Viv? This won’t take that long.”

The voice was honey smooth and deep, vibrating every single bone in her body. She reacted to the voice, as any female werewolf would, with the soft twang of want mixed with awe and reverence. Still, Viv felt her bladder immediately shrivel up, making her need to go even more imminent, but when the Alpha of the Greater Pack asked you to hold it....

You fucking held it.



## *Chapter 29*

Brig stood with his arms crossed and had to control his breathing as he listened to Hammer insist on killing his mate. There was nothing he could say, even less he could do. As Commander of the Alpha's Pipers, his input was not needed or wanted – it was only his actions that would be called upon if and when it was needed. Yes, he was more than just a guard dog, but in this situation all he could do was wait for them to signal that the hounds needed releasing.

With a nod to the newest Piper within their ranks, Brig sent in JT to assist Vivienne when the Alpha finally held his hand up, silencing his father. Brig looked at Hammer, as did Duncan and Vigo, and they all watched as the Alpha left the control room. He heard Hammer let out a slow breath and crack his thick neck.

The Alpha entered the room and spoke softly to Vivienne. With a look toward the mirror, the Alpha lifted his hand and immediately the sound cut off. Brig could feel Lewis hold his breath, waiting for Hammer to demand the audio be turned back on, but they all knew better.

The Alpha was as tall as his father and had the same build,

something Brig never noticed before; the wide shoulders, long powerful arms, and same gray eyes...both eyes. The Alpha was certainly a blood relative, much to everyone's dismay, but did not receive the gift from his biological father, but his mother's husband. It was a long, convoluted story, but bottom line was the son's word superseded the father's, despite rank in family. Alpha trumped Beta any day of the week.

With his back to them, the Alpha spoke to Vivienne, lifting his hands in a non-threatening way, but they could still see Vivienne's eyes flick down and flinch. Her face was a multitude of emotion: fear, awe, even a touch of want, but in the end she lowered her head and nodded. The Alpha was in there maybe five minutes before he reached out and touched Vivienne's chin, lifting her face to look at him.

Brig felt his shoulders tighten as the Alpha stepped closer to his mate. Whatever he was saying to her, Viv listened intently and with respect, definitely not the norm. From the moment she stepped foot on the property, she was nothing but sarcasm and unintentional sex. The Pipers all loved her and she had every single one wrapped around her finger. It annoyed him, yes, but she was the older sister that everyone loved, especially Brig.

The Alpha let go of her chin and turned away, leaving Viv with a shocked expression. Exiting, the Alpha did not return to the control room and Hammer's jaw tightened angrily.

Hammer turned and looked at Brig, his slight inch looking down at him. Hammer opened his mouth and then sneered,



biting back the words.

“No weapons. We’ll keep an eye on her. She’ll continue as before, per Alpha’s orders.” Brig knew what Hammer wanted to say and it wasn’t anything near close to what Brig relayed.

Hammer lowered his eye and then looked at his father. “An entire training facility. Trainers and Pipers.”

Duncan, Brig’s father, stepped forward. “We’ll have Vincent up recruitment. Pull some of the older Pipers into Training.”

Brig watched as Vigo merely looked at Hammer, his cold gray eye betraying nothing.

“The Pipers who helped her with Huntington—”

Brig nodded, “I’ll take care of it.”

“No, I will,” Hammer said. “And have the LT find me. *Now*.”

With a nod, Hammer dismissed them and Brig stepped back out of Hammer’s way as he watched his cousin and best friend leave the room. Hammer was now on his warpath and Lothias would be the first to feel his wrath if Vivienne would not. Brig would object to any type of formal reprimand, but LT did set himself up for a front-and-center with the Beta.

Brig looked back out the mirror. Vivienne was looking at her hands, her expression confused. He could see her hands trembling.

“What do you think he said to her?” Brig asked as his eyes narrowed in thought.

Vigo answered quietly, “She’ll never tell you and you

shouldn't ask." With a nod to Duncan, the Elders stepped up to the door.

Duncan looked at Brig and raised his eyebrows. "Hope she's worth it."

Brig uncrossed his arms and let a sigh out after the Elders left.

"Guess this means the Beta won't kill her?"

Brig looked down at Lewis who had turned and looked up at him from his perch at the control console. "For now, at least."

"That's a good thing, right? For us?" Lewis asked in his inquisitively young voice, his soft green eyes looking hopeful and relieved at the same time.

With a shrug, Brig turned toward the door. "Have her escorted back up to her apartment. Keep an Aug on her, out of sight."

With augmentee surveillance on Viv, there'd be no way Brig would be able to see her, but then her scent was tainted now. He wasn't even sure if he could get within six feet of her without a repulsive sneer on his face. Huntington's scent was all over her and it set his teeth on edge just thinking about it.

"Aye, sir," Lewis responded quietly.

Brig would wait the week out and then pull surveillance. It wasn't necessary, but it was protocol and Hammer would insist. They still had Glenveagh to contend with and his absence would explain that.



## *Chapter 30*

“You stand on the edge of death, Viv. And no one has spoken up for you.”

The Alpha watched the female who appeared on his property three months earlier representing his father’s family pack. She carried the authority of Elder Vigo Hammerthynn, the Alpha’s paternal grandfather, but it meant very little to him. That was one of the advantages of being the Greater Pack Alpha. He answered to no one and every one.

“But you know this, don’t you?”

Vivienne was smart not to answer and instead lowered her head respectfully. Cutting the audio and keeping his back to the Piper Leadership had been intentional. This was for her ears only.

Lifting his hands, he saw the initial flinch and realized she thought he meant to hurt her, but that wasn’t his style. She looked up at him with her strangely gold rimmed-brown eyes and he saw the flash of arousal that most females felt around him. His presence went deeper than just being head guy in charge, as wolves he was the strongest and held the most

power. All females of their kind would recognize that immediately. It vanished as quickly as it appeared.

“I received a strange message just before my Pipers returned you here. It was from your traveling companion, Mr. Simon Huntington.” Vivienne’s eyes widened, but she kept her head low. “You made a friend and an unlikely ally. He offered his services and unlimited resources...for your life. Made me wonder what happened between you and the Tacharan Leader during your trip, and normally that would not be my concern, but when it involves my Pipers, specifically my father, it becomes my main concern.

“He told me what you were looking for, and more importantly, what you say you didn’t find. For what it’s worth, I don’t believe a word he says, but if you were to tell me that something as constant as my father’s *Blood Memory* is tainted, then I’d believe *you*.”

Gently the Alpha pinched her chin and lifted it as he stepped closer to her, letting his deep, soft voice enthrall her.

“I won’t let my father kill you, but our kind doesn’t have nine lives, Viv. The blood of the dead you left in your wake is on your hands, so don’t make me regret letting you live, or I’ll kill you myself.”

The Alpha dropped his hand and turned away from the outcast female, his father’s adoptive sister and his adoptive aunt. He would not hesitate to kill her, but Huntington had been clear on what they were looking for – lies within a truth held in such high regard that its taint was obvious even to him.

She either found out the truth or he'd take his pound of flesh.



*One month later...*

Danil Hammerthynn removed his scarf from around his weather beaten face. His skin had darkened considerably since leaving Siberia and it looked worn like leather, wrinkles accented at the corners of his eyes. The smells in the marketplace were putrid, filled with dirt, feces, dogs, and a plethora of food aromas.

“I didn’t think she was serious.”

Danil turned toward a voice behind him and looked at the covered figure standing alone. The voice was female, not that he could tell from the yards of linen she was wearing. Her eyes were brown with bright gold rings and a shock of white hair poked out from the hood.

“Madam,” Danil said politely. “Vivienne?”

Pulling the hood back quickly, the almond shaped eyes glared at him. “Not quite, Elder Hammerthynn.”

Danil was mistaken. This woman was at least three inches taller than Vigo’s pet and was almost her polar opposite with, shorn white hair, with skin a deeper bronze from the Saharan sun, and a somewhat perpetual snarl...except for the eyes. He inhaled deeply, tasting her scent and remembering it.

“Then who are you?”

“Greater Pack. One of yours.”

“I have no pack now, madam.”

“I heard. You’re supposed to be dead.”

“I get that more than you know.”

“You’re in mine, for now.”

“Who are you?”

“Indiana. You can call me Indy. My mother was one of yours; my father was Lorenzo Sena, Outcast. Welcome to the Boutin’s. Hope you enjoy your stay.”

Danil’s features tightened as he watched Vivienne Sena’s half sister walk out of the marketplace, deep in the Sahara desert. This was where Huntington had told Danil to head to, per Vivienne. Apparently his grandson let her live, for the time being. He would hide with the family that Vivienne had been hiding all these years from Vigo Hammerthynn. Sighing, he wrapped his scarf back around his face to ward off the sand and dust.

Over fifty years ago Danil had sent Vigo and his Pipers to wipe out the Sena clan.

Apparently he missed one.



# *Vampire Ability Appendix*

## **Blending –**

This vampire has the amazing ability to go unseen. Able to walk about in silence or to go unnoticed in plain sight. It isn't that they are invisible; they just seem to get passed up.

## **Bonding –**

This is the ability to know another living being that you are in tune with more than most others, similar to Savage Savant but with creatures of more complexity. This could be vampire or human. You're able to sense their feelings and whims easily and while you can't always hear their thoughts, you do get impressions of strong desires and fears. A person bonded to the vampire is able to call the vampire in times of danger and the vampire is able to call in return.

## **Coat of Arms –**

Vampires can obviously take more punishment than a human. This power would allow them take even more. Being shot would still knock you backwards, but with this ability you might get right back up with no pain; whereas, someone without the ability would still feel pain from a gunshot. You would still be susceptible to the normal things that harm vampires, fire, sunlight, a stake etc.. though it may take longer for it to affect you.

### **Command –**

This is the ability to take over someone of a weak will and make them do as you bid.

### **Dreamwalking –**

Vampires with this ability are able to insert themselves into the unconscious minds of their victims and change their dreams in various ways. The vampire can even change the events of a dream to his whim showing the person the images he wants them to see. For example:

#### *Nightmares –*

The vampire is able to invoke intense nightmares in his victims, over time cultivating fears that haunt the victims in their waking hours.

#### *Luring –*

The vampire influences the pleasant dreams of the person with images of themselves generally causing an obsession in the dreamer.

In all cases of dreamwalking you have to potentially battle the will of the dreamer, dependant on the victim's age (if another vampire). The victim's subconscious mind draws on what it finds familiar or appropriate in the situation and may be able to change minor details of the dream the vampire wishes to present.

*\*Note: The above examples are suggested ways the ability could be used; a vampire is not limited to using one or the other.*

### **Empathy –**

Vampires with this ability are able to get emotional



impressions from the people near them. The range is very close at the early stage of the ability and later develops into being able to sense and process the emotions of an entire room. With full concentration perhaps even an entire building. \*Note: That is at a very advanced stage and would be something difficult for even an ancient

### **Ethereal –**

The body of this vampire is not tied so closely to the earth, they are able to achieve an almost spirit-like form, mist-like in appearance.

### **Fierce Visage –**

This is the ability to look intimidating to those of a weaker will. Imagine a cat with its hackles up or a dog growling and showing teeth. The vampire with this ability looks especially fierce when baring fangs and claws.

### **Glamour –**

Basically tricks of the mind. There are two versions:

#### *Evoking –*

These glammers trick the emotions of the person causing them to feel a certain way.

#### *Illusions –*

These glammers trick the thinking of the person causing them to believe or see what you wish them to. Most vampires are only able to concentrate on one person at a time.

Glamour is thought to have its origins in Gaelic lands where bards and druids were known to be able to work magic through words and song. (Possibly a very advanced form of hypnosis.)

**Perception –**

The uncanny and supernatural ability to perceive nearly everything going on around them making it nearly impossible to surprise them. This power does require a small bit of concentration.

**Pyschometry –**

This is the ability to pick up things from inanimate objects. Picking up a necklace you might be able to sense that it once belonged to a Lady in Waiting who always seemed very sad, etc...

**Sending –**

Vampires with this ability are able to mentally send thoughts to another person and receive any focused mental reply sent their way.

*\*Note: The Sender has to make the connection first in each instance; this is not a lasting bond. It works for a brief send-and-receive and then has to be initiated by the sender again. The reply has to be focused as this is NOT telepathy and a person with sending CANNOT read minds.*

**Subterfuge –**

This is the ability to hide or fake your emotions, fooling even those with Empathy.

**Suggestions –**

This is the ability to insinuate an idea to someone of a weaker will. The power of this ability is that unlike a direct command the victim will assume it was his or her own idea from the start. The weakness of the ability is that the person must not be entirely opposed to the idea and it takes longer to suggest it properly than a simple command.



## *Excerpt from Awake*

"She made me. On the move fast, heading southbound."

JT Paulson was six foot seven and three hundred pounds of muscle, but this five foot nothing human was giving him a run for his money. She avoided straight-a-ways and made impossible turns in the most public of places. He had no idea how she spotted him, but when he accidentally made eye contact with her for the second time, she took off like a shot.

"What did you do?" a tinny voice asked in his ear.

"I looked at her."

"Coming up west bound." The other voice chimed into his ear piece making JT's hackles bristle out of instinct.

"I got her."

"No you don't," the same voice said sternly.

Grunting as he threw his long legs over a railing, JT jumped down a flight of concrete stairs toward a public park. "She's heading toward the park for cover."

Plain clothed, the other Piper, a dark red head with a severe flat top, came into view. It was the LT, Lothias Jameson, their

Lieutenant and the nephew of their Commander. JT and LT instantly disliked each other, but JT had no idea why.

Together the LT and JT converged onto the park as they caught sight of the woman weaving in between the hundreds of bodies enjoying the brisk fall weather before the snow fell in northern Middle America. Pointing back out, JT flanked her right as the LT took her left.

~

Slow down. Slow down. Slowdownslowdownslowdown....

She kept trying to calm herself, forcing her legs to slow down as she made it into the thick crowd of patrons flooding the park for a late fall festival. She chose this city to disappear into because of the lack of technology with a high population density. She was a stranger, but she didn't stick out like a sore thumb like she would have in a smaller town. Population 48,252 – Mishawaka, Indiana was on the St. Joseph River and nicknamed 'The Princess City'. She didn't really care; she just wanted to blend in till she figured out where to head to next.

Beutter Park was dead center of the city and the main focus of the celebration that late afternoon. It boasted elliptical-shaped overlook weirs and fiber-optic underwater lighting, which was all well and good, but as she slowed down to a quick walk along the river, the man from before popped up in her peripheral vision. Turning her head to the right, she watched him rush toward her direction, pushing through the crowd.

Forcing herself to look away, she was fairly certain he hadn't zeroed in on her just yet. But if he was there, then someone

was flanking her left and she didn't dare look to see if she was right.

Moving further into the crowd her eyes were drawn to a tall, dark haired man wearing a cargo jacket with a dark blue hoodie. He was looking around, standing on his tip-toes, when his eyes casually locked with hers, then moved on again. His eyes were hooded with a concentrated look, but it was his sparkling blue eyes that caught her attention. That with his short, dark hair, she made her decision and pulled at her pony tail that hung low over her right shoulder and walked up to the man, wrapping her arm around his, making him give her a startled look.

"Hi, do me a favor?"

The man looked at her with crisp, blue eyes. "Excuse me?"

Cait pulled on his collar, forcing the taller man down and kissed him. The man gave a shocked grunt as she deepened the kiss, and after a moment, willingly kissed her back.

Reaching up, she pulled on his hoodie and covered his head, along with the front of hers, and hid herself inside his jacket, pushing her arms around his chest. He was warm and felt hard with muscles, most of which she felt as he wrapped his arms around her, successfully hiding her within his large jacket.

Opening her eyes, she risked a look to her right and watched with baited breath as the man who followed her walked passed quickly, talking to himself. Another appeared to her left, but again she did not look and he brushed by them, nudging her

closer to the man she was kissing, rather deeply. Slowly their kiss broke and then a curious thing happened. The man licked his lips slowly, looking at hers and then she found herself pulling him closer, kissing him again.

His hands ran up her back and up to her face, cupping her cheeks with his long, chilled fingers. He smelled clean, like Ivory soap, that for a moment she lost herself in him and deepened the kiss. In the back of her mind she told herself that she needed to kill about twenty seconds anyway, so this was purely professional. Yeah, that's her story and she was sticking to it even when she felt a soft mew escape her lips when he pressed her body against his, caressing his tongue with hers. Her stomach twisted into a thousand knots as she absolutely indulged herself, tasting this man's full lips, almost moaning when the kiss became more aggressive and certainly more feral. She found herself grabbing the back of his hoodie and pulling him closer. Her mew was clearly outdone by his as he took her bottom lip with his teeth, almost making her knees buckle. Their kiss was incredibly deep and far more intimate than she had intended, but when he ran his hands up into her hair and tangled it with his fingers she lost all train of thought. She moved her hands up the curve of his back and pressed her fingers against his hard muscles until she literally ran out of breath.

Finally, albeit reluctantly, Cait pulled back, opening her eyes slowly and looked into his light blue ones. He stayed close to her, letting his lips hover over hers. She felt his thumbs brush her cheeks and his breath bathed her face, sending chills up

her spine. Biting her bottom lip, something in the back of her mind said, 'Oh hey – you should probably run now,' then filtered in her brain and right back out again as she felt her fingers grip his hoodie. His blue eyes searched her face and a small smile tugged at his lips, making her stomach tighten.

"Thank you," she said meekly and took a step away from him, releasing her grip.

"Wait-"

"Yeah, sorry about this." Her main goal refocused, Cait moved back in the other direction and let out a deep breath.

"Wait a minute. Are you in trouble or something?" he called after her.

"Uh," Cait said, her eyes darting back and forth, "yeah, you could say that. Listen, guy...I'm sorry-"

The man came up beside her and walked quickly, pulling her along. "I don't mind. Let me help."

Inwardly Cait groaned – while avoiding attention, she managed to gain more than she needed. She looked at the man: about six foot three or so, short hair that fell naturally forward, dusting his forehead, light blue eyes and full lips. He looked back at her and smiled.

"Ex boyfriend?"

Cait snorted as they took the steps back up to street level. "Not exactly." The crowd thinned out as they moved away from the festival.



"This way, Caitlinn. Corner of West Front and North Main."

She had started to move south toward Mishawaka Avenue when she stopped. "Mother fucker," she grumbled. The barrel of a gun poked her ribs and she grimaced with an eye roll.

Leaning in close, the man asked, "Are you going to run?"

"Every fucking chance I get." And she meant it. Granted the element of surprise would have been a fantastic advantage, but she would not hesitate to make like a banana when the opportunity presented itself.

"I wish you wouldn't." His fingers wrapped around her arm as he turned her back toward the park. Standing slightly behind her left shoulder, he pushed her forward with the gun.

With an exasperated sigh, Cait slowed and stopped. "Do me a solid first, will ya?" Turning, she looked at him, forcing him to stand close to her to hide his gun.

"Want me to kiss you again?" The hint of a smile he had made her toes curl, even if he was pointing a gun at her.

Slowly Cait raised her hands and then reached out to touch his chest, pulling him forward. He moved the gun slightly out of the way as Cait wrapped her fingers around the collar of his jacket and kneed him with everything she had.

"No, just breathe."

The man doubled over onto his knees as Cait turned to run, only to feel a bee sting just above her breast bone. It was the

first man again, pointing a gun at her chest. Strangely enough, being shot didn't hurt near as much as she thought it would.

Immediately she felt her head cloud as she fell to the concrete sidewalk on her knees painfully. The shooter was nice enough to catch her before she bounced her face off the sidewalk, completely out.

*Awake* coming Summer 2013