

# Do You Believe In Magic?

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## Prologue-

People were dying. People I knew. I could stop it, too, but at the same time, I couldn't. I was chained up on the ceiling and my friend, my brother, and I watched the nurse beat my girlfriend's younger brother to death with a metal bat. I couldn't break loose. Nobody could.

I swear to God, we were goners. Soon, we'd all be like him. I just wished I could have been the first so I didn't have to watch. But since I was the strongest and the biggest, I was probably going to be last. If I was last, I had to watch as my brother, my friend, and my girlfriend dies.

This is not your classic love story.

## 1

There was a new girl at the group home. I didn't know her name yet, but she was *not* human. She was a witch. I only knew from her scent. It wasn't normal. I mean, she smelled really good, but not what a regular human smelled like and she wasn't wearing perfume and I knew a witch from a long time ago who smelled the same. The reason why I know her scent from a long distance is because I am a werewolf. My brother, Tommy, is a vampire and so is his girlfriend, Casey. We don't age, so that's why, fifty years later, I still look like I'm sixteen and he still looks like he's eighteen.

Back to the new girl. Her black hair had auburn and golden blonde streaks in it and with my werewolf vision, I saw that it was from the sun, not chemicals. She was average weight and that was good. I hated seeing super skinny girls; they didn't look right. She was actually very beautiful and I found myself thinking that nobody could hurt her. Not as long as I was around.

I could tell that she didn't think as much of herself as I did because of the way she held herself. Shoulders slightly hunched, looking kind of pouty...she almost looked mad, but there was nobody to be mad at.

I only noticed her because she was sitting in the backyard on the swinging bench, all alone. The stray dog that always came around here jumped on her, licking her face. She looked like she

needed some help, so I walked outside and pulled the dog off her by the collar Tommy and I gave him. I sat down next to her on the bench and asked, "You okay?" while petting the dog.

She wiped her face with the sleeve of her hoodie. "Yeah, thanks." She held out a small hand to me. "Marissa DiCaprio."

I smiled and shook her hand. "Damion Benz. So we're being formal?"

She smiled a little, too. "My brother's watchin'. He told me to be inviting to people."

When Marissa spoke, I heard a slight southern accent. It was kind of cute. It was different. Her eyes were different, too...they were brown with gray around the irises. Another sign of a witch.

"Is he older?"

"He wishes. I also have a younger sister. She's four."

"Then who says he can tell you what to do?"

"I don't know. I figured he was kinda right. The reason I'm even here is 'cause I haven't been talkin' to people much."

"That's really cool, the way you talk. Why didn't you? I bet a lot of people loved your voice."

She laughed and leaned back in the bench, swinging us a little with her feet. "Thanks, but I never really liked talking to people in Georgia."

"That's where you're from," I guessed.

"Yeah."

"That's really different. My brother and I have lived in New Jersey our whole lives. Mia and Lindsey are from New York."

"Don't they spit there?"

I raised one eyebrow. "Don't they spit in Georgia?"

She shrugged and smiled. "Boys do...and girls who want to be boys..."

I laughed. That's when a boy came over to us and said, "I see you've done what I told ya." He had the same kind of accent as she did.

"I could *never* disobey *you*, sir," Marissa said.

"Cute."

She sighed. "Damion, this is Keith. He's my brother." Then she said, in a softer voice, "He's thirteen and he thinks he can control everybody."

I smiled at her last comment and Keith said, "I heard that."

"You were supposed to," Marissa said.

Keith raised his hand, palm to us. A blue light glowed from it and Marissa said, "Keith, *stop*," in a kind of angry tone.

"Oh, he doesn't know?" he asked. The blue light disappeared from his hand.

"Of course not, I've known him for twenty minutes."

"No, it's okay," I said. "You're a witch. Your brother would obviously be a wizard."

She looked at me with wide eyes. "How do you know that?"

I leaned down and whispered in her ear, "Your eyes and you smell like one. I'm a werewolf." As soon as I admitted that last part, I was a little scared. I didn't know if this girl could keep her mouth shut with something like this.

When I straightened back up, she laughed a little and said, "Whoa."

I chuckled and Keith said, "What did he say?"

"Nothing," she said.

Good. She could keep a secret.

"I should go before mom freaks out and I freeze to death." He spit in the grass and Marissa flinched. Wow. She really wasn't kidding about the spitting thing.

"That's disgusting, Keith," she said.

"Learn to love it, baby." He spread his arms wide. "Come here."

"I'll never." She stood up and hugged him. He hugged her back and she said, "Miss ya."

"Miss ya more." He kissed her on the cheek and Marissa kind of had to lean down a little for him to do it. She wasn't really tall, probably only 5'2", just taller than him because she was older. Keith turned and took a few steps before vanishing into thin air.

Marissa turned on her heel to face me. "Creepy, ain't it?"

I laughed. "Little bit."

## 2

*Damion.*

Marissa's voice popped into my head so clearly that she could have been standing right next to me.

*Are you gonna answer me?*

*How am I supposed to answer you if you're not here?*

*Like that.* She sounded like she was calling me stupid.

*Prove to me that I'm not crazy. Come to my room. Tommy's not here.*

*Okay.*

Less than a minute later, there was a knock at the door. I opened it and Marissa was standing there, looking kind of arrogant.

No way.

"Yes way," she said. "May I come in?"

"If you don't freak me out," I said, stepping aside for her.

She paused before coming in, looking away from me. When she did come in, she sat down cross legged on Tommy's bed. "No guarantees."

I sat down on my own bed across from her and she said, "I can only do that with you, so I figured I might as well show ya."

"That's really creepy."

She smiled. "Witches are creepy."

"Are you powerful?"

"Yes."

"Put a spell on me, then."

"Sure. What one?"

"What?"

"Hate, pain, sadness, or love?"

"Notice how the only good thing in that sentence was 'love'."

She laughed. "I can't remember the other ones."

I smiled. "Well, uh, I don't care. Do what you want."

"I don't want to hurt you, I don't want you to hate me, and I don't want you to be sad. So..."

And just like that, I was madly in love with her. I felt excited when I looked at her and nervous, but extremely happy. My heart was pounding so loud that I was sure that even she could hear it.

Then I felt normal...or as close to normal as I could get. As fast as it had come, it was gone.

"Nice job," she said. "You didn't act on anything."

"You're lucky."

She half smiled. "Kinda." She brushed a strand of her straight black hair behind one ear.

After a minute of silence, I smiled a little and said, "Sorry, I don't usually talk much to anybody."

"Yeah, Lindsey told me that. She also told me that Tommy's a vampire."

"Tell Lindsey to shut her mouth."

"I will. When she begins to annoy me. That won't be long." She paused. "Oh, yeah. Mia told me to tell you that she wants to be your girlfriend."

"She just put it right out there, huh?"

"Yep."

I sighed. "I think I should probably tell her that I don't like her myself."

"Yeah, or...I could do it for ya and make it seem like it was you."

"How?"

"You got a cell phone?"

"Yes."

"Give me it."

I reached into my pocket and gave it to her. That's when she paused and said, "There's this one thing I have to do. It's one of the very few spells that I have to do something for it to work. I don't know if you'll like it."

"Just do it, I don't care."

Marissa took a deep breath and leaned forward, putting her elbows on her knees. She looked straight into my eyes for a second before continuing, like she was nervous. When she kissed me, I felt a wave of shock and happiness. I kind of wanted the kiss to last, but I knew it was only for the spell. Then she called Mia and when she began talking, her voice was mine.

"That's freaking weird," I whispered. I still had my own voice.

She smiled. *I know.*

On the other end, I heard Mia sound sadder and sadder. I felt a little bad that I didn't have the same feelings for her, but I can't exactly control who I want to be my girlfriend and who I don't.

When Marissa hung up, she kissed me shortly again and gave me back my phone.

"Good?" she asked. She had her own voice now.

"Yeah, thanks." I still couldn't get over how much I liked Marissa within only a day. "So, I guess not even my thoughts are safe now, are they?"

"Oh, please. I'm not a stalker. I won't be in your head 24/7."

"Sounds fair."

She smiled and stood up to leave.

### 3

Tommy came in shortly after Marissa left. It was about six.

"Hey," he said, dropping a notebook onto the desk. "Did you know that Marissa's a witch?"

"Yes. She told me."

"You guys talked?"

"Obviously."

"Imagine how cool that would be. I mean, to just snap your fingers and what you want to happen, happens? I would love that."

"I'm sure there's a downside to it. There's a downside to everything."

"Maybe, but--"

We heard the nurse calling us.

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Tommy and I came down to the living room. Now was the actual group part of the group home. I kind of hated that time for the fact that all I did was sit there, listening to Mia and Lindsey talk

and Tommy's music, which wasn't that good. But I had a feeling that this time, it was going to be different. And it was.

The table started shaking.

"Marissa should go tip a cow," I heard Lindsey say.

"She's such a redneck, I'm sure she spent her days working in the fields and woke up from the rooster," Mia said.

Marissa leaned forward slightly and placed her hands on the table, trying to get it to stop shaking, even though she was accidentally doing it. I guess this was a downside to being a witch.

"I bet she was a slave in her last life."

"No, she's pale white. I wonder if she cuts herself...she wears black a lot...and look at her nails. They're black, too."

The table shook more violently as Marissa's feelings grew stronger. I saw that it was taking most of her strength to keep it down because I saw her muscles through her hoodie. So I decided to help her. I placed my hands on the table, too. She glanced at me and mouthed, "Thanks."

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"What was that? During the group time?" Tommy asked.

We were sitting in our room again. My gaze shot from my notebook to him. "Marissa was just really mad."

"So maybe you should go check on her."

"Maybe I will."

"Go."

Shortest conversation ever. I got up and left for Marissa's room.

I tapped on Marissa's door lightly and it opened. Marissa leaned forward in her bed and when she saw me, she smiled and motioned me inside. I walked in and sat down at the foot of her bed, facing her. She had a big book in her hands.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Photo album," she said. She crawled the few feet to sit next to me. She showed me the page that she was on and said, "That's me and my little brother when we were younger."

Marissa looked about seven in the picture. She still had the shock of black hair and the streaks. She had on a striped t-shirt with a hoodie and shorts and she was on a bike. Her brother had the same dark brown eyes with the gray as her, but his hair was light brown. Besides the hair, they looked a lot alike.

“How old are you now?” I asked.

“Fifteen.”

“Who’s that?” I pointed to a picture of a couple that looked like they were in their early twenties. They both had black hair. The man had brown eyes and the woman had hazel eyes, both with the gray around the irises. The woman was sitting on the man’s lap.

“My mom and dad when they were together.”

“They aren’t anymore?”

“Nah. My mom died when she was having me.”

“But, then...how did your brother and sister get here? I don’t have to explain where babies come from, do I?”

Marissa laughed. “No, I hated learning about that the first time. I have a stepmom. I don’t like her, though.”

“You look like your real mom.”

She closed the book and moved it, mentally, across the room and into the closet. Then she shrugged, obviously wanting to change the subject. “I have a question.”

“Shoot.”

“No, it’s nothin’ bad.”

I chuckled. “No, I meant give me your question.”

“Oh.” Marissa blushed, embarrassed. “Is it cool if I come with you when you change?”

I straightened up and studied her to see if she was serious. She was and that surprised me. Even Tommy didn’t want to come with me. I kind of didn’t want her to come because I was afraid that she might get scared or disgusted or something of that nature. But I did want her to come because, well, I really liked her.

My selfish side won. “Yeah, sure, if you want.”

She smiled. “Awesome.” Then she turned her head to fix the sheets on her bed and I caught a scar on her cheek.

“What happened there?” I asked.

She touched her cheek where the scar was. "I got that when I was ten."

"How?"

"I got into a fight with this girl...long story short, I got really mad and things flew and a chair hit me...or I think it was a chair...I don't remember."

"Remind me to never piss you off."

She smiled at me and asked, "So, ya know how my brother is a wizard?"

"Yes."

"That's why it's so awesome when we fight. That blue light thing was his way of warning me."

I laughed. "I bet it's pretty awesome." I paused, changing the subject. "So why were you so...kind of nervous when you first came here?"

"Well, uh..." She smiled nervously. "Just...this guy. Teenage girl drama crap. Doesn't matter."

I rubbed her arm. "Come on. Yes, it does."

She took a glance at my hand on her arm and I could almost feel her breaking inside. Suddenly, I was walking through the halls of a school that I didn't recognize. I felt nervous and excited as I walked toward a guy I didn't know. Then I realized that this wasn't me. I'm not attracted to other guys that way. I was watching Marissa from a time where we didn't know each other. It was like I was walking beside her, but I could feel everything she felt.

"Hey, Leon," she said, smiling.

"Hey, babe," he said. He hugged her and a surge of Marissa's happiness flowed through me. It was weird because her happiness mixed in with my jealousy was confusing me. I didn't know which one I felt most.

"So, um, ya know how you said you loved me?"

"Yeah, and it's true."

"Well..." She took a deep breath. "Do you want to go out with me? Like, on a date?"

Leon laughed. "Uh, no, thanks."

In that split second, Marissa's strong sadness, confusion, and humiliation came over me. I actually could feel it when she cried, but I wasn't crying.

"Oh. O-Okay," she said. She turned and...I was back in her room at the group home.

"Wow," I said.

"I'm sorry," she said quickly. She was blushing madly and she looked at anything except me. "I was just going to tell you with words, not the real thing."

"No, it's okay. I understand better with that." I smiled when she continued to look at everything else and took her chin, forcing her to look at me. "And I know how that can happen with witches and wizards when they remember the exact memory and feelings. Besides, I touched you, so that had to do with it, too." I removed my hand from her arm. "I also heard that it tires you guys out. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Do you know that's one of the most common lies ever?"

She laughed. "Really, I am. I should be asking you that."

"I'm okay."

## 4

Lindsey called all of us downstairs. Apparently, she had some big announcement. I bet if the nurses were here at night, they would be called down, too.

"So," Lindsey said. "I've found a little something out about Marissa."

Marissa raised an eyebrow. "Is there a reason why you searched me?"

Lindsey shrugged. Marissa crossed her arms and Mia said, "You can't be trusted."

"Why?"

"Your father is a murderer."

Things started shaking a little. "Who did he kill?"

"Your mother."

"Liar."

"How are we lying?"

Vases exploded around us. "Because it's *my* fault that she died."

"But--"

“Is there a reason why you’re still here?” Marissa had to yell over the thunder and rain she was accidentally creating. “That’s not funny! Why would you lie about something like that?” She turned and walked angrily down the hallway.

Tommy and I exchanged glances.

“Go,” he mouthed. “I’ll take care of this.”

I nodded to let him know that I understood and followed after Marissa.

I found Marissa at the end of the hallway, leaning over a desk with her head in her hands. I leaned next to her on the desk and said, “Don’t cry.”

Wow. That was convincing.

Marissa rubbed her eyes and put her hands on the desk. She wouldn’t look at me. “I’m not. I just don’t understand why they hate me so much.”

“They’re like that with everyone except themselves. They’re just stuck up; you shouldn’t even look at them.” I opened up a magazine and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, pulling her close to me. “Read with me. Hey, look, haunted houses.”

She started laughing. That was exactly what I was aiming for. Thunder roared again and I asked, “Are you doing that?”

She looked out the window at the rain. “Probably. Wait.”

In a second, the weather went from pouring rain, to bright sun. She smiled and I said, “That’s so cool.”

“Yeah. That part is.”

## 5

I walked inside the room. Tommy jumped up and said, “Where the hell have you been?”

“With Marissa,” I said, lying down on my bed.

“Where did you guys go?”

“Gosh, you’re acting like I was gone for five days instead of five hours. We were in her room. We just talked and stuff.”

“And stuff? What kind of stuff?”

"I don't know. That's all we did, Tommy, so don't think anything different."

"Hey, do you like Marissa?"

"Yeah, she's cool. Really nice. She has a bit of a temper, though."

Tommy laughed. "I meant girlfriend like, Damion."

"Oh. Well...I guess I kind of do...in that way. Yeah, pretty sure."

"Are you lying to me?"

I shot him a look. "When have I ever lied to you?"

"Whoa, down doggy. I didn't mean anything by it. Speaking of dogs, when are you gonna change?"

"I don't know. Nothing, yet, so it could be in, like, a week or something."

"That's really stupid."

"*You're* stupid."

He laughed. "Duh, yesterday's news."

I smiled. "Whatever."

"You know, it's surprising that you like Marissa that way."

"Surprising how?"

"You never seemed to like anybody since...well, Elizabeth."

"Ah, well, she's probably old now, if not dead. She smoked. It was so gross."

"Well, yeah, anybody who smokes anything is disgusting."

I stood up and grabbed a towel and pajamas, which were really just sweatpants and boxers.

"I'm taking a shower. You might as well go to sleep because that's what I'll be doing the second I get out."

"Alright." Tommy got under the sheets on his bed. "Night, bitch."

I laughed and went into the shower.

## 6

I woke up to someone shaking me. I shoved my dark brown hair out of my eyes and looked up at Tommy.

“What?” I asked. I glanced at the clock. “It’s five. Are you crazy?”

“Yeah. But I need you up.”

“Why?”

“I’m lonely.”

I sighed and sat up, rubbing my green eyes. “Fine. I’m up. What do you want to do?”

“I don’t know. Maybe talk.”

“About what?”

Tommy smiled and hopped onto my bed. “Marissa.”

“Do you have a crush on her?”

“No. I think she’s awesome, but I’d never leave Casey.”

I rolled my eyes. “Whatever. Say words.”

“I will say many words.”

“No surprise there,” I muttered.

He laughed. “Do you seriously like her or were you just saying that to get me to stop trying to set you up on dates?”

“Both.”

“One syllable? That’s all I get?”

I shrugged.

“And now, none. I swear, you’re adopted.”

“I wouldn’t be too shocked.”

Tommy didn’t say anything for a second, probably counting how many syllables I said. Then he smiled. “Nice. Six syllables.”

“Yeah, it was a party.”

“Hey, can you teach me how to drive today?”

“You mean later? Sure, no problem.”

“I want you to bring Marissa.”

“What am I supposed to say? ‘Hey, want to come help teach my brother how to drive?’”

*Sure. Thanks for waking me up, by the way.*

I jumped a little. *Thanks for scaring me. Tommy wants you to come.*

*Okay.*

I was too busy talking to Marissa in that telepathic way to realize that Tommy had started talking again.

“-and so I want you to invite her.”

I just nodded. I had no idea what he was saying and I didn’t want to ask for him to repeat it.

“Will you bring Marissa?” he asked.

“Sure.” I wasn’t about to tell him that I already had invited Marissa by the telepathic conversations we were having.

*Why won’t you tell him?*

*It’s weird.*

*I know. But he’s a vampire. Wouldn’t he be okay with weird?*

*Yeah. Maybe I will...*

*I think you should. He’s your brother.*

*Here goes nothing.*

“I have something to tell you, Tommy.”

## 7

"That's so cool," Tommy said when I told him.

"It's all her thing," I explained. "I can only do it with her, nobody else. She can't do it with anybody else, either."

"So...the whole time when you were being quiet, you were actually talking to Marissa?"

"Only since a few days ago."

"I would kill to be you right now."

"Why?"

"Do you know how awesome that is?" He jumped up. "You're the only one she can do that with. How special is that?"

"Kind of special...look, I- well, Marissa thought I should tell you because you're my brother."

"She's so nice."

"Let's just go now. Marissa's awake."

"Yes," he said, and followed me out.

When we reached Marissa's door, it was already open.

"Y'all can come in," she called from inside.

Tommy and I walked in. She was hanging upside down on her bed, facing us.

Tommy laughed. "Is this what you do when you're bored at six in the morning?"

"This is the only time I've been up at six and didn't have to go to school," she said. "How do you not know how to drive? You're way older and I know how."

"I'm only a year older."

"Oh, come on. I'm not an idiot. You guys don't age. Which explains..." She popped herself directly in front of us. "The way you dress." She appeared behind us. We spun around. "Those so slight English accents." She zapped herself in the doorway. We turned to face her. She was smiling. "Don't ya hate that I'm right?" She walked out and Tommy looked at me.

I shrugged. "She's smart."

\*\*\*

Tommy was driving, at the most, ten miles an hour. Marissa leaned forward as far as the seatbelt would let her and said, "Drive slower, Tommy. You're like a speed demon."

While I laughed, Tommy said, "If I go faster, we'll crash and die."

"It's not that hard."

"Do *you* want to drive? Oh, and, by the way, that's what she said."

Marissa snapped her fingers. "Another clue as to why you're so old. Your lame-ass jokes. And no. You're learning."

I chuckled and Tommy said, "Where's the brake?"

"The one on the left," I said.

"Which left?"

"Which left do you think?" Marissa asked. "There's only one."

"Where is it?!"

"Do the L thing with your hands," I said, doing it to show him.

He started screaming, very loudly.

*Ain't it a little early to be this loud?*

*I think so.*

"Tommy, you're being crazy," I said, hoping he'd hear me. I was too tired to try to yell over him.

"No, I'm not," he yelled. "We're all going to die! Oh, God."

Marissa and I started laughing at him. He gave up on finding the brake, so he just stopped pressing on the gas.

"Holy crap, we're alive," Marissa said when the car stopped.

"I know," Tommy said. "I'm never doing that again."

"You are the worst driver ever," I said.

"One of you drive us back."

"Do you want to do it, Marissa?"

She looked shocked when I asked. "Uh...sure." She got out and switched seats with Tommy.

With Marissa driving, we got back to the group home a thousand times faster than with Tommy. We got out and Marissa tossed the keys to me, and then stopped, studying me with a weird look.

That's when I realized that I was sweating. Just great. I was probably going to change by tonight.

Probably hearing what was going on in my head, she nodded, waiting for me to catch up to her. When I did, we began walking again. Tommy was already in the house. The neighborhood dog ran in front of us and growled, eyeing Marissa.

"Is he gonna bite me?" she asked.

"Nah," I said. I crouched down and petted him. "Come here. Pet him."

"Are ya sure?"

I smiled at her. "Yeah, I'm sure."

She leaned forward tentatively and placed a small hand on his head. He growled again, louder, and she pulled back fast.

"See? He's gonna bite me."

I held the dog's muzzle shut and said, "No, he won't."

She laughed. "Yeah, but now he's gonna bite you."

I smiled, shook my head, and used my free hand to make her pet him. "Are you afraid of dogs?"

"No, course not. I just don't like dogs that growl at me."

I laughed and stood up straight, letting go of her hand. She pulled it back from the dog and stuck it in her pocket. We began walking up the driveway again.

## 8

Because of this changing thing, I had to stay locked up in my room all day. The only people allowed inside with me were Tommy and Marissa because they were the only ones who knew and actually respected this, unlike Mia and Lindsey.

I was in my room alone when Tommy walked in the room, saying, "Hey, genie in the room," and Marissa walked in behind him, shaking her head slightly.

I smiled a little. "Oh, I get it."

"Yeah, you can do anything, can't you?" he asked Marissa.

She shrugged. "Not *anything*."

"Okay, what can't you do?"

"I can't bring anybody back from the dead. 'Cause, ya know...zombies..." She smiled when Tommy and I laughed. "I can't make anybody fall in love." When I began to protest that one, she held up her finger, said, "*Permanently*," and I smiled at her. "And...I can't have a fish for a week without killing it. Off topic, but totally true. That sucker was a goner before we even bought him."

Tommy laughed again. "I won't get you a fish, then. But still, you can do a lot."

"I know. But not *anything*."

Tommy rolled his eyes. "Do girls know anything?"

"I know how to make you cry."

"Yeah, right."

"Mm, bet ya wish you hadn't said that."

Tears poured out from Tommy's eyes. "What..." He rubbed his eyes but that didn't work.

I laughed. "Nice."

"Stop," he said.

"What do you say?" Marissa asked.

"Please."

"Please what?"

"Please stop."

"Please stop what?"

I was finding this very amusing, but Tommy wasn't...which kind of made it more amusing.

"Please stop making me cry."

Marissa sighed. "Okay. Never underestimate me." She paused. "No, actually, I want you to. That was fun."

Tommy flipped her off and trailed into the bathroom. When the door shut, she whispered, "Dude, how awesome was that?"

"Very," I said, smiling. "Seriously, though, I thought using your magic made you really tired."

"Oh, it does."

"You're not tired?"

"You care?"

"Of course, I do."

She sighed. "I'm a *little* tired. You can always tell by my eyes. Ya know the gray?"

"Yeah."

"Well, my whole eye is gray when I'm tired."

"That's weird."

She laughed. "Yeah, but it's *so* cool and you know it."

I smiled. "Come on, sit down. You're making me nervous."

"I-"

I rolled my eyes and pulled her down on my bed.

She laughed a little. "Pushy."

"You know it. Relax, okay?"

"Make me."

"You don't think I will?"

Marissa shrugged and I pounced on her. We wrestled for a few seconds and I got her down. I hovered over her and pinned her wrists down on my bed, smiling. That's when Tommy walked out of the bathroom and both our gazes shot to him. He studied us for a second and then backed into the bathroom again. Marissa and I totally cracked up. When we stopped laughing, I stared at her and smiled like an idiot.

"What?" she asked, a small smile curving up her lips, too.

“Nothing...you’re just really beautiful.”

Her smile widened by a little and she went to say something, but then her smile faltered and she said, “Thanks.”

“You know what I love about you?”

I saw a weird kind of look in her eyes and she smiled. “What?”

“Nothing is ever uncomfortable or weird for you. You never feel awkward about anything. Just sometimes embarrassed, but that’s different.”

She thought for a second. “Hey, you’re right.” Her gaze flicked from me to the window. “Would you believe me if I said I’d never seen snow in real life before?”

“Yes. Plenty of people haven’t.”

I looked towards the window she was looking at. “Okay, come here.” I got off her, took her hand, and pulled her over to the window. I opened it and freezing wind blew in. We both leaned forward onto the windowsill and looked out.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“I think it’s cold,” she said.

I chuckled and tentatively put my arm around her shoulders. “Better?”

She rocked back on her heels a couple of times but she didn’t shake me off. “Yeah.”

“Good.”

“Well, now I think it’s kinda pretty...hey, what’s that?”

“What?”

She leaned further out the window and pointed to a black thing, trying to get its way out of the few feet of snow.

“It looks like a cat or something,” I said.

“I want to go help it.”

“Are you crazy? It’s freezing out there.”

“Trust me, it’s more freezing to me than it is to you. Ya got a jacket?”

“Yeah, but-“

“You got shoes?”

“Yes.”

“Give me them. I’ll go.”

“Don’t you think they’ll be a little big?”

“Who cares? I only have socks and a hoodie right now.”

I walked over to my closet and got out my sneakers and jacket. I handed them to her and when she put them on, she laughed and said, “Damn.”

“You are really small.”

“You’re just too tall. And you have...bigger feet than I do.”

I laughed a little. “You’re like a children’s size four, Mini.”

“I got a nickname now, huh?” she said with a smile. “And so what if I am?”

“I’m right?”

She shrugged. “Possibly...maybe...” She shoved me lightly. “Of course not, smarty. I’m a regular size four, don’t make fun of me.” I laughed and she smiled, opening up the window a little wider and crawling through. She fell in some snow and muttered, “Holy crap.”

I leaned out the window. “You okay?”

She stood up. “I’m awesome. Freezing, but awesome.”

I smiled as I watched her balance down the roof, then hop down. It wasn’t a far fall so she wasn’t hurt. She made her way to the cat and pulled it out of the snow. It wasn’t dead, so she looked for a place where it would be okay. She spotted the old shed that nobody ever used and opened the door. She let it in and she was in there for a minute, probably creating things for it to live like a blanket or something.

Marissa made her way back up on the roof and through the window again. She had a lot of strength for her size. When I first saw her, I thought she could probably break her arms by doing what she just did.

She slipped off my jacket and shoes and I put them back in the closet. When I turned, she was shivering a little. Her hair and her clothes were a little damp. She really has never been in snow. I thought she was just kidding.

“You want a blanket or something?” I asked.

She shook her head. “No, I’m fine.”

I sighed. She was never going to admit if she needed something. “Come here.” I pulled her over to my bed and lied her down.

“Damion, I-“

“Shh,” I said as I put the sheets over her, trying to ignore the thrill I got from her saying my name.

She sighed angrily and I tried not to smile. She got mad over the smallest things and she kind of looked cute when she was mad at me.

When I stood up straight, she said, sarcastically, “What, are you gonna make up a bedtime story?”

I laughed. “Do you want me to?”

She shrugged. “Try.”

“Um...something happens, two people fall in love, and then one of them dies. The end.”

Marissa laughed. “That’s so bad.”

“Uh, yeah, it came from me.”

She rolled her eyes. “This is stupid. What do you expect me to do?”

I shrugged. “Lie there.”

She scoffed at that, but she couldn’t help smiling a little.

I sat next to her on the bed. She looked at me weird and said, “Dude, lie down.”

When I started to protest, she said, “If I have to, you have to.”

She was right. It was only fair. I lied down next to her and she really was still very cold. So I carefully wrapped my arm around her. I’m warmer than others because of this werewolf thing, so she wouldn’t be so cold now.

Before I knew it, we were both asleep.

## 9

When I woke up, Marissa was still there, but Tommy wasn’t. The bathroom door was open and he wasn’t in the room. Marissa was still sleeping. She was holding my hand tightly, like she didn’t want me to go. I didn’t want to go. I felt completely happy waking up next to her like this. I’ve never felt like this about anyone else before.

But what if she didn’t feel the same way? That would hurt extremely. I guess you could say that I fell in love with her in only a month. There would be one reason why she wouldn’t love me

back that I knew for sure. Maybe she wasn't ready to go on after what happened with that guy Leon.

"I am so totally over him," Marissa said. She rolled over and looked at me.

"How long have you been awake?" I asked.

"From 'I love her.'" She looked away from me. "Is it true?"

No sense in lying. I kind of wanted her to know. "Yes."

She took a deep breath and looked at me again. It seemed like she had to force herself to look at me. Oh no. She was going to let me down easily, I shouldn't have been even thinking it; I knew she would have heard me.

Then she smiled. "Well, look who has a low self-esteem."

I sighed. I loved that smile. "I don't have a low self-esteem. It's just...well, I love you, Mini, and I don't know what I mean to you, but all I know is that I desperately want to be with you all the time and it's driving me crazy. Have you ever felt like you're working for something you're never going to get? That's how it is with me, right now. A lot of people say love is for suckers and I guess I'm one of them."

She studied me, and then smiled again. "Kay, that was like the best speech I have ever heard. And I love that name. Don't call me Marissa anymore, call me that."

I couldn't help smiling back at her. "Oh, thank you. And okay, I will."

"And, um, I love you, too."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

I smiled again. "Oh my God." I'd never felt this happy.

She smiled back. "You're actually that shocked?"

"Yes. I would have never thought that you did. Don't you know how happy it makes me that you do?"

"It makes you happy?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

She paused, and then shrugged. "I don't think Mia will like this."

"Do you care?"

"Are you kidding me? No, she can go explode and Lindsey can, too."

I laughed. "That's so mean."

"That's why I said it."

I kissed her. I couldn't take it anymore; I had to do it. She was still with shock for a second, then she kissed me back with the same need I had. It was a lot different than when she kissed me for the spell.

When I pulled back, I said, "I've wanted to do that for a long time," and she smiled and kissed me again.

## 10

Marissa and I ended up spending the whole day together. I hadn't changed yet, so we basically just stayed in my room. She was spinning slightly on the computer chair and I was sitting on my bed when Tommy came in. He had a pair of scissors in his hand.

"Hey, do any of you know where a piece of blue paper is?" he asked.

"Look in there," I said, pointing to the desk drawer.

As he took a step forward, he tripped and accidentally stabbed Marissa right in the leg with the scissors. She bit her hand to stop herself from screaming, I jumped up, and Tommy started rambling apologies.

"I'm so sorry," he said. He held up three fingers. "How many fingers am I holding up?"

"I don't care," she said, taking her hand out of her mouth. She wasn't yelling at him-she understood it was an accident-but the way she said it sounded mean and I couldn't blame her. She lifted a shaking hand and gripped the scissors.

"You're bleeding," Tommy said. He was at her throat in a split second.

"What are you doing?" Marissa asked.

I saw his fangs and I said, "Thomas, don't do it."

"There's so much of it," he whined.

"I know you're hurting. But you don't have to hurt her just because of it."

"It's *blood*. I am a *vampire*. What do you expect me to do?"

"I expect you to step away from her. *Right now*."

Tommy eyed her pale white throat once more and pushed himself back. Marissa exhaled like she was holding her breath and pulled the knife out of her leg.

“I am so very sorry, Marissa,” Tommy said as she carefully put the scissors on the desk. “Do you forgive me?”

Marissa didn’t answer him right away. She was concentrating on healing herself. She put her hand on the cut for a few seconds and then removed it. It was like the incident didn’t even happen. She was okay. Then she sighed and said, “Yeah, I forgive you. It was an accident.” She began to stand, but Tommy and I pushed her back down on the chair lightly.

“Just take it easy for a little, okay?” I said.

Her eyes narrowed as she studied us. “Kay.”

I kept my hand on her knee as I crouched there and I noticed Tommy looking at me.

“What?” I asked.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing.”

“Why are you so close to her?”

“Do you not like me?” Marissa asked.

“Nah, I like you,” he said. “It’s just that his hand is on your knee. And I don’t think it’s possible for you to sit more on the edge of that chair.”

She shrugged and I sighed. I was planning to tell him later, but I guess now was better. “She’s my girlfriend,” I said.

Tommy hopped up. “Really?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.” He messed up my hair and walked out of the room.

Marissa laughed, fixed my hair for me, and said, “What was that about?”

I smiled. “He’s just happy. I haven’t been with anyone in a really long time.”

“How long?”

“Fifty years.”

“Whoa, that *is* a really long time.”

“Exactly.”

## 11

Marissa had to leave shortly after that. When she left, Tommy came in. I wasn't alone for a single second.

"Why did she leave?" he asked.

"She's allowed to leave me for a while, Tommy," I said. "We're not attached together."

"You might as well be. She's spent all day in here."

"Hey, I love her and she loves me. I wanted her here and she wanted to be here. Be nice to her. And if you don't, I will break you."

"Damn."

"I'm not just saying that because it's you. I'll hurt anyone who hurts her."

"You didn't hurt me for accidentally stabbing her."

"That's because it was what you just said-an accident. You didn't intentionally do it."

"Don't you have to go change?"

"Um...not yet...maybe-" I heard piano music coming from down the hall. "Do you hear that?"

Tommy listened. "Yeah. I know that song...it's "My Heart Will Go On". From that movie...*Titanic*."

"Yes. Who plays piano?"

He shrugged. "Whoever does, she's really good." He paused. "Do you think...?"

"Oh, it couldn't be Marissa. Try to picture that."

"I can't picture Marissa doing ballet. I can kind of see her playing piano."

"Don't those two kind of go together?"

He laughed. "Come on. Let's go see."

I got up and we went down the hall, following the sound of the music. Sure enough, we were led to Marissa's door. The tempo of the music slowed, like she was listening for something, and then she went back to normal speed.

"Bet you had no idea she was a musician," Tommy whispered.

"You know, I did see a piano in there before. It's really cool that she can play that well."

The song died out and she began playing another one that I didn't know. She began singing so softly; no human could hear it. It was amazing, she was so good.

"Do you think she's playing from memory or sheet music?" Tommy asked.

*Memory. You can come in.*

I laughed. She knew we were here. "Memory," I said.

"What's so funny?"

I shook my head. "It's nothing. We can go in."

"How do you know?"

"I just do."

"Okay," he said and we walked in. Marissa was turned around on the piano bench, facing us.

"How'd you learn how to play like that?" Tommy asked.

"It's really easy," she said with a shrug. "I could even teach you."

"Oh, please."

"I can prove it." She waved him over. "C'mon."

"Okay, it's a bet. If you can teach me, I owe you five dollars. If you can't, you owe *me* five dollars," he said, sitting on the bench next to her. I went around the piano and leaned on it, watching them.

"Fine," she said.

"If you can actually do this, I want to learn that first one you did," Tommy said.

Marissa took his wrists and put them on the keys.

"You have *extremely* small hands," he said. "Your hands and feet are supposed to grow and you're supposed to fill out once you hit puberty." He looked under the bench at her feet and then studied her. "You're too bony. I think you got skipped."

"Hey, ya know what? At least I can drive with my small self." She flashed him that sweet crooked smile that I loved so much.

"Well played."

"Thank you. Now do this..." She tried to direct him in the right way he was supposed to go, but he sounded horrible.

"You suck," she said. "Just watch me for a second." She played the first few notes. "Try that."

"You can see the bones in your hands move when you play."

"Shut up."

"It's weird."

She elbowed him lightly. "*You're* weird. Just do what I told ya to."

Tommy did, and it really sounded kind of good. It was like a memory game. They continued to do that and when they put it together, she still sounded a lot better than him, but he was okay.

"Oh, guess who's right again," she said. "You can keep your money, by the way."

"Show off," he muttered.

"I wasn't showin' off."

"I wasn't showin' off'," Tommy mocked her in a high voice, getting up and throwing himself on her bed.

"Your brother's a meanie," she whispered to me.

I laughed. "I know," I whispered back.

"What are you guys whispering about over there?" Tommy asked.

Marissa turned around. "Your face."

"I know, it's so beautiful, right?"

"You wish it was beautiful."

"Hey. I'm cute."

Marissa laughed and he said, "I'm cute, right, Damion?"

I smiled. "You really shouldn't ask me that."

"You look like me!"

"No, I don't."

"Marissa?"

She looked up at me and then back at him. "Nope. Hey, dude, I was just kidding. You can relax."

"Admit that I'm cute."

She sighed. "Tommy, you are cute."

"Thank you."

There was a loud knock at the door and Marissa got up and opened it. A mouse ran in with a note on it. She picked the mouse up before it ran under her bed. She read the note and laughed a little. "Guess who's *not* afraid of mice?"

"What's the note say?" I asked.

"Lindsey and Mia aren't that clever. It says, 'A little present for you...from M and L.' There's no way I'm gonna be afraid of this unless it has an explosive inside."

Tommy laughed. "How can you put an explosive in a mouse?"

"Feed it to him?" She shrugged. "I dunno. So who wants a mouse?"

I chuckled. "Nobody does."

"Well, I don't know what to do with it."

"That is so what she said," Tommy said

"Dude."

"I had to, I'm sorry."

"And that's what *he* said."

He laughed. "*Nice.*"

"Right?" she said, laughing with him.

I couldn't help smiling. "You're both ten years old," I said.

"Kick-ass ten year olds," Marissa said.

"Hell yes," Tommy said and he high-fived her. That's when I realized that Marissa had more things in common with Tommy than with me. It made me kind of jealous to know that.

Marissa looked confused and said, "Hey, Tommy, could ya go?"

"*Well*, then," he said and stood up.

"Sorry," she said as he left. When the door shut, she said, "Why would you think that?"

I sighed. "I don't know. It's just that you guys seem to really like each other."

"Yeah, he's your brother. I was just trying to get him to approve of me." As soon as she said it, she looked shocked that she did.

"You want my brother's approval?" I asked incredulously, as I brought her over to her bed.

She looked down at the mouse still in her hands. "Yes. I know it sounds totally stupid."

“No,” I said, sliding her closer to me. “I think that sounds totally *nice*, not stupid. But he already approves of you. Trust me, he’s been trying to set me up with you since you got here.”

She laughed a little. She studied the mouse. Then she smiled and said in an excited voice, “I know what to do with this.”

I smiled, too. “And what would that be?”

“Give it back.”

“What?”

“Lindsey and Mia would be afraid of an *ant*. They’ll definitely be afraid of this and I know for a fact that Lindsey got her boyfriend to give this to me.”

“How do you know?”

“I can’t talk to anybody through their mind but you. I never said I couldn’t still read other people’s minds.”

I smiled. “Come on. Let’s do it.”

We stood up and as we walked out, she said, “Ya know, it’s never a good thing when a guy says that.”

I laughed and slid my arm around her. “Oh, God.”

We came up to their door. Marissa was the only one in the whole group home who had her own room.

“So, how are we going to do this?” I asked.

She popped the mouse into the room with her magic. “Like that.”

“Shouldn’t we go?”

“Nah, we’re invisible to them. Literally.”

“Really?” I laughed. “That’s so cool.”

We heard shrieks coming from inside. I saw Marissa smile and when they ran out, we both laughed so hard. Their faces were priceless. They ran down the stairs somewhere.

“My best idea *ever*,” Marissa said.

I smiled at her and then looked in the room, wondering where the mouse went. I felt a sharp pain in my arm and I said, “Ow. Did you just hit me?”

“What? No. And besides, even if I did, I wouldn’t be able to make you say ‘ow’.”

I sighed and rubbed my arm where it hurt. The pain spread to my legs and I said, "Maybe we should go outside."

"Wh-" She studied me for a second. Then she shrugged and said, "'Kay. I get it."

"Thank you," I breathed and I led her outside. She understood that we didn't have enough time to get jackets, so she just kept us warm with her magic, which I thought was a little too selfless because it was making her extremely tired.

I was a wolf for only a little while, which was kind of weird, but it worked just fine for me. It was a good thing that, when I change, I don't lose my clothes. They just pop off me when I'm a wolf and then, somehow, they're on me when I'm a human again like nothing ever happened. When I was done changing back, I asked tiredly, "How long are you able to keep that up?"

"As long as I want. Just I...can't fall asleep." She started laughing.

I couldn't help smiling. "What?"

"I don't know," she said, still laughing. She stopped abruptly and stared at me for a second. "Hey, you're pretty."

I chuckled. "Whoa, Mini, you're *really* tired." I stood up, despite how tired I was from changing, and picked her up. As I started walking, she asked dreamily, "Where are we going?"

"Back to your room. You need sleep desperately."

She sighed. "I don't want to go back. I don't like it there."

"Oh, don't you like me?"

She smiled at me. "No. I love ya. There is a *huge* difference."

I smiled back at her. "I love you, too."

"Do ya mean that?" she asked as I started climbing the stairs.

"Yes, I do. It's the truest thing I've ever said."

"Hey, Damion?"

"What?"

"Don't drop me."

I laughed. "I won't. I promise."

I reached her room and I set her down on her bed. I pulled the sheets over her and kissed her goodnight. When I started to turn away, she said, "Hey, wait."

"Yes?" I said, turning around to face her again.

“Stay here with me, please.”

“You really want me to?”

“Yeah, I do.”

I smiled at her boldness and climbed into bed with her. She was different when she was tired. If she hadn't used her magic to help us, she would have been okay. I guess that proved how much she cared about me. She wore herself out trying to keep me warm. I saw that she didn't use as much on herself; she was shivering a little, but she wasn't freezing.

“I love you,” she whispered as I pulled her close to me.

I smiled again. “I love you, too.”

## 12

“Damion,” Tommy said. “Come look at this.”

“What?” I asked, walking over to his laptop.

“Well, there's a video of Marissa on here.”

“Okay.”

“Come watch.”

“No. That's like stalking her.” I sat back down on my own bed.

He sighed. “Okay, well I am.”

“Have fun with that.”

He played the video and I heard Marissa say in a babyish voice, “Marissa's gonna play chat roulette...hi! You're shirt's missing...oh, you're a bi- oh, hi, you're not a bitch. How's it goin'?” Then I heard her scream, “Bitch!” and then a pause. “Hey, I'm your long-lost granddaughter, grandma. Come save me and take me home! They hate me here...or you can just jack off. That's cool, too. Go to hell, banana! Nobody likes you!” Okay, was she drunk or something? “No, *you're* not a cracker. *I'm* a cracker. You gotta listen to me. People tied me up and they are gonna come in and attack me with stuffed animals and you're a whore!” She laughed. “Come on, man. God damn. I'm tied up here and all you can do is jack off?!” She began singing. “Marissa's puttin' on a bandana, a bandana, a bandana...hi, aren't you glad I'm not a naked

guy? Okay, guess not because you left. I'm sorry, sir, you're going to die of really tiny dick cancer. Oops, doctors don't say 'dick.' That was bad." She cracked up and I heard somebody else laughing with her, so I guess even if she was the only one talking, somebody was listening. The last thing she said was muffled by what sounded like a pillow. "What is up with all the freaking dicks?"

The whole entire time, Tommy was either smiling or laughing. "Dude, you should have seen that."

"Yeah, it was funny, but I don't like seeing naked guys."

"She censored it. Oh, yeah, I forgot to tell you something."

"What?"

"I threw a snowball at Marissa today."

"Why?"

"It was funny."

I sighed and he said, "She said she'd get me back."

I chuckled, remembering what she did last night to Mia and Lindsey. "Be careful. I'm going to go by her now."

"Whatever."

I ignored his attitude and walked out. I heard some kind of rock song playing from her room. I knocked lightly on her door.

"It's open," she called and lowered the music a little.

I opened the door and stepped inside. She smiled at me. She was on her own laptop, sitting up in her bed with the sheets pulled up to her torso and her hair tied back in a messy pony tail. She actually looked like a normal teenager.

Marissa closed the laptop and put it to the side. "Somethin' wrong?"

"No. I'm just waiting for your permission to sit down with you."

She laughed. "Wow. Okay. You can come here."

I smiled, shut the door, and sat down on the bed next to her. "So, um, Tommy and I saw this video...well, I didn't see it. Tommy told me about it."

She smiled, too. "And?"

"It was of you."

“Okay, so? There are a lot of videos of me and my friends online.”

“I never knew that. You seemed to have a lot of fun with them.”

She smiled again and began to say something, but her door flew open. Mia and Lindsey walked inside.

“Hey, there’s this word,” Marissa said. “It begins and ends with a K and there’s an O in the middle.”

Lindsey laughed. “You’re so funny.”

“I wasn’t trying to be.”

“Hey, where’s your straightener?”

“My what?”

“You know, that really hot thing you use to get your hair so straight. Where is it?”

Marissa stared at her. “I don’t have one.”

“Oh, come on. You’re kidding.”

She shrugged and Mia said, “That’s so cool. What do you do to get it so thick then?”

“Nothin’.”

“Wow.”

*Why are they being nice?*

I shrugged. *I wish I knew.*

“Yeah, so...what do ya want?” Marissa asked them.

“Oh my gosh, can you teach me how to talk like you do?” Mia asked. “I love that it’s different.”

“Not really. Sorry.”

*Did you seriously just apologize to them?*

*I guess I did.* She bit her knuckle.

“You have sharp teeth,” Lindsey said. “You’ll hurt yourself.”

Marissa just shrugged, looking down.

“Okay, listen, Lemon,” Lindsey said, sitting on the other side of Marissa.

Lemon?

“Lemon?” Marissa asked when she stopped biting her knuckle. She didn’t get it, either.

“You’re *always* pouting.”

“That’s over-exaggerating it.”

“You know, you smell *really* good.” Lindsey dragged out a strand of Marissa’s black hair. “It’s not just your hair, though. What are you wearing?”

Marissa looked down at herself then back at her. “Clothes?”

Lindsey and Mia laughed. “No,” Mia said. “What perfume?”

“Oh, none.”

“What?” At the same time, Lindsey said, “Really?”

*Is that so hard to believe?*

*Not really.*

Lindsey hugged Marissa tight and stood up. “We’re going to go. Bye.” Before Mia left, she hugged her, too.

Once the door shut, Marissa said, “They wanted something.”

“How do you know?”

“Hang on.” She was listening to something that even I couldn’t hear-their thoughts. Then she said, “They wanted me to freak out.” She shrugged. “Sucks for them.”

“That’s like some sick kind of psychology.”

“I know. That’s mean.”

“Are you okay?”

“I have no reason to not be.”

“I can’t exactly blame them for wanting to talk like you. It’s kind of...sexy.”

She smiled and blushed a little. “Sexy, huh?”

“Very. I think your voice and accent is sexy and, just, *you* are beautiful.”

Her blush got deeper and I smiled. Then she said, “Sorry, I’ve never been told that before.”

“You should have been.” I stroked her hair. “You look a little pale. Are you really okay?”

She laughed. “I’m *always* pale.”

“Do you have anemia?”

“Nah, I’m just weird.”

I chuckled. “Everyone’s weird.” I kissed her and I was so involved with her, I didn’t hear it when Tommy came in while we were kissing. He came up close to us and said, “I think I know where my brother’s tongue is going.”

I pulled away from Marissa and she said, “That’s gross.”

He shrugged. “French kissing is better.”

“Ew.”

“Can you *not*, Tommy,” I said.

He laughed. “You wish I couldn’t. Mia’s looking for you.”

“Why?”

He shrugged. “She’s waiting in our room for you,” he called just before he walked out.

I sighed. Wasn’t she *just* here? I didn’t want to go, but I guess I had to. I kissed Marissa again and said, “I love you. I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

She smiled. “Kay, love you, too.”

I smiled back at her just before leaving her.

## 13

I walked inside my room and, just like Tommy said, Mia was sitting there, waiting for me. I wasn’t that much of a fan of her. She wasn’t nice to the girl I loved and I couldn’t hurt her. She was a girl, too, and I was raised to never hit a girl.

“What’s wrong, Mia?” I asked, putting everything back in place since Tommy messed our room up.

“Well, um, remember how I asked Marissa to tell you that I wanted to be your girlfriend?”

I looked at her and she flipped her blonde hair over her shoulder, trying to seem pretty and innocent. “Yes, why?”

“I still want to be.”

I finished doing what I was doing and stood up straight. "I'm sorry, but that's not going to really happen. I'm with Marissa and I love her."

"Are you sure about that?"

"Very sure. I'm positive."

"But, Damion..." She sighed. "Sit down."

"I don't think so."

"Okay, fine. Just..." Before I knew what was happening, she kissed me. I pulled away from her, fast. But right before I did, Tommy *and* Marissa walked in. They stopped dead in their tracks.

No. No, no, *no*, this could not be happening.

"Mini..." I began.

"T-Tommy told me to just come along with him here...but I'm just gonna..." She walked out the door. I could tell she was trying to hold back tears; her voice cracked on her last few words.

I completely lost it. I yelled and screamed at Mia, even threw some things. I had just lost the girl of my dreams because she had to kiss me. Marissa would never forgive me and I knew it. By the end of my rampage, Mia was scared senseless of me and she left.

"Damion?" Tommy asked carefully.

"What?" I asked, leaning my forehead to a wall and closing my eyes.

"You didn't *want* to do kiss her, right?"

"No. Never." My own voice was starting to crack and I took a deep breath. I wasn't about to cry in front of my older brother. "She's never going to believe me."

"Sure, she will."

"Marissa had a hard time trusting me before because of something that I think she wants me to keep a secret. But it had to do with the same kind of topic. She's definitely not going to trust me now."

"Won't you try?"

I opened my eyes and looked at him. "I want to."

He smiled. "Good." He took my arm and pulled me out of the room. "You're not allowed back in here till Marissa loves you again." He slammed the door in my face and I heard the click of the lock. I sighed. What if she never does?

I looked toward Marissa's door and I heard her playing the piano weakly. She was playing some sad song slower than it was probably supposed to go. If there was one thing I knew about her, it

was that she only played the piano when she had something on her mind. I also heard very quiet sobs coming from inside. I did it; I broke the girl who built herself up to be unbreakable. And I absolutely loathed myself for it.

## 14

I walked to her room. As I was walking down the hallway, I saw shattered glass from the picture frames on the floor, probably from when she was walking to her room. This really upset her; why *would* she even *think* about forgiving me? I tapped on the door lightly like I always did and the piano music stopped. It was a moment before she came to the door. When she saw me, she looked into my eyes for a second and drew in a deep breath. "If you didn't want me anymore, all you had to do was say so."

"I do want you. I *need* you, Mini."

She looked away from me and turned, heading for her bed instead of her piano.

"May I come in?" I asked tentatively.

She didn't say anything, but she motioned me over with one hand. I stood at the edge of her bed. Her room was a little messy from what happened. I wasn't sure if she'd accidentally brought her things down with her magic, or if she intentionally threw them.

"Are you upset?" I asked.

She raised an eyebrow and glanced at me. When my eyes met hers, all I saw was the pain she was feeling. She looked down at her lap again.

"Yeah, that was a stupid question, wasn't it?" I said, kneeling down and folding my hands together on her bed. When I got no response from her, I said, "I didn't want to kiss her. She kissed me. I didn't want it, Mini, I *didn't*. You're the only girl I want in my life. I told you I loved you and I meant it. There are so many reasons why. Like..." I rested my chin on my hands. "Like how I get chills when you say my name or when I kiss you, your smile and your laugh, those eyes..." A small tear ran down my cheek and rubbed my eyes, totally embarrassed.

Her hands started to shake a little as more tears formed in her own eyes and I heard her grind her teeth together. She began to wipe them away, but I caught her wrists and said, "No, it's okay. You can cry."

"I don't want to," she muttered. Her voice was a little raspy from when she did cry.

“Then at least let me do it.”

She kept her mouth shut as I wiped away her tears, but she followed my finger with her eyes, even if it did make her go a little cross-eyed. When I was done, I asked, “Can I sit with you?”

She didn’t answer me right away. Then she nodded. I sat down on her bed next to her, but I didn’t touch her. I was afraid to. I’d got her to say only four words to me, that’s it. That was progress and I wasn’t about to blow it with her.

“Do you love me?” I asked shyly.

She nodded without hesitation.

Okay. That was great. She still loved me. “Do you believe what I said?”

She paused before answering me. Then she nodded again.

That was better. “Do you forgive me?”

She leaned her head on the wall the bed was directly next to and sighed. She looked kind of tired, but she still answered me. She nodded.

A huge wave of relief crashed over me. I understood that she still wasn’t ready to talk and I respected that. Marissa would start talking again when she wanted to.

“Are you tired?” I asked. I couldn’t help the happiness in my voice.

“Yeah,” she said quietly. When she said that, I reached over carefully and put my arm around her shoulders. She stiffened and I asked, “Is this okay?”

“It’s okay.”

I brought her closer to me and she tentatively leaned her head on my shoulder instead of the wall.

“I am so sorry,” I whispered. I kissed the top of her head. “I wish this never happened.”

She closed her eyes. “Why?”

“If this never happened, you would be happy, I wouldn’t be freaking out, and we would have no problems.”

“We don’t have any problems. I believe you.”

“Yes, but I have a problem.”

“What’s that?”

I smiled slightly. “You’re falling asleep on me, Mini.”

“Oh.” She rubbed her eyes and opened them. “Sorry.”

“Don’t be, it’s okay.” I looked around. “Do you realize that your room is *super* creepy in the dark?”

“Yeah, I have. Feels like there’s somebody always lookin’ at ya, right?”

“Yes.” I laughed. “Or maybe we’re just paranoid.”

She actually laughed a little. “Maybe we are. You’re freaking me the hell out of me now that you brought it up.”

“Oh,” I said, rubbing her arms. “It’s okay, I’m here with you.”

“Will you always be here with me?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Is that a promise?”

“One that I’ll never break.”

She sighed and closed her eyes again.

“What’s wrong?”

“You give me butterflies.”

I smiled. “That’s a bad thing?”

She opened her eyes. “I’m just not used to it. I guess I probably should be, huh?”

“If it keeps happening and if you don’t want it to stop.”

Marissa rolled her eyes. “Even if I did, I wouldn’t have control over it.”

I shrugged. “*You* could. Normal people can’t.”

She laughed a little. “Oh, right.” She paused. “Hey, guess what.”

“What?”

“You’re not allowed to kiss me till you go rinse your mouth out.”

I laughed. “Okay. Show me where it is.”

She smiled and crawled off her bed. I followed her to her bathroom and she got mouth wash out of one the drawers. She set it down on the counter, said, “Have fun,” and walked out.

When I was finished, I walked out to see her leaning against the wall near the bathroom, waiting for me. I walked the few feet to her and asked, “May I kiss you now?”

She half smiled and nodded. I smiled back at her and kissed her gently. When I pulled back from her, she asked, "So, who's a better kisser?"

"Competitive, huh?" I asked.

She nodded. I took a deep breath and stuffed my hands in my pockets. "The neighborhood dog."

She laughed and smacked me on the stomach a little. "No, really."

I laughed, too, and said, "*You*, of course," and I kissed her again.

## 15

It was New Year's Eve, about a minute till midnight. Tommy, Marissa, and I were standing outside. It was mine and Tommy's tradition to set off a firework every year at midnight on this night. Since Marissa was happily my girlfriend again, she was part of it now. Casey would be, too, if she was enrolled in the group home.

"Marissa, since you're the newbie, you get to set it off," Tommy said.

"I don't know how," she said.

"All you do is set it on fire." He took out a lighter. None of us smoked, so I never knew where he got it from. "With this, of course."

"How do you use it?"

With a flick of his thumb, a flame popped up. He gave it to her and she tried it. She got it on the first try.

"Oh," she said, obviously pleased with herself.

All of us crouched down to the firework on the ground. Tommy looked at his watch and said, "Okay, in five, four, three, two..."

Marissa set the firework off and we went away from it before it exploded. We watched it and then she gave the lighter back to Tommy. I kissed her and Tommy kissed her on the cheek. Then he came over to me and kissed me on the mouth and Marissa couldn't help laughing as I wiped my mouth.

"Hey, don't ya think it's weird that it's one year here and the past one in, like, California?"

Tommy and I laughed and he said, "I've never thought about that but you're right."

She smiled and I said, "Well, before we all freeze to death, I suggest we go inside."

"Oh, or...have any of you guys ever wanted to see my house?"

"I have," Tommy said. "I imagine it white and plain."

"Ya got the white part right. So not plain. Especially tonight. My brother throws a party every year and it's kind of *our* tradition, so if y'all don't wanna come..."

"We'll go. Right, Damion?"

"Uh...right."

"Yes, but how are we going to get there?"

She shrugged. "Easily."

"Oh, wait, Marissa."

"What?"

"Shouldn't you stuff your bra so you don't embarrass us?"

She crossed her arms. "Why don't you stuff yours?"

I couldn't help laughing a little at her answer, but I said, "Tommy, leave her alone."

"Oh, come on," he said. "You know that was funny."

"Yeah, what I said was funny. Not what you said," Marissa said, and then suddenly, we were outside of a two-story white house. It was a lot warmer, and our jackets were removed. I wasn't sure where they had gone, but I was okay with it. Marissa still had on a hoodie, though, even if it was about eighty degrees.

"Whoa," Tommy said. "That's so cool."

Marissa flashed us both her beautiful crooked smile and led us inside. A lot of people were either talking or dancing to the music that was blasting out from speakers. Keith was right in the middle of it. When he spotted Marissa, he ran over and hugged her. She hugged him back and Keith looked back at us, pulled away from Marissa, and said, "So ya have chauffeurs now?"

Marissa laughed and pointed to me, saying, "Boyfriend," and pointed to Tommy, saying, "Boyfriend's total dick of an older brother. That okay?"

As Tommy and I cracked up, Keith said, "Yeah, I needed more people anyway."

He started to turn away, but Marissa tapped him on the shoulder and said in a voice so low that only people very close by and I could hear, "Where's April?"

“Over here,” he said when a small girl in a blue dress with long brown hair walked over. She attached herself to Marissa’s leg.

“Everyone’s so much older than me,” April said.

“You let her stay here? Dude, she could get stomped on,” Marissa said.

“She had nowhere else to go,” Keith said. “Take her with you.” He walked away to resume hosting the party.

Marissa bent down and picked up her little sister in her arms. “You look so pretty. Who dressed you?”

“Mommy.”

Marissa sighed. That’s when some kid ordered her to give April to somebody else. Marissa handed her carefully to me and the kid put a hand on her waist. She pushed him and said, “What are you, twelve? Don’t touch me.”

The kid smiled. “I know what *you* want.” He whispered something in her ear that I didn’t really understand because he said it really softly and quickly. Marissa’s muscles tensed and I thought she was going to hit him, but instead she relaxed and smiled seductively at him.

“You wanna go to my room?” she asked.

“Really?”

Marissa led him up the stairs and soon, I heard the click of a lock and Marissa came back down. I heard pounding on a door and the kid screaming for somebody to let him out.

“I should so be on Broadway,” she said, smiling. “You look cute with a little kid, by the way.”

I smiled at her and Tommy said, “You know, I could be a southerner. All ya gotta do is talk like this.”

“I don’t sound like that.”

“Do you?”

“Do I?”

“No, not really,” I said.

“Marissa!” a grown man shouted. He ran up to her and hugged her, lifting her off her feet. When he put her down, I got a good look at him. He was her dad; he looked like the guy in the picture that she showed me.

“Hey,” she said. A blonde woman with shining blue eyes and clothes that were two sizes too small and too short walked towards us, putting her arms around Marissa’s dad. Marissa sighed and her dad said, “Oh, baby, don’t be like that.”

“Like what, Daddy?” Marissa and the blonde woman asked at the same time.

“Oh my gosh,” Tommy muttered under his breath. I knew why. There was a good chance that this was going to turn bad and fast. Marissa was really territorial. The only reason why she didn’t kick Mia’s ass when she kissed me was because she was too upset.

Marissa crossed her arms. “She calls you ‘Daddy’, too?”

“Marissa-“

She raised a hand to stop him and shook her head. “Forget about it. I don’t care.” We all knew that she definitely did. “And you can keep my clothes,” she said to the woman. “I don’t want them anymore.” She walked back up the stairs and Tommy and I followed her. Just as she shut the door, Keith knocked. I only knew it was him because the witch and wizard scent grew stronger than it was when it was just Marissa and April. Keith opened it and the bottom hinge of the door broke off.

“Uh...” Keith said. He started to try to slip inside through the small crack and when he made it in, Marissa said, “You broke my door.”

“I’m telling!” April shouted.

“Go ahead.”

“Daddy!” She screamed it so loud, I thought I would go deaf forever. When she continued to scream, Marissa put a hand over her mouth, muffling her screams by a lot.

“Sorry,” she said to me and Tommy.

We both waved off the apology. Marissa’s father came running up the stairs and asked, “What happened?”

Marissa and Keith laughed and said, simultaneously, “Nothing.”

“You swear?”

“Yeah, we swear,” Marissa said.

As April continued to try to scream, we heard a high-pitched, angry voice yell from downstairs, “David!” Marissa, Keith, and their dad cracked up.

“You brought the psycho from here,” her dad said, leveling his hand at his waist, and then bringing it up over his head, “to here, April.” They were still laughing when the blonde woman from before ran in, red-faced. She hit Marissa’s and Keith’s father in the arm and that’s when I

saw Tommy trying not to laugh. I guess the whole thing was kind of funny, if you knew the people well. But the only person I knew well here that was in the family was Marissa.

“What the hell happened?” the blonde woman yelled.

“Nothing happened, baby, I swear,” Marissa’s dad said. I finally realized that this was Marissa’s stepmom. By the slight disappointed look on Marissa’s face, I saw that she didn’t like them being together.

“You!” her stepmom said with a glare to Marissa.

“Me?” Marissa said sarcastically. She wasn’t laughing or smiling anymore, but her dad and brother were.

“What did you do?”

“Nothing.”

“Then why is your hand over her mouth? Are you trying to kill her?”

“She was...” Marissa stood up straight and stuffed her hands in her pockets. “You’re so right. I was tryin’ to kill my baby sister. You caught me...gosh, you’re so good at that.”

“You’re an arrogant little bitch.”

“Actually, it’s *witch*.”

I covered up my smile with my hand and I heard Tommy snicker quietly.

“Lucy,” Marissa’s dad said harshly. “You do not call my daughter that, not even my oldest one.”

“I’m her mother.”

“No, you’re not *her* mother. You are Keith’s and April’s mother.”

“Get owned,” Tommy whispered quietly enough so that only I could hear it.

“Leave,” Marissa’s stepmom said. He did.

“You’re just gonna...” Marissa said, spreading her arms wide. When the door shut, she scoffed and dropped her hands to her sides. When she did, a movie from her shelf flew off and straight for her, but she caught it and threw it back without even looking. It landed right in its spot. Okay, that was pretty awesome.

“You know why your father loves me?”

“I can think of a couple of reasons,” Marissa said, crossing her arms. Everyone got that, except for April, of course. I saw Keith and Tommy smile. I tried not to. I was trying to be polite.

“It’s because I have a hot tub.”

"Guess whose house this is."

"Yours."

Marissa smiled and nodded. "So...*who* has the hot tub?"

"You...wait."

"Yeah."

"I hate you."

"I'm dying because that hurt so much," Marissa said flatly.

"Oh, my gosh, I'm so sorry! I didn't mean any of it, I swear."

She started coughing. "I don't know if I'll make it now."

Her stepmom started crying. Marissa waited for her to leave, but when she didn't, Marissa sighed, lying on the floor on her back, closing her eyes like she was going to sleep.

"Well, nice job, mom," Keith said. "You killed my sister."

She walked out, mumbling something unintelligible and Marissa stood up, smiling. "I'm the worst."

"That was awesome," Keith said, making his hand into a fist and holding it up to Marissa. She did the same and bumped her fist into his.

"Do you know how old that is?" Tommy asked.

"Shut up," Marissa said, acting offended. Then she mouthed, "He's only thirteen, let him be cool."

Tommy laughed a little and I couldn't help smiling. Then Keith said, "Sorry 'bout destroying the door." His voice went up at the end and he cleared his throat. "I hate that."

"It happens for about a year," Tommy said. "You might want to get used to it."

Marissa laughed a little. "I don't care, I don't live here anymore."

"Are you sure you don't care?"

She shrugged. "Yeah, pretty sure."

He waved his hand and Marissa stood up straight. Then he asked again, "Are you *sure* you don't care?"

"I'm sure I don't care."

"Hey, you're telling the truth."

“Yeah, I do that most of the time. And also-“

“Okay, shut up.” He waved his hand again and Marissa blinked. Then he said, “Nobody wants to know the truth about anything more.”

“Hey, try to embarrass me again and I’ll tell everyone about your uncontrollable morning stiffness.”

Tommy cracked up. I tried not to smile. It wouldn’t be nice. Marissa covered her mouth and said, “Oops.”

“She’s lying! Sh-she is,” Keith tried to lie his way out.

“Dude, calm down. Nobody here cares. ‘Cause in case you haven’t noticed, they’re guys, too.”

“You were right. You *are* the worst.”

“Duh.”

“I just came here to talk to the guys...so if you could...”

“You’re kicking me out of my own room?” She smiled. “I’ve taught you well.” Keith laughed and she walked out.

“Marissa!” April shouted and she ran out to follow her.

“So...what are your names?” Keith said, shutting the door.

“Um...” Tommy said. “I’m Tommy, that’s Damion.”

“Cool,” he said with a smile. “Hey, Damion, guess what.”

I smiled politely. “What?”

“If you hurt my sister, I’ll hurt you severely. She doesn’t need to go through this crap again. Actually, I don’t even know why she’s trying. You look like a player.”

By the end, I wasn’t smiling anymore. “Oh, I’m not.”

“Trust me, dude, he hasn’t even had a girlfriend in...” He stopped when I tapped him hard. Then he said, “In a really long time. And when they broke up, the girl was the player, not him. Marissa’s going to be just fine with him.”

“I don’t know, I just don’t trust guys with her anymore. Once she was raped, the other was just a total jackass and I swear, that caused her schizophrenia and bipolar issues...” He cursed, loudly, when Tommy and I stared at him in shock.

“What?” I asked.

"I wasn't supposed to say that. She told me not to tell anybody...our dad doesn't even know...I mean, he knows about her medical problems but not about the other...I am such a screw up."

"No, it's...it's okay." Holy freaking crap. I absolutely could not fathom this. "Are you serious?"

"Uh, yeah, why do you think she's so skinny? She hasn't eaten much since...well, I mean, she's not a toothpick, she's average weight, but y'all know what I mean. She's supposed to be heavier. I keep saying, 'Marissa Lena, damn it, eat the rest of your food,' but she never listened 'cause I'm younger. And I called her that because she hates when people say her middle name."

I thought she was fine just the way she was, not that I knew her actual weight, but...that's not really the problem.

"Well...when did it happen?" Tommy asked. "Not the medical crap. The other thing."

"A few months before she came into the group home. Then there was the guy that led her on. I think that was why she never talked to anybody...you know what? I've said too much. I'm just gonna..." He slid out of the bedroom. Right then, Marissa slid inside.

"So, what did he say?" she asked with a smile.

"Nothing," Tommy said, quickly.

"Tommy, could you go?" I asked.

"Damion, I don't know..." I gave him a look and he sighed and left.

Marissa fixed and shut her door after he left and turned around to face me. "There's something wrong. What is it?"

I began walking around in circles, not exactly looking her in the eye. "Were you...you know...raped?"

She tried to feign laughter, but then she sighed and looked down. "Maybe..."

I turned my head and looked at her. She looked up slightly, saw me looking, and looked down again, saying, "Yeah, I was. Surprise!" She tried to do jazz hands, but when she saw that I wasn't even smiling, she said, "No? Okay," and she stuffed her hands in her pockets.

I felt kind of bad about not smiling or laughing, but I said, "How come you never told me?"

"What was I supposed to say? 'Hey, I was raped before I came here, and I know you don't know me very well, but ya know...' 'Cause that would be a hell of an introduction."

"I meant later, when we knew each other better. Don't you trust me?"

Her head snapped up and she looked at me with wide eyes. "Yeah, I trust you. Do you trust *me*?" A tear escaped from one eye.

“Yes,” I said, walking up to her and hugging her tightly. “I didn’t mean to make you upset, I’m sorry.”

“It wasn’t you. It was just...the memory. I don’t remember exactly everything, so you won’t see it.”

“Good.” I stroked her hair as I held her close. “What *do* you remember?”

“I remember...that he hit me a lot and he threatened to kill me if I didn’t do what he said. It just led up to what he did...and I don’t wanna talk about ‘cause it’s really awkward for me.” She said the last part with a small laugh.

I smiled a little. “It’s okay. It’s kind of getting me mad, anyway.” I sighed. “So, I guess you’re not a virgin, huh?”

“Not...technically. I mean...does it count?”

“I think so. But it’s okay.” I waited a second before asking her another question. “So, um, Keith said you were schizophrenic and bipolar...”

She sighed. “I take medicine for it. It’s not like I’m hearing and seeing things that aren’t there anymore. I’m still kinda messed up with how I feel, though.”

“You’re so weird.”

She laughed and I smiled. “Thanks.”

We heard something that sounded like Keith yelling and we walked out of the room to see what happened. Marissa opened a door and inside, Keith and a girl were arguing about something. Right when the door opened, Keith said, “-and if I *lose*...” He looked towards us. “You get to make out with my sister’s boyfriend.”

Can we *not* go through this again?

“What?” Marissa said. “No, she doesn’t.”

“She likes his hair.”

“Yeah, so do I.”

I smiled. “Thank you.”

She looked up for a second and smiled at me before looking back at her brother.

Keith and the girl played rock-paper-scissors and Keith won. Marissa and I sighed quietly in relief while the girl stomped her foot.

\*\*\*

Tommy, Marissa, and I stayed in her room in Georgia all night. Only we didn't realize that we had fallen asleep there until we woke up. When we did, Marissa brought us back to New Jersey. Nobody even noticed we were gone.

## 16

Casey and Tommy broke up. It was really weird. I don't understand how I can go through something terrible with my girlfriend and then a few weeks later, he went through almost the same thing. The only difference was that he actually *did* cheat on her and he admitted it to her because he felt bad about it afterwards. It was good that he told her the truth, but you still couldn't just expect things to be okay just because you told the truth, especially with that kind of situation.

"I told her that she would never hear my voice again," he said. He was lying on his bed, just staring at the ceiling. "I should call her."

"No, you shouldn't," I said. "If you get up and go for that phone, I will hurt you."

"But I miss her so much."

"Then why'd ya do it?" Marissa asked.

Tough love. Just like her.

"It was just a one night stand."

"That doesn't make it right."

"I know."

"Come on." She jumped up. "You're wastin' your time. Ya got better things to do other than lie on your bed and complain about something that was totally stupid. It happened, it's over, and it doesn't matter anymore. Lots of girls would want ya and you're stayin' in here, makin' sure that they don't."

"You're just saying that."

"No, I'm not."

"Tommy, she's right and you know it," I said. "Casey wanted to break it off, so she did. She doesn't know what she's missing."

"But I want her back so bad."

"Then why don't ya sing to her?" Marissa asked sarcastically.

Tommy sat up. "That is one of the smartest things you have ever said."

"I was kidding."

"Too bad. That is such a good idea."

"You can't even sing," I said.

"Neither can you."

"I know that. It's why I don't do it."

He pointed to Marissa. "But *you* can sing. Don't even try to deny it, I heard you once, even if it *was* quiet as hell."

"What if I don't want to sing to her?" she asked.

"Please. Please, please, I am begging you."

"Stop it, you know I hate that."

"That's why I'm doing it."

She sighed in annoyance.

"Why are you dragging her into this?" I asked. "She doesn't even *know* Casey."

"Marissa, she has brown hair and blue eyes and she's really pretty."

"So are a lot of people," she said.

"I'll bring you to her house and stay with you."

"Just hold a radio over your head and play that."

"It won't mean as much. *Please*, Marissa?"

"No."

"Please?"

She smacked her knee in anger, her three bracelets making a clicking sound as they knocked together. "*Fine*."

"Thank you!" He went to give her a hug but she said, "Don't touch me."

He leaned away from her. "Sure."

Marissa proceeded to sing "Fall For You" by Secondhand Serenade and play it on a piano for Casey that night. She forgave Tommy because it was the first and only time in fifty years that he ever hurt her like that.

As we were walking back to the group home, Tommy wouldn't shut up about it. He kept on thanking Marissa and talking about Casey. We put up with it...until I caught the sound of footsteps behind us. I glanced back and saw three guys a little shorter than I was following us. It was like they were stalking us; they were staring at us and muttering things about us.

"Tommy, be quiet for a minute," I said.

He stopped talking, but he said, "What's wrong?"

"Do you know those guys?"

He looked behind us, then back at me. "No."

"Mini?"

"Nope."

"Well, they seem to know our names."

"Go talk to them," Tommy said.

Marissa gave him a look and he shrugged. I sighed and looked back at them once more before I stopped walking. Tommy and Marissa stopped, too, and we let the three guys catch up with us. As they got closer, I caught their scent. All three of them were werewolves, the ones that killed my mother.

"We should go," I said.

"Why?" Tommy asked.

"We just sh--"

"We know you guys," one of the guys said. I turned around to face him. Tommy muttered a curse under his breath.

*They know you?*

*They're just werewolves that killed my mother.*

There was a pause before she answered me. *Oh*, was all she could manage. I could tell that she was a little frightened.

"So how ya been?" the same guy said.

“Fine,” I said. They were drunk. I could smell the alcohol on their breath. “Maybe all of you should just go back.”

He shoved me and I stumbled back a step. Then he asked, “Anybody else agree?”

Tommy and Marissa just stared at him and didn’t say anything. His glare shot to Marissa and he said, “Do *you*?”

“No,” she said calmly.

“Oh, I’m sure you do.”

“Leave her alone,” I said.

He gave me the finger and continued toward Marissa, saying, “Get on the ground.”

She knelt down slowly, keeping her eyes on him.

“Step away from her,” I said gravely.

“Make me.”

I spotted the knife in his front pocket and I wasn’t sure if I could. “I just don’t want any trouble. Get away from her.”

“Why? Is she yours?”

“Yes.”

He gave me a devilish smile. “All the more reason to do it, buddy.”

In a very quick movement, he bit her wrist and she didn’t scream, but she punched him in the stomach with her free hand, a reaction to someone hurting her purposely. He fell to his side, coughing. I pounced on him and yelled, “*I told you to stay away from her!*” Since he was now an easy target, I cracked his head against the pavement without him fighting back and he was unconscious. When I looked up, the other two men were gone, having being bit by Tommy.

Marissa stood up slowly, clutching her bleeding wrist. Tommy’s eyes were wild with pain from her bleeding so much, but he held himself back since he got the blood from the other two.

“So, yeah, we should go,” Marissa said. She said it so calmly, you would have thought that nothing happened to her.

We rushed the rest of the way to the group home.

"Take off your sweater," Tommy instructed.

"No," Marissa said.

"What, are you naked under there or something?"

"Dude, you can see my shirt. It's unzipped."

"If she doesn't want to do it, she doesn't have to," I said. "We can just roll up her sleeves, see?" I rolled up the cuff of her sweater where she was bitten.

"It would be easier if—"

"Just do it this way."

He sighed, but didn't argue.

"They took my thread," she said.

"What?" Tommy asked.

"Keith gave me a piece of thread for my seventh birthday. He was four, so don't be mean."

"You kept a piece of thread for eight years?"

"Yeah, dude. My brother is my best friend in the world. And I'm okay, really."

"Do you not see the cut?" Tommy asked.

"Yeah, I see it," she said with an eye roll. "I just don't feel it."

"How do you not?"

"Cause I don't."

"Tommy, just go with it, okay? Leave her alone," I said.

"I'm starting to think you love her more than me."

"I do."

Marissa laughed and I smiled when he said, "Wow. I'm so betrayed."

"That's how life works," she said. Then she flinched as Tommy poked at her bite.

"You felt *that*, huh?" he asked.

"It was numb until you did that. I think you did that on purpose."

He smiled up at her. "I did not. Damion would kick my ass if I did."

She glanced at me. "I don't think he would."

"He told me he would." He paused. "Black nails?"

"I've had them forever. You just noticed them?"

"I guess so. Hey, you also have a tongue ring?"

"It's fake." She took it out and showed us her tongue. It really was fake; there was no hole. She put it back in and said, "But I like it. I wouldn't get a real one 'cause that would hurt worse than when I got my ears pierced."

"Are you emo?"

"Ya know what emo stands for?"

"What?"

"Emotional."

"How?"

"Emo...tional. Duh."

He laughed. "I wouldn't be too surprised if you cut your wrists when we're not here." He cut her arm with his finger nail, blood pouring down her wrist. Then he took a plastic cup that he brought upstairs when we got here. He filled it with her blood and gave it to her.

She took it and looked at him questioningly.

"You're supposed to drink it, smart one," he said.

"Ew, no, that's so gross," she said.

"No, it's not. Trust me."

"Uh, to *you* it's not. I'm not drinking blood."

"It will make you feel better."

"I feel fine."

"Shut up and drink it."

She poured it on his head. I couldn't help laughing a little at his annoyed expression. Marissa smiled a little, not showing her teeth. "So, what's this mean? The bite."

"Well, it means that you could either become a werewolf or you just stay the same," I said.

"I'd rather you die than become a werewolf," Tommy said. "I've seen what Damion goes through every few months."

"Hey, it's not like I could help it, even if I'm not."

"That doesn't matter. *You* got bit."

"*You* were the one who wanted to leave in the first place."

They started arguing with each other at the same time and even I couldn't understand what they were saying between the both of them. I swear, they were *both* bipolar with each other. They could get along just fine one minute, and then the next, they were fighting.

"Okay, okay," I said over them. They quieted down. "It's not her fault that she got bit. He had a knife, but he decided to use his teeth, and I'd rather that instead because if he *had* used the knife, she *would* be dead. And if you tell her that you wished she would be dead instead ever again, *you* will be dead, Tommy. Got it?"

He sighed and smacked her arm. She kicked his knee. He gave her a look and she returned it. I sighed, but didn't interfere again since they weren't yelling at each other anymore.

\*\*\*

When Tommy was done cleaning up Marissa's bite, he left for our room. I stayed with her like I did almost every night now.

"Does it hurt?" she asked, wheeling her chair back over to her desk. "Changing, I mean."

"Well, yeah. But, I mean...well...that's not fair, that's a hard question."

She turned and smiled at me. I saw little fangs like I had. Oh, no. I was hoping that she would just stay the way she was. "I know, sorry. But I know what you're sayin'. Like, it hurts, but it's not that bad after a while...kinda like biting your tongue."

I laughed a little at her analogy. It was worse than biting your tongue.

"That's why I said 'kinda'," she said, reading my mind. When she talked or smiled, I was distracted by her new fangs; so distracted that I almost didn't hear what she was saying. She caught my expression and she said, "What's wrong?"

I blinked, trying to make sense of what she was saying again. "Is it okay if I turn out the lights?"

She stared at me. "Maybe..."

I smiled. "No, I mean I don't want to do anything like that with you." I paused, realizing that what I said came out wrong. "I mean, I do, but...wow, forget I said that."

She smiled, too. "Oh, really?"

“When I said I loved you, I meant in that way, too. Don’t say that you don’t want to. I know you do.” It was so weird, though. I’d never been sexually attracted to anyone ever in my life before her.

“I’m not sayin’ I do and I’m not sayin’ I don’t. Go turn out the lights, creeper,” she said, laughing.

I laughed, too, and walked over to the light switch and turned it off. “Can you see the same as you did when the lights were on?”

She didn’t answer me right away. “Yeah.”

I turned the lights back on. “How strong are you?”

“Pretty strong...I guess. Why?”

“Can you pick up, um...my car?”

She laughed. “I’m not *that* strong.”

“Can you try? For me?”

Marissa shrugged. “Sure.”

I led her outside. When we got up to my car, she leaned down, slid her hands under the bed of the truck and tried to lift it. She could lift it up about a foot and when she lowered it down, she said, “Whoa.”

“I don’t think you could have done that before.”

“I know.”

“I never knew that it could happen this fast.”

“Well, it’s not like I’m changing.”

“Not yet. But you will be.”

“I know that.” She ran a hand through her hair. “So what are we gonna do?”

“I don’t know.”

She sighed when her phone buzzed in my pocket.

“Go ahead,” I said.

She answered her phone with, “Hello?”

I didn’t listen to the person on the other end. That was her personal call and I wasn’t going to eavesdrop.

Marissa said, "Okay...that's cool..." Then she smiled. "Sure, but how...oh. Okay, yeah." She rolled her eyes. "I will...yes...okay...bye." She put her phone in her back pocket.

"You don't even talk much to your family?" I asked.

She shrugged. "Course not. But I have to go to a party, so I guess I have to start doin' it."

"My family would yell at me if I didn't talk to them," I said, walking with her back to the group home.

She laughed. "Seriously?"

"Yeah, it's happened before."

"That's so mean. If you don't want to talk to anybody, you shouldn't have to."

"That's what I said. Nobody sees it that way besides us." I held the door open for her and kissed her goodnight. "I'll see you tomorrow."

Marissa smiled at me before pulling her door closed.

## 19

When Marissa and I were walking, Tommy jumped out from out of the bushes and tackled Marissa to the ground.

"What are you doing?!" she asked.

"Shh," Tommy said, stuffing snow in her mouth. She pushed him off her and spit the snow out. She put him in a full-blown headlock and jammed snow into his mouth.

"Doesn't taste so good, does it?" she said.

Marissa and I laughed at his expression when she let go of him.

"How the hell did you get so strong?" he asked, wiping his mouth.

She half shrugged. "I just did."

"Fine. Don't tell me." He turned to me. "Where have you been?"

"With Mini," I simply said.

“You,” he said, turning back to Marissa. “Go in the living room at seven.”

“Make me,” she said.

“You don’t think I will?”

“How would you, even if you could?”

“I would carry you there.”

“You can’t carry me. You can’t even pick me up.”

“Oh, yeah?”

She nodded. Tommy put his arm behind her knees and scooped her up in his arms. Marissa started laughing and she tried to say something, but he started talking and laughing at the same time. “See? I can pick you up very easily.”

She kicked her way out of his arms and she rolled her shoulder. “I was tryin’ to say that you were hurting me. My arm ain’t supposed to bend that way. But that was cool.”

“Dude, a two year old could pick your ass up.”

“I’d like to see that happen.”

I wrapped an arm around Marissa’s shoulders and walked her towards the group home. They were about to start arguing again and I didn’t want that.

“Is your arm okay?” I asked.

She smiled. “Yeah, it’s okay. Just-“

Tommy rammed into her, knocking her down for the second time. Except this time, she said, “Get off me,” like she was in pain.

“Tommy, get off her, I think you hurt her,” I said. He crawled off her and she sat up. She lifted her right foot up out of the snow and it was twisted almost all the way around.

“Oh my God,” I said.

“I didn’t know that would happen,” Tommy said.

She reached out to her ankle and went to fix it with her magic.

“Do you need help?” I asked, kneeling down next to her.

“No.” She bit the sleeve of her free arm as she twisted her foot back slowly. I tried not to look away. She healed herself and when she was done, she took her jacket out of her mouth and stood up.

“Can you teach me how to do that?” Tommy asked.

“Not really,” she said.

I stood and picked her up, putting her on my shoulders. “I’m not letting you walk. Not now.”

“But I-“

“Shh,” I said, tapping her knees lightly with my fingers.

She sighed and kicked her feet gently against my stomach.

“You know what? I’m just going to stay away from you for the rest of the day. You don’t need to get hurt again,” Tommy said, walking inside.

“So, um, that’s what changing feels like,” I said when Tommy was out of sight.

She laughed. “Then it hurts like crazy.”

“You get used to it over time.” I began walking around the yard with her still on my shoulders. “I’m sorry about Tommy.”

“Oh, it’s okay.”

“No, it’s not. He keeps hurting you. Or when he’s around, you get hurt. He’s like bad luck for you and I don’t like that.”

“It’s fine.” Her tone of voice changed. She almost sounded kind of sad or scared or some combination of both.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I am.”

I looked up at her, one eyebrow raised. She shook her head and said, “It’s stupid.”

“I bet it’s not.”

“It is, I swear. It just crossed my mind for a second, that’s it.”

I sighed and set her down gently. Then I pulled her down carefully and sat down with her. The snow had melted in the spot that I brought us to, so we weren’t too cold.

“You can tell me anything,” I said. I took her small hands, warming them up.

“I know. It just doesn’t matter.”

“I think it does.”

“Are you seriously gonna fight me on this?”

I smiled. "Bring it on."

"It's stupid."

"Everything you say or think is important."

"It was like lightening. That's how fast I ditched the thought."

"It still went through your mind, which means that it meant something."

"Stupid things go through your mind, too."

"Maybe so, but it made you upset."

She didn't say anything for a few seconds, which meant I was winning. "It only made me upset for a second."

"That is the worst excuse I have ever heard."

She laughed. "I know. Okay, you win. I'll tell ya."

I smiled and she said, without really looking at me, "I just thought that maybe you were using the thing about Tommy as an easy way to tell me that you were done with me."

"Oh," I said, pulling her into my lap. She was kind of shivering and I didn't want her to be cold.

"No, I don't ever want to be done with you. I don't think I *can* be."

"I told you it was stupid."

"It wasn't." I leaned my head down on hers and rested our hands on her stomach. "Has anyone ever told you how much I love you?"

I couldn't see it, but I knew that she was smiling. She nuzzled into me, making a warm kind of feeling spread through my body. "*You* have."

I chuckled. "Yes, I have. I'm so glad I did." I kissed the top of her head.

"You were so scared."

"I didn't want you to tell me no."

"What made you think that I would have told ya no?"

I shrugged. "I don't know. I just thought it. Like you said, stupid things go through my mind, too."

She laughed and stood up. I got up, too, and asked, "What are you doing? I don't want you to stand on your feet."

Marissa sighed and held out her arms to let me pick her up. I smiled at her reaction and picked her up, putting her on my shoulders.

“I know ya care, but I kinda like walking,” she said as I began walking towards the group home in a third attempt to actually get *inside* the group home.

“Yeah, but you snapped your ankle in half, like, twenty minutes ago.”

“I fixed it. It doesn’t hurt anymore.”

I laughed. “No normal person would say that.”

“Who said I was normal? Being normal is boring.”

“Nobody. You know what I mean.”

“You don’t walk steady. I swear to God, you’re gonna drop me.”

I smiled. “I won’t drop you. I promise.”

“Can I please walk by myself?”

“Do you really want to?”

“Yeah.”

“Well, too bad.”

“You’re mean.”

“I love you, too.”

She laughed and I said, “Okay,” lifting her carefully off my shoulders and setting her down. “You can walk, but I get to hold you.”

She scoffed, but began walking. I held her shoulders, walking behind her.

“This is so dumb,” she said.

“You have a dumb boyfriend. I thought you knew that.”

“I did know that.”

As we began walking up the stairs, I asked, “So, where are we going?”

“I really don’t know.” She stopped walking and turned around to face me.

I smiled and let go of her. My smile faded when Lindsey came by and stepped between us, facing Marissa.

“Hey, beautiful,” Lindsey said. She hugged Marissa.

Marissa shifted her weight from foot to foot uncomfortably. She didn't hug her back. "Hi..."

"So, you're still with Damion, right?"

"I'm right here," I said.

"Yeah, yeah," Lindsey said, waving her hand.

Marissa tried not to smile. "Yeah, I am."

"Oh, well, if you're not busy with him, do you want to go to a movie tonight?"

"Am I comin' back?"

Lindsey laughed. "Of course."

"Well...okay."

"Awesome." Lindsey walked-well, more like skipped-back to her room.

"Are you sure that's a good idea?" I asked, opening up her door for her.

She bit her bottom lip and walked in. "I guess we'll see tonight."

"I don't know about this, Marissa," I said, following her inside and shutting the door. "How can she go from hating you, to acting like you're her best friend?"

"I know what ya mean. But I was thinking...well, hey, why not give it a try? Maybe she's changed."

"People don't change overnight."

She sighed. "I know that. Anyone ever tell you how much of a *dad* you are?"

I couldn't help smiling at that. "Besides now? No. It's just because I care."

"You're not helping your dad-ness here."

I laughed and sat down next to her on her bed. "So what if I do act like a dad? I'd be an awesome one."

She smiled at me. "You would be an over protective one."

"Yeah, okay," I said, rolling my eyes.

"But *I* would be the best mother ever."

"No, you wouldn't," I said, laughing.

"Why the hell not?"

“You’re mad, aren’t you?”

“A little bit.”

“That’s why. You get mad too easily and you have no patience.”

She sighed. “Your *face* has no patience.”

I laughed. “That makes no sense.”

She laughed, too. “So? Nothing makes sense.”

“You have no idea how right you are.”

That’s when Keith popped himself into the room.

## 20

Keith spoke first. “I would’ve told ya, Mars, but there wasn’t enough time.”

“Okay, well...why are you here?” she asked.

“I am so done with everything over there. I want to come live with *you*.” He sat on her lap like he was a little kid. “Cause ya know you’re the best sister ever.” He gave her a sweet smile.

“I know,” she said, returning the smile. “But ya gotta, like, go to the office first.”

Keith sighed and put his feet up on my lap.

“Keith, don’t be a jerk,” Marissa said, knocking his feet off of me.

I smiled. “It’s okay.”

She pushed Keith off of her. She stood up and said, “Do ya want me to come with you?”

“Uh, no,” he said. As he began walking towards the door, he said, “I can do it myself. I’ll talk to y’all later.”

Marissa threw herself down on the bed again when he shut the door. “I feel so unloved right now.”

I chuckled. “You shouldn’t. I’m here and I love you very much.”

She smiled and nudged me a little. “I meant by my brother. By the way, I love you, too.”

I loved it when she said those words to me. I never told her that for the fear of sounding *too* much like the old romantic movie type. So I just smiled back at her and took her hand, resting our entwined hands on my knee.

"I *really* don't want you to go with Lindsey," I said carefully. I didn't want to piss her off again.

"I'll be fine," she said. "It's not like she *could* hurt me, even if she wanted to. You worry too much."

"I know. But can you give me a specific reason as to why you *want* to go?"

"Did you just say 'pacific'? 'Cause that's an ocean."

"I said, 'specific'."

"That's an ocean."

I laughed. "What are you talking about?"

She laughed with me. "It sounds like an ocean. Pacific. I always said, 'sispefic'."

"That's not a word."

"Yeah, but now try sayin' it."

"Sp-s...you see what you do to me?"

We began laughing again. Then she said, "But do ya know what I mean? It's hard to say."

"Yeah, now that you put the way you say it in my head."

She smiled and I said, "You just totally avoided answering me, too. You thought that I wouldn't notice, but I did, so now you *have* to answer."

Marissa sighed. "You suck."

I smiled at her. "Thank you. Now, why do you want to go?"

She shrugged. "I dunno. I guess I've never really had a friend that was a girl and I was thinking that maybe she actually wanted to be my friend."

"Do you know how nice you are?"

"Um...yeah, I do."

"So, 'Mars'?"

She laughed a little. "Keith couldn't say my name right when he was little, so it just turned into that."

I kissed the top of her head and then glanced at the clock. Just as I did, there was a knock at the door. I caught Lindsey's scent and I said, "I think it's time for you to leave with her."

We stood up and I walked her to the door. Lindsey stood there, smiling hugely. She grabbed Marissa's hand, saying, "Come on."

As Marissa waved goodbye to me, I half smiled at her and walked to my room.

## 21

Marissa came home about a half hour later. I was in the living room alone, reading whatever book was on the table, because Tommy was upstairs with Casey in our room.

"*That was a-*" I began to say when I saw her, but she kissed me out of nowhere. It's not like I minded, but something was up.

When she pulled back, she said, "So what are ya doin'?" She stuffed her hands in her sweater pockets and bounced a little on her toes.

"What are *you* doing? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, totally, I'm fine. Really awesome."

I raised an eyebrow. "Do you want to sit down with me?"

She shook her head quickly. "Nope."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong."

I stared at her. She sighed in defeat, took her hands out of her pockets, stopped bouncing, and said, "Lindsey kissed me."

It took me a second to process that. "Are you serious?"

"Yeah, I'm serious." She kind of sounded like she was calling me an idiot and I tried not to smile. "You were right, I shouldn't have gone."

"So that's why you-"

I heard Marissa scream just before I blacked out.

\*\*\*

I woke up hanging from a ceiling by my wrists. Marissa hung across from me with Keith hanging beside her on the right and Lindsey and Mia on her left and Tommy hung beside me. They were

both still out and I wondered if they were actually dead. When I listened to see if they were breathing, I heard that at least Marissa, Tommy, Lindsey and Keith were and I focused my attention away from them and to the metal cuffs that were dangling me so I didn't have to look at Mia. I tried shaking a little and then pulling on them. When I put pressure on them, it burned me and I immediately stopped. I studied the cuffs. They were silver, which could hurt werewolves. I didn't care. I kept pulling on them, but they wouldn't break. I'd never touched silver, so I didn't know that werewolves couldn't break them. Great. I just got severe burns on my wrists for no freaking reason.

"You're alive?" I heard Lindsey ask.

My gaze flicked towards her, startled. "I thought you were out. You scared me."

"Sorry."

"It's fine."

"I know that Marissa told you what I did."

"Oh." I got a little embarrassed and I tried to avoid looking at her. "I mean, it's cool that you like other girls and all...but Marissa doesn't. In that way, anyway."

"Trust me, I know," she said, laughing a little. "She totally freaked out. I didn't mean for it to happen. I wasn't planning on kissing her, so you don't have to be mad at me. She's just so pretty and nice, you know?"

"Yeah, I know. And I'm not mad at you. It's okay." I wasn't about to say that she never had a chance with Marissa and that's why I wasn't mad at her. That would be way to mean. "You know, you're okay. I just don't understand something."

"What don't you understand?"

"How come you were so mean to her in the beginning?"

"She was different. I was just going with Mia. I felt bad about it...but..." She looked at me. "You wouldn't get it. It's a girl thing. There's always a leader of the pack. Mia was the leader out of us. If there were more girls here, it would have been worse. Everybody wants to fit in."

"Nah, I get it. That sometimes happens with guys, too."

After an hour, Marissa woke up. She tried the same thing I did, but I told her that it wasn't going to do any good before she really hurt herself.

"Do you remember who hit me?" I asked.

"No," she said, still squirming in her cuffs. "I can't even break it with..." She glanced at Lindsey and then back up at her cuffs. "Ya know. What is this?"

"It's okay, don't worry about it. We'll get out."

She sighed when she finally decided to give up on doing absolutely anything and glanced at Tommy. I looked to where she was looking and saw that he was hurt the worst out of all of us. Dried blood was on his face and neck and in his hair. At least he was still alive. She looked to her left and saw Mia, dead on her cuffs and chains and she quickly looked away, to her right. She saw Keith. She tapped him lightly with her foot and he woke up. Keith blinked, looking around and noticing that he was tied up, too.

“What the hell...” he muttered, tugging on the cuffs.

“If we can’t break it, you can’t,” Marissa said. “You can try, though.”

He did, multiple times. Of course, they didn’t break.

“Mars, I don’t wanna die,” he said.

“Nobody’s gonna die.”

“Do you promise?”

She looked down. “Yeah, I promise.” She didn’t sound so sure. I wasn’t sure, either.

“Is that your brother?” Lindsey asked her.

“Yeah,” she said.

“I’m sorry about before.”

Marissa’s cheeks grew red. “It’s okay.”

A few hours later, and Tommy woke up. He did what all of us already did and they didn’t break for him, either.

“This is f-“ Tommy began to say.

“Please don’t cuss,” Marissa said. “Not in front of Keith.”

Tommy sighed, swinging on his chains. That’s when one of the nurses that used to pay attention to us came in. Ever since her husband died, she hasn’t been the same. She’s the reason why everybody at the group home could do whatever we wanted. Before that, it was kind of like kindergarten. We had rules and things like that, but we could have fun, too. The nurse held a metal bat in her hand. She swung it at Marissa’s leg and Marissa flinched. The nurse hit her again and said, “That’s for moving.” Marissa didn’t move at all after that. “I’m *really* going to make you suffer after all that trouble you gave me before.”

“I hope you do,” Marissa said.

I opened my mouth to say something, but Marissa’s voice came into my mind.

*Please don’t say anything and don’t move. It’s bad enough, okay?*

I sighed softly. *Okay.*

The nurse brought a pocket knife out and held it up to Marissa's throat. It wasn't touching her, but it was close enough that if either of them moved at all, it would cut her.

"I have a question," the nurse said. "Do you make love to *all* your cousins and siblings, or just the ones you find that are cute?"

Marissa's eyes flashed with anger and I could hear her grinding her teeth, but she didn't say anything. I wanted to say something so badly. I wanted to scream at the nurse, to take away her weapons and used them on her, see how *she* liked it. But I kept my mouth shut.

"Do you understand why this is happening to you?"

"No."

"You're evil." Marissa raised her eyebrows and the nurse continued, "I mean, you killed your mother. And to kill her while you were coming out of her, just...wow. *I* can't even go that low."

Marissa looked really hurt by that and she hung her head. I *almost* broke. It took all of my willpower to not say something. Lindsey opened her mouth, but Marissa looked at her and shook her head. The nurse grabbed her chin and snapped her neck to the side. I saw that the nurse had fangs. I thought I caught more of the vampire scent. The nurse leaned forward to Marissa's neck and I was about to say something, but then she said, "Ugh," and leaned back, letting go of her chin. "I can't believe I didn't smell you..." She looked over at me. "And *you*." She turned back to Marissa. "From ten miles away. Are you a *werewolf*?"

I heard Marissa breath a soft sigh of relief, but she didn't answer her.

"Oh, you're not speaking back? You're a smart little doggy, yes you are." She ruffled her hair and Marissa gave her a look. Yeah, that kind of pissed me off, too.

The nurse walked over to Keith, who was glaring at her.

"Do you have a problem here, boy?" the nurse asked.

Keith nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

"Well..." The nurse brought Keith down. She took the metal bat and began beating him violently with it. He screamed and I heard sickening cracking sounds with every time she hit him. Marissa yelled, "Stop!" and the nurse turned to her, knife at her throat again.

"Do you want to be next?" she asked.

"Yeah, I do. I freakin' dare you to do it. No, ya know what? I *want* you to do it."

*Mini, what the hell are you doing?*

*Just wait.*

The nurse smiled, bringing her down. When she raised the bat to beat her, it flew out of her hands and into Marissa's, as did the pocket knife.

"Oh..." Marissa said, studying the bat and the knife. She looked at the nurse and smiled. "Don't ya hate that?" She smacked the metal bat into the nurse's knee and she fell. Marissa hit her again and said, "*That's* for moving," in a mocking voice. "Get up against the wall." When the nurse hesitated, Marissa yelled, "*Get up against the damn wall!*" and the nurse got up practically sprinted to it. "Bet ya wish you had just left us alone, now, don't ya?" Marissa said with a wicked smile, flipping the pocket knife around in her hand. The nurse disappeared for a second, then reappeared, hanging by her wrists from where Marissa was hung before. "Don't move," Marissa sang. "Or...well, ya know what happens."

"You...you're a witch," the nurse stammered.

"Yeah...which means that you're in more trouble than you would be if I wasn't here." Marissa bent down, checking on Keith. She flipped him over so she could see his face. It was covered in blood and his head was smashed in. I hadn't known that the nurse hit him that hard. Keith opened his eyes as much as he could manage and choked out, "Mars..." just before he fell silent. I didn't hear his heart beat anymore and I couldn't hear his breathing. Keith was dead. It was quiet for a second. Then Marissa completely and totally lost it. Even the walls shook, threatening to break down. She showed the nurse just how evil she *could* be. Marissa slowly tortured her, dragging the knife across her bare skin, cutting it, calling her names and saying nasty things. I didn't tell her to stop. Nobody else did, either.

"It sucks, doesn't it?" Marissa spat. "To be tortured like this..." She cut the nurse's arm for the fifth time in a different spot and the nurse screamed. "*Shut* up. Nobody here gives a damn, especially not me."

"Are you possessed by a demon?" the nurse asked, shaking.

"Oh, if I was, this wouldn't be as bad as it is." She cut her again. I tried not to flinch every time Marissa cut her. I didn't feel bad for the nurse; it's just that the smell of blood made me a little sick.

"You're right."

"I know."

"And I'm right, too. You're as evil as the devil."

Marissa looked up at her. "*I* wasn't the one who killed a ten year old boy for no good reason. *I* didn't chain five living people up. But ya know what *I did* do?" She laughed a little and said, almost cheerfully, "I killed my mother." She shrugged. "And I'm torturing you. And do ya know the worst part?"

"How can it get any worse?"

She smiled. "Oh, it can. Instead of cutting you to death...I'm just gonna leave you here." She dropped the knife and bat.

"How is that going to kill me?"

"Well, ya can't get out...those are bound pretty tight." She pointed to the cuffs. "And...you'll starve to death...there's barely any air in here...and I'm almost positive your arms will fall off after a few days of bein' tied up there. Karma's a bitch, huh? Damn bloodsucker."

The nurse glared at her. Marissa smiled and said, "Yeah, *you* get nicknames, too." Marissa went through nurse's pockets for something. She held up a key and brought me, Tommy, and Lindsey down from our chains. She spun on her heel to face us, saying, "We're gonna take my car because it's faster and newer than any of the ones here. We're not gonna use magic 'cause there's no way we can just randomly show up somewhere out of thin air and not expect someone to see." She began walking out of the room.

"Holy crap," Lindsey whispered. "She didn't tell me..."

"Well, now you know," I said.

Tommy, Lindsey, and I waited a few seconds before following her. We wouldn't admit it, but we were kind of afraid of her. We left, hearing the nurse call, "Wait! You can't just leave me here!"

Oh, yes, we could.

\*\*\*

When we were all in her black convertible, I was still a little tense, being so close to Marissa since I was in the front seat. In a few hours, Tommy and Lindsey were asleep, Marissa was still driving, and I was just staring out the window. None of us had talked since we left the group home. But I broke the silence with a whisper. "Are you okay, Mini?"

She didn't answer me right away. "No."

It was a stupid question. She had just killed a woman and witnessed her own brother's death. "Do you want to stop driving?"

"No."

"You've been driving for four hours straight. I think you should take a break."

"Keith said that I shouldn't let anybody else drive my car." Her voice broke on her brother's name.

"I wasn't suggesting that I would drive. I meant, like, pull over."

It was a few seconds before she pulled over. When the car stopped moving, I asked, "Do you want to talk about it?"

She looked down, letting her black straight hair fall in front of her face, and shook her head.

“I think you should. It might make you feel better.”

She was quiet. Then she said, “I promised him that nobody would die.” She sounded like she was crying, so I pulled her over into my lap.

“It wasn’t like you knew for sure. I think he knew that.”

“It’s my fault. I could have stopped it earlier.”

“You didn’t know. There would have been damage done, anyway. It was a metal bat.”

“I miss him.”

“I know.” Even though I didn’t really know Keith, I missed him, too. Marissa cried silently into my shirt while I held her, whispering, “It’s okay,” over and over again, even though we both knew that I wasn’t positive about that.

## 22

Marissa didn’t cry for long. After a few minutes, she grabbed my wrist and I gasped at the sudden pain. She looked up at me, confused, and then back down at my wrist. She flipped it over and when she saw the burns, her eyes widened slightly. She rubbed her other hand over the burns and they disappeared. It was like I never even had them.

“Thank you,” I whispered after I recovered from the slight shock of being healed by her.

She rubbed my wrists where the burns were with her thumbs lightly. I wondered why anybody would want to hurt her. I didn’t waste time thinking about it and I asked, “Do you feel better?”

“A little,” she admitted. “Why do you care so much? Nobody else has...or does.”

“I hate seeing you so sad. I like it when you’re happy and I *especially* like it when *I’m* the one making you happy. Now, will you go to sleep for me? You’re tired and I know it.”

Marissa leaned her head against my chest and closed her eyes, doing what I asked her to.

\*\*\*

We were somewhere in Maryland. Nobody really talked much. But Tommy tried to make Marissa laugh or smile as much as he could with various things. Nothing would work.

“Shut up, Marissa,” Tommy said. “You talk too much.”

She looked at him questioningly through the rear view mirror, probably because she wasn't even talking at all. Usually that would at least make her smile because we all knew that it definitely wasn't true.

"Cheer up, or you're getting smacked," Tommy said.

She didn't say anything.

"You have one second to cheer up." He smacked her head. She didn't even blink.

"Tommy, stop," I said. "Not now."

"Okay, fine. But, Marissa, dude, you're one of my best friends and I want you to be happy."

"I'm fine," she said flatly.

"You're not fine."

"I'm not crying, am I?"

"No, but--"

"So I'm fine. Just forget about it."

"But then why aren't you laughing or making people laugh like you always do?" I asked. I couldn't help it. I wanted her to be okay, too.

She shrugged. I sighed and Tommy started talking in a weird voice and making weird faces. I couldn't understand what he was saying, so I turned around and I laughed a little at him when I saw him. Marissa glanced at him, too, but she didn't even smile.

"Stop talkin' like that," she said. "It's weird."

"Shut up, whore," he said in the same weird voice.

"Okay."

"Tommy, that was mean," Lindsey said.

Tommy sighed in annoyance. I knew he was just kidding about calling her a whore, so I didn't tell him off. "Prove that you're okay, if you really are."

"Come on, it's like a road trip," she said. "Yay." She tried to laugh, but she couldn't.

I wanted to see her happy again, too, but I didn't know how. She was rarely ever serious, so Tommy and I had thought that she would laugh easily, or at least smile.

"Come on, Marissa," Tommy said. "Remember what you told me when I was hurting from Casey?"

"I hope ya know that that's totally different," she said.

"Yeah, but still...you made me feel better and I want to make you feel better. Damion can't. He's not funny."

"Oh, thanks," I said, rolling my eyes.

"That's not true. Damion makes me laugh."

"Yeah, but he can't right now."

"Neither can you. You're lucky I'm even talking. What if I don't *want* to laugh?"

"I'll find a way."

She stared straight ahead and didn't respond to him after that.

When we stopped for gasoline, Marissa went inside to pay and Tommy got out of the car to talk to me while I stood, holding the nozzle. Lindsey waited in the car. She was kind of down, too, though I wasn't completely sure why.

"I guess I can't really blame Marissa for being so upset," he said, leaning back against the car. "You went a little crazy, too, after mom died."

"I know," I said, sighing. "It's just that, well, we didn't see our mom die right in front of us."

"She'll be fine. She's tough."

I nodded once and looked towards the building. She was talking with the cashier, probably being friendly, but she wasn't smiling like she usually would. I really wasn't paying any attention until I heard the cashier say, "What's wrong?"

"What do ya mean?" Marissa asked.

"You're kind of sweaty."

"Oh..." She looked down at herself and then back to her quickly. "It's just...it's hot in here, that's all."

It was a good thing that she could come up with excuses right away. If she hesitated any longer, the cashier probably would have thought that she was going to steal something. This was the worst time in the universe for her to be getting ready to change for the first time. Then again, it always happened at night...either way, it was bad. We had no place to go for it.

"Really?" the cashier said. "No, it's..." She looked into Marissa's eyes, seemed mesmerized for a second, and then said, "You know, yeah, it is. Thanks for telling me, everybody has been commenting on that."

Marissa nodded politely and walked out. I put the nozzle back and walked up to her. "Are you hurting?"

She shook her head and walked past me, sliding into the driver's seat. Tommy looked at me with a questioning look. I just waved for him to get in the car and got in the passenger seat.

## 23

Tommy was passed out in the backseat when Marissa had to go out and change. She was looking for a place to pull over and go.

"Do you want me to come with you?" I asked.

"Okay. I don't care."

"Where are you guys going?" Lindsey asked.

Marissa and I exchanged a quick glance, and then we both looked back at her. Okay, this was really bad. Marissa pulled the car over to a grassy field.

"Um...you guys don't have to tell me where...but can I come?" she asked.

"M-Maybe...I don't know," Marissa said. "I think you should stay here with Tommy."

"Oh." Lindsey looked a little left out. "Okay."

When we got out of the car, we both shuddered a little from the sudden cold, but it didn't last long because of her magic. As we walked far away from the car, I remembered my first change. It hurt the most and it took the longest out of all of them, but I guess that made sense. This was going to be agony for her *and* me. I didn't want to see her in pain.

Marissa chose a spot about half a mile away from the car and the road. We sat down in the field, the grass surrounding us like some kind of fort that little kids make with sheets and chairs. She hugged her knees, clenching and unclenching her hands.

"How bad does it hurt?" I asked. "Like, on a scale from one to ten. Ten is the worst."

"Um...maybe an eight." She shrugged. "I dunno. Don't worry about me."

"I can't help it." I smiled weakly at her. She tried to half smile, but she couldn't quite get it. I wasn't sure if it was the physical or the emotional pain that was stopping her from smiling right now. I decided that it was probably the emotional, so I asked, "Do you regret anything you did or said to him?"

“Keith?” When I nodded, she started pulling at the grass. “No. And I never made love to him. That’s gross...and I think it’s illegal.”

“Well, I knew that.”

She looked up at me and actually smiled a little. “I couldn’t say it to that nurse. I had to say it to somebody.”

I smiled because she finally did after two days. Now I just had to make her laugh. She sighed and said, “Why are you and Tommy tryin’ so hard?”

I couldn’t think of a reason right away, so I kissed her instead. When I pulled back, she said, “Okay, don’t answer me.”

“It’s been so long since I could do that,” I said. “And also, I can’t answer that.”

“Why can’t ya?”

I shrugged. “It’s hard to explain.”

I heard a crack and at first I thought it was someone stepping on a twig, coming toward us or just her magic because I might have made her a little mad. But then I realized that it was one of her bones. I heard more cracking and I tried not to ask if she was okay because I already knew the answer, even if she wasn’t screaming. I saw a bright light and...she was a wolf.

## 24

I wasn’t sure if the bright light was because she was a witch or if it was always there and I had just never noticed it. I couldn’t help myself this time. I had to ask her. “Are you okay?”

*I’m fine, just tired.*

I half smiled at her. “Me, too. It’s one in the morning.”

*You know what I mean.* She had a playful tone of voice when she said that, so I knew that she wasn’t really mad at me. She began crawling forward on her stomach.

I crawled with her. “What are you doing?”

*Crawling, dude. I can’t walk. Not yet, anyway, I don’t know how. And it’s kinda boring staying in one place.*

"I know what you mean," I said, pushing the tall grass out of our way. "Hey, um, you're better now, right? You know...with everything that went on..."

*At the group home? She paused. Yeah, pretty much. I don't get upset often so when I do, I always get over it quickly.*

"But I'm just saying that since it was your own brother..."

*Technically, he was my half-brother. Either way, I still loved him. He was my best friend. But people die and he was gonna die eventually anyway, so...I had to get over it. That's it.*

"I know. I felt the same way when my mom was killed. It's like...you're sad as hell, but you knew it was going to happen soon enough. Even if it wasn't what you thought was going to happen."

*Yeah...exactly that. That's weird. Nobody ever knows exactly what I feel.*

I smiled. "I'm freaking talented."

I think if she was human, she would have laughed or at least smiled. But right now, she couldn't. *Of course ya are.* She stopped crawling. *I think we went too far. I can't even see the car anymore. Can you?*

"No," I said, lifting up on my knees to try and get a better look back to where the car was. I shrugged and looked back at her, getting down on my stomach again. "We know our way back. We're okay. So why didn't you want Lindsey to come?"

*I don't know if I can trust her just yet.*

Soon, Marissa was human again. When she was, she said tiredly, "You didn't have to come with me. You could have been sleeping and comfortable right now."

I shook my head. "What if I didn't want to be? I wanted to be with you, make sure you were okay."

"But now you have scratches all over."

"So do you." I stood and helped her up. "We should probably get back to the car before Tommy wakes up and freaks out."

She began walking with me. She stumbled a little, but she didn't fall because I was holding her hand. When she got used to walking again, she was fine.

"Yeah, that's going to happen the first few times," I told her.

She just nodded. When we got inside the car again, we assumed that Tommy was still asleep and that Lindsey had fallen asleep, too. So when Marissa started the car and we heard, "Hiya," from the backseat, we both jumped.

"Jesus, Tommy," I said, rubbing my eyes.

He chuckled. "Sorry. I didn't mean to scare you guys. Where did you two go?"

"Out in the field."

"Doing what?"

"Nothing," Marissa said, turning onto the highway.

"Then why'd you go?"

She shrugged. Tommy still didn't know about her being a werewolf. I think she was afraid of telling him because he might not approve of her anymore. I didn't see why she cared if he did or not. *I* loved her and that was all that was really important, right?

"Just go back to sleep, Tommy," I said.

"Sure." He lied back down. Within a few minutes, he was asleep. I only knew that because of his loud snoring.

"Is that him?" Marissa whispered.

"Yeah," I whispered back. "It's why I always slept on the couch or with you most of the time."

She laughed. "I thought that was a freakin' bear."

I laughed, too. Then I realized that she *finally* laughed. I smiled like an idiot because I was proud of her.

She glanced at me. "What?"

"Nothing, I'm just...happy."

She smiled and looked ahead at the road again. I took her one hand that wasn't on the wheel.

"I love you *so* much, Mini," I said.

She squeezed my hand and I squeezed back. "I love you, too."

If she wasn't driving, I would have kissed her, maybe even made out with her like we did occasionally. I never touched her inappropriately, so it wasn't *that* kind of making out.

"Do you know where we're going?" I asked.

She sighed. "No, not really. There's nowhere *to* go."

"Aren't you tired?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So, come here. Pull over."

She did, onto the side of the highway. There weren't any exits close by. She slid over next to me and I gladly took her in my arms.

"Now, are you going to go to sleep for me?" I asked, leaning my head on hers.

"Sure. I guess there's nothin' else to do."

I smiled a little as I hugged her, waiting for her to fall asleep. After a few minutes, she did, and I knew that from the change in her breathing. She didn't snore at all, so I had to listen close to make sure she was actually asleep. I didn't move. The slightest thing could wake her up now, ever since Keith was killed. I think it was because she felt the need to protect everyone, even if she was the smallest out of all of us.

## 25

Tommy was complaining about having to go hunt and that we were somewhere where there weren't any animals. He was kind of right, but where could we go?

"Marissa..." he whined.

"There's nothing I can do," she said. "I'm sorry."

"Well...this is really weird to ask...but can I bite you?"

"Are you crazy?" I asked him.

"It won't hurt her."

"Yeah, that's why every animal you *have* hunted from always ended up dead."

"That's because they were animals. They weren't something we both cared about."

"I don't..." When I glanced back at him and saw how much he needed it, I wasn't sure what to do anymore. "Why can't you bite me?"

"Vampires can't bite from the same gender as them unless we want to kill them. That's why I've never done it to you before."

"Well, what about Lindsey?"

"Oh, hell no, Damion," Lindsey said.

I sighed. "I don't want her to get hurt."

"It won't...it only hurts for a second but then it feels good, I swear," Tommy said.

"To you, maybe," I heard Marissa say under her breath.

Tommy didn't hear it. "Can you...please...?"

Marissa and I exchanged quick glances.

*Damion...*

*I don't know, Mini. It just doesn't seem so safe.*

*I know...but he has nothing else. Will he die if he doesn't get it?*

*Yes, most likely. Do you want to, though?*

*I...don't know. I don't want him to die, too.*

*Then I guess you have to...I'm sorry.*

*But how come that nurse couldn't do it, but he can?*

*He's lived with me all his life.*

Marissa pulled over to the side of the road and climbed into the backseat. Tommy sighed in relief and leaned over to bite her neck, but she covered it and said, "Wait."

"What?" he asked.

"If you kill me, I will haunt your ass so bad. Don't even think I won't. I will flip this freaking car over and you will never get to where you want to go."

Lindsey and Tommy laughed and I couldn't help smiling at that, but I said, "Be careful, Tommy. Please."

"I will. Don't worry."

Marissa brushed her black hair out of the way so he could bite her. I heard her heart beat faster as the distance between his teeth and her neck decreased. I wanted to stop it, but I couldn't. That would send Marissa's depression lower if he died because she was the only one that could help him. That's why she was doing this. Finally, he bit her. She didn't move. She didn't even show what she felt. Marissa just sat there and took it. I wasn't sure if it felt good, like Tommy said, or if it felt like nothing, or if it was hurting her. And that was frustrating the hell out of me. I had to know if she was okay.

*You're worrying too much again. I'm fine.*

*Are you sure? What does it feel like?*

She looked like she was going to laugh for a second, then she went back to her normal expression. *It feels kinda good but it also hurts. So he...half lied.*

*Is he taking too much?*

*I don't know.*

*Well, do you feel dizzy?*

*Nah, not really...can you relax for me? I went to sleep for you last night.*

*I owe you?*

*Hell yeah, dude.*

*I smiled a little. Okay. Relaxed.*

*Ya swear?*

*I swear. But really...you're okay?*

"You swore, Damion," she said out loud.

"Sorry, I just need to know."

"I'm okay."

Tommy pulled back from her neck and wiped his mouth. "I owe you so much. Thank you."

She just smiled at him and went to crawl back to the driver's seat, but he put his arm back and pushed her against the backseat again.

"Open your mouth," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"What are you doing?" I asked. "You got what you needed, now let her go."

Tommy put his thumb to her mouth, pushing her lip up to see her teeth. She pushed him back and said, "Gross, don't put your fingers in my mouth."

"You have fangs."

"I've always had sharp teeth."

"I can vouch for that," Lindsey said. Tommy didn't understand, but Marissa and I kind of shuddered at the thought of Lindsey kissing her like that.

"No, like his," he said with a pointed look at me.

"Leave her alone," I said.

"Are you a werewolf?"

“You know the answer. You were there at the group home, too.”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t paying attention. Why would I? I was scared. Just tell me. Now.”

“Okay, yeah, I am. And if you’d *really* rather me dead like you said, then fine.” She opened the door, got out, and slammed it shut. She began walking down the hill that the car was parked next to.

“Nice job,” I said. “She was *just* getting better.” I got out, too, and walked towards her. When I caught up with her, I said, “Please don’t do anything risky,” while taking her hand.

“I’m not gonna do anything, calm down,” she said with an eye roll.

“I don’t understand what’s wrong with him. You really should ignore him. I do, all the time.”

She half smiled, like I meant for her to do. “Yeah, but you’re his brother. You’re kinda allowed to.”

“Who said that *you* weren’t?”

“I did. I can’t tell him off.”

“You kind of just did before.”

“Only kinda, like you said. Not full out head ripping.”

I laughed. “What?”

She smiled. “Nothing, Keith always used to say that when he was really pissed off.”

“That he would rip someone’s head off?”

“Yeah, he-“

We heard footsteps behind us and we stopped, turning around. Tommy was walking toward us. Marissa looked like she wanted to turn around and keep walking in the opposite direction, but since I was holding on tight to her hand, she didn’t move.

“I’m sorry, Marissa,” Tommy said. “It was completely wrong of me to treat you like that when you were the one who saved my life.”

“I don’t care. It’s okay.”

He went to hug her, but she turned away slightly, increasing her already tight grip on my hand.

“Okay, so you let Damion touch you, but I can’t?”

She shrugged. “He’s never been mean to me.”

Tommy opened his mouth to argue, but I said, “Why don’t we all just get a motel or something? I think you guys need some space between yourselves.”

“Sure, whatever,” she said, crossing her free arm over her ribs, almost like she was hugging herself.

“Fine,” he said, walking back up the hill. We followed him into the car and searched for a place to stay for a little.

## 26

We found a cheap motel. It wasn’t that hard to find; it was only a few exits away from where we were. Tommy was getting us a room when he looked like he was having some trouble. Tommy turned around and walked towards us as Marissa walked over and, like every good manager does, he looked her in the eyes as she talked, which meant that we were going to get what we needed and wanted.

“You would so be dead if I wasn’t here,” she muttered, walking past us and pressing the button for the elevator. That was obviously pointed at Tommy, since she was still mad at him. Or I hoped it was meant for him and not me...

“Aren’t there stairs?” Tommy asked.

Marissa leaned back and looked around for any sign of a stairwell. “It doesn’t look like it. You scared of elevators?”

“Yeah, they get stuck.”

“Oh, come on. Has that ever happened to you?”

“No, because I’ve never went on one.”

“Don’t be such a girl.”

“And what are you? A boy?”

She raised an eyebrow. “Oh, yeah, totally.” Then I heard her mutter, “Freakin’ retard,” under her breath and I laughed. She looked at me and smiled and Tommy and Lindsey looked totally confused because they didn’t hear.

The elevator doors opened and we stepped inside. Tommy pressed a button and the doors closed. It started moving, but after a few seconds, it stopped. Not on a floor, though.

“See? This is why I don’t go on elevators,” Tommy said.

“Will you chill out, please?” Marissa said. She whispered, “*God*,” in an annoyed tone and got the elevator moving again with her magic.

“Isn’t that abusing your powers?”

I felt her anger when he said that, but instead of snapping at him, she said, “I’m doin’ it so you won’t cry.” She made herself sound like *she* was about to cry when she said that and Lindsey and I laughed.

*There you go. Just tell him off, Mini.*

*I can’t.*

*Why not?*

*I’ll feel bad.*

*No, you won’t, I promise. You’ll feel better.*

She took a deep breath. “And I am so sick of you sayin’ the wrong thing at the wrong time. You’re just a...jerk who only thinks about himself. I hope you know that I’m only using my magic to help your ass out of the ditch that you dug yourself into. Like that time you cheated on Casey. You knew what you were doing. You just didn’t want her anymore, admit it. And guess who also helped you when you were in danger of dying...twice.”

Tommy stood there with his mouth hung open. I was appalled, too. I mean, I know I told her that she should do it, but...well, damn, it was harsh. But I was happy for her. I knew that she had wanted to do that for a while. He had nothing on her to fight back with, so he just leaned against the elevator wall with his arms crossed over his chest.

*Now, don’t you feel a little better?*

*Yeah...actually, I do.*

*Good. I like it when you’re happy. Okay, this is a completely different subject, but do you want me to sleep on the couch at night? Because I could...*

She smirked. *No, you can sleep in the bed with me. If you want, that is.*

*I want to.*

*Okay, then.*

The elevator stopped on our floor, finally, and we walked into our room. It was nice, for fifty bucks a night. There were three bedrooms, a kitchen, a living room, and three bathrooms.

"I'll be in the room to the left," Tommy announced and sauntered into the bedroom, shutting and locking the door.

"Told you I'd feel a little bad," Marissa whispered.

"Yeah, but you also feel better, and that's what we needed," I said.

I heard a lock click and Tommy came out of his bedroom, saying, "Oh, and Marissa?"

"Yeah?" she asked tentatively.

He punched her in the stomach. She gasped from the pain and went to jump on him, but I caught her before she could and Tommy jumped a few steps back.

"Thomas, I'll kill you before she does," I growled. "Go back inside!"

He looked like he was going to talk back to me, but when I gave him a look, he looked scared instead and walked back into the room. When I heard the lock, I let her go.

"Are you okay?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I guess I deserved it."

"No, you didn't."

"Yeah, come on, Marissa," Lindsey said. "Tommy's a total douche bag." She glanced at me. "No offense."

"Oh, none taken," I said. "I know he is."

She smiled and walked over into one of the other bedrooms.

I pulled Marissa into our bedroom and lied her down on the bed. She rolled over on her side to face me as I knelt down at the side of the bed. "You really didn't deserve it. After all the things you've done for him? And um, not to start anything, but one of those times that you saved his life, you kind of saved mine, too."

She smiled. "You know I wasn't saying that to be mean to you. Besides, I liked saving your life."

"Usually, the guy is supposed to save the girl's life. Are we switching roles here?"

"For that one, sometimes...but all the other things, no. I've never..." She paused. "Nope, I have. Never mind."

"What?"

"I was gonna say that I've never seen you cry, but I have."

I got a little embarrassed and I rested my head on my folded hands that were on the bed. "I usually don't do that."

"It's okay. I like guys that can cry."

I smiled at her. "Thank you."

She smiled, too, and I said, "I love you're smile."

"Why? I don't."

"It's crooked. Not your teeth, I mean just your smile. It's cute."

"I've never had braces so I would think that they were. And also, I'm half French, so..."

I laughed. "That's so mean."

She laughed, too. "Who cares? And will you get up here? You look uncomfortable kneeling all the time."

I smiled and lied down on the bed with her, on my side and facing her. She sighed softly and said, "I can't believe that I'm sayin' this, but, do you know how much easier you make life for me?"

"Wow, I've never viewed you as the romantic type. Except for that time when you were really tired and told me that you loved me about twenty times."

"Shut up," she said, laughing.

"Well, I'm happy that I can make your life easier." I kissed her because I finally could. I missed being able to do that without being teased. Even if I just touched her arm, Tommy would say something dirty, like I was touching her somewhere else. I kissed her longer than I usually would, but when I couldn't hold my breath any longer, I went down to her neck. She gasped, almost silently, when I did that, probably because she wasn't expecting me to do it. When I finally pulled back from her, she said, "You, sir, are driving me crazy."

I smiled innocently at her. "Teenage hormones are raging, aren't they?"

"I should beat you."

"Just because I'm right?"

"You're not right!" Her cheeks grew red. "And even if you were, how 'bout I suck on *your* neck and see if it gets you worked up."

I tilted my head for her, challenging her. She accepted the challenge and kissed my neck. She held me close as she did it and she was right; it did get me worked up. When she gave me a little nip, I gasped and pushed her back lightly before we did anything that we would regret. She smiled and said, "Now you know what I mean."

I sighed. "I'm sorry for teasing you."

She laughed. "I didn't care about the teasing. I just like bein' right."

I chuckled. "You almost made me give in to you fully. I would have been your slave."

"Oh, that would've been so awesome." She shrugged. "Oh, well."

I smiled. "I love you."

"I love you...too..." She looked over my shoulder, out the window, like she saw something. Then she looked back at me and smiled.

"What?" I asked.

She shook her head. "It's nothing, I just thought I saw something."

"But--"

She kissed me to shut me up. I made a small sound of protest, but then I just went along with it. I guess it didn't really matter if she wasn't telling me what she thought she saw. Her little shut-up-kiss turned into us making out. Before I knew it, my shirt was off and somewhere to the side of the bed. Like I said before, we never touched each other sexually. But right now...I kind of wanted to. Hearing that, her hands moved slowly down my chest and I groaned softly, flipping her over so that I was on top of her. I went back to kissing her neck and she held me even tighter, which made us both groan at the same time so quietly, only each other could hear.

Wait. What was I doing here? We both believed in not doing anything like this until marriage and, well, here we were. I didn't know what to do...my mind was racing...

I ripped myself away from her, but I was still hovering over her. We were both breathing hard. God, I loved her. I didn't know how much somebody could love another person until I met her. I swallowed and climbed off her to go back to where I was before this ever happened.

"Hey, Damion?" she asked in a soft voice.

Oh, why did she have to say my name? It made me want to rewind time and not stop us when I did. "Yeah, Mini?"

"Do ya want your shirt back?"

I laughed breathlessly. "Yes, please."

She smiled and handed it to me. As I pulled it on, she asked, "Are you okay? You looked like you were gonna be sick."

I smiled at her. "I'm okay. I was just a little scared...I didn't want to do that yet but I felt so ready and...I'm used to knowing exactly how I feel and what to do, but I just didn't."

"It's okay. We didn't do that so you can just...relax now."

"I'm sorry. You're right, I *do* worry too much."

"Yeah, and now you're worrying about worrying too much." She rolled her eyes and hugged me tight. "Calm down, okay? It's all fine."

I sighed and rested my head on a pillow as I ran my hand up and down her back. "Marry me?" The words were out of my mouth before I could stop them. I felt like smacking myself. She was going to say no. I just totally screwed up our relationship.

She pulled back from me and looked me in the eye. "Are you...like, serious?"

I did want Marissa forever. She was perfect in every way. I loved her so much...so that explains why I said, "Yes. And I know I don't have a ring, but, um..." I tore off a small piece of my shirt where it was already ripped from crawling through the field with her and tied it around her left ring finger, saying, "Marissa Lena DiCaprio, I love you. Will you marry me?"

She watched as I tied the piece to her finger, then she smiled. "Yeah, I will."

A rush of excitement came over me and I kissed her. It wasn't like what just happened, though, which was okay because I didn't want to torture us with breaking away like that again. I hugged her when I pulled away and I said, "Do you know how happy you make me?"

"By how fast your heart is beating? Yeah, I do."

I chuckled and tried to calm myself down a little. Then she asked, "How did you know my middle name?"

"Keith told me."

She buried her head in my chest when she began to fall asleep. Soon, she was asleep and I was stuck awake, torturing myself with how I could have stopped what happened before I asked her to marry me.

It's not like we actually did it. We didn't even touch each other like that, even if she was beginning to touch me, she didn't make it to my pants since I flipped her over. So why did I feel guilty? It was frustrating. I usually knew why I felt what I did. I closed my eyes and tried to forget about it. I focused on Marissa and how she said yes to marrying me instead. That was really more important to me. It helped me fall asleep...

I woke up by somebody knocking on the door. Marissa woke up, too. She was still holding me tightly from the night before. We both sat up and I called, "You can come in."

Lindsey walked in and shut the door. When she looked up and saw us-our messed up hair and wrinkled clothes, also from the night before-she said, "Sorry...I could leave."

Marissa looked confused for a second, but then she laughed a little. "We weren't doing anything. We just woke up."

"Reckless sleepers, I see."

Marissa and I looked at each other quickly before I said, "Uh, yeah," and Marissa half-laughed at my unsure answer.

Lindsey laughed. "Don't try to lie. I heard you guys."

"No, really," I said. "We weren't doing anything. We were barely making any noise." I couldn't say that we weren't making absolutely any noise at all because of our talking and, with what happened last night, really quiet growls and moans.

"Looks like we got some noisy neighbors," Marissa said in a sexy kind of tone and Lindsey and I laughed. She shrugged and went back to her normal voice. "It's the honeymoon suite next door, anyway, so ya already know what they're doin' at night."

"Who would have a honeymoon in this crap hole?" Lindsey asked.

"Maybe it was a drunken marriage. In an hour, you'll hear, 'What happened last night?!' From the girl, obviously. The guy would be like, 'I remember what happened last night, and I wanna do it again. Whoa, whoa, I didn't wanna get married. I mean after that. Get low, bitch.'"

"That is such a stereotype," I said.

"Yeah, so is the one guys use that says that women can't drive."

I shrugged. "You're good at driving."

"See? I just broke that stereotype. You break the one that I said."

I smiled. "Thank you."

"Oh, you have something stuck to your finger, Marissa," Lindsey said. She took Marissa's left hand and began tugging at the piece of cloth that I tied to her finger as an engagement ring.

"No, it's supposed to be there," she said, pulling her hand away. "It's special."

I couldn't help smiling at the way she said that; with love, excitement, and happiness.

“Oh. So, um, the main reason I came in here was because your car is kind of...well, it rolled down the hill.”

“What?”

“Yeah, Tommy needed something and he turned it on...he forgot to put on the brakes.”

Marissa crawled off the bed and walked out. Lindsey and I followed her. We went down the elevator and outside and, sure enough, Marissa’s car was down the hill. Marissa sighed and walked down the hill.

*What are you doing?*

*I’m gonna drive it back up.*

*Are you crazy?*

*You know it.*

I sighed as I watched her. *Do you want me to come?*

*No, stay there. I need someone to tell me when to stop goin’.* She got in her car and began driving. When she got a little close, she asked, *Keep going?*

I nodded. She had to press down a little harder on the gas to get her car all the way up. But when she did, the car flipped over and began rolling down the hill. Lindsey screamed, which made me jump, and then we were off, running down the hill to see if she was okay.

When the car finally stopped rolling, it was upside down. This was *not* good. Before Lindsey and I got to the bottom, Marissa was crawling out the window on her back. Okay, at least she was alive. The most she could have now was a broken bone, but she could heal that in a few seconds.

“Are you okay?” Lindsey and I asked at the same time when we got down.

“Yeah...” She laughed. “That was kinda fun, but it hurt like a bitch.”

She was half in and half out of the car, so Lindsey pulled her out by her underarms. The bottoms of her jeans were soaked with blood.

“Whoa,” Lindsey said and rolled up Marissa’s jeans, revealing two huge cuts.

“Can you feel that?” I asked.

“No,” she said.

Lindsey pinched her arm. “Did you feel *that?*”

“Yeah.”

“Can you stand up?”

“One sec.” She ran a hand over her two cuts, healing them, and stood up. “I’m fine. I don’t need everybody worrying about me.”

“Can I at least carry you?” I asked. “I really don’t want you to walk right now.”

“Again? Really?”

I nodded. She sighed and climbed on my back. I smiled and stood up, walking up the hill. Lindsey followed.

## 28

Lindsey and Tommy left Marissa and me alone. I think they went to a store or something...all I knew was that both Lindsey and I didn’t want Marissa near Tommy. I wasn’t sure if she was mad at him for starting up her car in the first place. But if she was...well, it just wouldn’t be good.

Even though nobody was there with us, we decided to just stay in the bedroom. We were doing what we did last night, except we didn’t stop because now we had better control over ourselves since we had already done this. We still didn’t make love, but that was just fine. I wasn’t interested in doing that in the day time and neither was she. We didn’t touch each other like that, either, but we came close to it. Like, a few times she hooked a finger in one of the belt loops in my jeans and I held her waste tightly, just *barely* touching each other that way and I could tell it drove her as crazy as it did me.

Soon, we heard moans that weren’t coming from us since they were really loud-we usually just made sighs and really quiet moans when we were making out-and, well, we just weren’t the ones making them. I pulled away from her and looked to where the sound was coming from.

“Oh my God,” Marissa said, laughing. “You’re so lucky you can’t read minds.”

I laughed, too, and looked at her. “Sometimes I wish I could...but not this time.”

“Did you know that they’re, like, super old?”

“Ew, gross.”

“I know, right. But I wouldn’t talk, if I were you. You’re old, too.”

“Yeah, but I look and sound young. So, there. And soon, you’ll be as old as me and when I tease you for it, you’ll use the same excuse.”

“But you’ll still be fifty years older.”

I sighed. She smiled because she knew she got me. I loved how she could do that to me. Nobody else could. The neighbor’s moaning filled our silence until we both cracked up because of it.

“I’m not so turned on anymore,” she said.

“Yeah, me neither.” I climbed off her and stayed at her side.

“Hey,” she said, pulling me back on top of her. “I never said stop.”

I smiled and kissed her neck. She gasped, but I heard the neighbors moan, and that kind of made me want to stop. But I didn’t, because she didn’t want me to. After a second, she pulled me down closer to her body and began kissing my neck. She always knew how to change my mind about stopping.

When I pulled back and she kept on kissing my neck, I whispered, “God, I love you.” I felt her smile a little against me. She nibbled on my neck and it drove me wild. I drew in a ragged breath and resumed kissing her neck to try to stop myself from making noise.

I heard the front door open and I jumped off her, startled out of my own little world. Marissa laughed and after a second, I laughed, too. Sure enough, Tommy walked in without knocking so it’s a good thing we stopped.

“Lindsey is a total bitch,” he said.

“Hey, be nice to her,” Marissa said. “She’s been nice to *you*.”

He pulled her hair and I said, “Don’t do that.”

“I was just showing her what she did to me over and over again.”

“Yeah, but it didn’t hurt,” she said.

“It was annoying.”

“*You’re* annoying.”

He studied her. “What happened to your face?”

“I fell down the hill.” I didn’t know if she wanted him to know *how* she fell down the hill, so I kept my mouth shut, just to be safe. “And besides, scars are hot.”

Tommy and I laughed. She smiled and we heard the neighbors moan again. Marissa and I laughed hysterically and Tommy said, “What the hell was that?”

“The people next door,” I said.

“Ew, they’re old.”

“Which means they can last longer,” Marissa said. “Who would be turned on by *that*?”

Tommy laughed. “How can you be so funny with such a messed up life?”

“Cause I’m totally awesome. It’s better to just go with it. I don’t get why people hang on to the past. Like...okay, a girl. She got her heart broken by some guy and then she gets a new boyfriend. Next thing ya know, she’s comparin’ the two guys and she’s like, ‘Oh my God, it’s gonna happen again.’” She rolled her eyes. “You’re just screwin’ up your whole life by doin’ that.”

“Just so you know, there were g’s in some of those words.”

“Just so ya know, there were r’s in some of those words.”

Tommy shut up. Marissa and I laughed because he had nothing to say. What she said to him didn’t offend me because I say the r’s and g’s in all my words. Tommy said ‘car’ like ‘caw’ and I didn’t. So Tommy just got up and left to try to avoid any more embarrassment.

“I love that,” she said.

“Me, too,” I said, running a hand up and down her back. I loved her almost too much to say. I guess that’s mostly why we’re engaged.

Marissa’s smile faded and she had a blank expression.

“Mini?” I asked. She didn’t answer. “Hey, you okay?” Still, no answer. I snapped my fingers in her face. She blinked twice, her eyes turning black and then back to brown and gray. I stared at her in shock. I was kind of afraid of her now.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Um...nothing,” I said slowly. “Are you okay?”

“Yeah,” she said with a sudden smile. She stopped smiling. “Why? Are you saying that I’m not?”

“No, I-“

A painting flew off the wall. “Yes, you are. God, shut up.” She stormed off into the other room.

Whoa. I didn’t say anything about that. I didn’t know what I did. I heard Lindsey say a polite “Hey” to her and she just told her to go die. Lindsey walked in, looking hurt.

“What’s wrong with *her*?” she asked. “She was crying...”

“I don’t know,” I said, rubbing my face. “She blanked out, I asked her if she was okay, and she yelled at me.” I thought about it. What could possibly be causing her to act this way? I dropped my hands from my face and froze. She doesn’t have her medicine for her schizophrenia and bipolar problems. I didn’t know how to get them; you can’t get that kind of medicine over the counter. Maybe she had a prescription...I stood up.

"I'll be back," I said. "You don't have to come, but you might want to if you like your self-esteem."

"Sure."

She followed me out.

## 29

Lindsey and I trailed down the hill to Marissa's crashed car. She didn't fix it with her magic yet since we weren't going anywhere. I crawled through the window, watching out for the broken glass, and searched through her car. It might seem wrong, but she needed her medicine. I found a small white piece of paper with her name and a refill amount for both her medicines. I sighed in relief and crawled out carefully.

"What's that?" Lindsey asked, still crouching on the snowy ground.

"Prescriptions," I said, standing up straight. "She needs medicine."

"For what?"

"I can't tell you. I don't know if she wants me to."

"Oh...okay."

We began walking back up the hill and into the hotel when she asked, "Is she going to be okay?"

"I think so. When she gets these, at least. Right now, she's a little crazy." I said the last part quietly, for fear that she might hear me. It's not like I wanted to offend her or anything, that was the last thing I wanted to do, but she was acting differently.

As soon as we got in, Tommy and Marissa were fighting. Things were flying off the walls and tables. Tommy had to get down to avoid getting hit.

"Uh, hey, Mini?" I asked tentatively.

"What?" she said. She didn't sound as mad as she just had been.

"Can you..." I waved her to our bedroom. She walked in with me without an argument. I shut the door and held up the white piece of paper. She stared at it for a second and then looked back at me.

"I forgot I had that," she said. She took it from me. "Thanks. I should go..." She looked over my shoulder for what seemed like forever. Her eyes went black and then back to brown and gray, just like before.

"Okay, let's go," I said quickly before it happened again. I have to admit, it scared the hell out of me. I didn't know what that meant, but I was sure that it didn't happen to any other schizophrenic.

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"Hey, when will it be done?" I whispered to the pharmacist when Marissa had walked away.

"In about an hour."

I sighed. I needed the time length to be shorter than that. But I thanked her anyway and caught up with Marissa.

We stayed in the pharmacy for the hour. There was nothing else to do and nowhere else to go. When we got her medicines, I bought her a bottle of water and asked her sweetly to take it right away. She shrugged and took it, since we weren't driving back. We walked. When it was in her system, I felt better. I didn't like seeing her eyes change colors out of nowhere. About half way home, she was herself again. It was a long walk, just saying.

"So, um..." she said, shoving her hands in her pockets and looking down at the sidewalk. "I'm sorry." She mumbled the last part. I knew she usually didn't have to say it because she was rarely the one doing anything wrong, so I understood why she wasn't comfortable saying it.

"No, it's okay. You have conditions and you didn't have your medicine. I get that. But...why did your eyes turn black for a second?"

"Oh." She laughed a little. "Witch thing. It's weird. I can't even explain it."

"Okay. Are you still mad at me?"

"I wasn't really mad at you in the first place. I don't know what happened. But when I saw how hurt you were, I...dunno."

I also knew she wasn't used to sharing how she felt, so I didn't push her on it. I carefully wrapped my arm around her. She was okay now. I didn't have to ask her if she was.

"But you're okay now?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said with a small smile. "It's just that...I wasn't expecting you to yell at me."

"That tends to happen without my stuff."

"It's okay. You're okay now."

"Hey, what is your perfect girl like?" she asked after a second.

"You," I said without any hesitation.

She laughed. "No, seriously."

"I am serious."

I saw her smile slightly behind her curtain of black hair. "Whatever."

"Do you not believe me?"

"I don't know."

"Come on." I tickled her stomach lightly and she laughed. I smiled, holding her a little tighter than I already was. She was getting colder by the second. "Okay, do you really want to know what my perfect girl is like?"

"Yeah, I do."

"Well, she has black, blonde, and red hair." I picked out those three colors from her hair and showed her the strands. She rolled her eyes and I smiled. "She's funny and easy to talk to. She's also very pretty. Guess who I'm talking about."

"Um...I dunno."

"You."

She scoffed. "That's cute."

"I mean it."

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Soon, Marissa and I were at the hotel. Except I had to go out again to get Tommy aspirin for a headache or whatever. He didn't really tell me what was wrong, that I just had to go get it. When, I got back though, I heard screaming and fierce growling coming from the second floor in our hotel room. I dropped the bag and went to open the door to enter the lobby, but Marissa ran out. She turned around and yelped when she saw me, probably because she hadn't known I was there. She had complete terror in her eyes, so I began to ask, "What-"

"Tommy's gone crazy," she said. Her voice was shaking, but her body wasn't. She looked like she was about to cry. "He tried to kill...he was, um, drinking blood from this, like, pouch thing and..."

"Are you okay?" I had never seen her so scared, not even that last time at the group home.

"Maybe, I dunno. But I don't wanna go back in. I wanna leave."

"Okay...go run down the hill as fast as you can and don't stop. I'll catch up to you, I promise." I pushed her lightly to get her going. "Go." I didn't know how fast she could run until now. I

watched her for a second, making sure that she didn't stop, and then I walked in, heading for the elevator. I wished there were stairs; I would have been up there by the time the elevator doors opened.

Tommy was sitting on the couch, rubbing his face when I got in. I smelled the blood and I saw it dripping down his jaw. I heard Lindsey crying in one of the bathrooms.

"Tommy, what did you do?" I asked. The walls were splattered with blood. I wondered if he had actually bit Marissa. I didn't even stop to check.

"I don't know," he mumbled. "Just keep Marissa away from me. I've been near her too long...she smells and tastes too good..."

Hearing those words come from my brother's mouth about my fiancée made me shudder. "How am I supposed to keep her away from you when we have nowhere else to go? I can't exactly separate the two of you."

"It's why I'm always starting fights with her...I can't control it anymore, Damion."

"What am I supposed to do?" I couldn't leave either of them out on their own.

"Leave her. Find another girl, one whose blood doesn't smell as good."

"No. There is no possible way I could do that." I wanted to hit something just thinking about it.

"I guess that was harsh to even consider...put me in the trunk of her car, then. I won't be as tempted when I can't smell her as much."

"Could you even breathe in there?"

"I don't *have* to breathe. It just feels weird not to."

I thought about it. "Okay. But, just saying, if you *ever* go at Marissa like that again, you are a complete goner."

"I understand. Did you get that aspirin?"

"Yeah...I'll be back." I had to get Marissa first. She couldn't have run too far, even if she was insanely fast. I was only inside with Tommy for a minute or so. I walked out and began running to catch up with her.

I found Marissa about a mile down the road. She'd stopped running and slowed to a fast walking pace.

"Hey," I said, putting a hand on her shoulder to stop her. She looked back at me and stopped walking. "He's okay now. But he's not going to be directly in the car with us when we go. He's going to be in the trunk."

"Why? That's one of the most stupid things I've ever heard."

“I know. But if I tell you why, you’d freak out.”

“I already am freaking out.”

“It’ll be worse. Trust me.” I took both her hands and began walking backwards, pulling her forwards back to the hotel. “Are you sure you’re okay? I thought you were going to cry.”

“I was just scared. I’m fine now.”

“Did he bite you?”

“Only a little. I’m fine.”

“Can I see it?”

She sighed and turned her head a little to the left. I saw two faint bite marks from his fangs. “Do you feel okay?”

“Okay, third time. I am *okay*. I would tell ya if I wasn’t.”

“I’m sorry. I know I’m worrying too much again. It’s what I do.”

She smiled a little. “I know. It’s okay. I understand why you worry about *that*.”

I picked up the bag with the aspirin in it when we reached the hotel. Before Marissa and I walked in, I turned to her and said, “Right when you get in, go straight to our room. Okay?”

“Sure.”

I opened the door. She did what I asked, not even stopping to say hello to Lindsey. I tossed the bag to Tommy and followed Marissa inside our room, shutting the door behind me.

## 30

From a far distance away, Tommy asked Marissa to bring Casey with us. She did it without hesitation and when I asked her on it, she told me that she panicked and she didn’t want to start any fights with him.

“Okay, it’s okay,” I said. She’d started freaking out about it. “We had room for one more, anyway.”

“But-“

Casey walked in without knocking. She and Tommy were exactly the same, except she had control over herself when it came to blood, so she was okay being near Marissa.

"Guess who needs advice," she said, hopping up on our bed.

"You?" I asked.

"Yes. Both of you need to answer. Do you think Tommy and I should have a baby?"

While I said, "Sure," Marissa said, "No."

"Okay, why not?" I asked Marissa.

"They're hard to handle." She said it like it was totally obvious.

"Well, yeah, but everyone has them."

"So?"

Casey smiled. "This is exactly why I asked you guys."

"You're scared of babies," I said.

"What?" she said. "No, I'm not."

"Yeah, you are."

"Well, come on. I mean, a soft spot? That's, like, a self-destruct button. Anybody could accidentally press it and they're dead. And what about my little sister? I'm not scared of *her*."

"She's not technically a baby anymore. I bet you didn't even look at her when she was."

She crossed her arms. "So what if I didn't? I was eleven."

"You're crazy. What kind of girl never wants kids?"

"I never said I *never* wanted them. I'm just sayin' that-and I'm *not* afraid of them-but they are kinda scary."

"If you say that they're scary, then you're afraid of them."

"They're gross. And ya know what?"

"What?"

"You're like a dad already. *That's* why you wouldn't mind a kid around."

"*What?* No."

Casey laughed. "You are *so* a dad."

"How am I a dad? *Besides* worrying about everything."

"You're a peacemaker," Marissa said. "And you don't get mad often, which I think is weird, but I like it. "

I couldn't help smiling a little at her. "Whatever."

"So, you know you are, but you won't admit it."

I thought about it. "Yes."

"Okay, so yes or no?" Casey asked.

"I think that should be your own decision," I said.

"No! Come on. Yes or no? I can't make the decision by myself and Tommy's just like, whatever."

"Well...do *you* want kids?" Marissa asked.

"Yeah, I do."

"Then that's your answer."

"She's right," I said.

"Oh, I'll just go ask Lindsey," Casey said. She walked out.

"Then why didn't she go to her first?" I asked, lying down on my back.

Marissa copied me by lying down on her back, too. I laughed a little and tickled her lightly.

She laughed, too, and said, "I'm not afraid of kids. What the hell gave you that idea?"

"You are so! Oh my God, you don't even notice it. It's so funny. Like when that guy at that New Year's party asked you to put your sister down. You gave her to me without even thinking about it."

"Yeah, because I trust you."

"But you didn't even know him."

"So?"

"So why did you do what he said?"

She scoffed. "That doesn't mean anything."

"It so does."

"No!"

I tried to copy her high voice. "Yeah!"

“Shut up, dad.”

I laughed. “Shut up, baby hater,” I said in my regular voice.

She laughed, too. “I don’t hate them. You’re mean.”

“Yes, I am. And I like it.”

She smiled a little. “Whatever.”

“Come on. You know you love me.”

“No, I’m mad at you.”

“Oh, you know you do.” I began tickling her again. “Admit it.”

She started laughing. “No, stop. You’re such a jerk!”

I smiled, but didn’t stop. “Admit that you love me.”

“Okay! I love you,” she said between laughter.

“I know,” I said, still smiling. I stopped tickling her. “I love you, too.” I kissed her lightly.

We heard the neighbors going at it again and my smile faded away because I immediately got annoyed. My patience was running on low. It was kind of funny at first, but enough was enough. Marissa stood up and said, “You coming?”

“Where?”

“I’m gonna make them stop.”

“Are you seriously going to do that? I mean, it’s kind of...rude.”

“Uh, yeah. Dude, we haven’t slept in two days. My *car* was better than this, and it’s not that great. And also, it’s annoying and if I hear it again, I swear I’m gonna throw up.”

I sighed and got up, too. “Okay. Let’s go.”

We walked next door and Marissa knocked a little loudly on the door. An elderly man came to the door in only boxer shorts.

“Stop,” Marissa said. “Everybody in this hotel can hear you.”

The guy whispered something in her ear that I couldn’t really understand and went to pull her inside. She said, “Whoa!” and ripped herself away from him. But he was still holding onto the collar of her shirt that she was wearing underneath her hoodie and it ripped down to the middle to her ribs.

“Damn it!” Marissa said, a little loudly. “I hope you explode. That was the only thing I had.” She kneed him in the place where a guy *never* wants to get kneed in and he fell to the ground, shouting. Well...*that* stopped him and his wife. She reached forward and slammed the door shut and when she turned around, I saw a little of her black bra and I looked away to try to be polite. When I heard her zip up her hoodie, I looked back at her.

“What did he say?” I asked as we began walking, wondering what made her do that.

Her cheeks grew a little red. “Ya know, I’ve always wanted a threesome.”

“Oh. That’s gross.”

She laughed a little. “I know...that’s illegal, too.”

“Which makes that even grosser. He’s, like, eighty and you’re fifteen.”

She sniffled, so I thought she was crying and asked, “What’s wrong? Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I just have a stuffy nose, gosh.”

I laughed a little when she sneezed. She kind of sounded like a small kitten, which I thought was cute. “I think you’re getting sick.”

“I am...” She sneezed again. “Not.”

“You’re a horrible liar.”

“Thanks.” She sighed. “I wanted to leave tonight. I don’t like it here.”

“Nobody does. It’s okay. We’ll just leave when you get better.”

“I don’t want to make you guys wait.”

“We’re okay, I promise. Nobody has complained yet.”

“You just said that nobody likes it here.”

“Yeah, but nobody’s freaking out over it, either. We can stay here for a few more days.” I opened the door for her and followed her into our bedroom again. I shut our door and led her to our bed, making her lie down.

“But I can-“

“Shh.”

“I can make myself better.”

I stood up straight. “Okay. Let me see.”

She didn't move. She just stared at me. I stared back. After about a minute, she started laughing and she stood up, balancing herself on the bed. I smiled at her.

"See?" she said. "I'm good now."

"Alright, you proved yourself." I grabbed her hands and helped her down to the floor.

## 31

Later that night, we left to motel after Marissa fixed her car with her magic. And, yes, we actually did put Tommy in the trunk, which we all thought was pretty hilarious. Except for Casey; she didn't think it was too funny.

By noon the next day, we were in Florida. Marissa had built three houses with her magic in a deserted part of a town. I think she would have built only one or two if Tommy didn't want to eat her so badly. Lindsey lived on her own; she said that she would rather it that way.

Tommy and Casey did end up having a baby. His name's Nicky. Marissa could hear its thoughts when it was still inside Casey and we all thought it was creepy, especially her. Every time Casey came over, Marissa had to go in a different room to stop herself from totally losing it until Casey actually had the baby. Marissa and I stayed home for that, so she was okay.

Eventually, Marissa and I got married and it was the best night of our lives. Everybody had fun and she got along with my family pretty well. I wasn't too worried about that part, anyway; most people enjoyed Marissa's company.

I had figured out why she always wore a hoodie over her clothes. She had a tattoo, one she didn't have control over. It was a black line all the way down her right arm to her elbow. She explained that there were two colors-black and red. Witches and wizards with black tattoos were the most powerful and ones with red tattoos aren't that powerful. Just about all her family has or had red, but she had black because both of her birth parents were a witch and wizard. I found it pretty awesome that she was the most powerful out of her whole family.

Soon after that, Marissa became this extremely famous rock star. We both loved it; she loved being up on stage and I loved seeing her really happy. I went to all her concerts, even when some were in different countries. She got her popularity from this high school dance that she performed at because she saw a flyer for it and she decided to help out. Karma actually does exist.

Just about every single time she gave a little speech before her concerts, everybody was crying. That is, except for me, her, and the band, because we all knew what her motivation was-her brother. Keith was the one who inspired her to start singing in the first place, even when he was alive. She admitted that she had written really corny songs when she was younger that

were about him and she even talked about one on an interview. Of course, everyone began laughing, even her because she knew it was a bad song. And just like all those other concerts, everyone was crying now.

“...and the last thing he said was the nickname he gave me,” she said into the microphone. The first time, she cried a little. Now, she didn’t. The stadium was filled with sniffles and I could smell the tears. Marissa smiled. “But the best part is that he is somewhere here right now and he is listening to this. I’m sure he’s just like, ‘God, Mars, shut the hell up and get on with it.’” Some people laughed. “So that’s what I’m gonna do. I really hope y’all enjoy the show tonight because nobody...and I am totally serious about that...*nobody* is leaving without some kind of brain damage.” There were cheers and shouts that rang my ears because it was so loud.

The band was playing softly the whole time. Now, they were loud and instead of playing some sad song, they were playing the usual rock songs. In the middle of her singing and the crowd singing along with her—except me, because I can’t sing for my life—she looked towards her guitarist as he inched closer to her. Right as she did, he kicked her right in the crotch. Even though she wasn’t a guy, it looked like it hurt. Everybody in the crowd went, “Oh!” as she hunched over, arm over her stomach. She tried to keep singing, but it sounded like she was in pain instead of having fun.

“Oh, wow,” she said, not into the microphone, but I could hear her. She took a deep breath and began jumping a little, yelling into the microphone, “It’s all good!” and the crowd cheered.

*Really?* I asked

*Kinda.*

I smiled at her and she picked up where she left off in the song. In between songs, she walked over to her guitarist and began talking to him, asking him why he kicked her.

“It was a total accident,” he said.

She stared at him for a second, and then slowly brought the microphone up to her mouth. “Your fly’s down.” Everybody laughed, even me. She turned and skipped across the stage, yelling, “It’s not bothering me, is it bothering you?!” She really did know how to make an already awesome concert better. I saw a small square package hit her right on the head. She stopped, picked it up, and started cracking up. She held it above her head for everyone to see and everybody cheered. Wow, people were really crazy when it came to rock concerts. What she held was a condom package. “Hey, I love you guys a *lot*, but not *that* much!” she yelled into the microphone, still laughing. “But that’s okay. That’s okay! And to all you lazy guys who aren’t doin’ a damn thing...” She lowered her voice. “I totally screwed all your mothers last night!” Even though she did lower her voice, she got louder with every syllable. The crowd laughed and hooted, making catcalls and whistling when she threw the package back out there.

She was really good at this whole concert thing. She had a lot of pyro and confetti shooting out from cannons. She interacted with the audience, handing the microphone out so they could sing, too, and kneeling down at the edge of the stage so they could all see her, and she ran

around, too. She had a lot of energy for such a small person. She jumped and ran and danced and it was just awesome.

At the end of her show-which was about ten songs because of the encores-, she yelled, "You guys are by far the *best* audience I have ever had!" Everyone screamed and cheered so loudly that I thought people's heads would start exploding. "Ya know...once I died...but then I got better and so here I am, putting an ending to the most awesome performance that anyone has ever made!" Again, the crowd screamed. "Yeah, who here is getting' laid tonight?!" Mostly guys yelled and cheered. Marissa laughed. "All the guys who just screamed, I hope you notice that your dates were lookin' at y'all like, 'Uh, no ya ain't.' But I know I am!" That made everybody laugh. She did, too, and she looked out at the crowd. "Ya know, I can't believe you guys threw this surprise party for me! You really shouldn't have."

All the lights cut out and they went off stage. Everybody cheered and started leaving. I didn't hear any bad comments at all.

As soon as everybody was gone, I walked backstage to Marissa and kissed her.

"Hey," she said with a smile.

"Hey. Are you okay? You know, from that scissor kick?"

She laughed. "That happened three hours ago. I'm fine. It hurt so badly, though. And I think I bruised my elbow...but that's okay."

"That's going to be all over the internet."

"I know. But who cares? If anyone gets hurt by it, it's gonna be Evan." Evan was the name of her guitarist. "Oh, but that was so fun," she said, walking over to a mirror to put her hair up in a ponytail.

"The people here are so crazy."

"That's what makes it really fun!"

"Yeah, but I bet your throat hurts now, doesn't it?"

She waved her hand, dismissing it. "So what? It's fine."

"So, you think you're getting laid tonight?" I asked playfully.

"Yes, I do," she said, turning around to face me.

"You just keep thinking that."

She half smiled. "Oh, please. You'll break. You always do."

"I do not."

“Do so.”

I went to tickle her, but she jumped out of my way and began running down the hall. I chased after her and when I caught her, I pushed her against the wall gently. She laughed and I smiled. I saw a blinding flash and I heard a click. I looked over to see a young man taking our picture. He ran off with the camera. I looked back at her and asked, “Doesn’t that get annoying?”

She shook her head. “Not one bit. I love it.”

I released her from the wall, but I still held her hand.

“I dare you to not talk to me or see me for a whole day,” Marissa said. She looked kind of sad, but she smiled at me. “I bet ya can’t do it.”

“I bet you I can,” I said, returning the smile. I stood up. “Okay, starting now, I am not seeing you or talking to you for twenty-four hours.” I kissed her goodbye.

The last thing I heard was her laugh before I walked out the door. I spent my day walking around town and in parts of our house that I knew she never went in, like the spare bedroom.

The next day, she was dead. She left a note next to her body. It said, in her perfect handwriting,

You can do it every day because you did it for one. I love you so much. Love, Mini.

## 32

I woke up with a start, feeling so sad that I could barely stand it. Marissa was next to me, still in her shorts and my too big t-shirt that I was wearing last night, curled up in a little ball.

“Hey, Mini?” I asked quietly. I knew she was usually a heavy sleeper, so I shook her a little. She didn’t wake up, but she rolled over and nuzzled herself into my chest. I smiled with relief. It was only a completely screwed up dream; it didn’t mean anything. What the hell was I thinking before I fell asleep? I ran a hand through my dark shoulder-length hair, probably messing it up even more, and sighed.

Not even a minute passed when our nephew crawled through the door. He was only one, so Marissa was always scared when she had to pick him up. But she got better with it every day. I got out of bed carefully so I didn’t wake her up and I picked Nicky up from the floor. I brought him back to the bed because I was a little cold from being in just my boxer shorts. Tommy or Casey must have turned down the heat because vampires like the cold better. But what I didn’t understand is why they always turned down a *werewolf’s* heat. We like the hot, that’s why our body temperature *was* hot. This wasn’t even their house. I pulled up the sheets to my waste and sat Nicky down on my stomach.

Tommy walked in and whispered, "Is she still sleeping?"

I nodded and whispered back, "Big night."

He mimed playing guitar and I nodded again. He walked over to her and yelled, right in her ear, "Good morning!"

"Tommy," I said, getting mad. It was mean of him to wake her up like that.

"I hate you," she muttered. She opened her eyes and glared at him tiredly.

He smiled and said, "I love you."

"Yeah, well, I don't love you." She looked over at me and Nicky. "I love them." She looked back over at him and smiled. "But not you."

"They're both related to me more than they are to you. If you love them, you have to love me."

She scoffed. "Says you."

"I love you, Marissa!" He hugged her and it looked like he was squeezing her to death.

"Okay, you can stop torturing her," I said, laughing and pushing him off her.

Tommy and Casey left after that with Nicky. I think they just came over every morning to annoy me and Marissa. When they left, I walked into the living room and sat down on the chair, checking my email on the computer. I sighed out of boredom when I found nothing and leaned back in the chair. I spun around in it to face the opposite direction when I caught Marissa's scent. I smiled at her.

She laughed. "You have no idea how evil you just looked."

"I think I'll take that as a compliment." I held my arms out for a hug. "I'm lonely. Come here."

She smiled and walked over to me. I pulled her in my lap and hugged her really tight. She made a choking sound and I laughed and loosened my grip on her a little.

"There is *nothing* to do," I said. "I swear I am going to die of boredom."

"I know. I'm bored, too."

"Kiss me and be my distraction?"

She laughed a little. "Sure." She kissed me gently, like she was afraid she would break me. I don't know why she always did that, because she couldn't, but it was sweet.

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Later, I was on the couch and calling Marissa over to me. I'd gotten her a kitten because I knew she always liked cats. She'd had a cat at her home in Georgia and she told me she missed it

once. And also, I wanted to talk to her about having kids. I thought this might open up her mind. By the way, I did change into a different shirt.

“Hey, Mini?” I asked, struggling to keep the kitten still while trying not to get scratched.

“Yeah?”

“Can you come over here? Ow.” I muttered the last part. The kitten scratched me in the worst place—right above my fingernail.

She walked in the doorway. “That depends.” She saw the kitten. “Oh, God, what did you do?”

I laughed. “Nothing, I swear. I just got you...” I studied the kitten. “Uh, her. Come here.”

She smiled and sat down next to me. “I can’t believe you did that.”

I handed her the kitten, smiling back. “Here. If I keep holding her, I’m gonna get scratched. Again.”

She took her from me and held her like she was a baby. The kitten wasn’t squirming anymore or anything. She held perfectly still in Marissa’s arms. “You are the best person in the world. Thanks so much.”

“I know,” I said, smiling. “I’d do anything for you. You don’t have to thank me. And I wanted to talk to you about something.”

“Sure. What?” she asked, putting the kitten down. She walked around the living room.

“Do you ever think of having children with me?”

“Uh...my mouth hurts. Wisdom teeth are comin’ in. See ya.” She went to get up to escape from the conversation, but I stopped her with my arms. I pulled her back on the couch and held her there, hovering over her.

“Nice try,” I said, smiling.

“No, really. My mouth *actually* does hurt ‘cause my wisdom teeth are *actually* coming in.”

“Okay. Let me see.”

She opened her mouth. She was telling the truth.

“Then I’ll get you some ice to chew on in a few minutes. Can’t we just talk about it for a little?”

She sighed. “Having children? Um, *ouch*.”

I smiled and nudged her with my knee playfully since I was holding her down with my hands.

“No, seriously.”

“You know I can’t be serious.” When I chuckled, she smiled and said, “Sure, I have. Like, in ten years.”

“Ten years?” I asked incredulously.

“We have all of eternity. Even if the world spontaneously combusts, we’ll still be alive.” She thought that one through. “Okay, maybe not. But ya know what I mean.”

I laughed. “I know we have all the time we want. But just think about it...” I put a hand on the top of her head. “In the child-loving, feminine part of your brain, wouldn’t you want a little you around?”

She raised an eyebrow. “Are you sayin’ I’m not feminine and that I don’t love children?”

“You know what I meant.”

She laughed. “No, I wouldn’t want a little me around.”

I smiled. “Me, neither. There would be too many guys to deal with.”

“Oh, my God, I married a loser.”

“Thank you, I appreciate that.” I kissed her forehead. “But, really, why wait?”

She thought about that. After a second, she shrugged. “I wouldn’t be a good mom.”

“Why not?”

“You told me that once, like, three years ago. When we were at the group home.”

“Why do you hold on to every word I say?” She smiled and I said, “Forget about your temper. I could take care of that minor problem.”

“Well, then, I don’t know.”

“Mini,” I said sweetly. “Let’s have a baby.”

She sighed and nodded. “Okay. But I don’t like you.”

“But you’re still here,” I said excitedly. I kissed her and when I ran out of breath, I kissed her neck instead.

“Oh, you mean right now?” she asked.

“Mm-hmm,” I said against her neck, running my hand down to the button of her jeans.

“Okay...”

By her tone, I stopped and pulled away from her. “You okay? We don’t have to...”

She rolled her eyes. “If I didn’t wanna have a baby with you, wouldn’t I tell ya?”

I smiled. "I guess so. But if you really want to wait, we will."

"Shut up, you're makin' me feel bad."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't say you're sorry."

"Okay...sorry."

"Dude."

"I'm sorry for being sorry! Oh, my God, I am the worst."

She laughed and I smiled because I knew she wasn't really mad at me.

"Can I just warm up to the idea of having one?" she asked. "I mean, 'cause it's just, like, sudden and-"

I kissed her. She didn't need to explain herself to me. I understood and I was willing to wait as long as she wanted for a child. I was too lucky to have Marissa all to myself.

My question for you now is, do you believe in magic? I do.

I would be delighted to receive some feedback about my book: please contact me via the obooko [Feedback Link](#).